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The Feminist Question

Traci Harris

September 12, 2001

There has been a great deal of criticism of the Bring the Ruckus document and how it has addressed the feminist question. I have given a great deal of thought to this and have grappled myself with my personal feminist feelings and how they fit into the Ruckus. I have revisited the statement numerous times and have focused on the section in which we state the need for any new revolutionary organization to be explicitly feminist. We have been criticized for not focusing enough on feminism, but instead “tacking on” a feminist ideology or “adding” the discussion of the feminist struggle to the statement. In my attempts to address the questions of feminism, I revisited another document based in feminist theory, bell hooks’ *Feminist Theory: from Margin to Center*, and in doing so I am here to say this about the document:

We in the Ruckus have written a document that is explicitly radically feminist in nature.

Bring the Ruckus focuses on the eradication of the politics of domination, not the achievement of equality. bell hooks states in her book that it is necessary to address the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels in order to be radically feminist. Feminism is not a lifestyle choice but instead a

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political commitment. Focusing on this political commitment and resistance to domination engages us in revolutionary praxis. A focus on the lifestyle of feminism ends in resorting to stereotyped perspectives of feminism. The criticisms of the Bring the Ruckus document as not being a feminist document or for “tacking on” a feminist ideology negates the radically feminist nature of the document.

Radical feminism is not rooted in competitive either/or types of thinking. bell hooks claims that we are socialized to think in terms of opposition rather than compatibility, and we in the Ruckus tend to agree with this thought. This competitive thought process leads to a misconception that one is a feminist because you are not something else. Bring the Ruckus, in line with radical feminist theory of bell hooks, sees anti-racist work as totally compatible with working to end sexist oppression rather than two movements competing for first place.

Much of the feminist movement, both historically and presently, focuses on “man as the enemy” instead of developing a political consciousness and an in-depth analysis of women’s social status. As a result, feminism has been focused exclusively around women’s relationship to male supremacy and the ideology of sexism. hooks states that this is once again the focus of equality of the sexes instead of the eradication of the cultural basis of group oppression. In shifting the focus to the later form of eradication, we explore all of the aspects of women’s political reality. This means that race and class oppression are recognized as feminist issues with as much relevance as sexism, as they are in Bring the Ruckus.

Radical feminism focuses its attention to the systems of domination and the inter-relatedness of sex, class, and racial oppression. In order to have a strong movement firmly grounded in feminism it is vital to understand this interconnected thought. Radical feminists challenge the prevailing notion of power as domination and attempt to transform its meaning. It is our acceptance of the cur-

rent value system of the culture that will lead us to passively absorb sexism. We must reconceptualize the power structure otherwise we will fall into the same old trap of shaping a feminist movement using class and race hierarchies that exist in larger society.

Struggles for power and the rights to dominate and control others undermine the feminist movement. Bring the Ruckus directly challenges the current power structure. In the current structure, women are forced to obtain their own power on the terms set by society. hooks' states that as long as the US is an imperialist, capitalist, patriarchal society, no large female majority can enter the existing ranks of the powerful. Bring the Ruckus argues for an end to the current power structure. In doing so it not only furthers the movements of racially oppressed groups, it furthers the feminist movement.

In actual numbers, I am one of two women currently in Ruckus, but we are not the only two feminists. More importantly, we are not the only two RADICAL feminists. This document does not advocate the "feminist" lifestyle because it advocates feminist politics instead. We do argue for a feminist structure of the organization that does insure women's participation and a commitment to feminist political work. We do argue for a feminist vision in which gender relations are completely transformed, but these things could not be accomplished if we advocated a feminist ideology that falls in line with old definitions and stereotypes. Instead we argue a view of race, class and sex and the interconnectedness of all of these oppressions that is radically feminist in nature. We argue for the end to the current system of power and domination along radically feminist lines. We demand the end of racism because it is completely compatible with the demands to end sexism. We fight capitalism because of its interconnectedness with sexist oppression.

Feminism has not been "tacked on" to the end of this document nor has it been ignored in addressing the key struggles. Bring the Ruckus is radically feminist not only in its thought, strategy, vision

and structure, but in its arguments against power, racism, imperialism, and the state.