everyday struggling

The title of this issue, 'Everyday Struggling', sounds a little awkward, a little odd. It doesn't roll off the tongue, and appears to have too many syllables. 'Everyday Struggles' might have been neater, and its meaning clearer. But despite (or indeed because of) its awkwardness, we settled on this title for the way it highlights the active, ongoing nature of struggle. Struggles are not something only externally imposed, objects to be overcome, but are experienced at a visceral, personal level, and are formative of subjectivity. We liked the image 'everyday struggling' evokes of a wriggling body, never still, always engaged with itself and the world. A struggling body might tighten bonds or loosen them, and everyday struggling may be visible or hidden, vocal or silent. Struggling, then, gives a sense of action more than outcome, an emphasis we felt was awkwardly appropriate to the flavour of the articles included in this issue.

In strikingly different ways, each author interrogates the question of resources, critically examining the relationship between what a body needs for life (for example, health, freedom from violence, shelter, human care and of course economic means) and what one has access to. The shortfall between the two produces everyday struggling in a material sense, and necessitates the use or development of more personal resources, in the form of narrative, testimony, action or reflection. Since it is experienced differently, everyday struggling is also expressed differently for different groups and individuals; this difference raises a further question of representation in each article. The authors in this issue are grappling not only with the various ways in which their research subjects (people or texts) experience and express everyday struggling, but with how to convey this to an external readership. It is an ongoing task to find ways to represent everyday struggling in all its complexity, without solidifying responses as simply transgression or capitulation.

This task of representing everyday struggling is important for feminist work for a variety of overlapping reasons. One reason is simply to keep open the question of how to represent the relationship between resources, experience and narration from a feminist perspective. There has never been a time when feminist thought was not concerned with mapping ways out of oppressive or limiting circumstances – and reasonably so. Yet, while the idea of a structural account (whether singular or multiple) of power and resistance has always seemed rather inadequate to the task of representing what one might call simply tenacity, so too is an approach that searches relentlessly for acts

or moments of resistance that come to stand in for that tenacity. The fetishization of the event or moment as evidence of agency, itself understood as liberation from constraint rather than, say, facility within constraint, seems to dominate feminist work. In focusing on freedom (and its lack), feminist thought seems to lack a vocabulary for analysing the banal horrors of capitulation that mark most people's existence.

The articles in this issue are thus unusual in that they foreground the ways in which everyday struggling cannot be separated out into moments or intentions – 'good' and 'bad', freeing or constraining. The papers indicate not only that agency might not be so simple (that individuals and indeed groups may be active in reproducing the conditions of their constraint, for example), but that the real question that a focus on resources raises is one of survival – what one needs, how one should act, whether and how to continue the next day. As the dialogue pieces so directly remind us in this issue, survival (over and above resistance or agency) is key for the most vulnerable individuals and groups, and many do not survive. But the texts included here also point to the sheer inventiveness of this process of negotiation of resources. In different ways, the articles in this issue insist that we are human insofar, surely, as we tell stories – to ourselves and to others – as a way of becoming and exceeding ourselves. We narrate the world to make it palatable – with strangeness and humour, often – to enable ourselves to be and remain human, and we narrate the world to others in the form of testimony or with the benefit of hindsight, in order to attempt to alter the conditions that shape the narratives we tell.

The disciplinary range reflected in the articles is important for this issue too: it is not just the content, but the mode of representing everyday struggling that gives each article particular resonance. Readers will notice a variety of genres and narrative forms in this issue, and this is not external to the questions opened up here. As a way of negotiating the *confluence* of the social, the everyday and the personal, narrative always exceeds the singular and the uniform. Narrative might be thought of as a way of witnessing everyday struggling, of reflecting on its value, rather than simply reproducing its rigours. Narratives are contradictory as they work to open up and generate new meanings and concurrently they suture meanings and process over. They are also a means though of seeking order and reason so as to generate an illusory experience of wholeness as a means of getting through the day, or indeed a life. Narratives, seemingly unique, reveal the precariousness of human lives and how they are inhabited. As Cavarero asserts telling a narrative requires the 'necessary other' as witness, as audience, as the other human being (who also narrates) to give us the very stuff of our identity (Cavarero, 2000). We are nothing without the other – for each of us is exposed to and dependent on the other for our sense of self. Responsibility to the other – how we understand, narrate, respond – is critical as we need to struggle to allow diverse narratives to make a difference to our perceptions and experiences. Being

surprised and thrown into a different theoretical space is key here for the world cannot be treated as if it is already known and understood.

Diverse, uncomfortable, jagged, pleasurable modes of experience are evoked by the articles in this issue as they represent hurt, conflict, relief and ambivalence (to mention but a few). In Karen Ruddy's careful exploration of Duras's novel *The Lover* ambivalence is an organizing motif. *The Lover* speaks through and from ambivalent desire and pleasure – the desire for a lover who is other in more ways than one – class, race, gender – and in this way matters of miscegenation, racialized desire and bodies are to the fore. This novel simultaneously collides with and subverts social norms. Female desire and pleasures are foregrounded at risk of family dishonour, marginality and shame. With reckless enjoyment Duras's protagonist explores, and pursues, her own pleasures. This could be read as mimicry of male desire but what is re-represented and argued for in this article is that, imitation, though it may be, but crucially this impersonation is undertaken by a white woman who is able to act resolutely on her fantasies to satisfy her desire.

Fulfilment of desire can come at a cost to self and others bringing shame upon oneself and those one loves. Perhaps, more problematically still, feelings of superiority are represented in the articles by Karen Ruddy and Amal Treacher. These two rather different articles allude to how a sense of self can be, indeed is, bolstered through the denigration of the other – in *The Lover* by feeling superior over the servants no matter how poor one is, and in *Children's Imaginings* by an imagined superiority over one's peers and siblings. Vulnerability and hurt are seemingly pushed asunder and on the face of it frailty is apparently pushed into others. Upset can be, and is, caused to others in a variety of ways through the seemingly innocent comment to an act of aggression that is cruel in its consequences.

All of the articles contained in this issue speak of and explore hurt in several ways. In *Promoting Freedom from Poverty*, Diana Zoelle and Jyl Josephson state how hurt is caused by a profound lack of material resources leading to a diminished sense of citizenship; while in *Unreal Women*, Amy Kaler explores the physical pain caused by intercourse and the emotional consequences of 'not feeling like a real woman'. Three articles concentrate in diverse ways on the effects of this hurt on family life: *Independence, Dependency and Inter-dependence* by Khatidja Chantler explores the physical hurt and social alienation felt by African, African-Caribbean, Irish, Jewish and South Asian women, while, from a different angle, the hurt that can be caused by adults and other children is illustrated by *Children's Imaginings*. In *The Ambivalence of Colonial Desire* Ruddy tracks the hurt caused by marginalization and the resolute attempt to overcome the experience of the same.

Hurt, an everyday unspoken and yet nonetheless frequent experience, is an aspect of everyday struggling. It is needless and yet important to point out that

hurt can lead to conflict – both within the self, and between people and that those conflicts can be emotional, social and political. Exploring US domestic policy and how a local organization challenged domestic policy through the use of international human rights law, Zoelle and Josephson highlight both the profound effects of poverty on women and children, and significantly also point to how even the US government may be challenged. The organization – Kensington Welfare Rights Union's actions – emphasise that a legal approach is one way of urging the US to recognize seriously the poverty experienced by many of its citizens and the authors highlight the need for a more expansive human rights approach.

In her article, Chantler explores the effect of domestic violence and resulting conflict for some women living in the north of England. Importantly, it is common experiences that are highlighted in this careful essay and focus is placed on some 'general issues in terms of patterns of racialization and their intersections with domestic violence, class and gender'. Taking on the term – independence – which can be heralded as an automatically good thing within feminist thinking, Chantler explores and interrogates the effects of foisting independence on minority women. For Chantler, conflict cannot be avoided – either among feminists, the organizations that deal with domestic violence, or importantly within the families that have to deal with aggression.

Conflict about the self is also explored by Kaler as she highlights the gap between women's experiences of vulvodynia and social representations. Kaler illustrates how women find diverse resources both within themselves and through others so as to come to terms with their condition. In this account support is found in relatedness with other people – partners, family, web sites and perhaps being interviewed. In Treacher's analysis, mid-childhood is a time of exploration, as children find their way through to being within and outside of the family, and she examines the resultant conflicts that can arise in the attempt to discover and sustain relationships outside of the family. Treacher's article explores the conflicts that arise in relationships and the dynamics that occur from recognizing social constraints.

Alongside conflict, relief as a mode of necessary experience is also a strand within many of these articles: the relief and pleasure gained from speaking one's story, to finding a way out of domestic violence, discovering a politically viable way of challenging domestic policy, of coming to terms with a physical condition or indeed, the relief and pleasure gained from pushing the boundaries of socially constraining representations and narratives. Here, though, relief and pleasure can be experienced simultaneously and also need to be separated out. Relief can be felt by those who are challenging political systems of poverty, of leaving behind a situation of domestic violence or putting into words the experience of

having vulvodynia, but pleasure is perhaps not so available. Duras's protagonist is represented as experiencing pleasure in flouting social boundaries, and similarly the girls' narratives in Treacher's article illustrate pleasure gained in the extraordinary and in stretching everyday experiences to become something else altogether.

The everyday is also about the banal and the tedious as most of us attempt to get through the day with as much energy as we can muster. Lives are not just made out of the extraordinary for ordinary everyday existence (poverty, unfulfilled desire, aggression, conflict, fleeting moments of recognition and relatedness or poverty) is, on the whole, most people's mode of experiencing. As feminist academics and practitioners we have an obligation to recognize the banal, the obvious, in relationship to social and political constraints so that we do not continually reach for that which is seemingly already known. Matters of thinking and judgement are important here and should be rehabilitated differently so that we can think within the tension of constraints and resistance, recognition and misrecognition, of how lives are made and simultaneously subjugated. Hannah Arendt was cognisant of how conflicted and fragmented human beings are and she argued for the importance of the struggle to become a morally accountable agent. In her account this centres on matters of responsibility and judgement – in short becoming and maintaining being a subject who acts and thinks. This recognition calls for judgement, and judgement for Arendt is never final, but is always and by necessity to be woven back into action and woven back into thought. For Arendt it is through persistent thought, judgement and exploration of public life that a decent polity can be recovered. Judgement, action and thought are essential requirements for a different politics to be made and sustained.

The articles in this collection call upon, oblige, the reader to think anew about desire and dissatisfaction, subjection and resistance, power and helplessness and the important ways we all struggle, are struggling, to get through the everyday.

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