

# Workbook for *Socialist Feminism: A New Approach*

by Frieda Afary

## **Chapter 1. The Pandemic, the #MeToo Movement, and Contradictory Developments in Gender Relations**

### **Key Terms and Concepts:**

Abolitionism  
Abolitionist feminism  
Essential worker  
Misogyny  
Militarism  
Post-feminism  
Reproductive justice  
Second-wave feminism  
Shadow pandemic  
Transformative justice

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What have been the economic, social, physical, and emotional effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and children?
2. Why are women of color more in danger of contracting COVID-19?
3. What have been the negative and positive effects of increased telecommuting on women who can work from home during the pandemic?
4. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected prisoners and refugees?
5. What are some of the distinct challenges that the #MeToo Movement has raised?

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6. How have African American women, beginning with Tarana Burke, articulated the unique questions and challenges that the #MeToo Movement is raising?
7. What have been some of the contradictory developments in gender relations since the 1980s?
8. What are some of the main factors that have led to these contradictory developments?
9. According to Jenny Brown and Katha Pollitt, what are some of the main reasons for the global restrictions on abortion rights and specifically the current assault on abortion and reproductive rights in the United States?
10. What is reproductive justice and what does the reproductive justice movement demand?

### **Ideas for Activities:**

1. Interview a woman of color who is an essential worker. Ask them about the ways in which they have coped with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Select a woman prisoner or refugee or an international feminist activist and write about their plight on your blog or a website to which you can contribute.
3. Read Tarana Burke's *Unbound* and write an open letter to her or a book review to discuss what is new and distinctive about her work.
4. Interview a young and an older person about their attitudes toward LGBTQ identity. Compare and contrast.
5. Compare and contrast the situation of women in U.S. prisons and Xinjiang prisons.
6. Read more about the concept of reproductive justice. Interview a young and an older person about their attitudes toward abortion from a reproductive justice standpoint. Organize an event for abortion rights which centers on reproductive justice.
7. Give a presentation to your class or a community group about the current situation of women and children in Afghanistan or Ukraine or Myanmar or Ethiopia's Tigray Province and discuss ways in which feminists around the world can help.

## **Chapter 2. Distinctive Features of Authoritarian Capitalism/ Imperialism Today and the New Challenges of Black Lives Matter and Global Uprisings**

### **Key Terms and Concepts:**

Capitalist mode of production  
Concentration and centralization of capital  
High-tech unreflectiveness  
Imperialism  
Globalization  
Mass incarceration  
Neoliberalism  
Prison-industrial complex  
Regionalization  
State capitalism

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. From a Marxian standpoint, why does capitalism lead to authoritarianism?
2. How does capitalism lead to periodic crises and wars?
3. What are the distinctive features of capitalist authoritarianism in the twenty-first century?
4. What is Jonathan Kurlantzick's definition of state capitalism in the twenty-first century?
5. What is distinctive about imperialism in the twenty-first century?
6. What can we learn from Angela Davis, and Ruth Wilson Gilmore and Michele Alexander's discussions of mass incarceration in the United States?
7. Identify the countries that have the largest sites of mass incarceration in the world today?
8. How does Maryanne Wolf define high-tech unreflectiveness and its effects on the human brain?
9. Name and discuss some of the popular uprisings that have taken place since 2019 in which women have been in the forefront and have raised feminist demands.
10. What lessons can we draw from the shortcomings of the Arab Spring?

11. What lessons can we draw from the shortcomings of the Occupy Movement?

**Ideas for Activities:**

1. Examine the degree of concentration and centralization of capital in the hands of the state in the United States, China, and Russia today. Include joint ventures that involve the state and private capitalist corporations.
2. Devise an exercise on how to challenge high-tech unreflectiveness as defined by Maryanne Wolf's *Reader, Come Home*.
3. Organize an activity that connects abolitionism and the struggle against the prison-industrial complex in the United States to struggles against mass imprisonment in China, Myanmar, and the Middle East.
4. Give a presentation about the 1619 Project to a group of younger or older people.
5. Pick one of the international struggles against authoritarianism and imperialist war discussed in this chapter. Design and give a presentation about it to your class or group of friends and think of ideas for international solidarity that you can act on.

**Chapter 3. Women, Reproductive Labor, and Capital  
Accumulation: Theories of Social Reproduction**

**Key Terms and Concepts:**

Abstract labor  
Accumulation of Capital or Expanded Reproduction  
Concrete labor  
Dual character of labor  
Ectogenesis  
Exchange-value  
Form of value  
Factory dormitory  
Gene editing  
Productive labor  
Reproductive labor  
Socialization of the family  
Socially necessary labor time

State capitalism  
Substance of value  
Surplus value  
Use-value  
Valorization process  
Value

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What are the two main branches within theories of social reproduction and what are the arguments of their main theorists: Benston, James and Dalla Costa, Federici, Vogel?
2. What are Marx's concepts of capitalist "value," "productive labor," and "accumulation of capital" as derived from his critique of Classical Political Economy?
3. Based on a Marxian explanation of the above concepts, can it be argued that domestic and reproductive labor produces "value" in a capitalist sense?
4. Discuss the views of Tithi Bhattacharyya, Susan Ferguson, Joan Smith, and Martha Jimenez.
5. Discuss Michele Barrett and Angela Davis's critiques of the argument that domestic labor is needed to produce capitalist value.
6. Can a Marxian view anticipate the emergence of an authoritarian state capitalism taking charge of all aspects of life including reproduction of labor power?
7. How is gene editing and ectogenesis being used by capitalism today and what are some of its ominous ramifications?

**Ideas for Activities:**

1. Count the number of hours that you and your partner and/or caregiver put into domestic and reproductive labor. Multiply that by the minimum wage in your state or country. How many dollars is the "value" of your reproductive labor if a monetary value were placed on it? Compare this value to what you are currently being paid and reflect on the outcome.
2. Make a list of the types of reproductive labor that you and your partner and/or caregiver engage in. Based on Marx's definition of abstract and concrete labor, which category does each represent?

3. Read some articles about factory dormitories in China or the labor camps and orphanages in Xinjiang or for-profit prison labor in the United States. Do you think capitalism can fully take over and manage the reproduction of labor power in these ways?
4. If you telecommute, make a log about the ways in which doing domestic labor and telecommuting at home without temporal or spatial separation is affecting you. Is it oppressive or liberating?
5. Read some articles about gene editing and ectogenesis. Distinguish the positive and negative possibilities that these technologies offer.

## Chapter 4. Alienated Labor and How It Relates to Gender Oppression

### Key Terms and Concepts:

Alienated labor  
Essentialism  
Fetishism of the commodity  
Reification  
Social division of labor  
Species being  
Utilitarianism

### Discussion Questions:

1. According to Marx, what are the four types of alienation that characterize alienated labor under capitalism?
2. Why does Marx argue that “All human servitude is involved in the relation of the worker to production, and all the types of servitude are only modifications or consequences of this relation” (Marx & Fromm, 1961, p. 107)?
3. What does Marx mean when he writes the following? “In the relationship with *woman*, as the prey and the handmaid of communal lust, is expressed the infinite degradation in which man exists for himself ... From this relationship [of man to woman], man’s whole level of development can be assessed. It follows from the character of this relationship how far *man* has become, and has understood himself as, a *species-being*, a *human being*... and consequently how far the other person, as a person, has become

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one of his needs” (Marx & Fromm, 1961, p. 126, emphasis in the original)?

4. According to Angela Davis, Raya Dunayevskaya, and Heather Brown, what are some aspects of Marx’s work that can help us explain and overcome gender oppression?
5. What does Anne Foreman mean when she argues that Freud’s understanding of the sexual drive, as the main factor in social and political relations, is only true in a capitalist system based on alienated labor and reified human relations?
6. How does Nancy Holmstrom explain the concept of “free, conscious activity” in *Marx’s Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*?
7. Why do Judith Grant and Marcia Klotz argue that Marx’s Humanism can become the basis for transforming gender relations and breaking with an essentialist view of woman’s “nature.”
8. How does Silvia Federici see the relationship between the rise of capitalism and the drive to discipline the proletarian body and take away any control that women had over their sexuality and reproductive ability?
9. Why does Gayatri Spivak think that Marx’s concept of alienation is more relevant to feminism than a strict economic analysis of women’s oppression?
10. What are the questions raised by Iranian feminist, Narges Imani about the challenge of the #MeToo Movement?
11. How can Marx’s concept of alienation help the #MeToo Movement explain why so many educated men harass, abuse, rape, and assault women?

### **Ideas for Activities:**

1. Analyze the labor that you perform for your job. By Marx’s standard, is it alienated labor?
2. Examine your relationships, romantic or otherwise. To what extent are they about satisfying your basic needs and to what extent do you care about your friends and family members as ends in themselves?

3. Conduct a survey in your class or group and ask whether respondents think that the social division of labor relegating some only to mental work and others only to manual work is natural.
4. Conduct a survey to find out the degree to which your friends and classmates' understanding of sexual relations have been shaped by pornography.
5. Try to critically evaluate this chapter's claim about the relevance of Marx's concept of alienation to the #MeToo Movement by doing your own reading of the relevant essays in Marx's *1844 Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*.

## Chapter 5. Black Feminism and Intersectionality

### Key Terms and Concepts:

Identity politics  
Interlocking systems of oppression  
Intersectionality  
Modern Abolitionist Movement  
Oppression versus exploitation  
Organized abandonment  
Pluralism  
Prison-industrial complex  
Transformative justice  
Violence matrix

### Discussion Questions:

1. What did the Combahee River Collective Statement mean by "Identity Politics"?
2. What did the Combahee River Collective Statement mean by "interlocking systems of oppression"?
3. Why did Audre Lorde challenge a concept of difference that is limited to pluralism?
4. What is the essence of Audre Lorde's message in the essay, "The Master's Tools Will Not Dismantle the Master's House"?
5. Identify the main lesson that Angela Davis draws from her study of the first and second waves of feminism in the United States?
6. Give an example of a legal case that Kimberlé Crenshaw would consider an overlap of racism, sexism, and classism.

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7. What is the “Afrocentric feminist epistemology” that Patricia Hill Collins offers?
8. How does bell hooks distinguish between ideology and liberatory theory and between individuality and competitive capitalist individualism?
9. Why does Tracy Denean Sharpley-Whiting return to Frantz Fanon’s “new humanism”?
10. What is the radical Black feminism that Joy James offers?
11. What is Angela Davis’s concept of prison-industrial complex?
12. What is Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s contribution to the concept of prison-industrial complex?
13. What does Beth Richie mean by “violence matrix”?
14. What is Mariame Kaba’s concept of transformative justice?
15. According to Romarilyn Ralston, what are the key drivers that lead to the imprisonment of Black and Latina women in the United States?
16. According to Keeanga Yamahtta-Taylor, what are some of the external and internal barriers that the Black Lives Matter Movement faces?
17. According To Ashley Bohrer, what are the key contributions of intersectional thinkers?

### **Ideas for Activities:**

1. Construct an outline of all the ways in which you have experienced the interlocking systems of oppression in your own life.
2. Do a survey of your classmates or friends to find out their understanding of the concept of identity politics. Compare and contrast to the concept of identity politics in the Combahee River Collective Statement.
3. Explore Audre Lorde’s critique of the limitations of pluralism as expressed in “The Master’s Tools Will Not Dismantle the Master’s House” and articulate the type of understanding of difference that she is advocating instead.
4. Develop and give a presentation to your class or a group about the concept of prison-industrial complex as articulated by Angela Davis and Ruth Wilson Gilmore and the concept of transformative justice as articulated by Mariame Kaba.

## Chapter 6. Queer Theories

### Key Terms and Concepts:

Biological determinism  
Cartesian mind-body dualism  
Essentialism  
Fluid gender identity  
Gender performativity  
Historical materialism  
Heteronormativity  
Linguistic determinism  
Reification  
Utilitarianism

### Discussion Questions:

1. On what basis does Judith Butler challenge any fixed notion of gender or sex?
2. Who are the philosophers that have greatly influenced Butler's work?
3. Why does Butler reject Humanism?
4. What is Butler's "anti-foundationalist approach to coalitional politics"?
5. What is Butler's concept of Agency?
6. Describe the main criticisms of Butler's work by Allison Weir, Nancy Fraser, Rosemary Hennessy, and Teresa Ebert.
7. How does Rosemary Hennessy's historical materialist queer theory draw connections between nineteenth-century consumer capitalism and the emergence of homosexual and heterosexual identities and between twentieth-century capitalist globalization and the emergence of a more flexible sexual identity?
8. How does Hennessy challenge economic reductionism in discussing the relationship between capitalism and sexuality?
9. In Holy Lewis's view, what is the material foundation of heteronormativity under capitalism?
10. According to Nancy Holmstrom, what is Marx's concept of human nature and how can it help challenge biological determinism?

11. Why does Judith Grant think that Marx's concept of the human being embodies "infinite variability"?
12. According to Marcia Klotz, why would a non-alienated and non-utilitarian existence emancipate the human senses?
13. According to Heather Brown, what are the two distinct meanings of the term "natural" that Marx had in mind?
14. Discuss Sheena Howard's overall critique of queer theory.
15. What is Howard's critique of Black lesbian relationships?

**Ideas for Activities:**

1. Create an exercise on the basis of Judith Butler's concept of Agency.
2. Consider Rosemary's Hennessy's discussion of the ways in which the capitalist mode of production limits our human sexual affective potential. Evaluate that view in relationship to your own experiences with the types of labor you have performed in your life. This is really an exercise for your own personal enlightenment and not necessarily for sharing with classmates or friends.
3. Evaluate Marx's concept of human nature in light of your own life experiences.
4. Write notes about how you think abolishing alienated labor could go hand in hand with transforming gender relations.

**Chapter 7. Theorizing a Socialist Humanist and Feminist  
Alternative to Capitalism**

**Key Terms and Concepts:**

Abstract time  
Alienated labor  
Commons  
Degenerated workers' state  
Interstitial autonomous cooperatives  
Law of value  
Lower phase of communism  
Mental-manual division of labor  
Piecework  
Post-work society  
Rectification (in Mao Zedong Thought)

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Reparations  
Socially necessary labor time  
Stakhanovism  
State capitalism  
Subsistence farming  
Utilitarianism  
Voluntarism

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What is Nancy Fraser's concept of redistribution, recognition, and representation?
2. How Does Ann Ferguson's feminist perspective expand Eric Olin Wright's alternative to capitalism?
3. What is Patricia Hill Collins's Afrocentric model of community?
4. What are the key features of the alternative to capitalism offered by ecofeminist Maria Mies?
5. What are the main features of the alternative to capitalism offered by autonomist feminists, Silvia Federici and Kathi Weeks?
6. What are Federici and Weeks's critiques of Marx's concept of an alternative to capitalism?
7. What are the main features of Marx's humanist concept of an alternative to capitalism?
8. What is Audre Lorde's concept of non-alienated labor and how does she think it can lead to ending abuse of self and other?
9. On what basis did Raya Dunayevskaya analyze the USSR's economy from 1928 onward as totalitarian state capitalist?
10. What were the distinct features of Mao Zedong Thought, as discerned by Raya Dunayevskaya, and how did they express themselves in the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution?
11. How can Marx's concept of ending the domination of abstract time over the process of production help further define workers' control of production in a socialist society?
12. How does Marx's concept of abolishing alienated labor translate into the abolition of money?
13. How would more onerous and more exhausting types of labor be compensated in a socialist society?

14. Why does Marx think the “lower phase” of communism is needed before a higher phase or phases that could realize the principle of “from each according to their ability and to each according to their needs”?

**Ideas for Activities:**

1. Compare and contrast the ideas concerning an alternative to capitalism offered by Maria Mies, Silvia Federici, Kathi Weeks with Karl Marx’s concept of an alternative.
2. Do a survey of your classmates or friends to find out whether they think Marx’s concept of an immediate break with alienated labor in the first phase of post-capitalism is possible.
3. Devise a project to envision a society in which humanity has been able to end the domination of abstract time over the process of production on a global level. How would people accept the idea of compensation based on actual labor time and energy expended (not measured by quantitative output or value) regardless of previous education or advanced degrees?
4. Imagine if time for one’s own family’s domestic and reproductive labor and for taking higher education classes could be compensated on a global scale as work time on a part-time basis. How would that change the nature of work and of human relations?
5. Design a system of reparations for previously colonized and enslaved populations in a post-capitalist society.
6. Hypothesize how open borders would work in a post-capitalist society.

## **Chapter 8. Overcoming Domination: Reconceptualizing the Self-Other Relationship**

**Key Terms and Concepts:**

Absolute (in Hegel)  
Determinante negation  
Formal logic  
Individual  
Mediation  
Objectivity  
Other

Particular  
Sacrificial logic  
Subjectivity  
Transhistorical  
Universal

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What is de Beauvoir's existentialist perspective on the relationship of self to other?
2. Why does Beauvoir claim that women accept their status as Other?
3. According to Jessica Benjamin, why do women submit to men's domination and even idealize their dominator?
4. What is the relationship of self to other that Benjamin offers as an alternative?
5. What does Allison Weir identify as the main error of feminist theory beginning with de Beauvoir?
6. How in particular does Weir argue that de Beauvoir has misread Hegel on the master-slave dialectic and the concept of the relationship of self to other?
7. What concepts in Hegel's philosophy does Weir think feminist theory can benefit from in order to conceptualize a relationship of self to other that is not based on domination?
8. What does Raya Dunayevskaya see as emancipatory in Hegel's concept of the Absolute? Pay special attention to the concepts of mediation and absolute negativity.
9. What is Frantz Fanon's concept of "a new humanism"?
10. What are the similarities between the ways in which Hegel and Audre Lorde address the limitations of pluralism? How do they offer a relationship of Identity to Difference that goes beyond simply tolerance or indifference?

**Ideas for Activities:**

1. Give a presentation to your class or group of friends in which you summarize, compare and contrast the ideal concept of the relationship of self to other proposed by de Beauvoir and Benjamin, on the one hand, and by Weir, Dunayevskaya, Fanon, Hegel, and

- Audre Lorde, on the other. Elicit responses and evaluate those responses through a class or group discussion.
2. Write down your thoughts about the ways in which the critique of the existentialist and Freudian perspectives offered in this chapter challenge the Nietzschean and Foucauldian power and domination model which is prevalent in feminist theory today.
  3. Conduct a survey in your class or group of friends. Ask for opinions about why capitalist authoritarianism's open and brutal use of the Self-Other dynamic as a dynamic of hate has been so effective in the United States and globally especially in the past decade?
  4. Re-read the epigraph from Maryanne Wolf and propose some exercises to invoke the empathy of self with other that she articulates.

### **Conclusion. Socialist Feminist Revolutionary Organizing in the Twenty-First Century**

#### **Key Terms and Concepts:**

Critical Race Theory  
Critical thinking  
Global view  
Imperialism  
Multi-polar world  
Pro-living  
Voluntarism

#### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What are the poles of capital in the world today?
2. Name some ways in which Russia, China, United States, Europe and smaller regional powers are acting in an imperialist manner?
3. What is the organic connection between the #MeToo Movement and the Black Lives Matter and Abolitionist Movements?
4. Name some countries in which struggles against authoritarianism are taking place today?
5. What is the difference between advocating the decriminalization of sex workers and advocating the legalization of sex work?

6. Why does critical thinking in the United States require rootedness in Critical Race Theory?
7. Why is it that decentralized forms of organization without rootedness in history, philosophy, political economy, and critical thinking skills can lead to voluntarism and arbitrariness?

**Ideas for Activities:**

1. Organize an anti-war solidarity activity that highlights the voices and demands of the populations who are being subjected to authoritarianism, imperialism, and war.
2. Write a review of Tarana Burke's *Unbound*, discuss her contributions as the founder of the #MeToo Movement, and critically evaluate the #MeToo Movement.
3. Give a presentation about the contributions of the modern Abolitionist Movement in the United States and single out some of the key elements that activists opposing imprisonment and the death penalty around the world can learn from it.
4. Discuss some ecofeminist thinkers and critically evaluate their ideas.
5. Develop your ideas about a post-capitalist system of education that promotes critical and independent thinking, accountability, and ethical responsibility.
6. Imagine a universal health care system that does not fragment the human being. Present your ideas to your class or friends.
7. Discuss ways of defending abortion rights and reproductive justice as a struggle for self-determination and pro-living. Organize an event on this topic.
8. Devise a plan in which a social justice organization can help its members become critical, ethical, and independent thinkers.
9. What standards for truth, responsibility, and accountability should such an organization have?

Questions about this Study Guide or book can be directed to Frieda Afary's website, [socialistfeminism.org](http://socialistfeminism.org)