

Mary Evans, *The Persistence of Gender Inequality*. Cambridge: Polity, 2017. 200pp; £15.99 paperback, £50 hardback, £15.99 eBook. ISBN: 978-0745689920.

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Gender inequality persists. In spite of decades of feminist activism, in spite of at least a century of legislation to turn things around, gender equality has not been achieved anywhere in the world. Evans sets out to discuss the complexity of this infuriating situation and to theorise how gender inequality is part of the wider problem of global inequality. In defining gender inequality Evans argues that the material conditions of women are for the majority of the world based on biological difference and 'fantasies' (ix) of femininity. The book is not based on new empirical material, but it does analyse a number of sites in which gender inequality is apparent: social media, UK 'austerity' policies and the globalised beauty and fashion industries. Evans weaves through this analysis literary examples and theoretical approaches from psychoanalysis to economics, developing a complex argument that shows the inadequacies of both theories of inequalities that do not include gender inequality in their analysis (e.g. Wilkinson and Pickett, Picketty) and liberal feminism.

Three main theoretical ideas underpin her approach. First, that persistent gender inequalities must be considered within the global context of its intersections with race and class. We ought not to think of gender inequality as the primary inequality, but rather to think of it as part of a system of inequality. Second, that we need to go beyond thinking of women's equality as access to the same things men have and on the same terms, to considering the specific conditions of most women's lives. Finally, that our subjectivities are shaped by the social sphere and economic structure, thus making it difficult to imagine a better world from within this one.

At the core of the book is the notion of care. For Evans the caring roles of women's lives are fundamental for understanding the persistence of gender inequality since this is what sets the material conditions of women's lives apart from men's. This is where the critique of liberalism is particularly useful: in claiming that paid work would emancipate women liberal feminists forget that women have been in paid employment for centuries, but that this work may be drudgery. Such work can hardly be said to be liberating as there is very little pay or support for those who must combine care with paid work or those who seek to care full time.

Feminists, instead of emphasising paid work and education, need to engage with three propositions: the world is shaped by human events: there is no natural progression towards gender equality; protests against the cultural degradation of women should include calls for legislation, not just moral outrage; feminist campaigns need to recognise the difference between 'theories of the individual psyche and theories of the social' (118).

Evans calls for a more radical feminism, arguing that we cannot build an equal world within the limits of the existing one. What is needed is to place more defined limits around feminism: we need a feminism 'that moves away from the fundamentalism inherent in essentialism and towards a more defined, and socially coherent, vision of the origin and meaning of gendered inequality' (119). This means taking into account that inequality is 'universal' (139) - this is not about the particularity of gender inequality, it is about the multiple sites of inequality that are wrought by neoliberalism and political elites' reliance upon its ideology. There are no examples of how we might 'do' feminism from this perspective. Evans would seem to be calling for the state to provide the conditions for equality, but the book is not an overt call for socialist feminism, although the ideas have harmonies with socialism (as she mentions in careful references to USSR).

After the so-called 'cultural turn', the recent return to thinking about material conditions and structural inequalities that impact on women's lives is very welcome. Whilst the book may not be making a particular new argument - second wave feminists such as Hartmann argued for the need to consider the caring roles in women's lives - and whilst it is grounded in earlier feminist traditions of thinking, the book brings together a range of feminist and non-feminist research and is informed by contemporary feminist theory. This makes it a particularly valuable book for those who have read critiques of inequality and found gender missing. It doesn't entirely fill in the gaps, but it does convince that gender inequality and economic inequality are part and parcel of the same thing, and that feminists need to look beyond liberal-informed calls for education and access to the boardroom if we are to end the persistence of gender inequality.