

80 | a feminist review roundtable on the un/certainties of the routes of the collective and the journal

1 The members who participated in one or all of the three round tables that took place between November 2004 to March 2005 in London were the following: AB – Avtar Brah; AT – Amal Treacher; CH – Clare Hemmings; DG – Dot Griffiths; HC – Helen Crowley; IG – Irene Gedalof; JA – Jacqueline Andall; LB – Lucy Bland; LT – Lyn Thomas; NP – Nirmal Puwar.

The following text has been generated from three roundtable discussions which took place over a series of months between several members from the editorial Collective.¹ These conversations reflected on significant intellectual turning points in the journal as well as shifts and continuities in the dynamics and politics of the Collective itself. The articles we have selected for this 25 years anniversary issue were chosen through a discussion about the publications – in *Feminist Review* – that have been hugely influential to the intellectual development of individual autobiographies as well as the social trajectory of feminism(s), in a wider sense. Within these exchanges while the younger generation expressed a desire to hear the histories of the journal, the older members told the past with an anxiety about the inevitable distortion of any one person trying to tell, speak for and represent a variegated set of changes and people across different Collectives. Clearly this is one of many possible narratives of this history, shaped by the current membership of the collective and the limitations of memory. Particularly, we are aware that the early history of the collective is not fully explored here. This is because only one member of the present collective. Dot Griffiths, was in the collective during this period. The absence of early collective members, and Dot's own reticence about speaking for them has inevitably limited this narrative. Historical fragments are offered in the spirit of trying, however inadequately, to link stories and events over the years which have delivered the present Collective the task of celebrating a quarter of a century of feminist endeavour. So, in this roundtable we have chosen to celebrate 25 years of existence, by sharing fragments from these reflections on the productive un/certainties that have been critical to the routes we have taken as well those we may take, both as a journal and as a Collective, with our readers. The place of academia, politics, global feminism as well as our own affective bonds and labour form a part of this ongoing conversation.

part I: hearing and telling

JA: I think it is important for people on the Collective to hear of developments in the journal – that people have left and people have come back...

CH: An actual block on the history of the Collective from someone who has been in it for a long period would be good to hear for those of us who have not been in it for that long.

HC: I agree with Dot about the impossibility of any one person representing a collective history. I didn't join the Collective until 1986 but I think there are a few things we can say briefly about the history of the Collective. Shall I have a go?

LT/CH/JA/IG/NP [together]: Yes, Yes

HC: My encounter with the Collective was when I was in my third year of University at Essex. Mary McIntosh was teaching there, as was Maxine Molyneux and they were two of the founding members. People had been thinking about setting up a feminist journal and then several publishers made approaches, I think, to Elizabeth Wilson. The publisher's overtures were rejected and it was decided to publish *Feminist Review* independently. The first issue came out in 1979 and the Collective supported itself through subscriptions and fundraising – there were 600 subscribers by issue 2 and an individual subscription cost £3.50. Readers' Groups were an important feature of the journal and meetings of readers were held in different parts of the country. From the outset the journal was very much part of the Women's Liberation Movement (which actually had an office in Covent Garden!). The fundraising events were lots of fun. I remember one in particular, where people made their own badges and one of Elizabeth Wilson's famous hand knitted cardigans – which were magnificent – was auctioned. That particular event was in the town hall in Essex Road from memory and very much part of the political culture of the day – lots of meetings and fundraising activities, and politically the Women's Movement was very exciting.

From the outside the Collective appeared to be a broad church with all the tensions and conflicts of socialist feminism and feminism more generally. There was the influence of Althusserian Marxism, the preoccupations with debates within the Communist Party, the sociology of literature and cultural theory arising out of the Centre for Cultural Studies and of course the central debates of feminism and the feminist critiques mobilized within and against all those different influences. Some of these tensions emerged in the domestic labour debate, which deeply preoccupied many people. It was one part of the broad theoretical framework (in *FR* at least) for the rather stark confrontation between 'black' women and white women. I think this was *FR's* first key role in providing a platform for debate and managing, in spite of all the tensions, to sort of 'hold' the debate.

It is hard to convey now the energy and enthusiasms of the Women's Liberation Movement and the intellectual energy of feminist thinking. The journal was important both for the positions the Collective represented but also as a platform for debate. Debates and discussions were passionate and individual women were closely identified with their theoretical positions and arguments. I think a lot of women carried, personally, a great deal of the difficulties of those early debates.

When I joined the Collective in '86 it was a large group and I have to say fairly intimidating. Membership had changed quite a lot with only one or two original people still involved. Although *FR* had been so important in providing a platform for key moments in feminist thinking, particularly around the issue of 'race' the Collective was white and predominantly middle class. So the politics of seventies sisterhood masked class as effectively as it masked 'race'.

CH: How large was it?

HC: It had maybe 15 + members.

NP: Can we come in with questions?

HC: Yes of course.

NP: You know 'Many Voices One chant' – why did you decide to publish it?

HC: I wasn't on the Collective then, I joined in 1986.

NP: I wonder how they decided that they were going to have that issue.

HC: Well I think that's another interesting issue, which was the extent to which the journal was involved in and responsive to the women's movement which was a very active and diverse social movement. There was a dialogue that went on between other groups of women and the journal. *FR* was shaped very significantly by the political movement which gave rise to it.

JA: Did people leave because of changed circumstances or was it always conflictual?

HC: Well my sense of it was that it was fairly conflictual, but then everything was in those days. Politics was very dynamic.

AB: Was it also conflictual, even before I joined?

HC: Well yes, there were always the theoretical conflicts and theoretical positions passionately held and there were as well the many conflicting strands within the women's movement itself, which were in turn overlaid by the many different positions on the left. And the challenge from 'black' feminists was very protracted. In terms of whiteness and the politics of the Collective that didn't really get resolved until the early '90s with the editorial shift to an antiracist socialist feminism.

JA: How was class dealt with?

HC: Here I'm being very subjective. The issue of class wasn't really spelt out in terms of people's backgrounds, I think. There weren't many women with non middle class backgrounds. One of the ways in which that got slightly displaced was through a division between women who were academics and women who were activists or who worked in the media or the voluntary sector or publishing. That was played out by a number of women who came onto the journal but in the end

were overwhelmed by its academic nature. I think the class dimension was very difficult to speak. I certainly didn't speak it, it was very silencing.

NP: Was it different from 'race' in the sense that class was discussed continuously as an intellectual topic, even though they were middle class, in a way that 'race' wasn't?

HC: Yes but class was that object out there that didn't directly implicate in the same way, especially given the oppositional stance of left and feminist politics. Whereas 'race' brought in the subjective and 'race' had everything to do with you, even though for a long time it was something that was only seen to be the concern of 'black' women rather than white women. That was the understanding that took a long time in the unmaking. I think for a certain number of the Collective members the question about not coming from a middle class background was very significant. Questions of class were completely abstracted. It was an overarching universalising language but never really about identity and subjectivity. Part of the thing about the intervention of black feminism was that it broke that abstraction. It shattered that abstraction. I'll shut up now!

AT/CH/JA/NP [together]: No, no, no – it's so interesting.

CH: Avatar when did you join? What were the conflicts you came in on? Tell us the story.

AB: Well what happened was that my involvement started with Chandra's article because I was asked to give an external assessment of it. I mean I thought it was a brilliant piece, which it is. Kum-Kum Bhavnani had already joined the Collective at that point, because I refereed it she then got me involved. Then we got Gail involved as well. For us actually, partly we were outnumbered. There were only two, three of us in what was a very large Collective. At an inter-personal level one can say a lot of things but I don't think that's necessarily that important.

What we began to realise however was that women weren't aware of their whiteness, that language was not there at the time. But the fact that there were white women, the whole question of racialisation – there wasn't any general awareness of it and the content of *Feminist Review* did not reflect those differences either. So what we tried to do was to try and say that the Collective should try to address these issues in terms of the content of the journal but at the same time as far as possible try to have women of colour. Equivalent numbers if possible but at least as many as possible. But it wasn't just a question of numbers there was also a racialised form of intellectual elitism. It was almost as if somehow 'we' the 'black' women, were not really of the same level. It was never said, of course.

HC: Like the working class women.

AB: Yes. It was never said — who would, my god. But the feeling we would get would be like that. The 'black' women were not the ones who were seen to be the theorists. I was very badly affected by an incident that pointed to this. Gail was there, Kum-Kum was there, and we all noticed it. Again I won't personalise it. We didn't even have to explain, we looked at each other and we knew. We began to think this is not simply a case of having a few more 'black' women in. It is really very much a question for all of us, of what today we call our subjectivity. How were we being constituted on the Collective itself as 'black' women as well as white women?

A little bit later we went to our annual gathering at Bore Place in the big house.

HC: The weekend away.

AB: We were discussing all these questions; we were raising these issues at the weekend away. And actually the way the whole thing developed it became quite direct. Some of us, I think it was Gail and I, we actually sort of sensed, I don't remember what it was, but it was quite direct. We didn't mince words.

HC: It was the use of 'we', the inclusive we.

AB: That was when the tension really came out into the open wasn't it?

NP: What year was this?

AB: This would be, was it 89? I joined in 88.

NP: A few years after Many Voices... .

AB: Quite a few years after Many Voices... We went in to the Collective thinking they have produced that issue, this is really moving forward. We were shocked actually. In reality nothing happened after that issue, in terms of 'race' and racism.

AB: After that weekend away we decided that as 'black' women we did not want to continue, unless the Collective decided to change. We very directly actually challenged whiteness, I mean we talked about white women and 'black' women and the differences. We felt that there was no point in us staying inside unless everyone was willing to own the issue itself and to discuss it.

HC: And it was something people found very difficult, that people were not willing to do.

AB: Which is something you'd have to tell us because we left. We said we'd consider perhaps coming back... .

JA: So you left?

AB: We did, together, the three of us.

JA: The three of who, who left?

HC: Gail, Kum-Kum and Avtar.

AB: We said we would come back if you make a sincere commitment that 'race' is not something that not only we bring up, it's something to do with all of us and everybody has to own it.

AB: That was quite a difficult phase for the Collective. We were gone for a year, was it? That is something that you would obviously know.

HC: Yes well it was a very difficult phase because of that but also because all the certainties were going. All of the certainties out of which the journal had come, which was socialist feminism, all of those certainties had become deeply problematic. Questions of class, socialism, feminist theory and feminism itself were all losing their anchors. The fracturing was very troubling.

AB: A lot of women left at that point, it was very significant the number that left at that point.

NP: You know the edited collection *The Empire Strikes Back*?

AB: Yes, hmm.

NP: A lot of these people were related to some of the central figures of the Centre for Cultural Studies, where 'race' was raised quite a lot. Did that not affect the Collective?

HC: Well clearly not if 'black' feminists found being on the Collective untenable.

AB: Yes that was our point because it didn't effect the contents. Then we came back after you had decided, the people that were left that is, didn't you write something?

HC: Yes we wrote an editorial. And on that basis I think you came back

AB: Yes that's right, that's right.

JA: So an editorial responding to some of those issues?

AB: Yes. We might want to have a look at that at some point [we chose to re-publish it in this celebration issue].

JA: How interesting.

AB: Yes.

HC: And the Collective by then was smaller

AB: Yes, yes.

CH: Because everyone had left [laughter].

HC: It was smaller but it was something else as well. The certainties had gone. Many of us felt dispossessed particularly of our roots in Marxism which had been such a powerful part of our intellectual life. That debate between Marxism and

feminism, was very powerful and lots of people felt terribly adrift at the failures of Marxism as a theoretical force, even though feminism had been instrumental in its undoing. So the Collective was a lot smaller but it didn't any longer have the original mission that it had. Both because of the challenge of 'black' feminists but also because of the wider landscape and shifts that had happened.

NP: What do you feel that you lost the Marxism to? Do you mean the newly formed cultural studies? I mean because some people carried on the Marxism in a different way in cultural studies, didn't they? A lot of cultural studies is still quite Marxist but in a different way.

HC: Well everything is still quite Marxist but nobody was in/within Marxism in the same way. So what year are we up to now?

AB: Post 89, so we are talking about the nineties now really.

JA: I found it interesting when you said that when the journal started they had some editorial autonomy, what happened to that? When did you switch to a corporate publisher and what brought about that change?

HC: Hmm. I think some people thought self publishing was slightly cottage industry-ish and that it needed to be professionalised. But moving to a publisher never involved surrendering editorial control.

AB: And when did we move to Routledge?

H: 1991

JA: At that stage, in the late 80s was there still a mix of women in the Collective who were in academia and outside of it?

HC: Yes.

AB: It was mainly academic.

JA: Right

HC: Just in terms of feminism there was this really interesting moment, it etched itself in my memory. We were in this kitchen and people used to prepare because people were also amazing cooks.

AB: Meals used to be something.

JA: Really

HC: Yes. You know some people really were amazing cooks. Even a book of *Feminist Review* recipes was published.

AB: Oh yes, I remember.

HC: It was a Friday night, you know, glass of wine, chopping the food up and feast on the agenda. And during this there was a difficult exchange around an assumed heterosexuality.

CH: But when was that!?

HC: 88. What I mean is the exchange illustrated (for me anyhow) that, even though there was a great deal of debate on sexuality, many of us still assumed a heterosexual world much as we assumed a white world. I often think back on that evening and how hard it was, really, to grasp the question of difference.

CH: Yes, yes. I think what is interesting – I mean in some ways this is a similar sort of question as Nirmal's – that there were other places where these debates were happening. (So I am thinking that is quite late for a debate about sexuality.)

LB: In terms of where sexuality was in the journal, I can remember this incredibly important article – 'Upsetting an Applecart' – and that led to great debates, reflecting those splits around sexuality. And there were one or two others and then there were debates on pornography. Actually I think *FR* was a place where there were important debates going on about sexuality which certainly had wider ripple effects.

AB: Absolutely. But if you looked at the composition of the Collective itself there were very few women. If you are a mixed group – where there are lesbian women, heterosexual women – sometimes issues get centred because it is also a part of your life. You are right that was a very important issue. But if you actually look at all the articles we had published there was less of a presence of sexuality.

JA: I think there is an interesting question about friendship and politics within the Collective because it sounds as though from the beginning these were people who lived together, worked together in the early stages and that's how the dynamism started.

AB: Definitely it was a mixture of politics and the personal. For me that has always been very important. Once we came back, you always find that there are some people that you get close to as friends. But I think the personal has always been political.

JA: The fact that you had so many meetings in someone's home already makes the project more personal.

AB: It's not that it's a friendship that you necessarily carried outside of those things but in the group itself it has been very important.

LB: Dot, you have been on the Collective from the beginning. So what is your sense of the significant changes in the Collective?

DG: Yes, that's very hard, because in a way I was very engaged with feminism but now I don't feel engaged at almost any level. I can ask questions now but I can't give answers. And I suppose I can say we don't have a clear sense of what we are

now. And I suppose we had a clearer sense of what we were, rightly or wrongly, when we started in 1979 or whenever we started. I have been around a long time but I don't want only two voices to carry too much of history really.

NP: For us it was important to hear the history, it gave some real life to conflicts and tensions that are often just displayed in theoretical terms. I think it was very important memory work. It will just stay with me as it was almost like a film they unfolded for us from behind the scenes.

CH: It was actually very moving. There was a real feeling of the relationship of the struggles among the Collective and hearing about the struggles that were taking place at a theoretical and historical level is interesting; I want to hear more of it.

NP: So do I.

CH: Where or when it is that one has a moment of political and intellectual fusion will determine the origin of the tale one tells. So Helen was talking about Marx and feminism, while I would talk about Foucault and feminism, or Butler and feminism. And of course, if you were intellectually politicised in the same era as me, but were differently located, if you were not a middle class white queer activist for example, your account of who you were having a dialogue with would be different again. I don't think it's accidental that it is 1989 that emerges as the 'end of the story of the Collective' for some earlier members of the Collective; but this was also the moment when I, and many other people of my generation, became politicised around the intersections among feminism, sexual and 'race' politics. For me, the 90s had very clear political stakes.

part II: turning point articles

Having heard some of the historical accounts, we turned to discussing the articles we should publish in our anniversary issue on the basis that they represent significant turning points for us?

CH: It is very interesting hearing about these past moments of crisis in the Collective because it was when I read the journal from 1984 – the 'Many voices One Chant' – and I remember reading the original Mary McIntosh and Michelle Barrett article and being really convinced. And then reading these essays that questioned it and then thinking – oh my god. It was a profound moment for me. It was that moment that forced me I think to put myself in feminist work.

LT: Our selection of articles represent moments when the journal has made important interventions in feminism. A lot of articles we have selected have transformed the debates. We have done a short version of the biography of the journal by looking at what we consider to be its turning points.

NP: As a desert island disc activity I thought about which articles you are supposed to take away and I did this on the basis of two criteria. One was those pieces that

were autobiographically important to my development. And two, those that have been important to the field of Feminism.

When I first read *Feminist Review* it was when I went to the Barrett and McIntosh article. At that time, in 1987, I was at Middlesex University and was grappling with trying to bring Feminism with Marxism. Conveniently developments in the journal tied in with my own intellectual development. As an undergraduate student I was also thinking about how to bring 'race' into all of this. That is when the Bhavnani and Coulson response was published and became very significant for grappling with those different elements of 'race', gender and class. Then I went to work in a women's refuge in East London, as a part of a sandwich year at Middlesex. You had to write a 10,000 word dissertation on the basis of this year long placement. And I couldn't have done it without the Amos and Parmar articles on domestic violence, refuges and the political. At that point *FR* was the main feminist journal.

Finally I would have to take the Mohanty article. There is a bit of a different criteria for that selection. When I teach, I usually give my students that article. It clears the terrain straight away, especially when we are discussing women in other parts of the world, in terms of globalization and international feminism. A lot of them are very keen on going away to 'help' people somewhere else so when you give them that it creates quite a good dialogue in the classroom.

In the mid-eighties, I was only an undergraduate but I knew, I had a lecturer called Jeanne Gregory, she just told me to go to *FR* and *Race and Class*. They were the two journals you used. And it also made it really alive, the fact that they had these round table discussions published. It wasn't just articles. It gave you a sense that there was really somebody out there arguing about this. Also they often published reports back from conferences, such as European Feminism. That for me was significant because it made me curious about the movement. I think it is really surprising how many of our pieces across the years are from out there. They are not just straight academic pieces; they are connected to different types of feminist movements.

DG: It was like that right from the very beginning, from Issue 1 onwards, there was an international perspective.

IG: Still, I think part of this is the vagaries of publishing. There are lots and lots of things written by good academics which never get picked up. Mohanty's piece is just a part of this. Mohanty's piece came out at a time. It hit a nerve. It generated a debate. It is still used today. You know we all use it with our students all the time. Clare says it as well 'I don't even have to make an argument for this one, surely it just is'. Then she goes on to say 'I might not want it on a desert island because it is a bit preachy but it is a classic'.

NP: ... It is very good to hear these responses. Because there has been a very linear dialogue on Mohanty, so our discussion of the selection is very important too

because we have not really heard this other side that we are hearing from within the Collective now.

LT: Shall I say something about choosing the articles? I found this very difficult. I have found this very difficult indeed. It is a history I am not a part of. I end up thinking why am I here, basically.

During those years when *Feminist Review* was doing all these things, and producing all these articles, I really didn't have access to any of this stuff. I was teaching in secondary schools and I wasn't linked into any of these circles at all. But that shifted, otherwise I wouldn't be here, it shifted in the mid to the late 80's. Actually before that I was in a women's group but it wasn't an academic women's group. I did an Open University course, on The Changing Experience of Women, in the early 1980s and then started becoming interested in feminism at that point. I did lots of women's studies courses in the WEA in Brighton. I was becoming more and more involved in different women's groups and every night I was out in different women's groups. That was from 1981 to say 1988, which was also a very turbulent time for me, in my life personally. But that, that was all good stuff, I did the courses and was in all those groups.

So my relationship to the journal at that time, I must have discovered at some point. I went to a thing at Sussex University called Feminist Forum where I met a lot of my current friends and I met Alison Light and I think she possibly introduced me to *Feminist Review*. My relationship to the journal was a sort of aspirational one. I thought it was way up there, way up there. Alison asked me to write a book review and it was like she had given me a piece of gold. I was so honoured to be asked to do this book review, very excited about it. But it didn't mean to say that I read the journal! I tried to read it, but I found it very difficult and I didn't get enormously far.

Then I was able to make a move back into higher education, which is why I am here now really. So for me it is completely impossible to choose the articles, because I haven't caught up on it all, and I have missed it, I wasn't there you know? It's sad, I feel sad about that. I also feel, right, I would like to do some of these things, why aren't we doing some of these things? I don't know whether it is a desire to sort of re-live it. It would be pointless for us to sort of re-live all these things that have happened. But listening to the history I wish it was more like what it used to be. What I would like to get out of *FR* is to have some of those experiences that I have lost, which is impossible of course.

LB: Are you romanticising those experiences?

LT: I am sure I am and I am sure they were very painful. Whenever I hear you talk about it I think 'Thank god I wasn't in it'. I would have fallen to pieces, I would have been terrified.

AT: It may not necessarily be romantic. It may, after all, a bit like envy, these feelings let us know about pulsing desires. I just wanted to say that actually.

LB: I found it very interesting to hear Nirmal's and Lyn's story about your engagement and non-engagement in the journal in terms of where you were. I didn't really know that and I want to know that about everyone, I know a bit about Helen. When you are dealing with the history of the journal it is good to have a history of the people and where they slot in.

LT: We are coming from different places.

AT: I also wanted to say something about what you were saying Lyn. I just wanted to connect back to what you were talking about. I mean I read a lot of the early *Feminist Review* because I was an undergraduate from 81. I became an undergraduate without an 'O' or 'A' level to my name. Actually I did do a high theory degree, we sort of did Gramsci, not quite in the Italian, but I remember being given Gramsci, Foucault and Althusser in my first year and not even digested versions at NELP (now University of East London University). I can remember my first lecture doing cultural studies which was Bill Schwarz writing up on the board that 'history is about the present' and I thought these people are completely barking mad! ...

[Laughter]

The issue is, how we manage these questions of exclusions and what do we think of the history of feminism. Because when I think of my selections as it were, it's interesting I kind of go backwards. There is the question of exclusion from the Academy. I was very struck as I was reading this in the library; I was visually somewhere else in a sort of journey backwards. It takes me back to some of the more important stuff which also connects to my early life. My political history was as a trade unionist and a shop steward. I was much more engaged in those kinds of fights about trying to save the NHS. It really it was from my academic life that I kind of found feminism. I was a nurse for quite a long time.

LT: Well it makes you do that yes, going back through these years.

AT: I just wanted to say that because I didn't want you to be left to feel that you were the only one... .

LT: No it's not a feeling of isolation because I am totally into all this stuff now. It was just a reflection on this history.

NP: So Lyn which ones will you select?

LT: I can't select any of them. It is not my history, I wasn't there.

LB: I read *Feminist Review* from the start. I went to the Birmingham Centre of Cultural Studies the late 70s, and we all kind of consumed *FR*. It arrived when I was involved in writing this book *Women Take Issue* collectively with other people, it was feminism's answer to Marxism and so we were kind of taking on Marxism.

Almost simultaneously, well just a little bit later, there is the edited collection *The Empire Strikes Back* from the Centre with work on 'race' going on in the Centre, but there is nothing on 'race' in our book.

HC: So Hazel Carby was not in your group then?

LB: I knew Hazel but she lived in London, she just came up for the Race Group. She did not come to our Women's Studies Group.

NP: She and Parmar wrote feminist work in *Empire Strikes Back*

LB: Thinking just in terms of *Feminist Review*, for me, Amos and Parmar were very important. And of course the debate with Barrett and McIntosh as well as the reply. So I would have those three definitely and Mohanty. I would have the article by O'Sullivan and Ardell because I was involved in lots of debates around sexuality and there were all these battles. And I knew Sheila Jeffreys from Manchester in the early 70's when I was an undergraduate and she was a postgraduate. That kind of debate, it was more than a debate, it was a real set of battles between feminists around sexuality was central to me. Ardell and O' Sullivan wrote about that in a very interesting way, that article was very important to me. I use all these articles I have selected for teaching. When I am teaching feminism in relation to developing ideas around sexuality I get them to read Ardell and O'Sullivan. So I think I would have those five. I think they are very important.

DG: Sexuality has preoccupied the journal quite a lot. I think the earlier trend of class and 'race' has been incredibly important but there was also a whole trend around sexuality as well.

LT: Class, gender and ethnicity it seems to me as a Collective we have given them more attention than to sexualities, at least since I have been in it. And that PhD student in Canada who interviewed me about the Collective asked me about sexual diversity in the Collective and there was a big sort of silent moment when I thought: 'What do I say now?' [Laughter]

HC: We don't do sex... .

NP: We just do admin. [Laughter]

AT: My greatest hits would be slightly different and I want to work backwards through my own history. I would want something in there about ethnicity and post coloniality. What we read and what informs us - it may be a bit banal to say this - but it is inflected with our history and our preoccupations. I would want the Mohanty piece in there. Then moving on I would want the Jacqueline Rose one. For me that would be critical, because sliding backwards through my own intellectual formation, the whole question of psychoanalysis and sexual difference has been so sort of formative in my intellectual preoccupations, really. I would also feel a loss if we didn't have a more historical article here. It's about 'past as the present' to go back to that. The historical stuff has been so fascinating and important to me.

If we didn't have a historical piece in there I would feel it as a lack personally and I think it wouldn't actually, not accurately, reflect the historical articles that *FR* has published. So I would like to include the one by the Birmingham History Workshop.

part III: surviving as a collective

The rich array of publications we have been able to select from have relied on the very survival of the journal and the Collective which itself can not be taken for granted.

CH: What made you stay when lots of people left the Collective in the 90s?

HC: Some of the women who left in the 90s, not all of them, felt that the moment was over.

AB: I didn't agree that the moment was over. Yes, I did feel that things were changing and they change all the time and the journal could try and keep up with that. I felt there was still a place for the journal and I felt it strongly enough with Helen and the other two we wanted to think through ways in which we could keep it going. Although that was hard with only four of us. We just felt strongly that the moment had not gone and the journal had something to contribute. It was a gut feeling wasn't it?

HC: I felt the conversation had only just begun and that it was important we didn't lose the historical connectiveness of feminist debates.

DG: We should perhaps capture that moment; maybe we didn't make an intervention at that time except by continuing our existence which was extremely problematic for a while. A lot of people decided they wanted a change and to leave. Then the journal did not go out with them but went on to become something else. What I don't quite understand is – which is why I ask so many silly marketing questions – is what we have become and how clear our identity is to us and to others?

CH: It sounds like there were two main difficulties – on the one hand there were all these theoretical and political shifts; on the other, Collective membership was so reduced in the nineties that it was practically very difficult to get the journal out. It sounds as though it's really only now that there are enough bodies present to even have this conversation, and ironically this coincides with the accelerated rate of bureaucratisation and consumerisation of higher education more generally. No wonder it's been difficult to have intellectual reflection.

HC: Often we are facilitating the journal. And that sometimes means facilitating articles through the referee process – which we adhere to stringently – articles we might not actually choose to read.

AT: Yes that is right.

NP: You are right. Sometimes you do feel a degree of disconnection from the journal where you feel you are just a vehicle for processing the material coming in.

HC: And that is a really horrible feeling.

HC: In the beginning one of the things the journal used to do was have readers' meetings. They had pretty well petered out by the end of the eighties.

NP: That's the other change isn't it, because we don't actually have fights – not because we're really calm people because we're not [laughter]? It is because we don't actually have intellectual exchange between us. We do very administrative or editorial roles don't we? We don't really argue about how we see the labour market now for instance, we don't have those debates? I am not saying that as a criticism, I am just noting that that is the way things have developed.

CH: What is incredible about *Feminist Review* is that it has been going as a Collective for 25 years. And as time goes on, it becomes more and more precious, I think. Given that we are now in a time that isn't in any way supportive of Collectives, quite the opposite in fact, is the real fear that if there were a big argument, and people left, those people remaining might not have the energy to start again? As collective work becomes rarer and in an academic context, the amount of energy required to rejuvenate it after a crisis becomes harder and harder to generate. Where would we find that level of energy? Yet it is still incredible – when I walked into the room of *FR* Collective members for the first time, the overriding feeling was of relief – oh thank god, you know, I'm back in a context where people will listen to what I have to say...

JA: I just want to echo that. I remember receiving a letter from Lyn not so long ago when I was asked to join and thinking that 'Oh god this is still a Collective'. That really really struck me. And I really found that in a sense quite uplifting. Given the current academic climate we should not forget how special the journal is from that point of view.

AB: And what we have achieved.

JA: But also the kind of space it creates. I think that's something that's really special with all the difficulties that it has. We're all operating in this new academic environment i.e. RAE and other things which emerge as a barrier to this kind of project. It is a much harder climate now and it must have been hard when the four of you left and you had to rebuild. Now, like you say, we don't know what would happen. If you take something like today, to be an intellectual collective it is about the time and space so that we can have a real exchange of ideas.

AT: There is also something about how we think this through and in a way the kind of Collective we want to be?

HC: The key thing is, how do we put those discussions back into the Collective, how do we sidestep the housework, the admin? Reflecting back to what Nirmal was

saying about subjectivity, theory and admin, what we are doing is that we are kind of managing, we are deploying a whole range of managerial skills which is us as a Collective. There is a set of questions there – What we mean by Collective? What we mean by feminism? What should *Feminist Review* be thinking about as a thinking thing?

LT: We can trot out all these terms – intersections, class, gender, 'race', blah. I really would like to talk about all those things with you, you know. I think it is amazing to have contact with this group of women. And yet we do spend our time on admin. I feel very culpable because I have been the Chair and it's been my job to keep things moving. I have been implicated in that sort of admin thing. It's partly a mode of operation that is to do with our professional lives and we are in this mode of operation and we need to get out of it. Even in the 1980's I might not have been in on all of this but I wasn't in that world. I was in some kind of feminist world, it was political. You went to Greenham Common and you did things like that. You just didn't think about your job. I mean you thought about political questions and your personal lives.

part IV: interventions today

So what kinds of interventions do we see ourselves making today and in the future directions of the journal?

LB: The Mohanty came out almost 17 years ago! Maybe the interventions we are making now are of a different order. *Feminist Review* was the journal, and it could have an impact. Interventions now are not of the same order. But you know I imagine the Globalization issue has made an intervention.

LT: Yes... it's sold a lot! [Laughter ...]

LB: You can't tell until a bit later quite what the impact of things is anyway, can you?

HC: It inspired the Iranian Women's Conference; they used that issue to have their debate.

LB: So it would be good to have an article from the globalization issue.

NP: I think most of the time we are grappling with this question of intervention and impact. We have got different desires and movements going on between us actually.

HC: Yes

AT: How can *Feminist Review* intervene? What are the limits of our intervention, we are only a journal? And also what is our responsibility in all of that?

AB: *Feminist Review* is an academic journal, but it is a political and not a neutral journal. So in that sense I see *Feminist Review* as a political project. There are other forms of politics as well of course and we can all be involved in other activities. But in relation to *Feminist Review* the main issue is to retain the politics that underpins it. To keep that alive, the political dialogue.

JA: I think the Dialogue Section is a part of that. I really like the dialogue section published in 77, the issue on Labour Migration. If I compare it to all the other migration journals I read, it really is different. There isn't that space for that kind of material in other journals. So I think there is something intrinsically political about having that space there to present those kinds of experiences and voices in a different way, which you can't necessarily get from a straightforward academic journal article. So I think there is something very political about that.

NP: Half of the Dialogue Section of the Labour Migration issue was gathered by Eleanor and Parvati, the Guest Editors. The half I gathered came out as it did precisely because I have been dipping into these other worlds, outside of academia.

JA: I think the journal can be political but obviously the more of a relationship we have with these other worlds will give us more of an opportunity to bring in much more of that dialogue.

AB: We have all these projects through the *Feminist Review* Trust. We could give those projects a space in the dialogue section. Some of those projects are amazing; we need to give them visibility and to invite them to contribute.

CH: It is such a bizarre thing being part of academia. This is a project that is part of academia but also linked to other worlds. The Trust project is an amazing thing in that it happens outside the pages of the journal.

HC: In a funny way the journal is political in ways that we don't know about. The journal is the space where debates and conversations can happen. It is political in ways we don't know about, in terms of how people use it. We are facilitating conversations that we don't always hear of.

AT: If they speak politics in a different way, can we hear it?

HC: When the journal started feminism was dealing with real questions about transformation. What started out as a piece of cake, you know you just had to seize state power and sort it out from the top [laughter], once you had added women. That thing about transition and where we are going, the voices of women in that understanding and transformation is what I now think of as feminism. I think that dialogue within the journal is crucial. I mean I know *Feminist Review* is an academic journal, but I think of it as where I do my politics in producing this thing. And my politics are about keeping that discussion going because it is a really important discussion. How we think, how we proceed, how we make

connections – all of these debates happen here. So that's the reason why I keep hanging on to that project because it has such a continuing conversation going on it.

NP: One thing that I find difficult is this connection between academia and politics. It gets to me how a lot of feminist academics think that just writing about certain issues is all that is required to be political. Well of course politics is in the academy. But I think there's got to be more than that as well. Plus I think the journal tries to do that through dialogue. Not many journals have that. It is not just about creating some thing that does not exist out there but it is also about being connected to things that are already going on out there and feeding into them.

AT: I also wondered Nirmal if you didn't partly feel that with the European Social Forum. You did say that you are not doing it again, and I didn't quite understand.

NP: Oh yes the ESF!

AT: Why don't you want to do it again?

NP: I don't want to do it with *Feminist Review* again largely because I felt I was carrying this burden of representation for the journal. And if we were to have a presence at the ESF again we need to work it through as a group. People need to know why they are entering that space. When it screws up it is not so much of a big deal for me, it is more about process rather than a big conference output.

IG: At the *Feminist Review* meeting prior to the ESF participation was treated as an administrative thing rather than a discussion of why it was the place to go or why it wasn't the place to go. Or if we are there why are we there.

NP: Yes and what are the risks of being there. I was aware of them because I had participated in previous ESFs but other members of the Collective have not been involved in any of them.

CH: Yes, I can remember the meeting where we had a discussion of it; it was simply OK, who is going to do this. Are you going to do it, Nirmal? Great, tick, business done.

NP: The main reason for my reservations are that as members of *Feminist Review* a few of you could not see anything positive in our participation and I found that frustrating and so limited. Let us not forget that the panel, titled 'Creating Collectivities/Doing Transnational Politics', included speakers (two of whom were men) from other collectivities. These were the Torino Samba Band, Scovengo also from Italy, NextGeneration (London), the BSA Race Forum and our international corresponding editor from Bangladesh, Firdous Azim.

Most of the panel were themselves deeply disappointed with the quality of the bad translations especially because we chose to have a space in the official ESF as

opposed to the autonomous arena (which is where we located ourselves in the Paris ESF 2003) precisely because of the professional translations that we paid for. Next time we will most certainly locate ourselves in the autonomous space rather than the official space. And although the event was messed up by the organizational and spatial shambles of the ESF 2004 itself, the event gave us the impetus to come together. So in that sense we did not have a totally negative view of it. And since then our gathering has spiralled into other initiatives, including seminars, action and joint publications. Hence I see it as a process in thinking together rather than delivering a short term outcome that is easily identifiable.

LT: Well I saw it as a really important intervention, and although I agree it was an unfamiliar space for some of us, I valued it, and your work, and the international dimension it brought in.

NP: Maybe we don't realize the impact those kinds of seminars can have. It creates a knock on effect. Amongst younger feminists *Feminist Review* is known quite well, partly because at the Paris ESF we had a panel on 'Embodied Leadership' in collaboration with NextGeneration. They are not the people in the RAE but that does not matter. They are people into academia but also different kinds of social movements. Many of the women I have met through these networks have actually then written for the journal. We are on the webpage of NextGeneration as well as others that have been started by feminists of more recent generations. The question is what is the constituency of *Feminist Review*? Do you want to have that influence, or not?

CH: In our first roundtable there was this very strong sense of what happened in the early years, but there wasn't the same sense of 1995 until now. It was as though history had stopped in 1995. I wonder if that might tie into the marginalisation of issues of sexuality, in part, given that feminist debates in the nineties were so concerned with and influenced by queer theory. A queer theorist would not say that feminist theory had stopped being interesting in 1995. I also wonder if this, rather common, narrative of the waning of feminist theory and activism, post 1995 has the unintended effect of marginalising and objectifying younger feminists, as if their experiences are not real, can't be included in this history...

NP: Some of the feminists of the earlier generation are not seeing how younger women are politicised in other ways, through digital media or creative ways. Instead we have a lament about the loss of feminism through the closure of women's studies departments. Some of the younger women are choosing not to go into academia, even after their PhDs or even to name themselves as feminists first and foremost. So perhaps you have to look somewhere else to see where young women are politicised.

CH: I think there are lots of young women who are politically active. The interesting thing is that they may not be found in academia in the way that we were. Maybe one needs to look in different places.

NP: Well I don't think there is a lack of them, I definitely don't. I actually think there is quite a lot, there are loads coming through, more than my own generation. There is a difference though; they occupy quite a different space. They are quite creative – multimedia, film, web technologies. They do the theory but they are quite creative as well. They produce things; they don't necessarily want to be academics.

IG: I think it is related to the question of what we mean by politics and what we mean by feminist politics and how that relates to the journal as an academic journal but as a space for feminist politics as well. One way these sorts of considerations can impact on us is that we don't foreclose too quickly on what we mean by the political. Yes it means absolutely what Nirmal is talking about, defining new spaces that in earlier moments might not have been seen as truly political, purely political or political enough – the political from below. But it also means thinking about that very messy space up above – of if you like, femocrats – which may not be where we ourselves want to be but is worth paying attention to and worth reflecting on and encouraging serious critical academic reflection. There are important questions about the mainstreaming of feminism and the impact of this that need exploring. I think that one of our jobs with the journal should be to think about what we see as the new, big questions facing feminism today, and to carry on re-creating a space where these can be debated seriously.

NP: We are quite privileged aren't we? It's about how you see your job. I think we have a responsibility to do it, that's the way I see it. In my bag here I have a book by Edward Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, his last lectures. He talks about how as an intellectual you should be a critic, and not just a writing critic.

LT: That's also very French. French intellectuals do political intervention all the time, Pierre Bourdieu for example. It's not very British.

AT: That's the context we work in isn't it? In which the intellectual context is so undermined from Thatcherism onwards.

LT: That tradition of political contestation isn't strong in this country, not strong compared to other places.

NP: Yes, unlike Italy and France. Then again, we are so connected now; you can get inspiration from other places. You have to seek it out, don't you?

AT: But you also have to be in the space.

IG: But we are in this space. This is where I feel this contradiction. The space of *Feminist Review*. To me writing is a political intervention, the sense of thinking through the issues. Yet none of us bring our current work to the Collective, to get feedback on, to think through issues. And I feel that is a bit bizarre, to be honest.

AT: There is that whole question that Nirmal has been gnawing away at about a bit this afternoon about academia and the political and how we situate ourselves within that, or not.

NP: I found it very useful to work with Firdous [an international corresponding editor] when she came for our ESF panel. It really made the whole question of the international very real. It also raised loads of questions for us but also for her. And she started putting questions to us. Because when we asked her if her group from Dhaka would want to come over here for some workshops instead of us going over there, she said that they would have to be connected to Bangladeshi women's groups here, in London, if they were to come over here from Bangladesh. That raised the whole question of what is our relationship to women of colour locally. And sometimes it is easier to think of it internationally. When we are thinking about trying to work across boundaries and territories they are here in our local feminisms as well. This is related to a bigger question – Whether the journal is part of different social movements or not, for me, or is it a journal that simply produces a certain kind of scholarship?

JA: So again it is about politics and activism.

HC: It can't survive without the connection between it as an academic journal and as activism.

AT: Well there are loads of pure academic feminist journals that do survive. It depends on how you want to force it. It takes us to a set of questions – what is it about the journal *Feminist Review* that we want to hang on to, what do we want to strengthen? In other words what kind of journal do we want to be engaged in? What is relationship to our local feminisms, activisms and what is our relationship to international feminism?

CH: This is about what vision do we have for *Feminist Review* that we would like to be part of. Helen for you doing the work on the Collective is your politics. Because the other discussion is how do we connect this back to politics? There are two very different senses of the Collective.

HC: I would like to talk about the intellectual Collective. The ways in which we can open up that space, occupy that space, make a claim to it, re-territorialize it... .

AT: Well I find something difficult to say and I'm going to say it. It is of course true that we have all these demands on our time and I think there's no question about that but I'm sorry, I think it was what you [Nirmal] said when you summed up that we had to make a choice about what we do with our time. We know that people are not putting equal time into the Collective, you know absenteeism.

HC: But I think that's true that in a way I don't think there's anything you can do about that except know that sometimes you're the person carrying and at other times other people carry it, you can trust that kind of distribution. What Amal is

saying is that we are not dealing with the things about contributions, the different contributions people make and that that's not collective, with some people doing more. That's much more problematic, especially if it's going to be over-ridden by some touchy-feely notion of a collective role we're all doing you know. So what I'm trying to say is that I agree with you but I also want to keep a bit of that other element, you know the connections between us as friends somehow or other. Make that more negotiable, that differential input than it would otherwise be.

NP: It is like families you have affectionate bonds there, wherever they come from. I think you're right you've got to allow for people having times when you know they can't do much; you've got to have flexibility. But when you can you've got to put your bit in otherwise...

HC: yes, I agree.

NP: If you're finding that you're not putting yourself out, not all the time obviously we have lives, thankfully.

CH: For me, this raises the question of where the Collective fits into the current academic and cultural obsession with the 'work/life balance'. The work of the Collective isn't paid, or simply 'voluntary' work, and it's not part of private, 'family' life, of course. Consideration of the Collective suggests a different social formation, in which we value personal and political connections that can't be captured by a public/private divide. In fact, collective work is important precisely because it challenges the opposition between 'work' and 'family', and exposes its heteronormative presumptions. That's part of the relief Jacqui and I mentioned earlier – relief to have recognition of other forms of work and affective ties. And perhaps it's that collective relief that provides the energy for continuing to generate feminist knowledge.

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