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Issue 40

Feminist Review has been publishing regularly since 1979. Conceived in a period of optimism about feminism and socialism, and the possibilities for socialist feminism, the journal from the outset included international issues and debates around class, alongside the more expected women's studies themes.

Feminist Review 17 (1984) was a clear indicator that 'race' was a problem for *FR* – both in the journal and for the collective of women working voluntarily to bring it out. Black women had been organizing together for a long time, formulating and expressing criticisms of white-dominated feminisms. *FR* was aware of these challenges, and yet the collective remained one comprised of all white women. *FR* 17 was a Black feminist issue, given over to an autonomous group of Black feminists – the first and last time for such a departure from general *FR* practice.

Much has changed since 1984. A small number of Black women have joined the collective. The will of the collective to represent Black women, questions around racism and race have sharpened, but not unproblematically – who could believe otherwise! In issue 36, *FR* editorialized its desire to publish more of such writing. Looking back from 1992 you can see challenging articles by Black and ethnic-minority women on various issues around race, identity and feminism. However, while the journal provided a place for these ideas and debates, in many respects the collective remained outside the political and cultural moment from which they arose.

Feminism had itself changed radically; it had become more self-conscious and stronger in spirit through the recognition that it was not a single voice. The diversity and difference of women's lives upon which Black feminists had so long insisted – once acknowledged – changed the political and theoretical shape of feminism. The old feminism was, as many know well, no stranger to division: but it was a division unified by the shared political rhetoric of the grand narrative and utopian transformation. Initially moulded by these political sentiments, *FR* debated their limitations and gave voice to the growing disenchantment with such world-views. But for the collective the political import of the new language of difference and diversity proved a rather more difficult adjustment. Part of the collective's identity remained within the old feminism and it proved – for many different reasons – both difficult to see, and difficult to surrender.

This ambivalence around the changing ground of feminism generated its own malaise: the work of the collective in producing the journal became strained and routinized, often proceeding on automatic pilot according to a largely

assumed and unspoken political agenda. Thus, paradoxically, while the journal increasingly carried pieces on the changing, more self-conscious, positioned and reflexive terrain of feminist theory and politics, the collective became more functional and pragmatic. Within these limiting circumstances, however, debate continued, as did the commitment to change the identity of the collective.

FR's attempt to broaden Black women's participation in the *FR* project foundered in 1990. Three Black women out of five on the collective left in sorrow in the spring, frustrated by the collective's lack of will in taking up particular political points they had individually, and finally collectively, brought up. Their intervention problematized the practice and politics of the collective and inspired a sustained confrontation with what had been, until then, a set of working assumptions about our openness as a collective, and about precisely what was entailed in our commitment to antiracism. Like all assumptions, closer examination revealed a diversity of views and understandings and this fragmentation proved a difficult starting point from which to reconsider the issue of race, and why we yet remained a predominantly white collective. The questions were, of course, intimately linked but it was only through the enforced recognition of our own 'otherness' that the links became apparent.

The process of 'putting our house in order' was also a process of leaving the home of old feminism. Although it had become somewhat uncomfortable, it retained some of the certainties of earlier struggles. As well, however, it represented the sediment of accumulated and unresolved dilemmas of academics vs activists, of elitism, exclusion and marginalization of the outsider. These problems of power, hierarchy and hidden agendas are no strangers to political collectives. Nor are they ones to which there is 'a solution'. However, to the extent that they begin to operate through the collective unconscious they certainly become – to continue the earlier metaphor – a corrosive foundation. It was to these problems the Black women pointed in finally registering their inability to remain within the collective. What had been, effectively, a strategy for limited survival as a collective was shown to be unviable, particularly and especially if that strategy was concerned to open up the journal to Black, Third World, and ethnic minority women, and to participate in the struggles against racism.

We had duplicated yet another of 'nature's' couplets. In much the same way as issues around sexuality fell to the lesbian women on the collective, politics to the activists, the family to the heterosexuals, and expertise to the experts, etc., we had attempted to deal with the issue of 'race' and the homogeneity of the collective by bringing in more Black women. Black women were taken to represent, first and foremost, an antiracist politics, a compartmentalization which, like all the others, both set up false categories and boundaries, and located the problem as 'other' in the sense that it became the provenance of a specific group rather than the collective as a whole. Moreover, it constituted a negation of who and what Black, ethnic minority, and Third World women are and represent, in much the

same way as labels such as 'lesbian', 'activist', and 'heterosexual' are such poor refractions of both individual and collective identity. The difference and diversity that has been foregrounded by contemporary (including Black) feminism is not about a pluralistic or pluralized tolerance of categories of difference. These concepts address the hierarchies and exclusions which make up the social relationships of race, sexuality, class and gender, which intersect in constructing historical identity and political realities. These relationships mutually and similarly connect 'white' and 'black' women first and foremost in the language, politics and reality of racism. Those Black women who left the collective did so in part because their political participation was impossible as long as only one side of that equation was recognized.

Now *FR* is faced at the beginning of the 1990s with a situation it is determined to meet and negotiate carefully – and hopefully with some success. The content of the journal, while by no means perfect, has changed significantly. The collective has begun a process of changing our working practices in an attempt to reach beyond the networks within which we have worked traditionally, to bring in not only Black and Third World women and the range of areas of work and politics in which they are involved, but also other women whose voices have not been heard in the pages of the journal. We want to make *Feminist Review* a place where women of many different ethnic origins would want to work – as collective members as well as writers.

We hope to encourage more critical thought and reflection on all the political vocabularies and strategies which as feminists we engage in, even as we are using those vocabularies in our workplaces and in our everyday living and thinking. Political labels are crude and limited ways of representing our political identities but they are also necessary. So, too, are categories such as race which we perform must use even as we recognize there are no such thing as 'races'. We would therefore especially welcome articles, which help to sharpen our understanding of the different ways in which we speak of race and its relation to gender – 'race' itself, questions of ethnicity and nationality, the different forms of xenophobia and ethnocentrism, the histories of racist knowledges and practices, and the questions of identity and subjectivity. These are all areas we need to explore further, both as a way of deconstructing the self-evident language of race and racism, and constructing an analytical and political language with which to appreciate difference and diversity.

Also, we hope the journal will become a platform for rethinking the vocabularies of socialism and class. These issues are also, for *FR*, important elements in the differentiated feminist project. Issue 39 gave some indication of the immensely contradictory flux which is shaping the lives of women in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. It also acknowledged the lacunae in political thought created by the crisis of socialism and the difficulty this poses for those of us who wish to signal that the world can be a better place. It is not just the communist world

which is undergoing transformation. The changes which continue to motivate globalization are ones which map the engendered international division of labour in starker and starker terms. The intersecting lines of class and gender so often used to draw the boundaries of nationalism are increasingly racialized to accommodate international realignments. In Western Europe, the language of citizenship systematically articulates the status of the outsider, and subjects 'migrant' women to more intensive and extensive exploitation. All of these extraordinary changes demand a reconsideration of political and theoretical frameworks as well as a new feminist vision of the future. Hopefully, *FR* will provide a platform for these important questions and help foster a new feminist imagination.

In anticipation of this, we are trying to make criteria for articles both more explicit and more responsive to the many idioms of feminist thinking, expression and politics. In this process, we think we have begun to dislodge the old assumptions and their attendant frailties and, although it has been difficult and taken up many hours of testing consideration, it has generated resolve, energy and enthusiasm for the new but ongoing *FR* project. Although much, of necessity, remains unresolved, we hope the journal and the collective will grasp the nettle of uncertainty and ambiguity and engage with the conditions and strategies of women's lives and our aspirations for change.

As part of this process the collective has also, of course, debated the question of *FR* taking on an antiracist policy. It was recognized that to do so would not be without difficulty. There was concern that it would invoke some of the problematic ethos generated by earlier antiracist politics, whereas what we wanted to do was build on the strength created by that political intervention. As well, we wanted to draw on the strength of the antiracist tradition that stretches beyond our more immediate political past in which 'antiracist' politics were so influential. However, there was concern too that if we invoked that more recent 'antiracist' tradition such a statement could fall into the trap of formalism and closure, inspiring new patterns of exclusion. 'Antiracist' politics arose at a particular historical juncture and have enabled both Black and white involvement in an active opposition to racism. But is it enough? What are the politics of antiracism? What gets built on them?

These questions continue to preoccupy collective discussion and debate. Finally, however, they were thought not to be reasons against adopting such a policy, but rather difficulties to be aware of so as not to undermine or abort our collective commitment to the continuing struggles against racism. In that spirit, *FR* hopes to draw from the years of experience, the work of Black feminists, and the critical analyses of Black activists and take the challenge of racism further through the changing language and politics of antiracism. Our respect for the achievements of earlier antiracist policies co-exists with a recognition of the need to be part of a politics and analyses which articulate difference, take on contradictions and

ambiguity, avoid moralism and nurture radicalism. It is in this spirit we wish to express our commitment as an antiracist journal. It is made at a time when the hideousness and ubiquity of racism and its impact on the lives of women (and men) cannot be doubted.

As a journal, *Feminist Review* wants to challenge the racist discourses that increasingly pervade our globalized world. We hope to provide analyses of the realignments of power that fuel ethnic conflicts and which continue to racialize minority groups. We want to continue the work analyzing and confronting racist representations of women, and the deepening and entrenched intersections of race, gender, class and sexuality. We hope, too, that the journal can contribute to creating languages and structures of feeling which will encourage new forms of political organization and activity.

The collective also want the journal to continue to explore the different strands of antiracism within the women's movement. To reflect on the attempts to undermine institutionalized racism; to review the successes of recent 'racism awareness' campaigns; the attempts to radicalize equal opportunities programmes, and to confront institutionalized racism in women's organizations. The journal also wants to carry articles on the question of cultural or religious separatism, of identity politics and the political options open to feminists within and without such boundaries. It also wishes to publish articles analysing cultural politics – the arenas of creativity and artistic practice – within the communities of Black and ethnic-minority women. It hopes to give much greater voice to the historical and cross-cultural work being done, which is providing a more detailed mapping of our political realities as always imbricated by race, gender, sexuality and class. The journal wants to participate in and contribute to the discussions, debates and political networks which are shaping and examining these issues. In making such a statement, we recognize that we are, as a collective, initiating a process rather than presenting something cast in tablets of stone. What we hope we have indicated here is our commitment to political change in opening up the journal to all the discussions and issues that make up the diversity of feminism. We anticipate and welcome your contributions and support.

doi:10.1057/palgrave.fr.9400228