



# FEMINISMS IN REVOLUTION

## CALL FOR PAPERS

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## PRÉSENTATION

Feminism *and* revolution: juxtaposing the two terms seems to go without saying. Who could deny that feminism is indeed revolutionary? In the collective consciousness, whether in reference to specific historical sequences or in more general terms, feminism points to a radical transformation in, to start with, social, legal, and cultural relations. Yet, in research as well as in activism, feminism is rarely grasped in and through the angle of its own revolutionary vocation. We often prefer to think feminism *with* other struggles (feminism and class struggle, feminism and antiracism) and/or *in relation to* other forms of oppression (black feminism, intersectional feminism, postcolonial feminism). While highlighting the consubstantiality of modes of domination and resistance, this approach tends, however, to reduce the contribution of feminism to the domain of gender questions, rather than considering it as a transformative political movement in and by itself.

This issue of *Comment s'en sortir ?* proposes to put back on the agenda the ambition of revolutionary change embodied by feminism. For us, the analytical privilege of feminism is based on its power to reveal simultaneously the potentialities and the limits of revolutionary thought and process. We propose to no longer consider feminism as the section dedicated to “gender questions” in a larger emancipatory politics, or the “female version” of revolution, but to understand its necessary contribution to all revolutionary thought, to every attempt to disrupt the order of things. How does transforming the family, sexuality, organisation of social and biological reproduction, domestic or affective work, entail a revolution of the everyday life, of health, culture, wage labour, housing, collective life, industrial strategies, finances, and vice versa? In other terms, we are looking for contributions that envisage feminism as a constituting power, not as an amendment strategy of already constituted powers.

The issue deploys three lines of investigation: historical enquiries on the revolutionary forms of feminism and/or feminism in revolutionary contexts; analyses that geographically decenter and decolonize the revolutionary question starting with non-European feminisms; and, thirdly, time and space aside, the line of feminist utopias and uchronias.



# THEMES

## ▪ **Herstories/histories of revolutionary feminism:**

One of the aims of this issue is to contribute to a remapping of a genealogy of feminist struggle in the heart of (rather than alongside or in addition to) emancipatory struggles. This history of emancipation includes several revelatory moments when tensions and aspirations condensed, moments of action and intellectual agitation, namely the great revolutionary episodes: the French revolution, the Paris Commune, the Soviet revolution, etc. Even if feminist historiography has dedicated studies to all of these tumultuous periods, we do not yet have a global perspective on feminism in revolution. Such a perspective would unveil the contextual and structural parallels between different ways of thinking about and working towards the participation of feminist struggle in the revolutionary process, as well as revealing the concrete theoretical and political lineages, connections and circulations between different experiences of revolutionary feminism. On the occasion of the centenary of the Revolution of 1917, we propose to initiate a reflection on these topics.

The context calls for consideration of the intimate connections between feminism and the perspective of the socialist revolution, the “communism to come” (Bebel, 1975 ; Zetkin, 2015). It has become customary to affirm that despite contributing to political progress and legal and economic achievements Marxist feminism was limited by a founding vision in which the struggle between the sexes remained a secondary one with regard to class struggle. This view needs to be re-examined in the light of a re-reading of the historical relations between feminism and socialism. How were the relations between class oppression and gender oppression theorized? What kind of alliance strategies were set up to promote the interests of women as women and not only as members of the working class? To what extent did the critique of (bourgeois) feminism contain the definition of another feminism rather than a straightforward rejection of it?

Special attention will be given to proposals addressing the key moment of the Soviet revolution, characterized as it was by a rich debate on the “woman question”, on communism’s “sexual morals”, the decline of the family (correlative of the decline of the State), the socialization of housework and the education of children, etc. (Goldman, 1993 ; Kollontai, 1977 ; Warshofsky Lapidus, 1978). We also welcome contributions exploring the “failed revolutions” (Germany, Hungary) or the modalities of the progressive autonomization of the problem of the women’s liberation as well as sexual and homosexual emancipation (Guérin, 2013) in the Marxist movements after the Second World War, especially in Workerism and Italian Autonomism (Federici, 2012).

## ▪ **Decolonizing Revolution, Decentering Feminism:**

The fact that the Soviet Revolution took place at the margins of the capitalist West, rather than at its center, and that it triggered anti-imperialist imaginations and struggles on a global scale, reminds us that such a study of “feminism in revolution” should itself be (geographically) *global*. It cannot fail to analyze, on an equal share, the revolutionary struggles that have unfolded in the non-European world, up to the most recent.

Over the past few decades, Western theories of emancipation, most notably Marxism, have not escaped the postcolonial imperative of “provincializing Europe” (Chakrabarty, 2000), thus revealing the need for decolonizing *the theory and historiography of revolutions*. In this respect, the idea of a radical break with the past, which has been pivotal to European revolutionary thought for the last centuries, may have appeared inadequate to think of struggles for emancipation beyond the West. If so, how does it impact the very definition of feminism in non-European countries? In addition, such a notion of revolution as rupture, although challenging the view of a linear and homogeneous progress, nonetheless often remained dependent on an *evolutionist* conception of history. To what extent postcolonial/decolonial feminisms has helped to disrupt a (historicist) notion of *r-evolution* according to which non-European women can have no model other than their European “emancipated” counterparts, and, as a result, are required to follow in their footsteps. Finally, given that the idea of revolution has increasingly be linked to the concept of *desire*, the issue is also to examine



how decolonizing feminism has entailed a redefinition of desire and sexuality, as well as a criticism (not to be reduced to a form of archaism) of the prominent role given to them in white feminism.

Considering the manifold (anti-Eurocentric) critique of Western-white feminism, turning to non-European histories and thoughts on women's emancipation may reveal crucial. Case studies are numerous: socialist and anti-imperialist revolutions in semi-colonial situations (China, Cuba); national-anticolonial struggles for liberation (Algeria, India, Angola, etc.); the overthrow of postcolonial-authoritarian regimes (Arab Spring) (Mestiri, 2016); to which one can add the case of internal struggles led by national-racial minorities from within revolutionary organizations in Western countries (the United States especially) (Davis, 1981). Just as such revolts and revolutions has required critical appropriations, translations and "nationalization" of revolutionary theory and practice (Dirlik, 1989) long before the emergence of postcolonial critique, women's demands and struggles for emancipation that developed in such contexts produced, ahead of their time, a *decentering of feminism*, the genealogy of which is still to be written.

- **Feminist utopias-uchronias... and revolutionary melancholia:**

In spite of the historical and geographical rootedness of feminist politics and the strategic and theoretical issues they involve, feminism carries "timeless" and "spaceless" dreams and imaginations, probably more than any other emancipation movement. From Fourier to Ursula Le Guin, utopia touches upon the space of repressed desires and unconscious aspirations; and feminism puts forward an extraordinary transformation of the imaginary, owing to its ambitions of radically changing the intimate sphere, the forms of sexualities, and all that governs the genesis of our identities: our socializing environment. The issue here is to reexamine feminist narratives and experiences that endeavored to embody the unimaginable: rewritings of history, fictional societies, alternative communities, etc. In the domain of sex-gender relations, the great revolutionary episodes of the past triggered the development of emancipatory utopias and uchronias, which were sometimes translated into radical social experiments, especially urban and architectural ones.

There are still lessons to be learned from such *concrete utopias*, precisely insofar as they were generally subject to subsequent repressions that established them as the bad conscience of the revolution. In the realm of feminism, perhaps more than elsewhere, the experience of failures and defeats has given rise to a "left melancholy" that should not be considered only negatively, because it also offers "an access to the memory of the conquered, that reconnects with the expectations of the past, which have remained incomplete and are waiting to be reactivated" (Traverso, 2016). In this respect, utopias and uchronias are still valuable resources for present and future struggles for emancipation.

## DEADLINES AND CONTACTS

To propose an article, please submit an abstract up to 5 000 characters and, in a separate file, a presentation of the author, including your name(s), discipline, contact details and a short biography (up to 1 000 characters) to : [redaction@commentssortir.org](mailto:redaction@commentssortir.org).

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