

Dialogue

Feminism 2000: One Step Beyond?

Will the twenty-first century be an age of third-wave feminism? What, if anything, does it mean to speak of a 'third wave' at all? For some sections of the media, in the UK and elsewhere, feminism has become strangely fashionable during the 1990s. A relatively young, largely white and fiercely articulate generation of writers, such as Naomi Wolf (in the USA) and Natasha Walter (in the UK), have argued for a reinvention of feminism. Many have explicitly spoken of a rising 'third wave' of feminism, or of what Natasha Walter calls a 'new feminism' (Walter's book of that name is reviewed on page 139). Some older feminists too, notably Germaine Greer, have called for a reinvigoration of feminism, demanding that women should 'get angry again'.

Such calls to arms have received a great deal of attention in the media, both positive and negative. These 'third-wave' or 'new' feminists write popular and popularizing feminist books, and their words doubtless have a more immediate impact on the general reading public than those of the academic feminists who tend to predominate in the pages of journals like *Feminist Review*. Yet many feminist thinkers and activists, both within and outside of academia, feel uncomfortable about these 'new' feminists. The discomfort stems from a sense that the 'new' feminist debates are perhaps too little reflective of the differences at work between and within women; that they are perhaps too narrowly addressed from and to the relatively privileged and affluent, to women who are not at the sharp end of daily brutalities such as racism, poverty or homophobia; that they are perhaps a little too complacent about the gains they suppose women to have made since the second wave – gains which have benefited certain women to the exclusion of others, as Bev Skeggs points out in her contribution to this issue. For some feminists, then, the politics of the 'third wave' may seem a little too close to the politics of 'post-feminism'. Others welcome its vigour and its success in putting feminism back on the agenda for public discussion in a way that we have not seen for some time.

Indeed, it should be remembered that the work of writers such as Wolf and Walter is not the only context in which the term ‘third-wave feminism’ can be or even has been used. Pragna Patel, for example, has used the term ‘third-wave feminism’ to describe the recent activisms of Southall Black Sisters and other black feminist organizations in the UK (Patel, 1997). For Patel, the third wave is a feminism which moves beyond both identity politics and liberal multiculturalism in its radical resistance against ‘new forms of racism, fascism, nationalism and religious fundamentalism world-wide’ (p. 267). To be sure, this is not (yet) what the British media mean when they speak of ‘third-wave feminism’; but it does illustrate that the term has more radical potential than its media appearances might suggest.

With all of these questions in mind, the *Feminist Review* Editorial Collective invited contributors to this issue’s Dialogue to reflect on the futures of feminism in the twenty-first century. We formulated and distributed five questions on feminism, ‘post-feminism’ and the third wave. For most contributors, these questions served as a jumping-off point into other questions of their own. However our first contributor, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, chose to directly answer each question in turn. Our five original questions appear below with Spivak’s responses.

References

PATEL, Pragna (1997) ‘Third wave feminism and black women’s activism’ in Heidi Safia Mirza (1997) editor, *Black British Feminism: A Reader*, London and New York: Routledge.

1. Is patriarchy an outmoded concept?

I am not good on conceptual modes. I think the idea of a patriarchy is useful if it is not taken as the last instance. The history of the present is still controlled by the rule of fathers all over the place, if we don’t confine ourselves to our own situation. As I outline in ‘The New Subaltern’ (forthcoming, I think, from Verso, in an anthology edited by Gopal Balakrishnan), womanpower is strong in ‘aboriginal’ communities in some parts of Western West Bengal, and the police can exploit this. The thing to do there is to see the connection between the police and patriarchal formulations; and to see how rural police relate in turn to assaults upon patriarchy by the rather strong state-level and national-level women’s movements. I could go on.

2. Given the diversity of women's experience, does the term 'feminism' have any useful political currency?

I would say 'diversity of women's location', rather than 'experience'. 'Feminism' as a term can be useful if it is not invariably located in (metropolitan) academic formations. By the same token, we must be prepared to give it up if there is reasonable resistance to it from groups we respect. We then stop to look at the resistance and learn from it. Upon that terrain, perhaps an alternative term is preferred. I am not always very patient with Anglophone 'outsiders' who say the word is not useful because it cannot be translated into the language of the country. I think in such a situation, we use feminism in English and the word that best describes the situation of women's struggle in the language of the country. Word fights often have a hidden agenda that closes doors and delays work.

3. Do you feel comfortable calling yourself a feminist and to whom?

I always call myself a 'feminist'. I am never very comfortable calling myself that because of the term's troubled history in France and Africa. Groups that celebrate themselves as 'feminists together' look upon me with some suspicion – as I sensed, once again, at a recent feminist book party I went to in New York City. There was a great deal of girlish complimenting of each other, with gleeful cries. Resistance ending in a book, forgetting the ISBN number, looking at me with the smile switched off made me sense once again how irrelevant that enthusiasm would be for very large parts of the world. Yet I had gone to share the joy. That is my ambivalent attitude toward the adjective 'feminist', which I will not give up.

4. Do you think that there is now a definable new phase of feminism, characterized in some of the recent literature as 'third wave'?

Yes, I do, if I confine 'feminism' to describing the dominant. It is reflected in the change from 'Women in Development' to 'Gender and Development'. To keep pace with globalization, the great international NGOs and organizations such as Women's World Banking now infiltrate into the interstices of gendered subalternity to give 'gender training'. There is a great deal of activity with the adjective 'global' attached on the electronic circuit. There is also a strong move to reduce women's diversity to database. I am not sure how to define this new phase, but I sense that it is rather different from the usual definitions of 'third wave'. You tell me.

5. How do you see feminism fifty years on?

On one level, I see more uniformity. I see a falling off in life interest among young metropolitan women with a corresponding impatient entry of peripheral women into the subjectship of 'women's rights', without a corresponding sedimented internalization of the new gendering. At another level, I don't know. Something will have happened in spite of what I see.

Notes

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The Future of Feminism in the Caribbean

Patricia Mohammed

A question which is still being posed in this region at the end of the twentieth century is what is Caribbean feminism? Optimistically the question refers to a range of different things, all of which suggest an attempt to define the specific nature of Caribbean feminism, rather than the idea that there *is* no feminism. It is still thought, and often debated, that the term 'feminism' is inapplicable to the region, that the history of women's struggles has not followed the trajectory of the European and North American models, and as such the movement for women's freedom from aspects of patriarchal subordination should be appropriately renamed to reflect its peculiar racial and ethnic identity politics.

For many, 'feminism' represents an imported set of ideas about women's rights and struggles, the latter which is felt to be unnecessary in these societies where the colonized black woman is deemed to have emerged as independent and aggressive in her own right. In fact within these societies, the category woman has been largely treated as undifferentiated, synonymous with women of African descent, and generally with reference to women of the working and lower middle classes. This is being addressed more and more as we come to the end of the twentieth century. Gender differences of other ethnic groups and differences between women are being acknowledged, at least in academic research in women and gender studies.

For others, the activism of the pre-1950s by women such as Amy Bailey and Una Marson in Jamaica, and Elma Francois and Audrey Jeffers in

Trinidad, followed by the more woman conscious activism of the period of the 1970s to 1980s, have been watered down. The general feeling is that with the globalization of the women's movement; the co-optation of governments and international organizations in the struggle for gender equity; the introduction of women and gender studies in education; and the career opportunities available in flourishing non-governmental projects, the status and condition of 'woman' has become less important to the idea of feminism. Instead the term 'gender' is used loosely to refer to some vague acknowledgement of equality between the sexes, as if the invocation of the word itself, liberally sprinkled in the right places and documents, has succeeded in achieving the goals of a feminist project launched centuries ago.

That this is a general feeling in the intellectual and popular imagination of the peoples of the region, must be addressed in the twenty-first century. How we will do this is itself the direction which feminism in the Caribbean will take in the future. The renaming or titling of Government ministries for women as the Ministry of Gender Affairs, admittedly suggests a political awareness of the evolution of feminism. The feminist goal has never called for, in my estimation, and in that of the majority of women, the devaluation or undervaluing of the male, or of masculinity. Nor has Caribbean feminism ever projected a solution of androgynous symmetry. What it has attempted to address is the skewed hierarchy which existed and continues to inform the relations between men and women, and consequently, women's status and access to goods and resources, in their own right, in society. The interrogation of masculinity, the deciphering of the 'subject' for its own good, is the necessary dialectic of the feminist inquiry. What is clear, nonetheless, is that Caribbean patriarchy is not willing to be a taciturn partner in its deconstruction, and correctly so. Feminist conscious men and women must bargain with that tendency of patriarchy which has ensured its persistence: like an amoeba, patriarchy recreates itself in different guises over time to ensure its survival and the privilege which it has become accustomed to. The burden of the feminist agenda in the twenty-first century is to demonstrate more concretely that patriarchal privilege costs both men and society a heavy price, and that there are alternative and more fruitful ways of organizing the sexual division of labour, of managing households and families, of ruling societies and shaping welfare policies, and of structuring the global political economy such that the arguments between ethnic or racialized groups, different classes and the sexes, are not resolved through violence and warfare.

That we have entered a new phase of feminism which we are already referring to as a 'third wave' in the Caribbean is clear. The concerns of this third phase are inherited from the specific questions of the region. What is the

unifying principle of feminism across these territories, and with the differing cultures found elsewhere? Are the categories of 'woman' and 'feminism' to be themselves further differentiated within the region? If the struggles in the twentieth century were focused on the post-colonial projects of nationalism and independence, in which women were supportive actresses rather than major players, what is the role of women in the continued shaping of identity in the Caribbean? Has the activist component of feminism become co-opted by bureaucracy, mainstream conservatism and dictated to by the demands of funding agencies? These are some of the issues which concern and preoccupy us in the Caribbean now, and will no doubt continue and persist well into the twenty-first century.

Equally important is whether the 'third wave' has introduced new questions and new actresses and actors into this theatre of gender. From the 1950s onwards, one generation has moved on and another is preparing to take the supporting roles, if not the lead. Where are the new faces and what are their concerns? In the 1970s when women like myself began to give voice to feminism, we allied ourselves with the progressive movements of the period, with black and socialist struggles. Our conviction that violence against women should be eradicated was translated into concrete programmes such as the setting up of crisis centres and half-way houses. We 'took back the night' with street marches, and protested in parliament about legislation which affected the status of women and children. The methods of activism ranged from intimate consciousness raising women's groups to societal challenging of policy makers. We made the personal political and the political personal to our lives and the lives of others around us, committed as we were to uplifting the quality of women's lives in our societies.

The concerns which have affected women and men of each period are always mirrored in the feminist stances which each generation of women take. The future of feminism in the Caribbean into the twenty-first century depends on the extent to which young women and men feel the weight of gender inequality; are compelled to change the forms it takes; and are allowed the democratic rights to struggle for transformation. There is a long way to go and this is a long and insidious revolution challenging subterranean practices and ideology. Even when it appears dormant, the seeds of feminism once sown will surface overground, with variations we are unable to predict. In the final analysis, however, the future of feminism depends on whether we have tilled this soil well and created fertile ground for a healthy crop of ideas and practices to emerge with a new generation. It depends on the genuineness and honesty of those of us who have taken the movement forward in the latter half of the twentieth century. We have much to answer for.

Note

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Women's Movements in Bangladesh

Firdous Azim

At the end of the millennium, and after three decades of intense activism, both on the ground and at the theoretical level, feminist movements around the world can congratulate themselves on basic changes in attitude and a serious questioning around issues of sexuality and gender relations. Having said that, theoretical issues, not excluding nomenclature, still need revision, debates and reconsidering as *strategy*. That is to say, terms like patriarchy, feminism and even 'woman' need to be defined and placed within the context of particular struggles. I will use this space to see how the women's movement in Bangladesh has evolved and tried to frame categories for itself.

'Progressive' movements, whether they be nationalist or broadly Marxist (on the left) have a tendency to subsume all other movements within their aegis. Pitted against retrogressive, sometimes Islamic fundamentalist movements as they are, they can easily claim legitimacy as the platform for all liberatory and progressive struggles. Similarly, the rhetoric of Islam can also be wielded in favour of women's rights. Women's struggles have to fight to find a voice and a space from within, and also autonomously of, these very powerful ideological positions. Given the situation, though much has been achieved, the struggle for space and recognition remains. The ground has changed in the sense that everyone has to speak of women's issues and women's rights, but the political need for women to organize on a women's platform remains.

Why is that? Why, if every political spectrum in the country has 'recognized' women's causes, do women need a separate platform from which to voice them? While the answer to this question is fairly simple and self-evident for the many women's groups that form the women's movement in Bangladesh, it is the question of diversity amongst women that makes the question of who is to represent women's voices that creates the most angst and debate. The most striking example of this can be seen in the ongoing movement for the rights of sex workers. This movement was launched in the face of eviction from brothels, and the way that the issue

is debated is highly interesting. On the one hand, leading women's groups use the language of rights – right to a home, to earnings, etc. to lobby the Government for the protection of these women. These groups carefully stay clear of any debate around sexuality as that would be strategically risky. What does take place are internal discussions regarding prostitution/sex work, the sexual position and exploitation of women – all leading to the one crucial question about 'our' attitudes towards sex work. This question is largely unresolved within women's groups, whose public stance is one of 'never mind the rights and wrongs of the case, what are these women to do in the meantime'? This is in stark contrast to prostitutes or sex workers themselves, who are very willing to talk about the social function that they perform. Brothels thus become 'safe' places, not only for the women who live and work there (as opposed to women who walk the streets), but also for the sexual status quo in society. Sex workers seem to have no problem in identifying themselves as prostitutes or 'fallen women', who by providing the services that they do, keep a certain order in society. They seem to legitimize a certain sexual freedom for men, but keep women within tight ideological constraints and divisions.

This movement, which could have acted as a means of bringing issues of sexuality into the political forefront, is hesitant about doing so. All players in the field take recourse to some other discourse – that of rights, that of social harmony – and play coy with issues of exploitation and freedom. For mainstream women's groups, a recognition of the exploitative nature of sex work seems to lead to the conclusion that the fight should be for its eradication. In the face of this, fighting for the rights of sex workers is presented as an interim strategy, to be resolved with the amelioration of the position of women involved in sex work. On the other hand, the question of freedom or choice seems to be irrelevant when confronted with the realities of sex work and the lives of sex workers. Sex workers themselves, in the face of an extreme situation like eviction, recognize the need for mainstream (middle class) women's groups to represent them to law-enforcing and governmental bodies, but at the same time the need to wield sympathy from the larger public is also felt.

While we have been looking at sex work within a very special national context, to a large extent only in and around Dhaka city, the changing nature of sex work is one of the major features of the new globalized era. Free movement of goods and a larger (though not free) movement of peoples across borders have changed the nature of metropolitan capitals, which are now marked by a racial mix and diversity. People move for economic reasons, in search of work and security. Women form a part of this new movement of peoples, but the women's movement remains part of a sexualized process. 'Trafficking' is one of the words used to describe the

movement of young women, who are supposedly lured into metropolitan sites, such as Bombay or Amsterdam, with the promise of work, which turns out to be sex work. 'Trafficking' is an issue that has been put on regional and international agendas, and designed to 'protect' young women, can also act as a means of controlling their movement. International conventions and documents including the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) or the Beijing Platform for Action drawn up after the fourth world conference on women in 1994, seek to address the issue of prostitution or sex work. One of the major features of the Beijing Platform for Action is that it talks of 'forced' prostitution, seeking to distinguish between coerced and voluntary prostitution. International women's forums have sprung up around the issue of sex work, as seen in the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW) or the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW). These groups represent very different positions, but it is interesting to see which women are granted agency and who are seen to be 'forced' into prostitution. Of course, it is the 'third world' poor young woman who is seen to be 'forced' and 'trafficked' into foreign capitals, while white women are more capable of wielding and manipulating their sexuality for themselves. The struggle within these groups to change or to question these perceptions, gives a new dimension to the women's movement, and perhaps places it in the vanguard of critiquing and challenging the complacencies of the globalized economic order.

At the end of the millennium, with changes in family structure and in the workplace, and even within legislative and national policies, terms like 'patriarchy' or even 'feminism' may not have the same relevance as they did thirty years ago, and words like exploitation or subordination do not seem adequate for political mobilization. But the global economic and political restructuring has not hesitated in using older ideological positions to create new hierarchies in the new world, and struggles, be they local or global (and it is difficult to keep them in these categories these days) are faced with hierarchies of gender which work to keep women subordinate. This subordination is determined by other categories such as class and race, and this is where strategy becomes important, as we struggle for greater expression and freedom from our various and very diverse positions.

Note

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Remaining the Same with Difference

Beverley Skeggs

Paradoxes seem to figure strongly in the backward and forward movements of feminism. In the UK the demise of Thatcherism was greeted with elation, made even more jubilant by the election in May 1997 of 120 Labour women MPs, only to see the majority of them vote into effect punitive legislation against lone mothers. The recent compensation of the GCHQ workers at Cheltenham, who were sacked (during Thatcher's reign) for remaining members of a Trades Union occurs after the massive demise of union power and the increased exploitation of women in the service sector. The success of Women's Studies in the academy has been enabled by 'market forces' (and of course all the hard work of the women who were struggling for years). Global institutions such as the British Council are having to respond to local demand for Women's Studies generated through massive capitalist development in countries such as Taiwan and Korea. The flows of feminist knowledge around the world are increasing, but only for some.

In many respects, it seems that advertisers are able to pick at feminism for the juicy bits that enable them to open up new markets. The Western media still seem to fumble with feminism, in ways Susan Douglas (1994) has outlined historically. It has altered few conceptual frameworks but the add on effect remains: women's issues, women's pages, women's concerns. As long as women remain compartmentalized and in their place they remain 'fed snippets'. In fact, the mainstream media continue to apply terms such as post-feminism and 'third-wave feminism' in the hope that the problem has either disappeared or remains non-threatening. The classic moment was when the *Guardian* newspaper ran an article by Catherine Bennett to 'celebrate' International Women's Day (8 March 1997) only to conclude that there were no feminists in Britain. Yet at the same time in academia, the funding councils that control research funding cannot ignore us; we are a significant force. We have performed so well, our productivity levels are enormous, even if we teach more, write more, we still get paid less and promoted less. We are useful to them for increased research output, yet they still try and keep us in our place. Or even more short-sightedly, they close us down.

Patriarchy was effectively critiqued in 1979 (by Veronica Beechey in this journal, No. 3) but it obviously still resonates as a means of understanding male power. Feminism is still a useful term because we have nothing else to replace it with. It signifies a stance, a politics that could not be understood without it. It is a constant interruption into the normative when used. Its political usefulness is not unlike the debates over the term

'woman'. We all know that 'woman' cannot be identified without an understanding of her disruptive relationships to other positions and categorizations, yet how else do we mobilize around gendered inequality? A similar paradox is how the theoretical critiques offered by black feminists and queer theorists of identity politics have had little impact on the destructive identity politics that fix and contain rather than move and make alliances. The shift that Charles Taylor (1994) and Nancy Fraser (1995) identify as a shift from the politics of redistribution to a politics of recognition is being played out in feminism. It seems as if different historical-temporal moves are all occurring at the same time: as some feminists critique concepts, others are trying to claim them. We enter the millennium with an incredible sense of the different movements that are being made. Some of us still hold on to political certainties (we want the world to change) whilst everything we do and teach promotes the uncertainty and complexities of what we do. I sometimes wish I could go back to the moral high ground when knowing what was right and wrong seemed so much clearer.

So what of the future? I see the development of powerful women, mainly those who come from positions with high volumes of cultural, economic, social and symbolic capital, who can enter spaces previously closed and take them over. They will only make heterosexual alliances if necessary. But just because they are called women and inhabit what we recognize as women's bodies does not mean they have any interest in feminism. They are more likely to be interested in themselves and will promote only their own interests. In contrast, women who are born into restricted access to economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital will *not* thrive. It is a future of difference. Their body sizes and mortality rates will be radically different. (This is already occurring in certain parts of Britain, which are ensconced in poverty.) It used to be called class. It still is. It will be. And I suspect that it will still be ignored by what publishers promote as 'sexy' feminism and may continue to be marginalized by feminist theory more generally. The differences will become more acute, as ability to ignore them becomes more sophisticated.

Notes

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Eco-activism and Feminism: Do Eco-warriors and Goddesses Need it?

Pam Alldred and Sarah Dennison

In Britain, as old ideological distinctions have collapsed, the gulf between political theory and action has widened, and the 1990s have seen the increasing visibility of direct action for protesting ecological issues in particular. While feminist and ecological analyses can be combined,¹ feminists are seen as turning increasingly to theory, and environmentalists, to action. Has feminism made such inroads into political consciousness that its contributions have been taken on board in current movements, mitigating the need for specific feminist theory or politics? We consider this in relation to our experiences of British eco-activism in the 1990s and the different ways we locate ourselves regarding both feminism and theory.

We met at the 'Pure Genius' eco-village, which The Land Is Ours² initiated in London in 1996. Sarah is an environmental activist who has studied Women's Studies, and Pam is a feminist academic and (part-time) activist. We agree that feminist theory, even ecofeminism, is not much in evidence as a resource for contemporary eco-activism, but also that waiting to iron out theoretical issues can block action. Sarah feels that feminist analyses have been important historically and have helped form eco-activism as it is today, so are incorporated within ecological analyses, but shrinks from using explicitly feminist critiques for fear of them being dismissed as 'old hat' and alienating to co-activists. Pam values the way activist coalitions can free up political activism from identities or unitary theories, but has reservations about relying on the incorporation of feminist analyses within

a ‘grand theory’, even one which revalues the conventionally feminized and devalued. As we discussed our perceptions of and views on the popularization of feminist ideas, we couldn’t resist identifying different constituencies of environmental protesters.

When the focus is on a particular locality it often brings together campaigners who’ve used official political means for that site/issue, such as public meetings and lobbying the council, and ‘eco-warrior’ activists who might squat land or buildings and live in tree-houses or tunnels. At Pure Genius, derelict urban land was visited, lived on and cultivated by local people and activists whose politics spanned shades and combinations of anarchism, socialism and deep ecology, or none of these, and whose identities ranged through Pagan, punk, professional and beyond.³ Prioritizing action meant not needing common identities or theoretical perspectives in order to act together.⁴

Pam’s experience of the gender politics of male co-activists is mixed. Militaristic machismo and misogynistic campfire humour at a Newbury Bypass protest-camp reminded her of the difficulties of coalitions, but she learned ways of diffusing aggression and Greenham Common Women’s Peace Camp songs from men at house occupations protesting the M11 motorway link-road. Many committed eco-activists⁵ who have a radical ecological analysis have analyses of gender *integrated* within their critiques of power and ‘progress’. With them, we both feel we can discuss, critically, the conventionally gendered identities which eco-activism can mobilize: of warriors fighting for the Earth, or the celebration of feminine energy and creativity. We take pro-feminist commitments for granted amongst these activists (probably because they often share aspects of our own political biographies), but not among the diverse people drawn to any particular protest. Is our presumption of feminist commitments amongst eco-activists valid or letting identity politics in by the back door?

We both feel the word ‘patriarchy’ sounds dated. Pam relates this to the increasing attention to the local, which means she uses the word infrequently, but when she does, it is to emphasize the breadth of analysis in an almost exasperated gesture to ‘capitalist patriarchy’ or ‘heteropatriarchal relations’, which she sees as an important counterpoint to a focus on the local. Sarah agrees, but worries that any emphasis on such big concepts can lead to feelings of powerlessness in the face of them and points out that, in the institutions and corporations that sustain them, decisions are made by *actual* people, with names and addresses etc. . . .

The emphasis on action, as opposed to theory, allows eco-activists to be represented in the mainstream media as unthinking. Whereas some issues, such as around violence, will be addressed as practical issues about living

or acting together, separate events (such as Earth First! gatherings) focus on more theoretical discussion. Since, on-site, we have not all 'come through' feminism, feminist analyses are needed, as they are to challenge appropriations of feminism on or off-site (where images of 'active' women are used to sell us beauty products and designer combat gear, and when journalists want 'cute' women protesters to be the vulnerable victims of burly bailiffs). If this century saw 'first-wave' Western feminists struggle for equality and integration, and 'second-wave' feminists criticize dominant values and sometimes invert value-hierarchies to revalue qualities associated with the feminine, 'third-wave' feminism goes beyond such reversals, stepping outside the existing terms of debate, such as by deconstructing the presumption of a gender binary or the conventional ways of doing politics.

We both value feminist analyses for showing who benefits most from corporate 'development' (locally, as well as globally) and for challenging dominant presumptions about desirable 'development' (such as in ecofeminist critiques of integrationist/'catch-up' models of international development). These could be described as first and second-wave arguments respectively. On-site, we see second-wave feminist analyses being drawn on implicitly (by men and women) to challenge dare-devilling machismo, which the emphasis on action sometimes elicits (from male or female activists); to identify aggression and intimidation by bailiffs, and to challenge the devaluation of nurturance and passivity. Pam is more ambivalent than Sarah about some revaluing, particularly where women's link to the Earth is understood as intrinsically gendered, because she shares (particularly third-wave) feminist *theorists'* wariness of essentialism and a scepticism of the discourse of 'the natural' (for its ability to undermine women's reproductive choices and sell us anything). The tensions of trying to reclaim or subvert conventional meanings are illustrated by our multiple responses to women activists using and enjoying the sexualization of their bodies, like the Sacred Harlots of Gaia who do striptease in order to distract security guards/police from the actions of other activists. Such attempts to reclaim or to deploy ironic or strategically gendered meanings can sometimes be indistinguishable from, or reinforce pre-second-wave sexist assumptions, and so we need second-wave analyses alongside (e.g. to remain critical about women being defined by their bodies or reproductive status). The questioning of truth claims which third-wave analyses suggest is what allows Pam to join Sarah in celebrating women's sexuality in a specific local intervention, while querying that it expresses women's 'true sexuality'. Since eco-activism can be seen as employing second and third-wave feminist approaches simultaneously, it seems more helpful to see them as different strategies, rather than phases.

isn't useful as a distinct analysis and that it's already an ingredient in the pot. Pam would rather have specific feminist analyses even whilst acting within broader coalitions, so as to be able to add to taste. Our different responses echo our different locations, and the difficulties we had in writing together were not unlike those faced by coalitions. However, our theoretical differences have not prevented us acting together (or being friends). So while Pam values 'third-wave' analyses for thinking about activism, Sarah asks, do they help her *do* it?

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Notes

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- 1 By activists as well as theorists: London, for instance, has distinct eco/anarcho-feminist scenes where, as elsewhere, individual women combine environmental and feminist concerns; the Women's Environmental Network draws together feminist and ecological analyses to support its campaigning work; and theoretical work includes Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva (1993) *Ecofeminism*, London: Zed Books, and Rosi Braidotti, Ewa Charkiewicz, Sabine Hausler and Saskia Wieringa (1994) *Women, the Environment and Sustainable Development: Towards a Theoretical Synthesis*, London: Zed Books.
 - 2 The Land Is Ours is a land-rights movement for Britain. Contact Box E, 111 Magdalen Rd, Oxford OX4 1RQ, UK.
 - 3 Wandsworth's 'Pure Genius' eco-village brought together diverse people with various concerns. Some opposed the private 'development' of luxury apartments in an area needing affordable housing, the building of yet another supermarket, the prevention of public access to the Thames, the destruction of a wildlife habitat. Some saw it as a landrights or a local democracy issue. Some wanted to grow organic vegetables in the city, live outside consumer culture, build homes and eat from what London throws away, and some simply needed a place to live.
 - 4 Just as Reclaim The Streets activists in the U.K., in 1997, didn't share the striking Liverpool Dockers' work (or 'worker') identities or investment in the system of paid labour, but identified a common enemy in the valuing of profits above people and acted together to call for social justice.
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Persistent Inequalities?: Gender and Technology in the Year 2000

Flis Henwood and Sally Wyatt

The millennium encourages both reflection and speculation and we indulge in a little of both as we assess the state of gender and technology relations on the brink of the third millennium. We both began in academia, in the interdisciplinary area of Science and Technology Studies (STS) in 1980. We were also both involved in local feminist politics, including the Women's Centre and the Rape Crisis Centre. Even though we worked as researchers in a university, we were engaged in other forms of adult education. We were keen to integrate theory and practice. Together with other women, we offered a 'Women and Technology' course via the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) for a couple of years in the early 1980s. We wanted to empower ourselves and other women by extending our knowledge of the structural inequalities in gender-technology relations. How has feminist work on gender and technology developed? What are the most positive developments in gender and technology studies that we wish to take with us into the future? Can anything be left behind as historical curiosity, the product of its particular time and place? Are there any lessons that we need to relearn about the relationship between theory and practice?

Let us start near the beginning. In 1985, we wrote:

in the context of a world where men hold most of the powerful positions and control the use of resources, we understand technology as being imbued with essentially male-centred values. . . . *[A]ll* men, regardless of race and class, benefit from their ability to control and dominate women. Access to and control over technological decision-making is one means by which this control is maintained.

(Zmroczek, Henwood and Wyatt, 1985: 121, italics in original)

How do we now feel about those claims? Has our thinking changed along with developments in both feminism and STS?

Like many of our sisters, we are excited by the challenges that post-modernist developments in the social sciences and humanities have brought to feminism in recent years. Similarly, we are encouraged by the ways in which more constructivist approaches in STS appear to be in the ascendancy. Both postmodernism and constructivism have played an important role in moving our analysis away from structuralist and deterministic theories of the gender-technology relation that dominated the literature to which we contributed fifteen to twenty years ago.

Women are no longer (or only very rarely) seen as passive victims of

patriarchal domination and control of technologies, which are themselves inherently masculine in design and character. Rather, in line with post-modernist thinking more generally, women are understood as active agents, able to affect and shape, as well as be shaped by, the development and diffusion of new technologies. Similarly, from constructivist approaches in STS, we have learnt that technologies are best understood as flexible and always contingent (Bijker and Law, 1992; Latour, 1996), shaped in design but also shaped or reconfigured at the multiple points of consumption and use, giving rise to diverse interpretations and meanings (Mackay and Gillespie, 1992; du Gay *et al.*, 1996). One of the key insights of recent work in STS is the reminder that ‘things could be otherwise’, that technologies are not the inevitable and only result of the application of scientific and technical knowledge.

These theoretical developments have made room for greater optimism about human agency, which is clearly evident in the feminist literature. Some commentators now border on the ‘technophobic’, a position that would have been unthinkable twenty years ago. Sadie Plant’s work is a good example of such technophilia: ‘with recent developments in information technology, the relationship between women and machinery begins to evolve into a dangerous alliance. Silicon and women’s liberation track each other’s development’ (Plant, 1997: 503).

Plant argues that new information and communications technologies are different; somehow, women are set free and men become subordinated to the machine. ‘Hooked up to screens and jacked into decks, man becomes the user, the addict, who can no longer insist on his sovereign autonomy and separation from nature’ (p. 505). She suggests that whilst early self-regulating machines were hailed as examples of man’s ability to dominate and control nature, cybernetics – self-designing mechanisms, self-organizing systems, self-replicating machines – are examples of machines which have begun to exceed the control of those who believe themselves to be in charge. ‘Every effort to build a world of man’s own design has resulted only in the development of a planetary network with its own networks of communication, circuits of control, and flows of information. With the development of self-regulating systems, man has finally made nature work, but now it no longer works for him’ (p. 508).

Plant’s arguments are seductive and exciting in their ability to move beyond a focus on the negative aspects of information overload and increasing dependence on information and communication technologies in the so-called ‘information society’, and to emphasize the spaces available to women to direct and shape their technological futures. However, not all women are in a position to achieve this more utopian state. Women still

earn less than men, are more likely to occupy positions at the bottom of workplace hierarchies and still have major responsibility for childcare and domestic work. For example, women largely staff the fast-growing 24-hour 'call centres', where shifts are designed to facilitate women's dual role as housewives and workers, and the tasks are repetitive and closely monitored via machines. In terms of their consumption of new information and communication technologies, women are catching up with men in terms of Internet usage, but they still lag behind to a significant extent, representing less than 20 per cent of users within Europe (www.cc.gatech.edu/gvu).

Clearly, new information and communication technologies present exciting new opportunities for identity reconstruction, innovative forms of learning and work organization. However, we wish to go forward into the new millennium with a renewed commitment to build on the insights of older social science and feminist theories, which were concerned to identify material disadvantage and structural inequalities, focusing on the collectivities of class, gender and 'race'. Following Giddens (1976, 1984) and Bradley (1996), we want to integrate structure and agency, to highlight what Bradley refers to as, 'the two faces of social reality' (p. 7). We remain convinced of the need to highlight human agency by identifying the individual and collective actions that shape the direction and experience of technological change. However, we fear that something valuable may have been lost in both our analysis and our practice if we continue to lose sight of the social, economic and cultural factors which constrain, structure and shape technological choices.

Notes

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From Absence to Sovereignty?: Psychoanalysis and Feminism

Amal Treacher

It is common knowledge that feminism is marked by multiple positions, which are inflected by similarities and differences in their understandings of women and our social, cultural and emotional formations. The turn to psychoanalysis, by some, has been part of the subsequent differences and consequent disagreement, which have focused on the desirability of theorizing female subjectivity through a psychoanalytic lens. The turn to psychoanalysis arose from different needs and wants, for as Margot Waddell describes, many have:

turned to psychoanalysis not only as a refuge for their damaged selves, but also to seek enlightenment about the irrational, intransigent and destructive aspects of us all, those aspects which, forever, variously undermine efforts to move on, compel to repeat, propel towards accommodation to the status quo.

(Waddell, 1995: 129)

The shift to psychoanalysis is not unitary and smooth, for this turn is/has been marked by a cleavage which focuses on those who are influenced by object-relations understandings – that from the beginning of life subjectivity is gained through inter-relating – and those who are driven to theorize subjectivity and sexual difference through an adherence to Freud and Lacan, with the primary emphasis on sexual difference and the oedipus complex. These divisions are not necessarily so discrete. For example, Juliet Mitchell has, through her clinical experience, shifted to a Kleinian orientation.

There are myriad ways into thinking psychoanalytically about subjectivity and many frameworks, which aid therapeutically. There does seem to be a continuing impulse to turn towards psychoanalytic theory as is illustrated by the inclusion of psychoanalytic theory in many degrees – both under- and postgraduate in the UK academy. In contradiction to this it is unclear whether psychoanalysis as a theory and as a therapeutic practice still holds the same validity as it once did. Many psychodynamically orientated training courses are struggling to recruit trainees, and yet alongside this counselling trainings, and the self-help movement are flourishing. Psychotherapy (broadly defined) provides many women with a profession, for the work can be perceived as a suitable job for a woman.

Psychoanalysis and feminism confront. Both frameworks confront the intractability of political, social and psychological systems to change and to allow different ways of thinking to make a difference. Feminism and psychoanalysis work within and face up to intransigence but there is a difference between them: while feminism tends to have more optimism that gender relations will eventually shift, psychoanalysis is more ambivalent about the question of the possibility of change. It can be difficult to know whether psychoanalysis centres on understanding and thereby gaining some release, or is based on a resignation to who one is, who others are and the state of the culture that one inhabits. Waddell argues, optimistically, that self-knowledge makes psychic change possible and thereby offers more potential to be free from conventional modes of social and political thought (Waddell, 1995).

For Joan Raphael-Leff the question persists: how in our daily lives can psychoanalysis be used to extend women's understandings of feminism and vice versa? (Raphael-Leff, 1995). There are problematic fantasies and feelings of aggression, contempt, destruction, denigration, envy, rivalry, masochism and triumph. These psychic processes are turned towards the self and others – and others would include critically other women. For as Raphael-Leff states '... within all humans ambivalent forces struggle for expression – for we are each both victim and oppressor' (Raphael-Leff, 1995: 140). These operant and pervasive feelings are in each of us and cannot be wished away by conscious thought. For Juliet Mitchell, however, concern still centres on understanding sexual difference: how do we live it, and what social and cultural conditions produce this knowledge, experience and the very stuff of our being? Indeed, we are left with the question of how do we live, as men and women; and what is the nature of and possibilities for relationships between men and women, and among women themselves? Joanna Ryan raises a number of important criticisms of psychoanalysis's relation to homosexuality, and the discipline's incapacity and/or willingness to question its own continuing negativity towards same

sex desire and to allow the possibility of women desiring other women *as* women (Ryan, 1995).

After nearly thirty years of second-wave Western feminism we are still left with questions of how we are imbued with and perpetuate political, social and cultural structures which damage us all. How do subordination and marginalization continue? During the 1970s we could argue straightforwardly that women were marginalized and subordinate – that women lived and suffered under patriarchy. This claim now requires some urgent refiguring in order to move towards a more nuanced understanding of how and why marginalization and subordination continue and how they were changed. How are they different for younger women brought up in the light of feminism, and in an era that has seen other powerful political struggles in operation and gaining some success? Psychoanalytic approaches suggest this requires a tracing through of how the psychic imprints of social inferiorization continue alongside the development of an understanding of how identifications have shifted. Jessica Benjamin conceptualizes gendered subjectivity as based on the ‘polymorphism of the psyche’ and for her it is possible to take up multiple gendered positions and have fluid identifications with others that are formed through, and within, similarity with and difference from others (Benjamin, 1995).

Freud’s bewildered cry ‘what does woman want?’ hung on an absence of the female voice, and the issue of the female voice – its absence or presence – has haunted some psychoanalytic and feminist theorizings. We can perhaps now move towards answering the question, ironically, through turning to a medieval fairy story. Marina Warner in *From the Beast to the Blonde* (1994) tells of the medieval version of the Beauty and the Beast in which a princess trapped by a riddle is released when the knight answers the question: ‘what is it that women really want? – with the reply – ‘sovereignty’ (Warner, 1994: 405). There are some hopeful signs that some women of many generations have more confidence, authority and assurance and are able to speak from presence and not absence – indeed have more sovereignty than previously. This confidence, however, may exist only in the public sphere. It is difficult to know whether this confidence is heartfelt, or whether we have learnt different ways of covering up our psychic distress and feelings of inferiority. There is now more of a moral injunction to feel mentally healthy, confident, independent and secure. Indeed, the British Labour Government is prioritizing mental health as part of its social regeneration programme and is intent on modernizing the mental health service. The aim is to provide ‘safe, sound, supportive’ services for those in need.¹ Concentration is being placed on poor, isolated and single mothers who have been marginalized from mental health services. It is completely unclear how, if at all, feminism has impacted on this

agenda and whether or not this government is motivated by control over or compassion for those women in need of 'social inclusion' and help in alleviating emotional difficulties.

We are confronted, theoretically and emotionally, by how hampered we are by our political and social conditions and our own unconscious psychic reluctance to change. Further, feminism and psychoanalysis can also in different ways stifle feeling and thinking albeit differently. Feminism in a particular way has become part of the establishment as Waddell cogently points out (Waddell, 1995: 130). And she carries on to argue that being a feminist lies in the struggle to strive towards the capacity 'to be oneself, in the fullest and most honest way possible' (ibid). To this I would add allowing others to be themselves fully. This then enjoins upon us responsibilities to speak psychic and social truths and to struggle with recognizing what psychoanalysis and feminism provide and where they are lacking. At the Psychoanalysis and Feminism conference held by the Freud Museum (London, 1996), Juliet Mitchell pondered why the women were there and not elsewhere. She continued to express her concern over the absence of women in the social and political field, and asked why isn't more happening outside? There is an absence of active political voices, and of a theoretical framework which can look both inward and outward, and perhaps more crucially, which knows when a social *or* a psychoanalytic lens is the stronger way forward.

Notes

Amal Treacher is a member of the *Feminist Review* Editorial Collective.

1 'Safe, sound, supportive' are the words used by the Labour Government.

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Victims No More (?)

Alyson M. Cole

Gender politics in 1990s America was framed by two Washington scandals. The Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas congressional hearings in 1992 (in which an ex-aid accused the then-US Supreme Court nominee of sexual harassment) and President Bill Clinton's liaison with Monica Lewinsky six years later. In the first event two claims of victimization competed, though ultimately Thomas's evocation of a lynch mob to describe his humiliation in front of the Senate occluded Hill's status as a victim of unwanted sexual advances. By the end of the decade being labelled a 'victim' has acquired such a negative patina, associated with weakness and passivity, that the former White House intern emphatically denied she was a victim. The only casualty of the affair who received widespread support was First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, and solely because she braved her degradation stoically without any public display of anguish. In other words, she was a 'good' victim, a victim who refused to be a victim.

Victim-talk and talk about victims are among the most recognizable features of contemporary American politics. This development has been fueled by a conservative campaign to curb the alleged proliferation of individuals and groups who supposedly attempt to secure their status as victims in order to gain various material and psychological rewards. 'Anti-victimists' regard current claims about social injustice as exaggerations at best, and most often as evidence of a large-scale psychological disorder infecting the US with a 'culture of complaint' (Steele, 1990; D'Souza, 1991; Sykes, 1992; Hughes, 1993; Dershowitz, 1994). They charge that the justice system became too lenient towards criminals and too generous with irresponsible plaintiffs, that universities sacrificed merit for bogus cultural diversity, and, most importantly, that the welfare state nourished a class of hopeless dependants.

While the women's movement is a staple target in this crusade to shame and re-blame victims, a group of self-described feminists joined the ranks. These women have made careers, and generated vast public attention, by censuring 'victim feminism' and heralding a new phase of the movement. Feminism certainly needs new paradigms and recruits, but 'anti-victim feminism' (AVF) is not a promising direction.

AVF has been led either by young women in their 20s and early 30s, who imagine themselves to be the vanguard of a rising 'third wave' (e.g. Naomi Wolf, Katie Roiphe, Rene Denfeld), or by older women, often academics, who flirted with feminism at one point or another, but by and large had remained on its outer edge (e.g. Camille Paglia, Christina Hoff Sommers).

Media savvy, their attack is delivered in an entertainingly irreverent style (most notably, Camille Paglia), and is propagated in books, magazine articles, public lectures and on popular talk shows. Even though anti-victim feminists (AVFers) do not share any official organizational ties, their criticisms are remarkably similar. American women, they maintain, are no longer oppressed as a group, and women's progress as individuals is now largely impeded by the women's movement. Victim feminists have 'betrayed' women by demanding unyielding collectivism and nurturing 'maladaptive attitudes' that prevent women from fully enjoying the fruits of the marketplace. This omnipotent 'feminist establishment' is also accused of encouraging 'hysterical moralism', sexual prudery, and stifling legal shields for women. According to AVFers, if women are victims, they are victims of victim feminism.

Victim status is not a position of genuine powerlessness. Victim feminists claim to be defenseless, but actually wield tremendous force through emotional manipulation. To this end, the argument goes, feminists exaggerate or fabricate data dramatizing women's vulnerability to rape, sexual harassment, low self-esteem, anorexia and so forth. AVFers view the victimist frame of mind as a personality disorder, a delusion, or conversely, a cynical deceit. They therefore spend little time critically analysing ideas or political argumentation, preferring instead to engage in psychological commentary. Their solution is rehabilitating individual character. Many of their prescriptions depend not simply upon women adopting abstract 'masculine' traits, but on their emulating actual men's behaviour. Naomi Wolf, for instance, advocates that women discover the benefits of seeing others as a means to an end, and infrequently co-operate by forming investment clubs to exploit the capitalist market. While women should model their behaviour at work on successful businessmen, at home she encourages them to indulge in traditional feminine activities, such as reading fashion magazines, making themselves and their domiciles pretty, and sexually pleasing their men.

AVF presents itself as a rebellion against an older generation of feminists, and simultaneously as the revival of Betty Friedan's feminism as articulated in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), before the movement allegedly veered off course in the early 1970s. It seeks to divorce feminism from its affiliation with the Left, to distinguish it from issues of economic redistribution and other egalitarian causes. AVF seems, at times, to be the latest reincarnation of liberal feminism; but it has endowed those old ideas with a rhetorical edge, a celebratory style reminiscent of identity politics (though this time femininity and heterosexuality are extolled), and the promise of full reconciliation between women and men. It is not surprising, therefore, that AVFers endeavor to unite women by suppressing questions of

ideology. Paradoxically, they also reject the idea that women constitute a distinct class, dismissing gender theories as yet another form of victimism.

This is not the only inconsistency characteristic of AVF. Even while embracing traditional femininity, these critics reject 'difference feminism'. Difference feminism is not, according to AVFers, a reevaluation of the cultural depreciation of the 'feminine', but instead the distorted theory on which feminists have secured neo-paternalistic protections and consequently retarded women's development. In their two-pronged attack on egalitarianism and difference feminism, AVFers imply that both serve to perpetuate (and to excuse) women's inability to make use of their liberty.

AVFers are not the first to question the appropriate role of suffering in feminist politics. The 'victimist' second wave feminists they criticize were themselves troubled by the uses of victimhood in feminist theory and practice. Since the early 1970s, feminists have debated how best to politicize women's conditions, how to balance accounts of oppression and liberation, as well as the risks involved in defining gender or feminist identities around static notions of domination and subjugation. This remains a challenge. Women's emancipation can be neither properly conceived nor actualized if women are considered nothing more than victims. But women will not be fully liberated if we overlook the fact that many women are still discriminated against as women, as the AVFers do by restrictively focusing on the circumstances of the white, middle class in the US. Rather than revitalizing feminism, AVF, as a 'third wave', obliterates it.

Note

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