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## Ignored Ironies: Women, Protest and Donald Trump

By Binoy Kampmark  
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“The USA has Urinary Trump Infection.” – Protest sign, San Francisco Women’s Rally, Jan 21, 2017

*San Francisco.*

The man, called Bruce, goes by the name of DJ Chocolate Starfish. He is energetically occupying himself in the corner of a room on the third floor of the often noisy San Francisco Public library, eyes moving with frenzied delight at the mixed tunes, ears covered with enormous head pieces. DJCS minds his computer screen and entire sound system of amplifiers, being true to his name.

A superb window is positioned beside the table DJCS has conquered with conviction. From there, the organism that is the Women’s March is developing, buzzing and heaving, adjusting between the Public Library and the Asian Museum.

“Whoa shit!” exclaims Chocolate Starfish, placing his headphones down with an elaborate gesture on the table. The thud is startling, followed by a question clouded in fear: “Hey man, I thought you were about to pick off the protesters one by one.” Not every day one is assumed to

be a sniper, exchanging pen for rifle. “Don’t worry man. I was just going to quietly slip out. I ain’t seen nothin...”

Solid calm and reassurance was quickly restored. Chocolate Starfish found form quickly, chirped with enthusiasm at the crowds gathering outside for the rally. “This is bigger than fucking Milk.” He was reminded by the passion of Harvey Milk, the San Francisco Board Supervisor and gay activist who paid for his life in the service of his city, speaking to lifestyle, rights and identity. Now that was a San Francisco that could march against fear, turning out after his murder in 1977 with solemn dignity.

Prior to two o’clock on the Sunday afternoon, the numbers were already gathering to celebrate Woman, the sleeping giant of America supposedly woken, in Her fight against the Misogynist-in-Chief, whose trash-talking disposition towards the opposite sex was captured by a video. Added to this were his erratic comments during the campaign about penalising those who use abortion, though he exited rapidly from that proposition.

Naturally, it was far more than that, and the protest over the course of the day drew in themes from across the spectrum that went beyond Woman. Pro-immigrant and Black Lives Matter voices were also in evidence. As these were added to the shopping list, contradictions appeared gaping.

In front of the Asian Museum were several women, garbed in hippy chic outfits, the tattered jackets lending themselves to stylish suggestions. They held signs backing Hillary Clinton as the legitimate president, alongside peace symbols, NATO, and “love, actually”. The confused combination evidently ignored the troubling and far from peaceful role of NATO since the end of the Cold War, not to mention the role played by the nuclear weapons in the alliance, triggering the European Disarmament Movement.

These are hippies turned conservative protectors of the status quo, doves genetically modified to be hawks in Hillary Clinton’s laboratory of politics. They are the patriots of the moment, darkly insinuating that Trump is Vladimir Putin’s poodle.

Protest simplifies. The street placard (or “signage” as it is often referred to here) takes a problem of various dimensions and dragoons it into a simple form. Sometimes, these are amusing. “Did you know Trump is fart in British slang?” went the message being held by a school girl, flashing her smile before the cameras. “My taco is nacho business,” went another.

In a perverse sense, the Trump tweet is a form of crude protest. The leader as “creeper tweeter” invites uncomplicated engagement, lures the respondent into a world where the complex subject goes to die. The entire twittersphere is a noisy engagement, furious, often abusive, the sovereign domain of trolls rather than the idyll of the philosophical walk. Complexity and nuance are compressed, even crushed.

Consequentially, the entire language of the debate has been shaped by Trump. Instead of seeking elevated forms of engagement, protests insist on the “Pussy Grab Back” line. Others use street fighting (or is it genital fighting?) talk: “Grab My Pussy and I Kick Your Dick.” The language

becomes pathological and violent, sounding very much like the man's own lingo, the subject of denigration turned denigrator. It is forceful, promising of assault, and worshipful of the vagina and uterus. Dick thinkers become vagina thinkers.

As the crowd swells and snakes out to the tens of thousands (the final estimate of those who turned up numbered a hundred thousand), more signs appear, providing the President with generous publicity: "We are still fighting for an America for all of us"; "E pluribus unum." Except, obviously, those who voted for Trump, who remain the shadow targets of the protesters, lowlife types to be denigrated rather than convinced.

Here, today, there was little complexity at hand. There was much indignation to bottle, but the speeches at the rally were rambles of self-indulgence, a mass of angst filled with platitudes: "Compassion changes minds." There were the usual salutes to native plights and the environment, a fear for war. There were memories, framed by pasts of pain.

There was little by way of a constructive targeting of Trump, given his non-existent record. Crimes spoken of had yet to happen; and many, in fact, had already been committed by previous US administrations. To date, apart from rumour and sentiment, the other targets were Trump's Cabinet nominees.

While these appointees may well seem like selections from a nightmare fantasy, thespians in an absurdist play, they have yet to prove true to their statements. Trump himself ducks, adjusts and re-forms positions with gum like indifference, and surely knows that he is now the People's Apprentice who might well be fired.

What we saw during these protests was, in fact, a huge festival, a chance to have a good Sunday out. There was, to that end, little to worry the police. These were individuals who had turned up with families, dogs, and, in some instances, to get laid. To its wet, flickering end, it was protest as festival, having found a convenient justification. It was excellent for the bars lining Larkin Street, where the protesters repaired to before marching on. It would have made Trump proud: spending patrons, keeping the US economy purring.

"He may well have united America," chortled Chocolate Starfish, his bulky bag packed after much effort, ready to brave the choking march that was already cutting off Market Street. "The poor bastard should have known he would do this." Not quite: a Disunited States is precisely why Trump is in office, and another cartoon character of blame could just as well have been Clinton herself, the figure lauded and celebrated before these indignados.