editorial

106 | re-imagining revolutions

Rutvica Andrijasevic, Carrie Hamilton and Clare Hemmings

In our original call for papers for this issue on 'Revolutions', we foregrounded our interest in reading work that documented revolutionary moments, movements or impulses, and that theorised the difference that gender makes both to revolutions themselves and to how we conceive of them. We were keen to highlight the ways that revolutions are gendered and also how our accounting of and for them makes and extends gendered meanings. As editors of this themed issue of *Feminist Review*, our concern was to think through what might constitute a 'feminist revolution', and what a feminist perspective on revolutions might inaugurate in analytical and political terms. The articles in the following pages make a key contribution to how revolution is conceptualised in relation to gender and the political, asking us to consider ways in which gender is always already part of the revolutionary process and struggle. Hence, these pieces urge us to consider the gendered politics of revolution as concept and practice, and to delve deeper into the figurations of masculinity and femininity that shape the idea of a revolutionary subjectivity.

temporality and location

One way to ask what we might expect from this special issue is to frame the problem of revolutions in terms of temporality. Shifting definitions of revolution and, with them, changing understandings of revolutionary time, caution us against simplistic divisions of revolutionary traditions into socialist, anarchist, liberal, etc. Yet, as a number of the pieces here attest, feminists, like other (would-be) revolutionaries, remain resolutely attached to particular revolutionary traditions, yearning for evidence of women's revolutionary commitment in the past. Feminist activists and theorists today need histories we can live with/by, as well as utopian dreams of 'other worlds' for the future. Thus, many of the interventions are concerned with memories and legacies of revolution. In some cases, younger women look to their elders to provide stories of an earlier, revolutionary feminist tradition to inspire greater radicalism among young feminists today, as does Finn Mackay in her interview with Al Garthwaite for Open Space. In other cases, the inheritance is through women's writing, and may traverse ideological borders. Maria Tamboukou's article

(1–8) © 2014 Feminist Review. 0141-7789/14 www.feminist-review.com

argues that Hannah Arendt—a philosopher whose work celebrated the American liberal revolutionary tradition and engaged in sharp critiques of Marxism—was deeply influenced in her thinking on revolution by the writings of 'Red Rosa' Luxemburg. And moving up towards the present: many of the revolutionary movements and traditions analysed in this issue tend more towards the 'slow burn' rather than 'explosive rupture' model of revolution, promoted by the feminists and anarchists Bice Maiguashca writes about. The approach to revolution among contemporary activists in the Global Justice Movement Maiguashca analyses overlaps with the theories of veteran Italian feminist activist and writer Silvia Federici, whose collection of essays, *Revolution at Point Zero*, is reviewed by Emma Dowling.

The need for a revolutionary history as one basis for imagining a different future is more disturbingly highlighted by examples of historical amnesia. Chiara Bonfiglioli's article 'Red Girls' suggests that one reason the legacy of communist women's activism has been 'written out' of the history of women's activism in contemporary Italy is that the Communist Parties of post-war Western Europe ultimately failed to overthrow the hegemony of liberal and social democracy. Indeed, no assessment of revolutionary thinking, activism and dreaming in the early twenty-first century can ignore the massive ideological and emotional—as well as global political—changes in the wake of the end of the Cold War (Buck-Morss, 2000). Bonfiglioli's enquiry also raises pertinent questions about memory and forgetting in feminist accounts of 'revolution', as she points to second-wave feminists' lack of attention to their foremothers, precisely because of the desire for a different model of revolution from a primarily Marxist-inflected one.

Another question to consider in relation to revolutionary temporalities is: When does a revolution begin, and when does it end? Cuba provides an interesting case here. Carrie Hamilton's interview with Norma Guillard recounts ways that a revolutionary regime that previously ignored or repressed 'taboo' issues—among them homosexuality and racism—now offers official (if still limited) support for 'sexual diversity' and space for discussion of racial differences and oppression. But the tale told by Guillard can also be read as following a particular Marxist script, one that sets revolutionary change in clear stages: eliminate class relations first, and then get onto the stuff of the superstructure (sexism, racism, homophobia). If feminist engagement with revolutionary theory and practice is in part done through the tales we tell ourselves and one another about revolutions past and present, the recent changes in the Cuban revolution, while most welcome, nonetheless reflect an idea of socialist 'progress' that in part justifies the feminist claim that revolutionary movements will always leave the issues of gender until 'after the (real) revolution'. In contrast, the contributions to this volume show the impossibility and inadequacy of thinking and making revolution first and gender second. Thus, Alessandro Castellini's article foregrounds the approach of the Japanese feminist movement *ribu* as more concerned with 'social rupture' than with

a direct challenge to the state, while Clare Hemmings' account of Emma Goldman emphasises the latter's insistence that no challenge to the nation-state can succeed without a broader shift in values. Such approaches as *ribu*'s and Goldman's (as well as Castellini's and Hemmings') require different analytic models as well as objects of analysis, and suggest a continuity to a feminist approach to revolution across time and space.

How we tell stories about revolution from a feminist perspective is always a question of location and temporality. The pieces in 'Revolutions' include case studies of women's revolutionary activism in Italy, Japan and America, as well as personal and political reflections on the ongoing revolutionary processes in Cuba and Egypt. Yet, while located within specific national contexts, the contributions also highlight the ways in which 'national' revolutionary moments are connected to struggles and knowledge in other places. Bonfiglioli's 'Red Girls' in Italy are invested in revolutionary events in Yugoslavia, and Jafari Sinclair Allen's *¡Venceremos? The Erotics of Black Self-Making in Cuba*, reviewed here by Carrie Hamilton, likewise shows the fruitful political, cultural and theoretical exchange between Cuban and US feminist and critical race theory for reimagining the sexual subjectivities of Black Cubans. Nadje Al-Ali's discussion of upheavals in Egypt ties together feminist concerns about gendered and sexual violence across the Middle East. Similarly, Maiguashca's article extends the analysis around the world, examining the relationship between anarchism and feminism in the Global Justice Movement, which brings together activists from south and north, east and west. These political and theoretical exchanges among feminist scholars and activists from different parts of the world reveal a deep commitment to revolution as a transnational movement for change, one that nonetheless draws on local, national and regional knowledge.

At the same time, such a transnational perspective on social and political change extends to how we study revolution and raises important questions of epistemology. Revolution is commonly perceived in terms of an insurrectional model and a split from former structures of oppression, and is approached and studied within a national framework. This is not surprising as often revolutions are directly related to an overhaul of existing governments, leaders or political elites. The articles in this volume suggest an alternative analytical framework, one that is not rooted in the nation-state and that is not primarily conceived of as a total break with the past, but rather one that emphasises long-term transformations.

Since revolution is in the air (as are counter-revolution and despotism), we had nevertheless hoped for more material from present sites of revolt. This relative absence returns us to the question of temporality, namely, that a critical analysis of gender and revolutions is always most likely to be retrospective—a politicised and imaginative process that nonetheless leaves the present strangely unoccupied. This temporal lag of feminist criticism makes the question of how to respond to events in the present both harder and more urgent. The authors in this issue who

reflect most explicitly on contemporary practices of revolution are concerned with 'history in the present', its framing of what is thinkable concerning sexual and gender-based violence in Egypt, for example, or the long (and often under-explored) tension between feminism and anarchism that finds new form. In ways we are delighted with, the articles speak to one another as well, such that Emma Goldman's or Rosa Luxemburg's concerns about gender resonate across more than a century to bubble up in the 1970s Japanese feminist movement, the Global Justice Movement or Revolutionary Feminism. Such a framing of revolutions challenges the compartmentalised categories through which politics—either institutionalised or non-institutionalised—and other formations, such as local or transnational social movements or strikes, as well as revolutions, are commonly studied (McAdam *et al.*, 2001). Most importantly, it allows us to think through connections and interdependencies of events that might seem set apart, but that are in fact deeply intertwined.

All of the pieces here highlight the ways in which a history of revolution that does not take gender—and indeed sexuality and race—into account remains a partial one, marking history through silence. That silence implicates both those engaged in revolutionary writing and action in particular places and times, but it also implicates those who write history as perpetuating such omissions in their own right. The omissions are not only historical, then, but are reproduced in the present again and again, in terms of what counts as 'revolution', yes, but also in terms of whose perspectives can be heard. Even when gender is tabled in discussions on revolution, and some women invited to speak, silences about the differences among women remain in practice and in criticism. While several of the contributions to this special issue explore the relationships between gender, sexuality and class, it is striking that intersectionality—whether as a stated methodology/theory/political commitment (Al-Ali on Egypt) or as an implicit approach (Guillard in Cuba)—comes to the fore in those studies focused on geographical locations and historical moments where racialised subjects are identified as revolutionary actors. In this issue, those places and moments are located in the global south. But what would an intersectional study of feminism and revolution in the European tradition look like? European feminist and revolutionary theories and movements do not ignore race and racism altogether. But the intersections of gender, sexuality, class and whiteness in revolutionary thinking and movements are areas that remain under-explored in these pages and elsewhere.

representation and subjectivity

How we write about revolution from a feminist perspective is, as discussed, a question of place and time, but it is also a question of storytelling and representation. The task of teasing out gendered meanings from the past and present takes our authors into the archive, precipitates interviews and personal

reflections and prompts readings of letters and autobiographies, as well as more canonical texts. These approaches raise the question of a public/private divide, and of the ethics of using letters (usually, though not always, intended to be private) or other 'domestic ephemera' as the basis of a contemporary argument, as has been widely discussed. As postcolonial, feminist and queer historians and literary critics have further argued, representation is a particularly vexed question when we try to narrate experiences of race or sexuality: the archive is already slanted away from the marginal and towards the dominant, and very often one is faced with silence (Anim-Addo, 2004). Thus, representation of other histories, including of intersectional perspectives on revolution, requires the development of alternative methodologies, of reading between rather than on the lines, or creative imagining, as well as painstaking archaeology (Hartman, 2008). As Tamboukou and Hemmings suggest in different ways here, representing and narrating revolution from a feminist perspective will always require looking askance. The question of representation with respect to revolution also foregrounds the (inter)subjective nature of feminist accounts. In this collection, that relational character of enquiry is directly reflected in the inclusion of interview material in both Hamilton's and Mackay's pieces, pointing us to the significance of oral histories in the production and preservation of feminist perspectives on revolution. It is present too in the ways memory and desire play their part in the construction of history for all writers, in terms of both what is sidelined and what is recuperated. Thus, not only do the pieces in 'Revolutions' represent relationships between author and subject in their own right, often explicitly causing pause for thought on the internal dynamics of representation within the archive (however broadly conceived), they further invite readers to position themselves in turn, to consider the importance of location and representation for any revolutionary enquiry.

That focus on relationality offers a methodological and conceptual link between feminism and revolution, opening up an understanding of revolution as process-based rather than simply external. In both Castellini's and Hemmings' articles, the process of self-transformation, of rejecting social norms and embracing alternative politics, is described as part of how revolution and gender are linked. Maiguashca too explores the shared feminist and anarchist commitment to addressing 'internalised oppression' as a central part of revolutionary process in the Global Justice Movement contemporarily, an approach that resonates with 'second-wave' feminist and anti-colonial thinkers' insistence on the importance of working on the self as part of liberation from dominant thinking. Indeed, attention to the psychic dimensions of power and oppression have been significant for feminist and postcolonial accounts of revolution from Goldman through to Fanon (1963) and on to Mitchell (1984) and Khanna (2003). To some extent then, the question of 'the psychic life' of both oppression and revolution is and remains at the heart of feminist accounts—in terms of a challenge to strict Marxist accounts that create a hierarchical temporality of need, as discussed above. While the notion of

'internalised oppression' implies that material inequalities and conservative social structures (such as the heteronormative family) are primarily external structures, psychoanalysis locates the transmission and construction of normative sexual and gender identities at the level of the unconscious itself. If we take the unconscious—and other key psychoanalytical concepts, like fantasy—as central to understanding subjectivity, our understanding of 'change' in the socio-economic-political sphere, and how to achieve it, takes on new dimensions.

Attention to affect, as well as the psyche, bubbles through these accounts. All our writers highlight the importance of emotion in what creates and sustains a revolutionary impetus, but also the centrality of affect for how and why we are drawn to others in the past and present. For a feminist account of revolution, feeling must surely remain key to how we imagine the past and future, as well as how we seek to intervene in our relations with others, the state and processes of transformation. Focusing on intersubjectivity and emotions does not simply reinforce the association of femininity with nurture and pacifism in this issue, but always forces a confrontation with the question of violence. In her interview with Mackay, 1970s self-declared 'revolutionary feminist' Garthwaite identifies violence against women (VAW) as the root cause of women's oppression, and in turn signals this understanding as the defining feature of revolutionary feminism. Al-Ali's careful reflections on the scenes of harassment and violence against women during the uprising in Egypt convey the enormous stakes for women in revolutionary and anti-colonial struggles, and caution us against any temptation to decide which political tradition or movement holds the key to women's emancipation, whether it be socialist, liberal feminist or Islamist. Jonathan Dean's review of Srila Roy's *Remembering Revolution* notes some of these dilemmas in relation to the Indian Naxalbari women interviewed by Roy, many of whom experienced sexual violence and harassment from revolutionary comrades and supporters, as well as from state authorities. But Roy's study adds another important dimension to the research on feminism and revolution: the participation of women in armed insurgencies, including their roles as agents of political violence.

Though often a minority of armed militants, women's participation in insurgency movements across the globe, especially during the apex of far left and postcolonial revolutionary movements of the 1960s and 1970s, provides an intriguing parallel history to the development of second-wave feminism. It also provides an important counterpoint to feminist arguments that women's relationship to violence is primarily as victims of male violence and promoters of peace. While feminists today continue to celebrate iconic revolutionary figures such as Rosa Luxemburg and Emma Goldman, who advocated armed uprising against the capitalist, imperialist state, in practice many of us remain more ambivalent and even troubled by the evidence that some of our contemporaries have forsaken feminists' largely non-violent forms of action to take up arms, and to use them. Hence, while the matter of women's revolutionary agency remains an important consideration

in relation to feminist activism and thought, the articles in this volume push us to question the dichotomies between pacifism and armed struggle, as well as between the private and the political that uphold mainstream conceptualisations of revolution. In doing so, the contributions in this special issue offer a glimpse of different analytical frameworks where similarities and continuities between struggles, locations and political thought can coalesce despite differences in temporality and location.

conclusion

The concern that this Introduction began with—that women's and feminist issues, like the elimination of racism and homophobia, will be left until a future 'after'—reminds us that revolutionary thinking, even when it seeks models and inspiration in the past, is always necessarily forward-looking. Looking beyond this special issue of *Feminist Review* and taking inspiration from innovative work in previous issues (see, e.g., *Feminist Review*, 2011, 2013), we might consider what other dimensions of human or extra-human existence we may wish to bring to the table as feminist revolutionaries. One aspect, addressed directly in Al-Ali's Open Space piece but largely missing elsewhere, is the role of religion, spirituality and faith. The early Third Millennium is a time of significant evidence for the growth of different religious and spiritual movements worldwide. Feminist and queer theorists are increasingly questioning the assumed secularism of the struggles against sexism and homophobia, and the concomitant assumption that institutional religions are uniquely patriarchal, sexist and homophobic.

Even if we remain grounded in the material, 'here on earth', we cannot help but notice that a major development in feminist and other critical thinking and activism over the past decades takes us beyond the anthropocentric inheritance of the European Enlightenment and Humanism (e.g. Braidotti, 2013). Feminists, anarchists and other revolutionaries have a head start on this critique, as the echoes of feminist spirituality, or the participation of animal rights and climate change activists in the Global Justice Movement in the papers by Mackay and Maiguashca remind us. Whether the 'posthuman turn' is conceived as embracing the already evident revolutionary potentials of new technologies, sounding the alarm and writing/acting/living against the devastating impact of human 'progress' on the environment and planet, or recognising the multiple links between human beings and other-than-human animals, it is hard to imagine any revolution for the twenty-first century that takes 'mankind'—or even 'womankind'—as its privileged and isolated subject. Our attachments to, and responsibilities for, the other-than-human—whether spiritual, technological,

environmental or animal—will no doubt be increasingly apparent as feminists continue to theorise and organise for revolution.

references

Anim-Addo, J. (2004) 'Sister Goose's Sisters: African-Caribbean women's nineteenth-century testimony' *Women: A Cultural Review*, Vol. 15, No. 1: 35–56.

Braidotti, R. (2013) *The Posthuman*, London: Polity Press.

Buck-Morss, S. (2000) *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press.

Fanon, F. (1963) *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York: Grove Press.

Feminist Review (2011) *Religion and spirituality*, Issue 97.

Feminist Review (2013) *Water*, Issue 103.

Hartman, S. (2008) 'Venus in two acts' *Small Axe*, Vol. 12, No. 2: 1–14.

Khanna, R. (2003) *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism*, Durham: Duke University Press.

McAdam, D., Tarrow, S. and Tilly, C. (2001) *Dynamics of Contention*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mitchell, J. (1984) *Women, The Longest Revolution: Essays on Feminism, Literature, and Psychoanalysis*, London: Virago.

doi:10.1057/fr.2013.34