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Border Work: Generating Spaces of Power

Being an ‘outsider’, being ‘close to the ground’, being ‘out there’, ‘on the other side’, being ‘inside-outside’, ‘meeting in the middle’, ‘shouting from the sidelines’, ‘working on the edge’, being ‘marginal’, being ‘in and against’ – the interviews were full of such images. As I read and reread the transcripts I began to wonder why this sense of being simultaneously inside and outside was so frequent. One possible reading would highlight women’s marginal status in relation to established institutions. This may be due to the predominance of women in unpaid or low-paid work, in part-time jobs or on short-term contracts, or their marginality to the ‘clubs’ that dictate dominant institutional norms. But there is another reading that runs through participant accounts: that of holding commitments and allegiances that are grounded ‘outside’ while working in, or engaging with, ‘insider’ positions. That is, spatial metaphors were used to denote political identities and dilemmas.

This takes us to one of the central questions of the book: how women with commitments to working for social and political change can work the spaces of power within neoliberal ruling relations. As I noted in Chapter 1, such work is often viewed through a binary system of thought in which narratives celebrating individual agency are set against narratives of incorporation and professionalization. In subsequent chapters I have tried to offer a more nuanced account, drawing out contradictions and dilemmas and showing something of how these were negotiated by participants. Here, my focus is on teasing out how such negotiations are conducted through different forms of ‘border work’. This is the substance of the first part of this chapter, while the second offers a number of different theoretical and conceptual resources for illuminating border work as generative – and gendered – labour.

Borders and crossings

The idea of border work produces different possible mappings of space and power. Sometimes place was used as key metaphors to express difference:

You can’t grow up in the West Highlands without being very aware of the social structure of the history of the clearances, of absentee landlords, and my family had ... certainly my grandparents were extremely poor and my mother, you know,

there were periods of time in which they were close to starving, so all of that ... there isn't any question that you would consider yourself, you know, on the other side. (Mary MacLeod; my emphasis)

My mother came from a poorer family – she left school at the age of thirteen to go and be an apprentice baker. But she made absolutely the most of her life bringing up her kids, feeding us on practically nothing, and helping us to progress and succeed. I feel as though I've had such a privileged life in comparison. I got a scholarship to a very posh school which was full of all the fee-paying girls, so I became very aware of class differences. I learned to sort of live with being me but also blending. So there was a duality I was aware of, of fitting in and also being the me who still lived with people I loved in that place [Bradford], who formed the basic me. And maybe a source of sensitivity to what are the informal rules of the game. If you really belong then you don't need to read those rules. If you don't belong then you do. (Sue Richards; my emphasis)

I am neither a South African nor a complete outsider to South Africa. I felt very aware of my own ambiguous national roots, or rights, but also an obligation to speak and write about the inequalities – especially the particular nature of gendered inequality – in many places, and the activism this gives rise to. (Ida Susser; my emphasis)

Differences of place, history and class are overlaid in these extracts to express something of the 'selves' who later engaged with public policy, and to suggest something of the contradictory politics of belonging. Both Mary and Sue were highly successful actors in the policy world, but both attributed some of this success to bringing 'outsider' perspectives to their work, while Ida viewed her contribution to the politics of AIDS in South Africa to her ambiguous standing within the nation and her peripatetic experience.

Inside-outside metaphors were also used to depict political backgrounds and belongings. The next extracts are from women involved in equality work who brought 'outsider' identities into heavily circumscribed institutional spaces. Again, such outside perspectives could be productive:

Well, I think I was an outsider, I mean I think there's no question, it's very hard to, particularly somebody like me, to be a real insider, and I think that was helpful. (Angela Mason; my emphasis)

Pioneers of equality work – Angela Mason and Avtar Brah – brought strong political identities and a history of activism that enabled them to assert collective subject positions (Black, gay) in organizations that had hitherto not recognized them (see Chapter 4). They were outsiders not only because they were not acculturated to the Civil Service or local government 'ways of doing things', but also because of their political commitments and a sense that their very presence potentially threatened to rupture the taken-for-granted organizational silences on issues of race and sexuality. The work of both Angela (in central and local government, and in the Equality and Human Rights Commission) and Avtar Brah (in local government and higher education) was supported by strong

external links that sustained equality work as a political, not just bureaucratic, project. Being an ‘outsider’ enabled Angela to offer her considerable political skills gained in other spaces to her work in government. But others, from later generations and social/cultural positions, faced considerable barriers. Munira Thobani came to the United Kingdom from Tanzania at the age of thirteen (see Chapter 2) and had a varied background before being appointed as a race equality advisor in a London borough in the 1980s. This was her first job after graduating:

It was very interesting but very scary. I went in at a senior level, as part of the management team, working with white men who had been with social services man and boy and knew how things should be done. But there was also a group of Black women social workers – some of whom resented not having been appointed to the post. I was not part of this radical grouping. It was all very painful, and I felt scared of those who looked down on me since I didn't have the professional background, I wasn't really part of social work. But I managed to achieve what I did because of developing networks across the Council, gaining support from other colleagues and from some of the management team. (Munira Thobani; my emphasis)

There is a sense that Munira was appointed to her first post *because* of her outsider status: her youth, lack of experience and, indeed, her place outside politicized forms of Black social work. It shows how the experience of being inside yet outside the nation was carried through into ambiguous and difficult organizational spaces. But it also suggests multiple senses of being outside – of the profession, of Black politics and of white male ‘management’ – and the struggle to form organizational alliances. Munira later went on to work as a consultant within the Office of Public Management (co-founded by Sue Richards), retaining her focus on equality issues but as part of the proliferating array of training and development consultancies (see Chapters 3 and 5). Equality units offer a prime example of the tensions inherent in border work: the spaces of power tend to be highly contested, traversed by identity struggles within and surrounded by conflicting assumptions about agency and incorporation. It takes place in a ‘liminal’ unit connecting inside policy actors to outside networks, but both ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ are constantly shifting, rendering the border work a highly skilled but potentially destabilizing form of labour.

There are some resonances between this form of labour and that of other women who came ‘inside’ to challenge the integrity of existing norms and rationalities. ‘Joined up government’, promoted by Sue Richards, sought to develop forms of governance that challenged the integrity of inside spaces. For example, programmes such as Sure Start worked across government’s strongly bounded departments around a common goal. But the ‘joining up’ was often strongly resisted by ministers and civil servants, creating a series of structural and cultural tensions that had to be managed. Naomi Eisenstadt, Director of

Sure Start, spoke of having to negotiate the conflicting agendas of central and local government, NGOs and professional communities:

I didn't set out to be innovative, but because I didn't know the rules, I was. It was very clear – they wanted me because I was different. They were looking for particular skills – and a real understanding of what it was like out there, of working with poor people, of knowing how it works on the ground.
(Naomi Eisenstadt; my emphasis)

Interestingly Naomi, Angela and Sue used similar terms to describe coming into the Civil Service as an 'outsider', and in the 'difference' that the individual brought was viewed as an asset. Naomi's American accent confounded attempts to locate her in terms of her class position, and she also suggested that being a stranger to the strange workings of the Civil Service – of not knowing the system – helped her. Angela saw her outsider status as deriving from her radical past, but again she saw this difference as 'helpful'. Both were sustained by strong external relationships with groups in which their commitments had been formed, and, for both, not knowing the rules enabled them to break them.

As Chapters 4 and 5 showed, the work of bridging between 'inside' and outside' was precarious, uneven and easily fractured as policy actors moved on or campaigns ran out of steam. And the governance shifts described in Chapter 4 – including 'joined up government', partnerships and participation initiatives – tended to render borders more porous and permeable, shifting the contours of spaces of power. In particular, the borders between academic research, feminist institutions and government were realigned through a double movement: the entry of feminist activists into the academy, the professions, the Civil Service and so on and the reaching out of policymakers to stakeholders previously excluded from policymaking circles. The experience of Julia Lowndes and Bec Bayliss, in positions with much less formal power than Naomi and Sue, suggests something of the increasing porosity of institutional and policy boundaries resulting from the turn to local partnerships: a shift that enabled agendas on domestic violence and the safety of urban gay populations to be pursued in public policy. We can extend this idea of a double movement to other areas of policy, including policies on children and families, care, disability, sexuality and local governance under New Labour.

But in these and other examples the work was also that of bridging the borders between policymakers and 'ordinary people' – the communities and citizens on whom policy was likely to have an impact. There were several examples of how the participants mobilized those living in poverty or experiencing disadvantage to 'speak to power':

We gave a lot of them [civil servants] the confidence to make the right decisions, actually, because we were close enough to the ground and very clear in the messages we were taking back. And we weren't operating as a political pressure

group, that wasn't our role. We were on the inside and outside – we straddled the Conservative government and a radical agenda. (Tricia Zipfel; my emphasis)

This extract brings together two different forms of border work. The first is that of bringing the expertise and experience of those living on the ground – often those whom policy sought to address – into government. This is also key to Naomi Eisenstadt's comments about knowing what it was like '*out there*' and '*on the ground*' because of her previous experience in provision for young children and in the voluntary sector. The second offers a more political reading of border work, one which used the gaps in the Conservative housing policy of the time (based on the rights of tenants to buy council houses) to secure funding to pursue alternative, and radical, housing projects in the areas that were left behind. The 'straddling' metaphor speaks to the contradictions inherent in finding and using spaces of power in the context of a government pursuing policies antithetical to one's own politics (a metaphor that might speak to the present moment: see Chapter 9).

Many participants, like Tricia, were positioned in ambiguous organizational spaces. Working on the edge of an institution enables individuals and projects to face both ways, being neither inside (part of a major programme) nor outside. People and projects can, at any time, be moved further into the institution concerned, but can also 'fall off' (indeed the Priority Estates Programme that the extract from Tricia refers to was taken 'outside' by Tricia and a colleague who set up a company to do the work under contract to government: see Chapter 3). Again, 'edge-work' is less a spatial metaphor than a political one. Participants from generational cohort 2 often had a strong collective basis from which to work: there is a very clear sense of a 'we' as a position from which participants engaged with governmental projects. 'In and against the state' is a classic example here; this was a political position formed by a group of socialist feminist economists who, after the election of Thatcher, moved 'inside' the state as a conscious political strategy. Although they worked as individuals in a range of different spaces of power, they were sustained by a collective ethos (see the work of Jane Foot and Ursula Murray, Chapter 5). For later generations, however, edge-work was conducted in more vulnerable, less collective spaces. It nevertheless remained attractive for many:

I can't say that I have had a career plan ... but one of the things I knew I wanted to do was to work on the edges, to work in alternative places or spaces or organizations, i.e. in places that were not the norm. (Sonia Khan, G3; my emphasis)

I do want to work within institutions but I want to be able to critique them as well. Being outside is really difficult – it's beneficial to have a position inside. But if I am working outside I can do things quicker, I can invest time and energy in what I really believe in. (Cecilia Wee, G4; my emphasis)

My ideal is to remain on the edge of academia, working on projects that keep me thinking but that don't take my whole life. Knowledge-work is not the academy;

the kind of work I do is not really valued. It's not that I don't have the right language but that it's not the kind of language I want to use. But I don't know whether I can always stay marginal. (P.G. Macioti, G4; my emphasis)

Sonia Khan later moved into a strategic policy role in local government but spoke about how:

I am in the right job but there's that residual sense of not being a corporate person – I still want to be slightly on the edge. (Sonia Khan: my emphasis)

She also spoke about how her next job would probably be back in the not-for-profit sector. This ambivalence is reflected in the extracts from younger participants. There is sometimes a sense of what Katz (Katz 2005) terms the seductions of belonging – of having a simpler, more secure basis from which to work, and a more secure sense of how present and future might be connected. But there are also frustrations about working 'inside' and ambivalence about the belongings offered. The key feature of edge-work is that it is neither wholly inside nor outside; it faces both ways, enabling different rationalities, logics and political orientations to be brought together – though often in uncomfortable ways, producing considerable tension for the worker concerned. It is inherently unstable and tends to be short-lived. Over time it may be absorbed into mainstream posts; it may be incorporated as time-limited 'projects', subject to institutional logics of targets, management and audit; or it may be hived off into businesses sub-contracted to deliver defined services or form the basis for the growing consultancy industry.

This takes us to a different image of border work configured around 'interstitial' organizations, groups and individuals who serve as brokers and intermediaries between different entities. In the latter years of my study think-tanks and NGOs became more significant spaces in which this work was carried out. These were ambiguously placed in the polity and, as the interviews suggest, their power base was similarly drawn from the creation and management of relationships and their capacity to mobilize new discursive repertoires:

And so through all the career steps I took I became more interested and more adept at understanding the sort of face between campaigning for justice of one sort or another, and the reality of the public policy decision making, and how you meet in the middle. I sort of learnt – but I didn't want to be shouting from the sidelines all my life. I wanted to try and actually change things, and so I was drawn [to IPPR] for that reason. (Lisa Harker; my emphasis)

The think-tank in which Lisa worked had an independent status 'outside', but it could only function effectively because of its networks and links not only to 'insiders' (policymakers and government actors) but also to other places, people and ideas. The Office of Public Management, in which both Sue Richards and Munira Thobani worked, the consultancies of Sue Beardsmore, Marion Macalpine and Jan Etienne, even quasi-government bodies such as the

Family and Parenting Institute led by Mary MacLeod, operated as such brokers; their power was based on their role as hubs connecting diverse networks. But they did more than connect: they each had their own political, social or policy ‘mission’ that served as a prism through which policy ideas were bent or refracted (see also discussion of Compass in Chapter 9). As well as influence, such actors wielded considerable discursive power. Change was based on the success of actors in mobilizing new ideas and linguistic repertoires (children’s rights, well-being, social exclusion, civil partnerships, joined up government and many others), and they had considerable success in constructing new public conversations.

Other participants chose to work in what they saw as more ‘autonomous’ spaces: in women’s organizations (Carole Harte, Bec Bayliss, Hannah Berry), human rights legal practices (Camilla Warren), some NGOs (Kate Raworth), activist groups such as Southall Black Sisters (Avtar Brah, Sukhwant Dhaliwal) and those running specific campaigns (Sarah Lamble). Carole Harte saw herself as ‘outside’ the major NGOs whom she considered to be part of the machinery of the state. This enabled her to build an alternative space in which a collective, participative ethos could flourish, and resonates with Hannah Berry’s efforts to create a cooperative base in which alternative enterprises could sustain each other (Chapter 2). Such spaces were traversed by the ‘identity struggles’ that focused attention on the borders between different claims for recognition and voice within and beyond feminism. And they were highly vulnerable to the withdrawal of funding and disciplined by the managerial logics of contracting. Campaigning work, in contrast, had to work the borders between those willing to engage with ‘formal’ politics and those wanting to remain detached in order to be able to retain and perform strong critiques. This takes us back to Angela Mason’s work at Stonewall and Sasha Roseneil’s analysis of the Greenham Common protest (see Chapters 2 and 6). And tensions also arose as participants sought to work across multiple struggles, as in Sarah Lamble’s attempt to combine work in the prison abolition movement with interventions on domestic violence:

I think the prison abolition movement has historically not done enough to address issues around violence against women: it will talk a lot about how the number of really violent prisoners is much smaller than the number of people who are in for economic [poverty-related] offences. But that does nothing to deal with people’s actual experience of sexual violence. On the flipside I feel like the anti-violence movement has very much got caught up in a kind of law and order agenda that equates justice with locking people up. And I see that actually as a failure within both movements. So part of my work is trying to bring those movements together, and think about how anti-violence work looks different if we said that prison and policing are part of the problem, particularly when we look at the use of sexual and gender violence by prison authorities and by police. And likewise how can we get anti-prison organizers to make the prevention of sexual and gender violence much more of a priority. (Sarah Lamble)

Border work here, as elsewhere, required complex alliance-building between different struggles and movements; engagements between different scalar sites of governing in the constant search for funding; and difficult negotiations between what Carole described as an authentic space of agency grounded in grassroots experience, and the NGOs which she viewed as compromised by their 'insider' status. Of course, the degree of perceived autonomy varied; each had to present itself in ways that enabled it to secure funds, and each had to balance campaigning work with other activities.

What cannot adequately be conveyed in these different metaphors and images of border work is its dynamic quality, both institutionally and personally. The Family and Parenting Institute, for example (see Chapter 4), drew on each of the forms of border work depicted here: its ambiguous status within New Labour's policy programme meant that it served as partner and ally as well as broker and opponent. Being aware of the potential traps was crucial:

It became very clear what contested territory [family policy] was, and how complicated it was going to manage what we said publicly so that we didn't allow ourselves to be disregarded, marginalized, ridiculed, and any of the other things that comes up, and also how to manage relationships with government.
(Mary MacLeod)

Mary's role as Chief Executive had to align the relationship between the feminist-inflected politics of many who worked at FPI and the New Labour agenda. Like many of those working with government she too saw herself as an 'outsider'; indeed, her comment in one of the opening quotes to this chapter about coming from the 'other side' suggests a compounding of class, place and politics in her political formation. In her work with government she was at times an antagonist, referring to herself as a 'mole within' the policy process, and at times an 'insider' in the shaping of family policy.

Participants also worked the borders between early commitments (movements and struggles that were more securely positioned 'outside' or 'elsewhere') and later 'insider' roles. The skills participants had accumulated in community, voluntary and charitable work were reconfigured and elaborated as women moved into governmental or quasi-governmental programmes, and then back out again. Most participants engaged in different forms of border work over the course of their working lives. Jane Foot, Ursula Murray and other socialist women who had worked in 'autonomous' campaigns and groups (campaigning from the outside) later moved into local government work (see Chapter 5). Their decisions to do so were often provoked by funding crises in community or trade union resource centres, but were also the result of an awareness of how political struggles between local and central government had intensified, and how new legislation was likely to have an adverse effect on low-paid employees – especially women – as services were put out to tender to private-sector contractors. Avtar Brah took self-conscious choices about

moving between the voluntary sector, local government and university work, seeing in each case where her work might bring greatest benefit. Angela Mason moved from being a radical activist ‘outside’ into the law, later heading up a campaigning organization, working within the Civil Service and taking up local authority political roles, bringing her commitments and skills with her and accruing new ones on the way. Tricia Zipfel, Lisa Harker, Mary MacLeod, Sonia Khan and others moved across multiple spaces in ambiguous inside/outside positions across their working lives. Overlaid on each of the metaphors of border work, then, are the zigzag patterns of individual trajectories that enabled skills and experiences to be accreted and networks progressively extended.

Border work as generative (and gendered) labour: conceptual resources

One of the arguments of this book is that the work of the participants generated new things: new pathways, new policies, new public conversations, new organizational practices, new governance foci, and new ways of understanding and practising politics. Previous chapters have hinted at some of the ways in which new things were created, drawing on notions of translation, relational labour, assemblage, knowledge-work and, here, border work. In this second half of the chapter I want to look a bit more systematically at the conceptual resources offered by different branches of the social sciences to an understanding of the generative features of border work. A concern with the analysis of borders and boundaries has proliferated across the social sciences in recent years, and I cannot hope to do justice to the wealth of conceptual and theoretical work that has taken place. My aim is not to cover each perspective in any depth but to hint at different understandings of how change can emerge from the new juxtapositions, alignments and performances traced earlier in the chapter.

Organizations, professions and sectors

The relationship between border work and organizational innovation is a difficult terrain, usually addressed indirectly rather than directly in the literatures on public and voluntary sectors. The dominant focus tends to be on contrasts between public and private sector innovative capacity (Cabinet Office 2003), on the management of innovation (Hartley, Donaldson, Skelcher and Wallace 2008) and on innovation for enhanced performance rather than for social benefit (Audit Commission 2007; National Audit Office 2006). Several early studies show how the public sector has taken up innovations developed in the not-for-profit sector (Osborne 1996; Osborne and Flynn 1997)

but more recently the focus has been on the use of pilots, projects and experiments to generate innovation, on the innovative potential of devolution and decentralization, on the use of 'e-governance' to drive transformational change and on social, rather than organizational, innovation (Mulgan 2006). Mulgan has long campaigned against 'silo mentalities' (mentalities that derive from the strong internal boundaries of bureaucracies) and, closer to the spirit of this chapter, has also talked about the value of 'cultivating hinterlands' (Mulgan 2007: 26); but this receives only a brief mention. The dominant assumption is that innovation is driven by organization-wide corporate strategies.

Within organizational studies Kirton (Kirton 1976) points to the significance of links between boundary-crossing and innovation; the more boundaries that are to be crossed, the more innovative an individual has to be, and this was particularly the case where organizations were fluid and undergoing change. This offers one framework that suggests some of the conditions in which women were likely to be able to be effective change agents (Colgan and Ledwith 1996). Kirton also distinguished between change agents as 'adaptors' (who produce ideas that stretch and extend agreed definitions of a problem and its likely solutions) and 'innovators' (who tend to reconstruct the problem without regard for existing rules). The work of participants tended not to fall easily into one or other side of this binary formulation; however, the difficulties facing women who wanted to do things differently may help explain why some participants moved from 'inside' to 'outside' or 'in between' spaces that offered greater potential for innovation and creativity. More recent analyses of actors 'working across boundaries' in the context of new governance forms noted the rise of 'boundary spanners' and 'reticulists' and the multiple roles they play that enable inter-organizational collaboration (Sullivan and Skelcher 2002).

Professional change

While the organizational studies literature tends to focus on newly emerging boundary-spanning individuals, the literature on the professions highlights how contemporary shifts are challenging the bounded fields of action within which professional autonomy is exercised. The literature on boundary-crossing professionals is structured around two topics: the first traces how managerialism and market logics produced 'hybrid' professionals who combine professional, managerial and sometimes business roles (Ferlie, Pettigrew, Ashburner and Fitzgerald 1996; see also Clarke and Newman 1997); the second concerns the shifting borders between professionals and their clients produced through discourses of co-production, self-advocacy and consumerism (Clarke, Newman, Smith, Vidler and Westmarland 2007; Needham 2011). Both developments shift and reconstitute boundaries in ways that enable some professional workers to bring alternative rationalities and practices into the forefront, rather than the margins, of their work. We saw

this in Chapter 5, where public librarians were depicted as shifting the borders between professionals and ‘communities’, constituting themselves as a new professional grouping – what, in terms of the mappings of this chapter, would be deemed as ‘edge-workers’ – a grouping that prefigured wider professional shifts. And in Chapter 6, Ann McPherson’s work on bringing patient experience into policy development within the Department of Health might be viewed in terms of creating spaces (of like-minded professionals and policy actors) within a bureaucratic Civil Service and a hierarchical medical profession. The shifting borders between ‘state’ and ‘society’ or between ‘welfare’ and ‘responsibility’ are likely to bring these forms of edge-work closer to the centres of power. But new groupings are constantly emerging: Chapter 2 showed the emergence of ‘community mobilizers’ and Jane Wills spoke of her work helping constitute a new profession of community organizers through a masters programme, with highly committed students working the borders between academic and activist work. Each example supports Fournier’s analysis of professional work and professional knowledge as performative and malleable rather than fixed and bounded (Fournier 2000), thus creating the possibility of change.

The cross-sector dance

Both organizational and professional literatures engage with the shifting relationship between ‘sectors’, and how this reconfigures work identities and practices. This is also a significant theme in the international development and voluntary sector literatures. D. Lewis’s studies of those moving from voluntary to statutory sectors in both the UK and in Bangladesh (D. Lewis 2008) distinguish between boundary-spanners and boundary-crossers, with the primary emphasis on the latter. Milligan and Conradson (Milligan and Conradson 2006) talk about the ‘cross sectoral dance’ performed by volunteers as they move from being on the outside, ‘knocking on walls’, to taking up work within the system in order to exert influence from the inside. The biographical methods on which the studies by Lewis and by Milligan and Conradson draw fruitfully illuminate the processes of transition between outsider and insider identities as well as the processes of development and learning that take place over time. But while finding such literatures suggestive, I am concerned that they tend to replicate the policy discourse of ‘sectors’, and, like much of the organizational studies literature, suggest clear organizational boundaries. Crossings may be performed and partnerships created, but the containers themselves remain and are defined as much by the oppositions through which they are imagined as by their institutional characteristics.

I want, in contrast, to argue that the spatial metaphors used by participants cannot be understood through common binary oppositions: state and civil society, voluntary and statutory, public and private. Gupta (Gupta 2006) proposes an approach that re-examines the conventional distinction between

‘state’ and ‘civil society’ and views the state itself as discursively constituted. In his paper ‘Blurred boundaries’, he draws on post-colonial ethnography to show how the state is confronted as a series of discrete and fragmentary practices and performances. This is a helpful way of framing some of the different constructions of borders and boundaries in different political-cultural moments in the period covered by this research. In the 1970s we saw how activists constituted ‘community’ through its otherness to the state and institutional power, while in the 1980s we saw some participants using the metaphor ‘in and against the state’. Both conceptualized the state as a strongly bounded entity that could be ignored, captured or reformed. But as governmental projects and programmes sought to reconfigure the state and to embark on programmes of ‘governing the social’ in the 1990s (Clarke 2006; Newman 2001; Newman 2005a; N. Rose 1999), so participants developed rather different constructions of the state and the borders with its others. Even being ‘in and against’ the state generated forms of labour that served to discursively and materially produce more flexible and distributed forms of state power – forms reliant less on coercion than on consent, and in which the state/market distinction was partially collapsed.

Liminal spaces

Rather than a focus on organizations and sectors, some forms of feminist scholarship point to how the liminal space between public and private can be used strategically by women to develop capacities and resources – for the benefit of self, community or other women – sheltered from the wider public gaze (Staeheli 1996; Ryan 1992; Jupp 2010; Fincher and Panelli 2001). Liminality here offers a particular gendering of politics, one in which women’s agency connects the personal and political through a focus on the everyday, the local, the pragmatic. Many of the spaces of power with which I am concerned in this book are precisely those through which connections between the personal and political are made. Buckingham *et al.* note how debates about liminality as a spatial relationship emerged in feminist geography in the 1970s as a means of conceptualizing women’s activity spheres, which were understood relationally rather than through the binary of public/private. They argue that liminal space is ‘much more than an intermediary space between private and public – it is variously private, communal and public depending on the motivations of the women using it’ (Buckingham, Marandet, Smith, Wainwright and Diosi 2006: 896).

We can situate the work of many of the ‘community activists’ discussed in Chapter 3, the policy entrepreneurs of Chapter 4, the organizational actors of Chapter 5 and the knowledge-workers of Chapter 6 in such liminal spaces, spaces that confound neat divisions between public, private and personal. Such spaces tend to be viewed as predominantly concerned with ‘everyday’

and informal forms of politics. But these examples also show how the work of participants was not just concerned with the 'here and now', the personal, the everyday, but was deeply engaged in generating what Rose terms 'fantatised futures' (N. Rose 1999: 280) – new ways of living, working and doing politics.

The idea of liminality has also been used to describe spaces 'on the edge', outside the norm and in which normal categories are disrupted (see Roseneil 2000 on Greenham Common). Currently it is also used to denote collective practices that transcend conventional definitions of public and private: attempts to create new 'commons' by the use of public land for collective garden and allotment projects, the creation of 'public' cultural artefacts and performances in privately owned property, or the generation of new temporary public facilities – from libraries to universities to deliberative events – within large-scale demonstrations or occupations on private land. But the predominant use of notions of liminality in feminist theory points to the entanglements between public, private and personal lives: 'The notion of liminality is therefore seen as a way of understanding the emancipatory potential of such spaces, with the suggestion that a fluidity between public and private might be empowering for women' (Jupp 2010: 77). However, Jupp goes on to suggest that liminality also marks a zone of intervention by governments into private or domestic settings, thereby drawing women into new formations of power. The liminality between public and private in community policy, programmes such as Sure Start or good parenting classes are a feature of such spaces of intervention. The notion of liminality, then, draws attention to particular gendered regimes of governance but does not tell us much about what actually happens within them. So rather than viewing spaces of power as the 'in between' spaces summoned up in some versions of liminality, I want to argue that they are formed relationally and are traversed by multiple forms of power. It is their (political) ambiguity rather than their (spatial) liminality that generates new spaces of possibility.

Strategic brokers

The process of reconfiguring of sectors, institutions and scales of governing generate conjuncturally specific spaces of possibility. Larner and Craig use the concept 'strategic brokers' to denote actors who work across sites, agencies, and scales in New Zealand and England (Larner and Craig 2005). Such brokers 'spend a great deal of time building and maintaining relationships because no policy or strategy is now complete or legitimate without evidence of consultation and/or collaboration'. They also work to 'avoid overlaps, sort out niches, and create wider platforms to legitimate the work of their organizations'. And 'they are geared towards *process* issues', facilitating, mediating and negotiating, nurturing networks and deploying cultural knowledge and local knowledge 'in ways that enable traditionally "silent" voices to be heard' (Larner and Craig 2005: 417–8; original emphasis). However, they are also vulnerable

to being co-opted into newly professionalized roles in which, as pragmatic improvisers, they may 'unwittingly contribute to the hybrid, contested rolling out of neoliberalism' (Larner and Craig 2005: 405). They do so precisely because they were seeking to overcome the ravages resulting from previous phases of 'roll back' neoliberalism: 'In the wake of profound neoliberal fragmentation, the complexity of the re-joining task is such that these agents find themselves palpably stretched, often carrying personally the enormous costs of reintegration. In this regard, the new strategic brokers appear not just to be governmentalised in their professional functions, but in their personal and political commitments too' (Larner and Craig 2005: 406).

These are more than boundary-crossing actors: they are involved in reconstituting the categories of contemporary governance and generating new forms of agency. Interestingly, Larner and Craig note how the majority of the 'strategic brokers' in their studies of community activism and local partnership working in both the United Kingdom and New Zealand were women. They acknowledge Hochschild's work on emotional labour, but also locate the dominance of women in such roles in a twin process: the 'mobilisation of un- and underpaid labour, and the expansion of governmentalsing ambits into feminised and domesticated realms' (Larner and Craig 2005: 419). An important feature of the work of Wendy Larner and her colleagues (e.g. Molloy and Larner 2010) is the way in which it links analyses of gendered labour markets with the analysis of the rise of new state forms – literatures that often do not speak to each other.

Wedel's work (Wedel 2009) on 'transactors' resonates with Larner's focus on changing spaces and scales of agency. She points to the role of NGOs in the ambiguous spaces of transnational consultancy work: actors who are able to deploy multiple identities in order to lever resources, 'playing the boundaries' (Wedel 2004: 167) between national and international, public and private, formal and informal, state and non-state. (I used the word transactor in a presentation at an event designed to promote learning on public participation between people from the global north and south. One woman came up to me at the end, very excited, saying, 'Yes, that describes me exactly – I have to face both ways, I'm a transactor.' She subsequently agreed to participate in this research.) Similarly Lendvai and Stubbs (Lendvai and Stubbs 2006; Lendvai and Stubbs 2007) note the significance of transnational consultants located in hybrid spaces 'in between scales, organizations, discursive practices, knowledge systems and geographies, as located in a kind of "liminality" characterized by a blurring and merging of distinctions' (Lendvai and Stubbs 2006: 8). This takes us back to the feminist geography discussed above, but again denotes not a 'space between' but a blurring and merging of distinctions. However, the blurring of inside and outside rationalities and commitments has implications for how activism can be sustained. This means turning to rather different literatures.

Emotion and affect

Border work can produce profound discomfort as different identifications – as insiders *and* outsiders, as both different *and* part of the dominant order – are lived and performed. Rather than attributing particular ‘feelings’ to participants, my aim here is to note how discursive reasoning is conducted through emotional registers. In Chapter 1, I suggested that the interview transcripts might be read in different ways, bringing into view cognitive, affective and reflexive understandings of the self. We can see each of these in the earlier extract from Munira Thobani, who spoke of her experience as ‘*interesting*’ and offered explanations for what happened. This implies a cognitive self who, as other sections of the interview suggested, learned from that experience and took that learning to other places. She is reflexive, looking back on what she achieved with some pride. And she also hints at the emotions the experience surfaced: of being scared (repeated), of being resented, of being looked down on, of not being ‘*really part of*’ social work. Other participants also highlighted such insider-outsider feelings. Being ‘*inside-outside*’ – of the nation, the organization, the polity, activist networks, the academy – clearly brings feelings of both inclusion and exclusion. Participant accounts suggest other affective dimensions of border work: being ‘*shocked*’ and finding it ‘*difficult*’ (Mary MacLeod), taking risks and finding things ‘*bizarre*’ or ‘*weird*’ (Tricia Zipfel); being proud and ‘*fulfilled*’ (Carole Harte); not being able to ‘*bear*’ one sector while feeling ‘*stifled*’ by another (Sukhwant Dhaliwal), of being viewed (and perhaps viewing the self) as selling out (Hannah Berry – see Chapter 2).

Paying attention to emotional registers of discursive reasoning brings other dimensions of ‘self-work’ into view. Participants spoke of the problems of sustaining working the borders, the exhaustion that can result and the need, eventually, to make compromises. But many also spoke of the excitement of looking back on what had been achieved:

Talking to other women about how we get into the positions of power that we get into, and then what we do with that power and how we use it ... particularly with women who come through a very activist, feminist route. So there are a number of people I come across who've come from similar backgrounds, in fact recognize me from, you know, twenty to thirty years ago, and we have those conversations which is how did we get here, and that we never thought we would be in these positions, and what do we do with them, and how do we come to terms with our kind of personal politics, but yet being in these positions of influence and power.
(Adi Cooper)

I have included this extract here since it shows how notions of inside and outside can be a collective subject position stretched over time. It brings into view a highly reflexive self and hints at the dialogic processes through which participants made sense of their lives. But it also underscores a theme running

through this chapter: how border work links notions of ‘personal politics’ and ‘public power’ in complex ways. Participants draw discourses and repertoires from different worlds, forming new configurations of what ‘work’ means and how it is to be conducted. Indeed, it is this capacity to span different worlds and identities that generates the spaces of power with which I am concerned. The transcripts suggest multiple and partial positionings of the self: at the same time an activist and paid worker, as an insider and an outsider, as a stranger and professional, as an individual, making her own decisions and compromises, and as part of collective entities.

I want to suggest how this can be traced in four particular accounts. Carole Harte spoke of how:

I've been able to be a bit of a hybrid really. I'm a working-class woman who's been able to access an environment that isn't usually available to women like me.
(Carole Harte)

Her self-proclaimed ‘hybridity’ linked her strong working class identity and the ‘academics’ and policy actors she engaged with. But she retained a sense of being an outsider of the process of policy formation and governance, challenging from the margins.

Sue Richards, in contrast, was a skilful ‘insider’, adept at negotiating change within government. She linked her skills to a tough upbringing that made her very aware of class differences and led her to try to find ‘*a way of being me while also blending*’. Later in her public career she continued to find ways of ‘*fitting in*’ while still ‘*being the basic me*’. She described herself as ‘*always watching*’ (holding herself apart) while also being ‘*heavily engaged*’. And it was this watching that enabled her to quickly assess the rules of the game in whatever context she worked.

The third is Jane Foot. I asked Jane what she had taken from her activist experiences into her working life in and beyond local government:

Networking – developing and sustaining them; lateral thinking; being at home with councillors, trade unions and officers and able to work across all these boundaries; empathy for the professionals delivering services that I knew were needed; values; soft power; and an identification first with users and communities rather than the organisation – though that got buried. (Jane Foot; my emphasis)

This hints at the ‘self’ work required to hold multiple allegiances and identifications together. Jane suggests that it was her activism, and the need to see how power works, where the contradictions might be, that has led her to try to ‘*knit things together*’. But her references to what ‘*got buried*’ imply a sense of loss as issues faded from the agenda.

Finally, I want to return to the account of Ursula Murray in Chapter 5. Describing her role in managing CCT, she recalled how:

It was being a consultant but from the inside. This was hard. We were not insiders. People reacted against you, there were charges of selling out – and a feeling of

trench warfare. One minute you were a hero, the next the enemy. But the bigger enemy enabled people to work together. (Ursula Murray)

Throughout the extracts in this chapter we can see hints at the emotion work (Hoschild 1979; see also Hoggett 2000; G. Lewis 2000) at stake as participants engaged with dominant rationalities while holding on to their personal and political commitments. We can also see how cognition and emotion are not easily distinguishable. But notions of affect take us further, drawing attention to non-cognitive, somatic responses to the world and raising questions of how 'experience' can be represented other than through language itself (though language is not dismissed: Wetherall 2011). The turn to psychosocial methods in studies of policy and governance (Froggett 2002; Hoggett 2000; Hunter 2012) offer rich resources for engaging with what Hunter terms 'impossible governance'. Such perspectives, drawing on Kleinian psychoanalytical concepts, would explore notions of being both 'inside' and 'outside', of 'fitting in' or 'bending' while also holding on to ones politics and values, of 'watching', 'holding oneself apart', while also being 'engaged', as suggesting a form of psychic 'splitting' that can result in melancholia. Psychic and organizational splittings may be dynamically connected, as in Ursula Murray's accounts of the rupturing of established teams in the client-contractor splits of CCT in Chapter 5, and the '*unfinished political business*' associated with the personal and organizational damage that resulted:

Tendering was a focus of horrendous projections, with the splitting between clients and contractors – the rupture of teams that had been together. So I got very interested in all of that. The last period [in local government management] I spent restructuring. What had been enacted was a defensive structure, not a structure for innovation. CCT did at least challenge entrenched ways of doing things. In the end we brought the clients and contractors together again.

There is unfinished political business about all this. There was a feeling of becoming the enemy within – part of the loony left – there was no legitimate language. We were not acknowledged as part of history. (Ursula Murray)

This goes beyond conventional views of emotion work to draw attention to the psychosocial dynamics of work and organization, and has formed a productive form of analysis, especially in theorizing equality work (Hunter 2012) and analyses of how 'difference' is embodied and lived (G. Lewis 2000).

Power and agency

Border work creates conjuncturally specific spaces of power. It challenges binary categories such as state/society, inside/outside, autonomous/incorporated, personal/political. Rather, it shows a multiplicity of spaces that intersect, and are sometimes in relationships of alignment and sometimes of antagonism. However, the blurring of distinctions, then, does not dissolve difference,

contradiction and antagonism. Indeed, spaces of power are spaces in which difference is negotiated and in which working across difference can produce new ideas, energies and projects as well as potential antagonisms.

I want to develop the analysis by pointing to two very different ways of understanding power and agency. The first draws on notions of 'translation'. Translation appeared as a practical discourse in some of the interviews – a way in which women described what they did (see, for example, Chapter 3). The work of Carole, Tricia and others evokes the sense of translation as an active, agentive process, requiring the labour of summoning, mobilizing, assembling and then – most importantly – that of combining elements into new configurations. Translation thus forms a valuable counter to notions of the flow of ideas across boundaries; attention shifts to the local and particular settings in which ideas are received, translated, mediated and adapted into new practices (e.g. Czarniawska and Georges 1996; Czarniawska and Sevón 2005; Freeman 2009; Lendvai 2005; Salskov-Iversen, Hansen and Bislev 2000). The image of 'source' and 'recipient' is rejected in favour of chains of association in which difference produces the possibility of the transformation of both: 'translation involves creating convergences or homologues by relating things that were previously different' (Callon 1980: 211). It is such creative reframings that offer new possibilities of public action and forms of political agency. Rather than networks of people or flows of ideas, the focus is on associations between things – objects as well as people (Law 1999). Actants (humans, goods and services, skills, ideas, money, practices, technologies, institutions and other entities) are assembled in new ways. These new associations change the meanings or other properties of individual components drawn into interactive practices.

This is a helpful way of engaging with the 'border work' of participants: rather than viewing them simply as boundary-crossing actors, they can be seen as engaged in a creative process that opens up new potential pathways and that generates new emergent practices. It suggests how processes of translation, brokering and alignment may be *productive* of new forms of identity and agency, including the constitution of forms of political subjectivity. However, translation does not capture the ways in which dominant and subordinate forms of power may be reconciled – or not (see discussion in Chapter 3). Power is assumed to be everywhere (inscribed in an array of discourses, technologies, actors, texts, institutional norms, policies and projects); but its very multiplicity renders it somewhat elusive. Here, I want to turn to a second way of conceptualizing power and agency. The notion of 'contact zones' as elaborated in post-colonial theory suggests ways in which actors engage with dominant and subordinate formations of power and forms of subjectivity. Contact zones are described as 'social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination – like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today' (Pratt 1992: 4). They are non-innocent settings in which power

differences between colonizer and colonized are formed through historical patterns of racialized subordination and exploitation. As such, contemporary tracings of historically embedded forms of power and oppression may resonate through contemporary struggles (see also Askins and Pain 2011).

Applying this concept beyond post-colonial studies can weaken or distort it by subordinating issues of race and colonialism to other forms of oppression. However, it offers a valuable way of drawing attention to the legacies of historical forms of domination and subordination out of which new spaces – the community forum, the task force, the ‘social inclusion’ project, the participation initiative – arise. It suggests how such spaces continue to be traversed by formations of power, despite the discursive repertoires (for example, of partnership, empowerment, inclusion), which mask them. And it suggests the possibility of subordinate groups coming to view themselves through dominant discursive repertoires, as well as that of dominant groups being transformed through encounters with ‘the other’. Returning to some of the different mappings with which this chapter began, we can understand the spaces of power as cross-cut by tracings of embedded orderings of rule that constituted participants as both ‘the other’ (the colonized subjects distant from centres of power) and the agents of reform (expected to transform colonial power, to modernize the centre itself).

Viewing border work in this way brings different insights into some of the mappings proposed earlier. Inside-outside spaces challenged institutional (colonial) power by learning its language and translating counter or oppositional voices in ways that could be seen to fit with dominant projects (see Chapter 3). Such spaces were also spaces in which dominant orders could be modernized and transformed through contact with the subordinate (the colonized). But this opens up questions about how to understand the dominant; rather than a single order of rule, it shows how it is constituted as multiple, with some would-be hegemonic political projects deliberately welcoming in counter projects in order to render them agents through which dominant orders could be transformed. The results are zones within which tracings of new hegemonic projects may emerge alongside residual orderings of power. They are zones in which participants sought to reconcile conflicting interests, build alliances, reconfigure relationships, align conflicting discourses, resignify existing symbols, retell old narratives and develop new ones. Their work was also that of managing – or not – the contradictions produced by the perverse alignments of different forces, an issue I return to in the next chapter.

Conclusion

I began the chapter by problematizing the idea of clear-cut distinction between an authentic space of politics ‘outside’ and ‘insider’ projects, a distinction

central to theses of incorporation and professionalization. Inside and outside are categories that appear to be opposites that map neatly on to narratives of authentic political agency on the one hand and of incorporation or professionalization on the other. But this chapter has explored different ways of being both ‘inside’ *and* ‘outside’ and the complexity of working lives and identities this produces. Rather than a single border – between an authentic activist politics ‘outside’, in social movements and political struggle, and ‘inside’, in positions of power within dominant institutions – participants in this research tended to work across multiple borders: those between different political identities, between different sectors, between paid and unpaid work, between multiple institutional sites and practices, between different disciplines or professions, between ‘community’ and government and, of course, between personal and political. The borders were variously more or less porous, more or less clearly delineated, more or less the object of governmental concern, and were constantly reconfigured by the profound cultural and institutional transformations that took place between the mid-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Indeed, it was out of such reconfigurations that many new spaces of power could be mobilized.

My analysis of ‘inside-outside’ draws on notions of space as a ‘relational construct’ (Massey 1994; Massey 2005) that does not conform to – and indeed challenges – dualistic thinking. The focus on border work in this chapter, then, serves to challenge power/resistance models of politics, in which dominant formations of power are challenged from ‘outside’. The languages of social movements, counter publics and civic action all tend to assume a clear distinction between entrenched formations of power and processes of political resistance and struggle. I do not want to denigrate the importance of oppositional politics nor of social movement activism; it is through such struggles that oppressive regimes may be challenged and sometimes overthrown, through which women’s movements have secured rights and resources, through which trade unions have squeezed concessions from employers and through which the overreaching powers of the securitized state have been challenged – often at great cost to those engaged in dissent and disobedience. As I will show in Chapter 9 to this book, such struggles are by no means over, and new sites and practices of resistance are currently emerging to contest the politics of austerity and retrenchment. And as Chapter 2 showed, such struggles – and the institutions that sustained them – are crucial for the formation of activist identities. But they cannot be conceptualized as entirely ‘free’ spaces, untrammelled and untainted by dominant forms of power. With Böhm, I want to suggest that:

Autonomy is itself (im)possible, as autonomous social movements are always embedded in specific social, economic, cultural and political rationalities that one cannot simply escape ... We do not see autonomy as a ‘good outside’ which allows an escape from politics into a pure space of self-determination. Rather, autonomy is an antagonistic political demand. (Böhm, Dinerstein and Spicer 2010: 28)

My aim here has been to trace how antagonistic political claims and demands were refracted through the 'border work' conducted by women working the spaces of power. Border work sometimes concerns performing crossings between different organizations, sectors, nations or institutions, but also changes the relationships between them to render borders more porous such that 'membership' becomes more diffuse. Across these accounts the notions of 'we' and 'them', of inside and outside, are rather slippery, and this slipperiness intensified as participants worked in ways that rendered boundaries more permeable in order to extend the influence of social and political movements on dominant ruling relations. But they also sought to stay in touch with the places where 'reality bites', to build bridges between policy actors and the 'grassroots', to link community based actors and those in poverty to resource streams, and to enlarge opportunities for 'voice'. Finally, as I argued earlier, border work has been understood as political rather than geographical: the 'inside', 'outside', 'edges', 'middles' and so on referred to by participants were less concerned with defined places as with political possibilities. They were spaces of agency, of power: but also spaces of ambiguity, discomfort and emotion work.

The chapter has offered a number of different conceptual resources for understanding the generative potential of such border work: its capacity to make new things and to prefigure new ways of living, working and performing politics. In the present, border work is shifting as a result of the realignments of state and society, economy and politics produced by current cycles of cuts and state retrenchment. This does not, as I will argue, foreclose the possibility of politics; but before assessing these possibilities I want, in the next chapter, to engage with broader arguments about the erasure of feminist-inflected activism in the face of the overwhelming power of neoliberalism.