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Talking Politics

‘Politics’ is at the heart of this book. But the politics with which I am concerned is not limited to that of political parties and institutions or to a series of distinct social movements. My aim is to show how activist commitments are formed, lived and practised – in different political-cultural moments and in multiple landscapes of antagonism. The emphasis on ‘talking politics’ is deliberate: I try to use participants’ own words to describe how the political self is formed and lived. But I am not just concerned with talk or identity. The accounts also suggest something of the performativity of politics: how commitments and practices bring into being different political worlds. The coverage is necessarily selective, and my use of extracts from the interviews does not do justice to the richness of individual accounts. But each section attempts – in the spirit of the ‘institutional ethnography’ outlined in Chapter 1 – to bring different participants into a virtual conversation with each other, sometimes across generations and sometimes from different institutional locations.

Finding politics

The chapter begins with participants reflecting on the political self in the making:

When I went to university at the end of the 1960s it was in the context of the civil rights movement in the US, the anti-war movement in the US, ‘Cathy Come Home’ etc.¹ in England. I was brought up as a Catholic at the time of the Second Vatican Council and the challenge to the male-dominated hierarchy of the Church and other institutions. We wanted to rethink the norms and protocols underpinning them. The late 1960s also coincided with liberation theology in Latin America, the writings of Paulo Freire and huge military oppression. There were all these radical people who were trying to find a common ground between a Marxist ideology, which as a young student I was hugely interested in, and a Christian ideology. I don’t want to overstate this, I was very young and starry-eyed – but these were all part of the ether that was seeping into my bones and forming who I was. (Tricia Zipfel, G2)

So in a way I fell into feminism with a lot of personal feelings – that you mustn’t let them get you. I remember sitting on the stairs in a collective house having a conversation saying ‘Wow – do all women feel like this?’ I thought it was just me.

Feminism was about finding yourself, finding your place in the world and having a context in which that kind of resentment and anger, alienation, the sense that you were having to fight against them making you someone you didn't want to be, and all of that kind of thing could find a place. It's been really powerful – that energy has continued into wherever I've found myself. So it's the personal and political combined around the biographical. I wasn't a head girl kind of person who got used to success then hit a glass ceiling; it was kind of the opposite. (Jane Foot, G2)

Now, it's human rights and environmental politics that I'm really interested in, But I remember – one of my first politicizing experiences was at a big anti-BNP [British National Party] demonstration in London when I was about sixteen. It was a big demonstration and I remember the police, they blocked the way and just ran their horses through the crowd, tipping people over. And I was scandalized – I didn't think that happened in our country. And they blocked the route so there was a sort of build up of outrage within the crowd. And I thought the papers would be in uproar about the way they'd acted the next day, but instead they blamed the demonstrators and I was absolutely ... now I'm just kind of cynical but at that point I was absolutely scandalized that it could happen. I suppose that was quite a radicalizing thing for me. (Camilla Warren, G3)

I'm really an anarchist, I suppose. I got interested in mainly environmental protests, road camps, stuff around Third World First, now called People and Planet. My parents lived in a Norfolk village; they were kind of left wing, my mother was in CND [Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament]. I thought of myself as a feminist but not with a very nuanced understanding. I was never someone who thought it was a good idea to go into the women's caucus, to sit round with a lot of other women moaning. I was aware of male-domination, but it was doing the gender audit² that opened my eyes. I saw that the more you came down to local level, on the ground, the more women there were, and vice versa. I hadn't thought too much about male-dominated decision-making before; I had presumed that men could represent different interests. But at board level – it's a bit of a stereotype – we observed all the men giving information. The only time a woman spoke was to ask a question, but once one woman had spoken then another would come in. The audit showed that there is a real lack of confidence among women to get involved in formal structures. (Hannah Berry, G4)

The first two extracts suggest something of the heady excitement of the 1960s and 1970s, a period in which New Left politics, the civil rights movement, CND and the women's movement flourished, in which many looked to South America and the work of Paulo Freire³ for inspiration, and in which there was a sense of fundamental and transformative change taking place. The third extract is from someone who came to politics in the context of the adversarial politics of Thatcherism in Britain, while the fourth suggests how some women positioned themselves in relation to the politics of an earlier generation, but also came to define their own.

Despite some patterns, the point I want to draw out from these first extracts here is the multiplicity of political formation and political lives, and the significance of different political-conjunctural moments. Many

participants recalled the transformative political climate of the 1960s and early 1970s, the more adversarial politics of the 1980s or the disappointment of the failed promises of Blair as mobilizing forces. Younger generations were often politicized by the rise of anti-globalization and environmental politics. Across these periods women referenced key events – the miners’ strike, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, the South African Springboks rugby tour during the period of apartheid, the fall of the Berlin wall, the election of Barack Obama – as symbolic moments, whether or not they had witnessed them. Myths of the past – of 1968, of Thatcherism and heroic struggles against oppression in Latin America, India, the Middle East, South Africa and Argentina – lived on through cultural images and helped shape contemporary political formations.

But the accounts also show the power of encounters across borders – of nations and movements, between north and south, across divisions of class and race – to open up an awareness of inequality and injustice, and to generate the possibility of politics. Ida Susser (G2) was born in South Africa and speaks of herself as a feminist, a white South African woman in exile, and a political activist supporting women’s mobilizations around HIV/AIDS in Africa; Ursula Murray (G2) attended a political conference in Montreal as a student that was ‘*dominated by Latin America*’ and at which she, like Tricia, encountered liberation theology and the work of Freire (*‘It was quite Marxist but we didn’t realize it at the time’*); Kate Raworth (G3) became involved in participation and empowerment programmes in Zanzibar before going to work for Oxfam; Avtar Brah (G2) brought her engagement in multiple political struggles in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s to her work in London; and Sukhwant Dhaliwal (G3/4) recalls how in her early twenties:

I had quite romanticized notions about Latin America basically, and I always wanted to leave the country and I wasn’t really sure where I was going to go. I was always torn between wanting to try something in Latin America or something in the South Asian sub-continent, and so I saw an advert for the Nicaraguan Solidarity Campaign for the first Women’s Brigade and joined it, and it was one month over a Christmas period with a very mixed ethnic group of women, which was also quite novel for me because I was predominantly in Black politics. (Sukhwant Dhaliwal)

Although most participants had been influenced by feminism, their political formations were quite complex. Some came from political families:

I can’t remember a time when politics didn’t matter. I was brought up by very political parents, and politics was part of my early life really from my earliest memories. (Sasha Roseneil, G3)

However as Sasha’s account shows, even within families political roots were often highly diverse. Some found politics at work: the first job of Ruth Lister (G2), with the Child Poverty Action group, led her to become involved in

campaigns for women's legal and financial independence; Jan Etienne (G3) found politics through trade union involvement, while others became part of radical groupings within the professions. Some came to politics through political parties. Some became politicized in community-based action or by participating in campaigns or demonstrations. But politicization was often not a one off events. Jane Wills (G3) spoke of three different political roots: the first was a nineteenth-century politics, inherited from her parents, of a self-organized Methodist church; the second, a twentieth-century politics based on mass organizing that she encountered in the 1980s while a student; and the third, a twenty-first-century politics confronting the crisis of the left and the search for alternatives. But in recent years the most politicizing issue for her had been the response of the state as she sought support for her autistic son:

In the past I would have defended the state, the NHS, but this experience has led me to look elsewhere for support and care. This, for me, has been more politicizing than anything. (Jane Wills)

Stella Semino (G3), Avtar Brah, Gail Lewis (G2), Sukhwant Dhaliwal and Ida Susser each also spoke of having multiple political roots, but their lives cannot easily be understood through a British chronology of social movements. Stella participated in the Monteros movement in Argentina before fleeing to Europe, where she later became involved in voluntary work in London and taking up forms of environmental politics, latterly in Denmark. Ida Susser was born in South Africa, moved to Britain aged five and subsequently lived in Kanpur in India and New York. Her parents were founders of the anti-apartheid groups in London and Manchester as Ida was getting involved in CND and anti-Vietnam struggles in Britain and the United States. Her political formation, then, was both trans-generational and transnational. Avtar came from Uganda to study in the United States, where she became involved in anti-Vietnam War demonstrations, anti-racist politics and labour union struggles. She lived through the civil rights movement, Black Power, non-violent activism, CND, 'flower power' and the beginnings of second-wave feminism. In her 1996 book he describes how: 'There were rallies, demonstrations, marches, teach-ins, and love-ins. There was energy and optimism that the world could be changed for the better, even if many of us were incredibly naive about the inherent complexity and contradiction' (Brah 1996: 6). But as she became more aware of issues of poverty in the inner cities in California: 'The gentle calls for love and peace of the "flower children" began to sound affected and utopian – the growing up pangs of a privileged post war generation – although the idea of "non violent" forms of struggle continued to touch a deep chord in me' (Brah 1996: 7). This tension was carried into her political work in the UK.

Sukhwant reflected how:

It's really interesting that you have also interviewed Avtar Brah and Gail Lewis, because in a sense I grew up in the shadow of their political negotiations even

if I wasn't active myself till the late 1980s/early 1990s. But exposure to all that 1970s/1980s stuff, especially in Southall, possibly gave me a different perspective from some of the other 1990s activist I encountered ... especially on the state. (Sukhwant Dhaliwal)

But the image of the '1970s/1980s stuff' is itself problematic. The following is an extract from the interview with Gail Lewis:

I think I was formed in different moments. In part that was because of my own route – I didn't go to university till my mid-twenties, after a crap education followed by a period of factory work. But my family's formation had taken place in the context of Caribbean struggles for independence alongside labourist activities in the Caribbean, and both of these were brought to London with us. So my political formation was in a context that said that class politics would change the world, but it also had to be anti-colonialist. And that was an important grounding for me. Then I went to work, got involved in the Union ... But then the moment when I decided to go to university was after I had been in Sri Lanka for a year, and had experienced the bubbling inter-ethnic conflict there in the 1970s. And it was that experience that brought me to feminism; it was feminism in Sri Lanka, not here, so I never thought that feminism was just a white western project. Then I went to the LSE, took one year out to work in a housing advice centre, then into development studies, then to the GLC in the Livingstone era. (Gail Lewis)

This extract points to multiple moments of political formation, confounding any neat categorization of different generational and national experiences. Gail refers to coming to feminism 'there' – in Sri Lanka – rather than here. Sukhwant spoke of finding feminism in India:

I got a scholarship to go to India to do a Masters in Sociology because I felt like a lot of stuff that was going on within South Asian communities in London was very connected to Indian politics. I went to India to start an academic career, but also because I was really very frustrated with the professionalization of the politics in Britain, and I wanted – whatever I thought in that time, I don't know what it was, what I wanted was a cutting-edge experience ... So I went to India and became active in what was a gender study group then on sexual harassment, but I was also very drawn to class politics and still had some very naïve ideas about being part of an active communist party. But actually when I got to Delhi I found that gender was the issue for me, and got involved in a brilliant, brilliant campus based feminist collective with a gender studies group which today has just repaid me ten-fold. I made the most amazing connections out of that, and I think that sort of transnational solidarity is really important especially if you're working on religious fundamentalism. (Sukhwant Dhaliwal)

We can see in these extracts – from different generations – how political formation is stretched across borders. This is also the case for young scholars moving to the UK to study; for example, for Dana Rubin (G4) her politics were formed in the Arab/Israeli struggles, and P.G. Macioti (G4) was shaped by the politics of migration in Italy. The migrants' rights struggles in which P.G. participated were, at the time, led by the Italian communist party, but she rejected its leadership in favour of more anti-hierarchical, feminist collective

groupings of activists. Later, in Berlin, she became involved in anti-racist politics and took part in 'No Borders' activism and, in London, in campaigns on migrants' rights with a particular focus on migrants involved in sex work. I will take up the story of these and other young activist/scholars in Chapter 6. But what I want to note here is how 'place' and 'time' are confounded in the ways in which individuals narrate their lives: Sri Lankan, Indian, Middle Eastern and European struggles are not just 'there' and in the past, but are 'here', in the present, in the ways in which individuals make sense of their political attachments, commitments and identities.

These accounts, together with the opening extracts, also show the complex entanglement of feminism with labour movement politics (Gail, Sukhwant and Jane), anti-racist and human rights struggles (Gail, Avtar and Camilla), HIV/AIDS activism (Ida), the peace movement and anarchist-inflected politics (Sasha, Hannah), with post-colonial struggles (Dana, Sukhwant) and with the politics of migration (P.G.). Each of these intersected with a politics of sexuality; indeed, many participants saw sexuality as the primary axis of their political formation:

My politics comes out through having a lesbian family, having to go to court three times to create a legal entity. The previous government created a framework of equality politics that actually supported me to do this in a way I would never have dreamed of when I got pregnant with my first child. Never would I have dreamed twenty-seven years ago that I would now have a legal entity, a civil partnership that enabled me to build a lesbian family. It was unimaginable, but for me it still feels quite dissident. There's still an aspect of it where I can't quite believe we've been assimilated into the status quo, even though legally we are. So my politics is played out on that field of struggle; there's still a lot of heterosexism, that happens all the time. Cos you have to come out to people around your family: the kids do and I have to at school, and then when the kids get involved with other people. But it's so different from how it was twenty-five years ago; the gender stuff is amazing and then the sexuality stuff has changed incredibly. (Adi Cooper, G2)

This extract traces the emergence of sexuality as a domain of public and political struggle; a struggle that was mobilized by the early activists in gay and lesbian groups, and by organizations such as Stonewall (see extracts from Angela Mason in later chapters). But it also shows how such struggles are both public (going to court, participating in campaigns) and deeply personal. This personal/political dynamic was interpreted in a rather different way by a younger woman who saw the development of her lesbian identity as a political process. Maria Lehané (G3) described how she felt 'suffocated' until she moved offices and found a group of 'out' lesbian women and began to lead a different kind of life. She saw herself as both inside and outside of the 'lesbian community' and commented:

You know the old adage, the personal is political; for me it was the politicization of things I thought were private. (Maria Lehané)

We can begin to trace here important intergenerational politics in which the struggles of one generation create institutions and repertoires that sustain those that follow. This was also a key issue raised in the interview with Alessandra Marino (G4), a young woman who stressed the importance of second-wave feminism in her own political formation, and Bec Bayliss (G4), who encountered activists from earlier generations through voluntary work:

The very last course on my BA was on feminist writing, and the person who taught that course was really enthusiastic. She kept talking about '68, the feminist struggles. And for me, coming from a little village in the south of Italy, this was really evoking; it felt like there were still urgent struggles going on, and that made all the difference. I got to politics quite late on, because I was living in this little village, with my parents, with my family, and my life was just normal. You go to university, you come back, and you don't really have the openness to the world. But for me that course on feminist writing, on political struggles, activated a certain sensibility. And after that my life changed; I started to travel more, to get more freedom. (Alessandra Marino)

I was seventeen or eighteen when I first started being introduced to people who were quite political in terms of socialism, communism, even feminism. This was in an organization for people who were homeless, both men and women, but there was also a women's project – it was global enough in its thinking to acknowledge that women had different experiences of being homeless, and the common feature was often abuse, or experiences of violence. And then I thought, 'I've found it, that's what I want to do.' I suppose the bit that was interesting is how it came with passion, energy and motivation. It was something that was meaningful, something that took you home at night and you thought, 'Cor blimey, that's fabulous, beneficial and worthwhile.' So I suppose it's like one big jigsaw piece and it still is really. It's about finding a bit for me, its finding what makes sense in the world, what fits with what I believe and what drives me. (Bec Bayliss)

I want to continue the theme of intergenerational resonances in the next set of extracts from Avtar Brah, one of the founding members of Southall Black Sisters in 1979, and Sukhwant Dhaliwal, who later 'found' this organization at a crucial point in her life. Avtar describes the founding year of Southall Black Sisters as a result of the rise of racist activity and the National Front. Following a big demonstration in 1979 at which Blair Peach was murdered and 340 people arrested, she and others became involved in practical and political work:

In the aftermath of that we were very involved in trying to free them [those who had been arrested], and at the same time we were aware of issues to do with women that couldn't be subsumed into that wider Black politics. So we thought that – it started out as a very practical thing, holding sessions giving advice to women on immigration, housing, we had lawyers coming in to help us. So we were doing this kind of practical work anyway. This was also a time when there were various industrial struggles around women's work and we used to go and support them. Southall Black Sisters emerged out of that – how to look at feminist issues in the context of the politics of the time. We called ourselves a feminist project, and we called ourselves Black but that was in the context of the Black politics

of the time – which was African, Caribbean and Asian women working together (though fewer African/Caribbean women are involved now). And as you know we were involved in lots of landmark legal decisions – for example on violence against women. (Avtar Brah)

Her account vividly points to the entanglement of different struggles – class-based, anti-racist, gender – undermining any idea of coherent communities of identity. Indeed, Avtar spoke about the necessity of any focus on gender being formed in relation to issues of race and class, prefiguring the theories of ‘intersectionality’ (see Chapter 6).

Sukhwant Dhaliwal recalled ‘finding’ this organization some thirty years later when, aged fourteen or fifteen, she became distressed at the mobilization of religious fundamentalism in the Khalistan movement in India:

There was a politics that I could already see, but I didn’t really find a word for it until my introduction to Southall Black Sisters which really encapsulated my general feelings. (Sukhwant Dhaliwal)

It is, then, not just narrow, western feminism that shaped personal and political commitments. Indeed, Alessandra Marino told of how she had not been involved in any particular social or political movements but had travelled widely – predominantly in India and North Africa – as a ‘*commitment to dismantle a certain western perspective that I knew I had*’. But the work of aligning different movements, working across multiple commitments, managing conflict within and between struggles, tended to be gendered labour.

Enacting politics

I think of it [politics] always as a practice not as an object; it’s a practice through which a collective identity can emerge and people can mobilize around a particular issue. (Susan Pell, G4)

Susan and others were sceptical of the idea of social movements, movements that assume a common identity and interests. Instead, politics was something that emerged out of social practice, from trying out different ways of taking action. For many participants this began with small-scale local projects:

I started off as a volunteer in a Neighbourhood Centre in Islington set up by Quakers, and just became excited about what was going on ... The activities [running playgroups, working in community projects] were not just meeting needs – at the time I think I was a bit naive, we thought this as part of the revolution. The revolution had to start from your street and your community and work up, and I believed that very strongly. I never felt hugely comfortable engaging in formal politics, it’s never been quite my thing, just feels like a lot of talk very often. For me politics is about doing things. (Tricia Zipfel)

I lived in a really small town [in Canada] and two people who were very close to me were sexually assaulted, and the only people that they could talk to were women that were much older and it kind of felt like they were talking to their mums. And so I started volunteering at the local rape crisis shelter in an effort to try and provide more peer support for young women. The range of women that were involved was pretty amazing. A lot of them were survivors of violence, and the oldest woman in the group she must have been in her seventies and she really took me under her wing. I mean I did environmental work before that and I had done work against cuts in education but it was kind of doing the work at the Rape Crisis Centre where I think I first kind of got a critique of the criminal justice system, and the kind of failure around women and violence issues. (Sarah Lamble, G3)

Such ‘practical politics’ took different forms at different points of a working life. For many it centred on work on ‘local’ issues and was ‘project’ based, but I do not want to suggest that this represents a subordinate form of politics outside the public domain of strategic action. To give a sense of what I mean by politics as practice I want to return to the accounts of Adi Cooper and Jane Foot, both G2. Adi spoke about applying ‘*all the familiar work around networking and groups*’ she had developed through her involvement in the women’s movement to the politics of lesbian parenting:

I started looking at adoption 10/11 years ago, and then went through it myself, and that experience led me to try to support other women through that process. And my politics came into all that work: all that kind of familiar work around networking and groups, and supporting and advising, and being at the end of a phone, and meeting up so that your children know other children who’ve got lesbian parents. (Adi Cooper)

Jane Foot honed her political skills in community-based projects and drew on them in later work in governmental projects, policy work, research and consultancy. When asked what she had taken from her political commitments into her working life, Jane spoke about herself as a ‘*community entrepreneur*’:

I think what I bring is lateral thinking: I am a very good lateral thinker, I like making connections. I think quite a lot of women do that but [laughs] I also think that being a socialist feminist – endlessly having to knit things together, to see how things are connected and to make the connections and to see where to make the connections and how to exploit the connections and work with the contradictions. I am not sure whether you learn those things from being an activist or whether you become an activist because you have got that kind of brain. (Jane Foot)

Both of these extracts demonstrate the significance of relational politics in the work of almost all of the participants. Relational politics signifies work through networks, but also the generative labour associated with pulling together new networks, constituting new political entities, performing new worlds. And such labour rests, in Jane’s case, on what she sees as a political mentality: one of making conceptual connections as well as knitting together disparate entities. Jane gives an excellent description of the work carried out

by many participants and suggests something of its gendered characteristics – although she acknowledges that this was as much to do with the kinds of activism she had been involved in as with her gender.

Such political skills, and the networks on which women drew, were honed and expanded in the more adversarial politics of the 1980s when many participants worked in and around law centres, trades union resource centres, women's employment projects, tenant participation projects, anti-racist projects, women's refuges, AIDS activism and so on. Jane worked in a Trades Council bookshop and printing service established as part of the Community Development Programme (CDP) in Coventry; and she was active in the women's movement and the National Abortion Campaign of the period. She joined Big Flame, was involved in the Tower Hill rent strike, worked on Hackney Play Bus and in a law centre engaged in supporting tenants' campaigns. She worked for five years at SCAT (Services to Community Action and Trade Unions) doing national campaigns against the sale of council housing, set up a National Housing Liaison Committee and later became part of the Housing Research Group at City University. The breadth, variety and complexity of this experience are striking. But it was not unique; other women of a similar age and political orientation recounted equally complex political lives. Ursula Murray, also G2, began her working life in Coventry City Council, where she encountered the government-funded Community Development Programme. She later moved to London to work on Canning Town CDP:

This was my education. University had been a dead loss – this [CDP] taught me how to think. My role was to analyse the local economy. It was a fantastically exciting time – different projects were coming together, we were writing joint reports and building rich networks. It lasted five years, all on short-term contracts.
(Ursula Murray)

She became pregnant and was made redundant as the funding ended and then, with another woman who had joined the project (also pregnant and unemployed), set up an employment project in north London, working closely with trade unions, and then the Haringey Women's Employment project, which had a focus on Black and working class women's issues:

We job shared and shared babies. We wanted to bring a woman's focus into work on employment issues. We got money from lots of sources, did action research, published pamphlets and so on. (Ursula Murray)

They subsequently secured major European Union (EU) and Greater London Council (GLC) funding to set up a women's training and education centre, taking over a defunct secondary school and running manual trades courses and computer courses for women:⁴

I don't think if we had understood what setting up such a big project with lots of staff would be like that we would have done it. Our approach was you come

at it, create something and it will work. We were very innovative but were full of tensions. By 1986 there was a feeling of exhaustion. Some people had gone off to work for the GLC, but there was also – there was a feeling that change had been possible in the era of political funding and sponsorship, now our work was all about income generation. So I went to work for Haringey Council. (Ursula Murray)

I will return to these narratives in Chapter 5, showing how such projects were taken ‘inside’ local government and suggesting something of their transformative effect.

While Jane and Ursula’s politics were formed in the proliferating left groups of the late 1970s and early 1980s, others came to politics through different routes. Esther Boyd (G2) had lived in the same inner-city area for some thirty years and spoke about how her work was informed by a Quaker concept of ‘service’. She trained as an architect but met considerable discrimination at work:

It was really interesting. I thought that once I had started proper work I wouldn’t need to do all this other stuff because I’d be getting my fulfilment through the job. But I found out, I’m afraid very quickly, that a woman in a man’s world is not listened to, and I got absolutely mad about that. I was already chair [of a housing association] but at work I didn’t get that sort of fulfilment. I got involved in the Union, became steward and then chief steward. But in the end the only way I could achieve the things that mattered to me was outside work. (Esther Boyd)

Esther had an extensive career break to care for her three children during which she helped develop and run a range of local initiatives (twenty-one in a twenty-year period) including housing associations, charities, Quaker bodies and a number of neighbourhood organizations. She had set up a group to coordinate responses to the devastation produced when a local area was hit by a tornado in 2005; became secretary to the local community forum (part of the City Council’s devolved structure of participation); was chair of a community action group promoting sustainability and supporting households in cutting carbon dioxide emissions, and led a protracted campaign against a planning proposal by Tesco supermarket. She had an extensive email circulation list through which she kept local people informed and wrote a regular blog on local sustainability issues. The list of projects in which she was involved is extensive, but all were informed by a strong and long-term commitment to the ‘local community’.

While Esther’s work was informed by a Quaker notion of ‘service’, the next set of extracts are taken from the interview with Kate Oliver (G3), who describes herself as an activist with non-conformist leanings. The account begins with campaigning work on local transport issues, then moves to her work as a GLC transport planner with a particular focus on women’s transport needs. While her children were young she piloted and promoted flexitime schooling while working as a job-sharing local authority strategic planner. She became

school governor of the school her children attended, then ran a campaign to keep the school open when it was threatened with closure:

We saved not just our school but all of the ones in our neighbourhood because I didn't want to set up a campaign where we were picking one local school off against another, and that worked really successfully. It was very time consuming but very rewarding, and it was the time when with local management of schools had just come in so I did spend hours and hours and hours ... at one point I was doing about thirty hours a week writing policies, setting up the whole thing. (Kate Oliver)

After a move to the Midlands she set up a local Town Forum in which to debate local political issues and produced an alternative transport strategy that challenged both the official strategy and the planning culture of the local authority. She took up the fostering of a child at the same school as her children after his foster placement broke down and went on to foster five young asylum-seekers. She says that this opened the door to the next stage of her life, because it introduced her to refugee and human rights campaigning. At work she became involved in setting up the Birmingham Early Years Partnership, a policy-oriented New Labour partnership body, and recounts how her range of experiences in her personal and work life gave her both a '*strategic policy and a children's services background*' that enabled her to move into the voluntary sector as Director of the Birmingham Children's Fund.

In a way the unpaid, voluntary community campaigning politics stuff has actually been the thing that's taken me on to the next project in my working life. I can't possibly grace it with the term career because quite a lot of the time ... well, when I had the children of course it dipped for a bit before it started to pick up again. It's all been very kind of ad hoc really and I've had lots of support.

The other thing that I think is key to all of this that my non-conformist Christian grandparents harboured Jewish refugees during the war, and the household that I grew up in was always a very kind of busy, open door one. And I think I've replicated that, that sense that you share what you've got, and that includes your intimate space. (Kate Oliver)

The 'ad hoc' and evolving nature of working lives is a theme replicated in many other accounts. Kate, from a younger generation than Esther, was able to bring the experience gained in informal politics into the making of employment opportunities, especially in the partnership bodies and children's policies that proliferated under the Blair governments. But for both Esther and Kate formal and informal politics, 'lay' roles and activist roles, all centred on issues of quality of life, sustainability and social justice. What is striking in their accounts is the complex relationships between public and private, personal and political. Both women attempted to 'live' their politics not only through their local community or political engagements but also in their personal lives.

These extracts could be read as confirming arguments that women's informal political activity takes place in spaces that are ambiguously public and private,

protected from – and perhaps excluded from – the formal politics of the public sphere (Jupp 2010; Staeheli 1996). There is much about the connections between politics and personal lives here, as indeed there was in the accounts of Jane, Ursula and Sarah. But for Esther the public politics of housing were linked to the personal resources offered by the Quaker community, while her voluntary activities could thrive because of her taking an extensive career break to care for her children. This was possible, she explained, because of adopting an explicitly ‘anti-consumerist’ lifestyle which enabled the family to live on a relatively low income. For Adi, her ‘personal’ conduct of lesbian politics was connected to more public activities through which she supported other lesbian parents. For Kate, personal and political were connected in the links made between the care of her own children and her decisions to take on the fostering of young asylum-seekers; in her engagement as a parent in the local school; and in her campaigns to promote flexitime schooling and to prevent school closures. Indeed, the references to the ‘open door’ house and of ‘sharing’ an intimate space appear as metaphors for an implicitly gendered orientation to a politics of community.

Yet these accounts confound the idea of women’s informal politics as operating somehow outside the public domain or in a liminal space between public and private. Each of the women cited here took on extensive public roles (as governors, chairs, managers, campaigners) and had a mix of unpaid, voluntary and paid work in professional and/or policy-oriented roles. All used their strong community embeddedness to develop spaces of power from which to intervene in the wider public sphere, run campaigns and engage in policy interventions. These different political practices are viewed as mutually constitutive and their power as derived from working across personal and political, inside and outside, activist and governmental spaces. But these were not, as later chapters show, comfortable places to be.

In and out of the party

There is an extensive body of feminist literature on women’s roles in political institutions. Some focus on issues of representation (Lovenduski 2002; Mackay 2001) while others prefer the language of ‘presence’ and ‘voice’ (Phillips 1995; Young 1990). Some challenge the dominance of political science perspectives, linking the analysis to the feminist ethic of care (Mackay 2010) or to concepts of deliberative democracy and difference (Benhabib 1996; Barnes, Newman and Sullivan 2007). My purpose here is more modest: I seek to show the influence of political parties in the formation of political selves, and to trace some of the tensions and ambivalences associated with taking on formal political roles in party, council and government.

Orientation to party was inflected by issues of generation, gender and class and post-colonial belonging. Women who became adults before the rise of the counter-cultural politics of the 1970s frequently found their route into politics through the Labour Party, although they quickly expanded their political work and sought to change the party from within. Theresa Stewart (G1) was a local councillor and served on a number of council committees, as well as on the board of a local hospital, eventually becoming Leader of Birmingham City Council:

I have been a lifelong Labour Party member – I joined when I was a student. I couldn't imagine not being Labour in 1945 in my school – it was just obvious. I did a lot of work – branch secretary and so on – while I was bringing up my children. Then when my youngest started school I put myself forward for election. I was also very active in CND. We had started a branch in Doncaster and helped to organize a march; then I was also involved in the anti-Vietnam War campaign after I came to Birmingham, in 1966. I was also very involved in the women's movement – in 1974 I was very angry with the Labour Party's election campaign because it didn't involve women at all apart from having an image of Shirley Williams with her shopping basket. So I did a leaflet, organized a meeting and we set up a women's section [within the local constituency party], which thrived for quite a few years. (Theresa Stewart)

Theresa was involved in campaigns on access to contraception for unmarried women and for comprehensive education, and she set up the National Association for the Welfare of Children in Hospital. She was elected Leader on a platform of taking resources back into local communities after a period of heavy investment in prestige projects in the city centre. While Theresa's links with the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s helped bring feminist perspectives into the Labour Party, for Kitty Ussher (G3) it was the politics of Thatcherism that formed a deep moral commitment to bringing about social change through political office. Kitty served as a local councillor, had a period working for MPs, then served in the Labour government of 2005:

Well, I think I'm probably one of the hated career politicians in that I've always been fascinated by Parliament and the way it works, and felt very clearly that ... a very strong sense of ideological drive I guess as a younger woman, and that mainstream politics is the way to achieve change. I reached political awareness in the early Thatcher years, and I saw the type of society that she was trying to create as, you know, kind of morally wrong. I hated the class system of Britain and felt very comfortable and at home in the Labour Party, and saw it as a kind of crusading organisation really. A group of people that were all about change leading to improvement, and so I always had it in the back of my mind that at some stage I'd do active politics, and I've known that since I was about seventeen, so for me it was a vocation really. (Kitty Ussher)

Growing up in a family with strong party allegiances was significant for many other women. Davina Cooper (G3), younger sister to Adi, recounted how:

I decided around the age of nine or ten that I wanted to be a politician as a way of being involved in bringing about change. In part, it was the result of seeing

my parents active in a party that was so outside the boundaries of institutional power ... When I was twenty-one, just finishing my first year at law school, I got elected to Haringey Council. This was my most intense period involved with institutional politics; it was heady, and hugely challenging. I was involved in a lot of committee work, chairing the Women's Committee and later the Community Development Panel which funded lots of local organizations. (Davina Cooper)

In contrast Esther Boyd, who grew up with similar expectations, was more ambivalent about party politics:

Both my parents were councillors, and I took it for granted that I would be a Labour councillor, I mean that's what one did. And I did once stand for councillor in a ward which was very solidly Labour. And I hated it, the campaigning, because you weren't supposed to do what was right, but what would gain votes. And I couldn't accept that. Things that I could see were wrong I wasn't allowed to mention because that would turn people against me. You do what gets votes, and the Party rules and so on. I found that having voluntary work which didn't have those political issues was actually – I found that very satisfying. It's political with a small 'p'; it's certainly not party political. The Quakers use the word 'service' a lot. Quakers are about action, they are not about God in the sky or anything, so the root of a lot of it for me is Quakerism. (Esther Boyd)

The 'ways of doing' politics emerging from the confluence of feminism and the peace movement noted above were viewed as incompatible with the 'party machine'. But for some from younger generations, the party and trade unions formed the only possible routes into politics. The next extracts are from the accounts of younger women whose political formations took place in the context of colonial and post-colonial encounters:

I came here [from Tanzania] in 1971 at the age of thirteen, completely the wrong age to be moving children, especially from a very hot country to a very cold country, so that kind of time was very traumatic for me because of language problems, being in a tiny minority in those days, and not speaking English, not really knowing how to live in a cold country, and so my first experience was not very good. When I started working in Eveready Batteries that's when I got interested in trade unions and the women's movement, and I was in the Labour Party so I joined the women's section, and then I became very interested in the Black Sections Movement. So I was kind of active in that in the early 1980s, and then there was the miners' strike, so there was quite a lot of political activity. (Munira Thobani, G3)

My dad came (as a migrant from St Lucia in the Caribbean) and worked for London Transport. My mum worked for the National Health Service. I still have very strong links with St Lucia; I'm involved in a project out there which is very important for me. I went to Grenada in 1983 just before the invasion as a youth project worker. We were invited over to work for the Ministry of Mobilisation, and it was all about women getting stuck in to sort of deal with things. But we were thrown off the island just before the Americans invaded and all these dreadful things happened, and of course a lot of the people who I worked with

are now dead. So I've always had a strong belief in doing something in one of the Caribbean islands. Meanwhile [in the UK] I became very active in the Labour Party. I was a local councillor in Brent for a little while, but before that I would say that I was informally active in political activism, community activity, but the formal side as a local councillor, and then standing in 2005 in the General Election. (Jan Etienne)

These extracts suggest the significance of trade unions and political parties as routes into politics – for Munira they were perhaps the only routes that could be found in that place in that period, while for Jan they formed part of a more complex, transnational political trajectory. But they also demonstrate something of the entanglements between anti-racist, feminist and socialist politics during the 1980s and 1990s. This was a period of very different mobilizations, with socialist groups confronting the deeply repressive Thatcher governments, the rise of the National Front, the miners' strike, the murder of Blair Peach and the emergence of new lines of racial antagonism.

Across the participants cited in this section we can trace ways in which early experiences led to a 'taken for granted' expectation of participation in party politics. But there are striking differences. While some were engaged in formal politics as MPs or as councillors, others explicitly rejected it, preferring more informal and direct forms of activism:

We really believed we were involved in challenging the system, and that this had to start from your street. (Tricia Zipfel)

But this distinction between formal and informal politics is too crude. Theresa Stewart, for example, connected a pragmatic politics of party work with an involvement in women's politics. And Kitty Ussher spoke with pride of her achievements for her Burnley constituency as well as her excitement about working in the 'Westminster village'. She resigned as an MP so I asked her whether she still sees her work as political:

Yes, I'm a Labour Party person. I don't know if I'll go back [into politics]; what I am not clear about is how far I need it and that worries me at times. I want to achieve change on sort of social justice principles, but I can also enjoy doing it on a piece by piece basis. You know, the neighbour knocking on my door asking for help is equally part of the same thing as far as I'm concerned ... I live in a very vibrant part of the world, I live in Brixton which has got a huge ethnic social mix, and I'm really enjoying getting into that community in an unbranded way. (Kitty Ussher)

The informal activism in community and neighbourhood is a theme to which I return in the next chapter. What is particularly interesting in this extract, however, is the reference to an 'unbranded' politics. This seems to say something both about the ways in which political acts might be perceived as independent from and untainted by associations with particular political parties, and about the shift of identity associated with this participant's move

out of formal politics – in which she had a relatively significant role – into a more diffuse political environment in which her role was less clearly defined. But for her these different roles were ‘all part of the same thing’ – working to certain social justice principles.

Transgressive politics

The idea of politics as transgressive is, of course, not new: practices that challenge traditional forms of politics were deeply inscribed in the women’s movement, from suffragettes chaining themselves to railings and engaging in hunger strikes while in prison to dramatic interventions in boardrooms and parliamentary debates. Such acts ruptured taken-for-granted meanings and practices of politics and helped enact new worlds in the making.

Among some of the participants to whom I spoke, the Greenham Common protest⁵ was a particularly significant marker of the formation of alternative political repertoires: not only did they publicize the struggle in a radical way but such repertoires were also able to mobilize actors untouched by the political machinery of union or party. Tess Ridge (G3) recounted how:

One of my most political periods started through my involvement with Greenham Common, which was near where I lived. I was expecting a child when the first marches came to the Common and when they started to locate the missiles.

I asked if Tess came to become involved through the peace movement:

I came to that through my mother. We have always been quite a political family in terms of a lot of discussions and a lot of involvement in various things, and my mother got involved in CND, and I had got involved with her to some degree. But what Greenham did was situate a very particular manifestation of power so it was right on our doorstep, right into the heart of local people, so it was very personal as well as a very political thing. And my mother initially got involved in helping the marchers to come to the Common. My son was born just before the marchers arrived, and I went up there not long afterwards with a very small baby tucked in my windcheater, and was promptly told by a policeman that the baby should be at home and shouldn’t be out and about. And gradually over time it became a women-only event, and as it became a women-only event I became more politicized by it. (Tess Ridge)

Another participant from the same generation took up the Greenham story:

We [a group of women in Bristol supporting the Greenham women] used to have big circular meetings, huge meetings. We tried this horizontal way of organizing, with mediated conversations, no real structure. But when the policing of Greenham became more acute we became more organized. We had telephone trees, and when something was threatened we would call people and rush off to look after the site at night in case the bailiffs came. I remember trying to break a fence down, it was

incredibly liberating. Greenham did politicize us. We would try to go to pubs on the way home, but wouldn't be allowed in. This made us both angry and proud. We were angry and energized by just being women together. (Mary Upton, G2)

Sasha Roseneil spoke about her involvement as a young woman:

It was 82–83 and I was doing teenage activism. Then I started going to Greenham, and then I left school to go and live at Greenham. I'd been getting more and more involved, and I had been arrested a few times. It caused quite a lot of uproar at school and the school did actually ask me to leave. (Sasha Roseneil)

Sasha, who has written extensively about Greenham Common (Roseneil 1995; Roseneil 2000), spoke of how her experience there had influenced her interest in the everyday practices of living and ethical subjectivity:

being interested in everyday ways of doing, and being, and living, and questions of how we live together. (Sasha Roseneil)

She later became involved in feminist and lesbian politics in London: in helping produce the *London Women's Liberation Newsletter*, helping out at A Woman's Place and becoming part of the collective. But this was the later 1980s:

It was a time of vehement identity politics, race politics were absolutely raging. That wasn't the stuff that had been talked about at Greenham, so it was another education in feminist politics. (Sasha Roseneil)

These extracts speak to the importance, at that time, of separatist politics – of having a place in which a particular form of what Sasha terms a '*queer feminism*' could flourish. They also suggest shifts over time and the emergence of challenges to a politics that assumed the pre-eminence of gender and the neglect of class, race and other identity struggles. But the point I want to focus on here is the new genre of politics emerging from feminism and the peace movement. This, in turn, informed the practices of younger women, many of whom used the term 'anarchist' or 'queer' to describe their styles of activism.

Susan Pell grew up in Canada and went to university in what she saw as a conservative part of the country, but:

In the mid-1990s protests happened in response to intense cuts in Canada that culminated in the anti-globalization protest 'the battle for Seattle' in 1999. This was a hugely visible protest. I learned a new critical language. I was involved in some subcultural things, but they didn't resonate with me – they struck me as very masculine. I got more interested in women's issues and worked for Planned Parenthood for while. And I started to look at the value of alternative media – zines and things – for political activism.

I'm much more of an anarchist than a member of anything. And I feel like I'm always attracted to queer spaces – non-hetero-normative spaces ... I'm not gay myself but I find people there who are more politicized, less likely to

make sweeping generalizations about the world that assume they know who other people are. (Susan Pell)

Susan and many others of her G4 generation came to politics through anti-globalization and environmental movements, and often brought considerable creativity to political practice. Alessandra Marino's research focused on forms of resistance through performance and theatre, and on 'non institutionalized' women's movements that mobilize women through writing: it is through writing, she argues, that people can intervene in the public sphere and expand the definition of politics.

Cecilia Wee (G3) described herself as an independent arts curator – a 'maverick' whose work was informed as much by political theory as art theory. She argued that cultural performance as a form of politics opens up new creative engagements in public spaces, museums and other sites that are fluid, sporadic and not easily contained. She organized collaborative events – '*spectacles of resistance*' – in public spaces and the public realm, describing with excitement how she brought a group of artists to the 2010 BP-sponsored Tate summer party to respond to the implications of the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico earlier that year. She also worked with art students in the kind of relational and 'practical' politics discussed earlier in this chapter:

I'm helping them to connect with the rest of the world – whether through a guerrilla activity or a more structured performance, I try to provide a cultural context for what they do ... I like to bring artists together, to make connections they might not have seen otherwise. But I am also interested in the audience – in their experience, how they understand what they see, how to open up their access to the creative process. (Cecilia Wee)

The use of events, demonstrations and performances as a form of political practice resonated across many of the interviews. Dana Rubin was researching the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and recounted how she tried to bring the reality of the occupation into a Gay Pride march in Tel Aviv, under the slogan 'There is no pride in this occupation'. She also helped form what she termed '*the first queer group against the occupation*'. This was '*very intensive, and really questioned everything*'. And it was deliberately performative, theatrical:

We collected used weapons from the occupied territories and tried to march with them, but we got arrested. Then we set up something that looked like a checkpoint on a main thoroughfare, and marched with blindfolds made to look like those the Israeli army used with Palestinians, and so on. All of this was about trying to bring a different kind of politics, one that was both feminist and queer. We were trying to look for the connections between different forms of oppression. (Dana Rubin)

These younger participants can be viewed as shaping and being shaped by a 'post-identity' politics. Sarah Lamble, another young researcher, spoke about

the politics of feminist, queer, transgender organizing that *‘doesn’t organize around identity’* but that engages with anti-capitalist, anti-poverty struggles:

I used to think that politics was about doing things, now I think it’s about building and sustaining relationships so that movements have meaning in people’s lives.
(Sarah Lamble)

Such relationships are, in part, enabled by new social media – Facebook, Twitter, blogs and so on – that provide new vehicles for political connections and mobilizations, often across borders. However, as Sarah commented, communication alone is not enough: the dramatic political changes in North African and Middle Eastern nations took place through mass presence of protesters in public spaces, and *‘in Facebook there can be a lot of not doing’* (Sarah Lamble; her emphasis).

But there are risks associated with performative politics. The arts can be accommodated and incorporated in what, in the 1990s, came to be termed the ‘culture industries’, and were put to use – ‘functionalized’ in the words of one participant – in government programmes of urban regeneration and community cohesion. In addition, Cecilia Wee’s work, and that of the artists she commissioned, was fragile and vulnerable, subject to contracts, sponsorship, cuts and periods of unemployment. She spoke of wanting to move from *‘creating very specific sealed off moments into creating art that has an idea of social change behind it’*. This meant finding funding for a larger, more sustained programme that could link the arts to green issues. Both areas however lack resources.

Hannah Berry, quoted earlier, has also faced difficult choices:

I first went to work for a research association which promoted ethical consumption and people saw it as selling out because it was about reforming capitalism, not fighting it, but the good thing was that it left me time to be an activist as well, and the subsistence wage fitted with my ideals quite well, too. Then going to work for the LSP [Local Strategic Partnership] women’s network – suddenly my focus shifted to local politics – proper reformist stuff, going to forums, working on projects, and more than anything my current situation of being paid by the state to do research. (Hannah Berry)

Of note here are Hannah’s ambivalent feelings about moving between different kinds of activism. While Tricia Zipfel and others who came to politics in the 1970s felt that they were involved in changes that were revolutionary, for this younger woman being paid to do ‘little projects’ was unfulfilling. Hannah and others are less likely than women from earlier generations to be able find the kind of employment that will enable them to bring politics into their working lives. Their accounts bring into view the tensions between being ‘inside’ the system, and thus able to have direct influence, and being ‘outside’ in what some see as a more authentic political space. This inside/outside duality is one that runs through this book, but in the chapters that follow I show how the idea of ‘spaces of power’ confounds such clear distinctions.

Conclusion: mapping change

This chapter began by trying to show what has inspired – and continues to inspire – participants in this research to become ‘political’, and then moved to a discussion of how women enacted politics in different sites and through different repertoires. It has traced the significance of what some women termed a ‘practical’ politics, a politics which connected ‘personal’ and ‘political’ and that generated new capacities and resources. It has shown something of the ambivalence many women brought to their encounters with mainstream political institutions, but has also traced ways in which some sought to transform them. Finally it has highlighted the significance of more transgressive political repertoires that challenged the traditions of older political institutions and movements. As such it has offered a series of ‘mappings’ of politics and how it is understood, lived and embodied, and how such mappings are subject to change. The chapter has not set out to write a history of any particular movement or period; but it does offer at least three ways of conceptualizing political change.

The first concerns personhood and identity. The women on whose extracts I have drawn in this chapter grew up in different periods, witnessed different mobilizing events, encountered different political ‘elsewheres’ and met different political challenges. They were not, however, formed once and for all as political persons of a certain sort (x is a feminist, y is a Labour Party activist, z is an anarchist); not only were most formed through complex entanglements between different struggles, they also changed over time. Personal biography matters, and we will see in subsequent chapters individuals coming to perform politics in different ways across a life-course. And generation matters, too; we can see the kinds of narratives participants offered changing according to age and generation. Older women (generational cohorts 1 and 2, and some from cohort 3) offered more complete, rehearsed narratives and they were more embedded in connections to taken for granted assumptions about the characteristics of a particular period ways (this was the cold war, that was 1968, then there was Thatcherism); their stories, it often seemed, had been told before, to others or just to themselves, and had been honed in the telling. The stories of younger participants (especially generational cohort 4) were less sure, with more uncertainties (about what is going on) and ambivalences (about how to place oneself in it); their life projects were still in the making and their stories still being worked on.

A second way of mapping change over time centres on shifts in political performance. Political movements tend to be associated with particular performance repertoires – the campaign, the party, the small group, the gathering, the demonstration, the spectacle, the riot, the mass assembly. These change over time, not only as movements mature, fracture, speak to one another, become exhausted and perhaps reassemble, but also as new spaces of

power emerge: Sasha Roseneil (G3), describing her feminist activism in the late 1980s, spoke of how:

I was very young compared with pretty much everyone else who was around, and there's a sense that it was all a bit past its peak, that the peak had been the 1970s and what was going on now was different, there had been a move into local government. (Sasha Roseneil)

However, it is also possible to trace resonances over time. For example, many young activists engaged in dramatic, radical and disruptive performances have an image of older movements as rather dour, boring and conventional. Yet it is possible to map echoes and resonances between, for example, the dramatic occupation of Greenham Common, with its innovative communication channels and its theatrical and symbolic feminization of a military installation, and the activities of UK Uncut in 2011 as it occupied banks and other buildings and installed crèches, libraries and other public spaces, as well as the Occupy movement (see Chapter 9). There is also a resonance between the older Reclaim the Streets marches and the recent Slut Walks. This is not to say that the *politics* is the same; but that there are resonances in the political performances across different times.

Over time, shifts in accepted performance repertoires tended to create new insides and outsides to what was understood as activism; one participant noted how she felt an outsider at Greenham Common because she was not like the other women there, and another noted ambivalence about whether to continue on an established political path or move on, with the personal rejections that might follow. Shifts in performance repertoires also led to intergenerational hostilities and tensions. Alessandra Marino spoke of the problem of those who see themselves as representatives of a particular generation: *'the myth of 68,'* she argues, *'is a moment that can't come back'*. The power of this myth has meant that older activists tend to construct younger generations as passive. But it has also meant that younger activists have to redefine what politics might mean and how it might be practised. At the same time younger generations may view older activists as having become professionalized or depoliticized (see also the mother-daughter authorship of a text on shifts in feminist politics, Woodward and Woodward 2009; and Maskovsky 2009 on inter-generational stereotypes within the gay movement in responses to the AIDS crisis).

A third way of mapping change over time concerns the relationship between activism and the shifting political and governing projects oriented to managing populations, curtailing dissent and sustaining the legitimacy of hegemonic blocs. Such projects tend, in much of the literature, to be viewed as evidence of the expanding reach of globalizing neoliberalism (see Chapter 8). Activism is viewed as taking place outside and in opposition to these logics. But activists tend not to be active for the sake of it, but seek to contest the actions of the powerful at specific moments and to campaign for particular,

historically situated, social and political reforms. At the same time the political and governing projects of the powerful often seek to draw on the resources, skills and practices generated by activist struggles and social movements. This creates what in subsequent chapters I term a series of ‘perverse alignments’, ‘close encounters’, ‘modernizing logics’ and ‘critical engagements’ whose effects cannot be read as simply the extension of neoliberal forms of governing. The stories we tell about change matter, not least for the ways they might inform the politics of the present and future.