

Transcript

Upstream Podcast Episode 10: Feminism for the 99 Percent

Della Duncan: This episode of Upstream was made possible with support by The Guerrilla Foundation, supporting activists & grassroots movements to bring about major systemic change. And from donations from listeners like you. To contribute to our fall season's crowdfunding campaign, please visit upstreampodcast.org forward slash support. Thank you

[Upstream Theme Music - Lanterns]

[River sounds]

Men's and Women's voices: You are listening to Upstream.

Della Duncan: A radio documentary series that invites you to unlearn everything you thought you knew about economics. I'm Della Duncan.

Robert Raymond: And I'm Robert Raymond.

Della Duncan: Join us, as we journey upstream.

Men's and Women's voices: To the heart of our economic system and discover cutting edge stories of game-changing solutions based on connection, resilience, and prosperity for all.

[Fade out music]

Khara Jabola-Carolus: I just — I changed a diaper, fed two kids, and was like, try not to be more than one minute late, so I'm here.

Della Duncan: And that's totally part of the context of our conversation. So, I totally hear you. I love the drawing behind you, by the way. Is that one of your children's drawings?

Khara Jabola-Carolus: Uh yeah, it's a cockroach.

Della Duncan: I love it. Well, welcome, Khara, to Upstream. Thanks for taking the time to speak with us. You recently posted a screenshot of your email auto reply that went somewhat viral. I think that would be a fun way to start...would mind reading it to us?

Khara Jabola-Carolus: Can I yell it?

Della Duncan: [Laughs] You can read it however you'd like...

Khara Jabola-Carolus: Okay cool. I'm pulling it up right now. I was really angry when I wrote it, I'll tell you that.

[Typing, email sound]

Khara Jabola-Carolus: Ok...Aloha. Due to patriarchy, I am behind in emails. I hope to respond to your message soon. But like many women, I'm working full time while tending to an infant and toddler full time. According to The Washington Post, the average length of an uninterrupted stretch of work time for parents during COVID-19 was three minutes, twenty four seconds. If you have a time sensitive need, please call our office between 7:45am and 4:30pm HST. Very best, Khara.

Della Duncan: Wow, okay. Thank you for that. So, can you tell us why you wrote it?

Khara Jabola-Carolus: I wrote it because I didn't, I wrote it because I didn't want to participate in the delusion. I knew that because of the fact that I lead a statewide government agency, that it would be seen widely through government. And I wanted them to think twice every time they demanded something from an employee, every time they asked their partner to do something. I wanted it to be in everyone's face. And I was really disappointed when schools closed and there were this uneven demands about telework — that there was like literally no accommodation.

And people knew I had an infant. And right before COVID hit, I was flinging my infant over my shoulder and going to the Capitol and testifying on things like paid family leave at the podium with an infant on my shoulder, not as a publicity stunt, but because I had no other option. And then I went into COVID, and even when the school system shut down, there was still no

awareness and that was completely unacceptable. And so, yeah, I wrote this to make a very strong statement for everybody to back off and let me not neglect my kids, too.

I'm going off. But I do want to say one other anecdote that was really, really scary. Me and my partner were on a Zoom call at the beginning of the pandemic, and I think my baby was maybe 11 months at that time. And we were in a six story apartment and the window had been open, but it had a screen. But midway through the call I looked over and the screen was off. So the baby was just standing there staring down into this open window. And my heart stopped. And it's like literally our kids are going to die for Zoom meetings. I mean, it was the scariest moment. It wasn't funny in that moment. But it's like, you know, taking care of children is serious business.

[News Montage]

News Anchor: At six o'clock, a working mother is fighting back after she says she was fired for taking care of her kids...

News Anchor: Nearly 54% of the jobs lost during the pandemic were held by women. Since last February, more than five million women have lost their jobs. ABC 7's Leah Hope introduces us today to a suburban woman who gave up a good job to help her children at home...

News Anchor: A Cape Coral mother filed a lawsuit against her former employer, she says, for laying her off because she needed to miss work to care for her sick kids at the height of the pandemic...

News Anchor: It's been challenging, and the struggle for many, including parents, who are trying to find that balance between taking care of kids and their job. Now one mom is suing, claiming she was fired because her boss felt her children were too noisy on conference calls.

News Anchor: Working from home with no childcare options for parents of young children especially? It's a nightmare...

[Music: Thao and the Get Down Stay Down — Temple]

Della Duncan: There are many ways women across the world have been disproportionately impacted by COVID. The pandemic has simultaneously increased the demand for unpaid labor from women, including childcare and homeschooling, while decimating industries like retail, leisure, hospitality, education and entertainment which are their main employers. So many of the jobs lost during the pandemic were held by women, that the resulting economic recession has been called a “shecession” — or even an example of “disaster patriarchy.”

But our current economic system has always had a history of harming women disproportionately — in fact, in many ways, COVID has simply revealed and exacerbated already existing inequalities. But where there is a crisis, there is also opportunity. And in this space, some are asking what a feminist response to COVID could look like?

But, of course, there are multiple kinds of feminism. In this episode, we explore what kind of feminism could not only lead us beyond this present crisis, but also offer us a vision of a more just world where equality and liberation are premises, not aspirations: a feminism for the 99%.

[Fade out music]

Khara Jabola-Carolus: So my name is Khara Jabola-Carolus. I'm the executive director of the Hawaii State Commission on the Status of Women. I am an activist-bureaucrat. I was raised in the anti-imperialist feminist left of the Philippines and that's what I bring to this position. So, you know, I realize that working in government is a loaded game, but it was really a movement victory that I'm here and holding the space for feminism — specifically trans-national and anti-imperialist feminism.

Della Duncan: Wonderful. I'm happy you're there as well. And I'm wondering, can you tell us a little bit more about some life experiences that you've had that have led you to the position you're in?

Khara Jabola-Carolus: I mean, I was a girl raised in patriarchy from a family that's from a country that's really just a pawn between competing superpowers. And growing up in the midst of what it means to try to survive as an immigrant family and the way that women have to cling to the man in

the family as kind, like, of the life vest economically while they are actually the ones propping him up, was very obvious to me growing up because I grew up in a household with four adult women and one man. And he was the one who was supporting us all financially and like, a bunch of kids. But these women were overworked nonetheless. They were constantly busy. So that sense of unfairness was really in my face all the time.

Della Duncan: So, a lot of your work centers around this idea of decolonizing feminism. What does that concept mean to you?

Khara Jabola-Carolus: Decolonization or decolonized feminism is really about reconnecting and restoring our relationships to our past and cultures that have been hurt by and eradicated in part by white supremacy, which white women have participated in. And so, it's time for native women and colonized women to be valued and heard in feminism. The feminist strategy, the white feminist strategy, the American feminist strategy, has failed. We need a new playbook.

Tiek Johnson: To me feminism has always been pretty whitewashed and almost a little classist in a lot of ways. So I've always you know thought about that when I've thought about feminism. Not to say that that's right, but that's what it has always reflected to me, like my community doesn't talk about feminism when I think about like my mom and my sister and my aunts and my cousins, they don't say, "oh, we're feminist". They are usually too busy in the day to day of survival to think about these large concepts.

Della Duncan: Thank you Tiek, and would you mind introducing yourself?

Tiek Johnson: I am Tiek Johnson. I live in Austin, but I am a proud New Orleans native. I hold the titles of woman, cis-gender, queer, mom and friend, daughter — all that.

Della Duncan: And how would you describe the work that you do and why you do it?

Tiek Johnson: I am a reproductive justice advocate, just as a person — it is a part of my core values. But the actual work that I do is I work for a doula organization in supporting and educating new doulas into that community. Why do I do this work is I had a little one in 2017 and that was probably the first time I ever really thought about my reproductive organs in

that way. And it was, it was huge. It was huge. It was a huge process. It was traumatic in a lot of ways, it was unsupportive in a lot of ways. And as a black woman — because I am a black woman — I realized that the narrative we have around what support looks like, especially during that vulnerable time, just wasn't the narrative that I was down with. And I wanted to be a part of the process of changing that narrative. And so I started doing whatever I could with whatever organization to change that narrative within the communities that I can — specifically the ones where people look like me.

Della Duncan: So you had this child and you went through this difficult birthing experience, but it inspired you to get into the reproductive health world. I'm wondering what difficulties have you been experiencing since especially in regards to being a mom during COVID.

Tiek Johnson: We didn't get enough government support, right, but we know that, I feel like the people who listen to the podcast know that. And that didn't feel comfortable sending my child back to daycare. And the daycare in order to, like, hold our spot was like, you still have to pay us, like you still have to pay us, we might reduce it. And then the director of the daycare even said, don't tell the other parents this, right? But I'll reduce it for you. And my son's dad lost his income, and so the bulk of it — he drives for Lyft. And my mom is high risk and his mom is high risk. And so Lyft was just too big of a risk with everything that was going on. So all of the financial things fell on me, right? Like he's just making enough money to take care of his basic needs, he can't pay for daycare or childcare or anything like that. So losing my son's spot at his daycare and not really being able to afford child care in another way, because I would have to 100 percent pay for it.

Della Duncan: The lack of affordable childcare in the U.S. is just one of many crises that usually gets very little attention from policymakers. However, just in April, the Biden Administration proposed a [‘families plan’](#) that includes some stuff on childcare that's actually pretty good, including \$225 billion that would go toward covering child care costs for low income and middle class parents with children aged five or younger. Like most of this administration's policy proposals, it's nothing radical or structurally transformative — it's not universal childcare free at the point of use, for example — but it is an important improvement that could make a significant difference in the lives of folks like Tiek and her son, Nyle.

[Tiek playing with her child]

Tiek Johnson: The experience of not having childcare is my child as my co-worker. And I'm not going to say I hate it, that's a very strong word, but I'm not a fan of it. And he's not a fan of it, right? Because I'm not able to do any one thing well, right? I'm wearing three hats. I have a four year old, like, teaching starts at home. So I try to spend time teaching him. So I'm home schooling in the morning, right? And then I'm an employee in the day — I'm an employee and a mom in the day. So I'm in Zoom meetings, fixing snacks and playing with blocks and all of these things throughout the day. And at the end of the day, I'm able to just parent. And that's cooking dinner and bath time and story time and all of those things. And so by the end of the day, I'm exhausted. I have no time for anything. And if I'm being 100 percent honest, I'm not able to show up for anything in the way that I want to show up. And I don't like the space into which I parent.

I'm often trying to get him to do something else so that I can do something else. And so it makes me be a little bit less patient and short and snippy and yeah, and yeah, that's not how I want to show up, like he doesn't deserve that. It's not his fault. And so, and then also give me all his mom guilt, you can probably hear it. And that, like, I'm not able to show up the way I want to be, like literally with the cards that I have, this is the best that I'm able to do.

Sarah Jaffe: So women have been taking the brunt of the COVID work crisis in so many ways. Right.

Della Duncan: This is Sarah Jaffe, journalist and author of *Work Won't Love You Back: How Devotion to Our Jobs Keeps Us Exploited, Exhausted, and Alone*.

Sarah Jaffe: One of them is that women are still doing the vast majority of the housework, the child care, the family care and friend care responsibilities. And that has remained true even as women are more and more likely to also be in the paid workplace. So what we've seen is COVID sort of broadly split the workforce into three. There are people who got laid off — no job. There were people who were working from home doing the same thing that they were already doing, but doing it at home. And then there are people who are still going to the workplace just in worse and

more dangerous conditions. So all three of those things suck, right? None of those things are fun. And then we saw in studies that people were actually working longer hours when they're working at home during COVID, right? And so you are supervising your kid, which you don't normally have to do, then also doing your day job.

Della Duncan: These conditions are resulting in a lot of women reporting being incredibly, stressed. But what are the roots of this? Why are women the ones primarily responsible for taking care of a home?

Sarah Jaffe: So the Split of women into being responsible for caring — the home, the household, that kind of work goes back a long ways. However, it's not natural. And sort of a lot of people will say, like, “oh, well, women are the ones who have babies. So therefore, this is just natural. And women are naturally good at caring.” And that's why they end up in professions like teaching and nursing, home health care and other things that are slightly more distant from that. But like food service and retail work, flight attendants, any number of things where we are expected to cater to other people's feelings and needs and desires. But actually this has been socially constructed and it's socially constructed through a whole bunch of violence.

Della Duncan: Violence that can in part be traced back to the transition from Feudalism to Capitalism. According to Sylvia Federici in her book *Caliban and The Witch*, the witch hunts aided in the transition to capitalism during the time of the enclosures by targeting poor, peasant women — partially in an effort to dispossess them of the land where they lived.

Sarah Jaffe: The control of the woman as a sort of resource is something that gets instantiated through the witch hunt, through massive state sanctioned violence against women — against women as witches.

So as people who control their reproduction, as people who didn't want to work — Federici writes about how magic was a way of getting what one wanted without work. And so burning witches was essentially another way of reinforcing the work ethic. But it was also a way of sort of confining women back into the home. So women before that had access to the Commons, so they were responsible for things that were considered labor. And the beginnings of capitalism through this period, it's a shift to wage labor from sort of subsistence labor. So now men are the ones who go to a

workplace to work — even though it was never actually clearly divided like this. There were a lot of women in those early factories and a lot of children as early factories.

But nevertheless, the narrative goes, women stay home in the home. This is what they're good at. This is what they're for. And men go into the workplace and they make a wage and they bring that home and they support the family. And the man is the head of the household, the same way that the king is the head of state.

So all of this structure is again, it's built on to us through the violence of the witch hunt. It's also achieved through a variety of laws that are put into place around vagrancy, around prostitution, around anything that was not considered sort of productive labor — it gets extremely regulated during this period. And so we end up moving into this work regime that on some level resembles this thing that we were told was natural.

Della Duncan: Capitalism did not invent violence against women — but it did establish a new form of sexism. Capitalism separated the reproductive labor of making people (birthing, feeding, clothing, etc.) from the making of profit, it then assigned the former job to women, and simultaneously devalued it and subordinated it to the latter.

[Music break: Marissa Kay — Fight Like a Girl]

Cecilia Palmeiro: Sisters, compañeras, welcome to our existential revolution. This is the most important date in the history of women, here we are making history, her-story. Today women of the world unite in the biggest and most radical measure of force: the second International Women's Strike. Today, we are connected with women and feminized bodies all over the world in more than fifty countries, and I would like to salute all these countries, and name them, one by one...

Della Duncan: Hello, Maura. Good to meet you.

Maura: Hi.

Della Duncan: Where are we right now, Maura?

Maura: Right now we are in Berkeley, at the Martin Luther King Jr. park, and we are here at the International Women's Day Strike rally that we are putting on.

Della Duncan: And what brought you here today, Moira?

Maura: I'm here because I've been organizing with the coalition that put this on and I became involved with this coalition because I am one of the organizers of the feminist socialist caucus out of the East Bay Democratic Socialists of America.

Della Duncan: And why is this day special or important? Why organize this day?

Maura: I feel like it's important to organize this day — to bring awareness of women's struggles not just nationally, but internationally. And in socialism, if we are to have any strength, it has to be with a women's force around the world and to understand women's struggles not just in the United States but in other worlds as well.

Della Duncan: And what does feminism for the 99 percent mean to you? What does that kind of idea — does anything come up for you around that?

Maura: Yeah, feminism for the 99 percent, to me, means feminism for the working class people. It means to recognize the invisible tasks that women do on a consistent basis. And to bring recognition to women's jobs — such as caregiving — that go unrecognized, and the struggles that happen with that.

Della Duncan: Awesome, thanks for talking to us.

Maura: Yeah.

Tithi Bhattacharya: The International Women's Strike was first conceived in the fall of 2016 after two massive mass demonstrations by women in Argentina and Poland.

Della Duncan: Tithi Bhattacharya is an organizer for the International Women's Strike and co-author of *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto*, co-authored with Cinzia Arruzza and Nancy Fraser.

Tithi Bhattacharya: The movement in Argentina was against femicide and gender violence and the movement in Poland was in defense of abortion rights — to legalize abortion. So both of those mobilizations went well beyond just being a feminist mobilization and became society-wide mass demonstrations. And so from there many feminists who have been part of the feminist movement for years decided to have an international conversation about global feminism and a global women's strike. And so from that emerged this idea of a women's strike on March 8th, which was International Women's Day the following year. So March 8th of 2017 was the first time that feminists in over fifty different countries struck together on March 8th.

Now what is significant about that is that this was an international coordination between women across the globe. So that is definitely a first in my lifetime at least, but at least in the last half century. So that level of international coordination and international solidarity is absolutely unprecedented. And it was exhilarating to be part of that organizing with my sisters all the way from Latin America to Eastern Europe and various parts of the global south.

Della Duncan: The International Women's Strike is not a traditional strike in the sense of being focused around a workplace — it's much broader than that. Women are encouraged to strike from their jobs, but also from their reproductive labor — work often associated with caregiving and domestic housework including cleaning, cooking, and caring for children and the elderly.

Tithi Bhattacharya: Women's labor is not and has never been limited only to the workplace. All of us who pick up a child before going to work, pick up a child from school, or cook dinner or know that women's labor do not stop once we leave our workplaces. In fact a second cycle begins after that. Women's strike activism has drawn into its repertoire of struggles withdrawal from housework, from sex, and even refusal to smile. So these are all sort of part of the repertoire of gender expectation and labor — labor both waged, unwaged, and emotional — that women are forced to do on a regular basis. And Women's Strike was saying that we need a total strike.

We need a total strike from all manners of labor that women do. So what is achieved is that such a strike, which is about withdrawing all labor that women perform, made visible the indispensable role played by gendered and unpaid work in capitalist society.

Della Duncan: The International Women's Strike is more than just a strike — it's a movement to reimagine feminism by centering intersectionality and class consciousness — a significant break from the more mainstream feminism of the last several decades.

Tithi Bhattacharya: One of the problems of what we understand as feminism in the last 40 years has been a neoliberal dream of feminism that has been sold to us, which has sort of segregated certain issues as “feminist issues,” while leaving other issues well alone from the scope of feminist politics. So, for instance, a narrow understanding of feminism has emerged under neoliberalism that women's issues are about, say, for instance, reproductive rights. So the right to have safe and accessible abortion is a woman's issue — and of course it is a women's issue. But it cannot be just a woman's issue because, if you think about it, the decision to have a child is dependent on the parents' ability to feed the child, to house the child, to send the child to a proper school. So it depends on the kind of wages that the parents are able to make in order to make a comfortable life for their child. So the decision to have a child is dependent on that. And the decision to have an abortion is similarly tied up with whether the woman feels, at that moment, able to take care of a child in that context. So these issues of reproductive rights are deeply embedded in wider questions of other sort of rights.

For instance, the right to adequate public healthcare, the right to a decent job, the right to a decent wage, and so on. And let's not forget that all of these issues are deeply implicated and embedded in race relations in this country, which has this horrendous history of slavery and actually sterilization of women of color. So I always say that reproductive rights cannot just be the right to abortion. Reproductive justice, if we want to formulate it as such, must also be the right to have children. So those issues of race, gender, and class are deeply implicated and co-constitute each other. And a feminism that does not respond to that implication does not attend to those various layers of social inequality and social domination is not feminism for the many — that is feminism for the few.

Nicole Aschoff: I don't think that we can really, truly achieve feminism without really looking critically at the kind of structures of power in our society. And we can't really achieve feminism without attacking racism and without attacking capitalism and really thinking critically about how these kinds of forces interact.

Della Duncan: Nicole Aschoff is editor at large at Jacobin Magazine, senior editor at Verso Books, and author of the book, *The New Prophets of Capital*.

Nicole Aschoff: Part of the really strong critique in second wave feminism was that it was a movement for white middle class women. And that ignored the kinds of realities that women of color were experiencing and that it wasn't a feminist project for them. We can't have a feminist movement without being an anti-racist, anti-capitalist movement. I think that there's a broader understanding of that today. I do think that we've actually made strides in the past few decades. Obviously it's still an uphill battle, but I think a lot of younger people are much more aware of the need to fight against racism.

And certainly when we look at the way that women are oppressed in society we really see that women of color are the most oppressed people in society. And they are the ones who by and large are receiving the lowest pay, and they are working in the worst jobs, and they are the ones who really need a radical feminist movement as much as anyone. So I think, again, it becomes a challenge — it becomes a question of actually framing demands and framing your movement about a vision that really benefits everyone. And that has to include an anti-racist vision.

Regina Larre Campuzano: My name is Regina Larre Campuzano and I am an organizer with East Bay DSA. I think we are living in an era where progress has taken priority over change. And what I mean by that is we will hear a lot about, you know, people saying like, “Oh, we need more women CEOs, we need more women police officers, we need more black women CEOs,” and seeing that as a sign of advancement, of like, somehow there's no discrimination, somehow there's now oppression, but ultimately, that is not true.

And ultimately, if we're building a feminism for the 99 percent, it is going to be truer to feminism — feminism being a way to change systems of oppression.

Nicole Aschoff: Obviously it would be much better if we had more women in power — that's a no brainer.

Della Duncan: This is Nicole Aschoff again.

Nicole Aschoff: Everyone should agree that more women need to be in government, more women need to be in charge of corporations, more women need to be in charge of labor unions, and we do see a massive under representation of women in positions of power. This is very clear and I think anyone who calls themselves a feminist would agree that women should always be seeking the initiative to take positions of power both to better their own lives but also to kind of serve as an aspirational model for younger women out there. I think that goes without saying.

The problem for me comes when this becomes a solution to a much broader structural problem which is violence against women, oppression of women, both in the United States and globally. And the two I think we need to make a distinction between them. Because saying that having women in power will solve the problems of oppression against women doesn't square. Part of the reason is that it actually ascribes to a kind of conservative essentialist notion of what it means to be a woman in the sense that women are somehow more kind, we're more caring, we're more thoughtful, we're going to look out for other women because that's just in our nature. Which I think is a very kind of conservative and ungrounded remnant of patriarchy and we should get rid of that. I don't think women are inherently more caring than men. I think we're socialized to behave in particular ways.

But the bigger problem is that we don't have any evidence that women in power have actually achieved these greater gains for women. We have a lot of examples of women in power doing great things, but it's not something that we can easily draw the line from A to B and say, "Look, having women in power has given us these gains for feminism." I think we should have women in power — but that shouldn't be our strategy. And the reason why is because having women in these positions of power doesn't

change the structural nature of our economy and the sort of ways that women are oppressed.

Della Duncan: As feminist author Susan Faludi once wrote in a CNN opinion piece: “You can’t change the world for women by simply inserting female faces at the top of an unchanged system of social and economic power. You can’t just add women and stir.” The title of this CNN piece is, “Sandberg Left Single Mothers Behind,” Sandberg being Sheryl Sandberg, the billionaire Chief Operating Officer of Facebook and author of the New York Time’s best seller, *Lean in: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*.

In her op-ed, Faludi decries mainstream feminism’s failure to examine root causes — particularly its recoil from class issues. She writes, “Mainstream feminist debate, for all the lip service paid to the “intersectionality” of race, class and gender, has also left economic divisions on the cutting-room floor.” Faludi sees Sheryl Sandberg’s genre of feminism, and her book, *Lean In*, as a perfect example of this. Nicole actually devoted an entire chapter of her book, “*The New Prophets of Capital*,” to critiquing Sheryl.

Nicole Aschoff: In many ways actually Sandberg's message echoes the message of Betty Friedan in the 1960s. Betty Friedan was really talking to middle class women, saying, get out of the house, get a job, and take advantage of what society has to offer you. This is — by choosing domesticity you are choosing kind of a half life and you need to take charge of your life and get out there. And Sandberg is kind of making a similar message but instead of telling women to get out of the kitchen she's telling women to get out of the cubicle, right? Stop being mediocre. Like, fight harder, become the boss, and in doing so you will make the world better for all women. So I think in some ways this is an appealing message for young women because it kind of puts to the side for a minute the structural barriers that people are facing and really encourages them to get fired up and take charge.

Della Duncan: One of the main issues with *Lean In* style feminism or “Girl Boss Feminism” is that it’s a purely individualistic strategy, which squares nicely with the deepset individualism that permeates neoliberalism and which conveniently ignores structural questions and the role of social movements.

As the “Feminism for the 99 Percent” manifesto that Tithi co-authored states: Lean in feminism “permits professional managerial women to lean in precisely by enabling them to lean on the poorly paid migrant women to whom they subcontract their caregiving and housework.

Insensitive to class and race, it links our cause with elitism and individualism, projecting feminism as a “standalone” movement. It associates us with policies that harm the majority and cuts us off from struggles that oppose those policies.”

Nicole Aschoff: One of the things that Sandberg says in the book, she says that all strategies of fighting for feminism are compatible. She says, so there are the people who want to build institutional strength, build collective movements, and take power that way. There are people who, like her, who want to become the boss and become sort of in a position of power so that they can then make rules that benefit everyone. She's saying these two strategies of power are perfectly compatible.

I argue that they're not. And one of the reasons why is because when you channel your fight for feminism through, let's say, a giant corporation like Facebook, and you work hard for the company, you get to the top — all of your work and your success then creates this kind of message that capitalism is actually meritocratic, right? If you say I am not only achieving success but I am achieving the goals of feminism by becoming the boss, you sort of burnish this meritocratic facade of capitalism — which is just factually untrue.

Everyone can't become the boss. Everyone can't move up the ranks and become powerful, right? So what are all the rest of the women supposed to do? The only way that you can really achieve gains for a wide range of women is by organizing collectively together to give yourself power against the boss. To actually create a sense of solidarity and material gains that can give you the kinds of protection you need in the workplace. And this isn't something that you can get through an individual strategy.

Tithi Bhattacharya: "Feminism of the 99 percent" is very distinct from *Lean In* feminism, which is about the rights of a tiny minority to succeed within the system, whereas "Feminism for the 99 percent" is about the rights of the majority to question the system — and in fact to reject it.

Della Duncan: Here's Tithi again.

Tithi Bhattacharya: So unless we talk about an anti-capitalist feminism, then if feminism is about the rights of women, then rights of women actually make no sense if we do not talk about the effect capitalism has on these rights. Because the vast majority of women are actually harmed by capitalism. So if we talk about the rights of women then we must of necessity talk about those rights as they emerge against the system. We cannot talk about rights of a tiny minority of women who benefit from the system and who form the sort of top layer of the capitalist system. So, this is the CEOs, the senators, etc. So, they may be women who have succeeded within the system, but that is not a feminist politics that we can see does not benefit actually the vast majority of women. So feminism in order to speak to the vast majority of women has to be of necessity anti-capitalist.

Nicole Aschoff: The question of whether feminism and capitalism are compatible is really dependent on how you define feminism. If you define feminism as a female president, half the Senate are women, women are in positions of power, maybe even women achieve an equal wage to men — this kind of feminism is compatible with capitalism. But if you have a broader understanding of feminism, and what I would say is a more radical understanding of feminism, where you're really talking about all women achieving more justice and security, all women actually making strides against sexism and violence against them, and also achieving material benefits that make their life better, right? Healthcare, guaranteed childcare, free higher education — these kinds of gains are not compatible with capitalism.

Della Duncan: As Tithi shares in the manifesto, “Our answer to lean-in feminism is kick-back feminism. We have no interest in breaking the glass ceiling while leaving the vast majority to clean up the shards. Far from celebrating women CEOs who occupy corner offices, we want to get rid of CEOs and corner offices.”

[Hawaii Vacation AD]

Khara Jabola-Carolus: The normal that we have in Hawaii is the normal built around a colonial infrastructure system.

Della Duncan: Here's Khara again.

Khara Jobola-Carolus: Extremely punishing for native people, extremely punishing for women, very white supremacist here in Hawaii, which I think a lot of people don't realize still is. Of course, there is Asian settlerism, but at the end of the line is still usually a white man who's the CEO, who's the president, who's behind our industries and our businesses here so — and our politics. Hawaii is the superlative of almost everything, you know, competes with L.A., SF, and New York, but has the lowest wages relative to the cost of living. And a lot of the factors that we were struggling with, like the highest amount of intergenerational living, most people living in one house, those things made us even more vulnerable to a pandemic and COVID-19 as a disease. So we did not want to return to this military-driven, war-driven, tourism-driven economy because it's wholly extractive.

Della Duncan: 'The Road to Economic Recovery should not be across women's backs.' These are the first words of "*Building Bridges, Not Walking on Backs: A Feminist Economic Recovery Plan for COVID-19*," led by Khara and her fellow organizers in Hawaii.

Khara Jabola-Carolus: So during the COVID-19 crisis, it was like women's rights are down the drain. You know, there were so many headlines like that, like this is going to be the biggest blow to — and, you know, how do we structure against that? Other countries have done that and normalized that. So, like in the Philippines, there's a Magna Carta for women that says disaster response has to be gender focused and equitable for women and lists the ways. So I already had that seed in my mind because I had relationships to my homeland. I had relationships with anti-imperialist and leftist frontline organizations in other countries. So I've been exposed to that and I had their support. So, how that translated to Hawaii was really the gift of the feminist organizing here.

Della Duncan: So, what was the process of writing the plan like?

Khara Jabola-Carolus: So, when COVID-19 hit, we convened the Commission on the Status of Women, which is a statewide government agency, convened a formal task force of women from different sectors, different types of organizing — we tried to be really conscious about

bringing in mothers as well. And we started meeting weekly. And we knew that if we didn't write the plan then and there that we would never be even considered. So, it was really simple. It was democratic, it was in a Google doc, nothing too complicated. And we did it up in about the course of a week and everybody who could contribute contributed what they could. And we sent it out into the world and started to organize around it.

[Hawaiian Music]

Della Duncan: Rather than rush to return to business as usual, this feminist economic recovery plan sees the pandemic as an opportunity to transition to an economy that better values the work we know is essential to sustaining us and to address the harms and gaps in systems laid bare by the epidemic.

The plan makes it clear that it's unwise to cut government spending during a pandemic, and instead, argues that federal stimulus funds go towards support for high risk groups, parents and caregivers, healthcare programs, shelters and public services, digital access, and native peoples. It goes further to say that to reshape the economy, Hawaii must build social infrastructure, harness the role of midwifery to improve deficits in maternal and neonatal healthcare, and incorporate gender-based violence prevention measures.

The plan also encourages economies to move away from military, tourism, and luxury development and instead advocates for access to green jobs — especially for women and people of color. It further demands that the voices of women — native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in particular — be given greater sway in decisions of how to rebuild from the pandemic to ensure that the recovery truly moves economies away from white, patriarchal systems.

Khara Jabola-Carolus: The biggest push was really to reconceptualize the social safety net. We don't even like that idea, that frame, let alone the actual structure of it, because it implies an unstable system that you will be falling from. And so our first recommendation was really to strengthen all the support that goes out to community and to remove barriers to that access. And a lot of those barriers were — means testing is a nightmare,

it's just a nightmare. So that was really the strongest recommendation at the fore was to restructure the support system and invest in it heavily as we move into the crisis rather than take from it as just our account to continually withdraw from.

And then the other key recommendations were about, you know, based off of what happened in the Great Recession several years ago, learning from those mistakes. So the jobs recovery programs, the stimulus, was gender neutral. And we saw all the ways that impacted women negatively. And so, you know, focusing on, in the immediate job stimulus that serve women's lives, that pull us away from the economy in Hawaii, that's entirely built on militarism, tourism, and luxury development and real estate. So anything that would facilitate a shift away from that and also meet the urgent needs right now, which are primarily caregiving and access to health. So we're having major issues with public accommodation for single moms and pregnant and birthing people. So that's the second prong that I would highlight.

Della Duncan: I'm wondering if we were to get really tangible, how might a mom in Hawaii feel the impact of this plan?

Khara Jabola-Carolus: Well, for one, there wouldn't be this idea that she has to work in order to get state support if that's needed, because having children is already an invaluable activity. So this abusive relationship with the state that women feel and they describe as similar to an abusive relationship because they can be pulled off at any time. We want to at minimum end that dynamic. I think the second way too, during COVID, for example, would be basic things. Things like child care. I mean, I just feel like these things are not radical at all. But things like child care would be free, or there would be no pressure to work and keep up with this traditional male workplace model.

So there would be a different flexibility, because right? We can't give all of childcare and all of the domestic responsibilities that we have over to the market or to the state. So there needs to be a lot more flexibility in the workplace and there needs to be equal leisure time because the mental health impact of COVID-19 is real. And I really worry about women in particular, especially mothers. So those might be some ways that a single mom might feel a tangible impact if this was reality right now.

Della Duncan: The plan has not yet been approved at the State level, but it was [successfully adopted by 4 out of 5 of Hawaii's counties](#). The document also inspired similar initiatives in Northern Ireland, several states and provinces in India and Canada, and the African Women's Union. It's also led to a proposal for a [Global Feminist Economic Recovery Plan](#) led by the Association for Women's Rights in Development, a global feminist movement-support organization. "We all deserve a recovery," they write in their Manifesto, "not only from COVID-19, but from ages of economic injustice and exploitation. To do this, our plan is anchored in feminist knowledge, practice, and a radical re-imagining of what it takes to create resilient and thriving economies."

[Music break: Kohala — Forest]

Della Duncan: Tiek, if you were to get an email that says we have just introduced a feminist economic recovery plan to COVID, What might you say? What might you include?

Tiek Johnson We'd have birth control, we'd have termination, we would have doula support for people who needed it, a network of childcare support and so resources, so for the people who were home schooling are okay with keeping their kids at home and wanting to solely focus on that, educational resources, free children's apps, whatever that looks like, lesson plans, having that available and accessible. Community groups and stuff like that. And then for the people who needed outside child care, who desire it outside child care, stipends. And safe places or whatever for them to send them, safe on what the parent deems important. And then, yeah, community. Therapy. Therapy stipends. Group therapy, if necessary, if needed, yeah.

Sarah Jaffe: One of the things we have to do is de-gender care work.

Della Duncan: Here's Sarah again.

Sarah Jaffe: To say that actually like this is not a natural function of being a woman that actually the way we think about the gender binary is screwed up in many, many ways, one of them being that we assume that certain work is naturally attached to a certain chromosome. This is really weird,

right? Like, I don't have children. I'm not particularly good with children. If I was magically, naturally good at this because I'm a woman, my life would look very different. I am not, I have, you know, know men who do care work. I know men who are nurses, who are teachers, who are wonderful with children and love them deeply and are excellent at their jobs. And so one of the things about the continued sort of devaluing of care work is that it is devalued because it's women's work and women end up doing it because it's devalued and it becomes this vicious cycle that to break that we have to both value women and value care and point out that those are not the same thing.

Della Duncan: And what about in terms of policy changes, what would you advocate for or recommend?

Sarah Jaffe: We need to really look at how the health care work is being done. Need universal health care like yesterday. We need to look at the way we've talked about teachers in this pandemic, the nightmare, all of this kind of caring labor needs to be reevaluated, it needs to be degendered, it needs to be paid a whole hell of a lot more. And we also just need some time off. And this is something that researcher Janet Gornick has written about, that one of the best ways to equalize the amount of work done in the home is to actually make the workweek shorter for everyone. Because if you make the work week shorter by choice, women tend to be lower earners and they end up taking the shorter hours and staying home and doing more of the housework. But if you actually make the workweek shorter for everyone, you don't have that excuse of forcing women back out of the workplace. And you can actually rely on a more equitable distribution of the non-waged work. So we need shorter hours because we're all friggin' traumatized, but we also need shorter hours because it's one of the ways to equitably distribute the non-waged work.

We absolutely need to have universal child care, child allowances, right? Under the first Biden rescue package, we actually got an expansion of the child tax credit that actually is refundable. So for the first time, people are going to get checks every month, \$3000 a year per kid, which is amazing, although it's still not really enough money and it's currently temporary. So we have to fight to keep it permanent. And that is in a way like it's a kind of a basic income. It's currently only being given per child. So it's being given to people who are parents or caregivers of children. But nevertheless, it is a recognition that child care is work and that it's work that we as a society

have a collective stake in supporting. So I don't have children of my own. I'm actually staying with friends right now who are about to have their first child. And I very much have a stake in their child being happy and healthy because they are my friends and I love them, but also in somebody down the street who I don't know's kid being happy and healthy.

Nicole Aschoff: The sort of upstream question in the case of feminism, or in the case of sexism, or the case of women's oppression in our society, is a combination of factors which is part of why we have these thorny debates between should we be fighting against sexism, or should we be fighting against capitalism, or the million dollar question how do we fit these things together, right? Because it's not just that women have less rights in the workplace. Why is that the case? Well part of it is that we have these overarching structures of power in society. We have sexism, we have racism, and we also have a very unequal class system. And these things work together as a tripartite force of oppression if we want to put it really structurally.

So what it looks like in real life is that employers can use existing norms of sexism, racism, in addition to people's sort of weakness in terms of because of their class position, right? The only way they can live is by selling their ability to work — and they can use these kind of tools together to keep people down. To say no you're not going to get a raise, you can't have time off work to pick up your kids or take care of your parents, or if you ask for these things I'm going to replace you with someone who doesn't ask for them. So we see this kind of complex forces of oppression — and this is why if we're going to actually build a social movement to challenge these things we need a much more collective, solidaristic force that's not just about individuals saying, "I'm going to work my way up to the top. And if we all just work our way up to the top we're going to help everybody." That's simply structurally not possible within our society the way it's organized right now.

[Music break: Marissa Kay — Fight Like a Girl]

Tiek Johnson: Ideally what I would love to see feminism do and be is — I think of the mind frame of uplifting, the most marginalized, and then everyone else benefits. And so to me, I would love to see black, trans women, healthy and thriving and getting paid, thriving wages and safe. Safe in in several different ways, like safe from physical violence, safe from

termination in employment, safe from housing discrimination. That to me is feminism, creating those environments, right? Where people are able to show up full and authentically — without causing harm — and be able to thrive and be able to have some safety.

Khara Jabola-Carolus: Feminist economics to me is not a futurist project — feminist economics is honestly just cultural reconnection. So it really is the underlying cultural foundation of our different backgrounds, our different societies. So feminist economics is not a new idea, it just has a new title. Like in Hawaii, for example, it was colonized later than the Philippines — we had around five hundred years. But in Hawaii women were free relatively recently. The transition to capitalism and having, you know, this proletariat working class as the base and this massive system of exploitation is new. And you can feel that here. There are still subsistence economies here. There's a tremendous amount of cultural resistance. There are, you know, revered women leaders and deities that inspire and strengthen the movement every day. And so going back to an economy based around women's needs valued equally is the basic of what a feminist economy would be. And that is really our indigenous economies. And so yeah, I think it's just a euphemism for indigenous economies.

Tithi Bhattacharya: As to whether I'm hopeful about the feminist movement: I have not been this hopeful in years. So yes of course I'm hopeful about the feminist movement. If you look at the kind of consciousness that is emerging in this country simply in the last two or three years, it is astonishing given the sterility of socialist thought and feminist thought of the past decade or so. We have young people, you know, come out on the streets and say they want to cancel capitalism and patriarchy. The fact that they see those two things together I think is a tremendous achievement for our times.

Della Duncan: Thank you to Thao and the Get Down Stay Down, Marissa Kay, Kohala, and Chris Zabriskie for the music in this episode, and thank you to Chiara Francesca for the cover art and to our Upstream correspondents Elle Bisgard Church and Noah Gabor for their research and support on this episode. Upstream theme music was composed by Robert.

We just launched our fall season's crowdfunding campaign! We hope to produce at least three documentaries, including episodes on Defunding the Police and the Sharing Economy, Pt. 2, looking at the gig-economy landscape five years after our very first documentary. We also plan on

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