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[Book Review] Me Not You. The trouble with mainstream feminism, by Alison Phipps. 2020, Manchester University Press

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GENDER, WORK & ORGANIZATION

**Me Not You. The trouble with mainstream feminism. by
Alison Phipps. 2020, Manchester University Press, 205
pages, ISBN: 978-1-5261-4717-2.**

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Manuscripts

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3 ***Me Not You. The trouble with mainstream feminism.* by Alison Phipps. 2020, Manchester**
4 **University Press, 205 pages, ISBN: 978-1-5261-4717-2.**
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8 I read *Me Not You* in the summer of 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic, it took me too long
9 to read it, as I tried to fit it around a daily intensive workload (paid and unpaid), that left me
10 too exhausted in late evenings to enjoy the pleasure of reading. My slowness was certainly not
11 due to the book's inaccessibility; on the contrary, this is a very approachable text, one that
12 resonated with me and my deep uneasiness with contemporary political choices. I use here the
13 word 'political' in its wider sense, as related to the complex relations of power between people
14 living in a society. *Me Not You* is a critique to mainstream feminism, but it is much more than
15 that as it discusses violence, racial relations, the role of mainstream media and the effects of
16 capitalism on all of this. It is a book that offers a lucid analysis of the current historical period,
17 its contradictions and the struggles for legitimacy and power of different groups, including
18 white feminists, trans-exclusionary feminists, anti-gender ideology groups and far-right
19 campaigners. The book is Alison Phipps' personal journey as a feminist activist against gender
20 violence, using the #MeToo movement as the catalyst for the analysis of the tools used by
21 mainstream feminists to sacrifice more marginalised groups (i.e. women of colour and
22 transgender women) in order to achieve their aims. As she places a mirror in front of white
23 feminism, Phipps, refers to current campaigns, campaigners, political groups and scholars (in
24 particular Black Feminist scholars) to offer a wider picture of the interconnections between the
25 objectives of white feminism, what it does to marginalised 'others' and violence in its various
26 forms, including the violence that emerges as a consequence of the capitalist system.
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42 This is a book for everyone who is interested in contemporary feminisms and social issues, it
43 is not a traditional academic text, it is accessible and personal. As a white feminist activist
44 Alison Phipps reflects on the various forms of exclusion and domination that the (white)
45 feminist movement created and continues to create in its struggles to achieve gender justice. In
46 considering sexual violence, Phipps analyses how the feminist movement and white feminists
47 use institutional and legal frameworks to achieve some form of justice; in doing so, she argues,
48 they often remove the perpetrators of violence from their own institutions, without concern for
49 where they will go or who will be their next targets. She also denounces conservative groups
50 of mainstream feminists for their attack on more marginalised others, such as sex workers and
51 trans people.
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3 The book is organised into six chapters, plus an introduction and a conclusion. The first chapter
4 re-evokes the new war on women and the war on gender ideology as tools to protect ‘man’s’
5 economy and defend the nuclear heterosexual family. The second chapter traces the origins of
6 #MeToo as one of the biggest social movement against sexual violence, and one of many “in
7 which white bourgeois women have co-opted the ideas and resistance of women of colour”
8 (p.38). She further analyses the movement in chapter three where she elaborates on the concept
9 of political whiteness. Others (e.g. HoSang, 2010) have used this term before, but Phipps goes
10 beyond its meaning in relation to the ‘white first’ orientation present in politics dominated by
11 white people. With several examples, and referencing the work of feminists of colour, she
12 shows how white subjectivities - and white feminism - are shaped by the position of white
13 supremacy within social relations. This is possibly the chapter I enjoyed the most in the book,
14 still is the one that makes me feel guilty and ashamed for all the times I perpetrated -and will
15 perpetrate- white supremacy. Specifically, for all the times I centre my work as gender scholar
16 on Eurocentric knowledge, all the times I do not see the further marginalisation that my
17 colleagues and students of colour experience, and all the times I remain ‘blind’ to colour. White
18 supremacy is about the structural advantage that white feminists have over feminists of colour,
19 on both the individual and collective level. It is about ‘leaving out’ their different stories,
20 narratives and experiences and to present information as neutral (rather than whitewashed).
21 Alison Phipps refers to the unconscious actions of violence and oppression exercised by white
22 feminists as well as their deliberate acts of marginalisation.

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39 Chapter four opens with the widely accepted knowledge that “feminism underpinned by
40 political whiteness seeks power within the existing system, not the overthrow of the system
41 itself” (p.82). While this assertion is undisputed, at least in academic circles, Phipps pushes its
42 logic further in order to dissect *political whiteness* and *corporate feminism* in relation to
43 contemporary capitalism, in a crescendo of plausible accusations that eloquently show how the
44 feminism of bourgeois white, western women has benefited them only and ‘priced out’ other
45 “women marginalised because of race, class, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability and
46 age” (p.96). The accusatory tone of this chapter is maintained in the fifth and sixth chapters.
47 Firstly, in chapter five white feminism is represented as war machine, with reference to the
48 punitive institutional power mobilised by (violated) white women who, in their fights for
49 justice, forfeits, as casualties, the bodies of the more marginalised. Specifically, Phipps
50 illustrates how white women create media outrage exploiting state power and bureaucratic
51 systems. In chapter six, Phipps exposes the alliances between far-right conservative groups and
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3 reactionary feminist campaigns that support trans-exclusionary politics and oppose the sex
4 industry. The accusatory tone here is loud and clear, still more a reckoning than a total
5 condemnation. The book concludes by offering a toolkit to fellow white feminists, in the form
6 of a list of six questions we should ask ourselves and our white peers as we initiate disruptive
7 actions. These questions are stimuli for us to attend to our role and responsibility in racism,
8 while addressing our political action towards the more marginalised. The questions can work
9 as a starting point for us to reflect on the impact that white feminism has on the lives of women
10 of colour. They will help those who are already questioning their positioning in relation to
11 mainstream feminism and those who are at the beginning of their critical feminist journey.

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20 This is an important and timely book which should be read by the different generations of
21 feminists and anybody else concerned with making society a better place for the ones who are
22 mostly affected by neoliberal politics of exclusion. Alison Phipps' work centres on violence
23 and feminist practices, however there are other lessons that we can learn from the book. For
24 those of us who work in academia, an important one concerns the effect that the invisibility of
25 Black and Indigenous knowledge from the curriculum and from the (feminist) research we
26 produce, has on black students and black scholars' sense of belonging. What white mainstream
27 feminist scholarship does is to exclude their 'lives' from our teachings and our research
28 'community' and expect them to be complicit in it. Another excellent lesson for the reader who
29 wants to 'hear' is that aiming to limit the rights of those who already have few rights does little
30 to advance the feminist cause(s), while, instead, it does maintain the hegemony of men and
31 masculinity. Let us not allow the fight of mainstream feminism to be the 'battle of the have-
32 nots', while the supremacists stand undisturbed winning the 'war'.

33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 **References**

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46 HoSang D.M. (2010) *Racial Propositions. Ballot Initiatives and the Making of Postwar*
47 *California*. University of California Press: Berkeley, CA.

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