

## Editorial

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We welcome you to the inaugural issue of *Feminist Dissent*. For many of us, it is the fruition of a long journey of struggle and dissent against fundamentalism and racism in a new global capitalist order where gender is increasingly instrumentalised to sustain power. But more importantly, *Feminist Dissent* is a new beginning. We hope you will join us as readers, contributors and interlocutors, both supporting and challenging us to create a genuine space of analysis and dissent.

We believe that the consolidation of religious fundamentalism globally is occurring at the same time as there is increasing control of borders and migration, organized along gender, race and class lines. This is happening at a time of renewed worldwide financial crisis. This contemporary confluence of a new series of crises has exposed a deep chasm in academic and activist thinking about gender and race as deeply articulated and intersectional. It is in this chasm, this constitutive contradiction that is shaping politics on the ground and work in academia today, that *Feminist Dissent* seeks to intervene in and challenge. Our hope is that *Feminist Dissent* will offer new modes of critique and analyses of the contemporary conjuncture, and particularly shed light on the multi-faceted connections between gender and fundamentalism.



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For us, “feminist dissent” also means dissenting from each other and showcasing genuine nuanced debate, including disagreement, in the journal in a way that is missing from the current polarised nature of discussion around these issues. So although we share commonalities in our positions, those involved in the editorial collective come with a variety of perspectives. We understand and recognise these are complex issues. We believe it is important to find new ways of speaking with each other, including with those with whom we do not necessarily agree, and be open to shifting approaches and positions.

This first issue is an introduction, a flavour of things to come, of the sorts of pieces that we would like to publish and the diverse formats – written, audio, visual – that the journal will utilise. In this issue, we feature two long articles, poetry, fiction, art works and four shorter, more experiential, pieces. Of those longer essays, the essay “Why Feminist Dissent” by Varma, Dhaliwal and Nagarajan sets out the historical and political context within which our understanding of dissent and our focus on gender and fundamentalism has emerged. We elaborate on a definition of fundamentalism and lay out an argument for taking on the challenges to dissent that we currently face. Alison Assiter’s piece “Why Universalism” underscores the importance of universalism and a human rights framework and charts a challenge to cultural and religious relativism and religious identity politics. These are themes that we anticipate will reverberate throughout future issues of this journal. Subsequent issues will look in more depth at the analytical importance of the categories

“fundamentalism” and “secularism”, at fundamentalism in the state, at postsecularism, at the impact of fundamentalism on sexualized minorities, at the Prevent agenda and at religion in the sphere of education.

The longer essays in this issue are interspersed with poetic interventions by Akhil Katyal and Rahila Gupta, about the Hindu Right and the Islamic Right respectively. We are grateful to Jackie Kay for being able to republish a chapter of her book *Red Dust Road* in which she recounts the first meeting with her Evangelical Christian birth father. These creative interludes are folded in alongside four short essays that reflect our commitment to bringing through personal political accounts of people’s struggles with fundamentalism and tensions with religious agendas within both left and right wing political spaces, across state and civil society. In this first issue, Kindy Sandhu speaks about “the faith agenda” in the UK by narrating her personal experience of being asked to represent Sikh women at a police consultative forum that largely comprised male religious leaders; Mubarak Bala writes about his personal journey from Islamist to free thinker while growing up in northern Nigeria; Yasmin Rehman reflects on the narrowing of cultural spaces and the rise of fundamentalist attacks on music and dance within the diasporic Pakistani community; and Stephen Cowden presents his critical reflections on a panel at the last Historical Materialism conference which defended Islamic Right formations and criticized secular feminist organisations. This is followed by Shakila Maan’s interview with Yousif Naser whose provocative paintings about the Iraq War are an important visual structure for the

articles within this issue. Finally, the Reviews section covers the book *Women Against Fundamentalism: Stories of Dissent and Solidarity*; and the films *Spotlight* and *The World Before Her*.

*Feminist Dissent* has been brought to life by the support, encouragement and assistance of many people and organisations but particularly an Editorial Collective comprising thirteen activists and academics whose determination has pushed this new journal on gender and fundamentalism out in to the world. We owe a debt of gratitude to the Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies at the University of Warwick that has so kindly agreed to host and nourish the journal and has provided administrative and intellectual support. We were fortunate to receive a grant from the Warwick Impact Fund. This grant enabled us to put together a number of workshops where we were able to think through many topics of relevance to academics, activists, and cultural practitioners, and which we plan to consolidate as future issues of this journal. The Impact Fund also enabled us to launch the journal at an event that was hosted and organized by Sonia Mehta of the South Asian Women's Creative Collective (SAWCC) London at the Rich Mix community arts centre in east London and we are grateful for Sonia's unerring support and interest in the journal. We would also like to thank the Centre for the Study of Women and Gender and the GRP in International Development at the University of Warwick for further financial support, and Roxanne Bibizadeh for her invaluable editorial assistance. Finally, this journal would

literally not have been possible without the generous support of Yvonne Budden, the Head of Scholarly Communications, at the University of Warwick Library, and we are very grateful to her.

We hope you enjoy this issue, and will come back for more.

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**Chitra Nagarajan** is an activist who has worked to promote and protect human rights, particularly those of women, in China, the United Kingdom, the United States and west Africa. She currently works to build peace in Nigeria. She writes a blog based on her work and activism.

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