



A Slam on Feminism in Academia

BY SHAUNGA TAGORE

Shaunga Tagore 'A slam on feminism in academia' (2011)

why did you let me through the doors in the first place
if you were just gonna turn around and force me out?

why did you let me in this ivory tower
filled with hippie feel-good activist academics
debating about feminist organizing in high theory discourse
while barely-paid migrant workers prepare lunches
for seminars, conferences, forums
and get deported the next day

an award winning tenured professor once told me
the only way i will succeed at graduate school
is if i read 300 pages of theory per week per class
and if i'm not capable
my writing must be of low quality
my intellect must be incredibly juvenile

nothing could be wrong with the way things are
because to change the rules would
undermine what it means to receive a graduate school education
and would leave me unprepared to
compete for future jobs and faculty positions

let me ask you
exactly which graduate student's education are you concerned about here?

not single mothers who need extra time to look after their families
not pregnant women who need a little more maternity leave

not low-income folks who need to take 2nd or 3rd jobs
to pay bills their funding doesn't cover

not racialized international students who don't have access to most scholarships

not the people with disabilities
who don't have access to comply with the way things are
made to feel something is wrong with them
instead of with the rules themselves

not those who survive sexual violence
and need extra time to grieve rage or deal

not anyone with familial, historical ties
to places and races always under siege
living under governments set on killing their people

who must spend free time at sit-ins or rallies
where emotions and exhaustions run too high
drumbeats and chants ring too loud
to read a detached article due for class the next day

not Indigenous students who are expected
to read speak and engage with
languages, theories, and knowledges
that erase appropriate and colonize
their lands, cultures, and selves
with the same ease as the colonizers

not people of colour subjected to
subtle and blatant racism
making it impossible to participate
the same way as their white peers

not anyone who needs to spend every moment of their leisure time
finding other ways of learning
through art, community activism, collective therapy
(or a mashup of all three)

your ideal graduate student is
someone who doesn't have to experience community organizing
because you've already assigned them five chapters to read about it

your ideal graduate student is
someone who can't talk about positionality or privilege
without referencing some article

your ideal graduate student is
rich enough
white enough
straight enough
able-bodied and -minded enough
to be given luxury of enjoying sitting in a corner reading 900 pages a week
(with their fair trade starbucks coffee in hand and their lulu lemon track pants on ass)

your ideal graduate student
IS NOT ME

so WHY did you let me through these doors in the first place
if you were just gonna turn around and shove me out?

to fill some quota for affirmative action?
to appear like a progressive program without putting in the effort
of actually being one?

don't pretend you're not secretly wishing you could
impersonate my lawyer to kidnap me
and deport me in a heartbeat
if i did so much as look at you funny
talk back
write an angry poem
and undermine your authority
by rolling my eyes at your hypocrisy

feminism in academia – OWN UP TO YOURSELF
do not pretend to be the godsend intellectually paving the revolution

recognize that the ones let through these doors by some strategic mistake
are the ones making you look good
while we burn out and burn up by your hands

what is it about your knowledge and education
that prevents you from imagining
all the different reasons someone may be in graduate school
or feel the need to study gender, race, sexuality, and class?

some of us are not here to one day
soullessly recite the entire canon of queer theory development
with our hearts and minds closed

some of us do not wish to compete to be the
newest biggest baddest radical faculty-hire

some of us need to engage with feminist theory
so we can ground it in our community activist work
our creative works
our personal relationships
for our families, communities and histories
for our own fucking deserved peace of minds

maybe we need to know how to make sense of oppression
because we're so heartbroken

we don't want to end up being locked away in psychiatric institutions
or in a hospital overdosed on pills, getting our stomachs pumped
because we don't know WHY all this shit is constantly driving us CRAZY

what i want to know is why the fuck YOU were let through these doors
and made to think you could decide all the rules FOR US?

you tell me my intellect is lacking

i'm not worthy of being here
if i'm not capable of doing exactly what you say
exactly your way

but i choose to follow the kind of wisdom your 300 pages per week per class
could never teach you

it's gotten me this fucking far

(from *Feminism for Real: Deconstructing the Academic Industrial Complex of Feminism*, ed.
Jessica Yee, 2011)

(read aloud by Prama Tagore at <http://rabble.ca/podcasts/shows/redeye/2011/04/slam-feminism-academia>)