

**Contrasting Debates and Perspectives from
Second and Third Wave Feminists in Britain:
Class, Work and Activism**

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Abstract

The dissertation rests firstly on the author's previously published work (German, 1989; German, 2007; German, 2013) which attempted to analyse the position of women in British society in terms of their relationship to class, work and oppression; and secondly on original research in the form of interviews with a number of Second Wave and Third Wave feminists, which aimed to elicit their responses to a variety of questions in relation to class, women's role at work, and feminist activism. The aim is to contrast the expectations and influences of the different generations of feminists in order to understand what has motivated them and what issues continued to be important for them. The research investigates differences between the two groups of women, considering the extent to which this reflects the different economic and social circumstances in which they were shaped politically. It argues that there is a strong ideological commitment to women's equality across the different age groups, itself based on the inability of successive generations to achieve full equality, but that there are considerable differences of approach to activism and campaigning priorities, as well as to some theoretical questions. It considers the extent to which the Third Wave reflects a fragmentation from Second Wave approaches. It argues that the continued centrality of class in understanding women's oppression and other forms of oppression is related to the discrepancy between the expectations of oppressed groups for equality and capitalism's structural inability to deliver such equality.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background to the Research

Modern feminism arose in the late 1960s and helped to shape women's lives over the ensuing decades. It was a movement for social justice and equality, arising from the great social movements of the 1960s against racism and war. The Women's Liberation Movement and its gains impacted on a large number of women in the United States and Britain; in the latter, it was accompanied by a general social liberalisation. In the space of a few years legislation such as the Abortion Act (1967), the Divorce Reform Act (1969), The Equal Pay Act (1970) and the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) were among those reforms which brought real change to women's lives. These legal and social changes resulted in women today having a very different set of experiences and assumptions about work and their personal lives in comparison to those growing up in the 1960s. Major social gains, such as access to wide areas of work, much greater control over fertility and childbirth, and recognition of the central importance of education to women, which characterised the last third of the 20th century, led to significant changes in women's lives.

However, there was sufficient concern at continuing inequality and discrimination experienced by women to generate new forms of feminism, as well providing a continuing rationale for 1960s feminism. While some of the demands of that movement seemed to have been realised, particularly the right of women to work outside the home and to have some control over their personal lives, the fulfilment of these demands fell very far short of what had originally been envisaged. Some demands, such as freely available state-funded childcare, seem to have disappeared from the agenda completely. Legislative changes have been very important in changing practice and attitudes, but they have been limited in their goals and achievements. Women's position at work and in society remains unequal (Slater

and Gordon, 2013; TUC, 2014). The existence of continued inequality therefore became a major concern, and a renewed interest in feminist ideas developed, with new strategies offered as solutions to the problems still facing women. This was reflected in a new feminism, sometimes called ‘Third Wave’ feminism in contrast to the ‘Second Wave’, the term used to describe the women’s movement that came into being as part of the great social transformations of the late 1960s.

1.2 Motivation and Contribution

My interest in researching this area comes from my own background as part of the Second Wave generation. The ‘natural history’ of the project (Silverman, 2013) arises from my long-term involvement in the debates and activities of Second Wave feminism and the socialist movement. The decision to embark on the research was stimulated by my employment as a university lecturer, and a desire to deepen my understanding of these issues. I experienced Women’s Liberation from its early years as a political activist and campaigner. As such I was involved in issues such as the National Abortion Campaign, equal pay strike support, and campaigning for the pathbreaking Grunwick strike of Asian women in the late 1970s. I took part in one of the first International Women’s Day demonstrations in the early 1970s, which marched in the footsteps of the suffragette Sylvia Pankhurst through East London, and was present at a number of meetings and conferences on the subject throughout the 1970s. In the latter half of the 1970s I was part of the Women’s Voice organisation, and was for a short time in the late 1970s to early 1980s, editor of the Women’s Voice magazine.

New writing on women’s liberation, which was pathbreaking for many women of my generation and heavily influenced the development of my ideas, included work by Greer (1970), Koedt (1970) and Rowbotham (1973, 1974). For many years I have been writing and speaking on issues of class and feminism, from a Marxist perspective, and have been engaged

in debate and discussion with a range of different feminists. This has continued through having contact with younger feminists in the course of my current campaigning work against war and austerity. Therefore I come to this research from a position of long-term involvement in the activism connected with the Women's Liberation Movement, and close contact with the ideas and debates which have informed much of feminism for nearly fifty years.

Over the course of these decades of activity I have written widely on the subject of women's liberation and feminism, and on women's role in society. Part of the submission of this thesis are three books, published between the late 1980s and 2013 (German, 1989, 2007 and 2013). *Sex, Class and Socialism* (1989) was an analysis of the changing position of women. It considered the theoretical and organisational basis of the women's movement, the history of women in trade unions and the Labour Party, the campaign for the vote, different theories of the family, locating them in relation to women's position today, and in the changing nature of women's work. The second publication, *Material Girls* (2007) continued to analyse a number of these themes, considering sexuality, the 'male crisis', women at work and in the family, and the balance sheet of feminism and socialism in relation to women. *How a Century of War Changed the Lives of Women* (2013) developed some of the themes from *Material Girls* looking at modern feminist attitudes to war, and interviewing a range of women affected by war and campaigning against it, including Second Wave feminists.

It was clear to me in considering the research that many of the assumptions about feminism and about women's lives held by those of us from the Second Wave generation no longer applied in the same way today, and that younger generations' interpretation of feminism appears to be considerably different. This stimulated an interest in comparing two generations of feminists and in particular focusing on the relevance of class and feminism.

1.3 Aims of new research and formulation of questions

Building on my published research, the aim of the new research is to investigate the continuities and differences of the Second and Third Waves in relation to women, work and feminism. The form of the new research is interviews conducted with six Second Wave feminists and six Third Wave feminists. The new research investigates the attitudes of feminists who had been part of the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and looks at the extent to which they have changed or been influenced by different material, political and ideological circumstances. It considers the differences and continuities between Second and Third Wave feminists. The Second Wave feminists were selected on the basis of being prominent campaigners from the 1960s and 1970s, as writers, speakers and organisers, and of continuing to play some role in these fields. The Third Wave feminists were also selected on the basis of playing some public role as writers, campaigners or speakers, although as is discussed later they are more difficult to identify. The interviews form the central part of the new research, and the political and theoretical analyses held by the interviewees are organised from a number of different thematic standpoints. They are reinforced both by the submission of my original texts, and by a review of literature on aspects of class and feminism, reflecting on women's position at work and in society today, and discussing how that impacts on feminism.

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the ideas and practice of these two generations of feminists, looking at the continuities and contrasts between them. It examines the extent to which Third Wave feminists see themselves as inheritors of the earlier wave, and to what extent the issues of oppression and inequality, which motivated the Women's Liberation Movement, still resonate today. In researching the contrasts in debates and perspectives over issues of class, work and activism, the aim was to understand the issues which motivate the

different groups of feminists. The continued expression of feminist ideas among a younger layer of political activists, the patent discontent and impatience that a number of them feel towards the slow pace of change for women, and the seemingly intractable problems of sexism and women's oppression, suggests that the aims of Second Wave feminism are very far from having been achieved. I wanted to interrogate both generations about why they thought this was the case, and what were the continuing obstacles to such change.

A series of questions were formulated to enable me to explore these themes. The questions were different for each generation, and I expected that in both sets of cases they would provide a starting point for further investigation of these themes. While there were obvious topics that suggested themselves, such as influences of class and of feminist thought, the impact of working class women's campaigns on feminists, and the attitudes of each generation to the other's campaigning priorities, it also became apparent that unanticipated themes arose, including attitudes to racism, and generational conflicts over issues related to sex work, for example.

Questions to Second Wave feminists included: What were the issues which led you to an understanding of women's politics and social oppression? What manifestations of women's oppression influenced your thinking on the question? Was women's oppression your starting point in politics? Was class a factor in your understanding of oppression or did/do you regard them as analytically separate? Did you have experience of working class organisations, such as the Labour Party or trade unions? These questions formed the starting point of a discussion which ranged over a number of issues including race, education, activism and experience at work, the legacy of Second Wave feminism, its impact and connection with Third Wave, and what they could learn from the younger generation.

Questions to Third Wave feminists were recalibrated to include: What first made you aware of feminism, and what have you learnt from the First and Second Wave? Was your initial political involvement over issues of women's oppression or were you drawn to other social issues? Did you have experience of working class organisations? Have you been involved in debates on the question of class? Have you modelled your ideas/activity on Second Wave feminism? What do you see as the key legacy of previous feminisms? Further, discussions on sex work, racism and intersectionality and women's appearance all flowed from the initial questions. The aim of the questions was to develop a series of themes, to understand the different influences on the women, especially in relationship to class and feminism (See Appendix 1 for full list of questions).

1.4 Gains, Consolidation and Backlash: the context

Whereas Second Wave feminism had been present almost at the beginning of women's mass entry into work and in education, younger generations found themselves in a different place. The restructuring of work in the era of neoliberalism has had a major impact on women and their class position. The general picture since the 1980s has been of a drawing of women into the workforce internationally, but not always in the most favourable circumstances. There has been a growth in work intensification, higher levels of inequality between classes (Dorling, 2014), and a polarisation in the class and economic position of women internationally. The process which began in Britain in the 1980s, when mothers of young children started to see full-time work outside the home as the norm rather than the exception, has led to growing pressures on women. While women have continued to enter the workforce at a rapid pace they have done so against a background of intensified workplace and social pressures. There is a growing recognition that wives and mothers are now an accepted part of the workforce, however the message from wider society is a contradictory one. There is a tacit demand from

society's political and media representatives that their labour market participation cannot be allowed to disrupt the central role of the family and women's role in it. While women are expected to be part of the labour force, they enter it on very different terms from men, because their domestic role is still a major factor in influencing their work outside the home, and their domestic responsibilities remain largely their private concern and responsibility.

While Second Wave feminism coincided with the beginning of this drive for women to work outside the home, and many of the issues that arose from this condition gave impetus to that movement, the acceptance of such feminist responses has not necessarily been either smooth or universal. There were discernible signs of two distinct developments by the early 1990s. The first development was a reaction against a number of the gains of women's liberation from the 1960s and 1970s. This was clearly and definitively spelt out by the US author Susan Faludi in the appropriately named *Backlash* (1991). Further, a series of writings questioned some of the main tenets of women's liberation from a feminist point of view; there was a sense that feminism was leading to damaging relations between men and women (Coward, 1999), or even overstating male violence towards women (Roiphe, 1993). The second development was a form of feminism which stressed empowerment, role models and individual achievement. It seemed that this new form of feminism had made its peace with an idealised capitalism, where class divisions had been replaced with a celebration of diversity. It was argued that there was much positive for women in the new opportunities at work, and they should embrace the modern neoliberal world and find the major means for their liberation in their individual lifestyle choices. Women should see their campaigns as stressing improving material conditions rather than being too conflictual (Walter, 1999; Wolf, 1993). According to this view career, education, consumerism, hold the key to emancipation in a globalised world with seemingly infinite choices. While women were encouraged, in Naomi

Wolf's words, to embrace 'power feminism', it seemed that the possibility of breaking into new and exciting careers on the same basis as men was available for many women. The analysis accepted in these accounts was one which emphasised mainstream equality rather than wider social change.

However, these ideas were strenuously contested. There were important alternatives to this approach to 'power feminism', which instead pointed to injustices in work, to the existence of growing inequalities and to the hard lives of those excluded from the benefits of globalisation or to the increase in paid domestic labour (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003; Rowbotham and Linkogle, 2001; Cox, 2006; Ehrenreich, 2002). There were significant critiques of consumerism (Fine and Leopold, 1993) which stressed the extent to which this consumerism was geared to women becoming working mothers and having to buy goods and services to substitute for unpaid labour previously carried out in the home.

The critiques of neoliberal society with regard to women's role did not necessarily centre on economic inequality. Issues of sexism, 'raunch culture', the objectification of women, became more visible. 'Power feminism' might have reflected the access some women obtained to work and a reasonable income, but it had also generated a new set of problems to do with men's and wider social attitudes to women's appearance and behaviour. Faludi (1999) challenged the idea that women were now in a stronger social position than many men. By the early twenty-first century a range of feminist critiques of aspects of women's lives were being articulated. Walter (2010) subtitled her book 'the return of sexism'. Levy (2005) and Penny (2011) took issue with the new raunch culture; these authors argued that the opportunities which had opened up for women were accompanied by a high degree of sexualisation of society and an objectification of women's bodies. Work and education had

not resulted in the disappearance of such phenomena, but of their continued very public existence.

The rise of social movements which occurred after Seattle's World Trade Organisation protests in 1999 saw, for the most part, a high level of women's participation and a degree of feminist consciousness among them. Almost a decade later, for many activists the economic crisis of 2008 brought certain questions into sharp relief. The limitations of consumerism and growing inequality within globalised capitalism, which put very strong constraints on the individual self-advancement of women without wider social change, were highlighted. There was an increase in activism among younger feminists, and some feminist critiques of 'consumerist feminism'. McRobbie (2009) argued that there had been an 'undoing of feminism', to see it replaced by individualism, hedonism and obsession with consumer culture. A feminism which is compatible with certain forms of neoliberalism, and which essentially supports the status quo, has been sharply criticised (Eisenstein, 2009; Power, 2009; McRobbie, 2009). Further, McRobbie is opposed to the 'mainstreamed feminism' she sees as emanating from institutions such as the European Union (McRobbie, 2009:152-3). These are important critiques of a type of feminism which can co-exist alongside other forms of social or economic inequality. It is limited because it concerns itself only with one aspect of women's oppression, that of legal equality, and ignores wider sources of discrimination and oppression. Another major issue has been attitudes towards wars and racism, since humanitarian intervention in recent wars has often been justified by use of arguments over women's rights, and Muslim women's dress has become a major focus of discussion among feminists (Eisenstein, 2009; German, 2007; German, 2013).

1.5 Delineating and Defining Second and Third Wave Feminism

In highlighting the contrasts between the different generations, decisions had to be made about the nature of the research and the selection of interviewees. Firstly, there was a question of defining and delineating the boundaries of Second and Third Wave feminism. First Wave feminism describes the movement which engaged women internationally in the period before the First World War, centred on their demand for full political equality with men through winning the suffrage, but encompassing other campaigns and demands, for example over women's education, while Second Wave feminism has become an accepted term describing the specific rise of the Women's Liberation Movement. This was formed, initially, in the United States, in the late 1960s, as a product of antagonisms between men and women activists in the civil rights and student movements of the time (see Chapter 2 for a detailed description of this). Its activists were usually educated to university level (often the first in their families to go to university) and tended to be subsequently engaged in professional work. The term Second Wave is used to distinguish this 1960s and 1970s feminism, noted for its campaigning for full social and economic equality for women.

Third Wave feminism suggests a new and distinct wave of feminism, which has arisen more recently, yet the term is more ambiguous and problematic to identify than the two previous waves. First appearing in the 1990s, it has become a term most identified in journalism rather than a clearly defined political activity. Some who articulated a Third Wave feminism did so in conscious opposition to the Second Wave, urging less stridency and more femininity, along with more relaxed attitudes to issues such as dress (Baumgardner and Richards, 2003). This attitude coincides, to some extent with the advent of 'power feminism' and there is certainly an element in Baumgardner (2011), which sees Third Wave feminism as a riposte to the common caricature of Second Wave feminism.

This reflects an alternative view, including attitudes to looking glamorous and working within the mainstream, which sees Second Wave feminism as too angry or counterproductive to achieve real advances for women. Most Second Wave feminists would reject this view of their movement. It is argued that this alternative view is also a misreading of the ideas of many younger feminists, who may see differences of priority or emphasis between the two waves, but who tend not to define themselves in opposition to older feminists. To some younger feminists, defining them as being part of a wave may not be the most appropriate way of looking at their ideas, which raises questions as to whether they see themselves as Third Wave. McRobbie (2009) also makes the point that this is an arbitrary and sometimes deliberately divisive term which serves to set different generations against one another. While she may overstate this case, the analysis of different waves should certainly acknowledge the continuity between them, as well as different social or economic circumstances against which they occur. However, it can be a useful framework for capturing feminism that has emerged from contrasting material realities and political and ideological circumstances.

I therefore used the terms in their most generally descriptive sense rather than as intended to signify particular political positions across the generations. The two waves (and indeed First Wave feminism) emerged from quite distinct political and economic circumstances, and were products of their particular time and place. At the same time, I subscribe to the view that there has always been a degree of continuity within feminist activism, sharing certain basic assumptions about women's inequality and oppression and this was certainly the way in which the interviews were approached.

The broad criteria of Second and Third Wave were used to identify and select two sets of interviewees. Several criteria were used. All the women interviewed had to be self-identifying feminists who had made some public impact as writers, speakers or campaigners. This was relatively easy to achieve with those from the Second Wave who had had a lifetime of political activity, but was more problematic in selecting younger women who by definition were at an earlier stage of their lives, political development and activism. As a relative insider among this group of women, I was able to select women who were known to me and with whom I had had some political contact. These women tended to be from the left of feminism, although they have defined themselves in a number of different ways.

The interviews were carried out face to face (in two cases via Skype) and lasted between one and two hours. They took place in the interviewees' homes or in a mutually agreed meeting place and tended to be relatively relaxed and wide ranging. I interviewed 12 women in total, six from each generation, which provided a good range of opinions and influences from which to draw some general themes.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical approach that underpins the three books that form part of the submission drew on a Marxist analysis. While this shared common ground with much feminist thinking on the nature of women's oppression, it also diverged from some of the same thinkers over questions of class. The books take as their starting point that the various oppressions facing women, ethnic minorities and other oppressed groups today are the product of a class society (although not necessarily just capitalism – women's oppression exists in all previous class societies). It is argued that class society structures and recreates different oppressions and, in the case of capitalism, relies on such divisions to help maintain its ideological hegemony and

power. The oppression of women under capitalism is centred on the family (Engels, 1978).

The aim of the books was to develop a materialist analysis, which integrated new thinking on women's oppression with an understanding of the wider oppressive structures of class society.

While classical Marxism dealt only partially with questions of women's oppression (Brown, 2012), the schools of thought and organisations which were subsequently influenced by Marxist ideas did at various points try to confront issues concerning women's equality on a theoretical and practical level. This was true of First Wave feminism before and immediately after the First World War, when writers such as the German socialist Clara Zetkin (Foner, 1984) and the Russian Alexandra Kollontai (Porter, 1980) tried to develop a theory and practice of women's emancipation based on a class analysis. While this tradition floundered, especially with the rise of fascism and Stalinism in Europe in the 1930s, it helped to create a practice of women organising and at least theoretical commitment to women's equality (Stites, 1978; Gruber and Graves, 1998).

When the New Left developed in the 1960s it reflected a youth radicalisation, which had to try to rediscover and to develop and elaborate this tradition. Second Wave feminism developed from this New Left, and reflected its origins in having a strand of Marxist feminists, as well as socialist feminists, who often adopted similar approaches to issues such as class. These tended to be the dominant schools of feminist thought on the left in Britain in the late 1960s and early 1970s. There were various different strands of left feminists, but Marxists saw class as a central analytical tool, and one which played a central role in explaining the roots and continuation of women's oppression. They located this oppression within class society, and especially within the capitalist mode of production dependent on

women's cheap labour outside the home and on their unpaid labour within the home. Both Marxist and socialist feminists stressed a wider social orientation on questions of women's inequality, and the need for wider social transformations to achieve full equality. Radical and revolutionary feminists, on the other hand, highlighted the role of individual men in the oppression of women, especially through issues such as domestic violence, and stressed the essential need for separate organisation from men.

In developing a theoretical framework for the new research on comparing the two waves of feminism, I have attempted to integrate the Marxist position with other methodological approaches. I have taken many insights from feminist methodology theories, but argue that they do not sufficiently integrate an analysis of class. While most closely identified with Marxist feminism, I have strong reservations about the tendency of Marxist feminists to separate class and patriarchy analytically. Critical Realism allowed me to develop Marxist categories to carry out social science research by helping to define questions such as structure and agency and the role of the individual in society. By adapting some of these insights into the wider Marxist framework I was able to consider some of the major analytical questions raised by the research, which will be discussed more extensively in Chapter 4 below. The method of interviewing draws on oral history techniques and methodology, which is consistent with the historical dimension of the research in connecting oral history and feminism.

1.7 Structure of the Dissertation

This chapter has outlined the rationale for the research, and the theoretical and political backgrounds to various phases in the women's movement and in feminism. It has traced the development of the women's movement from the 1960s, briefly considering the changed

attitudes towards it and looking at the definitions of the different waves of feminism. In it I have described the content of the three books which form the previous contribution. I have discussed the reasons for selecting the interviewees on the basis that I did and for asking particular questions, which enabled me to probe into the motivations of both generations of feminists, and to contrast their perspectives. I have also considered the theoretical framework which has underpinned my work, and its relationship with other theories.

Chapter 2 reflects on my previous contribution to the research contained in the three publications submitted: *Sex, Class and Socialism*, *Material Girls*, and *How a Century of War Changed the Lives of Women*. In doing so, it details the early history of Second Wave feminism, tracing its roots from the mass social movements of the 1960s in the US. It therefore locates the publications in their specific context, and contrasts the earlier writing which dealt very much with debates arising from Second Wave feminism with the later work which took into account many of the social and economic changes for women, as well as debating more topical issues such as the impact of these changes on men, and the importance of war as an issue for feminists.

Chapter 3 centres on the question of class, in particular making connections between class and feminism. The chapter begins by assessing the contribution of Marx and Engels, for whom class was central to their theories, and the extent to which their formulations can inform debate on class and gender today. The second section takes up the debate, currently regaining an audience among many young feminists, about social reproduction, looking at theories from the domestic labour debate of the 1970s through to materialist feminism. It considers the role of domestic labour in the capitalist system, and the ways in which it shapes women's labour market participation. The chapter goes on to consider a number of different

sociological theories of class, and questions whether they can satisfactorily integrate an analysis of women's class position. The final section of this chapter deals with women's oppression, race and class, looking particularly at the vibrant debate around intersectionality.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodological approach to the dissertation. I explain the reasons for selecting the particular interviewees, and the framework for the previous publications. I argue for an approach that combines an understanding of objective reality with recognising the subjective role of actors in particular circumstances. I reflect on aspects of feminist methodology, drawing on some of the insights provided by feminists in areas such as standpoint theory. I also consider Critical Realism, which helps to create a link between my past work and the new research. While adapting this and recognising the insights of certain sorts of feminist theory, I consider oral history methodology best suited to the sorts of interviews in which I am engaged.

Chapter 5 presents the research findings on the themes of personal experiences of class, with reference to what made the individuals concerned feminists, the role of working class women in developing feminism, the relationship between feminism and the left. I have also included in this chapter a section which deals with the decline of Second Wave feminism, as this is important to an understanding of later developments.

Chapter 6 is the second chapter presenting the research findings, entitled 'Feminism in the Twenty-First Century', and considers a range of themes. These include class and identity politics, economic crisis and austerity, social media, the experience of work. It also reflects on a number of debates within feminism including the question of women's appearance, the domestic labour debate, sex work and the controversies surrounding it. The final section

considers the impact of racism and anti-racism on the interviewees, and their attitudes to some of the issues.

Chapter 7 is a discussion and conclusion of the dissertation. It assesses the continued relevance of class, despite very substantial changes in the material conditions in which the two generations developed their ideas, the importance of anti-racism in defining feminism, and the role of activists today. It concludes that Second Wave feminism developed when and where it did in response to structural changes to women's position in capitalist society; Third Wave feminism represents an attempt to overcome the continued inequalities women face despite those structural changes.

The next chapter turns to summarising the content, contribution and key arguments in work already published.

Chapter 2: Contribution of Previous Publications

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to examine the explosion of ideas on feminism which was stimulated by the Women's Liberation Movement, and to assess the importance of the debates which resulted. It will consider the contribution made by my three books on the subject, written between the late 1980s and 2013. The chapter will discuss the genesis and impact of the women's movement, and will then assess the contribution of the three books in turn.

The Women's Liberation Movement began, and was always strongest, in the US during the late 1960s, arising dramatically in reaction to women's subordination in the mass movement for civil rights, and the mass student and anti-war movements of the 1960s – movements which were a product of long campaigning over issues of racial inequality, especially from the 1950s when figures such as Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks began the organising the movements that brought inequality and segregation in the Deep South of the United States to the attention of world public opinion. The civil rights movement grew in the 1950s and 1960s, and from its outset involved women, both black and white. It was characterised by a high level of moral commitment to anti-racism and equal opportunity, and a sense of physical commitment, which saw many activists place themselves in danger of imprisonment, injury and even death for their beliefs (Garrow, 1986; Evans, 1979). This movement had a major influence on the growing student movement of the early 1960s. In turn, the impact of US involvement in the Vietnam War was to create a mass anti-war movement, especially after the introduction of compulsory military service for young men (the draft).

However, even though women's role in these movements varied, in every case it was subordinate to those of men. In the anti-war movement, much protest centred on resistance to the draft, which by definition focused on men. In the civil rights and student movements, women often played a prominent political role, but also found themselves relegated to 'female' roles, from typing to making refreshments. The heightened political consciousness of the 1960s, which occurred across both sexes, led women participants in these movements questioning their role within them, and found it wanting in many respects. Their commitment to forms of national and racial liberation contrasted with their own lack of equality on the left (Hayden and King, 1965; SDS Women, 1967; New York Radical Women, 1968; Evans, 1979; Freeman, 1976; Ware, 1970).

What came to be called Second Wave feminism, which erupted in 1968, was politically formed by the movements, and its participants regarded themselves as anti-war and anti-racist, but it was also at least in part a critique of existing left movements. The emerging movement defined itself in opposition to certain ideas and practices which it had encountered within the movements, and at the same time, drew on various practices and ideas, such as consciousness-raising, from the movements themselves.

The US movements were part of an upsurge of youth protest across the world, and were very influential on the left in Britain, where opposition to the Vietnam War, in particular, was high. The women's movement therefore rapidly spread to Britain. The British Women's Liberation Movement was more trade union and class oriented, and while there were many differences and sometimes antagonisms between the women's movement and the left generally, relations tended to be much less disputatious than in the US. In addition, the new

ideas and early writings on the subject brought a fresh, if contested, approach to left-wing politics.

The early 1970s saw a wide range of original feminist theory and writing. Much of this writing was inspired by the Women's Liberation Movement, which began to challenge the subordinate position of women within society. There had been substantial work before the late 1960s looking at the problems of women in society, which tried to account for the different positions of men and women. Perhaps the two most celebrated are Betty Friedan (1963) and Simone De Beauvoir (1953), neither of which focused on Britain, but which articulated a view of a general discontent that was to provide a background to the more sharply focused writing which began to appear as a result of the political changes of the mid to late 1960s. There were also empirical studies of women at work, for example *Married Women Working* (Jephcott et al., 1962), as well as studies of women and the family, such as Wilmot and Young (1957). Juliet Mitchell's Marxist analysis in *New Left Review* was a turning point, attempting to locate women's oppression within capitalism (Mitchell, 1966). However, it is fair to say that it was only the schism in the 1960s movement which led to the search for theoretical explanations of the contradictions of gender and the nature of women's oppression. These came to fruition in the 1970s in various forms: radical statements of women's liberation (Greer, 1970; Koedt, 1970; Redstockings, 1969; New York Radical Women, 1969; Ware 1970); attempts at theorising the position of women economically and socially (Millett, 1971; Firestone 1971); women's hidden history (Rowbotham, 1973, 1974). The antagonisms which marked the development of the US movement are well-documented (see for example Evans, 1979; Freeman, 1976). Their consequences were to lead to a practical and theoretical emphasis on difference between men and women in terms of political strategy and possibly conflicting interests. There was also theorisation of, for

example, women's domestic labour and its economic role, the centrality or otherwise of women's role in the workforce, and the sexual division of labour. Theoretical discussions about women's organisation, their role in wider social movements, trade unions and political parties developed (Rowbotham et al., 1979; Campbell and Coote, 1982). The effect of these various debates was to transform thinking on the left, to the extent that existing organisations had to define themselves in terms of their relationships to women's equality.

Ideas on feminism and women's liberation were themselves products of a period of great social change: women had been able to enter higher education on a much wider level than had been possible for previous generations. They were able to access new career possibilities, and for some at least to gain financial and social independence through access to professional or managerial jobs. New legislation over issues including equal pay, sex discrimination, the legalisation of homosexuality, and liberalisation of divorce, was all passed in the 1960s or early 1970s. Traditional ideas of family, marriage and motherhood were becoming strained by the changes in society and by the opportunities opening up to women, and the new ideas of women's liberation articulated the thinking of a layer of women who rejected those traditional ideas. The writings had an impact far beyond their immediate audience. Yet the Women's Liberation Movement, at one level very successful, had a relatively brief theoretical and organisational flowering, and by the late 1970s was experiencing a series of divisions which would seriously hinder its effectiveness over the longer term. While the women's movement in Britain initially identified with trade union and other campaigns for women's rights and equality, it increasingly divided on political lines over class politics (a phenomenon which had also been present in First Wave feminism in the early part of the twentieth century). Different strategies presented themselves, often known as socialist feminism and radical feminism. The latter rejected any common cause between men and

women and highlighted gender differences and the issues of rape and domestic violence as priorities for organising.

My own writing and theorising on issues around women, work and the family began in the late 1970s, when controversies within the movement grew. The dominant form of feminism in the British movement, until the late 1970s, was socialist feminism of various sorts: the majority of feminists therefore rejected analysis of oppression which separated it from wider social issues, including control of wealth and power in society. However, inside Marxist and socialist feminism there were often controversial debates about patriarchy, the role of male-dominated unions, whether women played the role of a reserve army of labour within the workforce, and the extent to which domestic labour contributed to the overall economy. My writings from the 1980s, ‘Theories of Patriarchy’ (1981), ‘The Rise and Fall of the Women’s Movement’ (1987) and my book *Sex, Class and Socialism* (1989), set out a number of propositions in relation to these debates.

2.2 *Sex Class and Socialism* (1989) Bookmarks, London

The book *Sex, Class and Socialism* was an attempt to engage with these debates and to analyse the questions generated by them. The debate over Women’s Voice organisation, and other discussions on the left about separate women’s organisation, covered in one specific chapter, was symptomatic of the attempt to grapple with what had become sharply defined issues. The book drew widely on a range of historical studies and writings, and on contemporary British employment and social data, including the groundbreaking Women and Employment Survey by Martin and Roberts (1984). It also developed an analysis of Second Wave writers including Barrett (1980), Firestone (1971), Kuhn and Wolpe (1978). The history of the family throughout capitalism, including the role of the contemporary family,

was examined by looking at the transitions the family made from agricultural to industrial production, where it became increasingly separated from the arena of paid employment. This happened both through a sexual division of labour which saw the majority of married women engaged mainly in domestic labour, with their husbands (and sons and unmarried daughters) engaging in wage labour outside the home. The debate on the nineteenth century family and why the family sexual division of labour was established drew on the work of among others Hartmann (1979) and Humphries (1977). This became one of the major debates among feminists on the left, since Hartmann and her supporters claimed that they had developed a dual systems theory which had a material, not simply an ideological base. They argued that the nineteenth century settlement led to a strengthened working class family based on the male breadwinner model as one achieved through an alliance between capital and male workers, thus maintaining a patriarchal system which oppressed women. Humphries (1977) strongly contested this view, arguing that the actions of the working class in defence of the family were supported by women, as well as men, in the interest of maintaining or improving working class living standards, even if this was to the detriment of women in the wider social sense.

The book reviewed a range of theories which posited a dual systems approach (Delphy, 1984; Kuhn and Wolpe, 1978), and argued that the supposed material basis for understanding women's oppression within capitalism could not look simply at the division between social labour (carried out by men) and domestic labour (carried out by women). By the 1980s it was increasingly becoming clear that the 'male breadwinner family' was not a reality inside the working class, with families dependent on two wages to cover the costs of their reproduction. In addition it was argued that capitalism needed unpaid domestic labour in order to reproduce labour power in the form of the next generation of workers.

The fundamental changes which altered the pattern of the family occurred from the Second World War onwards, where the labour market began to absorb, not only single women, but married women and working mothers. Such a secular change cannot be explained without reference to the needs of capital to call on ever greater reserves of labour in order to expand. Oppression of gender was therefore located, at least for the purposes of work, in the search by capital for new sources of exploitation. Every aspect of life, from domestic labour to women's educational opportunities, was subordinated to this task.

My writing assessed the sexual division of labour, and the theoretical and practical question of whether women workers formed a reserve army, supplementary to the main or core 'male breadwinner' workforce. I argued that they were becoming an integral and permanent part of the workforce, albeit one whose place at work was highly segregated on the basis of gender. Women's prior and continuing role in the family, with prime responsibility for childcare, meant that they became part of the workforce in specific ways, heavily concentrated in certain sectors and often working part time, because of their domestic role. It was argued that the role of the family is key to an understanding of women's oppression, both in terms of their role as workers, but also in terms of what they contribute through domestic labour. While my writing concluded that housework and childcare produce use values, in that what is produced cannot be exchanged as commodities on the market, it also argued that the reproduction of labour power (the care and upbringing of the next generation of workers) does indirectly contribute to the production of surplus value, or to the profits and wealth of society. The analysis is close to various theories of social reproduction, which have seen a resurgence (see for example Vogel, 1983), and changes in the workforce and in the family since that time have tended to reinforce a number of the points made. These include the

permanent role of women in the labour market, the continued privatised family serving the needs of capital, and the central role of the family in the reproduction of labour power.

The book also discussed the various means which women and men have adopted to effect social change for working class people: the trade unions, the Labour Party, and the women's movement. It looked at the historic role of women in trade unions and political organisations, and at First Wave feminism in the movement round women's suffrage. It argued that while there have been many instances of male hostility to women joining unions, there is also a class interest against exploitation, which has led to common action and solidarity across gender. In general, while there has been political opposition to women's participation in wider class organisation, women have benefited greatly from such involvement and have been able to achieve advances for women as a result of their own activity and that of supportive men.

The book concluded that the class structures of exploitation both helped to maintain some aspects of individual oppression (failing to deal with domestic violence through inadequate laws, poor housing policies, police prejudice towards victims over rape cases), but also ensured that women came onto the labour market in much less favourable circumstances than their male counterparts (less pay, job segregation into worst rewarded jobs, inadequate childcare). Centrally the maintenance and support for the family, as the location of reproduction of labour power on a privatised basis and at relatively little cost to the capitalist class, is crucial to maintaining the sexual division of labour within the working class. The class interests of working class men and women therefore coincide in opposing such inequalities. At the same time the class interests of the exploiting class also tend to coincide, despite the real inequalities which women of all classes experience. The book argued that the centrality of this fault line of class explains women's position at work and in society as a

whole. While women are oppressed within each class, their class position to a large extent will mean that they experience this oppression very differently. The important real differences between working class women and men are subordinate to these class divisions, which allows the possibility of working class men joining with women to fight against their oppression.

2.3 *Material Girls* (2007) Bookmarks, London

The second book was written in a new context, which was that the ideological and social upheavals of the 1960s movements, and the changes in women's work and education, had combined to bring real change in the lives of many women. Women were working in large numbers, in higher education, with much greater control over their personal lives, their fertility and sexuality. There was a much greater recognition and at least surface acceptance of the need for women to be treated equally. At this point, it was possible to consider women's unequal role against a background of neoliberalism and globalisation, which introduced new challenges in many women's lives. In particular, it dealt with issues such as sexuality and 'male crisis' as well as analyses of work and family.

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, a new generation of women faced new experiences in work and education, and also the re-emergence of more collective social movements. *Material Girls* considered changes in the position of women at work and within the family. It argued that while there were marked continuities from the earlier period, there were also breaks with it, representing permanent changes in the way women lived. It approached a range of questions, which were either not posed in the 1980s, or which had become much more dominant in terms of their impact on women. It therefore had, and continues to have, a contemporary resonance in discussing questions about a globalised

economy, which has drawn an unprecedented number of women into paid work worldwide; and the neoliberal drive to free markets, which has led to a worsening of pay and conditions for many workers at precisely the point when women were entering the labour market on such a scale. These questions include the international dimensions of women's oppression, taking into account the increasingly feminised migration of labour; the rebranding of 'women's rights' for a neoliberal era; the re-sexualisation of women; the importance of work and consumption to the 'modern' image of women; and the changing nature of male and female roles and of male and female identity.

Some of the issues which had been controversial or seemed pathbreaking in the 1970s and 1980s had by this time been settled. There was, for example, no longer real controversy over whether women represented a disposable reserve army. Women are now recognised as a permanent part of the workforce, despite the many problems associated with their location in the labour market. The female workforce has changed, with greater numbers of women equipping themselves for the labour market by acquiring skills and qualifications in higher education. This in turn has led to a differentiation within the labour market, with the expansion of managerial layers now also including significant numbers of women, particularly in the public sector, and who have also increased their representation in professions such as the law. The questions now being raised about women have therefore developed since the early years of Second Wave feminism. However, despite the opening up of certain areas of work to women, they still entered the labour market at a disadvantage, which has remained despite a very small number of women 'breaking through'. The pattern of women's employment now looked much more class differentiated, with some women becoming part of the wider system of management and control within industry, state enterprises and public services, while the majority of women found themselves in routine

clerical, retail and finance occupations. At the same time, the family maintained itself in the face of such fundamental change in women's working patterns, and this altered the structure of family life and its role as a unit of consumption. The book used a range of examples and empirical data to show the continued relevance of class to women's oppression. It considered class inequalities between women, the commodification of much of women's traditional domestic work, the privatised nature of child care and the continued importance of the family as a centre of reproduction of labour power, and of consumption.

Women's consciousness was changing, partly because of the impact of work. Contemporary surveys and work such as Bunting (2005) and Toynbee (2003), showed transformed attitudes to sex, marriage, childbirth and the family, which have been a major feature of the period from the 1960s to the present. To consider these changes it was necessary to recognise the changed role of women at work and in education, and the relatively recent ability of the majority of women to earn their own wage and to claim a degree of independence from husbands or fathers, which was denied to them in earlier generations. This change in attitudes is underlined by statistics, which include fewer marriages and more divorces, a fall in the rate of childbirth, and the development of a modern family which takes these features into account (children born and brought up outside marriage; the family extended across different serial relationships; gay and lesbian relationships accepted, recognised and now legally sanctioned by the state). In turn, attitudes to sexuality which seemed dramatically outside the norm when they were raised by some of the writers who emerged from Second Wave feminism (Greer, 1970; Koedt, 1970) are much more widely accepted. At the same time, work and access to paid work was heralded as the pinnacle of women's achievement. Women were expected to subordinate any other interests to the achievement of skills through

education and commensurate higher status work. This led to greater pressures in terms of work, through long hours, commuting, and the need for full time childcare provision.

The book took up themes which considered the limits of women's freedoms. In particular, it attempted to explain why two of the major demands which surfaced in the 1960s, for the right to work and for more sexual freedom, had been achieved in some ways but had fallen short of expectations. Women's rights in these fields were much more pronounced, but had encountered the limitations of a society organised on the basis of a system of profit and exploitation, and which still depended on the privatised family. Women's genuine freedom remained elusive, while work was subject to the same disciplines and limitations suffered by men, and where aspects of sexuality had become commodified. Both these features placed limits on genuine equality and liberation, and questions of class exploitation remained at the centre of the analysis in explaining why the family continued to exist.

The book also considered the changes in consciousness among men, a phenomenon addressed in one of the chapters on 'male crisis'. This addressed the question of whether men had been thrown into crisis as a result of the changes in women's lives, and whether women's increased presence in the labour force, more open attitudes to sexuality, and their greater propensity to have children outside marriage, were a threat to the traditional position of men. Other chapters looked at alterations to work, childcare and the family under the impact of women working, and in particular underlined the importance of the consumption of commodities in and around the family, which necessitated an increase in women working, and analysed the role of privatised childcare as a commodity which women and men had to work long hours to pay for.

These changes posed major questions for feminism. The book considered developments in feminism in the 1980s and 1990s, and the extent to which its original aims could be said to have been achieved. It argued that some feminism could be regarded as an ideology, which was to a large extent compatible with modern capitalism, as opposed to the much more transformative social movement that had originally been conceived. One chapter in particular looked at feminist justifications for humanitarian intervention in wars. This became a subject of much controversy following the launch of the war on terror in 2001, when feminist attitudes were polarised. Justifications for war were presented in universalist terms as a means of achieving formal and practical equality for women in countries such as Afghanistan. It was argued that the aims of Second Wave feminism had been partly incorporated and integrated into capitalist society, but that this only served to distort the aspirations for liberation and equality that had inspired the movements of the 1960s, and that wider social change which challenged the priorities of private capital was needed. Some feminists argued that theories of equality conflicted with the aims of intervention and war. They also challenged the prevailing discourse about women's position in society and their dress, attempting to widen definitions of what equality and liberation should and could mean for women. This drew on Rostami Povey (2007), Afshar et al. (2005) and Brenner (2000) and was a theme reprised more centrally in the third book.

2.4 *How a century of war changed the lives of women* (2013) Pluto Press, London

The third of the books submitted in support of the PhD built on the theme of women, work and class in a different way. While the previous two were centrally concerned with analysis of feminist theory, the family under capitalism and the nature of work for women, *How a Century of War Changed the Lives of Women* built on this general theoretical framework to incorporate insights on race, gender and class in relation to the anti-war movement. It studied

a specific aspect of women's lives: the impact and influence of war on women's work and consciousness. This arose from my role as an anti-war campaigner and writer, and stemmed from an immediate question that needed addressing theoretically: the noticeable extent of women's involvement in this major movement, and the way in which this impacted on their ideas about women's role. One of the aspects of this was the relatively high participation of women from Muslim backgrounds, who became some of the most effective campaigners. In view of controversies over issues of dress and the existence of prejudice towards Muslims in some quarters, this seemed a particularly fruitful area to consider.

The work had a twofold thesis: it considered the impact of work on women's consciousness and behaviour in the two world wars; it then argued that women's changing consciousness and position in society has given them a much more clearly defined role as public actors and campaigners, which allows women to challenge gender stereotypes of passivity and submissiveness. Part of the research for the book involved conducting a number of interviews by women affected by war. These were drawn from different generations, including women from second wave feminism whose experience of campaigning against the Vietnam War and nuclear weapons was part of their political formation. The book also considers divisions within feminism along lines of class and race. For this it draws on critiques such as Power (2009) and Eisenstein (2009).

The role of war in changing the position of women in relation to paid work and the fundamental changes in women's employment and attitudes to work evidenced by the two world wars in Britain is well documented. (Marlow, 2009; Grayzel, 2002; Sheridan, 2000; Gardiner, 2004; Braybon and Summerfield, 1987). The two wars created more liberal attitudes on issues such as equal pay, childcare, marriage and sexuality, as well as marking

the prelude to the entry of women into permanent work, to the expansion of education, and to a change in attitudes on a range of liberal issues. The wars began to break down the structures of the traditional family, and the old forms of sexual division of labour. The exceptional conditions of wartime work did not prevail after hostilities ceased, but sufficient aspects changed to draw many more women into the labour market. While women's work was segregated much more in peacetime, with many forced against their wishes out of 'men's jobs' after both world wars, they often remained in the labour market. Equal pay became an issue in both world wars because of the contradiction between men's and women's wages, and 'modern' attitudes to personal and sexual politics gained much wider purchase. The Second World War in particular marked a watershed in terms of social provision and the welfare state. Further, it led to changes which opened up access to education for all, including for a minority, to higher education. Women's role at work after 1945 was increasingly towards jobs in the public sector, which expanded as a result of education and welfare provision.

The post Second World War reforms were important in creating a generation whose expectations were raised in terms of education, work and lifestyles. It was this next generation which helped to form some of the movements for social justice, including the women's liberation movement, whose initial membership was heavily drawn from graduates. One of their formative experiences in this process, as we have seen with the US, was campaigning against war. In Britain this involved opposing the Vietnam War, but also often being part of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament which burgeoned in the late 1950s. These aspects of consciousness, along with the anti-racism associated with support for the US civil rights campaign, contributed to the political formation of second wave feminism.

The existence of war, especially war that affected civilians in large numbers, became increasingly dominant in the lives of men and women in Britain during the 20th century. Interviewees were chosen from women whose lives had been affected by war, either through direct experience or concern about its consequences. The pervasive nature of modern war has helped create permanent mass peace and anti-war movements in the decades after 1945, as women's consciousness of war developed into activism against it. The shift in the gender balance in relation to work and education in post Second World War society played a major part in this development, as female participation in the public sphere as opposed to the home became more marked across all the classes.

As one interviewee in *How a Century of War Changed the Lives of Women* expressed it, 'Women's attitude to death is becoming much more the general attitude to death... Stop the War became the general attitude, not just the progressive attitude. A lot of that is women's attitude' (German, 2013:221). As modern warfare has become much more all encompassing, so it has impacted more greatly on civilians, often women and children. Wars are no longer fought in far-off battlefields, but in towns and cities through aerial bombardment. This change has led to greater awareness of war, and to greater opposition to it. Movements such as Greenham Common in 1982, where women demonstrated against the siting of Cruise missiles specifically as women and mothers, was a sign of rejection of war and militarism. Recent polls show that women tend to be more opposed to wars than men (Milne, 2013).

This phenomenon has also created a layer of women, including women from Muslim backgrounds, who have become conscious actors in opposing war and on the wider political stage. By the twenty-first century, the link between class, power and modern warfare became clearer, with globalised capital and neoliberalism also producing an upsurge in the numbers

of wars, although the relationship between them is complex. In turn, these wars were often used as a justification for the doctrine of ‘humanitarian intervention’ in relation to women’s rights. Young Muslim women have found themselves in a situation where they have challenged war, but also stereotypes about their role. They have insisted that their race and religion do not preclude them from public life or participation in education, work and wider society, and many reject a discourse which regards them as suffering greater discrimination than other women. This has presented a challenge to Second Wave feminism, which has sometimes been divided on this issue, with some regarding dress and other cultural aspects of Muslim life as inherently oppressive (Orr, 2006; Smith, 2006), while others stress that Muslim women themselves should decide in what way they express their consciousness (Rostami Povey, 2004; Al-Ali and Pratt, 2009). There are still others who place the debate within the context of Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism, therefore making connections with previous issues of racism and discrimination (Yaqoob, 2008; Heffernan, 2008; Eisenstein, 2009; Fekete, 2008; Riley et al., 2008).

There are further divisions within feminism, between those who have justified military intervention as aiding the liberation of women who suffer cultural oppression, including women such as Hillary Clinton and Condoleezza Rice, directly involved in the conduct of the war; and those feminists who argued that it would have a very different effect. The issues of Muslim women and war have become increasingly taken up in feminist debate (Fekete 2006 and 2008; Riley et al., 2008; Al Ali and Pratt, 2009; Eisenstein, 2009) and have implications in terms of campaigning against racism as well as women’s oppression.

2.5 Conclusion

Taken together the three books constitute a body of work, which aims to locate the position of women and their specific oppression within the wider economic and social system, providing a wide ranging analysis of oppression through work, the family and social structures, and also raise the question of forms of organisation which can challenge women's unequal position. The books complement one another. The distance in time between their writing and publications reflects the changing debates within the women's and socialist movements, in times characterised by different sets of economic, political and ideological contexts. The books were not written for academic purposes, although they engaged with academic debate and sources. Rather they were designed to consider key areas, as a means of contributing to the debates in such a way as to influence political practice in order to achieve successful outcomes to campaigns, and more widely to help achieve women's liberation.

The new research engaged in here will attempt to build on this work. It will consider the links between the older and younger generations of feminists, examining some of the themes first raised in the books and developing the analysis in a number of directions. It will attempt to explain some of the motivations of Second Wave feminists, look at their influences and the influences of class analysis on them, and the continuities between them and the new generation of feminists. It will also consider the extent to which an existing body of feminist thought and ideas influenced the younger generation, and to what extent questions of class remain influential and relevant to new ideas of feminism.

Chapter 3: Debates on Women and Class

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, it provides a conceptual basis for discussing the background of the interviewees, and how it shaped their political ideas and commitment to feminism. Secondly, it enables and underpins an exploration of the differences and difficulties in the thinking and practice of Second and Third Wave feminists, especially over issues such as domestic labour and social reproduction, and regarding the relationship between race and class. It considers various attempts to theorise class and women's oppression, looking at some of the relevant debates and literature. It begins by assessing classic theories of class developed by Marx and Engels, followed by consideration of feminist critiques, including the domestic labour debate and social reproduction theories. In addition, the nature of the working class, how it is defined and its composition, and the relation between women's and racial oppression, are considered.

Women's liberation arose as a movement at precisely the time when there was an upsurge in class struggles and conflicts in the Western world. In the United States, France, Italy and Britain, there were strikes and occupations on a range of issues, often involving young workers whose confidence had grown during the period of economic boom and full employment (Harman, 1988). This, in addition to the women's movement connection with existing left movements in the late 1960s, meant that an analysis of class social relations and class divisions was an integral part of much feminist theory. The women's movement brought new challenges to existing theories of class and social change. Feminism engaged in a sometimes sharp critique of existing class theory, in order to explain why most theories of class had not taken account of questions such as women's oppression, the sexual division of

labour, and women's dual role at work and in the home. In addition, feminists began to consider how the system of capitalism and the labour process involved in the capitalist mode of production helped to maintain and create or recreate various divisions within the working class. Gender and race played a major part in the division of labour and in discrimination at work, hence the need for a theory which could integrate these theoretical questions. Socialist or Marxist feminists developed a critique of Marxist theory by looking at Marx's categories to understand the role in the structures of capitalism (or earlier class societies) which created oppression, and what was the nature of women's oppression within capitalist society. The controversy over the question of whether Marx's theory of class could explain women's oppression informed much early feminist writing.

3.2 The Contribution of Marx and Engels

Marx wrote about various aspects of women's oppression and the family (Vogel, 1983; Brown, 2012). While it was not central to his writing, along with Friedrich Engels he developed theories about the family and women's oppression. The question was considered in their early work, where they argued that it was a product of a society distorted by exploitation and by the existence of private property: they returned to it in their later work, where both men studied historically to locate the origin of women's oppression. Some of Marx's last work before his death in 1883 was on this subject (Engels, 1968; Brown, 2012). They regarded women's oppression as affecting all women, not only women of the working class or proletariat, and saw it as having a deleterious effect on the upper class family. For example, Brown highlights Marx's writing on suicides among French upper class women, which he traced to the existence of sexual abuse and rape within the bourgeois family (Brown, 2012). Demonstrating that Marx and Engels saw this oppression as destructive of all personal and social relationships and as highly damaging to the lives of women, *The*

Communist Manifesto argues that marriage among the bourgeoisie was effectively prostitution (MECW 6, 1976). In a letter to his friend Ludwig Kugelmann in 1868 Marx wrote ‘Social progress may be measured precisely by the social position of the fair sex’ (MECW 43, 1988:185). Nevertheless, Marx and Engels saw the specific oppression of women as resulting from class society, which distorted the lives of all its members. Engels’ seminal book *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (Engels, 1968) traced the development of the family, and its connection with private property in early class society, as one which was directly oppressive to women.

Marx’s theory of class was central to his analysis of women’s oppression, since he and Engels connected it to the rise of class society and private property. He believed that the precondition for ending oppression lay in the overthrow of class society. Marx defined class as a relationship based on how wealth was produced, which in capitalist society is the process of exploitation, which involves the extraction of surplus value in the form of profit.

Membership of a class is created through that economic relationship, which is an objective one; as Marx put it, it requires only the creation of a class in itself, which exists whether or not members of that class are conscious of their own exploitation (Draper, 1978; MECW 6, 1976: 211). Capitalist society creates two major contending classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, who are defined by their relationship to the means of production. The crucial division here is whether the members of a class control or own the means of production (by definition a small minority but an exceptionally powerful class) or whether, as in the case of most people under capitalism, they find it necessary to sell their labour power in order to cover the costs of their subsistence. There is a fundamental antagonism between these classes because the fruits of the labour of those who sell their labour power are taken from them through the process of exploitation.

It is possible to see this theory as developing a universal and emancipatory character, which could inform the movements of those campaigning against oppression. Marx and Engels recognise both of the unevenness of consciousness within society and the transformative power of capitalism, which acted to destroy or weaken old social divisions and structures. However the fundamental flaw of the capitalist is its basis in an exploitative and oppressive system based on private property and the accumulation of profit (MECW 6, 1976). Transformation of this system can only take place collectively, on the part of those who produce the wealth and who in that process would experience a transformation of consciousness, which would rid them of ‘the muck of ages’ as Marx described it (Marx and Engels, 1965: 86). In other words, women and men would, in the process of making the revolution, develop a consciousness which overcame the divisions within the working class on grounds of sexism, racism or nationality.

Marx’s theory of class was found wanting by many feminists, who argued that it could not explain oppression and the many divisions within the working class. Their critique was perhaps more of certain interpretations of Marxism on the part of the left than of Marx’s writing itself, and of the inadequacies of left-wing organisations. The period from the 1950s had led to a challenging of some interpretations of Marxism, particularly those associated with the Communist Parties, which went into crisis after the death of Stalin in 1953 and the Hungarian uprising in 1956. Some of these writings influenced those who were involved in the 1960s movements. They critiqued a form of Marxism or socialism sometimes described as ‘economism’ which stressed the inevitability of economic change, arguing that this would in turn resolve the major contradictions within capitalist society, including those of oppression.

The charge of economism against Marxism was not just from a feminist point of view, but was a wider attempt to reintegrate a more subjective and human approach into Marxism. This debate has a long lineage going back through the socialist and communist movements, centring on questions of agency. The central argument was whether progress towards social change was inevitable or whether it was dependent on the actions of men and women; and this notion of a previously determined teleological economic progress to socialism marked much Marxist and other socialist theory (See on this Salvadori, 1979:115-180; Rees, 1998: 126-169); Thompson, 1978). Its fundamental weakness was its prognosis of inevitability which missed out questions of contingency and agency. This reliance on development of economic structures as automatically bringing social progress was challenged by Marxist historians such as De St Croix (1981) and Thompson (1968), who tried to develop Marx's ideas to consider class as a relationship, and the working class as both the subject and object of history. In doing so they considered it both from an economic point of view, but also from the question of class consciousness, in other words what made people think of themselves as being part of a certain class. In this sense it attempted to go beyond the immediate manifestations of social and class differences to examine the underlying relationships at the centre of any class society. It is perhaps not accidental that the late 1960s and early 1970s saw a revival in interest of Marxists such as the Hungarian Georg Lukacs and the Italian Antonio Gramsci. Both dealt with questions of consciousness and possibilities of revolution. The widespread interest in these theories on the left and in academia in the 1970s brought a new series of insights into this debate, especially Gramsci's concept of the need to fight for hegemony for Marxist ideas within capitalist society (Lukacs, 1971; Gramsci, 1971). This rethinking of socialist theory fitted with a number of feminist ideas. Sections of the new left, including many feminists, stressed that there was no inevitability about socialism ending women's or other forms of oppressions. They could point to the existence of nominally

‘socialist’ countries where the sexual division of labour, the family and oppression remained all too obvious realities (Scott, 1976). They concluded that there had to be conscious struggles against oppression that could not simply be reduced to the class struggle against capitalism, but which required at the very least an ideological struggle against oppression as well (Mitchell, 1975). This began, however, to create an analytical separation of the ideological and economic, which Marx saw as connected to one another.

3.3 Dual Systems, Domestic Labour and Social Reproduction

An early response to the challenges of class and feminism was to try to explain the economic role of housework and childcare within capitalism and to locate women’s oppression, at least in part, in relation to this. The relationship between women’s role in social production and privatised reproduction under capitalism has been the subject of much debate about the relative role of women and men inside the working class, and whether unpaid labour in the household (carried out overwhelmingly by women) can be seen as socially productive, producing value for the capitalist class. The debates also considered whether domestic labour carried out in the home could be considered a mode of production which can be viewed as something distinct from the capitalist mode of production.

The ‘domestic labour debate’ as it came to be known, entailed recognition of the important economic work carried out in the home, and was an attempt to locate women’s domestic labour within the capitalist economy. Some placed the location of women’s oppression in the contradiction between their role in social labour and in domestic labour, and the necessity of women having to carry out labour in both spheres of work. Others looked at whether the housewife through her labour created some sort of value for the capitalist class, beyond the use values produced within the home. (DallaCosta and James, 1975; Seccombe, 1974;

Benston, 1969; Harrison, 1974; Coulson et al., 1975; Smith, 1978; Gardiner et al., 1976)

There was also the argument that workers in the home should be considered as part of the labour force, producing value for capital and therefore entitled to recognition and to wages for housework (DallaCosta and James, 1975; Federici, 1975). The strength of the debate was its attempt to use Marxist categories and concepts of class in order to provide a material basis for women's oppression. However, it was characterised by an analytical separation between the domestic and industrial spheres, and an idealised view of the housewife where there was a decreasing correspondence to reality even in the 1970s. In addition, the danger of simply stating that domestic labour was unproductive labour in only producing use values underplayed its central role to capital and to the reproduction of labour power. This was an insight which the 'wages for housework' theorists understood, even if their political conclusions were widely rejected.

My own position (German, 1989) was to agree that housework and childcare did not produce commodities, but rather use values within the home. While conceding this argument, however, I felt that this did not adequately locate domestic labour in terms of its importance to capital, nor did it recognise the changes in housework and women's role caused by increasing participation of women in the labour market. The amount of necessary labour carried out in the home diminishes the amount of wage labour that can be performed by members of the family outside the home, so the drive to commodify domestic tasks in order to free women for greater participation in wage labour has been considerable. Marx foresaw this development: 'Domestic work, such as sewing and mending, must be replaced by the purchase of ready-made articles. Hence, the diminished expenditure of labour in the house is accompanied by an increased expenditure of money outside' (Marx, 1976: 518). Labour once carried out in the home is now often replaced by services bought on the market or

commodities which aid or substitute for use values once produced in the home. The emphasis in the family today is more on its role as a centre for the reproduction of labour power, especially renewed generations of labour power, an essential need for capital. I argued that women's labour in the home, as well as producing use values, also contributed to the reproduction of labour power, and therefore *indirectly* contributed to the production of surplus value. If not directly productive of surplus value, it was nonetheless essential to the continued production of that surplus value.

Not all feminist analysis centred on domestic labour, however. Many looked for an explanation of women's oppression which went beyond traditional class categories, positing the existence of two systems; put simply, an exploitative class system and an oppressive system, in what became known as dual systems theories. A number of socialist feminists took up Friedrich Engels' term in his preface to his *Origin of the Family* (1968: 449):

‘According to the materialistic conception, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of material life’ [or] ‘the stage of development of labour on the one hand and of the family on the other.’

This seemed to create an analytical distinction between the economic mode of production, and a separate mode of reproduction, which would consist of the family and related aspects of social reproduction. This would allow a specific approach to the family within class society as something quite distinct from the process of production. This theoretical approach was an attempt to analyse the specific nature of the family within capitalism, and to explain both women's oppression and their role in the family. It was cited in Smith (1977) who saw this as justifying a ‘mode of reproduction’, placing the family as a separate and parallel means of production, as fundamental to capitalism as the economy itself, a view challenged by Bruegel

(1978). Others such as Kuhn and Wolpe (1978) drew political conclusions which were that separate social challenges over questions of class and oppression were necessary, a degree of autonomy between the two (Kuhn and Wolpe, *ibid*).

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, patriarchy theory had developed as the dominant general explanation of women's oppression within capitalism, and was regarded as a counterpoint to or at the very least enhancement of class analysis (Barrett, 1980; Beechey, 1979; McDonough and Harrison, 1978). As Vogel puts it: 'The concept of patriarchy entered socialist-feminist discourse virtually without objection' (1983:26). This had not been the case in the early years of women's liberation. The term patriarchy was used by Weber in a very specific sense to explain particular societies where the father maintains social and economic control over the rest of the family or kinship network, and was adopted by some US feminists, such as Kate Millett, to describe a system of male domination which overrode class. To Millett, patriarchal rule of women by men was 'more rigorous than class stratification, more uniform, certainly more enduring'. Class differences between women were, she argued, transitory and illusory (Millett, 1970: 24, 38).

Patriarchy as a concept, however, lacked historical specificity and was often posed as an ideological construct, (Mitchell, 1975) rather than having any basis in material reality. For Marxist feminists and many socialist feminists, this was unsatisfactory since it denied any material connection between women's oppression and the nature of the society in which that oppression existed (Young, 1980). It raised a number of difficult questions in relation to how far patriarchy existed alongside the various modes of production to which Marx had referred, or was completely separate, and the extent to which patriarchy could be seen as a purely ideological factor.

A number of writers tried to overcome these difficulties by developing theories of patriarchy which had a much more materialist underpinning: Hartmann's 'The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism' (Hartmann, 1979) uses nineteenth century British history to develop a theory of patriarchy, which was based on the exclusion of women from work and the development of the male breadwinner family. Eisenstein's (1979) theory of capitalist patriarchy again posits an alliance between the forces of oppression and exploitation, and the French feminist Delphy (1984) cites the role of men and women within the family as the basis of patriarchy, and regards the marriage contract as akin to a form of patriarchal control, a serf relationship between the woman and her husband. Women who described themselves in class terms suffered from 'false consciousness', by identifying with 'enemy patriarchal classes' (ibid: 76).

All these were in different ways challenges to traditional class analyses. They had a degree of success within the movement and in the academy, and helped to marginalise class as an analytical tool describing oppression. Yet they were flawed both in their historical approach and in their analytical force (Barrett 1980). They relied on a reading of history that was always disputed (Humphries, 1977 and 1981; Brenner and Ramas, 1984; Brenner, 2000) and which looked at historical processes as the inevitable establishment of the division of labour created by patriarchy and capital, not as a series of historical events which could have produced very different outcomes, had contingent forces played out in different ways. Once these supposedly materialist reasons for the existence of patriarchy could be seen to be flawed, the theory was left without a clear foundation within capitalism and was increasingly used in a descriptive way as a synonym for male dominance or women's oppression. In addition, patriarchy theory leant heavily on a traditional view of the sexual division of labour, seeing women at home and men in the workplace. This tended to create an idealised and

empirically inaccurate view of women as outside social production, positing a material basis for patriarchy within an alternative domestic sphere, which was diminishing in importance for many women as they entered the labour market and education.

The problems with patriarchy theory led to a number of critiques that tried to assert a materialist feminism. Young (1980) rejected dual systems theory and stressed that any theory of oppression had to be based in social relationships, to have a historical view and to consider the gender division of labour as central. Similar approaches returned to developing a theory of oppression which is based in material conditions rather than being purely at an ideological level, which became known as materialist feminism (Hennessy and Ingraham, 1997).

Another materialist approach came from Vogel, who rejected dual systems theory (Vogel, 1983 and 2000; Giminez and Vogel, 2005). She stressed the centrality of the reproduction of labour power to capital, and the role of this reproduction as central to the oppression of women. Domestic labour for social reproduction is at the heart of the refreshing of labour power, which is essential to capitalist production (Giminez, 2005). Vogel argued that women play a key role in social reproduction because of their specific and unique role in childbirth and lactation. She considers that it is the process of social reproduction itself, rather than the family form, which is its most important aspect, and that in this sense women's role in social reproduction leads to their oppression (Vogel, 1983).

While Vogel makes a clear and compelling case for the centrality to capitalism of social reproduction, this takes a somewhat abstract view of how labour power is reproduced. She poses alternatives to the family for example, that a labour force can be replenished through immigration or slavery. However, this still involves labour power being reproduced in a family, but in a family that can take various forms geographically and historically. In

addition, it can be argued that institutions such as prisons or care homes, which carry out some of the same functions of the family, are not serious rivals to the nuclear family, which is the overwhelming site of reproduction of labour power. Even considering the commodification of some family functions, and women working outside the home over past thirty years, the family has if anything been enhanced as a site for the reproduction of labour power not diminished. It could be argued that capitalism has in some ways strengthened the family by making it more accommodating to diversity, for example with gay marriage. Nonetheless, social reproduction theory as outlined by Vogel has the strength of locating women's oppression in the needs of capital and thus relating it to class theory.

3.4 Women and Definitions of Class

Theories of class provided a challenge for feminist theorists, who attempted both to explain how class analysis was connected with women's liberation theory in general, but also what the specific economic role of women was within a class based system. The serious study of class as a phenomenon accompanied the development of industrialisation within capitalist society. It is impossible to consider society today without taking into account questions of class and social division, and our understanding of society leans heavily on theories which reference class. Most prominent of these derive from a Marxist or Weberian perspective. While both recognise major divisions of wealth and power within society, to Weber (1964), class was not defined by its relationship to the means of production, but was related to status, income and where people were located in a hierarchical society. In this, Weber's work was descriptive of class in society rather than explanatory. His theories lack Marx's sense of there being an economic relationship between classes which contains the potential for change. Marx's theories see class as a relationship which is antagonistic because of the nature of exploitation, and which therefore leads to class struggle. Weber rather sees class as deriving

from the social relations of exchange, as opposed to the production relationships which characterise Marx (Crompton, 1993).

Both Marxist and Weberian theories have classically tended to look at society as a whole and the relationship between the different classes, rather than at divisions within the working class, and they rarely have taken into account divisions between men and women. In so far as sociological theories did so, they tended to see class as being defined in terms of men's social role. Traditional sociological measures have often tended to judge women's class position by that of their husbands or fathers. Goldthorpe (1987) saw the male breadwinner family as the determinant of class and as late as the 1980s was able to conduct an investigation of class that focused on men (Goldthorpe, *ibid*). While this might have had a rationale when the male breadwinner family was a much more central form of family, it makes little sense today when women have their own direct and independent relationship to the labour market. The nature of this relationship to the labour market has changed dramatically in the past fifty years. Therefore it is necessary to assess how far it is possible to see women as independent class actors given the very different relations of production which exist compared to the 1960s. It is also important to consider to what extent women have become integrated into the workforce. For example, Marx's theory that women could constitute a disposable 'reserve army of labour' to be drawn in or pushed out of work depending on the economic cycle, which was taken up by many feminists, has by and large not been validated by history (Marx, 1976; Campbell and Coote, 1982). However, while women are now a permanent part of the workforce, their position is often characterised by low pay, insecurity and flexibility at work. Indeed, it could be argued that they still play a role as a reserve, not in terms of being disposable as workers, but as having the effect of holding down wages overall (Marx, 1976).

Theories which look at the changing nature of work, and how that affects class (Standing, 2011) may therefore have more relevance to the current situation of women.

The restructuring of the working class in Britain over the past decades has created major challenges in developing theories of class. Changes in the labour process have affected consciousness and ideas about class, and about what is meant by work. The rise of women in the workforce coincided with this major restructuring of British capital historically, especially with the decline in manufacturing industry, which accelerated in the 1970s and 1980s just at a time when women were becoming part of the workforce in large numbers. Women were central to the expansion of certain sectors of work, for example finance and retail in the private sector, and education and health in the public sector. They were motivated to work by a series of social and economic factors: the expansion of education, the ability of women to command higher reward for work, the ideological changes in attitudes to women and of women themselves, the decline of marriage and childbirth. Married women going out to work coincided with the decline of the single male wage, which became increasingly inadequate to maintain higher levels of consumption (Rubery, 1988; Hewitt, 1993; Desai et al in Gregg and Wadsworth, 1999; Beechey and Whitelegg, 1986).

However, as some women's jobs expanded, they also took on characteristics associated more traditionally with manual or routine clerical work. Wages were often pushed down: this was true in areas where women had traditionally been in a small minority but now became the majority workforce, for example in banking or printing industries (Braverman, 1974). White collar occupations, which might once have been associated with status, tended to lose that advantage when they became mass occupations, more subject to the same pressures as

traditional working class jobs. The introduction of machinery into clerical and retail work accelerated this process.

With the development of layers of management in industry, and the possibility of greater supervision, workers were subject to more managerial control and less autonomy as employees. This process, often referred to as proletarianisation, has increased the common characteristics between white collar and blue collar work. It has also been a feature of many professional occupations, for example teaching and lecturing, where work is subject to greater control, monitoring, supervision and assessment (Randle and Brady, 1998). Public services, which employ large numbers of women, have also become subject to these aspects of control. Women have entered work at a time when they see their conditions worsened alongside many of those of men, as there has been a greater tendency to longer hours, more supervision, intensification of work, and so on. A minority of women have, however, also become part of managerial structures, leading to a small increase in women CEOs and higher executives, but also to a much more significant layer of middle management.

The working class in Britain in the twenty-first century is white-collar as well as manual, and is much more diverse. Women's changing role in the workforce and their centrality as white collar workers means that their class location is important to define. Traditional approaches to class and the nature of the working class, whether from a Marxist or Weberian point of view, will be inadequate to analyse the phenomenon of women working outside the home if they fail to acknowledge the changes described above, and if they retain the traditional view of the working class, as composed largely of male manual workers (Todd, 2014).

Marx's view of class as a relationship, which hinges on the centrality of exploitation and whether or not an individual has to sell her or his labour power in order to live, is particularly useful here, since the definition of the working class can be extended to groups, including large numbers of women, who are dependent on work for their livelihood. This more fruitful approach leads to a wider and more inclusive view of what constitutes the working class (Braverman, 1974; Wright, 1989; Westergaard, 1995) and so help to explain class in the twenty-first century. It also allows us to place the exploitation of workers and the sale of labour power at the centre of analysis of new forms of work, including work in the digital age (Huws, 2013). The study of women as part of the working class has benefited from this approach, where for example Crompton (1993) looks at white collar workers, and Rubery (1988) examines women's entry into work. Adopting a wider definition of class also allows us to include analytically those who are future or past members of the working class (students or pensioners, for example), those who might work in different sectors of the economy, or in different types of work. It sees class as a fluid and dynamic rather than static concept. The definition that all such people are dependent on the sale of labour power for their subsistence also encompasses within it large sections of the oppressed: most women, black and ethnic minorities fall within the definition, demonstrating a close connection between class exploitation and specific oppression.

The most recent class survey in Britain, which took place in 2013, takes a very different and more fragmented view of class. Its approach has been to replace the standard Nuffield method of defining class sociologically with more modern methods that try to take into account a range of cultural and social factors, including self-definition (Savage and Devine, 2013). Similar theoretical approaches have drawn on the writing of Bourdieu to look at different aspects of class in relation to cultural questions in the wider sense (Devine et al.,

2005). However, their findings are in sharp contrast to ones which locate the centrality of work in definition of class. Indeed, there are questions about a definition of class which does not take into account the occupation of the person being defined as part of a particular class. Instead the class location of a particular individual is defined by the work locations of those it is acquainted with, and through various social and cultural manifestations including ‘cultural capital’: the idea that despite a lack of actual capital, certain groups of people may have access to advantages in society because of their education, their knowledge, style of dress or appearance (Bourdieu, 1986). While there are important insights here, it tends to reduce class to an individual and subjective question, and in this sense does not differ markedly from traditional sociological theories based on consumption or lifestyles.

This assessment of class stresses the horizontal fragmentation and separate characteristics of what might be termed the lower classes, of lower middle and working class. It therefore assesses particular class locations on the basis of age and cultural habits, which seems an inadequate distinction. Different cultural habits or indeed levels of education between older and younger people are a reality, as are different attitudes, but this can be compatible with those people belonging to the same class. In contrast, Marxist views which have stressed a greater tendency towards commonality of class interests and towards the ‘proletarianisation’ of a number of once professional occupations, allow the possibility of unifying superficially different groups into particular classes. The survey does also, however, points to greater polarisation between the ‘elite’ and the ‘precariat’, suggesting that it may concur with some aspects of Marxist thinking on this point.

In terms of women’s particular class position, the need to sell their labour power in order to cover the costs of their reproduction is essential for most women at work. As we have seen,

whatever the extent of the ‘family wage’ and the male breadwinner family in the past, they are no longer realities among the vast majority of the working class, and therefore most women will have this relationship to the means of production regardless of their husband’s position, or indeed whether they are married. Women face insecure and often difficult conditions at work, as well as the continued major responsibility for childcare and domestic labour. However, different conditions within the working class have always existed, and should not be seen as representing different class interests. Those who are unemployed or engaged in full time domestic labour, for example, should not be seen as outside the working class, but as sections of it who temporarily or even perhaps permanently are not engaged in wage labour. Standing’s ‘precariat’ (2011) should not be seen as cut off from more stable workers, but as a dispossessed section of the working class with the same interests (Palmer, 2013).

3.5 Racism, Identity and Intersectionality

If Second Wave feminism’s critique of traditional left and class politics found them wanting in regard to gender (Barrett, 1980; Campbell and Coote, 1982), the practical decline of working class parties and unions led some feminists away from more collective approaches towards individual ones, and towards the analytical centrality of gender other forms of oppression over class. In recent years there has been a renewed interest in theories such as intersectionality and privilege theory, which try to show the connection between class, gender and race (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 1998; McCall, 2005; Davis, 2008). These theories argue that it is necessary to go beyond traditional views of class in order to understand how different forms of oppression intersect with it, and how this alters the ways in which we should consider class.

Intersectionality has become an important reference point in academic writing in recent years. It is an attempt to analyse oppression not only by recognising the widespread existence of different oppressions, but also by looking at how they intersect with one another. The immediate appeal of these theories is that they try to explain how understanding of a particular oppression may not necessarily lead to the understanding of another or how they connect. The statement of the Combahee River Collective (1977), a collective of black feminists, is often cited as the founding of intersectionality theory, with its demand that those fighting one specific oppression have to take account of other forms of oppression. Another view locates it earlier as deriving from the 'triple jeopardy' cited by black women in the early women's movement in the US: black women face oppression from sexism, racism and capitalism or imperialism (Aguilar, 2015).

It is interesting to note, however, that much of the theory developed from the perspective of law, and particularly legal cases involving domestic violence and rape. Kimberle Crenshaw's approach in 'Mapping the Margins' (1991) is particularly important in this respect. As Crenshaw puts it, 'The problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite - that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences' (1991: 1242). Her concern being mainly with male violence, she wants to consider 'intersecting patterns of racism and sexism' (1991: 1243).

She looks at the incidence of such crimes as they relate to black women, and finds that an intersectional approach has to recognise the different social and racial aspects of these crimes in relation to black men and women. They have to take into account for example the racism which all blacks encounter from the legal and police system in the US, the different approaches taken by different races, and the different standards which are used against black men. She cites the example of the 1993 2LiveCrew prosecution for obscenity for a song

performed in Florida which contained extremely degrading lyrics to women. Crenshaw does not at all absolve the group from charges of sexism, but she is also extremely critical of the tactics of those supporting prosecution. She asks why these black men are singled out in an area where there are many shows which could be deemed degrading to women, and also questions the differential approaches to rape or sexual assault of white women (especially middle class white women) and blacks.

Patricia Hill Collins (1998) also looks at intersectional politics from the position of violence but broadens her definitions to include state violence aimed particularly at black people. She points out that courts fail to protect black women over issues such as rape, regardless of the race of the alleged offender (Collins 1998: 918). She also warns against two prevalent stereotypical explanations of black women's position, that of passive victim or strong woman (1998: 928).

In both Crenshaw and Collins there is a clear element of class involved in the understanding of oppression. The latter sees class location as protecting some black women from certain forms of wider social violence, and argues that 'those African-American women who currently enjoy middle-class and upper-middle-class privileges must come to terms with how they benefit from violence that is used to maintain social class hierarchies characterising advanced capitalism in the United States' (Collins, 1998: 929).

Intersectionality theory makes a number of important points. Crenshaw (1991) describes the differentiated attitudes towards rape once seen through the prism of race and class. She analyses responses to the Central Park jogger case (when a white middle class jogger in New York was gang raped and brutally beaten by young black men) and shows the contrast in

approaches which highlight repeatedly double standards towards black and white rape victims, and between ‘respectable’ middle class women and those deemed less so. At this level, intersectionality is both a useful descriptive tool, a means of recognising the specific problems of black women, and a reminder that issues of oppression are extremely complex and do not always fit into neat explanations. McCall discusses the need to look at the theories from the perspective of different disciplines, rather than too narrowly (McCall, 2005). It is problematic to make wider claims about it however. Here Davis (2008) usefully describes the attractions of the theory lying in precisely its lack of precision. Intersectionality may have become a buzzword, but it also lacks a clear or rigorous theoretical application and therefore tends to remain at the level of description. It lacks explanations of hegemony and power, and of consciousness which leads certain groups of the oppressed into certain directions. Brenner considers that it needs to move beyond the legacy of the 1960s movements in terms of developing a politics of equality which can be relevant in an era of globalisation (Brenner, 2000), and questions whether it relates sufficiently to white working class women. Jones (2014) argues that, ‘The problems of the “ordinary” working class are inherently intersectional: material disadvantage amplifies, and is amplified by, racism, sexism, homophobia, and ageism, all experienced as real and immediate issues enforced by existing structures of power’ (ibid 2014).

Intersectionality has, however, developed as a theory in such a way as to foreground forms of oppression other than class. This is in part symptomatic of the ‘retreat from class’ highlighted by Wood (1986). It also reflects an analytical separation between the manifestations of oppression and their root causes. It is unlikely that racism or sexism would take the form that they do, however, without the gender and racial division of labour which lies at the heart of capitalism. This failure to locate the root causes of oppression limits intersectionality theory,

leading it to concentrate on the manifestations of oppression, or, as Meyerson (2011) argues, ‘Oppression is multiple and intersecting but its causes are not’ (ibid 2011: 2).

In addition, the claims that intersectionality theory leads to new ways of approaching oppression is contradicted by some earlier feminist literature on the question of women and race, especially that of hooks (1981) and Davis (1982). Published in the early 1980s, both books consider the history of black women with a critique of both black men and white feminists for failing to take into account certain aspects of oppression, with Davis devoting a chapter to various myths about black men and rape. Hooks (1981) makes some very strong criticisms of white middle class feminists in relationship to charges of racism in behaviour to black women. She is critical of those who like the Combahee River Collective draw the conclusion that they must become black separatist feminists because of this racism. Other black feminists have also questioned the exclusion of black women from mainstream feminism. (Joseph, 1981; Carby, 1982). Hooks also looks at the role of black men, and talks about the difference between an anti-racist response to wider social and state racism, in which black men and women share a unity of interest, and the intra-racial sexism which helps reinforce the oppression of black women. This underlines not just racial differences which might exist, but those of class as well.

3.6 Conclusion

The relationship between class and oppression is highly complex, relating to the division of labour in work within capitalist society, but also – especially in relation to women’s oppression – reflecting inequalities which date back sometimes thousands of years. This chapter has addressed a number of the debates relating to class. It has considered classical Marxist theory, and where Marx locates the oppression of women within class society. It has

reviewed the debates on domestic labour and social reproduction, and considered whether theories of patriarchy have been able to explain the specific oppression of women. In addition, it discusses the location of working women within the working class, and whether traditional definitions of class still apply; and it considers the relationship between gender, race and class.

This is intended to provide a context for some of the discussions and debates with the interviewees; it assesses some of the ideas which have influenced them in becoming feminists, and considers what is meant by class in relation to women today. Moreover, it provides a context for some of the debates between Second and Third Wave feminists which will be discussed below.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The three books submitted as a contribution to the PhD did not contain a formal methodological analysis. Therefore the purpose of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, it is to consider retrospectively and be explicit about the ontological and epistemological approaches to the work; secondly, to demonstrate the methods of research undertaken in the course of the study. It will look at reasons for the research and the structure in its first section, then at approaches to methodology, including oral history techniques, before considering selection of the interviewees, conduct of the interviews and the theoretical framework in which the study is located.

There are two distinct phases of the research undertaken here. One is the work carried out in the past publications. The three publications span a period of over two decades, and while they were approached from the same theoretical framework, they were produced in different periods and therefore each took up somewhat different concerns. They were written outside an academic context and although they had a methodological position, they did not engage with comparative methodological approaches. The second phase of the research was the interviews carried out with Second or Third Wave feminists. These two aspects did not necessarily fit together neatly, creating some challenges when it came to methodology. When considering which methodology to adopt I reflected first of all on my previous work. My three books tended to be based on two different approaches to research: there was firstly a combination of empirical data, sometimes obtained directly from government and official statistical sources (Martin and Roberts, 1984; *Labour Force Survey*) as well as secondary sources which directly conveyed the experiences of women (Roberts 1984 and 1995; Braybon and Summerfield, 1987). The second approach was to assess the various theoretical

debates which had arisen especially within socialist and Marxist feminism, and to develop both a critique and a synthesis of them (See for example Kuhn and Wolpe, 1978; Coote and Campbell, 1982; Eisenstein, 2009). In addition, the third volume submitted also included a number of original interviews with participants in anti war, peace and feminist movements from different generations.

4.2 Marxism as Methodology

This section looks at the way in which the previous work was informed by a Marxist theory of history, which posits a connection between material reality and changing consciousness. Marxism is a theory whose ontological aspects are closely connected to its epistemology, or theory of knowledge. Marx's view of what constitutes 'species being', the ability to consciously labour, his theory of alienation in which this capacity is lost as a result of the operation of wage labour under capitalism, and his theory of how workers are both able to recognise and overcome this loss, are themselves a closely bound, mediated totality. In Marx there is no reductive relationship between being and consciousness but neither is there a false opposition between what it is to be human, the loss of control over this condition, the intellectual and ideological appreciation of this fact, and the struggle to overcome this condition. Marx sees ideas as developing from (changing) material reality and sometimes altering sharply as a result of changing circumstances: 'Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life' (Marx and Engels, 1965: 38). Marxist theory is concerned with the connection between objective factors in society and the subjective role of actors which can lead to certain outcomes, a point he makes famously in his comment, 'Men make their own history, but not of their own free will; not under circumstances they themselves have chosen but under the given and inherited circumstances with which they are directly confronted' (Marx, 1973:146). Marx's thought was influenced by the rational and

scientific ideas of the eighteenth century Enlightenment, but he built on, and provided a critique of, these ideas to develop a dialectical theory of change in history which stressed the contradictions in society. A major criticism of Marxism is that it is too deterministic, stressing the inevitability of change and the certainty of progress towards socialism (Paolucci, 2009). This would have been a more accurate criticism of certain forms of Enlightenment materialism, but it is a simplistic reading of Marx's theory. There have been major debates within both classical and more modern Marxism over the relationship between the subjective and objective circumstances, or over structure and agency; both these discussions are concerned with the role of individual actors in particular given circumstances (Jakubowski, 1978; Lukács, 1971; Luxemburg, 1971; Callinicos, 1987, and 1999; Sherman, 1981).

Quantitative research in social science is traditionally associated with positivist theories which tend to see the natural sciences as representing the only valid form of human knowledge, and which base their findings on quantifiable and supposedly objective data. The qualitative approach has stressed the importance of taking subjective factors into account when researching, thus allowing for deeper ways of understanding reality, and for understanding phenomena from different points of view. It is also better equipped to analyse a relatively small number of cases (Silverman, 2013:105). Positivist method with its roots in natural science is not best suited for this sort of inquiry into changing ideas and consciousness. Andrew Schonfield has made the point that 'In the social sciences it is rarely possible to pose questions and provide answers in the manner of some of the natural sciences, and it is a refusal to recognise this that has often led us up the wrong path' (Schonfield, 1971). Positivist theory tends to be a static theory, reflecting the given facts of a particular historical moment. Its limitation is that it can only reflect or describe society as it already

exists, rather than having the ability to point to the dynamics of historical change. It lacks this wider context which is important in the study of social movements.

Historically, positivist and empiricist thinking arose in the nineteenth century as industrial capitalism developed. Thinkers associated with the emerging capitalist class embraced these theories, which were descriptive rather than analytical, and stressed social continuity in contrast to Marx's emphasis on social change (Comte, 1988; Mill, 2013). Within the study of social science there have traditionally been two different broad approaches. Positivist theories are connected particularly with the natural sciences and stress the importance of formal logic and the existence of objective facts in research. This is posited as an alternative to interpretivist theories, the second approach, which place much greater emphasis on the extent to which reality is socially constructed (See on this Denzin, 1970; Taylor and Bogdan, 1998; McNeill and Chapman, 2005; Walker, 1985; Giddens, 1974). Many modern theories of society reject positivism, and tend to stress subjectivity in trying to understand the world. This approach to subjectivity has been welcomed often by those engaged in researching and theorising questions of oppression, since it allows more space for subjective feelings and understanding of the oppressed. Some such theories have played an important role in recognising the need to move beyond surface reality and look at deeper social reasons why things are as they are, for example looking at the social construction of gender and race oppression. However, in rejecting empiricism they can tend to ignore the way in which subjective processes are both produced by and, in turn, shape material reality (Callinicos, 1999).

My interest in the subject of women's liberation and feminism developed from the contradiction between new reality and old perceptions. In writing the books, I had wanted to

study the actual reality of women's lives and how it was changing. However, I also wanted to explain why ideas about women's role changed for certain women who could be regarded as representative of a wider group of women. In approaching methodology I wanted to continue to look at the relationship between the subjective and the objective which is so important in Marxism.

I therefore rejected a positivist approach: while it is essential to be able to provide empirical data to tell us how many women work, what jobs they fill, their attitudes to marriage and family at any one time, a theory which simply looks at 'what is' is inadequate to explain the issues which are the subject of this work. The limit of positivism is its relative incapacity to understand the contradictory, and therefore open-ended nature of the historical process; it is therefore particularly lacking in the realm of understanding ideas, so cannot deal with phenomena such as the Women's Liberation Movement in terms of the changing consciousness which produces and is in turn produced by it.

I wanted to take a much more interpretivist approach, looking at the subjective factors in order to understand why and how certain things occur. This coincides with feminist thought since the 1960s. The women's movement itself developed intellectually by rejecting biological or essentialist theories which had purported to explain women's unequal position in society, and looked instead at how certain given facts can be socially constructed. However at the same time I did not want to abandon factual analysis. I feel that it is erroneous to ignore the fact that a degree of objective social reality exists and is a factor in shaping consciousness. There are reasons why certain movements or ideas develop at certain times, and not at others. Material factors – employment, family law, war conditions, equality legislation – have all at different points helped to shape such ideas and movements. While it

is right to be sceptical about apparent reality or to counter certain received ideas about society, it is also important to see a role for natural or social science in terms of comprehending society. Ideas have to be located in social reality in order to begin to comprehend them. I therefore also rejected the idea of separating feminism as a body of ideas from any material basis, or regarding it as purely ideologically constructed. The false polarities of seeing everything as either essentialist or as completely socially constructed leave little room for a materialist theory of women's oppression. Theories such as Social Constructionism, with its links to postmodernism, contains some of the opposite errors of positivism, in that its subjectivist approach removes consideration of any objective reality, and considers that there can be no reality outside of people's perceptions (Webb, 2004). I believe that this leaves us unable to explain why and when ideas change, and is simply descriptive of the fact that they do.

While qualitative research in social science allows much more scope for subjective approaches than does quantitative research, and allows the area of research to be considered from different points of view, rejecting one view of 'objective reality' should not mean a rejection of broader notions of social reality, or discussion of the relationship between objective situations and subjective action. I wanted my work to reflect this relationship between the objective and subjective, rather than putting forward a one sided analysis.

4.3 Feminist Methodologies

An obvious starting point in carrying out the research was to consider feminist methodology. Second Wave feminism grew out of the social upheaval of the 1960s, and intellectually a new generation searched for an analysis which gave more space to human agency and did not rely on a deterministic view of change which viewed social progress as inevitable. The Second

Wave was in any case concerned with the specific condition of women and how that might influence their thought and actions, and with the place of subjective feelings in terms of creating feminism. The process of consciousness-raising was precisely concerned with developing feminist ideas through an articulation of and greater understanding of such subjective feelings (Baxandall and Gordon, 2000:67-83).

The growth of feminism as an ideology from the late 1960s onwards, and its increasing acceptance in academic life, has led to feminist critiques in most academic disciplines, which have been concerned to take into account the subjective experience and feelings of women. Since the 1960s there have been attempts at a location of such feminist thought, as we have already seen with the broad divisions on intellectual lines within the movement, leading to socialist, radical, revolutionary and Marxist feminists. While I consider myself closest in these categories to Marxist feminism, its intellectual approach has often been one of positing dual systems, analytically separating capitalist exploitation from patriarchal oppression, a distinction which prevents an integrated analysis of oppression and class (Hartmann, 1979; McDonough and Harrison, 1978).

In approaching the new research I considered various feminist methodologies. One aspect of feminist theory in general has been its determination to uncover conscious or unconscious bias in research, for example Barrett (1980) on concepts of masculinity and femininity and gender bias in education; Firestone (1972) on 'class' divisions between men and women; Brewer (1993) on race and gender; and Spender (1980) on language.

The sociologist Ann Oakley in her historical overview of research around gender and methodology warns against rejection of all statistical or numerical evidence as 'positivist' and

demonstrates that much of earlier research into women's social conditions, for example, combined qualitative methods such as interviewing with statistical surveys (Oakley in Hood et al., 1999:159). Some social surveys from the earlier twentieth century were later republished as a result of Second Wave feminism and its influence on publishing (Pember Reeves, 1994; Black, 1983).

Specific attempts to create a feminist epistemology or theory of knowledge appeared in the early 1980s. Harding warned against just attempting to 'add women' to any existing analysis (1982:4). She also cautions against a view of women which does not consider differences of class and race, since 'there is no one set of feminist principles or understandings beyond the very general ones to which feminists in every race, class and culture will assent!' (Harding, 1982: 7). Harding and Hintikka (1983) looked at different academic disciplines and questioned gender assumptions in research. Harding has argued that, 'While studying women is not new, studying them from the perspective of their own experiences so that women can understand themselves and the world can claim virtually no history at all' (ibid 1982: 8). She later defined three feminist epistemologies: feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint theory and feminist postmodernism (Harding, 1986). In these she contrasts empiricism, which regards bias against women as simply bad science, with postmodernism which rejects the role of science in understanding the issue, to standpoint theory which locates understanding in women's particular point of view allowed to them only as women.

Nancy Hartsock's analysis of feminist standpoint theory, also in Harding and Hintikka (1983) is an ambitious attempt to use Marx's method and categories to create a theory where the oppressed group is able to move beyond existing social situations by dint of its own particular viewpoint. Because, in Hartsock's words, 'Women's lives make available a particular and

privileged vantage point on male supremacy...’ they have the understanding and the potential to overcome oppression. Hartsock uses the term ‘privilege’ in explaining feminist standpoint theory, and this theory can be related to Marxism in that it shares the view that the oppressed group has this understanding of its own position precisely because of its subordinate place in society (Hartsock in Harding and Hintikka, 1983:283-310).

Hartsock’s theory draws upon the standpoint analogy developed by the Hungarian Marxist Georg Lukács when he talks about seeing society from the standpoint of the working class rather than the capitalist class (Lukács, 1971). The Marxist view, which talked of two major contending classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, was that the world can only truly be seen from the standpoint of one of the two major classes, that of the proletariat. Lukács, in his section on the standpoint of the proletariat in *History and Class Consciousness*, quotes Marx writing in *The Holy Family* that while both classes suffered from alienation under capitalism, the bourgeoisie was content in its alienation or ‘feels at home in this self-alienation and feels itself confirmed by it’; whereas the proletariat ‘sees in it its own impotence and the reality of an inhuman existence’ (Lukács, 1971:149). The capitalist is blinded to the true state of affairs that exist as a result of the process of exploitation, but the worker cannot be. Instead in the process of understanding her or his exploitation, the worker becomes in a position to see how to change this (Lukács, 1971:171). Because the proletariat is the exploited class, the object of history, it alone can see the true relations within capitalist society, and through its own organisation and struggles is it capable of replacing that society, making it both the object and subject of history. This gives the proletariat a privileged position in terms of understanding society.

Feminist standpoint theorists argue that their theory allows us to see society from a woman's subjective point of view and therefore to develop knowledge which takes this standpoint into account. However, while the theory has similarities with that of Lukács and Marx, it differs from them in a particular way. Lukács' view is that the working class has this standpoint not just because it is subordinate but because its labour is central to capitalist society. In addition, feminist standpoint theory is unable to take into account class divisions within society, or indeed other differences such as race or nationality. The economic relationship of exploitation which defines the working class in Marxist terms, allows the working class to potentially develop a view of the whole of society. Whereas Lukács based his theory on the Marxist view that the working class could be both the object and subject of history - that it could both exist objectively as an exploited class and be capable of developing revolutionary consciousness as an exploited class - feminist theory posits an interest of all women which of necessity transcends class, and other intersections such as race or ethnicity. The feminist standpoint can only therefore be a partial view, because it cannot overcome the class divisions which exist among women, and cannot therefore explain how class interests may cut across those of gender.

4.4 Critical Realism

There are many important methodological insights created by feminists which can point towards a clearer understanding of the situation of women in society and the role of oppression. However, despite my sympathies for some of these insights created by feminist ideas, and their challenge to traditional ideologies, I felt that the various theories were not adequate to provide the analysis that could synthesise individual consciousness with a broader analysis of the class society in which it was located. In considering various other approaches to methodology, Critical Realism presented itself as a theory which manages to

avoid the one sidedness of the totally objectivist or subjectivist approaches outlined above. The theory stresses that there are structures that exist in society independently and outside of our thought are not necessarily visible to our experience. These structures can shed at least partial light on our thought (O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014:9).

Critical Realism accepts that there is an objective reality but that it is deep and multi layered. It looks at the different ways in which society is stratified or 'laminated' to try to understand how it works. It is 'committed to a stratified, differentiated and changing world' which contrasts with the 'flat, uniform depthlessness of empirical realism' (Bhaskar, 1993:206). In attempting to achieve a deeper understanding of society than empiricism allows, it points to entities, mechanisms and structures which work at separate but connected registers. It tries to generalise about society through an understanding of such related strata. So 'entities' such as male and female identities or men's and women's bodies are seen as giving rise to 'mechanisms' such as socialization, and to the 'structures' of gendered relations (O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014: 17). This process is known as 'abduction', the description of observable objects in a more generalised way. So Critical Realist methodology will move from a description of events and objects to an analysis which theorises the mechanisms which generate them, their work involving movement: 'from consideration of the intransitive world of actual events, mechanisms, and structures to the transitive world of measures, descriptions, and theories' (O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014: 11).

This set of ideas helped to make the connection between the two parts of my dissertation. The publications submitted in this work all start from the assumption that there are concrete realities of capitalism, that the capitalist system exists independently and objectively as a number of structures. I aimed in the books to develop a theoretical approach from sources

which would shed light on those structures, and so resorted to the use of statistical data and figures to explain some of the social factors impacting on women's consciousness. I argued that structure was something objective, and that changing society involved both objective and subjective factors, particularly in the form of agency. Structures can however sometimes be enabling and can act to transform lives and consciousness as a result. Critical Realism also helped in formulating my approach to the interviews which informed the new research. Critical Realist research recognises that complete detachment is impossible and that there can be no such thing as totally objective writing (Ackroyd and Karlsson, 2014: 26). Every writer has her own subjective and sometimes highly committed perspective.

Unwittingly, this method of approach to my writing reflected many of the ideas of Critical Realism. The books concerned all attempted to start from a sense of what the world looked like and then asked the question why did it look like this, how was it changing and what was the agency for change? It started from a recognition of a structure of capitalism which exists independently. This entailed me attempting to develop theory through the study of empirical data to explain the position of women. In addition I carried out an analysis of Second Wave feminists' own original writing in the form of publications such as *Shrew* and *Spare Rib* (publications arising from the British women's movement) as well as reading secondary sources and theoretical works extensively.

Critical Realism fills a role which goes beyond a positivist approach (researching statistics) or a social constructionist one (the subjective choice of interviews with individuals), so therefore helps to create a synthesis between objective reality and subjective thought, between structure and agency, something which I attempted to do in the books submitted here. I feel that it can partly underpin the methodology of the previous work, albeit in an

inchoate way. It also to an extent complements the various insights from feminist theories which I considered above.

This has been useful in pointing towards the methodology used in the new research. I was involved in qualitative research, carrying out interviews with a number of feminists from different generations. The interviews aimed to be both about the individuals' subjective experiences and about their own wider location in social movements. However I was also aware that these interviews were about how certain aspects of society: the family, education, work and so on, also acted on the interviewees. It was a constant challenge in writing up the research to ensure that the subjective thoughts and ideas of the interviewees were placed in a social context. This too involved consideration of the connection between objective reality and subjective thought.

While I felt that Critical Realism helped to make the link between the two different aspects of the work submitted here, I also share some of the reservations about it from a Marxist point of view. Critical Realism at times seems to avoid its debt to Marxism, or to create unnecessary distinctions between the different theories. Callinicos makes the point that in the work of Roy Bhaskar, 'fairly concrete and clear propositions are translated into more abstract, and all too often less perspicuous formulae' (Callinicos in Bidet and Kouvelakis, 2008: 582). An example of this is the concept of *abduction*, used in Critical Realism to describe the theoretical generalising from particular situations, which does not seem to vary in any fundamental way from Marx's concept of *abstraction*. Ben Fine has argued that Critical Realism is neither sufficiently critical nor realist enough (Fine in Lewis 2004: 202). He claims that a theory which cannot use categories such as capital, or discuss where structures come from in terms of the Marxist emphasis on the forces and relations of

production in explaining how society is structured, leads to a weakening of its analysis. This argument is countered by Neilsen and Morgan (2006), who suggest that there are close connection between the two and that it is not possible to differentiate totally the different strands of the respective theories.

Other Marxists take a different approach. Sean Creaven argues that Critical Realism can be an important addition to Marxism, since it allows us to create what he calls an ‘emergentist Marxism’ which argues that ‘*specific forms* of human agency (social labour and class struggle) and social structure (the forces of production and relations of production) have explanatory primacy in shaping the constitution and dynamics of social systems’ (Creaven, 2007:146). He argues that this combination of the two theories can provide a defence against other theories which stress either a form of economic reductionism or a separation of ideas from any material base (Creaven, 2007: 145-6).

The insights provided by Creaven provide a means of linking the different theories and therefore of linking the different parts of the research that I am putting forward, and in being grounded in an ontological approach which stresses what is real and structured about society. In addition its specific aim of looking at the structures of society is useful in terms of social science research. It enables an analytical approach which can distinguish between being and consciousness, whereas the Marxist theory presupposes a very close connection between the two. It can therefore act as bridge between Marxist ideas and social scientific research. I therefore took the view that its importance for me was to adapt the insights in Critical Realism in order to use it as part of a wider set of theories.

4.5 Oral History

4.5.1 Rationale

When it came to deciding how to conduct the interviews, I gathered a number of important insights into how I should do so from the different methodological approaches considered above. There are many ways in which a researcher can approach interviews. The positivist approach, with its emphasis on quantitative research, stresses control and uniformity in the interviews, something which I felt neither necessary nor desirable in the circumstances of my research. Other approaches include standpoint theory, which I felt was inadequate for the reasons outlined above. Ann Oakley's essay on 'Interviewing Women' (Roberts ed, 1981) stressed the importance of rapport, and of using research to highlight women's subjective situation. Critical Realism emphasises that social action takes place against a wider canvas of pre existing structures and social relations (Smith and Elger in Edwards et al., 2014: 111). Smith and Elger emphasise that the constructionist approach can in certain circumstances lead to 'subjective understandings [which] involve the play of varied narratives, and these coexist but cannot be assessed against an external or objective social reality' (ibid: 111). While these points are valid, I decided to approach the interviews from a different viewpoint.

I found an oral history methodology the most satisfactory when considering the interviews. This was not a rejection of the other approaches completely, several of which helped to inform my research. My reasons for doing so were primarily these: with the Second Wave interviews in particular I was dealing with events which were sometimes half a century in the past and I felt that it would be appropriate for the sorts of interview I was carrying out. I was also encouraged by the approach to subjectivity in interviews – one shared by a number of the other methodologies – but also by the question of memory and how that can alter historical

accounts. Finally, I felt that such oral history techniques were closely connected to the subject matter of my research, as I shall explain below.

Oral history has been an important development in many areas of historical research, allowing participants in large and small events to record their own versions of their experience, in order to highlight wider developments. Kvale suggests that in oral history interviews, 'it is less the subject's experiences as such that are of interest, but the information they provide about social and historical events' (Kvale, 2007: 38). Problems of subjectivity are clearly a factor in oral history, but can often be outweighed by the value of direct personal testimony. With modern social movements, the method has provided a fruitful means of assessing the impact on activists of a series of political questions, not least feminism (Smith, 2009; McCrindle and Rowbotham, 1979; Armitage in Ritchie, 2012: 169).

Oral history came into its own after the Second World War as an attempt to look at history from a different perspective. It was informed by a variety of different influences, including folklore collection, social history and sociology. A great deal of it was concerned with what is called 'recovery history', the transcribing of memory of particular ways of life or events. It became more widely recognised as an approach to history in the 1960s, as the general radicalisation within wider society found expression in the search for new ways of approaching learning. It is also connected with the idea of 'history from below', the rejection of narratives which only explain history in terms of the actions of 'great men', and which instead searches for historical understanding through the lives of those whose actions or thoughts were not necessarily recorded or written down (Ritchie, 2011: 5; Samuel, 1981).

Oral history has given voice to oppressed groups over the past 40 years, and has created historians inside the academy, and outside, in trade unions or community groups. Its initial impetus came from outside academia. Organisations such as the Workers Educational Association played an important role in fostering studies of 'history from below' (Samuel, 1981). Oral history is recognised as helping to contribute to a great deal of modern historical understanding. The Popular Memory Group uses the example of Ronald Fraser's extensive oral history *Blood of Spain* (Fraser, 1979), which tells the story of the conflict of the Spanish Civil War through the very different testimonies of a range of participants, and is able to use individual stories or 'innumerable tiny personal narratives from which is woven a larger story of heroic proportions and almost infinite complication' (Popular Memory Group 1982 in Perks and Thomson, 2006:49).

4.5.2 Feminism and Oral History

The rise of Second Wave feminism was also a product of 1960s radicalisation, so the widening appeal of oral history coincided with the emergence of a new set of feminist ideas. The coincidence was fortuitous: women, especially women from the poorer classes, were less represented in historical accounts than even working class men, so oral history presented itself as a means of developing women's history. It also had elements in common with the practice of consciousness-raising within the women's movement, of women explaining and articulating their concerns and aspects of oppression to a small group. The idea of women expressing their own experience of the past and memory as a historical project had similarities with this practice. The role of recognising as a group that women had a common historical experience was partly filled by oral history (Abrams, 2010: 44). Sheila Rowbotham makes the point that any movement of the oppressed 'necessarily brings its own vision of itself into sight', and in order to discover its identity, 'has to become visible to itself'

(Rowbotham, 1973: 27). The discovery of women's oppression and its history was central to the development of Second Wave feminism. The work of oral history was important in helping to transform the history of the family (Thompson 1988 in Perks and Thomson, 2006: 29). Before this, sexual stereotyping, courtship, sexual behaviour, abortion, as well as many other aspects of family and personal life, were all 'secret', or hidden from view. Now history became in Thompson's words more 'democratic'. In an article where the two women respond to the other's point of view, Armitage argues that oral history is, 'the best method I know for understanding women's consciousness and their coping strategies.' Gluck also considers that oral history is particularly suited to women interviewees who have not had formal education or access to mainstream channels of communication (Armitage and Gluck 1998 in Perks and Thomson, 2006: 78-9).

Women's oral history can be seen as both motivated by women involved in the women's movement and by feminist ideas, and as a discovery of women's own roots in history (Abrams, 2010: 156-7). Indeed the rich level of theoretical work produced as a result of the early women's movement is all the more remarkable given the extent to which these ideas developed at least partly outside the established channels of academia (Abrams, 2010: 158). The impetus of the women's movement led to the widespread use of oral history to produce work which expressed history through women's own voices, for example the history of women and the family in Lancashire by Elizabeth Roberts (Roberts, 1984 and 1995), or women's role in the First and Second World Wars told partly through oral history techniques in Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield's *Out of the Cage* (1987). Sheila Rowbotham and Jean McCrindle's *Dutiful Daughters* (1979) examines the backgrounds and influences on feminists themselves. The important role of oral history in the women's movement, as expressed through this latter work has been described as aiming 'to render private feminist

oppression more public and more shared' (Popular Memory Group 1982 in Perks and Thomson 2006: 50).

Feminist approaches to oral history have been critical of certain aspects of oral history methodology. Anderson et al. (1987) highlight for example that dominant attitudes to work tend to treat paid work as 'real work' thereby excluding the significance of women's unpaid labour in the home. The methods of interviewing have in addition been felt to reflect a more masculine approach based on a neutrality and objectivity which increasingly came into question. This led to a new approach to methodology based on a feminism which stressed mutual respect and empathy (Abrams, 2010: 163).

While it is arguable that the methods of oral history have helped to enrich our understanding of women's role in history and in society, there are questions about the validity of oral history, and the extent to which it can be regarded as a truthful record. The testimony can only be a view of events seen through the eyes of the interviewee. This view will be by definition partial and subjective, and may be very different from other testimony of the same events. This in itself should not invalidate it. It is also true of other forms of historical record, for example diaries, autobiography and personal reminiscences, which are often relied on by historians. Alessandro Portelli makes the point that written documents are often the 'uncontrolled transmission of unidentified oral sources' (Portelli 1979 in Perks and Thomson, 2006: 37). They are also often written some time after the events recorded, and therefore may take a different approach from contemporaneous sources. There are also measures which can be taken to help to verify oral records. Testimony has to be backed up with specific facts where appropriate in order to correct personal views which might be inaccurate, and awareness of the background and viewpoint of the person who is being interviewed. It is also

necessary to cross reference, to match their personal testimony and evidence against any possible documentary evidence to support it.

4.5.3 Recovering the Subjective Experience: Contribution and Challenges

However, the interviews themselves amount to more than a simple record of the interviewee's story. Oral history is not a purely objective narrative, nor does it attempt to be. Indeed it could be argued that it is the 'recovery of subjective experience' (Samuel, 1981: xviii). The interview between narrator and researcher is one where both express their subjectivities. The interviewer brings to the interview her or his own views, background, status and her own sense of inquiry. No interview is exactly the same twice, and each interviewer and interviewee brings their own subjective experience to it. The interviewer as well as the narrator is present at the creation of oral history, so there should not be the pretence of neutrality (Abrams, 2010:54). Instead it is possible to see the two subjectivities as inter-subjectivity and to see that as creating an empathy which may be missing in supposedly 'objective accounts' (Abrams, 2010:163). Researchers need to reflect on their own role and to be transparent about these inter-subjectivities. The narrator in oral history is not a detached observer but becomes part of the story (Portelli 1979 in Perks and Thomson, 1998: 41; Yow, 1997). As the study of oral history has developed, so the question of subjectivity has been regarded as something to be discussed and even regarded as a strength (Yow, 1997). Portelli argues that one cannot see the historian's subjective role as disappearing under the weight of oral history testimonies, just as it is impossible to regard traditional historians as objective in writing history (Portelli 1979 in Perks and Thomson, 1998: 41).

Memory and its interpretation raises another set of questions which are relevant to the present research. Memory has been brought to the forefront of the historical agenda by oral history,

and is an important component of how we now see history (Cubitt, 2007). The Italian oral historian Luisa Passerini sees individual memory as ‘creating a history of itself, which is much less and perhaps somewhat more than a shared social history’ (Passerini, 1996). This would seem to suggest an approach which sees individual memory, often recalled over a long period of time, as helping to create an understanding of history on a wider scale. The extent to which memory can be reliable, or even when it is unreliable in relation to particular small facts, whether it can be reliable as a general testimony of what happened and why, is a question which arises with the present research, as it does with any research which relies on narratives. In the case of the Second Wave interviewees, much of the subject of the interview was about events which took place several decades previously. Even with the younger subjects, they were again describing childhood experiences which were at some distance from the present. Yet memory, whatever its subjective qualities, should not just be dismissed: the subjective nature of memory itself can be valuable in reflecting internalized attitudes, feelings or emotions. In addition, even when memory is mistaken it can have some value in exploring hopes or misunderstandings (Bornat, 2012). A perhaps more substantial question to consider is how memories alter as time passes, and whether there is a difference in the accounts as a result. Our own subjective experiences, tell us that this is a real phenomenon. All sorts of differences in terms not just of memory itself but also of the social location of that memory can be affected. The study of a young US soldier, who was involved in a serious incident during the Vietnam War, where several of his comrades were killed in a particular incident, is instructive. Interviewed two days after the event, and then again many years later in 2002, his accounts did not alter in terms of the basic facts but nonetheless were very different in terms of their content and approach, the later ones tending to be more elaborate and colourful, and less matter of fact (Allison, 2004). Interviewees may tend to also project wider social memories onto their own experience, projecting not just relations with friends

and family, but in one example informed by ‘a host of public representations of the 1960s’, identifying ‘the miniskirt as a key marker of change’ (Abrams, 2010:79).

In the case of my research, it is accepted that memories recollected after several decades will produce a different sort of interview than one conducted contemporaneously. The interviews were therefore conceived as part of a broader approach to oral history, of themselves helping to express historical acts through key players within them, and to also present reflections on that historical experience from those same people.

It is clear that both interviewer and interviewees in this research have strong, developed points of view. The interviews were an interchange between these views, which touched on important areas of agreement but also on others where there would be disagreement or controversy, reflecting past and current debates within the movement. These included attitudes towards left organisations, analysis of racism, questions of dress, and debates on domestic labour. One of the aims of the interviews was precisely to highlight such controversies among the interviewees. In the case of the present research oral history was also a method which the interviewees had sometimes used themselves. They tended to feel comfortable with it because of this and because of its wider relevance to uncovering women’s history from the point of view of feminist ideas.

4.6 Fieldwork

4.6.1: Selection of the Interviewees: Sampling Strategy

The selection of the interviewees involved the common element that they had all played and were playing a public role in feminist activity or developing feminist ideas. Given the scale of involvement in modern feminism and the wide impact these ideas have had, it was not

intended to be a comprehensive cross section, even of feminists who have played a public role. Instead, the interviewees were chosen partly as a result of their own work, and partly because they were opinion formers in their field. The sampling method was purposive, in the sense that I selected individuals who were not typical of their generation, but who had made a marked contribution to developing feminist theory or practice. The interviewees were not chosen as a random sample, but because they would have a specific privileged position in discussing the matters being researched. Neither did the interviewees range across the whole spectrum of feminist opinion. Since the research was concerned with issues such as women, work and class, those selected tended to be those more likely to be involved in work around these issues. They were therefore more likely (with one partial exception) to be from the strand of feminism more closely identified with socialist or Marxist feminism than with what is sometimes called radical, or separatist, feminism. This was true of both generations, although the younger generation were less likely to identify as socialist feminists *per se*. Nonetheless, they tended to identify with support for social movements and progressive change on a range of issues and often defined themselves in opposition to capitalism. In this sense they could be seen as a self selecting group, and indeed a number of the interviewees knew each other and had sometimes engaged politically with other interviewees from time to time. It was made clear to all the interviewees that their names as well as the interviews would be made public. While anonymity is often chosen for subjects of some personal sensitivity, it would not have been possible in research such as mine, which depended on finding out the views of women whose political activity was clearly in the public domain.

This selection involved a purposive approach, focusing on particular characteristics of a defined group of people, and was an attempt to allow the development of themes from the interviews which could be seen as having a wider application in assessing the different

generations and making a comparison between the two. Justifying my choice of interviewees was not particularly problematic because my research has already focused on a particularly defined group of women, especially the older feminists involved with Second Wave feminism. The interviewees were designed to symbolise the challenge of feminism and its continued sometimes fractious relationship with class. They were interviewees who had considered the relationship between class and gender in some depth, but who do not necessarily come from a working class background. While this may have meant less of a geographical or class spread in experiences, it did involve comparison between different generations of feminists.

The study was based on the attitudes of groups of women describing their own development intellectually as feminists, and their role in developing both ideas and activity in this field. I expected that all the women would have clearly defined and sometimes strong views on a number of questions and would provide wide ranging and thoughtful material on which to base the research. I did not therefore feel it necessary to have a larger sample. Given the influence of some of the women on feminist thought, I considered that they could be seen as representative of particular generations. The interviews were clearly biographical and political in nature. A relatively small number could serve to illustrate certain themes and ideas, and while they could not be said to speak for ‘all’ or even ‘most’ feminists, they could be seen as raising wider questions of relevance to many feminists (Silverman, 2013: 218-9). As Kvale has put it, ‘If the aim is to understand the world as experienced by one specific person, say in a biographical interview, this one subject is sufficient (Kvale, 2007: 43).’ He argues that the answer to the common inquiry of how many should be interviewed is, ‘Interview as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know’ (Kvale, 2007: 43). The possibility of ‘saturation’, where additional interviews with similar interviewees

yield the same sort of material, was also real, and would have made some of the interviews redundant. That could in turn lead to work which was repetitive or superfluous in some way (Mason, 2010). I felt that in the case of my research, given the depth and extent of knowledge and experience of the topic common among my interviewees, further interviews would not necessarily have led to more information. The interviewees chosen did, in addition, indeed provide rich material for ‘finding out what I needed to know’ about feminist attitudes on a number of themes.

The research attempted to make some general assessments about the attitude of women of these generations by specifically aiming to interview opinion formers and prominent feminists. The selection of the older feminists reflected their proven record in the women's movement. With the younger feminists, selection was made on the basis of already published work or a record of campaigning on various feminist issues. In selecting the interviewees in this way I hoped to interview a cross section of participants with a particularly privileged and dedicated viewpoint of the various stages of feminism. One criterion was that all the older Second Wave interviewees were still engaged at some level with campaigning around the questions which had first brought them to feminism over forty years ago. The information about some of the current campaigning, and certainly its extent, surprised me, and was an indication of their sense of commitment to these ideals which helped inform the research.

Selection of the younger generation or Third Wave feminists presented more of a difficulty. The Second Wave interviewees were all distinguished by a sustained and public contribution in their field over a number of decades. The younger feminists, by definition, had not had the opportunity to develop such a long term contribution. They were emerging as people who could and hopefully would make such a contribution in the future. I therefore selected them

in the following way. All were writers, speakers or campaigners who had played some sort of public role. Two were academics who were also involved in feminist campaigning, one a relatively high profile journalist, one a union organiser and activist in the Scottish Radical Independence Campaign, who co-authored a short book on women and independence. There were two participants from ethnic minority backgrounds, one an economist and researcher, and the other a campaigner within the National Union of Students. I felt that this was important for several reasons: issues of racism and anti-racism had surfaced early on in the interviews, and I wanted to obtain opinions on the connection between anti-racism and feminism from a range of points of view. In addition, Britain has become a considerably more diverse society in the period between the Second and Third Waves, and I wanted to reflect this. There were also issues where I felt it would be advantageous to obtain the points of view of feminists from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, especially to do with questions such as Muslim women's dress, which has proved divisive within mainstream feminism.

I wanted to provide a range of experiences and opinions and felt it important to include those who had been involved in campaigns to change women's position. It was somewhat harder therefore to choose the subjects. In general, it also proved harder to establish interviews with the younger generation, which might reflect a greater sense of instability in their lives, or perhaps a different set of attitudes towards time.

My own position as a longstanding campaigner and anti-war organiser with a public role gave me particular access to these individuals, and a particular personal viewpoint of involvement. I was acquainted with a number of the interviewees personally, and with the others I was able to make contact with them through intermediaries. They were for the most part aware of at

least some of my political ideas and practice, although I had not worked closely with any of them over a sustained period of time. While my position gave me a certain insider status in terms of the group I interviewed, I did not feel that this was total, since most of the women involved had not been engaged politically or personally with me over a long period of time. However, the fact that I was to a large extent an insider made it easier to conduct the sorts of interviews that I wanted. In this, I tend to agree with Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009) who say that the benefit of being part of the group one is studying is acceptance, 'One's membership automatically provides a level of trust and openness in your participants that would likely not have been present otherwise' (ibid: 58). That could weight the exchange too much on the interviewer's terms, but I felt that the relationship between me and the interviewees, and the strong opinions held by them, would not lead that to happen. As outlined above, I also took the view that the interviews would in any case not avoid levels of subjectivity, and that outsider status would not have altered this.

There were a number of aims in carrying out the interviews. The first was to establish some of the influences on the different feminists and the extent to which class as a social phenomenon and as a theory had impacted on them. I also wanted to look at what had changed in the years since Second Wave feminism, and whether this was what the women who founded the women's movement had considered likely to happen. Thirdly, I wanted to assess the extent of the continuities between the different generations and how much class was a factor in their thinking today.

A number of key feminists did agree to be interviewed including writers such as Sheila Rowbotham, trade union leader Heather Wakefield and campaigner Nina Power. Generally there was an openness to discuss and a willingness to reflect on past and current experience.

The interviewees tended to be knowledgeable and opinionated on the subject, a number provided not just accounts of events at the time but theories and analysis which were not only thought provoking in themselves but gave an insight into opinion within the feminist movement.

4.6.2 Conduct of Interviews

Most of the interviews were conducted face to face in the homes of interviewees or interviewer, or otherwise in a mutually agreeable quiet meeting room. They lasted between one and two hours. The interviewees were clearly told the nature of the study, its ethics approval and gave informed consent. I made clear that anything being recorded would be checked with them before any publication. The interviews were in depth and semi-structured, following some written questions but not in too rigid a way. So they were neither open, everyday conversations nor closed questionnaires (Kvale, 2007:11). I felt it was important, given the depth of knowledge and experience of the participants, to allow the discussion to go in directions which might prove to be fruitful in following up particular paths or concerns of individuals. Each of the interviewees was asked a series of simple questions which aimed to create a wider explanation of their motives (see Appendix 1). The questions and answers were all recorded. The questions were different for the different generations but included questions about their own experience and consciousness of class, the impact of Second Wave feminism, the role of racism and anti-racism in determining their organisational choices, and the connections and discontinuities between different generations. I particularly wanted interviewees to have the space to speak for themselves, especially given that I was interviewing a cohort of highly articulate and strongly opinionated women. Participants were encouraged to make broader observations about the role of feminism. While the questions for both sets of interviewees were similar, I did not necessarily follow them all rigidly, allowing

the flow of the interview to continue in particular directions which appeared fruitful. This was especially the case given that interviewees all had a confident sense of their own standpoint and were not reluctant to share their views. In addition to the questions, I therefore encouraged them to give their own opinions on particular specialisms or preoccupations. For this reason, there was little difficulty in persuading the interviewees to speak at length, and a number of them were able to provide information or opinions which added to the scope of the interview beyond the questions which I had asked them. The following of themes allowed more flexibility in discussion and prevented rigidity in following a script. I adopted the view that it was better to allow the discussion to flow, rather than fit into a tight scheme.

When it comes to the question of what should be transcribed there are a number of different possible approaches. Technical proficiency is essential to avoid rare but difficult occasions, for example where the interviewee claims they were not aware of being recorded, or when the interviewee is unhappy with the words attributed to him/her. This was important since, as pointed out above, the interviewees' names were to be made public, so it was necessary to send transcripts to interviewees for any necessary clarification, to ask at the beginning of the interview whether she was aware of the recording, to gain written permission, but also to use a clear template or letter when explaining the purpose of the interview. These stages in the interviews help to strengthen their credibility. I therefore ensured that the interviewees had given their informed consent, and later that the interviewees had a chance to look at the transcripts and make clear to them at every stage what was involved in the process. With the current research, however, some of these problems are likely to be minimised, since the interviewees are for the most part experienced politically, the subject of press or academic interest, and unlikely to be unaware of the nature of the interviews.

4.6.3 Analysis of Transcripts

The transcript is not the same as the oral testimony, but has been processed by the interviewer. In the process of writing up the testimony, the interviewer has of necessity to make a series of decisions about how the words are written up. Punctuation is not something recognised in oral speech, so must in a sense be arbitrary, a point made by Portelli (in Perks and Thomson, 2006: 34). The interviewer becomes part of the process of the interview, as well as the interviewee. Kvale considers that, from a linguistic perspective, transcripts are ‘translations from an oral language to a written language’ (Kvale, 2007: 93). If this is so, it is not always straightforward to know how to approach them. There can be a danger in approaching them too literally, therefore making the transcribed spoken word more difficult to follow in print than it ideally should be. On the other hand, there can be a danger in ‘smoothing out’ written testimony, so that it loses what is distinctive in language and speech of the interviewee. There is also the loss of body language and gesticulation. The danger with verbatim interviews is that they can produce ‘hybrids’ which may not satisfy audiences for written or spoken word (Kvale, 2007: 93).

The choices open to the interviewer here are real ones. In my case, I wanted to avoid transcripts where the interviewees repeated key phrases, or sometimes went into details about issues which were not strictly relevant to the interview. At the same time, I wanted to retain the sense of the interviews, of emphasis, occasionally purposeful repetition, or of recollection of incidents which had not been thought of by the interviewee for a long period of time. I also wanted to retain the natural vernacular and style of speech used by the interviewees. As the highly respected oral historian Studs Terkel has pointed out, while it may be permissible to lose some seemingly extraneous phrases or words, this should not be at the expense of losing the speech patterns of the interviewee (Parker, 1997: 170). My decision was to make

transcripts of all the interviews, omitting some small sections or avoiding repetitive phrases. This kept the strengths of the interviews but moved beyond simply verbatim reports. The interviews were recorded and extensive notes were taken by hand. The results were transcribed by me, an onerous but educational task which helped me to interrogate my own interview techniques and to make initial plans about writing up the work. This was helpful in developing the themes which formed the basis of the research chapters. The transcripts contained the vast bulk of oral testimony that had been given in the interview. Occasionally, small sections were omitted, and verbatim phrases and repetitions removed for ease of comprehension. Given the nature of the interviews, it did not seem essential to retain every single verbatim word, but to ensure that the sense of the interviewee came across forcefully and clearly. Interviewees were sent the relevant transcripts for approval before publication.

This methodology fitted the kind of research I was doing: the aim was not to gain large amounts of quantitative data, or to give objectively scientific results, but to gain a sense of the practice and theory of a number of prominent feminists, in order to generalise from their particular experiences. At the same time I recognised the need to immerse myself in the data in order to develop the themes of the research. I was aware that there is no ‘ideal’ method of transcribing, and that deployed should relate to the study in hand (Silverman, 2013), so the fact that my study was closer to a ‘readable public story’ than a ‘detailed linguistic conversational analysis’ (Kvale, 2007: 95) helped to make the choice that I did over transcription. The aim was to render the accounts readable and nuanced, while retaining their validity (Kvale, 2007: 98).

4.6.4 Identification of Themes

When I started out in considering the research, various themes suggested themselves. These included the contrast between the optimism of the 1960s which enabled a generation of women to grasp new social and political opportunities, and the experience of younger women campaigning for feminism in a climate of economic recession and globalisation. However, in following Silverman's (2013) approach to natural history of the research, the themes which were perhaps more obvious when considered in advance turned out not necessarily to be so. Emergent themes developed as a result of considering some of the interviews, for example the importance of anti-racism as an influence on feminists, and the personal experience of class. Given the size of the sample and the nature of the research, I did not adopt a specific method of coding. Instead I immersed myself very closely in the data, reading and rereading each interview, considering the points in common between different interviewees of the same generations, and also looking at similarities across the generations. I adopted this method of analysis because I had a fairly extensive knowledge of the topics and theoretical ideas under discussion so could approach the research in a more eclectic way (Kvale, 2007: 117).

I asked the interviewees questions relating to their views of the other generation, and while there was as one would expect a degree of mutual respect, I also felt that there was a distance between the generations which perhaps spoke more to the differences between feminists than might be apparent at first. The major themes that I identified included a series of more general questions: the influence of class and background on the women's political development; the feminist influences; the importance of working class women in shaping British feminism; and the left and feminism, which proved to be controversial across both generations. I also added a concluding section to the chapter entitled 'The ebbing of the tide' which reflected on the decline of the early Women's Movement and the rise of Thatcherism

from the point of view of the interviewees. While the research was not intended to give an overview of the history of Second Wave feminism, I felt it was hard to tell the women's stories without including this.

The second chapter of research findings moved on somewhat historically, and developed some of the clearer contrasts between the two waves. This contained themes on the new wave and its challenges; some contrasts in the attitudes between Second and Third Waves including relating to issues such as domestic labour, women's physical appearance, and sex work; and the influence of racism and anti-racism on the women's feminism. In the course of writing up the research I moved from the more general themes to more particular ones, which considered differences within feminism.

4.7 Conclusion

The research was conducted on the basis of interviews with Second and Third Wave feminists. It developed themes which were more wide ranging than envisaged in the earlier stages of planning. The methodology used, especially in approaching the interviews from the standpoint of oral history, enabled me to consider the research as part of a wider approach to the history of feminism. This was particularly useful given that the interview subjects had played such a role in participating in some of this history. The close connections between the development of feminism and that of oral history helped to facilitate the interviews, and helped to create a level of empathy between interviewer and interviewee. These different factors contributed to research which attempts to take up a variety of contemporary issues while at the same time providing a broader overview of some of the history and developments within modern feminism.

Chapter 5: Shaping Feminist Ideas

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to report the data gathered through a series of interviews exploring the views of Second and Third Wave feminists. Themes considered in the chapter will include assessing the various influences on the women, exploring questions of class, and the factors which led them to organising as feminists, and which helped to create their feminist consciousness. One of the primary aims of the research is to draw out contrasts and differences between the different generations. In addition, the perspectives, expectations and influences that characterise each generation will be examined. The views of the interviewees are considered in relation to a number of themes: the impact of class and class consciousness on their own personal development; the specific factors which led them to feminism; their involvement with working class women and trade unions; the relationship of Second Wave feminists with the organised left, and how that contrasts with the Third Wave feminist experience. Other themes which were developed in the interviews, including the role of racism and anti-racism in influencing modern feminism; the legacy of the movement and the divisions within it, the relationships between different generations of feminists, and their assessment of class and feminism today, will be considered in the following chapters.

The women interviewed were asked about the influences upon them, what led them to feminist ideas, and the impact of class on their thinking. While each group interviewed was comprised of people from roughly the same generation, they had very different class and social formative backgrounds. Of those in the Second Wave, one, Amrit Wilson, was born and brought up in India, coming to Britain as a university student in the early 1960s. The other five all experienced growing up and developing political awareness in Britain. All six participated in higher education, an experience which had been denied the large majority of

previous generations of both sexes, but which was becoming more common by the 1960s, as it was recognised that girls would not necessarily end their paid employment as a result of marriage and motherhood. However, the expansion of higher education allowed a minority of women to access it, including some from working class backgrounds. It also contributed to the creation of social attitudes, which encouraged girls to aspire to professions and to educational levels which had seemed remote or impossible to previous generations. The interviewees grew up in a period of intense social change in terms of attitudes, as issues such as divorce, abortion, relationships between gay men and lesbians, and theatre censorship were all subject to liberalising legislative changes. The changes in women's lives in the 1960s were set in the context of, and were partly inspired by, the 'long boom' from the early 1950s onwards. This was characterised by full employment, and created labour shortages which were often solved by encouraging women into the workforce. In addition, very high levels of welfare and public spending which helped to fund both the expansion of education and the public sector professions in which many women found themselves employed.

The younger generation of feminists experienced a very different set of circumstances. While on the one hand there was a much greater acceptance of women playing roles in public life, and a much higher level of participation in education and work, this did not necessarily make life economically easier for the younger generation, nor did it lessen the contradictions of women's role. In addition, they became conscious as feminists against a background of much greater insecurity economically- and in particular the 2008 financial crisis and subsequent austerity - and to some extent socially, than the older generation. Furthermore, this was accompanied by less security at work, and more intense competition in education and for paid employment. Whereas Second Wave feminism arose against a background of relatively full employment, high levels of trade union organisation and strike activity, and a general

liberalisation of society, the Third Wave feminists grew up in a society with declining trade unions, low levels of strike activity, and a growth (in some areas of society) of more conservative values. The situation of their generation, despite in general high levels of education, was marked by levels of precarity and insecurity over work, and a sense of instability in areas such as housing. Their political involvement tended to be in various movements, such as the anti-war or student movements, rather than political parties. At the same time, they were faced with a different political context. Feminism was already established in a way that was not the case in the 1960s; areas once closed to women opened up and, because of the legislative framework created by the laws of the 1960s and 1970s, a culture of nominal equality was more widespread than in the 1960s and 70s. This served, however, to highlight for a number of the women interviewed, the contradictions within a feminism which was pledged to formal equality but did not take into account issues such as race or class. Because of a degree of social acceptance of gender equality in civil society, the interviewees did not necessarily see feminism as relevant to them their lives as they developed political consciousness.

5.2 The Influence of Class and Background

5.2.1 Experiencing Class

It is striking that in most cases, the impact of class was felt by the interviewees long before they were in a position to formulate theoretical approaches to it. Whatever class background they came from, the existence of class differences was something that became clear to them, often at an early age. This tended to be true across both generations. Ursula Huws described how:

‘I started thinking about class from early childhood because I was the product of a mixed class marriage. My mother was from quite a posh family and was more or

less disinherited for marrying my father... They lived in quite considerable poverty for much of the time, and she'd been brought up in a house with servants. But it was very hard to disentangle class from other differences. There was the Welsh versus English thing (my father was Welsh), there was language, there was culture, there was religion, because she became a Catholic (to annoy him I sometimes think). So there were lots of contradictions. But he talked a lot about class. He used to talk with quite a lot of bitterness about what he called the old public school tie brigade keeping people out of jobs in engineering. He started off working in the shipyard in Birkenhead, in the drawing office and then got an engineering scholarship as a bright lad to Liverpool University to do engineering... There was a huge resentment of the English middle class but there was also a sense in which he felt really, really sorry for my mother. He used to say you have to forgive your mother, she was brought up by servants, she doesn't know what it is like to be loved.'

Ursula sees this background as being important in helping to shape a much more open approach to ideas and to challenging the status quo. Given that feminists see themselves, and are seen by society, as challenging the established order in a very central way, this may help to form such consciousness. As Ursula says:

'It's a characteristic of people who come from class conflicted or culturally conflicted backgrounds, that they're always questioning things, they don't take anything for granted, it's always a contested thing. So it goes with an attraction to dialectical thinking, but also with not being completely able to completely identify – that outsider thing is quite strong.'

For Hilary Wainwright, who came from a prosperous liberal middle class family in Leeds, awareness of class differences struck her at primary school age:

‘Class came before my consciously feminist thinking, because I became a socialist mainly in reaction to inequality. I faced inequality head on in my life as a middle class kid but in a city like Leeds. I was aware of poverty around me, in the working class estate I walked through on the way to school and back. But I had many privileges, a beautiful garden, a big house, and so on. I have clear recollections of looking at this garden and this big house and thinking, this is a bit irrational, why me? And finding no good answer. I was a Brownie /Girl Guide in a very working class community and made many good friends there. Also in the local youth club where I remember learning about ‘woodbines’ [cigarettes]. I became aware of class really early on.’

Sheila Rowbotham also grew up in Leeds, the child of a ‘self made’ father from a small farm background and a Tory mother who ‘was quite a personal rebel in her attitudes to life and to men, and particularly to my father who was an old style Yorkshire man.’ She found the contradictory attitudes towards class discomfoting even as a child:

‘In posh restaurants my father wasn’t that confident because he had made his money as a salesman and he used to over tip the waiters to make them bow and scrape and I would notice that when he wasn’t looking at them their faces were quite contemptuous. I remember thinking this is horrible. I was conscious [that I] never felt comfortable about relations of superiority. In Leeds anyway as soon as you spoke people knew your background but when I went to Oxford I got it the other way because I did have a Leeds accent and people would “take the Mickey” and sort of sneer at me. I don’t think they meant it nastily, but I found it very

humiliating. Just being a lower middle class northern person and a woman at that time was a bit peculiar. So I sort of had an internal feeling about class and the nastiness and humiliation of looking down on people.’

Heather Wakefield was never in doubt about her class background.

‘I grew up in Reading in what even in the 1950s I think was a poor family. My mum was a school cleaner at the local girls' convent school, where Marianne Faithfull went... She used to do a lot of home working, sewing. And my old man was a violent alcoholic who really didn't contribute anything to the family.’

Her consciousness of class, however, was perhaps less than some of the other interviewees, in that she took her situation for granted.

‘[T]he only place I really met middle class people was really at Sunday school where there was one or two. One of their fathers used to give us a lift home because it was a little way away and when he turned into our street with his two nice kids he always used to say, you'd better duck now because the Indians are going to get you. I used to think it was funny at the time, because he was quite nice actually, so I never really thought about it. My uncles were like window cleaners, one had the corner shop, he was the posh one, a printer, the printer was a Labour councillor as well actually, one worked in Huntley and Palmers, biscuit factory... So I wasn't really conscious of class until my secondary education.’

Here, however, she experienced a dramatic change, because her primary school head encouraged her to apply for and win a scholarship to the Abbey School in Reading, then a direct grant school and now a completely private school.

‘It was velour hats, Harris tweed skirts, and I’ll never forget the first morning walking down our street on the way to school and all my mates, the boys, were all laughing at my school uniform. I turn up at this school and everybody’s like, well I suppose the most modest occupation of anyone in my class were teachers, that was like they were professors, doctors... So I was like here I am from a two-up, two-down with a tin bath on the wall, which comes in on a Saturday evening and I suddenly find myself at this school. I had to get a grant from the church to buy the uniform, my godmother had bought my satchel, someone else had bought me a fountain pen. And off I go and I very quickly realised that I’m not quite one of them.’

The difficulties of coping with the financial costs of keeping up with friends in schools like this were acutely apparent to her, and ranged from being means tested to obtain new items of uniform, to being unable to buy birthday presents when invited to parties, to being unable to have friends to stay in her already overcrowded house. The experience, which Heather acknowledges was beneficial in all sorts of personal ways, has also led her to oppose selection of ‘bright’ working class pupils for these sorts of schools. ‘But it was problematic this idea that you should get working class kids into [these schools] is rubbish. I think unless you have a background that has a clear class identity, where people are proud of being working class.’

One of the Third Wave interviewees, Dawn Foster, also experienced coming from a very poor family, and was aware from very early on that the treatment of working class children like her was different from that of others. A recipient of free school meals, she noticed that this created a division between those who paid for their meals and those who did not.

‘I still remember our reception classes, and the first thing on Monday people sat down and said what they're doing for dinner... about half the class were on free dinners, and one of the kids said one day why are some kids on free dinners... the teacher said if you're on free dinners it's because your parents can't afford to feed you. We also had a breakfast club, this was about 1990 when I first went to school and loads of parents were constantly having their giros [benefits payments] stopped. I always remember when that sort of thing happened... some of our teachers were using their own money to buy us food.’

For Third Wave interviewees, class was also an important factor in helping to shape their consciousness. Nina Power was brought up in a small town in Wiltshire, where she went to the local comprehensive.

‘I was quite middle class compared to a lot of people at my school... when it came to things like people talking about what they were going to do with their lives or applying to university it just struck me that the class divide was so extreme. This was before fees, there was a huge cultural divide I think and it had nothing to do with intelligence so I think I got really hung up on this idea that you know class wasn't fair, in the sense that the intelligent people I knew at school weren't necessarily the ones that would go to university so it was very much tied up with education. These not very smart middle class people are all going to go [to university] and these very smart working class people aren't going to go.’

She adds that,

‘Class in the countryside is very strange, very different from the city; it's weirder, much more feudal. There are really old family divisions...the lord of the manor

who employed most people and rented out all the farms was the local Tory MP ...it was kind of weird feudal thing, kind if archaic. So I didn't really have a good understanding of class other than one of resentment on behalf of other people in a way.'

When she went to university at Warwick she found that there were other class divisions that she had not yet come across.

'Even going to university as quite a middle class person, meeting people who had gone to private school was like really weird, given how ridiculously stratified British society is I hadn't really met anyone from private school and that was quite a shock in terms of my perception, because I was really shy and quiet, and... that brash confidence as a class marker and as a marker of their education. So I guess thoughts of class probably came through education.'

Dawn Foster found at secondary school that the more middle class children were given better treatment:

'We had like the school I was at was just on the outskirts of the city, and a lot of the kids came from the villages nearby and they were like well relatively middle class in South Wales terms – most people would just call them upper working – and a lot of the teachers basically told the kids from council estates to sit towards the back of the class and spent a lot more time with the village kids.'

5.2.2 Experiencing Race

For two Second Wave interviewees, the experience of class was mediated by attitudes to race or religion. Gail Chester grew up in an Orthodox Jewish, Liberal-voting home in London, and saw her Jewishness as an important part of her identity, including her class identity.

‘I think the thing about being Jewish is... it complicates the class analysis. Most non-Jewish [people] think that most Jews have to be middle class, so Jews just by definition somehow get defined as middle class... I knew I wasn't happy with defining myself as middle class but it wasn't very explicit. My nuclear family, my mum and dad and my sister and me, we were definitely the poor relations... And then of course you go to Cambridge and that kind of complicates the matter both in your own head and in everybody else's head.’

Amrit Wilson's upbringing in India created a series of different experiences from the other interviewees.

‘When you grow up you know that your country's been colonised, you feel the effects of it, your parents and your grandparents have been through that, and you don't go into politics, you know that it's all around you, it's not a conscious decision to say right now I'm stepping into politics now, you know. So I think that's an issue.’

The impact of colonialism and racism have an effect which mediates the experience of class, and means that consciousness of the different elements of oppression tend to go hand in hand with any class consciousness.

‘For us it was just living it, you could see that there were people who had been affected for example by the Bengal famine, which was a man-made, British-made

creation. You could see how certain people, of a particular class were extremely colonised, others were extremely angry, so you were aware of race and colonialism. You were also aware of class and of course as women you were also aware of the extremely patriarchal relations which existed.’

While many of these features also influenced the other interviewees, none of them *directly* experienced it in this way, which may explain some different trajectories taken by Amrit and other Black or Asian women, and their sometimes high level of dissatisfaction with the Second Wave women’s movement, as we will explore more fully below.

Malia Bouattia, born in Britain to Algerian parents, who returned there when she was a baby but had to leave when she was aged seven because of the civil war, felt a range of influences. She knew her country’s colonial history: one of her grandparents had been killed in French reprisals for an attack during the War of Independence, and she also experienced all the problems of poverty, racism and national oppression when her family returned to Britain as immigrants in difficult circumstances. She connected these issues with a pride in Algeria’s fight against colonialism:

‘Those things and also having come from a country which has a long legacy of, a strong history of anti-colonialism and that always being in our collective memory. And always being at the forefront of what my parents shared with us, and how they educated us with like this incredible nationalist pride and thirst for justice. So despite the events in Algeria it’s quite strange because it didn’t make us love the homeland any less or like drive us to continue on in like the country’s legacy any less.’

Questions of race also affected Carys Afoko. Her mother's family lived in Swansea but she chose to bring up Carys and her brother in Brixton where there were many other black and ethnic minority people.

'My mum decided... she was living in London when she met my father, and obviously we didn't have a lot of money growing up, so she had a big decision to make about whether to go home, have free childcare and a bit more support but it was like two mixed race kids in the 80s. I'm pretty sure she didn't get many comments in Brixton... We went to Wales every single school holiday when I was growing up... played on the beach and had a really nice childhood. But I guess until maybe ten years ago we were the only non-white faces pretty much always... I can't think of experiencing any sort of direct racism, I think when I was a lot younger, and it's more ignorance I think, my grandparents were pretty ignorant of anything to do with race and still used the word 'coloured'... That was something I was conscious of that my mum had chosen to raise us in Brixton. And it does make a massive difference [laughs] growing up with other black people and not sort of being made to feel like an odd one out or in some way like an oddity.'

5.3 'What Made Me a Feminist'

5.3.1 The Problem Without a Name

The various influences on their lives outlined above, both positive and negative, helped to form an egalitarian consciousness. However, a key question is what led Second Wave women towards the idea of organising as women, reflecting the large numbers of young women in the late 1960s and early 1970s who came to a situation where they saw this idea as a major priority. The rise of activism during the 1960s, and especially towards the end of the decade,

also impacted on their political practice. In Britain there was also a very strong sense of change, both through the election of Labour governments in 1964 and 1966, and the various reforms this introduced such as laws for equal pay, legalised abortion, liberalised divorce and the legalisation of some categories of male homosexuality. There was also a sense of modernisation and cultural change which characterised much of the 1960s, and a growing number of strikes, rent strikes, occupations, and grassroots campaigns during these years. The fusion of these different elements, and the contradiction between these growing movements and the often subordinate role of women within them, led to a qualitative change in consciousness among a layer of women, many of them young and benefiting from higher education, who now saw the time was right to demand full equality and their own independent means of achieving it.

As Sheila Rowbotham put it,

‘When I think back I realise that my friends who were at school with me were really thinking about women’s position, but we didn’t have any political language and it took a long time. That was in the late 50s and early 60s and it was only with the very early beginnings of women’s liberation that we found a political language.’

By the late 1960s, this political language had taken shape, and by the early 1970s it had begun to be articulated across the left and the movements. As with most people who develop a political critique, particularly one which is critical of the status quo, influences both personal and political can play a very powerful role. The interviewees gave a combination of reasons for moving towards feminism. There was an important mixture of negatives, such as the direct experience of sexism and other forms of oppression, along with positives, for

example encouragement to achieve from friends or family. Several talked about books which had changed their views. There was also a political development in the sense that all the interviewees came into contact with radical left organisations, and were often members of them. This contact had an influence on their general politics, but also sometimes a negative impact in terms of the perception of all the women about the limitations of such politics, at least in relation to women and the politics of women's liberation.

Amrit Wilson remembers discussing issues of women's oppression with family and friends, but they also discussed the range of oppressions including race and imperialism. When she came to Britain she was aware not just of a high level of racism within society as a whole, but a specific form of sexism which she saw as closely connected to her race as well as her gender. She found that the academics she encountered would connect the two.

'There were lots of issues of sexuality and gender which were inseparable from race. They would constantly for example ask me to expand on the Karma Sutra [laughs] which I didn't know very much about.'

The experience was uncomfortable, coming mainly from older academics, but led her to an understanding that the issues were related.

'Right from the days I was asked about the Karma Sutra, very much about you know it was usually accompanied by comments about my skin etc. In the case of middle class men in terms of how beautiful I was, how nice my skin was and my hair. I really resented it and I could see it for what it was which was racism, but very much a gendered racism. So from that time I was fully aware that my experiences of gender were racialised and vice versa.'

5.3.2 Feminist influences

Some women talked more about their more positive experiences, of having mothers with a strong sense of justice and equality, or of school teachers who encouraged women. Sheila Rowbotham's mother 'stuck up for young people's freedom and felt sympathetic to young people... and to women. She had a sort of permanent underground resistance to my father.' Gail Chester's mother 'was very anti-racist, she got very angry about the way black people were treated and she would say I don't understand how Jewish people can be racist, look at what happened to us'. Heather Wakefield's mother, 'was the person in our street who everybody went to, who delivered babies, who climbed up ladders to find old ladies dead in their beds, did the shopping for everybody, she was that person. I always thought I would write a book one day called 'Go and get Joyce' because it was always, go and get Joyce, she'll sort it out'. She says of her father,

'He was not present really. I... grew up in a family in which there wasn't a patriarchal figure, because although he was fairly frequently violent and stuff he wasn't there as an ongoing authority or as a point of reference. He wasn't a rule maker in the household. I think that's often overlooked in feminist theory you know that patriarchy isn't always present.'

The younger women grew up in a society already influenced by some of the impact of Second Wave feminism. Even when their mothers were not explicitly feminists, most of them had clearly experienced some of the issues typified by it. Cat Boyd's mother was clearly influenced by some of the ideas:

'I grew up in what I would consider to be a fairly matriarchal household, my mother was always the main breadwinner, she was the most politically driven, perhaps yeah a feminist but without really ever speaking about it. I remember

when I was a kid having this postcard above my bed. Is it Rebecca West, you know the one about women and doormats?’

Her mother was a teacher who was involved in a dispute, when Cat was seven or eight, about the right to wear trousers in school. However, her mother did not think of herself as a feminist, as Cat describes:

[She was a] ‘feisty woman from a working class background, that the kind of, you know, you don’t mess [laughs], that sort of attitude, but she’s never been involved in like women’s liberation and has a very strict idea about how a woman should behave and how a woman should act. You know from a Catholic background, she’s fairly homophobic, has really rigid you know terms of identity, so I mean I wouldn’t consider my mum to be a feminist. I asked her about it recently, just after me and Jenny had written that pamphlet and she said, oh I never really did get all of that stuff’.

Carys Afoko’s mother was feminist:

‘I’m not sure if she’s a Second Wave feminist or not but she was sort of political and I grew up in a single parent household so I’m very close to her, and I think she was just a feminist, it wasn’t really a sort of...yeah, I can’t imagine what it’s like if your Mum’s not a feminist... I guess for her she had a very different experience of growing up, my grandfather’s quite right wing, quite domineering, she grew up in a nuclear family in Wales ...with a very patriarchal, my granddad he’s like you know growing up he was very scary, sort of scary figure, and I didn’t grow up with my father so he a sort of big male figure in my life. Scary, domineering, my grandmother cooked the meals, wasn’t allowed to argue back.

So I think for my mum there was a very obvious like feminist journey in that she was involved in like consciousness raising groups and women's groups and things. So she grew up with all that but for me I was just raised...I've got a younger brother...so we both grew up as feminists.'

Growing up taking feminism for granted was something that Carys experienced through childhood and largely through school, where she went to a London girls' Church of England comprehensive.

'So in that sense I was just always a feminist, but my like I guess my feminist awakening or when I became aware, or when feminism became more relevant to me....wasn't until I entered the working world. I think that I undoubtedly. I went to a girls' school, so maybe I was a bit protected from gender inequality in that way.... It wasn't until I entered the working world that I really experienced quite just overt and then I guess more implicit sexism.'

Nina Power's mother came from the same generation as the Second Wave feminists and was the first in her family to go to university:

'She didn't want to go back and be with her family and move back to where she was from and get married. She wanted some independence so I guess she was quite a strong figure but I don't think she ever used the word [feminism]. I don't think she would have put it like that.'

Kate Hardy's parents were 'quite gender neutral in some ways, like my dad did a lot of childcare when we were young, they're not particularly typically gendered.' She felt that as

socialists they were more likely to approach issues from a class rather than feminist point of view, but that she experienced feminist feelings early on.

‘I was quite a boring child; I wasn’t very interested in doing things like playing games. What I did want to do half the time was ask to play football with the boys. They wouldn’t let me and I didn’t really want to, because I was just aware that gender was at work in the playground when I was about ten.’

Malia Bouattia’s family contained strong women role models, and her mother would have seen herself as a feminist in some ways, although Malia says she would now self-define as a Muslim rather than a feminist. In Malia’s case, she found race, class and gender intertwined in politicising her. She grew up in Birmingham, in a diverse city, and experienced what she called her ‘second culture shock’ when she became a student at Birmingham University.

‘It just slapped me in the face. To be like one of a few hundred students within my department, within my year, within my course, the only one who didn’t self define as white, middle class, Christian background or atheist or Jewish, was really difficult because I then became the spokesperson of the whole of the global south.’

A year spent studying in Paris, where she experienced racism from the authorities because of her Algerian background, leading her to develop what she called ‘mass rage’, and the impact on her of Israel’s bombing of Gaza during Operation Cast Lead in 2009, all led her to return to Britain determined to engage with political activism, a path which led her towards NUS Black Students’ Campaign.

5.3.3 Feminist Ideas

A number of the interviewees instanced the role of teachers in shaping their ideas. Heather Wakefield encountered women teachers who encouraged her at her direct grant school in Reading, and indeed at her primary school. Hilary Wainwright and Sheila Rowbotham both went to boarding schools, run by Quakers and Methodists respectively, where they were encouraged to take the view that girls could do anything as well as boys. Hilary Wainwright recalls:

‘I went to a girls’ school but it was a Quaker school... women’s schools, boarding schools, you get teachers, maybe lesbian teachers who were obviously influenced by that first wave of feminism, and they were very much for women being high achievers, they encouraged us to go to Oxford, for example, and to stick up for ourselves. So it was a kind of culture that assumed women's equality. It was generally a very egalitarian culture.’

Even though some of their teachers were influenced by ‘first wave’ feminism, that did not seem to make a connection at first. Sheila Rowbotham describes her early attitudes to ‘first wave’ feminism:

‘I didn’t identify with feminism and I suppose I saw it quite narrowly as about the suffrage. Growing up in the 50s I thought it’s over. I went to an Oxford college, St Hilda’s, and we had to bow to Miss Buss and Miss Beale [founders of girls’ schools in the Victorian era] and I tended to think that feminists would be like our dons. I was more interested in my own sexual and personal freedom to do whatever I wanted to do.’

Nina Power first learnt about feminism from teachers.

‘I guess in terms of thinking about feminism as a set of ideas and practices I have a vague memory of one of my teachers talking about it. One of my teachers lent me a copy of [Germaine Greer’s] *The Female Eunuch* I think when I was about 15 or 16, but I think probably it was doing A level sociology at my comprehensive school in Wiltshire. Which I guess is an A level which is looked down on but I found kind of amazing. We read Marx or bits of Marx anyway and looked at some theories of gender I suppose and I wrote for my A level a piece on gender, education and confidence, so that’s where it became of interest but I have to say more of a theoretical interest at that point.’

Dawn Foster was helped in all sorts of practical ways by teachers, who supported her when she was in local authority care as a teenager.

‘I had a really good sociology teacher and a really good English teacher. Both of them focused on me, thought I could do really well, and gave me a lot more confidence. Both of them were women and the sociology teacher, she was bright, she was really political, and I... learnt about sociology as a working class young girl, especially the things like accents and confidence and demographics, I began to learn a bit about how people perceive you and why inequality happens, that sort of thing. And then my English teacher basically just got fed up of the school that we were at, and was offered another job at a kind of nicer school nearby, and she took me aside, and basically, she knew that I’d been applying over jobs in the army and the police force, jobs that I thought were good for where I was at, and she said that wanted me to go to sixth form at the school that she was going to, which I didn’t know was an option, and said that she thought I should go to university.’

Nina Power was also influenced by teachers:

‘One of my teachers lent me a copy of *The Female Eunuch* I think when I was about 15 or 16 but I think probably it was doing A level sociology at my comprehensive school in Wiltshire. Which I guess is an A level which is looked down on but I found kind of amazing. We read Marx or bits of Marx anyway and looked at some theories of gender I suppose and I wrote for my A level a piece on gender, education and confidence, so that’s where it became of interest but I have to say more of a theoretical interest at that point.’

Particular books were important to several other interviewees: Heather Wakefield, from a previous generation to Nina, bought the then recently published *The Female Eunuch* at Reading station while travelling for an interview at Oxford University: ‘I read it on the train or bits of it, on the train from Reading to Oxford, and got completely like suddenly this is it. It brought everything together for me.’

Sheila Rowbotham bought a biography of William Godwin at the age of 14 and discovered Mary Wollstonecraft, then the largely unknown author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*; Ursula Huws was given Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* by an aunt and read Simone de Beauvoir’s writing while at school. Sheila Rowbotham decided to write a book about the history of women’s struggles, while she worked teaching apprentices and typists in Further Education in east London:

‘I started writing in 1969... I got the idea that we need a book which had one line summing up a lot of complicated things, rather like an advert can and that we would use visual images, pictures, to take them through those ideas to the idea of

the need for revolution and so my apprentices would be transformed in their consciousness. I devised it with them but it was never published... [Then] when the women's movement began to stir I thought of writing a very arrogant book which showed that all revolutionary movements had involved women... I was convinced... all these movements had failed, and now there was the Women's Liberation Movement which was going to come and transform everything not just for women...women carried the seed of everything. In retrospect it seems presumptuous, but these were the early days of a movement, anything seemed possible. This book became eventually *Women, Resistance and Revolution* and *Women's Consciousness, Man's World*.

If the Third Wave interviewees were more likely to be brought up or taught by women who had themselves been influenced by feminist ideas, they also had more access to feminist resources. Cat Boyd was influenced by the black US writers, bell hooks and Angela Davis. Carys Afoko also cites hooks and Davis as influences, as well as *The Beauty Myth* and *The Women's Room*, both very popular feminist books. However in some cases the women did not necessarily become feminists at that stage, for both personal and political reasons. Nina Power felt that it took her some years to grasp the complexities of the question.

'[A]t school people were reading things like *The Beauty Myth* by Naomi Wolf. I didn't have the context to understand where these writers were coming from, these were just isolated objects. I guess *Female Chauvinist Pigs* by Ariel Levy was the key book, maybe slightly later, but I don't think it was until really a lot later that I had any understanding of the political context, maybe the sort of debates between left groups that come up in *Beyond the Fragments*.'

Dawn Foster recalls that she read feminist books while at school but was not convinced:

‘I didn’t really think about feminism or gender differences until I was about 16 and one of my friends who really wanted to get into Cambridge started reading lots of academic books... she started getting really into feminism and I remember thinking that it was this really outdated thing and that you know we were kind of past feminism, it wasn’t an issue but like class was a big thing. So I thought that poverty and class were a much bigger issue and that feminism was kind of over. It wasn’t until I then went to university and started thinking a bit more about it. Especially about domestic violence and that a lot of the attitudes of the police towards it were appalling.’

Dawn Foster also found that there were stereotypical views of Second Wave feminists among her male contemporaries, which made it harder to identify as a feminist in a working class community:

‘Part of the reason I didn’t embrace feminism until I went to university was the male reaction to anything to do with feminism and anything to do with women speaking up... which was if ever you mentioned feminism or if ever you tried to get involved in campaigns or showed that you were quite clever, you were immediately pegged as a lesbian, as butch, every single kind of stereotype, of second wave feminism from the 70s.’

For some of the other younger generation women, different issues were involved. Malia Bouattia’s experience of the conflicts around Algeria’s civil war, and the contested role of women in Algerian society, played a role, as well as female oppression in the west.

‘It’s two sides: the treatment of women in my own country, particularly through my experiences of the civil war, where we were like the bodies where like conflict was enacted during the period of colonisation, and this was carried forth like within the civil war, where acid would be thrown on women, female academics, writers, artists were like considered the devil’s work, and teachers... And then my experiences here within the western space where you’re seeing the kind of double oppression at play. The racism and misogyny coupled together. And everything from like the exoticising to the Islamophobia that I’d see my mum experiencing as a woman who wears a hijab and so on.’

Kate Hardy’s experience was different again. She did not regard herself as especially politically active while studying at Sheffield University, and she didn’t study feminism while at university, but a visit to Thailand changed her views quite sharply.

‘It was probably when I was 20 and I went to Thailand and I saw how embedded prostitution is in the sex workers in that kind of economy. For me it drew this question quite acutely of why that’s the case and it brought together issues of gender and economics or class, whichever way you want to look at it. It was almost via that portal or way in that I started thinking about those things a lot more strongly. And I’d say I became an activist when I met sex workers who had a class analysis.’

5.4 Working Class Women: How They Shaped British Feminism

5.4.1 Women at Work and Home

The rise of student consciousness coupled with a growing working class militancy in the late 1960s and early 1970s led to many connections being made between students and workers.

The levels of militancy can perhaps be seen as part of a more general ‘youth revolt’, where young workers in factories and mines developed more confrontational attitudes than the older generation, and this coincided with growing radicalism in the colleges. It became a badge of pride among left wing students that they involved themselves not just in ‘student issues’ but also in international issues and domestic ones, including rent strikes and industrial strikes. This attitude led feminists to seek out working class women to campaign with and organise, and to highlight women’s strikes. Hilary Wainwright, in Oxford, began to grasp the centrality of the class system of exploitation when she joined other students to leaflet the car factory in Cowley, which showed a very different side to life in the city. She was aware that when she leafleted factories early in the morning, she was able to have a good breakfast afterwards and had freedoms as a student which the workers who had to go in to work on the production line did not have. She began to make the connections between working class life and women’s oppression and moved towards organising with women working in those same car factories by the early 1970s. Initially, however, she did not necessarily think that a movement against oppression need apply to her.

‘I remember cycling to the first women's movement meeting in Oxford in the union and thinking is a women’s conference really for me? I feel quite emancipated already. So it was only then, at that conference, that I became fully aware of the real predicament of women. I remember I was shocked at a paper on housework and also learning a lot from a paper on female orgasm! I became more self-consciousness about sexuality and its relation to the secondariness of women... the whole prospect of being a housewife or of being responsible for housework struck me a particularly glum future. So it was those personal questions of what ones future was as a woman that, most importantly, the women's movement brought to the fore and helped politicise. And also the

subordination and secondary position of women in the student movement itself (in which I was very engaged) became a political issue that I could relate to. And then being a socialist I wanted to be involved not just at a personal level of politics but to be part of a movement that was reaching out to the mass of women and to their personal oppression.’

The connection between women’s oppression and class led them to prioritising not the university but the areas where working class women lived and worked.

‘So we got involved in Oxford in creating a women's group in the estates round the car factory. We started on childcare and tried to find out what women's feelings were about childcare on the estate, Blackbird Leys it was called, we put out a very ad hoc survey and called a meeting in the community centre. Women came and said there isn't enough childcare so we organised a demonstration... down to the council from Blackbird Leys. We set up a women's group from the meeting, I can remember the meeting in the community centre which was quite well attended, just women from the estate. We didn't know, we just put round these leaflets, I can remember a very badly Letrasetted leaflet which on the basis of our survey and some interviews where women complained of a lack of nurseries, urging them to come to a meeting to discuss what to do. And probably about 20 women came along who were keen to do something, And probably about 20 women came along who were keen to do something, and then we made that our priority in our women's group, then organised this demonstration, then it was the women’s group in Blackbird Leys that we would go to as well as the general meeting of the Women’s Action Group in Oxford. The Blackbird Leys women were very interested in the women's movement. A lot of men on the left

say, “oh working class women aren't interested in your sort of feminism, they're not interested in the demonstrations against Miss World etc.” but I remember these women were really pleased about the demos – the flour bombs and so on – that they saw on TV and they said “good on them”. And when there were those really well publicised actions against Miss World, they really identified with women's lib. So I never felt that division between working class and middle class women.’

The movement had this orientation nationally: there was enthusiasm for the Ford strike, the night cleaners' strike, the Leeds clothing workers' strike in 1970, and the involvement of women telephonists in the national post office workers strike in 1971. The wider movement for equal pay and sex discrimination legislation was also receiving more attention thanks in part to the Ford strike, to Labour's Barbara Castle who was introducing legislation, and to more grassroots organisation. In May 1969 the National Joint Action Committee for Women's Equal Rights, largely influenced by left trade union women and men, called a demonstration on equal pay. Hilary Wainwright went on the demonstration.

‘Then I just got involved in the women's movement and followed their priorities, so abortion became an issue. It was trying to keep that combination of mobilising around issues affecting the mass of women and at the same time pursuing that personal development/consciousness-raising through the consciousness-raising process that focused on the ways the personal is political.’

Ursula Huws experienced first-hand an area of work where she felt compelled to organise.

‘I got my first proper job in 1970 with Penguin books, as an audio visual editor and I had a boyfriend at the time who worked in television and earned relatively

speaking quite a lot of money. I was aware that there was a union because he went to meetings of the ACTT. Anyway I went to Penguin for the first six months and I worked my guts out. I had to learn how to be a record producer, a film producer, research film clips, to clear copyright, to produce teachers' books, and all these different skills. After about three months... we discovered that Penguin were taking advantage of a scheme where they got subsidies for paying new graduates because they were supposed to be training them to work in publishing. I suddenly realised that my standard of living had gone down since I had been a student, and then someone said I could claim overtime. I'd been working all these hours so I went and asked for some overtime and was told I couldn't have it, it had to be cleared in advance. Naively I asked for a rise and was told there absolutely wasn't a chance. Then I met a woman called Sue Milsome who had previously worked for another big unionised publisher, and she said she was thinking of starting a union. Before I knew it I was really actively involved in recruiting to the union, the NUJ at Penguin and working alongside SOGAT and Natsopa who were recruiting in the warehouse and among secretarial staff.'

Ursula soon became deeply involved in the union, going to its annual conference and becoming part of the Working Women's Charter campaign, which was a set of demands for women's equality which were similar to the early demands of the women's movement, and which were formed into a charter which could be adopted by trade union branches and other bodies. In turn this involvement led her to campaigning with women's centres in West London and in Islington in north London. This priority of organising working class women often led to involvement with trade unions. This has often been seen as a conflicted area for socialists, given the record historically of trade unions being contested areas in terms of

gender. While there are many instances of class solidarity across gender there are also many instances of conflict. The period when the women's movement arose was also one where work was being restructured, to include large numbers of women working, and where the traditional manufacturing base of British industry was in decline to be replaced by a range of service industries and public sector provision, such as health or education, each of which tended to employ relatively large numbers of women. The high levels of militancy inside the British trade union movement by the early 1970s tended to be concentrated in traditionally male dominated areas of manufacturing, such as engineering, printing or mining. However the impact of strikes in these areas spread to industries where women too were employed, as was seen with the range of equal pay strikes in the engineering industry in the early 1970s, and strikes involving previously non militant groups such as the London teachers, who struck in 1969.

5.4.2 Women and Trade Unions

Ursula Huws' own experience of organising a trade union led her to campaigning round a number of these disputes. Working at Penguin in west London she was close to what was then London's large industrial and manufacturing base.

'Penguin Education closed down in 1972 and we were all sacked. We had this huge fight to get redundancy pay.... The people who supported us were the warehouse workers who were mainly Asian women, and who had already asked me to help organise a union at Brentford Nylons [a major local employer]. They were in the same networks as Grunwick so when that strike happened [in 1976] I knew about it through these networks. Trico [an equal pay strike in Brentford] I followed but didn't have personal contact, but Grunwick I felt much more

personally engaged with... in the early days before I moved to Leeds I was on the picket line.’

She was perhaps unusual among the women interviewed in terms of her very close involvement at this stage in trade unions:

‘I saw really the class politics, the labour movement, coming first and had this very deep conviction that financial independence was key to liberation. It seems to me a feminist demand that everybody needs an independent source of income. So it’s a very different trajectory from most of my feminist friends. They tended to be feminists first, then worked in trade unions.’

Others too were very involved in the campaigns of working women. Amrit Wilson wrote a noted book, *Finding a Voice*, about Asian women workers in Britain, and she describes how this reflected a growing involvement in Asian women’s struggles.

‘I think there were two reasons. One was that I felt it was quite important for us to organise, at that point, as Asian women, not to exclude anyone but to strengthen ourselves... it was not as a separatist thing as such. That was one reason. The other reason was that I could see that racism was escalating enormously and I realised also that increasingly there was a sort of anthropological approach to black people, from academics like John Rex and Verity Khan. So with all these people who were all into studying Asian women, I felt worried that this was a whole area that they would take over and no Asian woman would have any way of intervening.’

Amrit felt conflicted with trade unions. One of her arguments in *Finding a Voice*, where she discusses the Imperial Typewriters strike in Leicester, which involved racism from the unions, was that particular outcomes in trade union disputes depend on the leadership of the union. She also talked about later strikes where union officials were hostile to the setting up of support groups within the community:

‘[T]here’s something that happened in the Burnsall’s strike that’s quite interesting. This is something I have written about in my book *Dreams Questions Struggles*. This was a small factory producing spare parts for multinationals like Fords and Jaguar. The women workers, and they were mainly Asian women had lots of issues with the trade union - that they did not take the strike seriously and that they were not doing anything to support the strike. We (South Asia Solidarity Group) set up a support group for the strikers, which started doing a lot of things that perhaps a good union would have done, but since they were not doing it we thought they’d be pleased. But they were not pleased at all – they were extremely angry.’

Gail Chester had less involvement with trade union or workplace campaigns than a number of the other interviewees, and was more involved in women’s grassroots campaigning in other areas. She was also critical of the way the TUC got involved in a major campaign of the 1970s, the National Abortion Campaign. She describes her attitude to the very large Trades Union Congress organised demonstration in support of abortion rights, when the march was led by male trade unionists.

‘The only time I got arrested was actually on the TUC abortion demo in 1979. Basically what happened was that some radical feminists were really furious about the fact that the whole of the front of the march was men, was led by men,

you know Len Murray, and so a couple of hundred women were really fed up about the fact that men were leading the march so they ran to the front of the march. By the time I joined the march basically my friends were in the front, so I went and joined them and I hadn't really had a chance to think about this or analyse this. So then I was at the front and then we went in front of Nelson's Column, the speakers were up there on the plinth and I looked up and I could see that there was no women's liberation banner, no women's banner on the plinth at all and it was all these trade union TUC banners, and I was really annoyed about it, and so to cut a long story short I got arrested for trying to put a women's liberation banner up on the plinth. I almost got away with it but because it was completely spontaneous I didn't really think it through thoroughly. I think if I'd spent two or three minutes figuring out how I was going to actually do it I wouldn't have got arrested.'

The TUC march was a major controversy at the time, with a number of feminists objecting to men leading the march. Other feminists, usually from the socialist feminist wing of the movement, defended the importance of the trade unions officially supporting a campaign which had long been regarded even by many on the left as 'non-political'. There was some truth to both sides of the argument but perhaps a better outcome would have been an officially mobilised march where women from the trade unions and the abortion campaign took the front and displayed a range of banners.

For the new generation of feminists there was a quite different profile for the trade unions. Nina Power did not remember her parents ever discussing trade unions, and first joined when

a lecturer at Middlesex University encouraged her to do so when she was teaching while completing her PhD, and she joined UCU (then Natfhe).

‘I think there’s still a bit of a perception that these are male dominated, that maybe belong to an earlier age, that maybe have lost membership. But that said I have a lot of friends and people I know who are involved in unions now are obviously are very important and I’m quite interested in these new unions that are setting up, like pop up unions and things like that round specific issues like the 3 Cosas thing, but I can’t say in all honesty that they were a big feature and I certainly wouldn’t have thought of them in relation to anything to do with feminism, at all. There obviously has been progress in terms of female led unions and more women involved in unions and that kind of thing and I don’t see why not, it just wouldn’t have been the most automatic link I would have made.’

Dawn Foster saw unions as important, growing up in industrial South Wales.

‘Yes I knew that my grandfather had been a miner, and he’d gone through the miners’ strike. I was told to join a union as soon as I started working, so I think I was in like Amicus... because I was working in a call centre they said join Amicus. I think I was in GMB first, then Amicus, then it became Unite, then I was in the UCU. I was always in unions. I remember the steelworks closed in Newport when I was still relatively young and there was this weird thing where you knew that people’s parents were middle class if their mum worked in Woolworth’s and their dad worked at the steelworks. Then the steelworks closed.’

Cat Boyd was never conflicted about joining trade unions.

‘I come from a like kind of aspirational working class background, and my parents are those classic, you know, my grandfather voted Labour, and my father voted Labour, and I’ll vote Labour... I never thought of myself as working class but I never quite saw us as being middle class either... I guess it’s a strange kind of halfway house to be in because working class had this particular cultural identity attached to it... my mum and dad both being teachers as well you know, it wasn’t really one or the other. But it was definitely the case that when you went to a workplace, you join the union, like. My mum was a union rep, my granddad was a union rep, my family on the other side are all like Irish Catholic immigrants and it’s so that kind of background. So you just pick that up, you join a union, you get involved, you know what I mean standing up for people.’

Cat works for a trade union in Glasgow as an organiser, having previously been an activist in the civil service union, the PCS, when she worked at the Department of Work and Pensions.. She sees trade unions as crucial to the fight for equality, and is critical of those who take too negative an approach to them. ‘It depends what you want the unions to do. If you’re in a workplace and you’re getting hammered, and you’ve got a union rep then that union rep can actually change things for you.’ She adds from personal experience,

‘But also, there is nothing more dignified, there is no more dignified form of resistance in the world I think than being on strike and withdrawing your labour. And when you take part in action like that, with other people, I remember like having half day walkouts when I was at the DWP, and you do actually begin to feel that sense of solidarity, that you’re a collective movement.’

She recognises that this is only one part of the story of trade unions in Britain in recent years:

‘Yeah the unions have been terrible like over austerity, I mean their silence during the 13 years of Blair was disastrous for them. But, look, I’m just a wee bit cautious about writing the unions off and just constantly giving the unions a hard time because I think like on an industrial level they do do good things for people’.

Despite her involvement at various times with trade unions, Dawn Foster is more sceptical of their role.

‘I’ve always found the unions to be quite blokey, less so in the UCU because there are quite a lot of women in it. I think it was also initially because I was quite young and if I had a problem I’d just speak to the shop steward. It wasn’t until I started thinking about the more organisational things that I became a bit more jaded.’

She felt that trade unions were not necessarily the vehicle for organising campaigns, preferring direct action organisations such as UK Uncut, and when asked said that she would not particularly organise through a trade union.

‘I’d do it on a much smaller grassroots level. I think the Focus E15 thing has shown. Newham council have been awful for years and years especially on housing for single mums and look at how much a small group have managed to do in such a small amount of time.’

Among a number of the younger interviewees there was less hostility to trade unionism than a sense that they were not particularly important or relevant. Dawn Foster probably felt this most strongly, but Carys Afoko also described her and colleagues’ attempts to unionise the New Economics Foundation, and finding that the cost of union membership and

inconvenience of staying for meetings after work tended to put off the working class women there. Kate Hardy was scathing about the UCU failure to defend pensions. A number, including Kate, referred to campaigns such as the Focus E15 housing campaign as being successful in their own terms. While there were in most cases positive aspects of trade unions, most of them did not see trade union organisation as necessarily key to change for women.

Carys recalls:

‘My experience of joining a trade union and trying to organise a trade union in my workplace hasn’t been very positive, definitely not a real role for feminists. Other than that there are great feminist women involved in the trade union movement. But I haven’t experienced... our experience with the, we sort of worked out...I and a few others were members of Unite. Unite seemed like a good fit because they unionise everyone, they organise everywhere. It was really us chasing the union and trying to get support. Just to even get recognition, yeah so I haven’t had a really positive experience of that, other than the female friends and colleagues who are trade unionists who are active. I think they’re great, but haven’t had class based experiences.’

This is in contrast to the Second Wave feminists. Both Ursula Huws and Heather Wakefield saw unions as central to their campaigning, Hilary Wainwright at various points worked with trade unionists, Amrit Wilson wrote about and worked around a number of strikes involving Asians. Changes inside the trade unions, brought about at least partly by the influence of the women’s movement, also created a space for feminist ideas and organisation within them.

Ursula Huws continued to organise on a range of levels, including in unions. Her approach has been to treat unions as bodies which can be influenced by campaigning and organising.

‘Inside the union is a site of struggle. Trade unions are institutional structures, but every so often they erupt into becoming the agency of workers action and power. I’ve been involved in enough disputes to see from inside the tensions between the full timers and the members, or the pressures on the full timers, or the different factions. They are sites of struggle just as society writ large is a site of struggle.’

One obvious feature explaining the differences between the generations is the very substantial difference in trade union membership between the 1970s and the present, where it is around half the number at its high point in 1979. Another is the very low level of strike action in the present, again in very stark contrast to the 1970s. This in turn leads to trade union activity being seen today as much more of an individual issue, dealing with grievances at work at a day to day level, rather than being inspired by some of the major disputes. These factors about the trade unions would seem to outweigh many of the positive changes which have taken place in trade unions since the 1970s in terms of equality.

5.5 The Left and Feminism

The Second Wave women’s movement’s relationship with the left in the US was conflicted from the beginning. This relationship was not replicated in Britain in the same form, but there is evidence that one key formative experience for many of the women was a difficult relationship with the left. This varied in its importance among the Second Wave interviewees, but in every case it appears to have been a factor in pushing them towards experimenting with feminist organisation, and sometimes towards separate organisation. All of the interviewees were to an extent influenced by the new left which emerged in the 1960s, socialist ideas or

organisation. The organisations to the left of Labour, including the then influential Communist Party, all had feminists within their ranks. The late 1960s was a period of rapid growth of such ideas among young people, radicalised by a range of issues which culminated in the great political explosions of 1968. Most interviewees encountered or joined left groups when they went to university, groups which gained momentum and support during the movements of 1968 and afterwards. Gail Chester's encounter with the International Socialists (IS) at Cambridge University did not encourage her to join:

‘I was too scared to go [to the university women's group during my first year] because they were in the IS, oh my god, they seemed to know it all and they were socialists, and I was not an international socialist at that stage and also they were very middle class.’ When at the end of her first year she travelled to the US and toured on a Greyhound bus, the levels of inequality she encountered shocked her and convinced her to get involved politically. However her decision was to join not a socialist organisation, but to join the town (as opposed to university) women's group when she came back to Cambridge: ‘there were quite a few women in that group who were associated with the university, they were mostly the wives of academics, librarians, or PhD students. But there were also quotes ‘normal women’, I just felt much more comfortable.’

Hilary Wainwright was part of the left in Oxford. She was close to the IS at various points and later joined the International Marxist Group (IMG).

‘I remember going to one or two IS meetings in Cowley with Stephen Marks, but the problem then was that they didn't acknowledge the student struggle as well. I wanted an alliance with working class organisations, but not to drop the student struggle.’

Heather Wakefield joined the International Marxist Group in Newcastle in the early 1970s through personal connections.

‘So I joined the IMG although I was always a bit, I couldn't get into the party names and I did feel it was a lot of posh boys playing politics. I gained a lot from it because I learnt a lot and it gave some coherence to my thinking in terms of Marxism, I'm not sure about Trotsky. I didn't join it because it was a Trotskyist organisation, I joined it because it was a socialist organisation, I knew I didn't want to join the Labour Party at the time because I couldn't bear it, and I wasn't going to join anything else really.’

Sheila Rowbotham was part of the Oxford left in the 1960s and then in the Hackney Labour Party Young Socialists, an organising centre of the far left. She sometimes felt ignored there.

‘It was the general attitude to women in the left. When I was with Bob [Rowthorn, her then partner] all the time people would come up and speak to him and you were never acknowledged, you weren't there. It was more rude than in normal capitalist life where people would at least give a nod to the wife. In Hackney YS I just developed a fighting technique not to get left out. After that the men would vaguely acknowledge that you were there, but it made me realise why older women would sometimes be described as real dragons, they had had to become like that.’

While class was an important formative experience for the interviewees, they also tended to feel a certain discomfort at being characterised today as ‘middle class,’ either as individuals, or as a whole movement. While they were all highly educated and for the most part engaged

in professional work, and clearly saw themselves as quite different from many working class women in this respect, they also tended to see the label of 'middle class' as a criticism of the left which was intended to demean or marginalise their efforts.

Sheila Rowbotham was very frustrated at this and found it irritating that women's liberation was dismissed as middle class.

'I always thought class in general was important, but my own experiences as a middle class woman were not recognised if you only looked at class. Because race was also coming up from the States and civil rights, there was a movement which was also talking about the internalisation of subjection which I think is also in part about class, the keeping down of people of different classes, but it wasn't really talked about by socialists. Socialists at the time talked about material things and material inequalities, not the manner in which people perceived themselves and felt.'

She felt that the critique of 'middle class' feminists was part of a wider class difference than experienced in higher education. The phenomenon of working class grammar school boys who made it to Oxbridge or other established universities was growing, but was much less likely to be the case with their female counterparts, who tended to enter higher education, if at all, at less stratified levels.

'Working class girls then were much more likely to go to teacher training college. Those working class boys who'd gone to grammar school and university were much more likely to be meeting middle class girls. Their discomfort sometimes could then be expressed as a sneer, oh you're just middle class. So class became an area of conflict between men and women. The men could chuck the class at

the girls. Statistically most working class people who went to university were men, I think.’

Ursula Huws too felt that there were class differences within the women’s movement, and also felt that being labelled as middle class was at the very least unsatisfactory.

‘I also felt that very strongly in the women’s movement – and I suspect a lot of other women did too – that this concept of sisterhood was just a little bit glib.

You really punished yourself, spoke in the collective we, were always being told that as a white middle class feminist you were taking up too much space.’

This was part of the critique of the left which led all of the interviewees to support some form of separate organisation from socialist men. In the case of Sheila Rowbotham, she briefly joined the IS in 1968, but remained a member only a short time.

‘The IS to me was always a mixture of Trotskyist group and the ILP [Independent Labour Party, important on the left during ‘First Wave’ feminism]. It attracted people who weren’t particularly interested in Trotskyism but who came along because it was the active left group in the late 60s. That was why I joined because I thought we ought to be organised because of Enoch Powell.’

She left within 18 months, partly over a dispute about Vietnam. She felt the organisation increasingly minimised the importance of movements against oppression.

‘Just after that there was turn to the class and then it was saying all these other movements aren’t the thing and at that particular juncture of time the women’s movement conflicted and... met this wall of Cliff’s resistance.’

Ursula Huws did not join an organisation but her involvement in the Working Women's Charter and the unions led her to work closely with far left groups.

'IS was a bit suspicious of it [the Working Women's Charter] because it was seen as IMG. I was asked to speak on a motion which was more or less the six demands of the Women's Liberation Movement. I remember Paul Foot and Laurie Flynn [journalists who wrote for the IS paper, *Socialist Worker*] saying look you can't have it both ways: you can have equal pay or maternity rights but not both.'

When she moved out of London she became deeply involved in women's liberation groups.

'I can remember before I moved up to Leeds, in 76, relationships with men were difficult, the more you started demanding your rights the more difficult it got, and I had a number of women friends that I was close to, and I remember someone suggesting setting up a group.' When she arrived in Leeds she 'very quickly got involved in several different women's groups, which almost became the normative way of organising.'

Sheila Rowbotham thought that there was a particular difficulty with IS, more so than with other left organisations.

'I never completely understood why IS was so particularly hostile to women's liberation coming along. The CP had an old style way of accommodating women, they were given the equivalent of a kind of middle management status as administrators, the IMG had a formal acceptance of it, but the bitterness, it was more difficult in IS for some reason. The only explanation I can think of was the emphasis on the workplace and syndicalism and because Women's Liberation

was necessarily always going on about other aspects of life... The other place where there was sticking was *New Left Review*, Juliet Mitchell had a struggle.'

If the conflict between the organised far left and the emergent women's movement was a key factor in the development of Second Wave feminism in Britain, it does not seem to be such a dominant feature with Third Wave feminists. There are possibly a number of reasons for this: the weakening of the left in Britain in the intervening decades, the greater likelihood of the younger women's involvement in looser formations rather than left organisations, the greater threshold of acceptance of certain feminist and egalitarian ideas. Ideas that had to be fought for in the 1960s and 1970s were now mainstreamed. The younger generation, while around the left, were not always in contact with left groups, nor did their strengths or weaknesses appear as such a feature in the interviews. They tended to be more involved in social movements and in campaigns than to become affiliates of political organisations. Their feminism as a consequence did not appear to be so strongly influenced or formed by the actions of men in left groups. Dawn Foster was involved in the Warwick against Sexism group at Warwick University, but found it unsatisfactory, partly because it involved men so was not a women's group as such (or not one that exclusively involved women). She also felt that it prioritised campaigns which were not necessarily in her eyes politically important. She turned instead to the National Union of Students' women's campaign:

'Partly because it was a proper women only space and partly because they did campaign rather than just sitting around debating. So they did a lot of work on women's rights in Zimbabwe, and about police responses to rape and violence, and also abortion rights, because when I was at university Nadine Dorries was trying her best to clamp down on abortion rights... NUS women's campaign were

the only group I'd come across that were actively including trans women and saying that they had a right to be there.'

When she graduated she worked as a student adviser in the University of East London:

'Then I got quite involved in political campaigning. I was a primary school governor at this primary school in Newham as well, and then I got kind of involved in UK Uncut, some kind of feminist campaign in London. I started writing a blog, and then the *Guardian* started asking me to write more regularly for Comment is Free.'

Dawn Foster also gravitated to left wing ideas through her courses at university, looking at feminist and post-colonial literature.

'I learnt a lot about Marxist theory, I learnt a lot about workers' rights in India and that sort of thing, and that was a lot more interesting than the university feminist society that let men in and didn't want to talk about anything of interest. That group all they wanted to talk about was women in magazines.'

Nina Power, who also went to Warwick, did not really get involved with the feminist group. Instead, her influences were a combination of theoretical and activist.

'Probably it took me longer than it should have to get round to these questions... I think it was probably reading things like Badiou maybe in 2000 and then probably being on the anti-war demos in 2003 probably made me think more about how things were connected.

'We did read some Marx in my S level sociology so I had a loose Marxist understanding of the world. Probably being a philosopher I thought about it more

abstractly rather than thinking about British society or something. I wouldn't have necessarily linked it up to activism or politics on the ground. I guess that came later really in the 2000s. Then the big anti-war demos, I started getting involved in anti-arms trade things; I guess it probably comes back to education thinking about the student protests in 2010. I think they're radicalised a lot of people of all ages really.'

Similarly, Carys Afoko went to Oxford University,

'I was politically active, I was involved in...I was involved in like leftI wasn't ever a member of a socialist party but I was involved in that sort of left of Labour, Education not for Sale, that kind of, so I was involved in student politics stuff on like refugee issues and detention'.

It would seem that the Third Wave interviewees were, while of the left in a general sense, much less likely to be involved in organised left groups in the first place. Their different political development made them much more likely to be involved generally in movements, and sometimes in movements only involving women, the latter of which were of course not available to Second Wave feminists until they created them. This perhaps lessened the tensions with men of the left (although we will see from the next chapter that they clearly exist). Given the way in which the 1960s women's movement developed, on the other hand, it is not surprising that all the Second Wave interviewees, in different ways, felt that this was an issue. It is clear that the schisms on the left and the feeling that men on the left were dismissive of their concerns, and oppressive of women, is still relatively strong in their memories about motivation for the creation and maintenance of a women's movement.

With the younger generation, this sense of critique of the left is much less focused and to a certain extent inchoate, it would perhaps be mistaken to regard it as absent. Cat Boyd has been a member of left groups, most recently the International Socialist Group in Scotland, and also in the broader left Radical Independence Campaign. She wants a ‘non-dogmatic Marxism which doesn’t privilege either gender or class,’ but feels that this is neither fully understood nor properly debated in the group. While the tensions she faces do not appear as large she is concerned at the lack of awareness of feminist issues and of the way in which class is not defined in a way which recognises gender.

‘[A] lot of the women who defined themselves as feminists didn’t see a role for feminism within class politics. They didn’t see how there was any relationship between the two... It was quite obvious for a lot of people on the left at the time, that that was people’s attitudes... I think some of the barriers...were really shallow surface based, you know, image of what class struggle looks like.’

Cat went on to explain that the image of class struggle in a traditional working class area like the west of Scotland is one of men.

‘There wasn’t a place for women in collective workers’ struggle... you still get that kind of knee jerk reaction on the left...oh well, you know, after the revolution that’s when you start to tackle patriarchy and things like that. And that was still ongoing so I think that those women who didn’t see the possibility of marrying a class analysis with already existing feminism and defining themselves as feminists just sort of pushed away any class analysis because they saw it as inherently sexist.’

She regards this as a major problem, meaning that the history of working class women in Scotland is under-valued and often hidden even from labour history, citing two modern industrial disputes in Scotland involving women, at Lee Jeans in Greenock, and at Timex in Dundee, about which there is little awareness or research:

‘Those really crucial disputes and what they could tell us about where we are in terms of like feminism and class, that really feels like it’s swept under the carpet. It’s never really talked about, it’s just like, oh it’s not that important, that actually you know it sometimes feels that the approach is to like women and Scotland’s labour history movement. It’s all tokenism.’

The difficulties encountered by Second Wave feminists may have disappeared, but even close to half a century since their demands were first raised, it would seem that there are many unresolved questions in the relationship between socialism and feminism.

5.6 Ebbing of the Tide: the Decline and Fragmentation of the Women’s Movement

The Women’s Liberation Movement was, as we have seen, the product of a very particular set of social and economic circumstances, and was part of a much wider radicalisation and desire for equality within society. In Britain it was accompanied by a rise in militancy and the level of strikes which shaped it in certain ways. However, by the mid-1970s there were further signs of change. The economic crisis of the early to mid-1970s brought the end of the long post-war boom and with it an ideological challenge to the post-war consensus. In practical terms, unemployment rose and the long expansion of the public sector went into reverse. In a climate of economic contraction, many of the liberal ideas of the 1960s and early 1970s were also challenged. This period is usually identified as Thatcherism, after the historic first female prime minister who was elected in 1979, although in reality it was

already distinguishable in the latter years of the previous government, particularly from 1976. It was to have a profound effect on all aspects of British politics and society, not least for ideas of feminism. However there were already major divisions among feminists predating Thatcher, reflecting at least in part the failure of the 1960s movements to achieve sufficient change as quickly or as deeply as many expected.

5.6.1 Divisions in the Movement

While women from Second Wave feminism found that their relationships with men were highly fractious, and this was one of the major factors leading to the creation of women's organisation, there were also divisions among women within the movement themselves. The divisions always existed: there were divisions between socialist feminists who were in left groups and those who were not, and there were divisions in general between socialist feminists (including those who called themselves Marxist feminists) and radical or separatist feminists. While these divisions always existed, they manifested themselves much more sharply from the mid-1970s onwards. While those I interviewed were much more inclined to socialist feminism, with the partial exception of Gail Chester, they found themselves in a more difficult position from that time onwards.

This was true with regard to changes in the movement itself, when the earlier demands which centred on women's social and economic independence were added to with demands to do with individual violence against women, and with the changes which both loose groups of feminists underwent. While socialist feminists found themselves much more on the defensive from the mid-1970s, as a result of the change in the fortunes of the left and working class movements, the radical wing became more confident, most obviously manifested in the growth of the Revolutionary Feminists (a particularly militant group of radical feminists).

These were splits which were at least partly connected with class: the socialist and Marxist feminists essentially shared an analysis which saw capitalist society as at least part of the problem in creating women's oppression, and the need for some sort of social transformation, involving working class women and men, as part of the solution. These groups were weakened by the late 1970s; the radical and revolutionary feminists' analysis denied any possibility of class unity. The women's movement conference in 1978 proved to be a turning point, and led to a breach which has never been overcome.

Sheila Rowbotham describes the decline of socialist feminism:

'An interesting issue is what happened to socialist feminism because up until Thatcher came to power certainly socialist feminism was the dominant tendency in the women's liberation movement although that's often forgotten because the media has always picked on either separatist feminism which they see to be clear or the getting on type feminism about going up the career structure... A lot of socialist feminists felt that they couldn't attack the Revolutionary Feminists because it went against feminism. I didn't feel like that because I just hated their tactics and I couldn't stand their politics. I really didn't like them attacking all men as misogynists and even baby boys, especially since I had just had a baby boy.'

Gail Chester felt some of the same antagonism, even though she was more sympathetic to radical feminist politics than Sheila. She described the hostility to 'boy children ...which was pretty big and a bit savage'. When I interviewed her she prefaced the interview by quoting from a well known article that she had written in 1979 entitled 'I call myself a radical

feminist', where she wanted to make clear what defined her radical feminism and why she still called herself one:

'In order to define myself as being active in, and believing in the need for, a strong autonomous, revolutionary movement for the liberation of women, I continue to call myself a radical feminist. In doing so, I am affirming my historical link with the earliest phases of second wave feminism – the rise of the women's liberation movement. I am not implying that I do not believe the concept of feminism itself to be inherently radical, almost the reverse. To call myself a socialist feminist or a revolutionary feminist would be to imply that (radical) feminism is not socialist, or is not revolutionary. To me, radical feminism, as expressed through the women's liberation movement, is both.'

(Chester in Feminist Anthology Collective, 1981: 68).

Gail's politics made her very critical of socialist feminists from left groups:

'I did have some historical run-ins with women who were... there were lots of women in the IMG, women in the CP, the RCP. Reading that extract and that letter I wrote to *Scarlet Woman* in the late 1970s just reminded me of how pissed off I was with women in parties, politically I mean...it was more about the sort of structures within which one chose to organise.'

She did not see radical feminism as opposed to a class analysis:

'I think there's a difference between having a class analysis of the way that society is constructed, and having one's own personal ideas about where precisely you fit on the class spectrum, and again I feel that being Jewish does sort of complicate that whole thing. But no there was never any doubt in my mind, from

very early on, that class was... It was always clear that class inequalities were huge. But as I say, the point is that as far as I was concerned being a radical feminist didn't mean that I didn't have a class perspective. It just meant that I was interested in pursuing, I suppose this is the other thing that became clear fairly early on, that whichever social class you looked at women within that class were being treated worse than men.'

At the same time,

'My brand of radical feminism, we were really angry with the revolutionary feminists, I was very critical of them from the very beginning... some of the revolutionary feminist leaders were very antagonistic human beings, and that didn't help the cause. Many of my friends were lesbians and they were really hacked off with the revolutionary feminists because they were saying, 'I'm not sleeping with women because I hate men, I'm sleeping with women because I love women'. The Revolutionary Feminists' line was you should have nothing whatsoever to do with men...which is not helpful. What it led to was a lot of women feeling under a lot of pressure to behave in a certain way. There was definitely a separatist tendency in the women's movement which I couldn't be doing with, for exactly the same reason why I couldn't join a left party.'

Sheila Rowbotham also explains the decline of socialist feminism as a form of fragmentation of the movement, which affected some of the left.

'We were very active. Everyone went on doing something or other. But there was this separation. Some went to work in local government, others got active in the

unions, and others went into academia. They carried the ideas but they didn't have any sense of cohesion as a movement.'

She also recalls that,

'All of the meetings had become very unpleasant as a result of these conflicts. Most people tend to avoid meetings when they become nasty. A small core will carry on. It was quite funny when we had discussions on whether men should be allowed on women's liberation marches on International Women's Day. Because we had participatory democracy there was this hopeless situation because the revolutionary feminists would come one week and make a decision, then the socialist feminists the next week would make another decision, and it was incredibly hard to get anything decided. In the end a lot of people I knew stopped going to them but the one who kept on was Connie Seifert, who was from the National Assembly of Women, and she didn't care. She was trained by long years in the Communist Party in tenacity.'

Sheila refers to a 'slight revival of socialist feminism round the miners' wives and Women Against Pit Closures, and then with the dock strike with Women on the Waterfront. She adds, 'we never had time to reflect on what happened and why what had been a very strong force sort of caved in.'

Sheila Rowbotham and Hilary Wainwright, along with Lynne Segal, wrote a highly influential book which came out in 1979. *Beyond the Fragments* was, as its title suggested, an attempt both to take feminist ideas outwards into the wider left and to counter the

fragmentation within the movement that Sheila has referred to. It was a major critique of Leninist politics and of left politics more generally. Hilary Wainwright describes how,

‘I felt that there were principles of organisation emerging in these different movements – the shop stewards’ movement and the militant tenants’ movement as well as the women’s liberation movement and I believed that there were lessons in the way the women’s movement organised that could be of wider significance. So when I was talking to people about this they said, oh Sheila Rowbotham would be interested in this. So I went to see Sheila in her house in Dalston, Hackney. And we had long discussions. I think she’d written an article about a critique of Leninism ‘Leninism in the Lurch’ in *Red Rag*, and I read that and it made sense. We had long chats with her while she was breastfeeding Will. She suggested contacting Lynne (Segal) who she knew was creating in Islington a similar Socialist Centre to what I was creating in Newcastle. And she had just been involved in creating the *Gutter Press*. So we were thinking along similar lines politically. So in a way *Beyond the Fragments* came more out of a sort of innovate organisationally and a feeling that the women’s movement had experiences that were worth learning from, than from specific concerns with gender. We were aware, however that the forms of organisation that the women’s movement has produced were to do with how women dealt with gender oppression which involved experimenting with a different way of organising from either parliamentary or Leninist. That was the context of *Beyond the Fragments*.’

In response to a question about whether *Beyond the Fragments* signified a recognition of the sense of crisis in the women’s movement, Hilary argued:

‘Maybe there was a sense that the women's movement if not in crisis certainly hadn't got the sort of momentum that would enable you to feel that you were able to pursue all political ideas and organisation through the women's movement. I don't think I have a very clear sense of crisis, I was very involved with socialist feminism and the regular socialist feminist conferences... Sheila knows more about why these didn't continue, but the fact that they didn't meant that people like me were searching or at least open to new forms organisation, with other women. In Newcastle there were a group of women who worked together quite closely, so many – but not all – of my political relationships, including with Sheila and Lynne, were shaped by the socialist feminist movement, and it was a socialist feminist way of organising that we were trying to work on.’

5.6.2 The Early Thatcher Years and a Return to Organisation

If part of the reason for the schisms within the women's movement lay in political divisions within different sections of the movement, and within the left more generally, faced with a right wing government led by a woman, another part of the reason was the changes in society which took place, including the restructuring of industry which saw a rapid decline in manufacturing industry and a corresponding decline in working class communities. Ursula Huws describes it graphically:

‘I was writing a working women's handbook and I just never quite finished it. I had one chapter left to go and Thatcher came in and as fast as you wrote about the legislation it was disappearing. I was ringing up people I'd interviewed previously – like this woman in a factory in Todmorden about how they had managed to get a Tampax machine and you'd ring her up and say I'm just checking the details

and she'd say oh the factory's closed. It was like the Forth Bridge you know I was never going to finish it.'

The decline of industry brought a big change: 'The point was that for those women their jobs just went. Deindustrialisation, there was a huge, huge, disappearance which wasn't just the physical disappearance of their jobs but a loss of that collective memory of how to do it [i.e. organise].' Ursula Huws had been involved in setting up a resource centre in Leeds in the late 1970s which was seen as an extension of the political activism which had characterised so much of the previous decade:

'What happened after the Thatcher victory [in 1979], a lot of people on the left turned their attention to the Labour Party and local government. I have to admit I wasn't one of them. I always thought you were better off fighting the multinationals than banging your head against the brick wall of Thatcherism. That happened and one of things that these left Labour local authorities did was to fund more centres like the ones we'd set up... so suddenly we became a model to be cloned... resource centres were set up all over the bloody place. But they actually weren't sustainable. It wasn't a direct expression of activism any more. It was mediated through an employment relationship and a management committee... but in the process some of the organisations which had been reasonably sustainable up to that point somehow became victims of the same process ...there's almost a sense in which local authority funding killed them off.'

The radicalisation and high levels of industrial action of the early 1970s made many women aware of the potential and importance of trade union membership, and 1979, the year in which Margaret Thatcher, the Tory prime minister, was elected, was also the high point for

union membership in Britain. Heather Wakefield, first a music journalist, then a Newham social worker by the late 1970s, chose this time to become more involved in organising women and organising unions.

‘A job was advertised setting up a women's employment project in Lewisham with Docklands money. And I got appointed as the full time job, and it was looking at women's employment and training issues in Docklands, of which Lewisham was one of the boroughs which had Docklands money... and then after a year a young woman joined... who was Frances O'Grady [now leader of the TUC]. So she and I have been best mates since about 1980. We had a centre in Deptford High Street, we did quite a lot of research but we ran... trade union courses there and we attempted a lot of recruitment. There were some paper bag factories nearby. I became president of the Trades Council in that period. So I became really immersed in the whole thing. All the voluntary sector workers were in NUPE at that time and so I became the steward. Deptford High Street was almost all voluntary organisations. That's how the union thing grew, through all of those things.’

That was the beginning of working around and within the trade unions. Hilary Wainwright also moved towards research and working with trade unions, which she saw as being complementary to feminist organisation.

‘I suppose I gravitated towards the trade unions more in relation to thinking about how do you what kinds of power can create conditions for socialist transformation. In terms of feminism though clearly women's needs particularly round pay but also round working time, working organisation of work, they were more likely to be met if they were backed by powerful trade union organisation so

my gravitation was generally a recognition of the importance of collective power, working people's power, but always recognising that we needed movements that were outside of the workplace as well.'

While the interviewees would at least in some cases find the trade unions wanting in terms of their organisation of women, they also saw them as arenas where women organising around feminist demands and issues could make real advances in circumstances which were not necessarily as hostile as society in general. The turn of many feminists towards the Labour Party from the late 1970s onwards, and the upswing of the Labour left around the Bennite phenomenon, which included plans to democratise the party to give women a much greater voice, and an impetus towards structural changes such as women's committees and weighted shortlists for women, also led many feminists towards a greater involvement in the unions.

Hilary Wainwright was, without herself becoming a member of the Labour Party, an example of this development. She became involved with the Greater London Council under Ken Livingstone. He took over as leader of the body in 1981, ushering in a period of radical reforms over issues such as transport. Under Livingstone's leadership the GLC tried to put into practice feminist and other egalitarian ideals as part of official policy.

'When the left won control of the GLC, one of the councillors concerned was Val Wise who with her mother Audrey [a Labour MP] had been very involved with the Lucas Aerospace workers, approached me to apply for a job, with Mike Cooley, who was one of the leaders of the Lucas Aerospace Plant. We applied together as a job-share for the economic policy group and we got the job. In my case this involved setting up the Popular Planning Unit in the GLC. Val was a very strong feminist, as indeed was Audrey. Audrey was a bit of a symbol of that

connection between class and feminism. Val similarly was very political in her feminism, and she was very insistent on the GLC having a women's committee... At the same time we tried to ensure that feminism was part of our economic strategy... we even had a policy of domestic labour as an economic sector. Sheila, who joined me in the Popular Planning Unit, was very involved in developing this. Housework was understood as a sphere of economic intervention, which included the whole childcare programme, support for community laundrettes, we even had ideas about community restaurants, so it was a strong recognition of the invisible labour of women and how to make it a public service.'

So for a number of feminists, especially socialist feminists, the trade unions and the Labour Party became a much more comfortable arena to work than they perhaps would have considered a decade previously. Now institutions such as the GLC, and the internal structures of some unions, helped to maintain socialist feminist ideas and organisation. This was a very important development given that the policies of the Thatcher government ran counter to many such ideas. It allowed individual feminists the possibility of a space in a period which was becoming less auspicious for their ideas.

However, in many ways it also marked a retreat from their previous aspirations. While in the 1960s and early 1970s, the idea of an autonomous women's movement was seen as the goal of most feminists, now the divisions within the movement and the weakening of the left generally led them towards much more dependence on mainstream institutions such as the unions or the Labour Party, or on the academy. While feminism brought something new to these areas, it lost the sense of a coherent and dynamic movement of women. There was also

what might be described as the professionalisation of political activity, according to Ursula Huws, when what was regarded as a sign of commitment and a voluntary activity became something which was a full time paid occupation:

‘I think the big shift came, and it didn’t just happen with feminists, it happened with other kinds of what would now be called NGOs, and the very word NGO defines the problem, but in the 60s and 70s your politics was something you did unpaid, either as an expression of how you felt in some other capacity about your life, if you were a worker it was what you did in your union and in your workplace, if you were a tenant it was what you did on your tenants’ association, if you were a parent it was what you did as a school governor, whatever... Basically it was something you did in your spare time. Then what happened and I think it was to do with economics really the time came in the late 70s when the welfare state was getting less generous... The organisations that had been set up altruistically in people’s spare time... actually became professionalised.’

5.7 Conclusion

The impact of Second Wave feminism was beginning to be felt by the late 1970s. It combined with the deep changes in the structure of women’s work, and a growing acceptance of women’s role in public life, meant that some of the anomalies and inequalities of women’s position in British society were overcome. Second Wave feminism played a major role in shifting ideological attitudes on a range of issues including family, motherhood, the right to work and awareness of sexist attitudes. However, the decline of Second Wave feminism in an organisational sense was a weakness, although its ideas had a much more enduring impact. The changed political fortunes of the left meant too that socialist and Marxist feminists within the left tended to share many of its problems. The Thatcher era led to the further demise of

the left. The changes in women's lives became more disconnected from conscious feminism. Furthermore, the underlying inequality which underpinned many of the original demands of the Second Wave feminists still remained. This contradiction between the greater social commitment to equality, and the gap between that and reality, helped to create the new wave of feminism.

Chapter 6: Feminism in the Twenty-First Century

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will continue to report and analyse the data from the interviews carried out with the Second and Third Wave feminists. While the last chapter was focused on the factors which influenced the two generations, and led them to develop their ideas and the form of their political participation, this chapter will look at feminism and its legacy for the younger generation. In particular, it will examine and discuss some of the key features which have helped to shape Third Wave feminism in different ways from the previous wave. There will be a section on racism and anti-racism, and the impact on both waves of feminists. The chapter will include areas of conflict or difference between the generations, touching on issues such as sex work, the role of certain contemporary feminist campaigns, attitudes to domestic labour and to women's dress. Again, it will do so by placing the attitudes of the different women in their political and economic context.

6.2 Shaping Twenty-First Century Feminism

6.2.1 From Class to Identity Politics

The development of feminism throughout the 1980s and 1990s, was, as we have seen, marked by the decline of organised feminist campaigning, with some important exceptions such as the Greenham Common Women and Women Against Pit Closures. On the one hand this led to the fragmentation referred to by Sheila Rowbotham above, where the early unity of purpose, and of organisation, was lost into a variety of different organisations and campaigns. On the other hand feminist ideas permeated and became institutionalised in much wider layers of society. It was these two features which helped create a range of changes in the way that issues about women were regarded in politics, education, the trade unions and other areas of life. However linking and connecting proved to be far from automatic. As right-wing

thinking came to be ascendant in the 1980s, the form of identity politics that prevailed was inclined to become more fragmented. So the more collective attitudes of the 1960s and 1970s receded and oppressed groups were apt to think of themselves in terms of their own individual identity as women or black. This dismissal of class was also evident in the media.

Sheila Rowbotham recalls:

‘I remember once being interviewed in Scotland about home workers and the interviewer said how boring, so I said it depends if you’re a home worker or not. Earlier in the 60s and early 70s a journalist wouldn’t have said that to someone because it would have been assumed that you would be concerned about low pay and women’s conditions. But by the late 80s and into the 90s it just became unmentionable to talk about poverty and class.’

In many fields, women still made advances: certain work which had been closed to them now opened up, and much larger numbers of women than in previous generations began to see themselves as lifelong participants in the labour market, and entered higher education in greater numbers in order to qualify themselves for this role. Despite continuing prejudice, there was also more widespread acceptance of certain questions of sexuality, for example towards lesbian and gay relationships and politics, towards children born outside marriage, and towards women’s personal and sexual behaviour. In addition there was an expansion of management roles for women, and the increase of women’s studies and gender studies as academic disciplines. These developments affected the paths which feminism took, as well as forming the background to the development of Third Wave feminism, against which the younger generation formed their ideas about feminism. This new generation did so against a greater emphasis on individual development, the encouragement of high levels of consumption, and of competition to achieve their goals. Women born in the 1980s,

sometimes with feminist mothers or other relatives, grew up in a social milieu where girls received a full education and women expected to have a lifetime working outside the home.

As Hilary Wainwright says,

‘I think probably Second Wave feminism did increase the confidence of women and raised expectations. You know there's a whole generation of mothers who took for granted women's equality and women's rights, and that would obviously affect their daughters who are now the people becoming involved...you've got a generation who took women's equality for granted and who demanded the conditions for that equality to be realised like childcare, like public services that were responsive to women.’

If these features were not exactly taken for granted by the interviewees, they formed a background in which feminism seemed one of a number of options of political identification. A number of the interviewees were influenced by social movements, rather than parties, as we saw in the last chapter, especially the anti-globalisation and anti-war movements. Their commitment to active or campaigning feminism was at least partly changed through economic circumstances.

6.2.2 Economic Crisis and Austerity

The banking crash of 2008 and the subsequent economic crisis, which led to austerity policies internationally, were cited by a number of Third Wave interviewees as a turning point. This turn in the economic situation also led to a greater consideration of ideas concepts such as class. Nina Power stresses the impact that the economic crisis of 2008 had on her generation. Before then, she already felt that there was perhaps too much emphasis on women's role at work, and certainly too much on the role of consumerism in women's identity.

‘The economic crisis renders the intervention into the discourse of employment and consumerism and employment not irrelevant, but not the main issue. There are far more serious issues to do with cuts and how they’re affecting women, and questions about work which have shifted with things like zero hour contracts, there are more forms of unemployment, precarity and so on. The consumerist thing works less well when people have less money.’

She dates this time as also changing attitudes towards feminism. ‘There’s been a revival of feminism since about 2008, at least where the word has been much more used, and lots of younger women are happy to call themselves feminists, there are lots more feminist events.’ In an echo of the earlier statement by Sheila Rowbotham, where she talks about the way she and her friends tried to address issues of oppression, but did not have the political language for it, so Nina says:

‘I think there was this lack of a discourse, then it turned up, the thing that I was missing then appeared. For historical and political reasons there was a feeling that enough is enough, in all sorts of ways really, and that things weren’t all postmodern and ironic and equality hadn’t really been achieved in the ways that people thought or hoped it would. So I think there was a kind of revival or new wave whatever you want to call it around that time.’

Cat Boyd also dates her own personal involvement to then.

‘I’ve always really liked the bell hooks definition, I read some bell hooks when I was about 17. I really liked that idea of feminism is a recognition that sexism exists. I think that’s quite an important approach to define what feminism is. But I

guess I got more interested in feminism more broadly just after the 2008 economic crisis.’

The impact of the crisis, the growth of inequality and austerity policies all influenced her in this respect.

‘[T]here were people from lots of different backgrounds who were pointing out the deep institutional sexist nature of austerity policies. How they were disproportionately affecting women. That led them to an argument about the democracy surrounding austerity, that it’s anti-democratic and that women were going to basically, you know, have this disproportionate impact on them. I think that’s probably when a lot of my, you know, like peer group would’ve got involved in feminism. A lot of the stuff we did through the Coalition of Resistance and the International Women’s Day demonstration. I couldn’t imagine that happening before. I also can’t really imagine it happening now. I think it was a very particular point where a lot of like young women in the student movement, or who had had some kind of background in like trade union politics or something like that, started to switch onto the meaning of austerity particularly for women.’

The development of a new wave of feminism is connected to the economic crisis according to Hilary Wainwright.

‘The economic crisis has massively hit women. Building on the impact of Second Wave feminism and women's expectations, it has meant that there's a high degree of anger and resistance and militancy amongst women in the face of cuts and loss of jobs and precarity. So yes the crisis and particularly the cuts has created the

conditions for a new wave. You can see how a new wave comes out of dashed expectations.’

Dawn Foster puts this sharply in terms of her own experience:

‘I was at university when the recession happened and I think a lot of people thought that this would mean the end of the way this kind of thing had been going. After Peter Mandelson said he was intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich, I think a lot of people at university thought, oh this is going to be the start of a new system. Banks have collapsed, we can say that these people shouldn’t have been earning the amount they were and maybe it could be a bit more evenly distributed. But then if you look at the very top 1 per cent – I suppose this is where Occupy Wall Street comes in – they’ve never been earning more. And the people at the bottom are still in relative terms even more in poverty and even more precarious than they were before.’

6.2.3 Social Media: Liberating or Constraining?

Ursula Huws gives a similar date for changes beginning to happen, but looks at it from a wider perspective.

‘In 2006 various things had reached critical mass more or less coinciding with the financial crisis. One was the commodification of public services, another was the commodification of arts and culture, the third was the commodification of sociality (through Facebook etc.). The genius of capitalism in generating new commodities.’

The intrusion of the market into these areas of life impacted on a range of issues affecting women, including representation of women, the status of women in the public sector, the privatisation of academic life, and of course the role of social media and how that impacted on feminism. Dawn Foster makes the point that social media has played a sometimes negative role in terms of women.

‘I think it’s just a Thatcherite thing that people are becoming more and more individualistic. I think part of that is just feeling precarious, and feeling that you need to shore yourself up against financial disaster, but I think a lot of it comes from social media as well, because you’re it’s kind of like a shop front for you that anyone can search on the internet, so people think a lot more about how they come across. They think a lot more about how many people are listening to them, what kind of interactions they have, whereas in the past I suppose you just got on with the job, you went to the pub afterwards, my job as a journalist you constantly feel that you have people judging you and that sort of thing. It just kind of feeds into this more individualistic thing, and that’s a lot of my problem with modern feminism.’

The new movement has tended to be much less coherent and unified than the Second Wave. Whereas Second Wave feminism in Britain and the US was responsible for an extensive set of writings on a range of topics connected to women and feminism in the years following the late 1960s, this has been much less in evidence with Third Wave feminism. Gail Chester makes this point:

‘What concerns me is that the feminist movement this time round has taken a lot longer to get off the ground. 2008 would be the period I would identify when the

first stirrings of a new movement were coming along, and if you compare 2008 and 2014 with 1968 and 1974, I mean there's no comparison is there?'

One of the Third Wave interviewees, Carys Afoko, argues similarly.

'I think generally that people like Kat Banyard who I know a bit, I think generally the writing we get now is, look guys, the world is still really unequal... that entry level, have you noticed that men and women are unequal. Could this be because the system is rigged in favour of men? Yeah there isn't a lot. I wonder if we're maybe at an early stage and writing will be the next stage of it.'

Kate Hardy echoes in a different way the point made by Gail Chester and thinks this may be a problem with recognition for the Second Wave legacy:

'I quite often have friends who say to me, I want to know more about feminism what shall I read? It's quite hard to tell them because some of the 70s stuff might feel a bit out of date to them but no one's writing it... there's very few...'

The impact of social media is put in a different way by Malia Bouattia, who sees it as maybe a barrier to in depth understanding of politics.

'What I do draw from... [Second Wave feminism] positively is like the aspect of political education, and I feel because here, because now the aspect of social media plays into political engagement and activism as a whole. It means that we want things instantly... without understanding why it is we need to take action, what our ultimate aims are... so looking at the bigger picture I worry sometimes is severely lacking, based largely on the lack of political education or the

encouragement to develop a political education amongst groups who are organising.’

At the same time it is clear that social media has also played a different role in conveying some feminist ideas. For example, Nina Power’s book *One Dimensional Woman* was based on her blogs. Other feminists have launched websites such as *Everyday Sexism* and *The Vagenda*. However, there may be a problem which did not face Second Wave feminists: they were able to organise collectively as feminists through various groups, through women’s centres and through consciousness raising groups. Today, such groups or organisations are much fewer, despite the higher levels of awareness about feminism in society generally. Cat Boyd says that,

‘I think part of the problem is that there’s actually no real political space for women to be able to discuss ideas like that. Because feminism has become so entrenched in identity politics, it’s become very difficult to have a serious discussion about things like class and intersectionality and how different oppressions relate to each other and that sort of thing’.

According to Gail Chester, this lack of forum to debate is at least partly to do with the changes wrought through widespread use of social media.

‘In my campaigning round the politics of technology, I focus on domestic digital technology (i.e. mobile phones, the internet, PCs etc.), and I’m acutely aware that it’s a very isolating mechanism and that kids disappear inside their machines, and find it very hard to get together with each other. So you’ve got this theory that it’s much easier to connect up with each other....but there used to be campaigns with national meetings when everybody sat in a room and knew why they were there.

We had a launch conference at the Feminist Library in 2013 for Women's Studies Without Walls, and over 100 women came....we went round and said to everyone why did you come, and they basically said well we just wanted to meet some other feminists in the flesh. The fact that they're not forced to meet each other has an effect.'

Ursula Huws' point above, of the commodification of sociality through social media, may mean that whatever its many potential benefits, it makes it less likely that groups of women will meet together in order to discuss the issues which are important to them. Whereas social media is often discussed in terms of its ability to connect people who might not otherwise be connected, and to spread vastly greater amounts of information far more quickly than was the case for previous generations, a number of the interviewees raised important caveats to that process.

6.2.4 Experience of Work

We have seen the connection between economic crisis and growing feminist consciousness above. Another feature in leading some the interviewees towards a stronger feminist identity was the experience of work. It may be that this was because it contrasted for some of them with what appeared a steady progression through the education system, where they were able to develop their ideas without necessarily a large degree of conflict. Going to work was something that they all expected to do, but were in some cases surprised at how women were treated. Carys Afoko describes how

'I was at NEF [the New Economics Foundation] with a female friend who was working at another very similar organisation...we went for a coffee were just ranting how it's so disheartening working at a place which was supposed to be

progressive where it's just so sexist all the time. So we set up a women's group at NEF, but not just for women who worked in NEF... and that started a few years ago, and that started as sort of trying to be about... we were prepared for it to become something activist or to just be a space to share things and work through dilemmas.'

The group attracted 20 people to the first meeting, then regularly a dozen, and was open to women not in paid work. Carys talks about various dilemmas at work, ranging from, 'you're in a meeting, you make a point, everyone ignores it. Two minutes later a man makes a point, everyone nods. That's just the, that's the universal experience, of every woman of my age in the work place,' to more serious issues of sexual harassment and bullying that she has encountered through friends. One of her frustrations was that it was often not easy to find a solution.

'We picked on things and talked through what was difficult about it and also different ways you could handle it because it is validating to have other people hear about something and say that was sexist, that wasn't ok. But it was also, how do I handle this without you know, resigning every job I ever have?'

She talks about the widespread prevalence of sexual harassment at work among friends and colleagues, which she regards as relatively shocking. Some other interviewees also expressed concern about their own working environment, or that of friends or acquaintances, where they also experienced levels of misogyny or sexism.

6.3 Issues and Debates

If Third Wave feminism is defined, at least in part, from the challenging conditions in which it arose, and the frustration at the lack of equality for women after decades of ‘change’, the interviewees also tended to define themselves very strongly as certain types of feminist: concerned with action and activity, rather than simply cultural representations of women; strongly anti-racist and against other forms of oppression; all of them had critiques of globalised neoliberalism; they all had strong, if not always the same views, on a number of issues including clothing and dress, and make up, sex work, the central role of class and economics. Inequality and class differences tended to feature quite sharply in their ideas.

Kate Hardy, an activist in the Feminist Fightback group, which she describes as feminist with a class analysis, takes a strong view about the different approaches to women’s work today.

‘I make an argument quite often that all we hear about now is the lap dancing club or the boardroom. So you either hear in mainstream debates, you hear radical feminists obsessing about the sex industry while ignoring the people who are cleaning those lap dancing clubs, or this liberal feminism that is obsessed with the glass ceiling and a particular type of women’s access to classed avenues of power. Everyone, all the other women working in between, just don’t seem to get a look in. So people in care work, women doing domiciliary care work, which is absolutely terrible, women cleaning hotel rooms, these are the types of jobs that women try to avoid by going into the sex industry, and then they quite often use the sex industry to move from those type of jobs to you know the more middle class ones. So that’s what I think gets missed, I don’t think there’s a narrative around women’s work beyond those two sites and it’s a bit frustrating.’

In defining themselves as feminists, the younger interviewees were very critical of certain sorts of contemporary feminism, including seeing the question as primarily one of lifestyle, and of certain sorts of campaigns. All of those interviewed were critical of what they saw as campaigns which did not reflect the class or race issues which had to inform feminism. Carys Afoko says,

‘Yeah and I think the danger with this sort of Third Wave – I guess I haven’t talked about all that sort of internet activism and the media friendly side of it – I guess with the Third Wave it is that it’s very middle class. So for me there were class issues generally at my workplace and they crossed over with gender because with the exception of myself and another member of staff who were friends from very similar backgrounds, came from I guess working class backgrounds, had gone to Oxford and were now in middle class jobs, jobs where you earn quite a lot of money but you don’t identify as a middle class person... it’s a sort of, I identify with working class people. I don’t always feel comfortable saying I’m working class, because I’m earning quite good money but... Then there were three or four people who were clearly working class members of staff. They were in admin roles, they were women; they were earning considerably less than anyone else in the organisation.’

Dawn Foster criticised the sort of feminism that is,

‘All about how others see you as an individual, hence this really irritating strand of media feminism where you’ve got to have 400 articles that begin “can you be a feminist and...” It doesn’t look at feminism as a kind of journey; it looks at it as a weird little lifestyle choice. So people are like am I a good feminist, am I a bad feminist, rather than thinking what should feminism be doing to combat the

bedroom tax? What should feminism be doing to help this class of people? Or solve this social problem?’

Some contemporary high profile media campaigns were also subject to strenuous criticism, including the campaign for the novelist Jane Austen to be represented on English banknotes. Nina Power commented: ‘I can see why people might want to do these things, but they seem limited. I’m far more interested in the abolition of money rather than putting a woman on a banknote’. Even though Scotland has different banknotes, Cat Boyd says:

‘I’ve heard of that Jane Austen on a banknote campaign, I listen to Radio 4 all the time... they’re obsessed with it... on Woman’s Hour. To be perfectly honest I really don’t identify with that brand of feminism, I find it really difficult, it feels like the class gulf is just far too big. Even to an extent it’s good this Women’s History Network has been campaigning to get a monument to Mary Barbour [the leader of the rent strike in Glasgow in 1915] in Glasgow, that’s good but you know it’s led by people who have no engagement in the type of struggles that people like Mary Barbour were fighting. I find it really difficult to, I just don’t see, that’s not where transformative change is going to come from. Yeah it’s frustrating that all the monuments in George Square are all men but you know putting one of a woman there isn’t automatically going to change it. It’s also going to be right outside Glasgow City Council chambers where they’re cutting all the care services, which will actually impact on women’s jobs and care provision, do you know what I mean? I just find it really difficult to get on board with campaigns that aren’t gonna have a transformative effect on feminist movements, or, you know, the outcome and standard of women’s lives in Scotland.’

The sentiments expressed here signify a wider division, and one which all the Third Wave feminists interviewed tended to agree. Dawn Foster talked about the two approaches to feminism.

‘I see the movement split in two and it’s not really an even split, where like half of them are talking about the things I am which is like economics, austerity, the political system; and the other half talking about magazines, page three, bank notes, whether we should be concerned about how many women there are at the very top, as if you’ll get this kind of trickle-down feminism, where if Sheryl Sandberg’s on the board of Facebook, or Theresa May is prime minister, I’m sure then eventually cleaners will be liberated and earn like a good wage. When that just simply isn’t true.’

Carys Afoko sees this split not just in terms of class, but of race as well, where she regards many white young feminists as unconcerned with the position of their black sisters. She cites the writers of the Vagenda blog as one example of this, because she disagrees with them over a controversy to do with whether white feminists took black women sufficiently into account. Generally, she says:

‘One thing yeah I find really difficult is that this wave of feminism, a lot of these things are quite middle class and quite white. The being quite white is something that I’ve confronted a lot more because the moment you say, well this is quite middle class you get into a big thing where people have different views of what working class or middle class is. But when you’re literally like, everyone in here is white, the conversation is easier, they don’t say I can consider myself to be African [laughs], and you’re like, that’s interesting, you can consider yourself but...’.

The frustration expresses a sense of the gap between women's (and other) equality as an accepted ideology, which has to an extent permeated major institutions in politics, industry, the media and education, with a much more transformative feminist agenda which the younger interviewees tend to espouse, and which the Second Wave feminists also identified. However on a number of points, there were differences of approach to particular questions, some of which are outlined below.

6.3.1 The Domestic Labour Debate

There were a number of differences reflected within the interviews, between the two generations. At one level these can be explained by changes in social attitudes even within the left and among feminists in the course of several decades. One reflected certain different attitudes to domestic labour.

The Second Wave feminists were involved in a series of debates, not least the one about domestic labour, which dominated a lot of socialist and Marxist feminist discussion in the early to mid-1970s. Some of this debate crystallised into contributions about the slogan 'wages for housework' and the centrality of women's unpaid work in the home. This was at times acrimonious, something which some of the younger interviewees found hard to understand. Nina Power said,

'I suppose one debate I've never really understood why it was so vehement and so tense was the debate around Wages for Housework which seems to have caused a major rift. I understand why you could read it as problematic but I also see it as a kind of provocation and also the way in which it's described by some of the socialist feminists who are very critical of it, or the feminists who want women in the workplace seem to misrepresent the argument. So I think when you

actually read DallaCosta or Selma James I think you know it doesn't match up to the critique, and I suppose as someone who is very interested in the debates around work and women in work I still find that split which seems to be absolutely total, and people still won't talk to Selma James or Federici, you know, so odd because both parties seem to have something interesting to say about work, in particular and feminism.'

Cat Boyd was also taken aback that a debate on women at the Radical Independence Conference broke out when her co-author Jenny Morrison raised the question of a women's domestic strike, as had been put forward in Spain. Many women in the room were very critical of the idea. When the question was posed about whether this reflected the concerns of older feminists, who had often been highly involved in the debates over wages for housework, Cat felt that the debate needed to develop from those that took place in the 1970s.

'I understand why that argument was made at that specific time but I think it's something that we have to look at. You know women's unpaid labour in the home, it's an important part of opening up a space to talk about women's role in society, that there still is this expectation of women to do the majority of domestic labour, to do the majority of unpaid care work, and as the public sector gets hammered more and more it will be women who not only face the harshest side of it in terms of like industrially because it is disproportionately women who work there, but it will be women who have to pick up the pieces when protecting their services are no longer provided by the state. So I think it is going to be something we should be looking at, but I understand why that argument existed. And I think this is the thing like, see if you try and have this discussion where the resurgence of feminist ideas has happened in the west...it's on the internet, it just

turns into this really strange debate where people are just attacking each other. You know there's no actual space for any sort of camaraderie, to learn from like Second Wave feminists and to have open discussions with other women about what we should actually be doing. I mean I think there is a bit of a concern that a lot of feminism and talking about the ideas too much takes away from action. I can't think of, even if it is a lot of the Second Wave feminists that you've spoken to, I don't think that they would particularly - maybe I'm speaking out of turn - would have a massive objection to hundreds of young women if they marched to parliament saying they were on strike... of course they wouldn't have a problem with that.'

Kate Hardy is also sympathetic to some of the arguments for wages for housework, seeing it as connected to social reproduction theories and campaigns centred round these issues:

'I also think it was quite a lot of misunderstanding about what was being argued by those sets of people. My impression is with the wages for housework it wasn't that they wanted to keep women as housewives, there was a kind of transitional demand to visibilise the labour that occurs there.'

She is involved in a campaign for a 'basic income' for everyone regardless of their situation. In some ways this can be seen as a continuation of the campaign over wages for housework, and she underlines the point about needing an analysis of labour which includes both paid and unpaid work.

'It's a way of talking about how labour is distributed, what's a demand on the state, and I can't see a demand at the moment that does anything in quite the same

way... A lot of the struggles are around how we recognise paid and unpaid work, essentially.’

6.3.2 Appearance

The interviews revealed very different attitudes towards clothing, make up and women’s appearance. The younger feminists tended to regard this purely as a personal matter, and having no wider relevance to any political question. Nor did they tend to see that it was possible to read off any political conclusions from the way in which women dressed or behaved. Indeed, they were more likely to resent the suggestion, usually from older feminists, that clothing or appearance should be regarded as important. Nina Power describes being at a conference on sexism at Goldsmiths College:

‘Angela McRobbie was being very critical of the way in which women are supposed to look sexy and... Linda Williamson, she was being very critical of women you know shaving their legs and going through pain in order to look nicer, and you know there was a really fierce resistance from a lot of the crowd, saying this is femmephobic in the sense that you’re almost being misogynist in saying that women can’t dress how they like, this kind of thing.’

When it was suggested that this was a generational difference, Nina responded that these should not be the issues concerning feminists:

‘I don’t think it’s that interesting, I think there are much bigger things to talk about, I don’t really care what someone wears or whatever. Why should I? At the same time, what I was trying to capture in the book from ages ago was the dominance of a certain image of womanhood which has nothing to do with actual

women, you know, wearing things or behaving in certain sorts of ways, it was rather about this consumerist image which was seen to be everywhere.'

One of the Second Wave feminists took a different view. Heather Wakefield describes how she attended her son's graduation and felt dispirited by the way the young women dressed.

'It was just all the young women were wearing [high heeled] shoes, and all with false eyelashes, all with the long hair, all looking dead elegant, with the short dresses. It was also very uniform but also quite depressing. Obviously these are all young women in uni doing well and all of that but there was I don't know you feel that there's a kind of acceptance of what being a woman is, or what has been determined women are meant to be.'

Some of the campaigns of the early 1970s reflected priorities which might seem strange today, but which reflected the rejection of sexual stereotypes which were so important to Second Wave feminism, and the very far reaching attempts by many feminists to change the way women behaved. The pressure on women's looks and definitions of beauty today are not just about gender argues Kate Hardy.

'I see a lot of that stuff as being about capital, rather than about gender. So I've seen this increasingly with young men... the pressures on them...I'm not saying that men are as oppressed as women in terms of beauty, I don't think they are, I think that women historically are a lot more oppressed in terms of beauty and being sexualised. But I guess I think women should be able to wear high heels and short skirts and lipstick and be left alone, and actually I think it's quite problematic the ways in which it's sexualised even by feminists... I think it's a lot

about being sold how you are supposed to look... it's as much about commodification as about gender.'

Dawn Foster felt that in fact sentiments criticising women's dress often included a class bias. I pointed out that the view expressed by Heather was not untypical of older feminists, because Second Wave feminism had been partly defined by some of these questions, and that it had seemed important to many in that generation to reject certain ways of dressing or behaving. Dawn's response was to see it as another aspect of class difference and possibly class prejudice:

'But even a lot of that is still like class based. You see loads of people saying "she looks trashy" and they don't mean she looks like a sex worker, they mean she looks working class, she looks like she's on "The Only Way Is Essex". She looks like she's just come back off holiday from Ibiza... So much of the discussion about what people wear is really class based, you get this idea about demure middle class feminists who wear nice dresses...I just think people still tie up how you dress and how you talk, and the length of your skirt, to your intelligence. If you're wearing false eyelashes then you're trashy and then you're stupid, instead of like I feel that that woman is pressured into making those decisions. And again that comes back to a class thing, that working class women don't make decisions, they get decisions thrown onto them because they're not as intellectually agile and capable and independent as middle class feminists.'

However, even among Third Wave feminists there were differences. The younger interviewees did not all take the same approach to make-up. For example, Carys Afoko said that she didn't wear makeup, and this was a decision she made after reading Naomi Wolf's

The Beauty Myth. However, she was also at pains to point out that questions of clothing and make-up should not affect how someone sees a feminist.

‘I don’t have a straightforward answer to this, and I think there’s a very difficult thing, and again as a black woman I’m very conscious of this because of my hair specifically, which is always very political. You know, are you straightening it, are you wearing traditional, so I have a general approach that look I don’t want to go... round like policing, any feminism that leads to policing women’s bodies and choices doesn’t really feel like feminism to me.’

Nina Power also mentioned the Wolf book as one which some contemporaries at school read. However, none of the women seemed to regard decisions about this as a matter of importance in relation to wider feminist questions. Ursula Huws, on the other hand, felt that it might reflect a wider division between the generations that allowed the stereotyping of the older generation on the question.

‘Some of them [Third Wave feminists] are children of feminists who have a conflicted relationship... I think there’s a kind of resentment. The mass media portrayal of feminism really got through that idea of hairy legs, dungarees. Which is exactly like looking back on it my generation growing up in the 50s [saw] the women of the 30s, spinsters, lesbians, unsexy, vegetarians.’

6.3.3 Sex Work

Attitudes among feminists about women who engage in what is termed sex work are highly conflicted. Whereas past feminist campaigns such as Reclaim the Night have focused on areas of cities with strip clubs and sex shops, and while there have been a number of campaigns over issues such as pin ups in newspapers or magazines, including a current one

which has gained some publicity against Page 3 of the *Sun* newspaper, there is a degree of argument over this. Some younger feminists see sex work as a woman's choice and therefore in some ways empowering. Sex workers themselves have in recent years organised in trade unions and spoken out in favour of being able to do this sort of work, which they argue should be treated in the same way as any other paid work.

Nina Power tends towards this view:

'[T]he issues round the Page 3 thing is again one of the strong dividing, one of the divisions between contemporary feminism would be around questions of sex, sex work, objectification and so on and I think there's still a big divide between those feminists who see sex as first and foremost exploitation and objectification, morally wrong I guess, would like to criminalise prostitution, and then I guess there's another strain which would be very much against that and would talk about sex work as being a form of work and would be very critical of campaigns to ban Page 3, or would at least try to contextualise that discussion and talk about maybe the moralism.'

Kate Hardy had by far the most developed view of those that I interviewed. As we have seen, she became an active feminist as a result of witnessing the levels of prostitution in Thailand. In Britain, she became involved in researching and campaigning round the issue, and carried out research in Argentina.

'I really sharpened my personal analysis of capitalism and patriarchy or gender relations and the economy through sex workers in Argentina, who were illiterate a lot of them, through what they said to me and their analysis of sex work. So I think before I had a more radical feminist analysis of sex work, despite having a

class analysis, but it was through what they said to me that really I saw how they are just completely inextricable.’

She is extremely critical of the way in which sex workers are treated by some feminists, especially radical feminists, and sees it as an important division which is part generational.

‘They’ve said things in the past that Trans women are just men wearing a dress, and they take this view of not allowing them into women only spaces. So the Trans issue also links up with the sex worker issue... I’ve been to events where they have not allowed sex workers to go in ...there’s been this process of excluding Trans women and sex workers from feminist spaces and doing it quite violently. Like I’ve seen sex workers have to stand outside in a car park in the rain, at an event that has plenty of space for everybody, and they kept saying there was no capacity. It was patently a lie and they physically blocked them going in...’

Some of these questions became more widely and publicly controversial as I was carrying out the research. A letter to the *Observer* newspaper, signed by prominent feminists including Beatrix Campbell, opposed the protests over feminists such as Germaine Greer, accused of making derogatory remarks about Trans women, was met by an indignant response on the following week’s letters page. Many women, including Kate and two others of my interviewees, Dawn Foster and Nina Power, signed it. I asked Kate why she felt so strongly about the issue. She argued that these were people who had shown great hostility to certain sorts of women, and they should expect to meet protests if they tried to speak along these lines.

‘There’s this ongoing history of excluding voices that a certain sector of radical feminists don’t like... but then when people object to people who’ve said those things speaking at things... they’ve turned it round by saying that they’re being silenced by the objections to what they’re saying. So I think it’s comparable to this free speech thing around Charlie Hebdo, that certain feminists should be allowed to say really violent things about sex workers and Trans people without any response, they should be able to say anything they like. And there’s a really interesting debate about who’s silencing who.’

6.4 Racism and Sexism

One aspect of the interviews quickly became apparent: the importance of racism and anti-racism on the political formation of all the women concerned, crossing the different generations. In most cases it seemed a central part of the interviewees’ political development. It is important therefore to consider what these influences represented, how the different generations saw them, and what were the key changes in the impact of racism over nearly half a century.

Perhaps it is hardly surprising, given the political background to the rise of the women’s movement, that Second Wave feminists found it such a defining issue. The women’s movement’s emergence from the civil rights and anti-war movements in the US meant that its participants there were in many instances committed anti-racist activists. The support for the Vietnamese people in the war against the US was also part of a wider commitment to support for anti-colonial movements in Africa and Asia. These major US campaigns also had an impact in Britain, especially through the relatively new medium of television, which screened

news of segregation and protests in the Deep South of the US, and news coverage of the Vietnam War was accessible to more people than previous wars.

In addition in Britain, there were a number of campaigns which had similar themes: the anti-Vietnam War movement, but also campaigns against apartheid South Africa, minority rule by whites in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), and a series of domestic-anti racist campaigns. There were connections between the young socialists and feminists of the 1960s and these movements. Sheila Rowbotham's then partner, Bob Rowthorn, had spent time at Berkeley, California, a centre of student radicalism in the 1960s, and had met fellow students from left wing US backgrounds. Many émigrés from countries such as South Africa made their way to Britain.

While, again, the issues have changed for younger generations, there are certainly plenty of campaigns connected with racism which have been taken up by feminists. There also appears to be a sense of disappointed or unfulfilled expectations. The movements of the 1960s raised the demand for equality across a range of oppressed groups. The failure to achieve this for women has been documented above, but in some ways has been even more stark in relation to black and ethnic minority groups. This is true in terms of class and work, where Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups tend to be among the most disadvantaged, but also face discrimination in relation to institutional racism such as in the police. The younger feminists have developed an awareness of racism against a background of the Stephen Lawrence case, a growth in racism towards Muslims, exacerbated since the wars launched from 2001, the high profile cases involving the shooting of young black men in the US, highlighted in 2014 by the Ferguson, Missouri police shooting of Michael Brown, and international issues such as

immigration and Palestine. All the ones interviewed expressed a sense of the connection between racism and sexism.

There were however differences between the two generations: firstly, the view that the women's movement as typified by Second Wave feminism was very much a white movement, and a determination on the part of the Third Wave interviewees to avoid this problem within contemporary feminism. This was where the ideas of intersectionality, that there had to be an understanding of the relationship between class, race, gender and other oppressions, were considered as important in a number of cases. The second difference was that whereas the 1960s tended to be an era of hope and expectation of fundamental social change, by the twenty-first century the younger interviewees faced a starker reality. They encountered the growth of racism in society generally, the rise of far right parties in a number of countries, and an increase in anti-immigrant sentiment. None of these were necessarily new phenomena, and in some ways British society was undoubtedly a more egalitarian place than in the 1960s, but there was also the background of austerity and inequality which had an impact on politics generally.

Some of the most significant campaigns against racism in the 1960s were the protests at Enoch Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech in 1968. Although he was sacked from the Conservative Shadow Cabinet, his words led to a rise in racism and support from sections of the organised working class, including the London dockers. There were also campaigns against police harassment of black and Asian people, many of whom came to Britain in the 1950s and 60s as part of a wave of Commonwealth immigration to fill labour shortages in the post-war economic boom. The generation radicalised in the late 1960s took up these

campaigns as part of a wider critique of society. Those who became feminists from 1968 onwards saw them as an important part of their work.

The general sense of liberalisation and change in the 1960s meant that the resurgence of right wing attitudes round questions of race came as a shock to the young feminists. The wave of anti-immigration feeling in the late 1960s took the left by surprise. Sheila Rowbotham remembers that her Further Education day release students were sympathetic to Powell.

Hilary Wainwright remembers that when Powell came to Oxford he was met with protests:

‘When Powell came to Oxford he was almost thrown into the pond at Nuffield and we all demonstrated outside his meeting.’ In addition she was arrested after being part of a protest against a hairdresser who refused to cut African hair: ‘it was the first time I was arrested and put in a cell. I was very proud of it, even my old headmistress sent me a letter saying well done... that experience of the racist hairdresser made me aware of racism in everyday British life... racism was definitely part of the struggle.’

Heather Wakefield remembered that,

‘There were 17 different nationalities in my class at junior school... So I’ve been very conscious of race, conscious of how black kids have been treated, even by nice teachers. Also living around black people was what I’d done. That wasn’t true for a lot of other feminists in particular or socialists even. During that period, late 70s/80s that was so much more of a debate within the bit of the women’s movement and the left in which I moved. Living in Lewisham we had the New Cross fire, and the National Front. I lived in Deptford where the NF won some ludicrously high proportion of the vote in the local elections during that period.

Linton Kwesi Johnson was at Goldsmiths. There was a big anti-racist movement there at the Lewisham riots. We did a lot of work and a lot of thinking about that in the Employment Project actually.’

There were growing numbers of strikes involving black and Asian workers. Ursula Huws was engaged in working round the strikes of Asian as well as white women which broke out in west London in the 1970s and Amrit Wilson was very involved in organising around Asian women in the same period. However, the experience of Gail Chester, as a Jewish woman, and of Amrit Wilson, as an Asian woman, was considerably different from the other interviewees. Gail's view was that her first real experience of anti-Semitism, since occasional brushes with it in childhood, was inside the women's movement. She is referring to an extremely acrimonious row which broke out among the editorial board of the feminist magazine *Spare Rib*, often between black and Jewish women, where she felt that most white Gentile feminists often got frightened, which was very unsupportive, both to their Jewish and black sisters.

‘Unfortunately I have to say that the first overt anti-Semitism that I encountered in my life was in the women's liberation movement. It was round that whole business with *Spare Rib*, and *Outwrite*, and the invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and it was hideous. Basically Jewish feminists getting attacked for some war that was going on 2,000 miles away... And then when we tried to defend ourselves against the racism that was coming at us, then we got kind of stomped on again. And it's very, very awful, the worst aspect of that was that essentially and in a way, it was Jewish women and women of colour who got set up against each other, and the white gentiles could all stand back like it wasn't their fault to start with, you know.’

This represented a level of fragmentation in the movement, which tended to continue in the 1980s, and where different groups began to define themselves in separate terms from other feminists. While Gail strongly supported the Jewish women in the above argument, she also had problems with the Jewish feminist group which had been created in 1978. On the one hand, she believed that Jewish women had been and were very influential in left and socially progressive movements, and should be proud to identify as Jewish:

‘If you look around radical movements in general I think that Jews and Catholics predominate, not predominate but are disproportionately represented, and if you looked at the women's liberation movement it was clear that there were a lot of Jewish women around. Now what was kind of annoying to me was that they were not identifying as Jewish, and some of them I only realised years later were actually Jewish.’

On the other hand, she rejected a Jewish identity that saw it as mainly concerned with religion.

‘I had quite a hard time in the Jewish feminist group in some ways because a lot of the women who were involved with that were somehow in search of an identity and meaning, and I'd been there, done that, not that I... I was always very, very positively identified as Jewish, it wasn't that I was trying to deny my Jewishness in the slightest, but also I was not in the remotest bit interested in religious participation and you know several of these women, not actually the most annoying ones, went off and became lady rabbis.’

Amrit Wilson too has a negative recollection of the women's movement as a white movement which, despite its commitment to anti-racism was not able to integrate the demands of black

and Asian women. She felt that the concerns expressed by the movement were those of a relatively narrow group of people.

‘We were very few in number, black women in the women's movement. Even in the anti-racist struggle we were a tiny minority, it was totally dominated by black men and white women. There were a lot of white women. Even if we didn't directly accuse anyone of racism, if we talked about racism there was a sense of withdrawal and shock, as if we had raised something that was neither pleasant nor relevant.’

The divergence between the different experiences is also reflected in a number of other women's accounts. Its origin is unlikely, it would appear, to be the result of overt racism of the sort that might be experienced in for example right wing parties. It is more likely to reflect two things: an unintended racism reflecting the general bias against ethnic minorities within society as a whole; and a very narrow approach to the women's movement's reach. It gives some support to the view that the women's movement was a movement not just mainly of white middle class women, but that it represented the interests of that layer of women, and that women who were working class or from ethnic minorities felt much less at home in it.

Amrit Wilson certainly still regards this as a problem. She spoke of a recent conference where there were sharp arguments about black women and feminism.

‘The same thing is still going on – there was a conference organised by the British Library at which Gail Lewis, Jocelyn Wolfe and I – all once members of OWAAD (the Organisation on Women of African and Asian Descent) – were asked to be part of a discussion panel. The vast majority of others were white.

There were some of the same women who had been in the women's movement in

the 70s and even now, after all these years, they were angry that we raised the issue of race. Bea Campbell was very angry with me.’

She feels that there are still major issues concerning many white feminists’ attitudes to race and to working with black and Asian women, and discerns this as part of a wider set of questions:

[There is] ‘an emerging trend where certain people who call themselves left wing or feminist are taking positions on race/ the role of the state/ trans people etc. which to me appear fairly reactionary. In the name of “freedom of speech”, for example, they are trying to silence any criticism of racist and transphobic speakers in universities for example. They are the sort of people who were wearing “Je Suis Charlie” t-shirts – in the name of freedom of speech without thinking, or caring about the racist content of Charlie Hebdo.’

Amrit Wilson adds: ‘At the same time there are still a lot of feminists who think that being accused of racism is worse than facing racism!’

For the younger generation of feminists interviewed, anti-racism was taken much more as a given, something that they had learnt partly through education, but partly from their own experience both of a much more multicultural society, and of one where campaigning for equality was much more centrally accepted, in the National Union of Students and the trade unions for example. That did not mean that many of the issues raised in the 1960s and 1970s had been resolved. Kate Hardy notes that her group is very consciously anti-racist, but that does not mean that one can assume the group is free from racism.

‘So in Feminist Fightback for example we’re explicitly anti-racist, we always go on anti-fascist things... and yet nearly everybody is white. So something is happening there which is not us being racist or having racist opinions, but a racist mechanism that means that black or non-white women can’t be involved, don’t want to be involved... So actually having learnt that... that’s been quite a hard thing to learn that maybe you are engaged in racist practices, whatever you think.’

6.5 The Debate on Intersectionality

All the interviewees were highly conscious of issues of race and of racial oppression within society, and many of them used the term intersectionality to try to comprehend the relationship between different forms of oppression. Nina Power recognises the importance of it.

‘I can absolutely see why people are using it. Because if feminism just seems to look like or in practice is the demands of a specific set of women, you know middle class white women or at least if that’s how it’s perceived, then clearly it is insufficient to even capture what it’s supposed to be talking about. So I think intersectionality or intersectional feminism is clearly a way of broadening that out to include questions of race, class and gender. I guess lots of the criticism of intersectionality is around the idea that it doesn’t treat class as primary enough, that it’s too interested in questions of identity rather than economic exploitation, but I don’t really see how you couldn’t be interested in all of those at once I suppose.’

Carys Afoko feels that intersectionality can be very important in trying to analyse the oppression of different groups of people.

‘[T]here isn’t this thing like an Oppression Olympics, if you’re black and a woman and gay and have a disability, you’re not like four times oppressed. There is a specific type of oppression that you experience. So as a black woman, something I know by experience that my white female friends don’t, is this angry black woman thing, this idea that I’m aggressive... when I’m asking for pay rises, which I know I do... there’s this that people are more hostile to me being assertive and they see it as aggression. You know I’ve had feedback once that was so racist and sexist, it was like something about me liking to have power. It was just mad, and I was like you’d never ever say that about a man and almost never ever say it about a white woman. So for me I get that, if that’s the theory of intersectionality that you have a specific oppression because you’re a black woman or a gay woman, and it’s not that times two, it’s a specific experience, then I think yeah, that makes sense.’

However, she was less convinced that the commitment to anti-racism, which defined many of the 1960s feminists, was so prevalent among their counterparts today. The individualism which she saw as part of modern feminism could mean a lack of generalisation about experiences outside the women’s own.

‘I think the problem is having that experience of all of those things, being involved in a lot of struggles at once, and being conscious of race and class and gender, I think tends to not be the experience of people of my age group. And I think the problem with... from being quite a consumerist individualist society, people are coming to this from their individual experience of sexism, and if they’re not active in any other ways, and they’re not personally experiencing racism, then it seems harder for people to make the connection. Not all people,

and I've got loads of white people who are my friends who are incredibly supportive... And I think the thing with this banknote, Twitter type feminism is it's quite shallow, and it's very focused on you know, women aren't getting paid as much... It's very individual, *you* should be being paid more, and it's not fair.'

Malia Bouattia was also critical of the use of the term intersectionality by many feminists while it remained unmatched to a commitment to really understand its meaning. She feared as well attempts to divide up the different groups of racially oppressed.

'There are huge tensions. There's always the desire to group all women or divide it up like experiences of Muslim women are separated from like black women... the main reason Muslim women are oppressed based on their faith stems from their ethnic origins essentially. It's part of the ongoing orientalism that's existed from way back when... Islamophobia stems from anti-blackness... there's definitely tensions with experiences with white feminists. They're all too willing to quote Audre Lord and use the word intersectionality everywhere but when it comes to the actual practice... there's still a lot of anger within black women's spaces... it's so constantly present and in your face... also at times it doesn't allow us to have the spaces about internal oppressions within the black community, experiences of misogyny and patriarchy and so on from within.'

While welcoming the younger generation's concerns over racism and sexism, the older interviewees suggested that there was a sense where they ignored or did not understand the importance of the critique, and the work that was done round it, by Second Wave feminists. Several of the older interviewees felt that the debates round intersectionality, regarded as very important by many younger feminists, tended to ignore this previous concern. They felt a

slight resentment that it was regarded as a totally new development when feminists had been talking about these issues over forty years ago, and Heather Wakefield said she did not like the term because it was abstract. Nonetheless, they welcomed the interest in discussing race, class and gender. Amrit Wilson sees it as ‘a useful starting point’.

Gail Chester was more acerbic:

‘I suppose that’s what younger generations do; they think they’ve invented it. Well what do they think we... the thing that really hacks me off is [they say] that our problem is that we’re too stuck in the gender binary. Excuse me, I think we were the first lot of people that were actually breaking down the gender binary.’

She felt that the present discussion often ignores the way in which Second Wave feminism took up a range of issues as part of its campaign for liberation.

‘The point about intersectionality as I understand it is that it reckons it is dealing with everything, you know like disability, age... but actually that is what we were trying to do. You tell a member of Sisters against Disablement that there was no work done on the intersections between disability and class and gender, they'd just laugh in your face.’

I asked Nina Power whether the younger generation were not too harsh on Second Wave feminists on this question. While Second Wave feminism was a largely white, middle class movement, many of its members were interested and concerned about anti-racism, and writers such as bell hooks and Angela Davis did address these questions.

‘Some people who use it are well aware of that history I think it’s just a shorthand way of referring to that history, making sure that people are talking

about all of those things at once, rather than getting side-tracked or becoming specifically too focused on particular groups.’

Her attitude highlights some of the contrasts between the generations and their perception of what was meant by feminism and women’s liberation. Questions of racism and feminism often raise some seemingly difficult problems. In recent years, there have been concerns about Muslim women’s dress, and in a number of European countries, notably France, there have been laws restricting what women can wear in public places. This is an issue that has divided feminists. For Dawn Foster that division also tends to reflect a class division.

‘I only really saw the anti-hijab arguments once I went to university, and it was always from white middle class women who’d come to university and were shocked that now they were in a multicultural environment. They saw the hijab, whereas when I was at school I was in a really mixed race area, so loads and loads of my teachers and my fellow students wore trousers instead of skirts to school, for PE they wore headscarves, people in the streets wore headscarves, the niqab. You just never thought about it because it was always there. It was only when you get to university that you get, they’re only wearing it because they’re forced to, if they were liberated and white they’d feel liberated and could throw it off.’

Another issue presenting challenges over gender and race is the contemporary one of ‘grooming’, highlighted in a number of extremely high profile court cases involving Asian having sex with underage girls, many of whom were in local authority care. The cases have caused widespread condemnation and some levels of racism aimed at the Asian men. Again, some of the interviewees who referred to the issue felt that it was more complex than was

presented. Dawn Foster argued that it reflected a lack of concern on behalf of the authorities for working class girls with difficult backgrounds, who were often blamed by state institutions for their plight.

‘So much about Rochdale of the race element was seized on that the girls got completely forgotten, and that seemed to echo what happened in Rochdale and in Oxford [areas where high profile grooming cases occurred]. You had girls who were in care, girls who came from poor backgrounds, and families, girls who'd been in trouble with the police before. And you basically had this night time economy, of men who worked in kebab shops, in taxis, as security guards. And obviously these men were by the nature of their jobs working class and often they were black or Asian, because black and Asian men don't get high profile jobs, working class men don't get high powered jobs, so you end up pushed to the weird night time economy. Then you get the police and the political response to these girls which is to say that, they're being sexually abused, and women have a sexual worth, but these women don't have a sexual worth, because they're slags, they're worthless. They've been cast away by their families, cast away by society, what's the point at investigating crimes against them? There's this whole idea they're going to be lost to the world anyway... what's the point of looking into what's happening to them?’

Amrit Wilson concurs with this view:

‘On the grooming issue what was revealed was that there are lots and lots of cases of white men who groomed young girls in say seaside towns and had gangs but that these were never reported in the press or highlighted in any way. And it was more the kind of jobs that people do, which enabled men to target and exploit

young vulnerable women... at the same time these girls receive no support or protection from the state... We had a speaker from Rotherham who works in an Asian women's centre there and she was saying that there's absolutely nothing for Asian women. There's no services, no support in any situation. So sexual violence is extremely common and people have no recourse to any kind of justice or support because of the cuts.'

Both the hijab and the issue of grooming reflect issues which require a more complex approach than might at first appear, and which might suggest the relevance of intersectionality at least in terms as a means of approaching questions which link race, class and gender. Amrit Wilson raises another issue, that of forced marriage within Asian communities in Britain.

'We also took up the issue of Forced Marriage – you know the government have brought this law which is not going to help women at all. I did a longish piece... whenever you write these things you always get attacked by these people whom the government has set up as spokespersons. So there was a lot of that. Basically my argument was that the laws to deal with forced marriage already exist: abduction, kidnapping, a whole battery of laws. So why bring in this new law? And the young women don't primarily want their parents to go to jail. They want to escape from forced marriage and they are not being given the support to enable them to do that. The organisations which they might have turned to have been closed down as a result of the cuts. So the only purpose of bringing a separate law on Forced Marriage is to whip up racism.'

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has been concerned with the development of a new wave of feminism which has occurred over the past decade. Many of the ideas and the social context which helped shape this wave were similar to the influences on Second Wave feminism. However, there were clearly differences in the approach taken by the younger generation, reflecting in part the different circumstances in which they found themselves, and in part the achievements of previous generations of feminists. There also remain a number of seemingly intractable and sometimes controversial questions. On the issue of race, for example, there were differences within the generations over attitudes to intersectionality, and with regard to the experience of black and Asian women in the women's movement. The final section of the research, in the next chapter, will consider the legacy and achievements of modern feminism, and draw conclusions about its impact on class.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion

7.1 Aim of the Research

This research explored the extent to which class informed the analysis of Second Wave feminists, and the extent to which it remained important to the Third Wave feminists, including its impact on activism. It builds on the analysis put forward in previous published work. Discussion with the interviewees was wide ranging, highlighting a number of different themes and areas for debate. These reflected differences in terms of the participants' background and influences, changing social and material circumstances between the different generations of feminists, and campaigning priorities. These are considered below. While there may be less overt expression of class and its contradictions among the younger generation of Third Wave feminists, their experiences reflect a society where they are sometimes acutely aware of inequality and discrimination. Class, feminism and race are closely intertwined for both generations. This chapter will consider the continued relevance of class, the limits of the legislation aimed at achieving greater equality and the changing material context for the two generations. It will also discuss the various issues around anti-racism and feminism, the role of activism among the interviewees and the structural changes within society that helped give rise to Second Wave feminism.

7.2 The Relevance of Class

Second Wave feminism in Britain was influenced by various forms of class analysis (see for example Barrett, 1980; Mitchell and Oakley, 1975; Kuhn and Wolpe, 1978). Socialist and Marxist feminism, which tended to locate oppression within wider structures of class or specifically capitalist society, were the dominant forms of feminism in Britain until the 1980s. There are two identifiable reasons why this might be the case. The first is that the women's movement in Britain was closely related to socialist and trade union organisation in

that its members were, or had at some time been, members of far left groups, or had worked closely with them. The second is that the early years of Women's Liberation in Britain, including its first conference in Oxford in 1970, coincided with the rise of trade union based struggles on a scale that had not been seen since the period after the First World War. The connection with trade unions, and with a series of prominent female centred strikes, was clear. Indeed strikes such as those of the night cleaners in London, the Ford Dagenham re-grading dispute in 1968, and the spate of strikes to achieve equal pay after 1970, all helped to define the movement (Wandor, 1972). A number of the Second Wave interviewees played a role in some of these disputes.

For Third Wave feminists, there was not necessarily the same connection. The organised left tended to be much weaker numerically, and therefore the involvement of Third Wave feminists with the left appeared much more tangential and distant. In addition, the balance of class forces was very different from that of the early 1970s. Then trade union membership, militancy and strike action were all in the ascendant, a situation that continued until the end of the decade. Women trade unionists played a very important role in some of the disputes, for example the strike involving Asian women at the Grunwick factory in north-west London in 1976-78. By the first decade of the twenty-first century, union membership was around half what it had been in 1979 and the levels of industrial action lower than they had been for a century.

This weakening of organised labour meant that the younger generation was therefore much less likely to see trade unions as relevant or to look to working class based organisations. Instead, as Hilary Wainwright suggested in her interview, younger feminists were more likely to see the relevance of social justice campaigns and to be involved in social movements

rather than trade unions. However, there are a number of contradictory processes at work here, and it would be perhaps mistaken to regard class as necessarily less relevant to the younger women. Firstly, women are now more likely than men to be trade union members (this is related to their predominance in public sector work). So 28.7 per cent of women at work are trade union members as opposed to 23.4 per cent of men. While the union density of men in the private sector is slightly greater than that of women, at 15.9 per cent compared with 12.4 per cent, in the public sector 56.5 per cent of women and 55.9 per cent of men are in unions (Fulton, 2013).

Secondly, the very different economic circumstances in which Third Wave feminists are located also leads to consciousness of the need for change. Second Wave feminism located injustices in the unfair treatment of certain sections of society in relation to national, racial or gender oppression. Moreover, they experienced these injustices within a society where overall the gap between rich and poor was narrowing as living standards increased. In the current period, the opposite applies, as inequality reaches record levels. At the same time, the fundamental inequalities and oppression highlighted by the 1960s movements, including women's oppression, still exist. Alongside this, the assumptions of Second Wave feminism that an expanding economic system had the potential to deliver change have disappeared, as have assumed certainties about work, employment, education and housing.

Therefore, while many of the manifestations of class organisation which marked Second Wave feminism – strong unions, high levels of strikes, a relatively strong degree of class consciousness – are much less apparent in the twenty-first century, there are other aspects of class division which, although they may not be so easily identified as relating to class, nonetheless have a substantial connection with it. Dawn Foster for example argues that the

key division in the feminist movement is over ‘economics’. Most of the younger interviewees (and indeed the older generation) were highly critical of campaigns which they felt did not sufficiently address fundamental economic inequality. It could be argued that one of the major features of contemporary society identified by the Third Wave interviewees was the centrality of class contradictions within oppression, and an understanding that various oppressions could only be fully understood by an appreciation of how class differences were mediated within them. This also helps to explain different attitudes to feminism itself. The accommodation of certain sorts of feminism within at least parts of neoliberal capitalism has led to sharp critiques from a number of the interviewees of feminism’s relationship to class divisions and also to questions of race and imperialism.

Connections with class are clear, but connections with class-based organisations are more ambiguous for the younger generation. The decline of trade union numbers and visible organisation, the existence of a range of different organisations which can be vehicles for social change – for example single issue campaigns and NGOs – and the actual or perceived distance between trade union activists and younger people involved in such campaigns, all make this connection more tenuous. It would, however, be mistaken to see this as representing the lessening of class contradictions among the younger generation. They were as likely as the older generation to express concerns over inequality, unfairness at work, discrimination in education and other issues which they saw at least in part as relating to class. Their views reflected rather the weakness of organisations identified as giving expression to these class contradictions, particularly the unions. The lack of a strong voice raising class issues from major parties or from trade unions does not necessarily denote their absence; rather it suggests the need to look for manifestations of class divisions elsewhere.

7.3 The Limits of Legislation

The 1960s and 1970s marked a period of great liberal legislative change in the UK.

Legislation including the Abortion Act 1967, the Divorce Reform Act 1969, the Equal Pay Act 1970 and Sex Discrimination Act 1975 all directly impacted on women's lives largely for the better. They also benefited from a wider general liberalisation of the law, from those abolishing theatre censorship to legalising gay rights (Thane, 2010). The issues that they identified were current, subject to campaigning and lobbying by activists. A number of them predated Second Wave feminism, but all of them helped to shape it. To women growing up in the 1960s, there was still much to be achieved at the level of basic legal and economic equality. These campaigns were an obvious focus, as was criticism of the higher education system, which still tended to segregate male and female students in living quarters and often in colleges. In the course of the decade from the mid-1960s to mid-1970s many changes had been achieved, including legislation affecting equal pay and abortion, a greater availability of contraception controlled by women, and the desegregating of many college residences. All of these opened up a range of new possibilities for women. The impact of many changes took some years to be fully realised, but they set in train a transformation of many areas of life.

This transformation wrought by legislative changes has long since become part of the fabric of women's lives. At the same time, while the greater availability of equal pay and the ending of more obvious forms of sex discrimination have clearly impacted on the lives of many women, their fundamental oppression has not changed. While it is true that for many Second Wave feminists, including those I interviewed, there was always a recognition that changing the law regarding women's employment and other rights would only have a limited effect, Third Wave feminists developed their consciousness with an understanding that this was

already the case. Indeed, there is a sense in which there has been an institutionalisation of equality law and practice. The requirements for formal equality in workplaces or educational establishments have resulted in a strong verbal commitment to these policies, even if that is not always matched in practice, and this has formed the background to the younger feminists' development and ideas.

This tends to suggest that the importance of legislative change, and its suitability as a focus for feminists, appeared very different to Third Wave feminists. There are a number of questions this raises for Third Wave women, who have seen no comparable sets of legislation in their lifetimes, and who have grown up against a background which is more dominated ideologically by the right wing in areas such as education and welfare. The first question is whether there were more easily identifiable objects for feminist campaigning in the 1960s, and whether it was easier for Second Wave feminists to identify a set of relatively simple and clear demands which seemed to encapsulate the inequalities of women's oppression. If that is the case, arguably this makes the task of Third Wave feminists harder, making it more difficult to clarify a set of key unifying demands. This may help to explain the apparently greater fragmentation of Third Wave feminism.

A second question is the extent to which the wider success or failure of the legislation has impacted on the consciousness of Third Wave feminists. Despite the extensive legislation designed to ameliorate the worst aspects of women's oppression, that oppression still continues, and even the immediate inequalities supposedly dealt with, for example the gender pay gap, still remain. This raises the question as to the extent this has led to a rejection of legislative change as a central path for women seeking change or to a certain impatience with conventional lobbying or political methods, seen as too insubstantial to bring real change. It

could be argued that in addition, campaigns to change legislation are conducted in a much more fragmented way, often involving lobbying by one campaign group or organisation among many. Certainly the Third Wave feminists I interviewed tended not to see these campaigns, over women's representation on banknotes or in statues, or the attempt to ban topless images in newspapers, as especially fruitful in their outcomes or central to their concerns as feminists. Instead they tended to stress forms of direct action or campaigning which they felt could be more effective in highlighting issues. Several of them highlighted the Focus E15 mothers' campaign, where young single parents waged a partially successful campaign for decent local housing. A twenty-first century feminist manifesto which I co-authored, for example, stresses the need both to campaign over specific demands, but to also see the need for fundamental changes in society, a combination which more fits the aspirations of the younger generation than the original demands of Women's Liberation (German and Power, 2010).

7.4 The Changing Material Context

One of the major contrasts between the two waves of feminists relates to the social and economic background in which they developed their consciousness and activism. Third Wave feminists experience a much greater acceptance of women in a wide range of roles and as playing a part in public life. However, in most other respects they lacked many of the economic certainties and opportunities available to Second Wave women. In addition, as Gail Chester put it, 'the headspace' of the previous generation was absent. The younger interviewees expected to go to university, but were under much greater pressure within the education system as Higher Education has become commodified, personally costly and increasingly market oriented. It is much more identified today as a means of getting on to the rungs of a career ladder than as education as an experience in itself.

The 1960s was clearly a decade where consumerism became more widespread, especially in comparison to the war and post-war years. Living standards rose and new opportunities began to open up for young people. However, the critique of consumerism was much more widespread in society, well beyond the confines of the organised left, albeit still among a minority of the population as a whole. This was reflected in an element of the 1960s and 1970s movements being the adoption of ‘alternative’ approaches to education, lifestyles, culture, dress and patterns of behaviour (Booker, 1992; Neville, 1996). This changed as consumerism adopted a much more all-embracing character identified from the 1980s onwards. For Third Wave feminists, their immediate formative experience was of Thatcherism and Blairism, with their emphasis on individualism, free markets, career, consumerism and choice, all of which tended to lessen the impetus towards collective action or consciousness compared with the previous generation. The benchmark of achievement for young women in the present stresses their role as individuals and the extent to which they are able to act in order to improve their life chances, whether through accessing education, dressing in a certain way and developing certain characteristics which allow them to compete in the labour market (McRobbie, 2009; Power, 2009).

The connection between certain sorts of feminism and consumerism was reflected in the adoption of the ‘power feminist’ approaches of the 1990s, and in the spate of books praising successful businesswomen or encouraging self help for women who did not measure up to the increasingly high standards required of them (Horlick, 1998; Wolf, 1993; Hakim, 1996). The degree to which younger feminists accepted this approach was only ever partial, and its efficacy was challenged by the economic crisis that broke in 2008. This had an effect on work, where good jobs became much harder to get, on education, where in 2010 students

found that the costs for accessing the necessary skills to achieve those jobs had trebled, and on lifestyles. The era of austerity, again from 2010, had the effect of worsening inequality, creating severe problems for many women including single parents. Even those in work found that higher living costs and real wage cuts lessened the appeal of consumerism (Sands, 2012).

A particularly stark example of the contrast between earlier aspirations of Second Wave feminism and the reality faced by twenty-first century working women lay in the area of childcare. One of the early demands of the women's movement was for free childcare; of the four demands passed at the first women's conference held in Oxford in 1970 was for 24-hour nurseries (Wandor, 1972:2). Today, round-the-clock childcare is available, but at an extremely high price. It is largely privatised, has risen in cost well above the rate of inflation and is prohibitive for women on low or even average wages. The cost of 50 hours a week in a nursery in 2015 was £212.09 on national average, and £283.66 in London (Rutter, 2015). The privatisation and commodification of childcare has meant that, rather than it becoming a service available freely to working parents, it has become even more inaccessible to poorer families, and represents a major financial burden rather than a benefit which enables women to enjoy more freedom from domestic burdens.

At the same time, aspects of life which had previously seemed, at least partly, outside of the market were being subject to market forces. Ursula Huws dates the process from 2006 when she identifies the commodification of public service, of the arts and culture, and of sociality. She refers to the privatisation encroaching into previous areas of public life, including in health and education; to the private sponsorship of the arts; and to the advent of social media such as Facebook. The contradiction between the reduced ability to consume goods for many

young people, and the spread of the market into personal life, has acted as a politicising force. The Occupy movement, the various housing campaigns in London, the student movement against the raising of tuition fees of 2010-11, and support for 'alternative' forms of arts, have all been features of recent political life in Britain, and all have had feminist elements embedded within them. All have tried, in different ways, to challenge the logic of this encroaching privatisation. The Third Wave interviewees tended to identify with these movements and to see them as closely connected with 'their sort' of feminism. In addition, the personal situation of their generation in an era of neoliberalism, including precarity and under-employment for highly educated people, rising costs of living including housing costs, the prospect of engaging in paid work often many years longer than their mothers and grandmothers, tended to affect the attitudes of the interviewees, suggesting to them that fundamental social change would be necessary to achieve many of their aims. Their response in opposition to neoliberal policies has been to embrace radical ideas about change which go beyond demands for reform, towards greater structural changes in society.

7.5 The Relevance of Race

Issues of race, gender and class remain central for feminists today. The question kept recurring in the interviews, and it informed the practice of a number of the interviewees. This was in some ways surprising, given that feminism is sometimes described as a white middle class movement and that it is mainly concerned by definition with issues of women's oppression. Moreover, it suggested a number of different conclusions. Identification with one area of oppression does not automatically leads to identification with other sorts, but it often does, and in the case of all interviewees the question of racism played a part in forming their ideas. The politicisation of the Second Wave feminists indeed tends to suggest that they came to an understanding of their own oppression through an intense and committed series of

campaigns over the oppression of other groups. Some of the earliest analysis of women's oppression within the US movement directly made the comparison with colonialism, with women in the SDS (the US student movement) arguing in a 'women's liberation workshop' at a conference in 1967 that, 'Women, because of their colonial relationship to men, have to fight for their own independence' (Evans, 1979: 190). Hilary Wainwright and Sheila Rowbotham spoke about the impact of Enoch Powell's 'rivers of blood' anti-immigration speech in Britain in 1968. Ursula Huws worked with Asian working class women in union organising when she was an editor at Penguin in west London in the early 1970s. That generation identified with the mass anti-racist campaigns for civil rights and with the anti-colonial campaigns, especially Vietnam. With the younger generation, a range of issues helped to politicise them, including anti-racism. Kate Hardy spoke of her group's commitment to anti-fascist activity, and Malia Bouattia became involved in NUS Black Students' Campaign. So for both waves of feminists, consciousness of racism and involvement in various campaigns to do with anti-fascism or anti-racism was part of creating political awareness.

The relationship between race, class and gender was a subject for debate at the very beginnings of the Women's Liberation Movement. In 1967, the SDS women were already pointing out to the nascent movement, 'Women must not make the same mistake the blacks did at first of allowing others (whites in their case, men in ours) to define our issues, methods and goals' (SDS Women in Baxandall and Gordon, 2000). The early US women's movement saw independent black organisations established within it from the beginning, and they often found themselves victims of racist attitudes over issues important to them such as reproductive rights (Baxandall and Gordon, 2000). Critiques of white feminism have been developed by black and Asian women (Carby in Hennessy and Ingraham, 1997) and about

white feminists' attitudes to race and imperialism (Afshar et al., 2005: 262-283; Chew in Riley, Mohandra and Pratt, 2008).

The perception of racism as closely connected with gender and class highlights the enduring contradictions of British society and the intractable nature of racism. This is true both of racism in society as a whole, as experienced through the behaviour of individuals, and the institutional racism which permeates bodies from the police to health services and education institutions. However, it is also clear from the various interviews that a commitment to anti-racism by feminists is different from an egalitarian approach to ethnic minority women within the feminist movement. For example, Kate Hardy described how, despite such a commitment, it was hard not to conclude that racism exists in the movement. However, it was women from ethnic minorities themselves who clearly saw the question in a much more negative light than the white women interviewed. Gail Chester saw the argument which broke out in the editorial collective of *Spare Rib* in the early 1980s as reflecting both a degree of anti-Semitism within the movement and divisions within Jewish feminists themselves. Amrit Wilson found Second Wave feminism not particularly habitable for black and Asian feminists; she also felt that there were still tensions in the present day between white feminists and black or Asian feminists. The younger generation was often aware of the debates around racism, but women from ethnic minorities tended to be critical of the way they were often unable to put this theory and these debates into practice in real life or into their approach to race.

All were aware of the term intersectionality, discussed above in Chapter 3. They saw it as a means of trying to analyse different oppressions; whatever the reservations some of the interviewees had for the term or what they felt that it implied, they all recognised that this

was a valuable attempt to try to analyse different oppressions. Both Amrit Wilson and Dawn Foster raised contemporary cases of ‘grooming’ of young girls by Asian men, and stressed that one had to look at wider issues, using a more intersectional approach to analysing why these cases happened. The issues raised by grooming relate strongly to class: these include the institutional treatment of young people in care, the high proportion of Asian men involved in the ‘night time economy’, the attitudes of police to working class girls, and the racism in society directed at Asians.

One might have expected younger feminists, growing up in a much more multicultural society than those from the Second Wave, to have a much greater awareness of racism and to be much more engaged in trying to involve ethnic minority women in their organisations and activities. That did not necessarily seem to be the case. The predominance of white women, usually university educated and often from middle class backgrounds, in both waves of feminism raises questions about how a commitment to anti-racism translates into the involvement of non-white women in the movement. This was a problem from the beginning of Second Wave feminism (Wright, 1970, quoted in Baxandall and Gordon: 37; Beal, 1969, quoted in Babcox and Belkin, 1971: 185). It could be argued that in addition the verbal commitment to organising working class women did not in most cases result in significant numbers of working class women becoming involved. This gap between the verbal commitment and reality also reflects some of the limitations of feminism, which remains a movement which has never extended its roots deeply into working class communities, where the majority of black and Asian women are to be found. It in part may reflect the particular origins of Second Wave feminism, which as we have seen emerged from existing mass movements among students, civil rights and anti-war campaigners. It emerged in response to the failing of those movements in analysing and recognising women’s oppression. So while

feminism represents an important ideological commitment for the interviewees and women like them, only rarely has it translated into a mass movement for change. One writer has described Second Wave feminism in the US as a 'bourgeois revolution' for women (Eisenstein, 2009: 64), allowing women to become full citizens, making certain demands for their equality central to mainstream social consciousness. Baxandall and Gordon (2000) describe it as a 'necessary modernizing force' (ibid: 3). Again, these contradictions between those who see women's liberation as an overturning of existing social relations, and those who have much more limited goals of equality, many of which have been partly or fully achieved, may explain the under-representation of black and working class women within the movement.

However, the importance of anti-racism to the feminists interviewed should not be in doubt. The extensiveness of racism, the degree to which it maintains itself while transforming the particular forms in which racism is manifest, suggests oppression so central in society that it impacts very deeply on class and gender.

7.6 Activism Today

The interviewees were selected as a purposive sample, as women who had established themselves in a public role through writing, speaking and activism. All of the Second Wave feminists, now in their sixties and seventies, remain active at some level in these roles. Gail Chester continues to work in the Feminist Library alongside a number of younger women activists. She is also involved in a consciousness-raising group for older women, which discusses, among other topics, aging and death. Amrit Wilson organises round issues concerning violence against women in the 'Freedom Without Fear Platform', a transnational feminist organisation set up in solidarity with the anti-rape movement in India, which attracts

large numbers of mainly black and Asian women. Amrit stressed the need to take racism and imperialism into account when discussing these issues. The younger generation too is involved in a range of campaigns to do with policing and protest, housing, and racism as well as overtly feminist campaigns. There are, however, as Cat Boyd pointed out, relatively few forums where women can come together as women to discuss political or theoretical issues. This is in contrast to the early flowering of Women's Liberation, when there were local women's groups in major towns and cities and – according to Ursula Huws – several in the Yorkshire city of Leeds alone by the late 1970s.

In contrast with the grassroots growth form below which characterised much of the 1970s, there has been a certain institutionalisation of feminism. Feminism has a place, if not necessarily a dominant one, in academic life, cultural work such as theatre and publishing, some of the media, trade union structures and education. Where groups particularly relating to women do exist today, they tend to be much more focused on one particular issue. They are also often funded by NGOs, charities or other bodies, and their campaigners paid workers. This professionalisation of campaigns – pointed to above by Ursula Huws in particular – has some obvious advantages, including stability and more regular funding. However, it can also lead to a loss of the grassroots activism and sometimes spontaneous character of earlier feminism. It also tends towards a greater fragmentation of the issues, as each campaign covers its own particular area, but there is little possibility of making permanent links between them, or of discussing issues which might seem more remote from its immediate concerns.

In the 1970s there were publications which tended to speak for many feminists, most notably *Spare Rib*, but also *Shrew*, *Red Rag*, *Scarlet Woman*, *Socialist Woman* and *Women's Voice*.

Several were overtly connected with the organised far left. Debates could be conducted in their pages. *Spare Rib*'s demise in the early 1980s was accompanied by one such extremely sharp debate. Today, despite the existence of social media, the preponderance of blogs and other forms of writing, there is a greater sense of disconnection in the way that these debates are conducted, despite the fact that such debates do exist, for example in attitudes to sex work, and the role of trans-gendered (Trans) women in the movement.

An argument that developed in the course of carrying out the research tended to reflect generational concerns. This arose from the proposed, or at least alleged, 'no platforming' of women, including veteran feminist Germaine Greer and comedian Kate Smurthwaite, because of their attitude to Trans question or to sex workers. This provoked a letter in *The Observer* newspaper signed by well known Second Wave feminists such as Beatrix Campbell, Ruth Lister and Anna Coote and by LGBT campaigner Peter Tatchell, to be responded to the following week by one signed by many younger feminists including some Trans women and some sex workers, arguing against it. The second letter was signed by three of the interviewees, Kate Hardy, Dawn Foster and Nina Power (*Observer* 14.2.2015 and 22.2.2015). While there is some dispute about the incidents themselves, the standpoint of each group is quite distinctive, and relatively distant from the other's position. The younger generation of feminists have been influenced by extensive writing on gender and sexuality, by intersectionality theory, by the development of campaigns within the student movement over questions of sexuality as well as women's oppression, and by changing attitudes to sex work. They have made these questions a higher priority in many cases than some of the more work and family related demands that characterised Second Wave feminism.

7.7 Structural Changes

In drawing out the contrasting debates and perspectives for Second and Third Wave feminists on the issues of class, work and activism, I have demonstrated that while there are many points of continuity and contact, there are also substantial differences in the two waves. It should be clear that these differences do not result in antagonism, for the most part, between Second Wave and Third Wave feminists. In terms of the research carried out here, there was no sense that Third Wave feminism involved a rejection of Second Wave feminism in any fundamental way. Indeed the opposite was more likely to be true. Kate Hardy, for example presented a sympathetic appreciation of Sheila Rowbotham's *Women, Resistance and Revolution* on its republication in 2014, in an event organised by its publisher at the Institute for Contemporary Art in London. There remain, of course, substantial differences within Second Wave feminism itself, as Amrit Wilson recalls above. The term Third Wave did not mark, in the women that I interviewed, a sense of separation from previous generations. Some see it as a convenient badge to express different concerns, or as a positive assertion of a new sort of feminism. One interviewee opined that the different waves (now including Fourth Wave feminism) were as much about a Guardian newspaper led definition of feminism rather than distinctions based on fundamental or even sometimes real differences.

However, it is important to recognise the different circumstances of the two generations. Second Wave feminism, at least in its early years in Britain, represented a movement which put forward various concrete demands, all of them initially concerned with the situation of women at work and in wider society. It displayed the confidence of the generation of 1968, which had highlighted opposition to war and racism and colonialism as its central demands, and whose slogans claimed that anything is possible; but it also represented a critique of those movements and of wider society and women's role within it.

The Second Wave occurred at the time when major changes in Western capitalism were beginning to alter society's perceptions of women and their own perceptions of themselves. Women going into higher education, becoming a permanent part of the workforce, limiting the number of children that they had, all represented major structural changes in women's lives. Second wave feminism became an articulation of those changes and at the same time a demand for much more than initially was on offer.

Third Wave feminism was not the product of any equivalent structural change. It had already experienced many of the changes for which Second Wave feminists fought. It could be argued instead that Third Wave feminism is a critique of the inability of that structural change to achieve full equality. Women now have the right to work, and much greater personal and sexual freedom. Yet the expansion of work for women has coincided with a worsening of conditions overall, as younger people can now expect to work for far longer than their parents or grandparents, at much higher personal cost in terms of pensions and education, having to juggle long hours with family and caring responsibilities. Women work much more alongside men, but both sexes suffer frequently difficult conditions at work, and women find themselves at a structural disadvantage in the labour market. Greater sexual freedom has seen a growth in commodified images of women, from pornography to advertising, and continuing very high levels of rape and domestic violence.

These contradictions explain the continuing relevance of feminism, and the search among younger feminists for a theory that relates to these issues. Their connection with class, both in terms of the economic nature of exploitation, and of the turning of personal relations into a series of commodities, should be central to any such theory.

The contribution to knowledge of this thesis consists of firstly the discussion of theoretical and historical questions about feminism and socialism contained in the three publications submitted. These have considered a number of questions related to women, class and activism, covering a time span of more than two decades. They have also discussed a number of areas of sometimes disputed feminist and socialist theory, including the questions relating to domestic labour and its economic role under capitalism; the issues relating to the rise and decline of Second Wave feminism; the changes in women's work patterns and their impact on the family; and the relationship between feminism and anti-war campaigning. The new research contained in the thesis assesses the continuities and changes between two generations of feminists, looking in particular at the impact of class on the different interviewees, and drawing out differences in terms of analysis and perspective between the two. It stresses the differing economic and social contexts of the two generations, and considers the background against which Second Wave feminism arose as marking a fundamental structural change in the position of women in Britain. It also highlights issues such as racism as of continued relevance to both generations of feminists, and considers the limits to legislative change associated with women's equality.

The limitations to the research are that it focuses on a number of areas, such as work, trade unions or feminist influences, but does not have the scope to investigate certain other areas further. For example, debates over sex work and Trans women are extensive and controversial, and are only dealt with relatively briefly here. They also touch on questions not covered in the interviews, for example the relationship between women's oppression and other gender oppressions, which is beyond the scope of the research. There is little within the thesis on the tensions within the same generations of feminists and between the different

generations, nor about the decline of the women's movement from the late 1970s. When embarking on the interviews, I wanted to highlight differences of approach or experience, but not necessarily to rehearse old arguments and disagreements.

There are a number of areas which would benefit from further study, especially in relation to younger women's attitudes towards trade unions and work; the different generational approaches to sex work; and the discussion on paid and unpaid labour carried out by women and its relationship to social reproduction. The renewed interest in these questions and in the demand for wages for housework or a basic income among younger feminists is perhaps counter-intuitive, given the role of women in the workforce today, and may be explained by the greater uncertainties about secure work and long-term debt among the younger generation. The reasons for the continued tensions over race within feminism also merit consideration. In addition, the contrast between the highly productive written output of Second Wave feminism, and the much lesser output among younger feminists is marked. It was commented on by some interviewees, including Gail Chester, Carys Afoko and Kate Hardy, and it would be interesting to explore the reasons for this. All of the above would provide fruitful areas for further research and investigation.

The contribution here has been to analyse and discuss attitudes towards class and feminism, showing contrasts and similarities between the generations. It is clear from the research presented in this thesis that issues of feminism, and of women's role in society and its relationship to the class structures, continue to prove engaging and thought provoking. It is precisely the changing position of younger women in society, against a background of continuing oppression, which makes it such a rich area for research and study.

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APPENDIX 1: Questions to Interviewees

To Second Wave interviewees:

1. What were the issues which led you to an understanding of women's politics and social oppression?
2. What manifestations of women's oppression influenced your thinking on the question?
3. Was women's oppression your starting point in politics?
4. Was class a factor in your understanding of oppression or did/do you regard them as analytically separate?
5. Did you have experience of working class organisations, such as the Labour Party or trade unions?
6. What debates have you been involved in around the question of class?
7. When you first became involved in the women's movement, did you consider that it would have long term social influence?
8. To what extent has the position of women today been influenced by the ideas or activities of women's liberation?
9. Did you expect the major changes in women's lives that we now see or have they to a certain extent taken you by surprise?
10. Do you see a level of continuity between second and third wave feminism?
11. To what extent has second wave feminism achieved its aims?
12. What can you learn from the younger generation of feminists?

To Third Wave interviewees:

1. What first made you aware of feminism, and what have you learnt from the first and second waves?
2. Was your initial political involvement over issues of women's oppression or were you drawn to other social issues?
3. Did you have experience of working class organisations?
4. Have you been involved in debates on the question of class?
5. Have you modelled your ideas/activity on second wave feminism?
6. What do you see as the key legacy of previous feminisms?
7. What do you understand by class, and do you consider it an element in women's oppression?
8. How far do you see trade unions as a vehicle for advancing the position of women?
9. In which respects do you feel second wave feminism has failed?
10. Changes in women working, and more liberal attitudes to sexuality, have made major differences to women's lives. What are their limitations?
11. What would be your major campaigning priorities against women's oppression today?
12. Are these priorities achievable within mainstream political discourse?

APPENDIX 2: The Interviewees

Gail Chester grew up in an Orthodox Jewish family in London and has been involved in feminist campaigning since the early 1970s. She helps to organise the Feminist Library in London.

Ursula Huws is well known for her research on women, work and technology. She has been involved with socialist feminist politics all her life and campaigns round issues such as housing in east London.

Sheila Rowbotham is a historian and one of the best known founders of Women's Liberation in Britain. She has written some of the most influential feminist history and was co-author of *Beyond the Fragments*.

Hilary Wainwright has been involved in feminist and socialist projects since the 1960s. She is co editor of *Red Pepper* magazine and was co-author of *Beyond the Fragments*.

Heather Wakefield is a national official for Unison, the trade union with the largest women's membership. She is an activist and campaigner for women's rights.

Amrit Wilson came to Britain from India to study in the 1960s and has campaigned especially around black and Asian women's demands. She is part of the Freedom from Fear organisation which has highlighted issues of race, gender and class over rape and domestic violence.

Carys Afoko grew up in Brixton and has worked as an economist and parliamentary researcher. She organised a women's group at her workplace and is involved in anti racist and feminist campaigning.

Malia Bouattia is currently Black Officer for the National Union of Students. She is of Algerian descent, and grew up in Birmingham after having to leave Algeria because of the civil war. She is a prominent speaker and campaigner.

Cat Boyd is a Scottish feminist and socialist. She is a prominent organiser of the Radical Independence Campaign in Scotland and co-authored a pamphlet on women and independence.

Dawn Foster is from a working class background and grew up in South Wales. She is a writer, blogger and campaigner around feminist issues and has a particular interest in housing.

Kate Hardy is an academic at Leeds University. She has researched lap dancing clubs and sex work, and is involved with the campaigning group feminist Fightback.

Nina Power is a philosophy lecturer and author of *One Dimensional Woman*. She is involved in a range of feminist, cultural and political campaigns, including Defend the Right to Protest.

APPENDIX THREE: Glossary of Terms

- Barbour, Mary: leader of rent strike in Glasgow in 1915, which had mass involvement of women
- Berkeley, University of California: centre of student radicalism in the 1960s in the US
- Blackbird Leys: working class Oxford housing estate near Cowley
- Burnsall: long running strike for union recognition at a metal finishing factory in the West Midlands in the early 1990s, involving Asian women
- Cliff, Tony: Leader of the International Socialists, and later Socialist Workers' Party.
- Communist Party of Great Britain (CP): main left of Labour Party organisation in Britain in 1960s and 70s. Strong base among manual workers
- Cooley Mike: creator of Lucas Aerospace plan for alternative working
- Consciousness-raising: practice in women's liberation movement of small group women-only discussions, aimed at overcoming some of the effects of women's oppression and allowing them to articulate their feelings
- Cowley: working class area in Oxford and site of major car factory
- Davis, Angela: US black woman writer
- De Beauvoir, Simone: French socialist and feminist, author of *The Second Sex*
- Feminist Fightback: a feminist socialist campaign connected with Third Wave feminism
- Focus E15: Campaign to demand decent housing by young mothers in Newham East London. Gained widespread support from its launch in 2014
- GLC: Greater London Council, led from early 1980s by Ken Livingstone
- GMB: General, Municipal and Boilermakers' trade union, which now organises manual and white-collar workers
- Greenham Common women: women protesters involved in opposing the siting of US cruise missiles at the eponymous air force base in Berkshire in the early 1980s. The campaign was strongly feminist and attracted mass support
- Greer, Germaine: well-known Second Wave feminist, Australian, author of *The Female Eunuch*
- Grunwick: famous London strike from 1976-78 involving largely Asian women
- Hooks, bell: US black woman writer
- International Socialists (IS): far left group based on Trotskyism which grew rapidly among students and young people in and after 1968
- International Marxist Group (IMG): far left Trotskyist group, British sectional of Fourth International, which had base among students
- LGBT, LGBTQ: lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer
- Lee Jeans: women led factory occupation at the jeans factory in Greenock, west of Scotland
- Livingstone, Ken: leader of the GLC, which was abolished by Margaret Thatcher. Later became Labour MP, then Mayor of London
- Marks, Stephen: IS member in Oxford in late 1960s
- MECW: Marx and Engels Collected Works
- Miss World: annual beauty contest, seen by many Second Wave feminists and degrading and objectifying women

Murray, Len: leader of TUC in late 1970s, early 1980s

National Assembly of Women: longstanding women's organisation established in the 1950s

New Economics Foundation (NEF): radical economics think tank in London

NUJ: National Union of Journalists

O'Grady, Frances: current and first woman leader of TUC

Organisation of Women of African and Asian Descent (OWAAD): organisation formed by Black and Asian women in 1970s to campaign round specific feminist demands affecting them

Powell, Enoch: former Tory government minister who made provocative anti-immigration speech in 1968, leading to a rise of racism in his support

PCS: major civil service trade union

Radical Independence Campaign: mass campaign for a 'yes' vote in the Scottish referendum on independence in 2014

Red Rag: Second Wave socialist feminist magazine connected with the CP and Beatrix Campbell

Revolutionary Feminists: radical or separatist feminist grouping from the late 1970s, led by Sheila Jeffreys

Scarlet Woman: socialist feminist publication from 1970s

Socialist Woman: Second Wave socialist feminist magazine connected with IMG, published between 1969 and 1980

Socialist Workers' Party: name of IS after 1977

Spare Rib: wide circulation feminist women's magazine, which lasted into the 1980s but whose final issues were marked with acrimonious debate

Students for a Democratic Society (SDS): radical left wing student movement in US in the 1960s

Timex strike: major strike involving women workers at Timex factory in Dundee

Tres Cosas: campaign by cleaners at London university to improve wages and conditions

TUC: Trades Union Congress, umbrella organisation for most trade unions

UK Uncut: campaign for tax justice aimed at companies such as Starbucks

Unite: trade union formed from the two major manual workers' unions, Amicus and Transport and General Workers' Union. Now organise many white-collar workers

Wise, Audrey: left wing Labour MP, played important role on parliamentary left in 1970s

Wise, Valerie: daughter of Audrey and key player at GLC

Wolf, Naomi: author of *The Beauty Myth*

Women against Pit Closures: movement of miners' wives and families in support of the 1984-5 strike, influenced by socialist feminists and influential in changing attitudes to working class women

Women of the Waterfront: organisation of wives and women supporters of Liverpool dockers during their strike in the 1990s

Women's Voice: paper, magazine and for some time organisation of women connected with the SWP

Working Women's Charter: charter of demands on women's liberation that gained some support in trade union branches in the early 1970s. Initiated by IMG

APPENDIX FOUR: The Feminist Manifesto

1. Globalisation and neoliberalism have had a profound effect on the lives of millions of women. Capitalism itself has created new forms and manifestations of women's oppression.
2. Women's oppression is a product of class society which has existed for thousands of years. It was only with the development of capitalism that large numbers of women developed a consciousness of their position and the ability to do something about it.
3. Women have been drawn into the workforce in millions but working in factories, offices and shops has not led to an improvement in women's lives far less to liberation. Women suffer exploitation at work as well as still shouldering the double burden of family and childcare as well as paid work.
4. Women's traditional role as wives and mothers has not disappeared but has been reinvented to fit in with the needs of exploitation. They are now expected to juggle all aspects of their lives and are blamed as individuals for any failings in family or work life.
5. The talk of glass ceilings and unfairly low bonuses for women bankers miss the point about liberation, which is that liberation has to be for all working women and not just a tiny number of privileged women.
6. Although all women suffer oppression and face discrimination, their life experiences are radically different. Women are not united as a sex but are divided on the basis of class. Middle and upper class women share in the profits from the exploitative system in which we live and use this benefit to alleviate their own oppression. Working class women are usually the people who cook, clean and provide personal services for these women, receiving low wages and often neglecting their own families to do so.
7. Women are more than ever regarded as objects defined by their sexuality. The commercialisation of sexuality with its lad and ladette culture, its pole dancing clubs and its post-modern Miss World contests keeps women being judged as sex objects as if nothing has changed since the 1950s.
8. This objectification, alongside women's role as supposedly the property of men, leads to domestic violence, rape and sexual abuse. This abuse is under recognised and under reported. It was only in the 1960s and 70s that these issues began to be viewed as political.
9. To control their own lives, women must control their own bodies and sexuality.
10. Capitalist ideology prioritises the family and the subordinate role of women and children within it, while at the same time forcing individual members of the family to sacrifice 'family life' because of the pressures of work and migration.
11. The priorities of the profit system and the existence of the privatised family means that women's oppression is structured into capitalism. Any genuine liberation has to be connected to a wider movement for human emancipation and for working people to control the wealth that they produce. That's why women and men have to fight for liberation. Socialism and women's liberation are inextricably connected.

12. We will not win without a fight. Every great social movement raises the question of women. In the nineteenth century the movement for women's emancipation took its name from the movement to abolish slavery. In the twentieth century women's liberation took its name from the movements against colonialism around the world. Twenty-first century women's liberation has to fight to change the world and to end the class society which created oppression and exploitation in the first place.

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See also: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/mar/08/international-womens-day-manifesto>