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Close Encounters: Feminism, Policy and the Remaking of Governance

This chapter traces what happens as women bring political commitments and campaigns into policy and governance roles. This is a terrain littered with stereotypes – the governance feminist, the femocrat and other demonic figures who, as they take on new forms of power, become distanced from the politics that formed them and separated from those whose interests they claim to represent. However, the evidence of this research does not support such stereotypes. It shows how participants moved in and out of policy roles, in and out of politics, in and out of campaigning roles and in and out of different ‘sectors’, gathering political experiences, building relationships and accreting skills on the way. The legislative and policy reforms they won led to the acceptance of lesbian and gay civil partnerships; brought about improved provision for children and families; secured women’s legal and financial independence; and opened up new policy foci on health, well-being, safety, care, parenting, disability, mental health and other issues. But participants also raised concerns about what happened next – how policies somehow became detached from the politics that inspired them, and how strategies of mainstreaming and monitoring failed to deliver the transformations they promised. Each ‘success’ was partial and conditional, and each can be situated in wider narratives of depoliticization and mainstreaming.

To explore some of these paradoxes this chapter traces how participants sought to influence policy and monitor its impact. It asks how far ‘close encounters’ with policymaking led to the incorporation of activists as they engaged with dominant forms of political and institutional power. It shows how policy was shaped by women bringing activist commitments into policy roles in the Civil Service, NGOs, think-tanks and local government. It also traces what happened as activist commitments were institutionalized through processes of ‘mainstreaming’ and monitoring. Throughout the chapter my focus is on the different ‘spaces of power’ that participants opened up and mobilized, and on how ‘insider’ and ‘activist’ roles, while often viewed as separate and antagonistic, were connected in multiple ways. Such connections did not erase antagonism but perhaps make us think again about what a policy is and how it is performed.

Gender agendas and social policy

Feminist influence on social policy has a long genealogy that can be traced through different inflections of ‘feminism’ and through different formations of welfare states (Fink and Lundqvist 2010; Gordon 1990; Guy 2009; G. Lewis 2002; Newman and Tonkens 2011). Within the United Kingdom the second-wave women’s movement generated extensive critiques and new forms of provision (for example, health and maternity services, childcare provision and elder care carer support, provision for women experiencing domestic violence) designed to transform the paternalistic and patriarchal assumptions inscribed in welfare services (Charles 2000). The feminist challenges to the maternalism of post-war social policies were – selectively and conditionally – accommodated in social and public policy, enabling Walby to suggest, in 1999, that: ‘Gender relations are being transformed. A new gender settlement, a new social contract between women and men, is being created. These arrangements are potentially more equitable, productive and socially inclusive for both women and men. Government has a crucial role in supporting this new settlement. Especially a new Labour government with an ethos of modernising and reducing social exclusion’ (Walby 1999: 1).

This quotation reflects the optimism of a period in which New Labour had just entered government with a much higher proportion of women MPs and a policy platform that appeared to take account of the ‘gender agendas’ raised by feminist campaigns of previous decades. However, reflections that look back at that period talk of the assimilation and deflection of feminist agendas (Annesley, Gains and Rummery 2010; McRobbie 2009) or imply that the achievements of women’s liberation in projects of ‘empowering’ women merely served to enable us to take our place as full worker citizens in the ‘Social Investment State’ (Lister 2001; Lister 2002; Lister 2004).

To assess such claims, I want to use the accounts of participants to show what happened as social policy came to be inflected by feminist struggles and claims. Hilary Land (G2) spoke of life as a campaigner, an academic and a member of a number of review bodies, including the Cabinet Office Policy Review Staff to which she was seconded in the 1970s, initially under Labour and subsequently under the first Thatcher administration (during which time the group was abolished). These engagements with policy were all informed by her involvement in the 1970s women’s liberation campaign for legal and financial independence for women (in which Ruth Lister was also active):

We developed a critique of the male breadwinner model out of our own family experience. We used our professional bourgeois skills to send evidence off to policymakers, working on issues of taxation, pensions, child benefit, family law, domestic violence and so on. In the 1970s there was a concern to improve the lot of women; and in some ways it was as if we were pushing at an open door.

It got harder in the 1980s: it was quite hard to get a handle on Thatcher – the paradigm had shifted, the door had slammed and we had far fewer networks with policymakers. The YBA Wife campaign and Rights of Women emerged out of the original financial and legal independence campaign, and my involvement in the Women's Budget Group [WBG] is a continuation of these in some respects. I have worked on issues of childcare and social care, maternity provision, work/life balance etc, and the WBG always comments on pre-budget reports and writes submissions to the Treasury on their impact on women. There were some ministers and civil servants who were happy to use our arguments but you trained them up and then they moved on to another policy area. We had some successes and the last New Labour government finally accepted the value of gender impact statements. However, the label comes off a policy proposal as soon as it gets into government – it's very hard to trace a specific policy back to its origins. You just sow these little seeds and hope that something grows from them. (Hilary Land)

Ruth Lister worked, initially, from a different kind of space: she spent some sixteen years in the Child Poverty Acton Group (CPAG) before becoming an academic. She served as a member of the Commission for Social Justice, set up in the early 1990s by John Smith to advise the Labour Party; was a member of the Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power, with a focus on the participation of people in poverty in decision-making (Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power 2000); and a member of the Fabian Commission on Life Chances and Child Poverty, the National Equality Panel, and many other boards and campaigning groups. She described her work as being focused on securing legislative and policy reform:

Because of my work with CPAG, I have always had a parliamentary focus, trying to get change through Parliament. Even in the Women's Liberation Movement, we were campaigning for legislative change to ensure women's legal and financial independence. But we also tried to live the future in the present, modelling the kind of society we wanted. CPAG worked a lot both with people in government and the opposition – we had good links with the Labour Party in opposition. We did seminars at No.11 [home of Chancellor of the Exchequer] on child poverty through the Smith Institute. As an academic my work on feminist perspectives on citizenship has informed policy interventions on lots of issues, including parental leave, and the work on poverty also fed into the work of the Women's Budget Group, one of the main intermediary institutions. (Ruth Lister)

Sue Himmelweit was the first Chair of the Women's Budget Group, a think tank which does gender audits of budgets, financial statements and expenditure plans as well as response to particular consultations. This is part of a wider transnational movement promoting gender impact assessments which has had a considerable impact within the EU and on agencies concerned with international development. In the UK the Women's Budget Group comprises a small core group – all working voluntarily – and a wider network of women bringing different forms of expertise. Sue described how, under New Labour, its work contributed to the political climate which led to the introduction

of legislation requiring public bodies to conduct gender impact assessments of policies and services (the Equality Act 2006). As Sue argued, these were not extensively implemented before the change of government in 2010, and the potential impact of the legislation has subsequently been weakened as the Treasury sought to pass responsibility for assessing the gender impact of budgetary measures (including public service cuts and changes to benefits) to local authorities or individual ministries. Nevertheless the Women's Budget Group played a significant role in drawing attention to the likely impact of the then new Coalition government's 2010 spending review, showing how cuts to benefits and services would impact disproportionately on women (Women's Budget Group, 2010). The Fawcett Society then used this evidence to challenge the government, through a process of judicial review, on its failure to conduct a gender impact assessment of its June 2010 Emergency Budget when first elected. This challenge was not successful, but the Treasury acknowledged that it was regrettable that such an assessment had not been done and subsequently conducted a limited gender equality impact assessment on the following year's budget. The work of the group continues.

There are several points I want to pull out of these accounts. First, although these are individual interviews there is a very strong sense of a feminist community: the interview transcripts are littered with the names of academics, policy actors, campaigners, equality activists, elected politicians and civil servants who had known each other for a long time and who had collectively learned how to link feminist politics, campaigning and policy interventions to good effect. Sue noted in particular the significance of women such as Fran Bennett, and Hilary Land recounted with some pride how twenty-five years on from the original 1970s campaign, 'we had a party of members of the original group and all of us had kept feminism going in our working and personal lives in various ways'. Such networks, at the time, spanned the civil servant/activist/academic boundaries and challenged any clear distinction between 'insiders' (those working inside policy circles) and 'outsiders' (campaigners and activists). However Sue Himmelweit noted how relationships with Treasury ministers and officials, never as open to outside influence as other government departments, had, in 2012, shifted from the period in which the WBG had been regularly consulted and in which it has been possible to foster networks with government advisers and occasionally with sympathetic ministers.

Second, the spaces of power were both relationally constituted and, as the life stories of Hilary, Ruth and Sue show, stretched over time, opening up and closing down in different political contexts and having constantly to be remade as policy actors moved on. And successes were ambiguous, with policies tending to become detached from the feminist politics that informed their making, but sometimes leading to a strengthening of feminist activism (as in campaigns around the Coalition government's economic and social policies). Third, there is no single gender agenda. We can see how the nature

of the struggles moved on from challenging the 'male breadwinner' model to helping shape 'family-friendly' policies, working to prioritize issues of poverty and care, participating in the formation of New Labour's national childcare strategy, working on parental leave and so on. However in 2012 feminist academics and campaigners were highlighting the implications of proposed benefit changes – in particular the introduction of a universal benefit that would be means-tested on household income and paid for the whole household to a single household member. This, it was argued, would reverse the idea that women should be treated as independent economic actors and potentially lead to the return of a 'male breadwinner' model (even if framed in gender neutral terms). This was, at the time this book went to press, being challenged by Sue's work in the Women's Budget Group and by Ruth's attempt to bring feminist perspectives into deliberations on a new welfare reform bill in the House of Lords.

The wider body of interviews suggest the breadth of feminist issues and agendas that campaigners pursued, the links between different struggles and the intersections of multiple-identity claims. They also show the significance of the network of feminist institutions and lobby groups that the second-wave and gay liberation movements had generated, including the Women's Budget Group, Fawcett Society, Stonewall and campaigning organizations on contraception, abortion, domestic violence and the treatment of victims of rape and abuse. What is at stake here is the relationship between broad social movements that operate in what Nancy Fraser (Fraser 1990) described as 'counter-public' spaces – spaces in which new identities and solidarities could form, separate from and in opposition to the mainstream public sphere – and more 'professionalized' interventions in the public sphere to try to bring about change. But this distinction suggests a binary between 'counter-public' and 'public' that is not sustainable here; the 'close encounters' with which this chapter is concerned took place in spaces of power sustained by personal connections to collective groups and wider political projects.

The work of Angela Mason (G2) suggests something of the power of such projects to influence legislative change. Angela had been active in trade union and Communist Party politics, and had been tried and acquitted in the Angry Brigade trials of 1972. She was an early member of the Gay Liberation Front and of the gay rights group Stonewall, of which she became Executive Director in 1992. She described Stonewall as a 'professional lobbying group' on gay agendas, on legislation on the age of consent, on the recognition of civil partnerships and on the repeal of legislation banning the teaching of homosexuality in schools:¹

I mean if you take some of the [legal] cases that we did. The first big case I did was on the age of consent, and actually that was a hard issue because it was the age of consent of sex and sex is always quite a tricky issue, although the press always like sex. We were always concerned in whatever we did, whether it was

campaigning for a vote in Parliament or taking a legal case, we tried to do it in such a way that increased public understanding.

So in all our legal cases, whether on the age of consent or later on civil partnership, we tried to find articulate and sympathetic claimants, and we sort of put them out in the public media. Because one of the secrets of campaigning is that campaigners can talk all they want but they are never quite believed as much as the people who are actually feeling the pinch. You have to beware of the sort of lobbying voice, and you have to try and organise things so that the alternative voice – the voice of experience – comes through.

I mean to be fair those sort of politics were actually rather different from the Women's Movement – the Women's Movement wasn't very practical or strategic at all, so I don't know quite how it managed to get the changes it did. I think sort of being a lawyer probably helped a little bit, and then having that work professionally, and that helped a bit as well, and I think perhaps my vast [Communist] Party background might have helped a bit. (Angela Mason)

Angela's work shows the power of pragmatic political skills, honed both through radical activism and Communist Party membership, allied with legal and media skills, and she has had considerable impact on the equalities landscape through her work (see also discussion in Hunter and Swan 2007). The power she describes is tactical, strategic; indeed, she makes an explicit contrast with the Women's Liberation Movement that was 'never very practical or strategic at all'.²

A rather different perspective is offered by Davina Cooper, from the G3 cohort, who served on the Women's Committee of a London borough as an elected councillor and spoke about the tensions associated with working in equality roles:

The approach I took was to enter institutional spaces but without compromising politically too much. These weren't easy spaces, and any power I had was short-lived because I wanted to work ethically according to my principles and political commitments. But I was working in a decision-making terrain that was of course already hugely structured and constrained, and I was too young maybe, and didn't have the skill to turn my commitments into practice – people talk about working through networks, creating alliances, constantly building up support ... but certainly then I wasn't a good networker, though I had one success – as chair of Community Development – I did manage to stop the council pulling funding from an Asian community centre. (Davina Cooper)

There is a suggested contrast here between the extensive political skills and tactical use of power depicted by Angela Mason and the strong ethical stance and unwillingness to compromise in Davina's account. But such a contrast is too stark; both were highly skilled women who successfully pursued social and political change, but from rather different spaces of power (Angela continued in high-profile equality and party political roles while Davina later became an academic). And many women combined strong personal and political

commitments with tactical skills. Theresa Stewart (G1) became involved in Labour Party politics before the days of the second-wave women's movement, but later brought an explicitly feminist politics into her political roles in local government, working on health, education, contraception and community development, all of which are critical issues in shaping the quality of women's lives. Jane Foot, from a later generation, combined strong socialist, feminist politics with different forms of 'state work', supported by a collective ethos of working 'in and against the state'. She was very involved in a range of practices that linked critical perspectives to campaigns for better provision:

I think it's that thing of – where do you think the critical points are for women? I became very strongly involved in housing, and the kind of welfare state I suppose, because for me the poorest women – their quality of life was not only determined by their wages but by issues of housing, of benefits, of domestic violence, the quality of their home life, their family life. And that's where I saw that as socialist feminists we could be most powerful, and that analysis about the role of the welfare state – we were part of a women and housing group, I was very active around council housing, and that for me was about the quality of life for women. Actually, a really good quality social housing sector would be the greatest contribution you could make to the quality of life for women. And it was quite hard, it was a hard argument to make at the time, when it was all about wages and equal opportunities – the welfare state was not seen as a really important site of struggle for feminism. I think now that understanding is much more widespread, but in the mid seventies, if you look at the big campaigns we had they were about equal pay, abortion, it wasn't council housing. (Jane Foot)

This is, however, a very UK-centred depiction of what were the critical spaces for women. Ida Susser's work on supporting women organizing in response to the AIDS epidemic in Africa tells a different story (Susser 2009). She helped form Athena: Advancing Gender Equity and Human Rights in the Global Response to HIV/AIDS and, as well as work in Africa, worked within the United States to defend budgets for AIDS preventative programmes.

These extracts illustrate the very diverse spaces of power from which women sought to influence social and political change, and something of the range of skills and political orientations they brought to that work. They suggest the breadth of the agendas being pursued, from benefits to care, from domestic violence to parenting, from housing to work/life balance, from campaigns to make contraception available to unmarried women to campaigns for the legal recognition of civil partnerships. They also show the multiple feminisms at stake and the complex entanglements between them. I return to the work of some of these participants in subsequent chapters, showing how their work evolved to address different constraints and opportunities. But first I want to focus on one set of issues that intensified the focus on cross-cutting work and the delivery of complex policy outcomes: issues of children, families and parenting.

Remaking governance

We saw in the previous chapter how policy spaces were generated in the UK during the Thatcher years, and how some women elaborated a politics of ‘in and against the state’ to inform their critical engagements with state power. Here, I show how women mobilized spaces of power within the proliferating policy initiatives of New Labour. These enabled many participants with backgrounds in community-based, voluntary, charitable and campaigning organizations to become powerful policy actors. I focus in particular on three participants. Naomi Eisenstadt (G2) had gained extensive experience in the voluntary sector, culminating in the directorship of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO). This, she reflected, gave her the opportunity to establish powerful networks, but *‘it wasn’t for me – defending a sector held no interest for me, I knew I was interested in women, children, sex education – I wanted a cause’*. This led her to the Family Service Units (see Chapter 5) then to two major government programmes addressing poverty and exclusion under the New Labour government: Sure Start and the Social Exclusion Unit. Mary MacLeod (G2) was part of the emergence of second-wave feminism in Edinburgh, working on issues of domestic violence and helping establish women’s refuges. After training as a social worker she worked for Barnardo’s, which at the time was mainly a provider of children’s homes. She went on to teach social work both in Edinburgh University and North London Polytechnic; became involved in the charity ChildLine, where she ran a twenty-four-hour counselling service for young people; and then went on to head the National Family and Parenting Institute (now Family and Parenting Institute, FPI), *‘an organization that’s involved in policy research, voice, information – all the things I was involved in at ChildLine’*. Lisa Harker (G3) worked for the Daycare Trust, the Child Poverty Action Group, the Save the Children Fund and the left-leaning think-tank, the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), before working as an advisor to the Treasury on the development of New Labour’s ten-year childcare strategy and then becoming the government’s Childcare Czar.

The appointment of these three women to roles that carried considerable power and influence reflects a number of related shifts in governance that took place in the 1990s and beyond. The ‘governance narrative’ (Rhodes 1997) tells of a shift to a plural polity and more reflexive style of governance. This narrative has been widely criticized: as I have argued elsewhere (Newman 2001; Newman 2005a) there was no clear shift from government to governance or from hierarchy to networks. But three issues are worth noting. The first reflects the strong New Labour policy focus on children and families. This can be understood as emerging out of the success of feminism in the transformation of social policy addressed in the previous section. The second generated shifts in the policy process itself. External stakeholders were drawn into policy circles, ‘expertise’ and evidence became valorized, think-tanks and

advisors were drawn close to politicians and the Civil Service, and there was a new emphasis on public participation. Third, the institutional architecture of government changed; Sure Start, the Social Exclusion Unit, FPI, a long-term childcare strategy and a Childcare Czar signalled not only new policy foci but also a new way of 'doing' policy. Governments established multiple projects and initiatives, looked to local partnership working as a key lever of policy delivery, and devolved some responsibility for managing and evaluating policy to other agencies.

Participants in this research both helped generate these shifts and mobilized new spaces of power within them. Sure Start was a 'cross-cutting' policy agenda that encompassed issues of childcare, parenting, early education, health and family support, with an emphasis on collaborative working and local involvement of both stakeholders (professionals working in the field, funders, local governance bodies) and parents, grandparents and local communities. It was overseen by three different departments of government and was an early example of an attempt to deliver more 'joined up' governance. Naomi described the experience as follows:

I think what you bring from the voluntary sector is an understanding of coalitions, and just working with the grain of what people want, which is very counter-cultural. In the Civil Service you work to a minister, and you work to a department, but working across departments seemed to challenge people. What was most interesting about it all was that I had no idea how different all this was. I didn't know that working across was a problem. I didn't understand about departmental policy. There was so much that was completely innovative about Sure Start but at the time I didn't know it was unusual. (Naomi Eisenstadt)

Each Sure Start project was shaped by local actors within the overarching requirements of the programme, and provision was usually through a partnership body comprising local authority, voluntary sector and professional stakeholders. This marked a profound shift in central/local relations, albeit one that was not sustained (Anning and Ball 2008; Belsky, Melhuish and Barnes 2007; and Naomi's own account, Eisenstadt 2011).

Mary MacLeod's work helped generate a shift towards more participative styles of policymaking. ChildLine raised issues of bullying, the position of children in care, child abuse, family relationships, and children and the law. Mary used evidence they had gathered from children in presenting evidence to an intergovernmental commission on children in care, and organized a major conference on 'Children and the Law' in 1999 that marked a shift towards enabling children's voices and interests to be inscribed in policymaking and legal practice. She drew extensively on this experience of bringing the voices of children directly to policymakers in her work at FPI:

There's an assumption that professionals know best, and that professional intervention is by definition benign. But when you hear from children themselves about what they need in order to live their lives differently, and how they see

services as a kind of juggernaut coming into their lives, taking things over, you get a different view and a sense from the children themselves that it's always possible to change things. (Mary MacLeod)

FPI was one of the organizations pushing for a stronger place for public consultation and involvement in policy, and:

Well, I think it's all over government now in the sense that they have to consult parents and families. Some years ago there were lots of policy documents that didn't have such consultation, so we set up parent/politician events with lead politicians. I don't think that [consultation] would exist in the same way without us. (Mary MacLeod)

It is fruitful to compare this focus on consultation to the work of Carole Harte and other community-based actors discussed in chapter 3; while the spaces of power are very different, both were concerned with bringing population groups excluded from power into direct communication with policy actors (see also Barnes *et al.* 2007).

Mary also typifies the paradoxes associated with the 'close encounters' of this chapter. She described her role at FPI as trying to be the 'voice of reason' on family policy and described her work as:

the everyday business of trying to influence the public and political conversation on 'the family' and to make it less punitive about particular families: not only those that were not two-parent heterosexual, but those with working mothers. And it was about the attempt to get into the public domain recognition of the effect, not only of poverty, but of other influences like the commercialization of neighbourhoods, the absence of play, long working hours, all the issues that are now bundled into 'family-friendly' policies. We were trying to fight the 'blame the parents' narrative. (Mary MacLeod)

This public conversation was conducted with other feminist academics (those at the Centre for Care, Values and the Future of Welfare³ as well as women associated with the Women's Budget Group and Fawcett Society); with policy actors who had been touched by feminism; with some voluntary organizations and NGOs, and so on. They took such conversations not only into policy circles but to the media, party conferences and the wider political landscape. This was remarkably successful: the term 'family-friendly' policy was adopted by politicians of all political persuasions in Britain. But there is something of a paradox here. Family-friendly policies secured substantial benefits for women struggling to combine care and paid work responsibilities, or to survive on low incomes. It also brought benefits for men as fathers. But the price was that the phrase became stripped of its feminist associations and used in conjunction with other political projects, for example, those that valorized 'hard-working families' and denigrated other population groups. At the same time, as Mary remarked, the tendency to blame families for problems of crime, ill-health, poor education and worklessness continues, sharpening considerably in the aftermath of the disturbances in English cities in August 2011.

Think-tanks were a rather different contributor to public conversations. They were not usually a space for 'progressive' politics, but often provided spaces of power through which participants could exert influence. Lisa Harker described how the think-tank role had advantages over campaigning organizations in that think-tanks got listened to where other agencies might not. She also contrasted her role with that of FPI:

Mary would have to get into a lot of detail because of her area of specialism, she must be official, she must have a strong commitment to the department she faced. Whereas I think there's a lot more freedom around the special advisors, and the political journalists, and that sort of whole world of rather murky ... all the other ways of influencing to get where the power is, particular under Blair. I mean the departments became less powerful (apart from the Treasury), and the special advisors in and around No.10 wielded a lot of the power, so I guess in short I think think-tanks know how to wield power in those environments rather than having to use the formal channels which many organizations would have had to focus on. (Lisa Harker)

I asked Lisa where she got her ideas from.

Largely from other people so actually a lot of ideas aren't really new ideas. One of the success stories would be the Child Trust Fund, which was invented in an IPPR handbook. Actually the idea came from the United States. So yes, you get your ideas by scouting around for other people's ideas. And the thing that I think we could do very well was to try to broker a way forward between different opinions in different parties. So if you're working on environmental issues, for example, Greenpeace would take a line and say 'no more gas or coal-fired power stations', and the government line might be 'we have to do that, or it's the nuclear option'. IPPR would disengage with both sides, and try to find a way through that was a balance between those two principles. And I think that made us sort of unpopular with purists who would stick to their fundamental principles, but it's a way of ensuring that any policy that gets made isn't as bad as it might have been. (Lisa Harker)

There are some stark implicit contrasts here: between the independent broker role which she attributes to IPPR and the role of campaigners who have a clear position on an issue (though Mary also spoke about being the 'voice of reason' between different interests); between the 'murky' world of politics where influence can happen and 'official' channels; between practical politics and 'purists'. The extracts also point to two different kinds of work: one concerned with generating new things (the Child's Trust Fund, for example) and the other mediating between different interests in order to make policy 'less bad' than it might otherwise have been.

These accounts suggest something of the changing nature of the spaces of power participants generated and the ways in which these produced 'close encounters' with policy and governmental actors. The period of the Third Way governments in Britain and beyond saw the emergence of 'joined up governance', 'partnership' and 'participation' as dominant policy discourses. These spaces emerged in part from the styles of 'doing' policy and governance

that had been developed by women ‘knitting together’ people, movements and campaigns in multiple spaces of power. They came to greater significance as those who had worked in voluntary sector or community-based projects took on governance roles in an expanded and plural policy. This was no accident – women with fractured working lives were less likely to climb an established occupational ladder than to find spaces emerging from and constitutive of ‘new’ governing rationales. That is, women were highly active in new governance forms but also used the new spaces of power these offered to initiate new pathways and projects.

Many such pathways and projects focused on the complex policy problems that arose in the aftermath of Thatcherism: urban deprivation, child poverty, social exclusion and other ‘wicked issues’. In turn, they opened up space for new cross-cutting agendas to be raised: on health and well-being, domestic violence, community safety, obesity and nutrition, climate change and so on. Such problems were ‘wicked issues’ in that they had no clear and agreed definition, were associated with multiple interlocking causes and could not be resolved by any single agency or department of government alone. ‘Partnerships’ opened up particularly significant spaces of power, not least because of the ways in which relatively junior actors and senior institutional and policy actors were brought to the same table. This did not eradicate power differences but did generate contingent spaces of opportunity. The next example is taken from the account of Julia Lowndes (G3), a local government worker who used her post as lead officer on a community safety partnership body to develop and improve provision on domestic violence and sexual health:

I went to a conference in London about domestic violence, and it was about the health responses that we were all shouting about at the time because they were so dreadful. Towards the end there was a kind of opposite number to me working in Community Safety [in a London borough], and she talked about their ‘Snapshot Project’ which provided cameras to the local Women’s Aid for women who didn’t want to go to the police, so that they could photograph their injuries and keep a record, and I thought, ‘My God, that’s a good idea’ so came back to [Birmingham] and worked with a group called Healthy Gay Life [serving men who work in the sex trade] as well as Women’s Aid, Victim Support and others to get funding to get that started. All these groups had been in competition with one and another for funding, and now we’re together, they’ll be getting the cameras for free, together with training from the police. It’s been about bringing the third sector in and getting the statutory sector to think outside of the box; getting the police to provide training for the voluntary sector when they knew that people wouldn’t come to them to report crimes like domestic violence or homophobic crime, and they stuck their neck out there because we put the seed money in and convinced people this was a good idea. (Julia Lowndes)

Such work shows how ideas are ‘pulled down’ or ‘translated’ from other places and people and made to work in a new context. This offers a rather different sense of translation from that discussed in the previous chapter, where

community-based claims, needs or languages were ‘translated’ in ways that rendered them acceptable to policymakers. Here the process of translation is one in which issues are resignified or rebadged so that they could be levered into existing policy programmes and resource streams. The extract from Julia hints at the work of resignification: here a process in which domestic violence comes to be represented as a health issue, thus rendering it a suitable issue for funding and coordinated action in order to represent the views of marginalized citizens to government.

This work can be viewed through Larner and Craig’s study of partnerships in Aotearoa, New Zealand (Larner and Craig 2005). The ‘strategic brokers’ they identify tend to be community activists who move into more formally recognized roles as local issues become politicized and partnerships become a favoured technology of governing. They emphasize that women are disproportionately represented in these brokering roles, but the political context of their work remains fraught. Brokers are required to translate their political goals into technical processes and to emphasize collaboration over conflict. And while the process skills they offer are significant assets, these are severely stretched to deal with the multiple pressures of their role (see also Newman 2001). Larner and Craig view such pressures as arising from the work of joining up the fragmentation arising from a previous phase of neoliberalism: ‘In this way, the neoliberal state gets to have its cake and eat it too, courtesy of the expanded domestic domains of feminised strategic brokers’ (Larner and Craig 2005: 27). But the paradox is that such brokers can also mobilize the spaces of power that partnerships offer to secure ‘other agendas’ and alternative political projects.

The politics of ‘mainstreaming’ and ‘monitoring’

The previous section showed how activists worked with policymakers and mobilized new governance arrangements in which the borders between politics and policy became blurred. Here, I turn to how participants sought to make their achievements and successes ‘stick’ by rendering them into governance technologies that were less dependent on the willingness of specific actors to maintain them. ‘Mainstreaming’ equality and ‘monitoring’ global patterns of exploitation were, in different ways, examples of the tensions this generated.

Mainstreaming

Equal opportunity work was not a primary focus of my study, but the accounts do open up important questions about how such work is remembered and currently understood. Lisa Duggan (Duggan 2003), writing about the fate

of feminism in the context of the rise of neoliberal economic policies in the United States, argues that the neoliberal endorsement of ‘equality feminism’ and ‘gay normality’ were part of a process of mainstreaming associated with ‘Third Way’ rhetoric, a process that acknowledged diversity as a means of appropriating identity politics. McRobbie (McRobbie 2009) builds on this to trace what she terms a ‘cultural process of “undoing”’ (McRobbie 2009: 30) of the politics of feminism. She describes the emergence of a ‘gender aware’ governmentality that takes feminism into account (McRobbie 2009: 140). But it is only liberal, ‘equality feminism’ that was taken into account at the expense of radical feminism’s concerns with social criticism. The decline of feminism, she suggests, goes in parallel to the mainstreaming of women’s issues. She is highly critical of Sylvia Walby’s support of mainstreaming strategies:

Gender mainstreaming can be thought of as a non-conflictual accommodating kind of programme or schema which follows a path which has some equalising potential, but which in essence can be absorbed and taken on board by the structures and institutions of capitalism. When, earlier in this book I have talked about ‘feminism being taken into account’, it is this strain of feminism which permits offices of government to claim that women’s interests are indeed being looked after. The vocabulary of gender mainstreaming is ‘modern’, managerial and professional, a programmatic approach, with all kinds of tools for evaluation and assessment of outcomes which can be enrolled as marks of good practice within corporate as well as state and public sector institutions. (McRobbie 2009: 154)

In a similar vein Angela Mason came under extensive criticism for her work at Stonewall from gay rights lobbies who depicted her work as a professionalization of sexual politics and as promoting a ‘normalization’ of heterosexual models of partnership and marriage (e.g. Richardson 2005). These are convincing critiques, but operate at a high level of abstraction that separate governance technologies from agency. I will return to such debates in Chapter 8, but here want to draw on the accounts of early practitioners of mainstreaming working in particular spaces of power (left-leaning institutions) at a specific political/cultural moment (the 1980s). Marion Macalpine (G2) held a post as an Equal Opportunities Officer within the GLC:

There were 20,000 GLC staff, and my role was to set up programmes in FE [further education] colleges that would allow access to interview to good jobs in the GLC at different levels. It was a big scheme with lots of places on it, and it was targeted to women, ethnic minorities, lesbians and gay men, and people with disabilities. Class was not mentioned but it was all about second-chance education. Obviously all of us in the Unit were involved as well in setting up and developing all those recruitment and development procedures, which have now become totally formulaic and discredited. However, at that time it was a huge shift, wasn't it? It did feel amazing to be in at the beginning of that. But now they've now become formulaic and wrongly used. (Marion Macalpine)

Avtar Brah, of the same generational cohort, also worked on equality issues in the GLC; after its closure in 1985 she went to work at Birkbeck, a college within the University of London:

My job was an unusual one. I was a lecturer in multicultural studies, expected to develop education programmes that would attract students who wouldn't normally come – second-chance students. There wasn't resistance to developing the work – but they wanted me to speak to large meetings (of the whole faculty) about multiculturalism. But I said I didn't want to be the multicultural specialist, that something had to be done across the board. And the Director was behind me. Politicking was key; we had to be creative. I think the most creative part of my work, with Jane Hoy, Mary Kennedy and with five or six other women, we decided that we would try to mainstream it within the faculty. We set up the first equal opportunity group, we asked every section of the faculty to look at the nature of their students and what kinds of tutors they had. This was the most difficult part of the work but because we had backing people had to do it. Lots of creative things were done, some very creative courses were developed. I don't know what's happened since – directors change, the politics moves, but for a few years we had a very active kind of EO policy and practice programme. (Avtar Brah)

The extracts show how the 'invention' of mainstreaming was possible because of positive alignments between activist concerns and a sympathetic institutional climate: the GLC (a left-wing local government body) and Birkbeck (an education institution historically committed to attracting students from a wide range of class backgrounds). Both participants referred, prompted, to its impoverishment over time. I noticed that Avtar used the word 'mainstreaming' and asked if it was around in the 1980s:

No, that came afterwards. We were doing it [mainstreaming, widening participation] before there was a word for it. Now, of course, it happens because of legislation as well as because senior management have been made responsible for widening participation. But it's a different kind of ballgame now. Some of the creativity is lost as it goes beyond the special moment when we were working with grassroots women, part-time students. Now it comes from the top, has a different kind of impact. (Avtar Brah)

Similarly, Marion reflected on how equality procedures had become 'formulaic' and 'wrongly used'. What had been lost, in part, were the 'close encounters' that sustained political momentum. Looking back to the notions of translation introduced above, equality politics had become one, and only one, element of new assemblages of actors, laws, policy guidelines, committees, job descriptions, management practices, appeals procedures, training handbooks, performance management systems and audit mechanisms. And as Tania Li has argued, in a different context, the process of assemblage can serve to render an issue into a technical matter and thus depoliticize it (Li 2007b; see also Newman and Clarke 2009).

Viewing mainstreaming as an assemblage of diverse elements draws attention to its ambiguity. What happens in any particular time and place

cannot be predicted since elements can be combined and recombined in new ways, with unpredictable outcomes. I want, then, to point to two rather different assemblages of equality work that took place some years after the pioneering work of Avtar and Marion. Here is Adi Cooper talking about her work as a strategic director in local government in the 2000s:

There's never been any kind of focus on LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender] work in the borough, and someone from the police force wanted to set up a forum. My role was to support that and it is now established. The approach was for all of us to make personal pledges to support this issue and work for change. That's using my power [as a strategic director]. And in terms of the sort of formalized equality standards within the council, my bit of the council is ahead of the rest because I think I'm pushing people all the time, asking what they are doing, what they could do. (Adi Cooper)

Angela Mason, whose work as a political campaigner in Stonewall was described earlier, later took up a post in the Blair government, heading what was then the Women's Equality Unit:

Ministers control the whole thing but I think you have to generate enthusiasm. You have to sort of have a vision that this is possible and persuade others of that position, and so you don't get sort of ... because there's more stuff in the Civil Service that will knock you back absolutely all of the time. Much more than if you're a director of a small organization where you can say, 'I'm going to do this', and then you do it and if it works then you get the sort of glory of it, whereas in government you have to stick to your guns but you do have to enthuse people. Both Bills I was involved had a lot of stakeholder input, and involved a lot of working across government departments. So you have to build relationships, actually. I mean when you're trying to persuade Conservatives to come on board with gay rights or persuade other departments not just put a block on it. That's what you have to stop them doing, and you do it through building relationships, I think. (Angela Mason)

I told Angela that this had come through very strongly with everybody to whom I had talked, and asked what kind of stakeholders she had involved in the preparation of the Bills.

Well, we had a lot of discussions, listening to the gay community, partnerships, and then with the EHRC [Equality and Human Rights Commission]. We had a Stakeholder Task Group, which we took quite seriously trying to arrive at key decisions about the shape of the new Commission. Even so far as some of the parliamentary drafting we did with stakeholders – that was quite a first. (Angela Mason)

I asked if there was much resistance.

Oh, there was enormous resistance – I mean there really was a sort of root and branch opposition. But I think by the end of it we had created quite a good platform. (Angela Mason)

These extracts from Adi and Angela show how equality work was not simply a set of bureaucratic instruments used to deliver ‘mainstreamed’ programmes but remained political work; and also show how it adapted to the ‘new governance’ style of policy work noted earlier, based on partnerships and high stakeholder involvement. But each also drew on technologies (the ‘personal pledge’), policy scripts and equality discourses. They each reassembled elements of past actions and events: in Angela’s case, of prior attempts to institutionalize equality at the centre of government; in Adi’s case, the legacies of a police service’s responses to earlier charges of ‘institutional racism’⁴ and its subsequent attempts to forge equality partnerships. They each also signalled new elements of equality assemblages: the shift to ‘human rights’ discourse and the inclusion of bisexual and transgender issues.

At the same time mainstreaming itself was becoming mainstreamed as institutional practice, being taken up in the governance instruments of the European Union, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and other global, national and regional institutions. The New Public Management of the 1990s offered new instruments, including performance measurement, target setting and audit procedures that were readily appropriated by activists. Gender mainstreaming predominated over other possible axes of equality policy and as a result some – but only some – feminist agendas were acknowledged within social policy and some women were included in policy circles and in governance institutions. But, following McRobbie’s argument, these inclusions concerned the progress or improvement of the position of women in an otherwise unchanged social order. Those elements of feminism that had transformational potential remained ‘outside’ the mainstream, and not incorporated into policy and practice.

There is much to agree with here, but I want to raise a few concerns. One is the idea of a clear distinction that can be made between liberal and radical feminisms: many of the women interviewed seemed to work across these categories. For example, Theresa Stewart, a lifelong Labour Party activist, was strongly associated with mainstreaming women’s issues within Labour Party politics and within the local authority of which she served, for a period, as leader. But she also successfully campaigned on extending the availability of contraceptive advice for unmarried women. Angela Mason, who used her political skills to campaign for radical and revolutionary political agendas, also worked to secure ‘liberal’ changes such as the recognition of civil partnerships. She reflected, somewhat ironically, on having herself become mainstreamed as the issues about which she was concerned were acknowledged in policy, and it is certainly the case that in her later roles in the Women’s Equality Unit and the Equality and Human Rights Commission she had become deeply entangled in government. But she continued to offer radical perspectives on power and agency and, at the time of the interview, was continuing her political work as Deputy Leader of Camden Council.

Second, processes of appropriation and resignification are not unidirectional: spaces of power are those in which actors can mobilize governmental resources and appropriate governmental discourses. The inclusion, development and empowerment programmes that proliferated under New Labour drew extensively on feminist praxis. Funding streams could be co-opted to generate rather more politicized subjects and assertive actors than public policy had envisaged. In addition, we can see how this work sought to transform not only the subjects involved but also the agencies concerned. Equality mainstreaming can co-opt activists, but perhaps can also be viewed as a process through which social movements can co-opt the state, its functions, powers and resources. I do not want here to celebrate their success: my focus, rather, is on the paradoxes that arise in such ‘close encounters’; how such paradoxes are differently experienced and lived in particular, time-specific governmental projects; and, over time, how the focus shifted from questions of ‘how could policy change be secured’ to ‘how could policy provisions be monitored and institutionalized’.

Monitory power

Monitoring was a key element of equality policy, but was also used in contexts where national or institutional policy had insufficient reach. Keane (Keane 2009) has drawn attention to what he terms the rise of ‘monitory democracy’ – the public scrutiny and control of unaccountable power. His argument is that contemporary, especially global, dynamics and flows of power now reach into areas in which democratic institutions can only play a limited role. Monitory power takes place through media scrutiny, blogging, congresses and through new forms of cross-border institution. It is central to the work of the Women’s Budget Group, discussed earlier, and to the wider movement promoting gender impact assessments. It is also exercised through a proliferating array of standards and codes of conduct.

The growing significance of monitory power is situated in contemporary problems of accountability and legitimacy in plural systems of governance. It has given rise to a huge proliferation of institutions concerned with quality, inspection, audit and evaluation (Power 1994; Newman 2001). These developments have been widely criticized. The nature of ‘evidence’ is always open to contestation, and the instrumentalism of measurement and monitoring practices detaches data from the experiences out of which campaigns and other forms of activism emerge. But, like mainstreaming, monitory power can also be appropriated and levered by activists. Social movements across the globe have used measures such as audit and measurement, monitoring and reporting both to bring particular forms of inequality to public attention and to secure forms of redress for those who have experienced breaches of laws and other policy instruments.

It is interesting that two of the participants in this research, Sukhwant Dhaliwal and Sasha Roseneil, from different generations and from very different political backgrounds, had both been involved in Newham Monitoring Project, formed in the early 1980s as a community-based anti-racist project in the face of the failure of statutory bodies to address racist attacks and to monitor police harassment of the Black community. The Gender Audit Project on which Hannah Berry worked is part of an international turn to audit and evaluation of equality goals, and its promotion by bodies such as the ILO. And the challenge to the 2010 UK coalition government budget by the Fawcett Society represents a significant use of audit and scrutiny to check government action. While the Fawcett Society's bid for judicial review of the 2010 budget did not succeed, its actions brought the likely effects of the budget on women and others into the public domain and generated considerable debate.

Monitory power is also inscribed in a proliferating array of review bodies, public enquiries, and the appointment of 'independent' lay and expert representatives on boards, trusts and commissions. Marian Barnes (G3), a social policy academic and activist promoting service-user involvement and rights, was invited to become a Mental Health Act Commissioner, and she became particularly interested in the position of women detained in high security facilities. In the early 1990s she gave evidence at a public inquiry into the treatment of patients, in particular women patients, at Ashworth Hospital; the inquiry was one of the factors that eventually led to the decision that women should no longer be admitted to such high security facilities:

This [being a Commissioner] was for me a very important experience. I did very much feel that being involved in MHAC [Mental Health Act Commission] was an opportunity to influence 'from the inside' even though many regarded MHAC as toothless. And the experience of women in the special hospital system was extreme – an issue that rarely gets made public. I felt I was bringing together research-based knowledge with a commitment to women who were in highly powerless situations in a context in which I had a route to power. And in doing so I was making an alliance with a woman on the inside (as in working in the system) who needed an ally because of the awfulness of the experience of working there as well as because of her commitment to the women who were patients. So one of the issues for me was that it was an experience of being able to be more effective in influencing policy thinking through involvement in what was a statutory regulatory body, rather than through research. (Marian Barnes)

I will return to Marian's account in Chapter 6, where I explore the turn to evidence and expertise in public policy more fully; but of particular interest here is the alliance between external 'experts' and internal 'whistleblowers' in bringing issues of exploitation and abuse to public attention.

Finally, monitory power is associated with the growing significance of global struggles for social justice. The human rights lawyer Camilla Warren (G3)

describes how, in her earlier CND work with women's groups in Asia and Africa:

we were trying to work towards global labour standards to stop companies subcontracting in ways that exploited local labour forces across different supply chains, going to the lowest standards to expand their profit margins. We tried to build on commonalities, on the common experiences of people working in these various supply chains, people who happen to be women in usually part time work. We linked up with trade unions and tried to exert pressure so that all of the workers in a particular supply chain, whatever the country, could have common legally enforceable labour standards. But the NGOs that were involved – the politics was rather wishy-washy, they didn't have a strong enough critique and couldn't form critical blocks, and the trade unions were a bit all over the shop as well. So it was co-opted by an institution called the Ethical Trade Union Initiative, which was a partnership of companies, NGOs and trade unions, and it ended up with companies dominating it. It became all about auditing when I think it should have focused on campaigning for a living wage, that's what women need. It all became around health and safety and social audits, which at the end of the day they never really do that much. Anyway companies are constantly squeezing factories on price in order to get cheaper and cheaper goods here [the UK]. It doesn't matter how many audits you do, because the conditions are just getting worse anyway. (Camilla Warren)

This extract draws attention to the limitations of monitory power, limitations that resonate with my earlier discussion of mainstreaming. That is, it can be co-opted and detached from the politics that generated it. Camilla explicitly contrasts 'auditing' with 'campaigning', emphasizing the weakness of the former. Kate Raworth, who worked for Oxfam on global supply chains and women's work, was also doubtful about the power of standards and codes of conduct:

Well you know these factory managers are incredibly difficult to regulate, so retailers were hiring NGOs to go round trying to monitor them, and it was all about enforcing the code of conduct and making sure the factory manager behaved – a very policing role. And the whole NGO debate was about how do you monitor effectively, and do you do surprise visits or not. What we tried to do in our campaigning – and I'm very proud that I feel we did it successfully and it really did shift the terms of debate – was to say to the retailers, 'It's not just about monitoring what's going on in the factories, you need to look at your own terms of trading, your own purchasing practices.' (Kate Raworth)

I asked Kate for an example.

Tesco's, for example, has somebody whose job it is to talk to suppliers about its code of conduct, to monitor its implementation, but then they have a buyer who might say, 'Well, I want it 30 per cent cheaper, I want it delivered faster, and I'm going to give you less regular, less advanced notice.' So monitoring the code of conduct is divorced from the purchasing practices. And you can see how the supermarkets are passing the costs and risks of business down the supply chain. It's called lean manufacturing, and it's a wonderful business model for supermarkets,

working with minimal stocks, fast turnaround and just-in-time delivery. But we showed that this results in incredibly insecure working conditions for women on the farms and in the factories, hired on temporary contracts, pressured to work overtime, or left standing at the factory bus stop each morning, not knowing whether they will get any work that day ...

The work we did looked at how pressures were passed through the supply chain in twelve countries, focused on the garment and fresh produce sectors. We showed how the principles of lean manufacturing were translating into poor terms and conditions particularly for women employed in these sectors. And the report had a significant impact. Certainly in the UK it shifted the terms of debate amongst retailers within the Ethical Trading Initiative from talking about codes of conduct to talking about their purchasing practices with their suppliers. It was fascinating when we first met with retailers and said, 'Tell us about how you ensure labour standards in your supply chains.' Oh, they had lots to say about monitoring their codes of conduct, and then we said, 'Well, what about your own purchasing practices?', and we were met with an absolute silence – they didn't know what to say, they'd never thought about it. That was how we knew we had hit on something. (Kate Raworth)

Both Camilla and Kate highlight the importance of political work alongside mainstreaming and monitoring standards. But both examples also show how the links between activism and policy work have been – in part – reconfigured to take account not only of the spread of new knowledge media but also the shifts of power within and beyond nation states. This speaks indirectly to, and perhaps adds a fresh perspective on, debates about the mainstreaming and monitoring of equality goals that have tended to dominate much feminist literature in recent years. It suggests how codified standards need to be set alongside more politicized concern with how and where power is exercised. It also suggests the need to set concerns about the employment rights of workers within a nation state against a more global sensibility of how patterns of exploitation are reconfigured as capitalist enterprises shift production sites to places where such rights may not exist.

As these examples show, the concept of monitory power is used to categorize highly diverse forms of power and agency. It is associated with government bodies of audit, inspection and quality assurance that seek to exert control over professional autonomy and judgement; with transnational NGOs that seek to secure new forms of global governance; with human rights lawyers and activists who seek to challenge governmental and corporate abuse and exploitation; with researchers seeking to generate and use knowledge as a political and policy resource; and with individuals bringing private actions within institutions into public view, either overtly (bringing information to the attention of the media) or covertly (through alliances with those with a respected public voice). We might extend this list to encompass academic research, citizen journalism and the use of the web as a means of generating new forms of public scrutiny. Condensing all of this into a single form of 'monitory' power

that is – or is capable of – supplanting democratic power, as Keane claims, is problematic. The examples I have drawn on suggest highly different forms and uses of power, based on highly diverse forms of expertise and with differential access to resources that might generate publicity and action. Nevertheless, they point to the significance of transnational and transdisciplinary lines of communication and action; and to the importance of ‘knowledge-work’ as a form of political agency. I return to these themes in Chapters 6 and 7.

Conclusion

This chapter began with the question of how far ‘close encounters’ has led to the incorporation of activists as they engage in policy work that enmeshes them in dominant forms of political and institutional power. But in the course of the analysis a second question has opened up about how far ‘success’ in bringing about policy shifts and legal reforms is compromised as the issues become mainstreamed. Two dimensions of mainstreaming have been examined. The first concerned the mainstreaming of ‘gender agendas’ in what has been termed the ‘social investment state’, while the second centred on the incorporation of equality agendas into ‘mainstream’ institutional practice.

The feminist challenges to the maternalism of post-war social policies led, in the United Kingdom, to significant policy shifts. But these were, in retrospect, vulnerable to appropriation by Third Way governments seeking to modernize welfare states. Gøsta Esping-Andersen (Esping-Andersen 2009) was a leading proponent of the turn from protection and welfare to the promotion of work as the route to female equality, together with the advocacy of social investment strategies that viewed children as the citizen workers of the future, able to take their place in the global knowledge economy. Women no longer need to struggle for equality, his analysis suggests, since modern states now depend on their equal participation in the workforce and should therefore make every effort to enable them to do so. States should invest more in education and in improving the life chances of children as the citizen workers of the future, thus enabling women to participate more fully.

The ideals and practices of the social investment state appropriated and resignified feminist arguments – not only did the ‘label come off’ as campaigns and claims led to policy adaptations, but government actors invented their own labels inscribed with a distorted image of what gender equality might look like and how it might be achieved, diluted their own policies and attempted to pass responsibility to subordinate tiers of governance. However, the spaces of power that women opened up and mobilized were not simply governmentally determined spaces – as Brah suggests (Brah 1996: 181), spaces occur at the point of confluence of different political, cultural, organizational and personal

projects. The work of aligning these multiple and competing projects was the gendered labour of the women on whose accounts I have drawn here: those who brought feminist perspectives, children's or human rights discourses and alternative cultural practices into their 'close encounters' with the policy process, whether as academics (Hilary Land, Ruth Lister, Sue Himmelweit, the staff of Care, Values and the Future of Welfare [CAVA]), as leaders of campaigning organizations (Ruth Lister at CPAG, Angela Mason at Stonewall), as directors and workers in charities and NGOs (Mary MacLeod and FPI, Kate Raworth and OXFAM), or as human rights lawyers and independent commissioners (Camilla Warren, Marian Barnes). The incorporation of gender agendas into social policy cannot, then, be simply attributed to forms of economic neoliberalism dominated by the search for cheaper, more flexible and less unionized (female) labour. Even within the economic agenda, ambiguities arise: as Ruth Lister comments, it is dangerous to assume unity or integration in these new state forms: 'Such ambiguities mean that there are spaces, such as around childcare and poverty, that civil society actors can exploit to argue for a more genuinely child focused and also more egalitarian approach' (Lister 2004: 176).

The participants in this research are evidence of precisely the ways in which actors can exploit such spaces. However, this is not a celebration of their agency, nor of the benefits that mainstreaming equality agendas secured. Spaces of power, as I have argued, are specific to the political-cultural formations of particular times and places. Much of the work of those quoted in this chapter looks back to a particular period of Third Way governance, a period in which many feminists were drawn into policy circles and in which partnerships proliferated. In the political climate of austerity following the banking crisis and subsequent recession, many of the achievements of the women discussed here are being reversed. The process of welfare state retrenchment and public service cuts are producing new landscapes of inequality that are highly gendered, classed and racialized. And new policy architectures are potentially taking us back to the formations of welfare that led to earlier campaigns for women's financial independence.

In such a climate debates about incorporation, professionalization and mainstreaming seem rather dated; as activists move back out to the streets to protest against cuts and austerity, and to challenge global capitalism and its agents, the bankers, so the fate of equality legislation and of those who enacted it in organizations can appear to be yesterday's agenda. But the work of such women has had a lot to say about politics and political skills: the importance of coalition building, of networking, of translating and of brokering between different sites and scales of power. The work of all of the women discussed in this chapter can be understood as traversing multiple borders between central and local government, between different departments of government, between different sectors, between different stakeholders and interests. But they also

worked the borders between activist networks and policy actors, bringing their political commitments and activist experience into their 'close encounters' with government (see Chapter 9 for examples of how such work continues).

The relationships, separations and tensions between campaigning 'outside' and taking up such spaces of influence are now evident in a range of contemporary struggles: on environmental governance, interventions on global supply chains and human rights as a new hegemonic global discourse. Each of these is, of course, subject to incorporation and depoliticization; but they form crucial sites in which struggles over meaning and practice are currently taking place (Collins 2003). Each draws extensively on feminist praxis: the *how* of politics and policy as well as the *what*. And each has to engage with institutional sites of power and authority: the focus of the next chapter.