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## Jenny Brown, Birth Strike: The Hidden Fight Over Women's Work (Oakland, CA: PM Press 2019)

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that the activists saw any attempts to frame the problem through other lenses—especially racial lenses—as bids by outside actors to break the movement and sow divisiveness. Activists pushed back against a racial framing of the crisis even when it emanated from sympathetic observers such as the Michigan Civil Rights Commission or the famous Michigan documentarian Michael Moore. Pauli unfortunately does not expand much on these particular insights from the Flint activists and the broader implications for left-wing strategy which might follow from them, despite the fact that these observations run directly counter to the dominant thinking amongst many left academics and NGO-based activists who seem increasingly focused on identity-based *difference* and contingent “allyship” rather than processes of class consciousness and the deeper forms of solidarity which can eventually *transcend* difference through common struggle as has played out in Flint.

In later chapters, Pauli also examines the contradictions that followed from activists’ attempts to recruit scientists like Marc Edwards and Scott Smith to their cause. Though such experts were helpful in building credibility for the water movement and helping the activists conduct studies refuting the shoddy and misleading evidence put forward by the City of Flint initially claiming the city’s water was safe, activists found that they had no way to hold the scientists accountable to the movement. As a result, the experts often engaged in opportunist behaviour by using the movement to bolster their own careers and political ambitions – sometimes becoming outright turncoats. Edwards, in particular, was blatantly co-opted by the State of Michigan, with Republican Governor Rick Snyder appointing Edwards to lead the state committee for Flint’s crisis recovery. Because of this, Pauli notes, “[r]ight around the

time when activists started calling for Snyder’s arrest, Edwards began singing his praises” (191). Pauli suggests that these experiences ought to serve as a warning for future environmental justice movements, which should exercise extreme caution when recruiting experts. Pauli reminds us that scientific evidence is a crucial tool for advocates of environmental justice, but science alone cannot replace social and political struggle. Similarly, individual experts are not impartial observers but can in fact function as influential political actors in their own right.

Though I find *Flint Fights Back* to be flawed in some ways, it is certainly worthwhile reading for anyone concerned with contemporary struggles for environmental justice and community-driven resistance to austerity. Water struggles like those in Flint will continue to be key sites of class conflict as climate change intensifies alongside economic inequality and as fresh water subsequently becomes an increasingly scarce resource.

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**Jenny Brown, *Birth Strike: The Hidden Fight Over Women’s Work* (Oakland, CA: PM Press 2019)**

IN *BIRTH STRIKE*, Jenny Brown provides an analysis of the declining birth rate in the United States, an area that has not received much attention from feminist scholars in their discussions of the struggle over reproductive rights. Brown argues that the conflict over birth control and abortion has less to do with culture or religion and more to do with economics, that is, corporate and establishment interests in “an ever-expanding workforce raised with a minimum of public spending.” (11) Brown argues that the “ruling group” is interested in women

having more babies to ensure a steady supply of workers whose labour the “powerful class” can exploit for increased profits. As Brown demonstrates, in recent years, government planners have become increasingly concerned that the low US birth rate would lead to economic stagnation. Instead of following in the footsteps of comparable countries, such as France or Sweden, who have introduced pro-natalist policies (subsidized childcare, paid parental leave, universal health care) to help raise the birthrate, the government planners in the United States have made it more difficult to afford having children, while at the same time creating barriers for women who want to control their reproduction by limiting their access to birth control and abortion. This means that the cost of childbearing and childrearing falls on the family, especially on women, whose domestic labour is undervalued and unpaid. Brown suggests that the slowdown in the birth rate represents a “strike” by women responding to poor conditions associated with having and raising children. (43)

*Birth Strike* is divided into eleven chapters that focus on topics including abortion and contraception in the United States since the late 19th century, concerns over overpopulation, the debates over social security, reproduction and race, immigrant labour, discussions about unpaid work, and other issues associated with the relationship between population and state. Generally, these chapters are used to further Brown’s argument that reproductive debates have always been about economics as much or more than anything else.

The greatest contribution that Brown makes is in broadening the discourse on what women’s reproductive labour is, what it means to society, and how this is an underappreciated aspect of ongoing women’s reproduction struggles in the United States. Brown conveys in vivid

detail in what is the strongest chapter in the book, the experiences of ordinary women who chose to have children and those who did not. Through testimonies from seventeen women, the reader is exposed to the decisions that many women are forced to make about having children when they lack adequate support to raise them. Later in the book, Brown offers a blueprint for how women can use their reproductive power to call for change, including participating in consciousness-raising groups that allow women to compare their experiences but also to think about, for instance, who benefits from their pregnancies and their unpaid work; exposing the reasons for the low birth rate; and demanding better programs that give women support when they decide to have children, for example universal childcare. Highlighting the poor conditions for bearing and raising children in the United States, emphasizing women’s reproductive power, and providing a path to improving their circumstances is when *Birth Strike* is the most convincing.

However, *Birth Strike* suffers from significant shortcomings. The book lacks cohesion as the chapters cover enormous, complicated, and multi-causal topics which the author relates sometimes unconvincingly to their central thesis. Brown’s emphasis on the concerted actions by a “ruling elite” in some chapters is borderline conspiratorial and ignores better explanations for these complicated dynamics. For example, the chapter, “Cannon Fodder” depicts a war mongering elite callously and cynically harnessing reproductive power to fight their wars. A better analysis might explore the changing relationship between the state and its populace, and in what context the citizenry became viewed as a national resource that could be used to increase the power and capacity of the state (through, for example, increased

labour, superior public health, and administrative bureaucracy). In addition, this chapter could have been better integrated into the book, as it is unclear how it connects to the preceding chapter on cheap labour and the following chapter on women's leverage regarding reproductive work. Other chapters detract for Brown's overall argument. For example, in "Reproduction and Race," Brown discusses the racist population control policies aimed at African American women, including involuntary sterilization and birth control campaigns, but Brown's claim that the "ruling class" wants all women to have more babies to ensure a future workforce is difficult to reconcile with the evidence that Brown presents. Lastly, the book would benefit from a conclusion that would tie different chapters together and strengthen Brown's central argument. Overall, *Birth Strike* is an effective re-evaluation of women's reproductive labour and a timely call to action, but the sheer breadth of issues that the book attempts to cover and relate to reproduction means that some chapters are unconvincing and end up weakening the author's overall argument.

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**Alex Rosenblat, *Uberland: How Algorithms are Rewriting the Rules of Work* (University of California Press 2018)**

*UBERLAND* IS at its core, a chronology of the work experiences and working conditions of Uber drivers across the United States and Canada. Yet, through the myriad of these drivers' accounts, Alex Rosenblat goes deeper, unpacking the faulty foundations and hustle of gig work, post-capitalism and the advent and exploitation of employment within

the digital economy. The book features Rosenblat's ethnographic experiences of being an Uber passenger, riding over 5,000 miles across twenty-five cities in the United States and Canada over the span of four years, as well as her netnographic experiences of visiting driver forums daily, and action research advocacy, that placed her in a number of meetings with senior Uber executives.

This heteroglossia, that is, multiple perspectives and voices, culminate in *Uberland* to narrate the ways in which technology is rewiring the American dream. Uber, the Silicon Valley tech giant, has promised to deliver freedom and flexibility through turn-key entrepreneurship where drivers can use their own vehicles, set their own schedule, and be their own boss, thanks to Uber's digital platform and algorithmic management practices. Rosenblat examines this rhetoric of freedom and flexibility from the perspective of the drivers, noting that their motivations to drive for Uber are diverse. She uncovers various types of drivers – full-time drivers, part-time drivers, and hobby drivers and highlights the socio-economic, racial and gendered differences that catapulted each of them into this line of work in the first place. While interesting, this is on par with some of what has been uncovered in the existing scholarship on the career experiences of ride-hail drivers.

Where Rosenblat makes her mark with *Uberland* is by lifting the veil of Uber's opaque management practices. She illustrates Uber's cogent history with their Tom-and-Jerry antics, whereby Uber outruns stakeholders and regulators by narrow escape, and then charges into new markets due to regulatory technicalities and infrastructure inconsistencies. Uber's employment arrangement is murky at best. For example, Uber positions drivers as both independent