

Feminism, women's movements and women in movement

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For this issue Interface is delighted to welcome Catherine Eschle as guest editor. Until recently co-editor of the International feminist journal of politics, Catherine has written with Bice Maiguashca on feminism and the global justice movement, as well as on the politics of feminist scholarship and other themes relevant to this issue.

Introduction

This issue engages with the increasingly important, separate yet interrelated themes of feminism, women's movements and women in movement in the context of global neoliberalism.

The last few decades have witnessed an intensification of neoliberal restructuring, involving the opening of national economies to international capital and the erosion of rights and guarantees won previously by organised labour (Federici, 1999, 2006). Neoliberal policies have driven ever larger proportions of the population into flexibilised and informalised working conditions, and caused a crisis in masculinised organised labour (Chant, 2008; Hite and Viterna, 2005), the collapse of welfare provision for poor families, and the privatisation of public and/or collective goods such as land, housing and education. As a consequence, poverty has been feminised and violence, both structural and individual, has intensified. In the main, women carry the burden of ensuring the survival of their families (Olivera, 2006; González de la Rocha, 2001), combining escalating domestic responsibilities with integration into a labour market that is increasingly precarious and unregulated. Furthermore, their integration is accompanied by accelerated sexualisation of public space, and the concurrent objectification and commodification of women's minds and bodies (McRobbie, 2009). Such conditions serve only to deepen women's experiences of poverty, inequality, exclusion, alienation and violence.

At the same time, feminism seems to be in crisis. Prominent sectors of the feminist movement have become institutionalised and professionalised, including within academia, and in this context serious questions have been raised about how well they can defend women from neoliberalism and about their role in the struggle for a post-neoliberal, post-patriarchal world. The result is a paradoxical situation of defeats and de-politicisation, on the one hand, combined with new forms of re-politicisation, on the other. Women continue to resist, in both familiar and more inventive ways, attempting in so doing to redefine the nature of feminism and of politics and to challenge patriarchal and neoliberal orthodoxies.

In this light, we suggest that there is an urgent need to revisit and reinvent feminist theorising and practice in ways that combine critical understanding of the past with our current struggles, and that create theories both inside and outside the academy to support movement praxis. There are, however, some obstacles to such a project. Feminist theory, which developed out of and for women's activism, at times has been directly linked to and shaped by the dilemmas facing movement organising and at other times has represented a more distant and reflective form of thought. If many activists continue to find it useful in the development of their social critiques and the scrutiny of mobilised identities, the relationship of feminist theory to questions of movement organising is often less clear, as is what feminist theory can offer social movement analysis.

More challengingly, while some women's movements are distinctly and proudly feminist, others avoid the term (even while consciously or unconsciously adopting feminist practices and attitudes), while still more contest its meaning. A range of activist communities, such as trade unions and alterglobalisation, environmental or peace movements, perceive feminist-labelled arguments as marginal to their struggles, at best, and ignore them altogether, at worst. The fraught relationship of activists to the notion of feminism is in some instances a result of the power of patriarchy; all struggles for social change, not just women's movements, are highly gendered, often in hierarchical and damaging ways.

In addition, many new movements - from the "occupy" camps to the recent student protests - seem to be victims of the historical moment and its peculiar dynamics of depoliticisation. In conditions of neoliberalism, the present is fetishised, any sense of the past is eroded, and the possibility of a different future is diminished. Lessons from past feminist struggles, theories and experiences thus often remain invisible, weakening the consolidation of resistance movements against neoliberal capitalist globalisation. Finally, feminists themselves may have contributed to their marginalisation in activist contexts because of their tendency to privilege a partial, white, bourgeois, liberal perspective. Long resisted by black and working class women for its silencing and sidelining of their experiences, voices and strategies, this tendency can make feminism appear less relevant than it should to movements of racially oppressed groups and of the poor.

In this issue of *Interface* we seek to explore the relationship between theory and practice as a means of opening up possibilities for the reconnection of feminist academic analysis to women's everyday struggles, thereby contributing to a more emancipatory feminism and to a post-patriarchal, anti-neoliberal politics. We do so both by re-considering feminist theories in the academy in the light of the strategic demands of political action and by exploring the theoretical implications of women's movements and women in movement. What is more, the issue seeks to expose to critical scrutiny the relationship between feminism and women's organising, on the one hand, and social movement theory and practice more generally, on the other.

To get the issue off the ground, we invited contributions from feminist activists and scholars, participants in and students of women's movements, and social movement researchers interested in women's agency and the gendering of movement activism. In the original call for papers, we set out a range of questions for consideration:

- Is there a distinctively feminist mode of analysing social movements and collective agency?
- Can (should) academic forms of feminism be reclaimed as theory-for-movements?
- In what ways and to what extent are social movement actors using feminist categories to develop new forms of collective action?
- Are there specific types of "women's movement/s" in terms of participation, tactics and strategies?
- Has the feminisation of poverty led to the feminisation of resistance among movements of the poor? If so / if not, what are the implications for such resistance?
- Under what conditions does women's participation in movements which are not explicitly feminist or focussed on specifically gendered issues lead to a change in power relations?
- What are the implications of women's participation for collective identity or movement practice, leadership and strategy?
- What constitutes progressive or emancipatory movement practice in relation to gender, and good practice in alliance-building?
- How can social movement scholarship contribute more to the feminist analysis of activism, and how can feminist scholarship help develop a fuller understanding of collective agency?
- Are there specifically gendered themes to the current global wave of movements? Have feminist perspectives anything distinctive to offer the analysis of such movements?
- What can enquiry into contemporary activism learn from historical feminist writing on women's movements and women's role in other movements?

We also specifically solicited contributions for the issue from feminist and / or women's groups, communities and movements, as well as from the individuals within them, asking them to reflect on questions of strategy in the neoliberal context delineated above. While inviting activists to frame their own questions and problematics, we suggested topics such as:

- What does feminist strategy mean today?
- What are the challenges and limitations of feminist strategising in the current moment?

- How do contemporary feminist activists and women's movements draw on the practices and experiences of earlier movements?
- Where do you see yourselves in terms of movement achievements to date and the road still to be travelled?
- What barriers and possibilities for feminist struggle has neoliberalism created?
- Does the decline of neo-liberalism create openings for feminists?
- What movements today could be allies for a transition out of patriarchy?

If these seem grandiose and difficult questions, they are no less important for that. We acknowledge that they cannot be answered definitively in one issue of a journal, much less one editorial. Nonetheless many are touched upon in the pieces that follow, which does not aim to provide final or even fixed solutions, but rather to re-open discussion and suggesting possibilities in theory and in practice for how we can construct a world beyond neoliberalism and beyond patriarchy in our everyday lives, in the academy and across the globe. In this spirit, we dedicate this issue of *Interface* to all those women and their male allies¹ who, though often unrecognised and delegitimised, have tirelessly struggled to create such a world.

In the remainder of this editorial, we offer a series of opening reflections on a few of the questions addressed in the issue that are of particular interest to us. We begin with strategic considerations in order to foreground the dynamics and demands of movement activism in the current conjuncture, before moving to more abstract questions of the relationship between theory and practice and more specifically the insights of feminist theory and the continuing dilemmas it poses with regard to collective, transformative social movement politics. We then turn to what and how feminist activists can learn from feminist histories before examining the issue of who they should build alliances with. The final set of reflections considers the contexts of and trends in contemporary women's organising, its impact on gendered relations and implications for feminist theory, before we introduce the articles and shorter pieces that follow.

What does feminist strategy mean today? What are the challenges and limitations of feminist strategising in the current moment?

The birth of second-wave feminist movements in the late 1960s and early 1970s saw a flowering of theoretical positions linked to specific political strategies. At the risk of oversimplification and reductionism, we can summarize the "map" of feminist approaches as it is commonly explained in overviews of feminist theory (e.g. Tong, 2009; Bryson, 2003). In this account, liberal feminists since the nineteenth century have sought to free contemporaneous society from residual,

¹ See e.g. Anonymous 2011.

pre-modern, patriarchal throwbacks in law and culture, investing in legal, educational and media strategies as a form of feminist civilising process as well as lobbying the state for formal equality within the public sphere. The radical feminists of the 1970s, by contrast, are defined in terms of an emphasis on patriarchy as the foundational system of power from which all other injustices spring, and often depicted as pursuing separatist organising strategies that celebrate and defend women's difference from men, under the headings of political lesbianism and global sisterhood. Marxist feminists usually come next in the list, described as holding to the view that gender oppression will be overcome with the end of capitalism and class society, and distinguished in this from socialist feminists who advocate alliances between women's movements and working-class struggles with the goal of overcoming both patriarchy and capitalism.

Black feminists are then perceived to add racism to this mix, perceiving it to be deeply intertwined with both capitalism and patriarchy within a complex matrix of domination, whilst anarchist feminism, on the rare occasions when it features in overviews of feminist theory, are elaborated in terms of their challenge to the underlying relationship of "power-over" they see as intrinsic to the institution of the state and embedded in everyday life. Most recently, post-modern or post-structuralist feminism has come to the fore in these accounts of feminism, characterised as seeking to move beyond the essentialisms of gendered binaries and fixed identities towards a queering of our practices of self and other.

Despite important points of divergence, most feminists would agree that contemporary society remains systematically shot through with oppression and exploitation in a multitude of different forms. Indeed, the consolidation of the neoliberal project in recent years is widely acknowledged to have worsened the situation for many women and men, as we noted at the start, and to have put feminist aspirations under sustained attack. In this context, it would seem that feminist political strategies have not achieved the emancipatory result for which their proponents were hoping. It is in this context, furthermore, that liberal varieties of feminism have achieved what amounts to a hollow victory, according to prominent feminist critics such as Nancy Fraser (2009), Hester Eisenstein (2009) and Angela McRobbie (2009). On this line of argument, feminist efforts to lobby and work with the state, or to pursue formal equal rights within a fundamentally exploitative labour market, have not only failed to pose an effective challenge to neoliberalism, but also supplied key cultural justifications for its modernising project of individuation, flexibilisation and the pruning of the state. These critics and others imply that a reconsideration of feminist political strategies is long overdue.

Any such reconsideration for us has to acknowledge that the liberal "long march through the institutions" may have brought a wide variety of significant changes in its train, but many of these have served the interests of only the most privileged women. What is more, gendered inequalities are not and have never been reducible to the overt legal, educational and political discrimination that continue to scar some societies. As documented by proponents of other feminist

theories, patriarchal power is bound up with practices of identity production and selfhood, with gendered divisions of labour, with the separation of the private and public realms, and with relationships of power-over that have emotional, intellectual, psychological, spiritual, symbolic, and corporeal dimensions, all of which liberal feminism neglects.

In addition, while it is hard to deny the important contribution of radical feminists in challenging rape and domestic violence, among other oppressions, the pursuit of entirely separatist organising, which many radical feminists advocate, seems ever more disconnected from the daily lives of many women. Moreover, the tendency of radical feminists to privilege patriarchy in their analyses as the most basic form of power has now been thoroughly criticised for ignoring the ways in which gender hierarchies are intertwined with race and class in mutually constitutive ways. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty has argued (1998), notions of a universal sisterhood based on shared experience and identity are thus fatally undermined.

The other political strategies outlined here also have their limitations. Marxist feminism in a narrow sense is marginal outside a handful of states where orthodox communist parties are still significant political actors. Although there has been a resurgence of Marxist feminist thought as part of the Pink Tide, or shift to the left, in Latin America, particularly in Venezuela, it often remains separated from the demands and identifications of women in the barrios. Broader socialist feminist arguments as to the need for alliance-building are often widely accepted in theory, but prove very difficult to implement in practice; just as black feminist struggles, today as in the 1970s, still find themselves caught between entrenched racism of a subtler variety in women's movements and resurgent, often religious, patriarchy in their own communities.

In a different vein, the anarchist feminist desire to move beyond relationships of power-over resonates across contemporary movements yet is rarely explicitly acknowledged by or connected to them. Finally, while the queering of subjectivities and of gendered dichotomies advocated by post-structuralist feminists is sometimes acknowledged in current movement discussion, it remains difficult to actualise in political contexts that seem to demand the taking of a subject position and thus rather marginal as a political practice.

Having said all that, we want to argue that women's groups and feminists remain tenacious, creative and adaptable, capable of reinventing theory and practice for a neoliberal age. Thus despite the contradictory current scenario, there is much remarkable and potentially radical, progressive or emancipatory feminist praxis to be seen if we look hard enough. There is also, we suggest, a resurgence of women's and feminist organising, and feminist theorising, at the heart of a range of social movements today (see, e.g., Eschle and Maignashca, 2010). Much of this is documented in the special section on feminist strategies in this edition of *Interface*, which brings together a wide range of reflections from around the world in order to contribute to a debate on practice which in our view needs to be revived and amplified. Arguably many of the re-articulations about strategy presented in this section are simultaneously

localised and transnationalised, and they articulate a praxis that is often mis-recognised and misrepresented in contemporary social movement scholarship.

Several key themes emerge from our strategies debate, which we will address here in general terms:

1. Plurality beyond liberal feminism and an ethic of recognition

Strikingly, the contributions in the special section embrace organisational plurality, in terms of the authors insisting on both their own right to be autonomous and develop a feminism that speaks to their needs and desires, and their recognition of the right of other feminists and women to similar freedoms. What we might term an ethic of recognition can be said to underlie their understandings of feminist strategy. This ethic is not relativistic, however, nor does it deny the tensions and contradictions between different forms of feminism. Many of our contributors do not feel represented by liberal, bourgeois strands of feminism and do not believe that there are easy alliances to be made with these strands. Rather, by giving voice and legitimacy to feminisms that come from working class and black positionalities, they make visible tensions among feminists and suggest that it is only by taking these seriously that we can collectively think through the possibilities and parameters of our alliances.

2. Experience and voice

In many of the contributions to the special section, we find an emphasis on the strategic importance of enabling marginal voices to speak and of making audible and visible diverse experiences of patriarchy. Structural incidents of silencing, misrepresentation and exclusion are a particular focus of critique. To overcome such patriarchal erasures and forgettings, we are urged to build the conditions within feminist groups and broader activist movements in which women feel sufficiently safe to begin to recount their experiences, find their voices and have their words heard and respected. This is a strategy of reclaiming, centering on dignity, remembering and recognition.

3. Communication

Another fascinating theme, one under-discussed in the wider literature, is that of communication and the fact that it can be gendered, imbued with power relations and assumptions about what certain terms mean and privileging some positionalities and experiences over others. Some of our contributors to the special section focus specifically on how we might overcome patriarchal forms of communication that centre on the elevation of ego, the domination of space and the clash of rival argumentation, by developing instead a praxis that is mindful of others, opens space for a plurality of voices to be heard, and challenges unspoken assumptions about race, class and gender.

4. Women-only spaces and self-care

Whilst not favouring separatist strategies as such, the pieces featured in the section do emphasise the centrality of women-only spaces. Such spaces are viewed as strategically necessary because they offer a safe environment in which patriarchal forms of communication can be challenged and in which women can begin to share experiences, reclaim individual and collective voice(s), and develop theoretical understandings and strategies. Of course, as black feminists, lesbian critics and working class women have long pointed out, women-only spaces may sidestep gendered hierarchies but they do not transcend power per se and indeed, if critical awareness and vigilance is lacking, may replicate and entrench within them diverse axes of oppression and inequality. Moreover, these spaces do not even escape patriarchy entirely. Our contributors view patriarchy not merely as a structure "out there", but as infusing our subjectivities and many of our relationships in ways that are impoverishing, harmful and painful. In this context, the importance of self-care (including fun and pleasure) is also stressed, and women-only spaces are depicted as key sites in which self-care can be both theorised and enacted.

5. Affective, embodied, spiritual and psychological dimensions of the self

Given the theorisation of patriarchy as pervading even our individual psyches, as noted above, the special section in effect reclaims and reworks the famous feminist slogan, "the personal is political". In this vein, our authors talk of the role of feminist love and anger, the importance of psychological healing, the freeing of our bodies and sexualities, and the role of the spiritual in the construction of worlds beyond patriarchy in the here and now.

6. In and beyond representational politics

Finally, there is a clear focus in the discussions and reflections in the special section on shifting our everyday relationships away from "power-over" and towards "power-with". They urge the development of a politics in, against, and beyond policy changes and representational politics, a politics that politicises the personal, the community, the family and that takes social reproduction seriously. With respect to this last point, visceral demands are made for more effective and extensive childcare, education, health care, and food security. Gendered practices within activist communities are politicised and challenged, particularly around questions of intimate partner violence and behaviours that reproduce capitalist, patriarchal relations between movement participants.

Our contributors to the special section on strategy thus offer a plurality of creative, dynamic and disruptive answers to the question of what a feminist strategy could and should look like in the twenty-first century. Taken together, these voices, reflections and theorisations demand the reinvention of feminist

praxis in order to moving it from the margins of scholarly and political activity to the centre of revolutionary thinking and practice.

Can (should) academic forms of feminism be reclaimed as theory-for-movements?

We want to turn now to the relationship between feminist strategies and academic frameworks. Feminism's entry to academia may be considered long delayed if measured against the history of the first wave, but the second wave (in the global North in particular) started with substantial numbers of participants already in education, and often committed to particular careers prior to becoming feminist.² One practical implication of this fact is that, as with other academics connected to and drawing on movements, feminist scholars are embedded in particular disciplines (albeit in critical ways), and engaged in the two-way challenge of advancing feminist perspectives within those disciplines at the same time as striving to carve out their own academic spaces (such as women's or gender studies or feminist theory), to which they bring their specific disciplinary specialities³. Their academic endeavours, moreover, are driven by the emphasis in the university system on abstraction, categorisation and specialisation, increasingly accorded a premium as universities seek to position themselves as globalised, competitive institutions in the neoliberal economy. Academic feminism, then, has its own distinctive dynamics.

What are the characteristics of the knowledge claims produced in this context, and how do they differ from those claims made by activists outside of the university? A long-standing, and still useful, activist distinction separates out *agitation* (convincing people that something is an issue to be outraged and active about), *education* (understanding the background or history and mechanisms of the issue), and *organisation* (putting together the kind of campaign that can win). Feminist agitation does not require academic theory as such, since the knowledge claims articulated to this end can be entirely derived from and articulated within activist circles, though on occasion well-known academics can be useful due to their public recognition.⁴

Feminist education, in contrast, is the *raison d'être* of academic feminism. This is not to deny a long and honourable activist tradition of popular education strategies which have been almost entirely detached from more formalised

² Arguably, this is one reason for the relative numbers of feminist theologians or literary critics as opposed to political scientists or social movements specialists - reflecting more the gendered breakdowns of university specialisation than careers chosen as a result of a movement commitment.

³ For critical reflections of tensions between subaltern knowledges and disciplinary specialties, see Nakano Glenn (2007) and Hill Collins (2007).

⁴ Having said that, the agitational mode dominates in much writing by feminist activists and scholars alike, treating the development of women's movements as a natural response to outrageous circumstances or a history to be celebrated rather than understood.

education structures. It is simply to acknowledge that academic feminism, to the extent that it is relevant to movement tasks, is primarily a matter of education in the sense laid out above: critiquing the gendered presuppositions of literary texts, analysing the mechanisms of gender inequality, or showing the nature of everyday micro-resistance - but not organising it. Lastly, while academic feminists may have a key role to play in feminist organising as sympathetic experts (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991; Barker and Cox, 2002), they rarely make the organisational dimension of feminism the focus of their analysis or theorising.

Having said that, in the last instance academic feminism remains a product of women's movements; there are very few settings where being a feminist is not at some level a disadvantage within the ruthless and emotionally bruising reality that is the norm for most people's experience of academia, and in tension with the demands of academic life. As feminist scholars are forced to fight for their feminist identities and for the legitimacy of their teaching and research, the boundary between activist and academic becomes blurred (Eschle and Manguashca 2006). The project of feminist theory itself, arguably, cannot be understood without reference to a movement which it seeks to make sense of and on which it relies for its very existence (Wainwright, 1994). To this extent, it seems reasonable to ask what can be learned from that theory which is relevant to movements. In this vein, we enquire in the next section into the contributions and limitations of feminist theorising about social movements and collective agency.

Is there a distinctively feminist mode of analysing social movements and collective agency? Or: how can feminist scholarship help develop a fuller understanding of collective agency?

It seems to us easier to see the direct, reciprocal implications of academic feminist theory for movements, and of movements for theory, in many women's struggles of the first and second waves: theories and practices of consciousness-raising are closely interconnected, for example, and a similarly close relationship can be seen in analyses and activism on more specific themes such as equal pay for equal work in the liberal tradition, anti-pornography and sexual objectification campaigns in some strands of radical feminism, or wages for housework campaigns and socialist feminist writings. This affinity is perhaps a product of the fact that, before feminists entered the academy in large numbers in the 1970s, the concepts generated to make sense of the issues above were mostly agitational or organising categories. As such, they were geared to alliance-building: theory was as much a tool for convincing people and making connections as it was a badge of affiliation or identity and thus persuasiveness and accessibility were the order of the day.

It was in this context, we suggest, that several distinguishing features of feminist analysis of collective movement struggles and agency first emerged. Perhaps the

most obvious and longstanding element we can identify is the exposure of hidden relations of oppression, and the foregrounding of voices that have been raised against that oppression but largely ignored. Evident in the establishment of women's or feminist libraries, for example, this focus is also found in scholarship on themes such as "hidden from history" (Rowbotham, 1975; Anderson and Zinsler 1988) and "tacit knowledge" (Wainwright, 1994).

Another characteristic of the feminist theorisation of collective struggle is the critical interrogation of power structures between and within movements – including, but not reducible to, patriarchal hierarchies. One of the best-known examples of this kind of analysis (and a model academic-activist dialogue) is then-PhD student Jo Freeman's *Tyranny of structurelessness* (1972), reflecting on her experiences of marginalisation in the early radical feminist movement, and anarchist Cathy Levine's response, *Tyranny of tyranny* (1974). The critique of movement stratification remains a central theme in more recent feminist scholarship, evident in Belinda Robnett's (1997) study of black women's "bridge leadership" in the US civil rights movement, for instance, and in Carol Coulter's (1993) account of the split between academic feminism and working-class women's community organising in Ireland.

Yet another theme to which we want to draw attention has to do with the privileging of some modes of activism over others, in gendered ways. Thus feminist scholars and activists have critiqued the centrality of the male hero in the narratives and practices of nationalist movements, for example, drawing attention to extensive female involvement in such movements (Jayawardena, 1986) and they have crystallised and brought to the fore political practices hinging on motherhood, care-work and cooperation (Pershing, 1996). More recently, this analytical strategy has brought to the fore how the privileging of "heroic" or "spiky" tropes of direct action in contemporary ecological and global justice movements and their association with masculine traits and male bodies, serve to marginalise women within those activist communities (Sullivan, 2005; Coleman and Bassi, 2011).

None of this is to argue conclusively that there is a "distinctively feminist mode of analysing social movements or collective agency", let alone a clear theoretical reflection of the distinctive organising practices often ascribed to women's movements. We want to suggest that there could and should be, but that the glimmerings we present above remain more evident as potential than a fully developed reality at this point in time.

Indeed, the intellectual and political obstacles to articulating a feminist analysis of movement politics have become formidable in recent years. For a start, integration into university structures has rewarded the building of sometimes sectarian theoretical positions in ways unhelpful to the uncovering of affinities between feminist projects or between scholars and activists. Subsequently, the rise of post-structuralist theory within the academy has encouraged the increased abstraction of feminist theorising – and is associated by critics with the detachment of academic endeavour from women's political practice. Hence the practical implications of contemporary feminist theory for transformative,

collective political agency have become rather harder to pin down, as we discuss below.

1. Individual subjectivity and political organising

The problem of the subject "woman" is one that has come to the fore with the growing theoretical influence of post-structuralism. Broadly conceived, this body of work shares a number of characteristics, chief among which are: a rejection of gender as a fixed category; a critique of the construction of binary oppositions and dualisms in discourse; and a belief that origin stories are futile and counterproductive, since an essentialist understanding of male and female lies at their heart. Last but not least, poststructuralists share with working-class, black and socialist feminists an insistence on the need to replace unitary notions of womanhood and female gender identity with pluralistic and complex conceptions of gender as a discursively constituted identity that will be mediated through categories of race, class, age, sexuality etc. and attuned to specific historical, social, political and economic contexts.

Such an approach raises a number of difficulties, chief among which is the tension between the desire to denaturalise essentialist, binary and heteronormative understandings of "woman" (or "man", for that matter) while retaining a feminist political project organised around a coherent, identifiable conception of women and their interests.⁵ After all, the radical deconstruction of the subject appears to deprive feminist politics of the categorical basis for its own normative claims. Judith Butler's influential work, for example, poses the fundamental question for post-structuralist feminism in this way: "What constitutes the who, the subject, for whom feminism seeks emancipation? If there is no subject, who is left to emancipate (1990: 327)?"

Like Donna Haraway (1985) or Rosi Braidotti (1994), far from lamenting the loss of a coherent subject, Butler welcomes the "possibility of complex and generative subject-positions as well as coalitional strategies that neither presuppose nor fix their constituents in their place" (1990: 339). Other theorists have sought to combine "elements of skepticism, particularly about the social formation of subjects [such as women], with elements of a standpoint feminism that has us acknowledging and interpreting what subjects say" (Sylvester, 1994: 52), in effect plumping for a "strategic essentialism".⁶ Still others have sought to

⁵ This problem was familiar to early socialist, anarchist and Marxist feminists. In these traditions, the working class was already understood *both* as a developing social identity *and* as a "class whose purpose is to abolish itself". So too, those organising migrant or colonised women workers and peasants had to find ways of holding together agitational discourses (in which gender, class and nation were addressed as given facts) and more educational ones (in which all three were seen as products of the historical development of society), in effect maintaining a distinction between immediate organising needs and long-term strategy. Present-day writers such as Sylvia Walby (1991) or Silvia Federici (2004), in their very different ways, draw on this theoretical legacy.

⁶ A term coined by Gayatri Spivak.

theorise subjectivity in a way that retains a collective dimension while taking post-structuralist concerns about essentialism seriously. Iris Marion Young (1994), for example, draws on Sartre to conceptualise gender as seriality, and in this way to argue that women constitute a social group on behalf of whom demands can be made.

These strategies for the reconciliation of the deconstruction of "woman" with collective, feminist agency may be diverse and imaginative, but they have not convinced everyone. Indeed, a sense of frustration and bafflement is widespread as to the usefulness of post-structuralist theory for actual mobilisation by or on behalf of women, however they are defined. To put this another way, while the theoretical project to dissolve or radically de-center the idea of a unitary, coherent, fixed, embodied subject that can be known, identified and acted upon is *potentially* radically transformative, the immediate implications for progressive social transformation remain unclear, given the deeply entrenched and naturalized character of such essentialist and binary constructions, and the historical importance that identity and origin myths have played in movement construction and strategy.

2. The complexities of difference

If one problem with the contemporary theorisation of collective agency is opened up by post-structuralism and its radical destabilisation of the individual subject, another emerges from the more politically straightforward idea that gender is but one strand of oppression among many, and alliances need to be made between the different identities that emerge from these distinct if intersecting oppressions. This point was first raised by working-class and anti-imperialist women activists in the late nineteenth century and more recently highlighted by socialist, black and postcolonial feminism. British socialist feminists Hilary Wainwright, Sheila Rowbotham and Lynne Segal (1979), for example, asserted in this vein the need for alliances of the oppressed on grounds of gender, class and race.

These three writers, however, also drew attention to the opposition to this approach within existing left organisations, which made it hard to implement. For their part, many left-wing thinkers in the 1980s and 90s argued that claims about gender, race and class as sources of oppression and mobilisation in their own right were built upon irreconcilable and essentialist identity constructions and thereby not only failed to properly theorise the fact that these identities were the product of the capitalist system, but also undercut and fragmented the more universalist left-wing counter-hegemonic struggle against that system (Hobsbawm, 1996; Gitlin, 1993). In this way, an approach originally intended to centralise the construction of collective action across differences was reinterpreted as undermining the very coalitional politics for which it yearned.

The glossing of differences between women has also been forcefully problematised by Chandra Mohanty. In her important essay "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" (1984), she criticises

particular first world or western feminist discourses for constructing the "third world woman" as a singular, monolithic subject who is passive, ignorant, dependent and victimised. This negative image is created through an implicit comparison with the average western women who is seen as educated, liberal and empowered. As such, this discourse is a symbolic manifestation of western imperialism and reveals the latent ethnocentrism embedded in much of western feminism. Mohanty argues that only when political analyses and strategies reflect the conflicts and contradictions associated with the location of women in multiple structures of power, and facilitate the self-expression of multiple third world female subjects, will effective political action ensue.

Black feminist thinkers have been amongst the most careful in their responses to this critique, albeit in different and not always entirely successful ways. For instance, Patricia Hill Collins' (1990) highly influential *Black Feminist Thought* argues for the existence of a specific black women's standpoint that is based on a particular life experience and excluded from both patriarchal thinking and also white feminist critiques. In order to avoid the problem that merely incorporating black women's perspective still fails to include other marginalized standpoints and knowledge such as that of immigrant women, for example, Hill Collins elaborates on bell hook's notion of a politics of domination that operates across interlocking, rather than cumulative, axes of oppression.⁷ hooks (1985/2000) argues that the standpoints of black women, emerging as they do at the intersection of multiple axes, enable both a distinct consciousness of the "racist, classist, sexist" dimensions of hegemony and the capacity to envision and create a counter hegemony.⁸ Hill Collins, for her part, argues explicitly that each and every standpoint, including those of black women, yield only particular, partial knowledge and thus a collective process of dialogue across subject positions and a recognition of the matrix of domination is essential.

In a similar vein, Angela Davis' (1981) classic *Women, race and class* stressed the ways in which race and class inequality undermined first- and second-wave feminist organising, leaving black and working-class women as well as migrants and other ethnic minorities largely absent from feminism, both as participants and as constituencies. Davis concludes that the mobilisation of ostensibly universal identity categories in the practice of movement organising weakens movements and narrows their goals. With this argument, Davis has returned us to the nineteenth-century women activists within the working-class movement, whose point of reference was often union, socialist or anarchist organising of

⁷ For her part, Hill Collins (1990) writes "Black feminist thought fosters a fundamental paradigm shift that rejects additive approaches to oppression. Instead of starting with gender and then adding in other variables such as age, sexual orientation, race, social class and religion, Black feminist thought sees these distinctive systems of oppression as being part of an overarching structure of domination."

⁸ This claiming of privileged standpoint is in fact common in post-colonial theories and echoes Hegels' discussion of the master-slave, where the slave has a more comprehensive view of the world because s/he must take the view of the master as well as her/his own.

unskilled women workers (often themselves migrants) in the face of the narrower mobilising strategies of male-dominated and native craft unions. In this context, the inclusion of women and/or migrants functioned to broaden and universalise left-wing struggle.

Taken as a whole, the defence put forward by theorists who argue for the intersectional analysis of oppressions is powerful and compelling. Yet some problems remain when we consider how their approach can be applied in concrete movement contexts, as we will discuss next.

3. Organising intersectionally

When striving to put intersectional thinking into practice, we immediately run up against the fact that standpoints and identities have a tendency to be articulated in essentialist, fixed ways, displacing more fluid, constructed notions of subjectivity and experience as the basis upon which groups are mobilised. This may be particularly the case in instances where the oppressed seek to form alliances with each other in desperate circumstances, facing extremely powerful opponents. More subtly, we might say that the "strategic essentialism" mentioned above with regard to post-structuralism rears its head again here.

Furthermore, an emphasis on multiple mechanisms of oppression can be used to play off one group against another, and can function to counter mobilization around shared issues or agendas. The de-gendering of policies designed to address women's issues by submerging them into non-gender specific "equality" policies in institutions such as the EU is a case in point. Attention to difference is thus a double-edged sword: insufficient attention leads to false generalisations and an inability to incorporate different situated knowledges; too much renders the task of bridging diverse struggles much more difficult, especially if difference is conceptualised in fixed, essentialist terms.

An additional problem arises when we try to settle on the range of differences that ought to be accommodated in a shared struggle. White second-wave feminists were rightly criticised for failing to take account of black women's experience and knowledge, but at what point can we say that sufficient discrete elements of identity and experience have been taken into consideration, (i.e. immigrant, working class, lesbian)? And is such attention to difference not in fact increasing the distance between potential allies?

Here perhaps the anti-identitarian position embraced particularly by many autonomous activists in the alterglobalisation or global justice movement, which calls for strategies of coalition building that do *not* rest on shared identities or experience offers a solution (Flesher Fominaya, 2007). This possible way forward cannot be granted uncritical support, however, given it may allow dominant identities to be replicated in the movement without challenge, and given that the politicisation of identity has been and continues to be a powerful trigger for mobilisation, including in alterglobalisation contexts (Eschle, 2011).

A final issue to we wish to draw attention has to do with the fact that respect for difference can, in practice, tip over into cultural relativism. Many feminists, including ourselves, would embrace the requirement to pay close attention to the historical, geopolitical and cultural context in which specific manifestations of oppression emerge, along with struggles against them. Yet there is a danger with this analytical strategy that context becomes all: that we ignore wider patterns of power within which specific political spaces gain their meaning; we accept that the subjects produced within those spaces are bounded within and by geopolitical borders; and we refuse to draw any parameters around the diverse claims we are prepared to accommodate or to make judgments about their merit. In this way, cultural relativism triumphs. And feminists have long been wary of cultural relativism, with good reason, given that it has served as a powerful discursive means to deflect attention from women's oppression or to delegitimise feminist efforts to challenge that oppression (for debates among feminists on this topic, see Okin, 1999; Phillips, 2009). The task remains of combining close attention to cultural, historical and political contexts with the identification of those mechanisms of women's oppression that cut across cultural, social, economic and political boundaries and around which movement alliances can be forged.

Nira Yuval-Davis' (1999) articulation of Italian practices of "transversal politics", in which ethnic differences were acknowledged within the context of the effort to work out a shared basis for mobilisation, may offer one way forward here. Another strategy, long adopted within feminist circles, is that of listening to the voices of women who face and fight oppression, building theory in dialogue with those voices, rather than simply theorising from a distance. After all, identities are rarely voluntaristic choices; more often, they are imposed in ways that structure lives in powerful ways and that can only be partially negotiated. For example, as Coulter (1993) observed, working-class community women's organising in Ireland has been caught in the web of a defensive nationalist and ethnically Catholic identity. While the choice of stepping outside that community altogether might exist for service-class professional women, for whom community or family networks play less salient roles, other women have not historically had this freedom, instead being forced to assert their own needs and voices within an ethnic Catholic context but against clerical and fundamentalist definitions of what that means. Such struggles are surely strategically crucial and deserving of our support.

In sum, we have argued that post-structuralist and black feminist theories offer important correctives to arguments that have attempted to theorise the intergration of women into existing patriarchal discourses and structures without fundamentally transforming them. They force us to reconsider the very basis of Western epistemological, intellectual and cultural frameworks. Yet from the perspective of a feminism concerned with movement politics, serious dilemmas remain when making the transition from theory to collective agency--from how to reconcile the deconstruction of the individual subject with the preservation of collective movement struggle, how to overcome deeply rooted binary thinking about difference and "othering" in society, to how to move from

the identification of diverse subject positions for emancipatory alliances to appropriate organising strategies across those positions. We cannot definitively resolve any of these dilemmas here, but only point to their existence and to the strategies some have adopted to try to think and act their way out of them. In this continuing endeavor, as in others, there may be lessons we can learn from past feminist writings and women's role in other movements, the focus of the next section.

What can enquiry into contemporary activism learn from historical feminist writing on women's movements and women's role in other movements?

Past traditions of feminism are often forgotten, absent from the consciousness of individuals involved in more recent activism. Indeed one of the first intellectual tasks of second-wave feminism was to recover its own, earlier pasts. We suggest that feminism today needs to reconnect to past struggles and the knowledges and theorisations (written, oral, musical, spiritual, emotional) they produced, in order to aid in the reconsideration of some of our assumptions about and practices in the present.

One example from our feminist strategies section, the Sisters of Resistance, offers hints on how this might be done. We explore this contribution in some depth here as the full contribution is in the form of an audio interview.

Sisters of Resistance call on history to help to understand their place in a tradition of women in struggle. Members have been drawn together by a quest to understand the experiences of inequality and violence that shape their everyday lives in conditions of patriarchal capitalism. Similarly alienating experiences in movement spaces have then created the context for their engagement with past feminist generations and experiences. This engagement is not about simply repeating the past or uncovering a model to follow, but rather about facilitating learning and reflection at both the individual and collective level in order to build a feminist praxis of everyday life.

Key elements in this process, according to the Sisters of Resistance example, include witnessing, validation and reflection. Witnessing the historical experiences and struggles of women that have been systematically made invisible is the first step. This helps in the recognition and validation of similar experiences and struggles in the present. When women learn, hear, read, dance to, and share stories about the past they realise that what they feel has been felt in similar ways before, what they experience has been experienced in similar ways by their predecessors and what they are angry about was previously also a cause for rage. We realise that there is nothing wrong with us. We begin to build the grounds for individual and collective voice, and for hope that our lives and our world can be different.

In turn, this opens up space for reflection, which involves taking oneself and one's needs seriously and politicising that which is portrayed and internalised as

individual, natural and inevitable. We come to realise that our doubts about our abilities, our ways of behaving in relationships, our feelings of fear when walking home at night are not just "the way things are". We come to recognise that being exhausted, making the tea, being shouted down by men in the movement performing a particular kind of masculinity are not just "the way things are". We come to see that feeling ashamed of our bodies, denying our desires, deforming our sexuality to men's needs is not the way things should be. In such ways, learning from the past is directly useful to individual as well as collective transformation in the present. It whets the appetite to learn more; to voraciously devour all that other feminists in struggle have written and left for us.

When feminist histories explore women's movements of the past, they consistently highlight the diversity and complexity of the activism that is their focus. There are obvious parallels here with the present. Importantly, historians also point us to women's participation in right-wing movements on the basis of their socially-ascribed identities: as white women in racist movements, for example, or as respectable middle-class women in movements of "moral reform" that policed the poor, and so on. As with other forms of top-down popular mobilisation on the basis of ascribed identities, such right-wing activism has typically inserted women more fully into their given place in the social order. Women in movement, then, are not *necessarily* emancipatory or progressive; we have to look more closely at which women we are talking about, which movements, at the specific context in which mobilisation takes place and at organisational practices.

In addition, feminist historians have shown that women from diverse social locations can experience the same movement struggle very differently. In Britain and the US in the 60s, 70s and 80s, for example, black women might challenge patriarchal behaviour by civil rights leaders and yet insist that these were arguments within a single community-in-movement, refusing to "jump ship" to white-dominated feminist struggles in which they did not recognise themselves or their aspirations. Similarly, their histories of low-paid menial employment have long led working class women to contest the elision of emancipation with integration into the labour market by a feminism dominated by middle class women for whom a career or even a vocation might be a realistic and empowering possibility.

Another important point made in histories of feminism has been the critique of the projection into the nineteenth or even the eighteenth century of the mid-twentieth-century exclusion of women from politics. Whether we examine the migrant women in the "new unions" of the late nineteenth century, or the urban rioters of the eighteenth, we find that forms of political behaviour that we now assume to be characteristically masculine have often become so within relatively recent times.

If there is a common theme that might sum up the historical study of women's participation in social movements, it is *situatedness* - the recognition of the crucial role of local situations, immediate social relationships, cultural

understandings and so on in understanding and facilitating mobilisation. Political projects that lack awareness of the historical context in which they act, the traditions on which they draw and the past mistakes from which they could learn, are doomed to fail - or rather to encounter their own limitations in practice when other women do not recognise themselves or their aspirations in that particular project. Alliance-building, by contrast, proceeds from the feminist practice of listening closely to and learning from the experiences of others, past and present.

What constitutes progressive or emancipatory movement practice in relation to gender, and good practice in alliance-building?

One of the key questions for feminists is who to build alliances with. Their ideological leanings have in part supplied the answer. In Britain and America in the 1970s, for example, separatists argued that women's movements had to rely on their own resources and that there was no scope for emancipatory alliances with others; liberals, at the opposite end of the spectrum, held that there was no fundamental reason why alliances could not even be made with current power-holders within existing structures. Historical and national specificities complicate this matter further. In some contexts, for example, feminism has been able to exercise substantial influence on men's movements (Messner, 1997), whereas in others men's mobilisation has been markedly anti-feminist.

One dramatic example of context driving the character of alliances is supplied by the Republic of Ireland, where the power of the church over women's bodies meant that contraception, divorce and abortion became the central political battlefield and one on which feminists allied with liberals, socialists and cultural radicals of all colours against a common enemy for over three decades. Struggles over LGBTQ rights, and more recently movements of survivors of clerical child abuse, have taken this situation in new directions, but the foundational importance of the critique of the church to feminist choices of alliance partners in Ireland is by no means dead.

Another, perhaps more strategic way of thinking about the issue of which group or movement to join with in struggle is to consider the gendered power structures and political dynamics at work within potential alliance partners. Some organising traditions have patriarchy built into their DNA: not only (most) religious and nationalist movements, but also (most) authoritarian kinds of left and union politics. The struggles of 1968 and subsequent movements - often in direct opposition to orthodox left politics - have left their own traces: a smaller number of organising traditions, particularly on the subcultural and libertarian left, have been shaped by feminism to such an extent that expressions of patriarchal attitudes and behaviour amount to *de facto* self-exclusion. In a crucial middle terrain are movements which are neither constitutively patriarchal, nor significantly feminist in their orientation. Such movements may be political fields in which the patriarchal assumptions and

behaviours of the wider society are reflected and need to be challenged, but also where women's battles can be fought and won, alliances can be made, and so on. Examples range from some indigenous movements, to the direct action wing of the US ecology movement and European alterglobalisation activist communities.

A key practical test in such contexts is how movements respond to sexual violence within their ranks; at its simplest, do they support the victim or the perpetrator? Matters are obviously more complex than this, and internal quasi-legal processes are fraught at the best of times, but there is clearly a fundamental distinction between situations where known rapists are named, shamed, excluded and otherwise sanctioned and those where assaults are denied, covered over or fudged. In a world where perhaps one in four women has experienced sexual assault, how movements respond is often decisive in terms of defining their future direction. "Safe space" policies are an outcome of this, but have to be made to mean something in concrete situations in order to be genuinely assimilated and practiced.⁹

Another test has to do with movement culture and practices. Does a movement institute feminist mentoring or rely on old boys' networks? Does it encourage modes of discussion which privilege heroic rhetoricians or open up space for the conversational, the inclusive and the participatory? Is there a willingness to respond to individual needs as they appear or are such issues relegated to the private sphere? And what kinds of political actor or subject are implied by organisational practicalities, such as the time of day the group meets, the safety and accessibility of the space it meets in, and the modes of performance it deems valuable?

Lastly is the question of the extent to which feminism, like anti-racism or opposition to class inequality, becomes a basic touchstone of a movement's politics. Do organisers think through the implications of their actions in terms of women's participation, and tackling patriarchy in the wider society? Are patriarchal attitudes challenged and gender issues thematised as a matter of course? And so on. Feminists need to consider these and other dimensions of actual and potential movement allies when choosing who to work with and when evaluating efforts to transform movements from the inside.

⁹ In this light, we draw attention to incidences of sexual violence in the "Occupy" camp movement and to the debates among campers/feminists/opponents as to why rapes weren't prevented and how they have been interpreted and responded to. For examples of commentary and interventions, see <http://libcom.org/forums/news/open-letter-glasgow-womens-activist-forum-occupy-glasgow-01112011>, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/gender/2011/12/05/occupy-lssexual-harrassment/>, <http://www.dominionpaper.ca/articles/4268>.

Has the feminisation of poverty led to the feminisation of resistance among movements of the poor? If so, what are the implications? Under what conditions does women's participation in movements which are not explicitly feminist or focussed on specifically gendered issues lead to a change in power relations?

We want to end, finally, at the point we started out, by considering the impact of neoliberalism on women's lives and on feminist theory and practice. After all, it is only within the historical context of the gendered and patriarchal political practices of developmentalism and the subsequent descent into neoliberalism that we can reveal the contours of contemporary forms of women's resistance and feminist praxis, and make sense of the impact of this praxis upon power relations.

With the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to spot the similarities between the economic strategies of national developmentalism in the global South, Fordism in the West and state socialism in the East as they developed in the three decades after World War II. In all of these situations, the state was a crucial economic agent in its own right (Lash and Urry, 1987; cf. Offe, 1985). While the political alliances directing the project in each region were significantly different, the powerful organisation of working-class, peasant and other subaltern groups across the board meant that some form of social wage which impacted significantly on the everyday lives of subaltern groups was widely offered as reward, concession or stepping stone. In the West, gender played a subordinate role in cleavage structures defined around other conflicts (for example, in differential church-state allegiances or in preferences for more centrist or conflictual positions within the left and right). In most cases, civil society was firmly controlled by a male-led and dominated political culture and system so "democratically excluding women from power" (Friedman, 1998: 90).¹⁰

In such ways, the practices of politics were highly patriarchal during the post-war decades, reproducing a caste of men as the economic and political elite through systems of tightly controlled interest groups. When middle and upper class women did participate in political life, they were often confined to traditionally feminised political roles and relied even for that on the ability to hand over their domestic responsibilities to other women, usually those much less well off than themselves and marked as racially inferior (Friedman, 1998: 115-128). Rights won in western countries often excluded the needs and demands of poor and black women; in state socialist contexts the state picked up the costs of formal gender equality for all women (for example, through universal creche provision), but without challenging the domestic division of labour. Finally, the poorest of the poor tended to be women-headed households

¹⁰ One significant exception is the longer history of Scandinavian state feminism, where alliances between the women's and labour movement continued through the interwar period.

and women from these were entirely excluded from political life by this patriarchal pact.

The implementation of neoliberal policies, in different periods in different parts of the world, reinforced the gendered nature of inequality and exclusion. In particular, as argued at the outset of this editorial, neoliberalism has further exacerbated the feminisation of poverty, increased domestic burdens for women and generated more precarious and exploitative working conditions. Of course, it could be argued that economic opportunities have expanded for women in conditions of neoliberalism, with its expansion of the service sector and flexibilisation of labour styles, and certainly, some women have benefited greatly from their incorporation into the workforce. This incorporation can be viewed overall, however, as part of a political project to restructure capitalism involving the disciplining and division of the subaltern struggles of the 1970s (including feminist struggles) and to break the social and political power of women (Midnight Notes, 1990: 320-1). In such ways, neoliberalism has contradictory consequences on women's lives and the possibilities of women's political agency (see particularly Hite and Viterna, 2005; Cupples, 2005; Talcot, 2004; Tinsman, 2000).

One such contradiction is that the base of trade unions, in Northern countries in particular, has moved from primarily male workforces in private-sector manufacturing industry to predominantly female workforces in public-sector services. Increasingly, the most powerful unions are not those of miners or metalworkers as much as they are those of teachers, nurses and low-level civil servants. In addition, the growing proportion of precarious labour, combined with the breakdown of survival mechanisms of the working and informalised poor, has resulted in a shift in the site of popular struggle from the formal world of work to the community. As women are at the heart of community they have become central actors in new forms of subaltern politics (see Motta and Nilsen, 2011; Naples, 1998).

What does this politics look like? Women have been forced to find individual and collective ways to survive on the margins of the money economy (Federici, 1992; Hite and Viterna, 2005). They have participated extensively in struggles against the erosion and privatisation of public services, removal of subsidies to basic food stuffs and disintegration of employment. And they have participated in familiar struggles to defend welfare provision and rights that inevitably address the state, whether in purely defensive / nostalgic forms or in struggles "in and against the state" (London-Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1979). In addition, the following trends strike us as of particular analytical and political interest.

1. The politicisation of social reproduction

Women in movement are often organised around attempts to reclaim collective process in the provision, definition and organisation of health, education and housing. In addition, their coping strategies mean that by necessity they have

often become organisers and thinkers in the struggle for day-to-day survival for themselves, their families and communities. Poor women in particular, who have faced the harshest forms of alienation, oppression and exploitation under neoliberalism, have engaged in a territorialised struggle to determine collectively how best to provide for social reproduction in a way that ensures the dignity and development of their community. These processes have extended the terrain of the political to the community and resulted in the growth of women's social power and autonomy. They have provided an alternative to the gendered, individualised forms of social welfare and reproduction characteristic of capitalist social relations and may in some cases have challenged patriarchal relationships and separations between the community and work, and between women and men.

2. Motherhood, womanhood and family become a terrain of struggle

The gendered roles and identities of women as mothers and housewives have been reinforced by the fact of their increasing care responsibilities in the context of the withdrawal of more socialised forms of welfare provision. However, such roles and identities have never been merely a product of passivity and subordination, nor defended in isolation from other elements of gendered and classed lives. In Latin America, most obviously, family, womanhood and motherhood has become a terrain of resistance. Women's struggles in that context have been characterised by suspicion toward and often rejection of political parties, as well as of the state, and heavily influenced by traditions of direct democracy and community-led change (including longstanding practices of popular education). From the 1980s onwards, they have increasingly politicised the everyday, community and family (Motta, 2009; Fernandes, 2007). In the process of collectively organising social reproduction, motherhood, womanhood and family may be transformed. This is not inevitable, however, as the mobilisation of motherhood may also reinforce restrictive representations of female subjectivity as premised around care and self-sacrifice.

3. Politicisation of the personal

The politicisation of the community, the family and the body involves a recognition of and struggle against pervasive and cross-cutting power relations, including gendered divisions of labour, gendered norms of behaviour, and patterns of power characterised by individualism, competition and hierarchy. Taking these power relations seriously expands the political agenda, so that it ranges from childcare provision, to the forms of communication used in movements, to intimate partner violence within the private sphere. Yet the politicisation of the personal has been very uneven, in terms both of women's daily lives (which continue to be marred by the triple burden of paid, domestic and political work) and women's participation in movements (which is characterised simultaneously by inclusion and marginalisation, welcome and

containment). This results in the development of highly contradictory female political subjectivities. As women build dignity, agency and collective power, they also continue to experience multiple violences and exclusions.

4. The politicisation of the body

The expansive politicisation process described above has implications for how women's bodies are experienced and lived. It encourages challenges to the gendered mechanisation of the female and/or feminine body, its exploitation and commodification under capitalism, and its objectification as a site of reproduction. Furthermore, for women in movement, the body is not merely a site of pain, pleasure for others and exhaustion, but can also be an element in the articulation and valuation of ability to create and defend life. Its use against the oppressive and coercive elements of the state in protests, and as means to protect the community, turns the body into a site of resistance and pride. As mentioned in the strategies section of this editorial, the politicisation of the body can also be accompanied by an emphasis on corporeal care and pleasure in movement contexts.

The implications of these trends are far-reaching. Taken together, they challenge the central traditions of western political thought, resting as these do on a masculinist conceptualisation of the political that excludes or subordinates women, femininity, the private sphere and the body (Sargisson, 1996; Brown, 1988). With few exceptions (John Stuart Mills, Mary Wollstonecraft), classical liberal political theory has not considered women to be political subjects at all, restricting them to a supporting role in the home. While this move finds little explicit defence in contemporary political theory, it has been argued forcefully by feminist critics (e.g. Pateman, 1988) that the foundational exclusion of women from conceptions of liberal democracy continues to restrict mainstream notions of appropriate political spaces, subjects and behaviours today. Moreover, the authoritarian revolutionary tradition, with its focus on the workplace, the party and the state and on representational conceptualisations of the political, also functions to marginalise women. The net effect is to position contemporary women's resistances outside of the political. In contrast, feminist reasoning and women's activism compels us rather to stretch our understanding of what politics is and where it occurs, in ways that encompass the everyday, the private and the informalised world of work (Cupples, 2005; Talcot, 2004; Tinsman, 2000).

There is an urgency to our engagement with such political forms. Although the feminisation of resistance that has accompanied the feminisation of poverty is reconfiguring the composition, character and implications of political struggle and social transformation, it rarely features in scholarly and political analysis. Without an analytical and theoretical engagement with these dynamics, however, we run the risk of reproducing a form of intellectual production which presents a barrier to the development of revolutionary theory and practice. It is

only by focussing on the realities of women in movement that we can begin to grasp the complexity of the feminised political subjectivities being formed and the contradictions and tensions in this process. In this way, we seek to re-write the dominant patriarchal script of politics in solidarity with women in movement, by placing their agency and rationality at the centre, as opposed to the margins. As Mohanty (2003: 516) argues, poor women of the periphery experience a particular form of exploitation and alienation which gives to their struggles a "potential epistemic privilege ... that can be the basis for reimagining a liberatory politics for ... this century". We wholeheartedly support this sentiment and it makes a fitting end to our editorial reflections. We close below by briefly introducing the contributions that follow.

In this issue

We start this issue with two articles that each use the experience of feminists at the World Social Forum to discuss the relationship between feminism and social movements. Janet Conway's "Activist knowledges on the anti-globalization terrain: transnational feminists at the World Social Forum" discusses how feminist networks, particularly the World March of Women and *Articulaci3n Feminista Marcosur*, have developed their different political strategies within the WSF and developed feminist critiques of the Forum's politics and culture. Lyndi Hewitt's article "Framing across differences, building solidarities: lessons from women's rights activism in transnational spaces" discusses how feminists bridged their own internal differences at WSF and Feminist Dialogues events using frames that both acknowledged diversity and enabled effective alliance-building. Between them these two articles offer a very rich picture of the relationship between feminism and social movements.

By contrast, the article by Eurig Scandrett, Suroopa Mukherjee and the Bhopal research team explores tools for overcoming the silencing of gender within social movements. Their "'We are flames not flowers': a gendered reading of the social movement for justice in Bhopal" discusses the complexities of gender in this movement and highlights the importance of oral history techniques listening to women's voices in bringing out the specifically gendered dimensions of the movement. By contrast Akwujo Emejulu, in "Women and the politics of authenticity: exploring populism, feminism and American grassroots movements", looks at women's role within "New populist" neighbourhood community organising and in right-wing "Tea Party" activism, showing how in both cases the dominant discursive repertoires silence feminist claims-making as disruptive or divisive..

In "A movement of their own: voices of young feminist activists in the London Feminist Network", Finn Mackay explores the new generation of British feminism. The experiences of sociability, collectivity and women-only space appear as important elements in motivating participation, as does outrage at the sexual objectification of women. Melody Hoffmann's action note "Bike Babes in Boyland: women cyclists' pedagogical strategies in urban bicycle culture"

discusses the bicycle advocacy of the Wisconsin-based Pedal Pusher Society, in particular how participants develop techniques to encourage other women both to ride bicycles and to see themselves as part of the cycling community. Finally, Nina Nissen's article "Changing perspectives: women, complementary and alternative medicine, and social change" explores the literature on women and alternative health, arguing that in this context women's use of alternative health challenges dominant discourses of femininity and challenges the social practices of biomedicine.

Feminist strategy for social change

This special section, edited by Sara Motta, brings together a remarkable range of feminist collectives and individuals to discuss what feminist strategy means today.

We start with "Why we need a feminist revolution now": the co-founders of the Sisters of Resistance collective, Sofia Mason and Angela Martinez a.k. el dia, in conversation with Sara Motta on healing, hip hop, spirituality and why we need a feminism relevant to the everyday lives of women.

Belgian feminist activist Nina Nijsten, "Some things we need for a feminist revolution" gives us a check-list of what we need to organise feminist resistance from self-care, our own space and collective struggle.

Feminist activist and academic Rosario González Arias, in "Viejas tensiones, nuevos desafíos y futuros territorios feministas" gives a view from the south on how global neoliberalism reinforces patriarchy and violence against women and why we need a feminism of many voices, across places and generations.

Tiny aka Lisa Gray-Garcia's "Independence vs. interdependence" brings a voice from the realities of poverty and single motherhood from the United States on building community, dignity and voice.

Activist academic Roberta Villalón, in "Feminist activist research and strategies from within the battered immigrants movement", recounts participatory action research with battered migrant women covering US racist and patriarchal capitalism, resistance across boundaries and borders and the uses of activist academic research for feminist strategy building.

Elena Jeffreys, Audry Autonomy, Jane Green (Scarlet Alliance Australian Sex Workers Association Executive Committee) and Christian Vega (National Representative of Australian Male Sex Workers, Scarlet Alliance Australian Sex Workers Association) write in "Listen to sex workers; support decriminalisation and anti-discrimination protections" on why we need to listen to the voices of sex workers as opposed to the voices of middle-class advocates on the rights of women who work in the sex industry.

Community activist Jean Bridgeman's "Wise women in community: building on everyday radical feminism for social change" brings her voice on the knowledges

and wisdom of working class Irish women and the limitations of liberal bourgeois feminism.

Activist mother and writer Jennifer Verson, "Performing unseen identities: a feminist strategy for radical communication" discusses why we need a feminist communication that breaks down the raced, classed and gendered assumptions that often frame activist spaces and can result in multiple exclusions and silencings.

Jed Picksley, Jamie Heckert and Sara Motta, in "Feminist love, feminist rage; or, Learning to listen", reflect on the patriarchy in our heads, the need for a space for screaming the rage of experiences of patriarchy and the nature of feminist love and feminist anger.

Finally, Anarchist Feminists Nottingham's "Statement on intimate partner violence" refuses to accept the silencing of the voices and experiences of survivors of intimate partner violence in activist communities. They are clear, loud and proud about how this is a political not merely individual and personal issue.

Other articles

Each issue of *Interface* also includes articles not specific to the main theme. Again we start with a pair of articles which complement each other neatly. Kenneth Good's "The capacities of the people versus a predominant, militarist, ethno-nationalist elite: democratisation in South Africa c. 1973 - 97" highlights the tension between the democratic practices of grassroots community movements and trade union activism within apartheid South Africa and the authoritarian behaviour of the ANC's military leadership in exile and in the new state. Michael Neocosmos' "Transition, human rights and violence: rethinking a liberal political relationship in the African neo-colony" argues that there is a contradiction between democracy and nationalism in neo-colonial contexts. Using the example of xenophobic violence in South Africa, Neocosmos argues that in such societies most people's experience of state power is one where violent political practices from above are the norm, which legitimises violence more generally.

Roy Krøvel's article discusses "Alternative journalism and the relationship between guerrillas and indigenous peoples in Latin America". In Nicaragua and Guatemala in particular, Northern alternative media were complicit in ignoring violations of indigenous rights by leftist guerrilla movements. Krøvel argues that a simple celebration of alternative media cannot substitute for a critical realist pursuit of adequate knowledge and highlights the case of Chiapas as modelling a better relationship.

Tomás Mac Sheoin's annotated bibliography of English-language research on Greenpeace, ranging from personal accounts through media strategies to specific campaigns and national affiliates will be a valuable working tool for any researchers studying this iconic campaigning organisation.

Lastly, in "‘Everything we do is niche’: a roundtable on contemporary progressive publishing" Anna Feigenbaum brings together some key figures in London-based left presses to discuss the question of what gets published, where to publish and how to write for publication.

The book reviews start with Jennifer Earl and Katrina Kimport, *Digitally enabled social change: activism in the Internet age* (Piotr Konieczny). Tomás Mac Sheoin reviews two books on major Indian social movements: SV Ojas, Madhuresh Kumar et al.'s *Plural narratives from Narmada Valley* and Eurig Scandrett et al.'s *Bhopal survivors speak: emergent voices from a people's movement*. Finally, we review the new edition of Hilary Wainwright's *Reclaim the state: experiments in popular democracy* (Laurence Cox).

Finally, this issue includes a call for papers for issue 4/2 (November 2012, deadline May 2012) on the theme "For the global emancipation of labour: new movements and struggles around work, workers and precarity". Our next issue (4/1, due out May 2012) will be on "The season of revolution: the Arab Spring" with a special section on the new wave of European mobilizations.

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