Feminism today is both recognizable and un-recognizable: its fast-changing pace of renewal, and the geographical and generational scope of its diffusion are transforming feminist practices, discourses and priorities as we knew them. However, much of it also remains familiar to scholars of feminism: not only the claims contemporary feminists are making but also the emotions that fuel feminism and the emotions that feminism ignite are recognizable to us. The anger, the joy, the fierceness, the wonder and the hope, but also the defiance, bitterness and anger among feminists are all emotions that have shaped and continue to shape feminist attachments (Ahmed, 2014). This special issue proposes to focus on emotions as a productive site to observe, analyse and interrogate feminism, its potentialities and its transformations. By which emotions is feminist activism sustained, inhibited or transformed? The various contributions to this special issue all investigate and reflect on the nature and the role of emotions in feminist activism. What are feminist emotions? How do they contribute to coalition building, intersectional practices or feminists’ political imagination? Conversely, how do they prevent coalition or intersectional work, reproduce and secure asymmetrical power relations among feminists?

Emotions have been a central site of investigation and conceptualization for feminist theory. Feminist philosophy and epistemology have reclaimed emotions as proper grounds for producing knowledge (Code, 1993; Jaggar, 1989). Feminist theorists have engaged thoroughly with emotions, contributing centrally to the affective turn in social science (Ahmed, 2010, 2014; Davis, 2015; Ngai, 2005; Pedwell and Whitehead, 2012), and emphasizing the role of emotion in the practice of theorization. Emotions such as rage (Ahmed, 2014) and passion (Braidotti, 1991) have been identified as stimulating and sustaining feminist theorization. Feminist theorizations of emotions are also productive sites of inquiry into how emotions shape feminist engagement and imagination (Hesford, 2009). As such, feminist scholars have investigated emotions as a way to renew the conceptualization of the subject of feminism as embodied, located and relational (Liljestrom, 2016). They have also questioned how emotions may elicit feminist solidarity (Hemmings, 2012; Luna, 2010) and question the dangers emotions are fraught...
with as they collide with identities, differences and power (Ahmed, 2010; Cole and Luna, 2010; Lorde, 1984). Feminist emotions are always at the same time political practices and objects of theoretical inquiry. In parallel to these developments in feminist theory, collective emotions have thus been for a long time a privileged site of investigation in studies of feminist movements (Hercus, 1999; Hesford, 2013; Taylor, 1996). Research on feminist activism has complexified the mainstream and rational approach of emotions in social movements by showing how emotions can be worked on (Taylor, 1996; Whittier, 2009) and liberated (Flam, 2005) in and by social movements. It has shown that emotions and emotion cultures are crucial to the construction of a collective identity (Rupp and Taylor, 2003) and for the possibility of collective (in)action (Flesher Fominaya, 2015). Research situated in this field of social movements studies approach emotions as both the conditions and the product of collective action: collective emotions are embedded in activists’ cultures, rituals and practices which shape, fuel and also prevent mobilization and coalitions (Reger, 2004).

The contributions to this special issue continue the approach adopted by feminist scholars and propose a complex understanding of the role that emotions play in feminist collective mobilization. Indeed, the articles presented here consider emotions as part of feminist relations, feminist work, conflicts and identities. They survey and analyse emotions as they bind or separate feminists, as they promote alliances or prevent them. The contributions underscore the dual nature of emotions in feminist movements: emotions are understood here as both a vehicle and a mode of power within movements, and, in the vein of Arlie Hochschild’s conceptualization (Hochschild, 1979), as a type of work performed by feminists. These two dimensions are not exclusive one of the other. Quite the contrary: because emotions express and relay power they need to be policed and managed within movements that strive for inclusivity. The various case studies presented in this special issue show that emotions are performed and policed, and therefore are the object of activists’ work, in the first place to enrol feminist subjects with emotions such as care and empathy (see article by Ruault), hatred and mysandrie (Védie) or nostalgia about the past (Quéré). Emotional work is also performed to sustain feminist alliances with specific emotional repertoires linked to coalitions (Whittier) and intersectionality (Calderaro and Lépinard), or, on the contrary, to sustain hierarchies within the movements (Chamberlain and Evans). Through emotion work, feminist activists attempt to establish or to disestablish hierarchies within feminist movements and the articles in this special issue explore the various ways in which emotions are used and shaped to do so.

First, the articles research understudied feminist emotions. Anger, fear, hope and grief are common emotions documented by social movements scholars (Kleres and Wettergren, 2017; Stierl, 2016). However, some emotions are underinvestigated by feminist and emotion scholars, or too often analysed as hurting or hindering protestors and activism (Jasper, 2011). This special issue is an opportunity to focus on such emotions. The paper by Léa Védie proposes to reconsider hatred, often framed as paralyzing for collective action, and offers a more contextual account of how it works and can combine with other emotions. Through the case of Valerie Solana’s Scum manifesto reception in France in the 1970s, Léa Védie sheds light on the empowering effects of claimed hatred for feminists. Studying metaphorical hatred as a stigma reversal strategy, she argues that it
subverts the norm of feminine respectability that constrains feminist activism, and that it makes feminist anger audible.

Focusing as well on the French context of the second wave, Lucile Ruault’s article discusses how another range of emotions, such as affection, mutual trust and caring, are embodied through and by collective action. Her study of the French Movement for the liberty of abortion and birth control (MLAC) which promoted non-medicalized practices of abortion shows how they transformed gendered dispositions into resources for a feminist activism dedicated to ‘direct action’ and ‘everyday life politics’. She analyses the intense emotional labour undertaken by these organizations and the centrality of bodily practices and experiences in their repertoire of action as mechanisms of political socialization that sustained feminist activism even after abortion was made legal. While gendered disposition towards care and empathy have sometimes been dismissed as improper or useless for political work, with scholars insisting on the liberating quality of improper feminine emotions such as rage and anger (Reger, 2004), Ruault shows that when embodied in political practices, these gendered repertoires of feminist practice can help enrol unlikely activists into feminism.

Continuing with the study of specific feminist emotions, Lucile Quéré’s article explores the production of nostalgia as central to contemporary feminisms and reveals the kind of collective identity it implies in the case of the contemporary feminist movement around gynaecological self-help. She examines the interlocking of emotional work and memory work which produces nostalgia for an imagined feminist past characterized by a fantasized solidarity between women. The anchoring of nostalgia in movement practices, in particular through the ritualized repetition of vaginal self-examination, reveals the hope for a unified feminist subject over the body and obscures the reproduction of inequalities within feminist mobilizations. Hence, emotions in feminist self-help activism are worked upon to induce nostalgia for a feminist past which obscure contemporary power asymmetries.

Feminist nostalgia is also the focus of Elizabeth Evans and Prudence Chamberlain who propose a critical look at the use of this emotion in contemporary UK feminist activism. Drawing on an analysis of White popular feminism seized by a discourse analysis of two major British newspapers’ coverage of feminism, they argue that current White feminist nostalgia for radicalism and sisterhood is ‘not reaching for a past utopia of activism, but instead, enacting a flawed remembering as a form of criticism of the present’. They highlight the role of neoliberal feminism and femonationalism in the production of White feminist nostalgia and ultimately underline how nostalgia counters the emphasis on inclusivity and performs an erasure of intersectional issues.

Second, the articles address more specifically the links between emotions and intersectionality in activism. Scholarship on intersectional practices and coalitions has focused so far mainly on understanding the political dynamics of intersectional solidarity (Ciccia and Roggeband, 2021; Evans and Lépinard, 2020) with an eye to how differences are represented, and how marginalized groups are included (Strolovitch, 2007; Townsend-Bell, 2011) and to the repertoires of intersectional practices used by movements (Chun et al., 2013; Evans, 2016; Laperrière and Lépinard, 2016; Lépinard, 2014; Zavella, 2017). Somehow emotions have thus far not been central to these reflections (for an exception,
see Cole and Luna, 2010; Nash, 2013) while contemporary feminist movements do offer a particularly heuristic terrain for such an exploration. Study on anti-racism in feminist groups has for instance showed how feminist emotions can reproduce power relations within organizations and hinder discussions of race (Hemmings, 2012; Srivastava, 2006). The growing literature on intersectionality as a feminist praxis in organizations and coalitions invites us to question further the links between emotions and resistance to (and reproduction of) the interlocking of power relations.

Reviewing a growing body of literature on feminist coalitions, Nancy Whittier explores how emotions sustain or disrupt coalitions. Building on social movement theory of emotions, she shows the emotional side of intersectional solidarity, underlining how emotions cultures and histories of trust and bonding across racial divides and inequalities make or break coalitions. She also insists on how emotion work, movements rituals fostering collective shared emotions are a crucial part of coalition work.

In their paper, Charlène Calderaro and Éléonore Lépinard ask to what extent the adoption of intersectionality as a new feminist discourse and identity transform emotion work and implies new feeling rules in feminist activism. Exploring recent feminist mobilizations in France and Switzerland, they show how the adoption of intersectionality as more central to feminist activism that it used to be in these two contexts entails on the part of white activists new feeling rules and the desire/need for self-educating on issues of racism, while the emotions that non-white feminist activist entertain with intersectionality are more ambivalent, due to their perception of the appropriation of the concept by white feminists.

Together, these articles re-emboby protest by addressing the richness and complexity of how emotions are mobilized and played out in feminist movements. Acknowledging the interdisciplinary nature of the research engaging with feminist emotions, this special issue spans various disciplines in order to grasp the multidimensionality of feminist emotions. The case studies presented in this special issue document the role of feminist emotions by covering five different national contexts of feminist activism – Belgium, France, the United Kingdom, the United States and Switzerland – and two different historical periods – second wave feminism and contemporary feminist activism – as well as a variety of feminist mobilizations. This special issue shows the range of emotions at stakes and how they shape feminist relations as they relay or transform power relations among feminists. It paves the way to study in more detail and depth emotion work among feminists, as a core element of feminist activism, one which aims at regulating and policing feminist relations, through emotions, be it to legitimize forms of power and authority, through nostalgia for example, or on the contrary to challenge existing asymmetries of power, through the adoption of new emotional repertoires.

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