Abstract: The Radical Independence Campaign (RIC) was established in the early stages of the Scottish Independence Referendum debate to promote a left wing alternative to the mainstream Yes campaign. Yet despite defining as a coalition including feminists, there was a failure to acknowledge feminist politics or policies during the campaign. Through an analysis of interviews with 30 feminist radicals from across Scotland, this paper argues that while there was some effort to institute a gender balance on platforms and public representation generally the politics of feminism were postponed until after the referendum. This mirrors the classic critique that socialist movements postpone questions of feminism until ‘after the revolution’ (Hartmann, 1979). However, this paper will conclude that the negotiation of class and gender identities and political practices used by Scottish feminist radicals offer lessons for future feminist activism in social justice campaigns. Specifically I explore the internal power relations of RIC and feminist struggles to overcome these as well as to integrate class and gender in the political direction of the campaign.

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Feminist Radicalism? Feminism and the Radical Independence Campaign

1. Introduction

The Scottish Independence Campaign in the run up to the referendum of the 18th of September 2014 was one of the largest political movements in recent Scottish history. The ultimately defeated campaign was not only nationalist but broadly left wing, dominated by a centre-left opposition to austerity. However, feminist politics did not feature prominently in the debate. One of the most high-profile campaigns, and separate from the official Yes campaign, Yes Scotland, the Radical Independence Campaign (hereafter RIC) was a young left wing movement where feminism was said to have a place. This paper analyses RIC to address a dual conflict. Firstly, it discusses to what extent feminism was integrated into the central analysis of the organisation, rather than added as a secondary or subordinate concern to the analysis of austerity and neoliberalism. Secondly, it examines the tension between RIC’s public assertion of gender equality and the internal dynamics of inequality of the movement. This conflict is explored through a discussion of the deployment of informal techniques of marginalisation which have acted to empty feminist content from the movement which, at the same time, formally valorised feminist politics.

This paper is structured as follows: section 2 discusses the theoretical background that has guided the analysis in the instrumentalisation of feminism by left wing and nationalist movements. Section 3 provides a gendered analysis of the main messages of RIC, and section 4 explores the informal techniques which act to marginalise feminism. In the fifth and final section, conclusions and lessons for future feminist activism are drawn. This study is based on the analysis of in-depth interviews with 30 self-identified women feminist radicals, 3 core men RIC organisers and 5 ‘expert’ interviews with women who work in Third Sector gender equality organisations and were active campaigners for Scottish Independence. Most of the interviews took place between May and July of 2014, while some took place in the few weeks just before the referendum in September of 2014. Interviews covered the varied geographical locations where RIC is active although with a bias towards Glasgow due to the high concentration of RIC activists in this city and its periphery, as well as by convenience considering budget and time limitations. Twenty of the feminist interviewees were involved with RIC at the time of their interview, including individuals from across the campaign, from core organisers to those who were active predominantly at the local level. The other 10 interviewees had either been involved in RIC and then dropped out, were peripherally
involved or in 3 cases had actively chosen not to be involved at all with RIC for varying reasons. A pseudonym has been assigned to all interviewees in order to preserve anonymity. In addition to the interviews, an evaluation of the gender representation at the conferences and published materials of RIC was realized, enabling a broad characterization of the gendered relations that have shaped the movement.

2. Feminist, Nationalist and Left Wing Movements

Feminism and nationalist and/or left-wing movements have a long, but highly fractious and contested, historical relationship. In a seminal paper Heidi Hartmann (1979) wrote of the ‘unhappy marriage’ of Marxism and feminism where claims to integrate the two ideologies left feminism as the subordinate partner and women’s oppression side-lined, regarded as a consequence of class society. Feminism has thus been given a platform but instrumentalised by left wing movements. Similarly, progressive nationalist movements have opened space for feminist organising, even though also controlling and constraining it (Lamoureux, 1987). Studies have demonstrated the secondary status of feminism within specific left wing movements which have made a claim to gender equality, for example in the Global Justice Movement (Conway, 2013) and in the Occupy Wall Street movement (Bhattacharjya et al, 2013). However, notwithstanding the disputed relationship between feminist, left wing and nationalist organising, engagement is widely held to be necessary although the question of how to effect such engagement remains open.

This paper takes a materialist approach which argues that movements are shaped by the material conditions they develop in. Consequently movements do not exist outside of relations of exploitation but rather gendered, classed and raced, power relations play out within them (Cox, 2015). As a result women’s and feminist knowledges and concerns have been marginalised by dominant forces within left wing and nationalist movements. In particular an appeal to unity, whether the unity of the working class in left wing movements (Rowbotham et al, 1979) or unity of the nation or pro-nationalist cause (Aretxaga, 1997), has frequently been used to side-line feminist voices which raise criticisms. Here, the case of the Radical Independence Campaign within the Scottish independence debate is investigated in light of this theoretical background to establish whether left wing and feminist politics have been fully integrated or remain in a gendered hierarchy.
3. A New Left? Feminism in the Radical Independence Campaign

The Radical Independence Campaign\(^1\) is a broad coalition including radical left groups, the Scottish Greens, the left of the SNP as well as community groups and independent activists and aimed to provide an explicit organised left wing activism to the independence movement. Furthermore, RIC defines itself as a coalition including feminists while its core organisers publically affirmed the importance of feminism and framed themselves as a ‘new left’, meaning a left which ‘takes feminism seriously’\(^2\). To this end RIC implemented formal measures to increase gender equality within the organisation. More specifically, a 50:50 policy was instituted - where at least 50% of speakers on any RIC platform must be women. However, this section argues that feminism was almost entirely absent in the main messages of the campaign. The main arguments were gender blind in their understanding of the central concepts used, such as class, neoliberalism and austerity. Where discussion of gender was included it tended to be tokenistic or added on to an otherwise gender-blind analysis. RIC has been organised around an annual conference in Glasgow, with autonomous local groups which organise activism in their areas countrywide. These local groups send representatives to National Forums held every 4 to 6 weeks, where decisions regarding national strategy and activism are made. RIC has produced little formal written material, focusing instead on propaganda leaflets, badges and slogans. Therefore, the (lack of) inclusion of feminist politics examined in this study is based on the inclusion of feminist voices at the annual conferences and a gender analysis of the main blog, political statements and leaflets. Finally, RIC’s *de facto* handbook by Foley and Ramand (2014) ‘Yes’ is considered to establish how far feminist politics were integrated into the campaign.

It must be acknowledged at this stage that RIC has shown awareness of the importance of gender representation and participation. In the early stages of the organisation of the first RIC conference in the spring of 2012 an initial statement of support was released with 10 men and 5 women as signatories. Complaints of inequality were quickly made via social media, particularly Facebook and Twitter, which, generally, were taken seriously and

\(^1\) As with many other organisations established to campaign for independence, the Radical Independence Campaign has continued even after the defeat of the September 2014 referendum.

\(^2\) The association of a ‘new left’ with gender equality has developed due to a number of high-profile scandals connected to misogynistic practices in left wing organisations in the UK over the past 15 years, particularly relating to Tommy Sheridan and the Scottish Socialist Party and the rape scandal in the UK wide Socialist Worker’s Party.
an updated list with nearly equal men and women signatories released. Moreover, from that point onwards, a core organiser, Robert, said that RIC ‘set out as a line in the sand that we weren’t going to cross, right at the start we said there will be more women speaking at this conference than men, even if it’s only one more, it has to be more’. In addition to the 50:50 policy, many of RIC’s leading public figures are women. It also must be recognised that women participated in RIC in high numbers with interviewees estimating between 40-50% of active participants were women, with an even higher participation rate for the under-30 years age group. The aim of 50:50 was achieved at the three national conferences held so far, in 2012, 2013 and 2014, with equal numbers of men and women speaking at each event. Additionally, 50:50 was achieved at RIC local events around Scotland. At the first conference while overall there was equality of representation and gender parity at all the main plenary sessions, a few of the breakaway panel sessions held between plenaries remained all-male, although these were a minority. Additionally, the first conference arguably had a degree of gender segregation as speakers on panel topics traditionally seen as female, such as the arts and Trident/peace predominantly women. Conversely, panels on republicanism, and post-devolution politics were all male. Nonetheless, the following two conferences had a gender balance across all of the panels.

However, while women as women were included in RIC, specifically feminist voices were not widely promoted in RIC outside of specific women’s sessions at the conferences. The relative exclusion of feminist voices indicates that feminism was not considered central to RIC’s messages. Arguably RIC has improved upon recent left wing movements as it included feminist speakers in its events from the start unlike, for example, the global justice movement (Eschle, 2005). Thus the main plenary sessions of each of the conferences contained at least one speaker who identified as a feminist and was known to have campaigned on feminist issues. However, none of these women were invited specifically as feminist activists and none spoke directly on feminist politics. For example, in 2012, Isobel Lindsay, a renowned Scottish feminist, spoke at the opening plenary but was invited as a peace movement activist to talk about trident and nuclear disarmament. Similarly, in 2013, feminist activist Maggie Chapman was one of the panellists but as Green councillor, and, in 2014, Suki Sangha spoke as a trade unionist activist instead of as a feminist. The opening plenary sessions are a basic indicator of what is considered politically important for the campaign, therefore, the failure to include feminist voices suggests that feminism was not a central issue. The presence of feminists in all plenary panels, yet the lack of explicit feminist
analysis is symbolic of the conflict over feminist politics within the movement. The presence of women as panellists rendered feminism voiceless.

Beyond the lack of specifically feminist speakers, there was little mention of feminism, women or gender in any of the plenary speeches apart from relating specifically to the issue of representation. For example, at the opening plenary of the RIC Conference 2014, which had 3 young women and 3 middle aged men as speakers, Suki Sangha, young trade union activist, feminist and RIC organiser, made only one reference to women in her speech in declaring ‘long gone should be the days when politics is dominated by white, middle aged men, we need a movement led by women, we need a movement which is young and as culturally diverse as the communities we live in’. Yet, the limitation of gender politics to the politics of representation illustrates the extremely narrow conception of feminism which was integrated into RIC’s main messages. Aside from the inclusion of Ailsa McKay, a renowned feminist economist who spoke at a session of the second conference, the only speeches directly discussing feminist politics or attempting to integrate gender in the central analyses of neoliberalism and class were at the women’s sessions. A women’s session, focusing on various issues around gender and the referendum, was held at the first two conferences in the breakaway workshops held between the main plenary events. These were not directly called feminist sessions but the majority of the speakers came from feminist organisations, groups or collectives. A slight change was seen at the 2014 conference with the women’s session entitled ‘Gender Equality Now: A feminist plan for women’s independence’, making it the first explicit inclusion of feminism in the conference timetable. Nonetheless, the side-lining of specifically feminist analyses into one breakaway session illustrates the failure to consider feminism as a central aspect of the entire campaign. Rather feminism was considered secondary to the main messages.

The written documents and material which have emerged from RIC serve as a further indicator of a gender-blind analysis which side-lines feminism. Where gender or women were mentioned, they tended to be added onto the central focus of neoliberalism or class. RIC written material has been in three main forms; the RIC blog, leaflets for national distribution and the declarations read at the end of each of the conferences and circulated in written form online afterwards. All three forms of written material failed to integrate gender into the discussions, which centred on income inequality and austerity. Thus, the most prominent set of RIC leaflets under the slogan ‘Britain is for the rich, Scotland can be ours’ focused on
income inequality with targeted sections for youth and pensioners. Gender inequality was mentioned only once in a reference to the gender pay gap. While text on leaflets is necessarily short and propagandistic a similar failure to integrate gender into the main focus of discussion on income inequality was found on the RIC blog (2012-present). Not only were all but one of the twenty articles written by men but none included gender as a category of analysis. In fact none of the articles contained any reference to women, gender or feminism. The lack of any inclusion of gender strongly signifies that feminist politics were peripheral to the RIC campaign. A RIC feminist activist Claire called attention to 2 articles posted on the blog of Yes Scotland, the mainstream Yes campaign to get more coverage, written by prominent RIC feminist activists for International Women’s Day the 8th of March 2014. Yet even in view of this, feminist politics were side-lined into specific articles on women rather than integrated into the everyday messages of the RIC blog.

The declarations read at each conference are an annual summary of the main politics and intentions of the campaign and consequently offer reasonable grounds to examine whether feminist concepts have been incorporated into the central understandings of the movement. Neither the ‘declaration for radical independence’ (2012) nor the separate ‘radical independence declaration’ (2013) mentioned gender, women or any other equalities such as sexuality or race. Both documents focus exclusively on inequality of class, particularly with austerity, indicating an economic determinism in understanding of inequality in society. However, the ‘People’s Vow’ (2014) of the third conference indicated some movement with the incorporation of a demand for positive action to reverse inequalities between men and women, an end to macho political culture and that ‘fifty-fifty representation for men and women is a minimum; equality is compulsory, not an afterthought’. The inclusion of statements on inequality between men and women and demands for action represent a positive change and suggest more attention is being paid to feminist politics in RIC. Still, it remains to be seen whether this signifies a permanent step towards the integration of feminist politics.

The most comprehensive statement of the politics of RIC can be found in the book ‘Yes: the radical case for Scottish independence’ by James Foley and Pete Ramand (2014), two of the co-founders of RIC. RIC activists referred to Yes as the de facto handbook of RIC, indicating it is representative of the dominant political discourse of the movement. Overall, the book adopts a gender-blind approach towards the central concepts of income inequality,
neoliberalism and imperialism as well as in the strategy for social change. The only mentions of gender or women are in suggestions for a radical needs agenda at the end of the book where suggestions are made around parliamentary quotas, equal pay, maternity and paternity leave and free childcare. Overall, gender is not a central part of the analysis, but rather equalities are an addition to the central problems of austerity and neoliberalism. As a response to the failure to integrate a class and gender perspective in ‘Yes’ Boyd and I (2014), both RIC activists, published a short manifesto ‘Scottish Independence: a feminist response’. The Radical Independence Campaign supported the publication of the book and publicised the events held to promote it. However, the reception of the manifesto relative to that of ‘Yes’ is itself indicative of the secondary status of gender relative to class in the understandings of the campaign. While ‘Yes’ was promoted as making an universal left-wing argument about independence relevant to all RIC activists, ‘Feminist Response’ was promoted as a ‘feminist’ book, implicitly a niche interest within RIC. Moreover, while ‘Yes’ was publicised through all RIC local branches, the manifesto was promoted only where an individual, usually woman, decided to organise an event. The difference in the reception and promotion of the two books illustrates a hierarchy constructed within RIC where feminist politics are considered secondary and separate to the central concerns of the movement.

Feminist politics were largely excluded from the main messages of RIC. While feminists were present as speakers in the conferences, they were generally not given a platform to speak specifically as feminists. Moreover, specific mention of gender or women was frequently omitted entirely from the published material of the campaign. Where gender was included in the analysis it was tokenistic, usually briefly added onto an analysis which remained centred on income inequality. Gender was understood as subordinate to, or as a distinct issue separate from the ‘real’ focus of RIC on a (gender-blind conception of) class, austerity or neoliberalism. The clear hierarchy between feminist politics and those of class inequality contrasts with the public assertion of equality in RIC, a tension examined in the following section.

4. Techniques of Marginalisation

The apparent contradiction between the inclusion of women, as well as feminists, and the lack of feminist politics in RIC can be explained through the deployment of informal
techniques of marginalisation that belie the public commitment to equality. This is one of the main outcomes of the interviews realized with RIC’s feminist activists analysed here. Central to the marginalisation of feminism was the appeal to unity within the independence campaign. The Scottish independence campaign has been celebrated for its plurality and diversity (Ramsay, 2014; Wainwright, 2014). However, it is argued that this plurality only existed within certain boundaries considered beneficial to the campaign. Clearly the overall campaign was broadly centre-left and based on inclusive civic not ethnic nationalism. Nonetheless, the campaign discouraged internal critique through promoting the importance of unity for winning a yes vote for independence. A degree of acceptable dissent was permitted or even encouraged, for example, in the relative prominence of the debate around gender representation in the campaign and in politics in general. Nonetheless generally a politics of consensus was encouraged against a politics of conflict which exposes internal divisions within a group or society.

While RIC was officially separate from the official Yes campaign, it also strategically discouraged overt criticism within organisations campaigning for a yes vote. The overarching appeal to unity marginalised feminism in two main ways. Firstly, feminism was considered potentially divisive to the campaign, thus tackling feminist issues should be delayed until after the referendum. This mirrors the classic critique that socialist movements postpone questions of feminism until ‘after the revolution’ (Hartmann, 1979). Secondly, feminism is framed as a ‘special interest’ concern which is only relevant to a certain section of the population, therefore, cannot appeal to a majority needed to have unity. These discourses have worked to marginalise feminism within RIC, while the public foregrounding of formal measures of equality allowed the campaign to maintain a general appearance of gender equality.

The Yes campaign, including RIC, framed a Yes vote as the basis for progressive social change in Scotland. The Westminster government, and by extension ‘Britain’ were positioned as unreformable, or ‘institutionally gridlocked’ in key RIC texts (Foley and Ramand, 2014; 3). Accordingly, the immediate focus was on achieving a yes vote rather than promoting and building towards social change. The framing of a Yes vote as fundamental for change resulted in some feminist interviewees self-censoring their views as potentially divisive:
I recognise that this campaign is about winning a Yes vote and when I’m speaking to people locally the likelihood is that they don’t share my vision but they might still vote yes so there’s a tempering of what, yeh of my arguments and policies. (Patricia)

We need a yes vote… I think that a lot of women, and feminists of any gender are essentially choosing public unity, a public face of unity, over kicking up too much of a stink (Sandra)

Evidently the yes vote was considered the immediate aim as opposed to using the movement to promote feminist or socialist politics. Feminism was recognised to be outside of majority opinion and not likely to be useful as a tactic to win people towards a pro-independence position. Other women noted pressure not to criticise any aspect of the Yes campaign. For example Alison, a non-RIC aligned socialist activist, noted,

I planned to write something over the summer about the way that people talk about women in the Yes campaign, women as a voting group and so on, and I expect that people will find that distasteful and think that you shouldn’t be doing that to the Yes campaign

While feminist views in themselves are not framed as divisive, the quote indicates that internal critique of the Yes side was discouraged. The plurality of the pro-independence movement accordingly masked a strong pull towards unity in the broad Yes campaign. Women were subtly dissuaded from raising feminist critiques due to the fear that division will harm the potential for winning a yes vote. As a result, the importance placed on unity within the umbrella of the Yes campaign worked to marginalise feminist opinions.

The focus on unity legitimised the postponement of feminism until after the referendum (and with the defeat of the campaign, until after independence is achieved). Thus RIC emphasised the importance of equality publically but simultaneously deferred discussion on any specific feminist demands until after a yes vote. The campaign, therefore, caused activists to strategically suspend feminist organising. Interviewees spoke of an exclusive focus on the independence:
There’s very much a sense that it’ll come down to every single vote and winning them over to Yes, get a Yes vote in September and then we’ll have the debate about what kinda country do we want to live in (Patricia)

Similarly RIC activist Sophie in response to a question asking if she would like to have seen a feminist movement within RIC stated ‘I actually think there is more necessity for that if there is a Yes vote’. Both quotes indicate a hierarchy between winning independence and raising feminist critiques where independence is viewed as a necessary condition to raising other progressive demands. As a result women are disciplined not to raise criticisms that would hurt ‘their own side’. Interviewees mentioned that class, particularly through anti-austerity arguments, was held to be immediately relevant to independence campaigning. Samantha, a RIC feminist activist described her experience,

You mention gender equality and they think what, why would we care about that? The same goes for any other aspect of equality, there was the Yes LGBT set up and I had a conversation with a few guys in RIC who said I don’t understand what’s so special about LGBT issues in the Yes campaign, how do those two things relate to each other? Where is the relationship?

She continued that others believed that these were issues that could be tackled ‘later on’ whereas issues such as austerity were held to be crucial to winning the Yes vote. The postponement of feminist concerns also echoes old arguments that feminism is divisive and breaks class unity (Chinchilla, 1991). In the Scottish independence campaign this is intricately interlinked with a discourse of national unity. Feminist politics, where the aim is to overturn oppression within the nation, therefore, can be framed as outside of the interests of the campaign. The appeal to unity, if of a broad left inclination, results in feminist politics being postponed. Even while they are valorised as ‘important’, they are left to be considered after independence has been won.

A further technique of marginalisation of feminism is in the framing of feminism as a ‘specialism’ or a special interest concern and, consequently, not a central concern for RIC activists as a whole. The understanding of gender as a specific or narrow issue was raised as a problem by feminist respondents who were sometimes faced with accusations that they were
focusing on a niche concern rather than on those which affect all activists. In one instance the understanding of gender as a specific concern was voiced by a RIC feminist Melissa:

For me it sort of goes beyond gender, you know the issues that the Radical Independence Campaign deals with are universal-poverty, inequality, democracy, these are all things which affect both genders, all genders, yeh, it definitely is not aimed specifically at women, I mean a group like Women for Independence is much more dealing with specific women’s issues.

Studies of left populist movements have illustrated how feminism is constructed as a specialist concern that threatens the unity of ‘the people’ (Emejulu, 2011; 135). A similar construction occurred within the independence campaign, where independence was considered to be in the interests of the majority of Scotland. In contrast, as evident in the above quote, feminism was viewed as beneficial only for a minority. Moreover, a core RIC organiser Iain claimed the appeal of RIC lay in the ability to incorporate feminism into a broader anti-austerity pro-independence movement:

[A]s far as I understand to be against austerity means to be promoting a feminist position because women are worse affected by austerity and you can go through a whole raft of issues which RIC tackles but also include men.

The need for feminism specifically is thus collapsed, already encompassed within the broader appeal of independence and anti-austerity. Alternatively, feminism itself is considered unrepresentative and without popular support. Feminism in seeking to transform the relations between men and women, hence, cannot hope to unite the interests of a majority. Respondents discussed how they repeatedly felt they had to emphasise that focusing only on income inequality would in fact reflect a bias towards the male working class and that incorporating gender did not necessarily entail taking a class-blind position. RIC activist Claire stated ‘they [other RIC activists] don’t seem to get that talking about class is already gendered-just towards men’ and her difficulty in trying to ‘point out that class can be central, class should be central, only gender should be central to class…but nobody really wants to hear that’. Therefore, the construction of class as capable of advancing the interests of the people or of ‘Scotland but’ feminism as a niche concern silenced feminist claims.
Some discourses present in certain prior left wing movements in the UK were not found in RIC, such as the idea that feminism is a ‘bourgeois distraction’ or split the working class (Olcott, 2011). On the contrary, RIC made public affirmations of feminism and instituted measures to ensure equality in gender representation. However, similar discourses around unity were deployed instead to marginalise feminism and silence feminist voices. Beneath the celebration of diversity and multiplicity in the independence campaign was a pressure not to internally criticise the campaign. Feminism was framed as a potential threat to the unity of the Yes campaign and as a result was side-lined as independence was viewed as the priority. The link between feminist movements and progressive social change was severed as feminism was reconstructed as a special interest concern that is unrepresentative. Overall, such techniques of marginalisation have succeeded to silence feminist voices.

5. Conclusions and Lessons for the Future

The public face of gender equality projected by RIC masks the marginalisation of feminist politics. While equality of representation features prominently in the rhetoric of the campaign feminist politics are absent from the central analyses. Thus technocratic measures for equality such as 50:50 are instrumentalised in RIC to promote an image of equality but this equality is emptied of feminist content. This is achieved through deploying informal techniques of marginalisation which work to justify the postponement of feminism until after the central aim of independence is achieved. In common with previous studies of feminism and left wing or nationalist movements, these practices focus on promoting the necessity of a united campaign and the framing of feminism as a secondary concern to class or national unity. Both techniques thus construct feminism as potentially divisive to a broad campaign so should be postponed until after independence is achieved. Feminism can accordingly be both valorised and separated off from the immediate campaign.

The instrumentalisation of formal technocratic 50:50 illustrate the limits such measures have in integrating gender and class based analyses in left wing or nationalist movements. It is now widely recognised that technocratic measures such as 50:50 policies do not automatically lead to a more central position for women overall (Conway, 2013; Desai, 2007). This is not to argue that 50:50 should not be implemented in campaigns but to see these measures as inadequate and to be aware they may be co-opted. The early incorporation
of 50:50 may have acted to fragment feminist organising as RIC activist Manjit commented there was ‘insecurity about what to do next’. Nonetheless, the latter stages and aftermath of the campaign saw increasing feminist activism with publishing and circulation on and offline of various feminist critiques of the campaign (Currier, 2014; McFarlane, 2015). Moreover, women began to organise left-wing women-only spaces in the few months before the referendum, albeit sporadically and on a small-scale. Moreover, various feminist events are now being planned by RIC feminists, such as a conference in Dundee and International Women’s Day events. Feminist activity around RIC suggests increasing counter-hegemonic strategies are being employed to challenge the side-lining of feminism.

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