Newman, Janet. "Activism, Neoliberalism and Gendered Labour." *Working the Spaces of Power: Activism, Neoliberalism and Gendered Labour*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012. 151–170. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781849666725.ch-008>>.

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Activism, Neoliberalism and Gendered Labour

This book is about change; about how different generations of women have worked to bring about fundamental shifts in politics, governance and culture. Their labour produced a succession of new laws, new policies and new institutional rationalities. It generated shifts in how ‘politics’ was understood and enacted, and how claims for social justice, recognition and voice were realized. But how can these transformations be situated in contemporary narratives of the rise of neoliberalism and the erasure of feminist politics?

In this, the first of two concluding chapters, I want to offer some response to the plethora of recent feminist work on the complicity of feminism, LGBT and other movements in the rollout of neoliberal economic strategies and ruling relations (though the work on feminism has been most prominent and thus drives my engagement with the debates). The first two sections engage with literatures on feminism and neoliberalism respectively and are largely theoretical. I then reflect on how the work of participants in this book can offer insights into political-cultural analyses of the present, revisiting previous chapters to show how neoliberalism works across the different ‘landscapes of antagonism’ traced in previous chapters. My aims are both theoretical and political. Theoretically, I want to puncture the seeming coherence of narratives of the incorporation and erasure of feminism by reintroducing questions of contradiction and ambivalence. Politically, I want to open up a space for a politics of the present; one that does not simply deny the possibilities of political agency by rolling its achievements into accounts of the progressive erasure of politics in the face of all consuming neoliberalism.

Feminism and neoliberalism

The coincidence between feminism and global capitalism has been a central concern of feminist scholarship. Such scholarship offers subtle arguments and well-developed theory to which I cannot hope to do justice here. But I want to draw out two interlinked narratives: first, on how processes of ‘mainstreaming’ served both to acknowledge and depoliticize feminist claims; and second, on how neoliberalism appropriated identity politics. These narratives rest on rather

different conceptual and political assumptions. Mainstreaming (see Chapter 4) is particularly associated with Third Way politics that is viewed as having selectively incorporated feminist claims in ways that stripped them of their radicalism to produce a 'post-feminist' climate (Duggan 2003 and Genz 2006; see Squires 2005 and Walby 2009 for counter-arguments). McRobbie (McRobbie 2009) argues that the Third Way occluded and displaced the multiplicity of feminisms and substituted a version of feminism that was anti-male, strident and anti-pleasure, rendering it out of date so that it might be undone, stripped of its political force. Eisenstein (in a book tellingly titled *Feminism Seduced*) recounts how feminism became complicit in its own undoing, showing how, in the United States, 'the many and varied struggles of the 1970s have been selectively filtered into a hegemonic, mainstream feminism, of a kind that can be readily used by people whose motives are anything but women friendly' (Eisenstein 2009: ix). Her earlier intervention, on the fate of feminism in 1980s Australia, focused on the 'femocrats' whose 'brilliant political manoeuvring' enabled them to lever an alliance with the then Labour administration. She saw the advancement of women, through federally funded childcare, domestic violence and rape prevention, as 'compatible with the policies that simultaneously increased the gap between rich and poor and weakened the labour movement' (Eisenstein 2006: 49; see also Yeatman 1990 and Watson 1990 on the rise of 'femocrats'). Similarly United Nations activity around gender seemed to be victories for the women's cause; 'Yet the success of women in creating special agencies for women was not connected to any larger success in extending and strengthening welfare state provisions for the poorest part of the population', while structural adjustment programmes meant that 'the safety net around the world was being shredded simultaneously with the increasing visibility and activism of a global feminist movement' (Eisenstein 2006: 50). Entry was not unproblematic: in the United States under the Clinton administration women could be explicitly feminist 'as long as they practiced the tough love of the Clinton regime' (Eisenstein 2006: 55). But in the same period the Clinton administration 'was using mainstream feminism to assist in the project of selling neoliberal, free market capitalism to the world' (Eisenstein 2006: 55).

This implies that something more than the politics of mainstreaming might be at stake. Rather than imply that neoliberalism conceded to feminist demands, feminism is viewed, in some accounts, as generative of or complicit with the very rationalities and ideologies of neoliberalism. Such accounts tend to be located in the impersonal and elusive forces of 'neoliberalism' or 'globalizing capitalism' that appropriated second-wave feminism for its own purposes – expanding consumerism (McRobbie 2009) and smoothing the way for a post-Fordist, disorganized, transnational capitalism (see discussion of Boltanski and Chiapello in Chapter 5). Nancy Fraser draws on Boltanski and Chiapello to highlight what she terms the 'elective affinity' between feminism and neoliberalism (Fraser 2009). In a carefully argued paper she points to how

feminist critiques of patriarchy ('anti-androcentrism') that opened the way for new forms of capitalist exploitation in which women's emancipation was tied to the engine of capitalist accumulation. At the same time, second-wave feminism's critique of welfare state paternalism slid easily into Thatcher's critique of the nanny state and welfare protection; and the feminist critique of bureaucratic paternalism was recuperated by neoliberalism. Similar debates have opened up in reflections on the achievements of LGBT politics. Smith (M. Smith 2005) shows how lesbian and gay organizing at both federal and local levels in Canada can be understood in terms of both resisting and reinforcing neoliberalism, while Richardson (Richardson 2004; Richardson 2005) argues that new citizenship claims, including those for same sex marriage, are complicit with neoliberal strategies. She writes of the professionalization of sexual politics and of a 'neoliberal politics of normalisation' in which sexual politics is influential in the development of neoliberal policies: not only through the constitution of consumer citizens but also integral to broader shifts towards social governance (Richardson 2005).

Much of this is convincing, but I am concerned about three features of such accounts. The first is the problem of explanation. There is a tension about how far feminism is viewed as the agent of its own demise, selling out its politics in exchange for welfare and other benefits (the mainstreaming narrative), or whether neoliberalism or capitalism – the language shifts between accounts – has appropriated feminist claims and aspirations in its own interests. There is also a troubling confusion around how far the focus is on the neoliberal economy (seeking new forms of exploitable labour in the face of the decline of manufacturing in the western heartlands); the neoliberal state (doing deals with women to promote projects of modernization); or on neoliberal cultural forms (new patterns of consumption that, in McRobbie's analysis, displaced feminist politics and substituted a stripped down, impoverished version of female empowerment). Each of these explanations is plausible, but the relationship between them – and thus the relationship between 'culture', 'economy' and 'state' – is not explored. Implicitly such accounts tend to collapse the social, political and cultural into the economic, reproducing forms of determinism that feminism, together with Gramscian, Althusserian and other engagements with Marxist theory, rejected decades ago. This takes me back to the arguments of Gibson-Graham and Roseneil on the problem of 'paranoid readings' of the present in Chapter 6. Gibson-Graham, responding to Eisenstein and others in a special issue of *Women's Studies Quarterly* in 2006, suggest that such thinking betrays a 'paranoid sensibility' that was all too common in leftist or radical thinking. They go on to ask:

What is the image of power that underlines such an interpretation of events? It seems to be one in which power is predominantly distributed to capital ... Surely the building of an immense apparatus of integrated and implicated parts produces a veritable 'Christmas effect' (Sedgwick 1993) in which women's rights,

femocrats, changed life chances for women, shoring up of capitalist globalization, enclosures of land and sea, informalisation of the labor markets, increased exploitation, ransacked state services, a shredded welfare system, and the war on terror all sing to the same tune. (Gibson-Graham 2006a: 74)

This conflation of ‘effects’ raises significant problems of explanation. ‘Strong theory ... affords the pleasures of recognition, of capture, of intellectually subduing that one last thing, [but] it offers no relief or exit to a place beyond’ (Gibson-Graham 2006b: 4). That is, it erases the possibility of spaces of agency and of politics.

My second concern about the complicity of feminism in neoliberalism centres on what might be termed a politics of blame. Feminism’s demise is attributed to the actions of white, middle-class feminists who sought equality, doing deals with the neoliberal devil and abandoning their own radicalism in the process. But blaming feminism for its own undoing too easily slides into the continued demonization of feminism and its achievements by the conservative right, fed by the popular press. It also chimes with the rise of an anti-liberal and anti-feminist political culture following the financial crisis of 2008 and, in the United Kingdom, the election of a coalition government committed to deep cuts in benefits and public services. The Women’s Budget Group’s response to the 2010 budget elicited a stream of vitriol; bloggers on the *Guardian* website responded, in colourful and abusive language, that women’s claims of the past had discriminated against men and should now be silenced. And David Willetts, at the time Minister of State for Universities and Science, controversially claimed that feminism was to blame for the lack of social mobility in Britain, and hinted that high-earning women had contributed to the rise in house prices that had precipitated the banking crisis (Newman 2011b).

It is not only a question of blame; sometimes women are viewed as willing dupes of processes of political and cultural change that were not in their interests. McRobbie’s emphasis on the cooption of feminist claims for choice and freedom in the developing consumer culture are relevant here. However Weeks offers a strong response to claims that the focus on identity politics helped generate a cult of individualism that was readily taken up in new forms of consumption-based citizenship. He argues that:

The problem with such arguments is that they all assume that the individual is forced to live with the illusion of freedom while actually being wrapped in the gilded cords of late capitalism ... A related argument ... is the proposal that ideas of individual autonomy and self responsabilization are not so much illusory or deceptive as the very forms of regulation which can be most effectively articulated with the current form of capitalist, and by extension social and cultural, organization: neoliberalism. (Weeks 2007: 129–30)

This takes me to the third, and most troubling, problem: that of the relationship between the ‘undoing’ of feminism and the rise of neoliberalism. As I noted in Chapter 5, McRobbie traces the emergence of a ‘gender aware

governmentality' supported by the thesis of reflexive modernization (Beck *et al.* 1994; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001). This, she argues, 'contributes to the eclipsing of feminism as a valid force for social and political change' and has provided 'a rationale for the rise of neoliberalism and the shift to the right in British politics' (McRobbie 2009: 46). She shows how women were losers in this emphasis on reflexivity, becoming disembedded from old institutions (e.g. an equal opportunity-based public sector) and set free to take their place in the post-Fordist flexible economy. For Nancy Fraser it was feminism's emphasis on culture (in a politics of recognition rather than redistribution) that was aligned with the demands of a new phase of post-Fordist, transnational and disorganized capitalism. Her 2009 paper 'Feminism, capitalism and the cunning of history' centred on how far feminism had 'unwittingly' supplied the key ingredients of the 'new spirit of capitalism' described by Boltanski and Chiapello:

Was it mere coincidence that second wave feminism and neoliberalism prospered in tandem? Or was there some perverse, subterranean elective affinity between them? That second possibility is heretical, to be sure, but we fail to investigate it at our peril. Certainly the rise of neoliberalism dramatically changed the terrain on which second wave feminism operated. The effect, I shall argue, was to resignify feminist ideals. Aspirations that had a clear emancipatory thrust in the context of state organised capitalism assumed a far more ambiguous meaning in the neo-liberal era. (Fraser 2009: 107)

Feminist anti-economism, Fraser argues, collapsed into a politics of recognition that privileged identity politics over claims for redistribution and economic justice. 'Feminism absolutised the critique of culture at precisely the moment when circumstances required redoubled attention to the critique of political economy' (Fraser 2009: 109). She underscores the feminist challenge to traditional authority and its value for the emergence of a new form of post-Fordist capitalism based on horizontal teams, flexible network and management processes oriented towards releasing individual creativity:

Disorganised capitalism turns a sow's ear into a silk purse by elaborating a new romance of female advancement and gender justice. Disturbing as it may sound, I am suggesting that second-wave feminism provided a key ingredient of the new spirit of neo-liberalism. Our critique of the family wage now supplies a good part of the romance that inflects flexible capitalism with a higher meaning and moral point. Endowing their daily struggles with an ethical meaning, the feminist romance attracts women at both ends of the social spectrum ... At both ends, the dream of women's emancipation is harnessed to the engine of capitalist accumulation. (Fraser 2009: 109–110)

We might, in passing, point to the binary opposition here between feminism as 'romance' and the economy as 'machine' in this extract. However, I want to draw attention to how Fraser avoids the politics of blame and victimhood by using the language of an 'elective affinity' between feminism and a new phase of capitalism. She also offers a more disaggregated conception of both feminism

and neoliberalism, showing how different feminist critiques and claims generated multiple points of alignment with emerging capitalist logics. Her concept of 'resignification' suggests a less deterministic and more ambiguous reading of the shifts she describes. Resignification, which I introduced in Chapter 2, is a form of cultural practice in which chains of signifiers are disrupted in order for a concept to take on a new meaning. For example, if the chain that links feminism, justice and equality is ruptured, feminism can be resignified as outdated, anti-male and, indeed, the cause of women's oppression (see, for example, the vilification of the 'superwoman' syndrome of the 1980s). The same rupturing enables particular concepts in the chain – for example, justice and equity – to become sutured into other chains of equivalence: equity and choice; justice and a post-welfare concept of fairness. These new couplings fundamentally change the meaning of (i.e. resignify) the concepts and render them compatible with projects of depoliticization and welfare reform.

The processes of articulation, disarticulation and resignification are helpful ways of framing both the relationship between different varieties of activism and the accommodations between activist claims and governance shifts that I have traced in previous chapters of this book. I do not want to suggest that politicized forms of feminism were not subject to exclusion, marginalization and demonization. But there is little regard in many of the accounts for political agency, and for how contradictions are lived, managed and potentially produce lines of fracture. The agency of capitalism or neoliberalism itself is unquestioned, whether it is depicted as an entity into which social movements are incorporated and assimilated, or whether it is a dynamic force which requires the agency of others – including activists – to generate productive mutations and flexings. And while the treatment of feminism is nuanced and subtle, neoliberalism tends to be regarded as an unproblematic category: it is feminism that has to flex, not neoliberalism itself. This opens up some puzzles about how neoliberalism itself might be understood, and how questions of contradiction, antagonism and instability might offer rather different narratives of change.

Neoliberalism in question

In much of the critical literature neoliberalism itself is treated as a given; as a self-evident phenomenon that needs little discussion. It is depicted as a global and globalizing phenomenon that rolls over all before it, operating at a different scale from and thus subsuming 'local' and 'particular' struggles. Whatever happens in the spaces of power I have been concerned with in this book, it follows, neoliberalism will emerge triumphant. But what is neoliberalism? It is a highly contested concept (Brown 2005; Ward and England 2007) and has become what Clarke (Clarke 2008) regards as a 'promiscuous' term that is widely overused and notoriously difficult to pin down. One difficulty is

that it is more likely to be a term used by critics than by its advocates; and this, Ferguson argues, leaves us 'with a politics largely defined by negation and disdain' (Ferguson 2010: 166). Within political economy, which tends to dominate the field of critical scholarship, David Harvey (Harvey 2005) views neoliberalism as a class-based political project of creating new means of capital accumulation, while Jessop (Jessop 2002) and Peck (Peck 2004) place more emphasis on the role of the state in securing political and ideological reform in order to enable the expansion of the scope and reach of corporate capital. In contrast Foucauldian inspired theories of governmentality (Brown 2005; Ong 2007; N. Rose 1999) view neoliberalism in terms of technologies for governing populations by installing 'economic' logics of calculation (constituted through discourses of markets, efficiency, managerialism, consumer choice and individual autonomy) and strategies for promoting 'self-governing' subjects.

Clarke (Clarke 2008) and Larner (Larner 2000), coming respectively from cultural studies and feminist geography, draw on such perspectives but carefully distinguish between neoliberalism as an ideology, as a set of political projects and policies, and as techniques of governing. Such distinctions are important, opening out questions about the coherence of neoliberalism as the singular source of 'all bad things' – an image that potentially undermines the possibility of contestation. As Larner suggests, 'this delineation of different interpretations of neoliberalism is not simply an academic exercise: our understanding of this phenomenon shape our readings of the scope and content of possible political interventions' (Larner 2000: 5).

This is an important point, which resonates with the analysis of the constitutive power of theory itself (Chapter 6): its capacity to make more solid that which is the object of critique, and to displace attention from experiments and examples which do not neatly fit. This is a point made strongly in my discussion with Sasha Roseneil:

I got just really, really fed up with how everything gets understood in certain circles of academia as being about neoliberalism, and the lack of nuance in the overarching account of it's all neoliberal. There's a similar move gone on in queer work. This shows a lack of ability to be properly historical, I would say, to actually see the changes that have been brought about and the way in which those changes – both political, legal, policy and cultural – have been brought about by political activism, and the way those politics have been suffusing everyday life. A lot of my work has been about trying to trace processes of social change. But I think there's a kind of whole tendency to flatten out social change, to ignore it. There's a much greater comfort with the kind of pessimism that says it's all neoliberal and it's all unstoppable than there is with really kind of grappling with what might we do with our power. This goes back to my kind of anarchist politics which has always said 'you have power, I have power and we have to use our power'. You know we're not just kind of victims of anything, of patriarchal or neoliberalism, or any kind of set of macro forces. And there's a kind of psychodynamic and post-structuralist take on that which is about the way in which we can continually reconstitute things by speaking them, so the more we say it's all neoliberalism, it's all impossible, the more we make it so. (Sasha Roseneil)

As Sasha and others have argued, theories of neoliberalism seem to fall too often into a form of ‘epochal analysis’ that reads all particularities as instances of a general phenomenon. In contrast, others have pointed to its variability:

New political configurations are more multi-vocal than we might previously have understood. Most immediately, we are alerted to the possibility that there are different configurations of neoliberalism, and that close inspection of particular neo-liberal political projects is more likely to reveal a complex and hybrid political imaginary, rather than the straightforward implementation of a unified and coherent political philosophy. (Larner 2000: 12)

The analysis of coexisting and divergent political projects in New Zealand (Larner, Le Heron and Lewis 2007) and of contradictory governance regimes within the UK Third Way (Newman 2001) each demonstrates the significance of multiplicity, antagonism and contradiction. None of this denies the significance of the hegemonic project of neoliberalization and its disastrous implications for women and the resulting intensification of poverty and new global patterns of exploitation and inequality. But I do want to argue that viewing neoliberalism as a singular and all-encompassing force squeezes the capacity both for analysis and for agency. Across the chapters of this volume it is possible to trace multiple projects of neoliberalization and to suggest some of the different problematics that neoliberal governance might seek to address, from creating more flexible, educated workers to constituting community as a governmental terrain; from generating innovation to fostering new policy logics. These require different kinds of agents, operate at different temporalities and spatialities, and may not always be coherent. Rather than general questions (Is this neoliberal or not? What kind or phase of neoliberalism is this?), the focus of analysis shifts to how multiple projects coexist and how contradictions between them are resolved in *particular* sites at *specific* moments, and what forms of labour are at stake. Such questions are, I want to suggest, empirical as well as theoretical.

Spaces of power

Rather than just confronting neoliberalism, then, I want to open up space for thinking about what happens as activist projects confront neoliberal rationalities in the series of the ‘perverse alignments’, ‘close encounters’, ‘modernizing moments’ and ‘critical engagements’ discussed in this book, and to offer something more than Ferguson’s politics of negation and disdain.

Issues of community (Chapter 3) have been integral to analyses of neoliberalism, but have been understood – and gendered – in rather different ways. The international development literature points to the centrality of women in economic development programmes in the global south, highlighting new patterns of exploitation and appropriation but also women’s role in cultural

and political change (Cornwall, Harrison and Whitehead 2007; Gaventa and McGee 2010; Gaventa and Tandon 2010; Gibson-Graham 2006b; Mohanty 2003; Sharma 2008). The literature on participation in the nations of Latin America and on Latina migrants in the United States highlights the problem of politics as strong and autonomous social movements confront globalizing neoliberal ruling relations (Coll 2010; Dagnino 2005; Dagnino 2007; Pearce 2010). The governmentality literature – especially in the global north – tends to centre on the constitution of new citizen subjects (the active citizen, the empowered citizen, the responsible citizen) situated in community as an ambiguous terrain that has taken on new significance in advanced neoliberal governance (N. Rose 1999).

Some feminist literatures point to community as the ‘human face’ of capitalism: ‘Community is posited as particular where capitalism is abstract. Posited as its other, its opposite, community is often presented as a complement to capitalism, balancing and humanising it, even in fact, enabling it’ (Joseph 2002: 1). Joseph notes how the discourse of community positions women as the defining other of modernity, of capitalism. Her idea of community as ‘excess’ that, because of its separateness from capitalist logics, can grow innovations on which capitalism can subsequently draw, is helpful. Indeed, this chapter has shown how women’s labour on collective and cooperative projects served to generate commitments, resources and skills that were later utilised in governmental projects of inclusion, participation and empowerment. Such projects prefigured significant policy shifts and reconfigured sectoral and organizational boundaries, transforming public and professional labour and containing dissent.

But this is only part of the story. Even in the United Kingdom, as Chapter 3 suggested, women’s engagements with community cannot be collapsed into a singular conception of neoliberal governmentality seeking to produce responsibilized citizen-subjects. But nor do they suggest a conception of the state in which it surrenders power to the ‘empowered’ community. Rather, Chapter 3 used the term ‘perverse alignments’ to suggest the relationship between multiple governmental projects and the resources generated through gendered labour. Such labour can be viewed as generating sources of power – or mobilizing community ‘assets’ – on which neoliberalism might draw, and/or of smoothing the edges of the conflicts resulting from the exacerbation of poverty, inequality and injustice. But it also generates images of potential alternatives that drew on – but failed to be subsumed by – governmentalities of community. In the UK context the conceptual and political hybridity of community enabled activist struggles to be resignified by government, but this did not mean that the original meaning was erased. ‘Community’ remains, in Britain and beyond, an intense focus of ideological and political struggles as welfare states seek to devolve responsibilities for care and welfare to ‘local’, personal, familial and faith-based actors, and as activists mobilize to define and pursue their own struggles, often drawing on public resources.

Chapter 4 highlighted the multiple projects that connected feminist-inflected activism, social policy and the regendering of governance. The selective incorporation of gender agendas in what has been termed the social investment state can be viewed as a triumph of neoliberal forms of appropriation of feminist politics. But in the same period concerns about parenting, family stability and care became amplified. These projects addressed women as citizen-subjects in different ways, the first calling on women to participate in the economy as full, adult-worker citizens; the second summoning them as carers, parents and responsible citizens. One might, rather crudely, depict feminism as functional to neoliberalism in two different and contradictory ways. In the first, the expanded role of female labour – more flexible, less unionized and more suited to the service economy – is viewed as constitutive of a new economic order of flexible accumulation. In the second, women are viewed as integral to advanced neoliberal strategies of governing the social and sustaining the informal economy that reproduces the conditions of capital accumulation. The contradictions between these projects, and between the subject positions women are expected to adopt, open out global patterns of migration (to meet care needs) but also intensify tensions between paid and unpaid work that can only be resolved by what development economists term the greater elasticity of women's labour (Elson 1995).

Such functionalist readings, however, offer limited purchase on the contradictions at stake in the regendering of the economy and of the social. In each case neoliberal projects were themselves transformed – in part – through their encounters with feminist and other activist claims. Employers came to bear the 'costs' of equality governance, parental leave and more complex patterns of work demanded by women's entry as full worker citizens. Welfare states, while looking to curb benefits paid to 'dependent' women, had to invest in development, empowerment and training and to launch a multiplicity of 'social' programmes in order to enable women both to contribute to the economy and to manage care work, however flawed and partial such programmes proved to be. It is not the case, then, that women were included in policy and economy in ways that left the social order unchanged (Brodie 2008): neoliberalism had itself to adapt and flex to take account of feminist projects. However, there is no doubt that feminist politics (especially the claim that 'the personal is political') laid the basis for the emergence of new governmentalities of the self and personal lives. Notions of active citizenship, for example, drew extensively on social movement (especially feminist) claims and practices, reflecting and resignifying them in line with hegemonic political projects (Newman and Tonkens 2011). The development of what Pykett terms the 'maternal state' (Pykett 2012), with its emphasis on 'soft paternalism' as a form of rule, reworked feminist vocabularies of the emotions and the body into new strategies of behaviour change and social control. Conceptions of neoliberalism as 'policy' and as 'governmentality' thus offer different readings of the regendering of governance.

Chapter 5 traced multiple modernizing logics, showing that ‘modernization’ was not a singular ethos but a rationale for a range of disparate projects. The ‘challenges to tradition’ in the 1960s can be viewed as both good for women and post-colonial citizen-subjects (symbolically, if not materially, freeing them from subordinate and dependent status), and good for capitalism (opening up access to new productive workforces and new products that were at the ‘leading edge’ of an economy to come, drawing on ‘wasted talent’ and introducing new production systems: ones that, in the case of F-International, ‘fitted’ with women’s lives). But they also opened up spaces that women could seize, occupy and subvert. Some decades later some women who had previously worked in socialist and community based projects entered local government to head up the process of competitive tendering (CCT). We might understand this as local authorities appropriating the experiences, politics and skills of socialist feminists and reworking them to extend market rationalities. But we might also see women appropriating local authority spaces to work new articulations between trade union discourses, feminist discourses and professional/managerial discourses within the local authority. This work of articulation was done ‘from below’ rather than by dominant actors, subverting – at least for a while – the rationalities of contracting in order to enhance the employment status of women and the value placed on women’s labour. This was a collective project – participants worked with women in the cleaning, catering and other services, with some local authority councillors and some trade unionists to generate new practices and service logics. And this government-imposed modernization, which can be understood as the state creating the conditions for the neoliberal logics to come, opened up spaces for ‘other projects’: catering services were modernized in ways that led to better school meals services, and contracts had equality provisions built into them. Both of these were, of course, temporary gains. But CCT also brought low-paid women’s work in cleaning and catering to the fore of local political agendas, leading to a partial modernization of trade unions around issues of gender and race, and prefiguring the ‘equal value’ legislation of later years.

A rather different modernization, becoming more evident through the 1990s, was characterized by the rise of managerialism (Clarke and Newman 1997). This superimposed economic forms of calculation on to embedded social, professional and public rationalities and was fundamental to the new ‘spirit of capitalism’ discussed by Boltanski and Chiapello (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005) on which Fraser drew (Fraser 2009). Managerialism privileged constant organizational change in the search for flexibility, performance and innovation. The ‘management of change’ was the key managerial skill sought out by employers through the 1990s, and who better to help them than those who understood the significance of the personal in organizational life and who could work with the emotional as well as the structural dynamics of change?

Women entering management can thus be viewed as doing important work in softening and humanizing organizations in ways that made them fit for

service-based rather than industrial, Fordist processes of capital accumulation. The feminization of management not only highlighted the role of women as change agents but also heralded the valorization of flexibility and reflexivity, both needed for the expansion of new capitalist logics. These qualities were promoted by a range of policy entrepreneurs, educators and consultants, and by those engaged in 'partnership' work. As the chapter showed, such actors helped to generate a new discursive organizational repertoire of culture, values, development, empowerment, quality, customer focus, missions, visions and participative leadership and so on that, although readily appropriated by modernizing logics, provided ample spaces for 'other projects'.

Chapter 6 showed how participants helped constitute the reflexive and educated subjects required by the 'information society' or 'knowledge economy', both integral to new logics of capital accumulation and central to national projects of global competitiveness. The turn to 'experiential knowledge' can be linked with the forms of reflexive modernization required by neoliberalism. It also enabled the production of new governmentalities of the self: the empowered citizen, the responsible citizen, the active citizen, the participating citizen and the citizen consumer. Each, as previous chapters have shown, was integral to neoliberal projects of state retrenchment. Each made more of the 'self' available for new governmental projects of coproduction, partnership and responsabilization; but also generated more critical and potentially politicized actors. Such paradoxes ran through a number of different forms of knowledge-work discussed in the chapter. For example, the professional shifts that sought to enhance citizen's knowledge of their own needs and conditions can be viewed as integral to their role as consumers of services in a disaggregated and marketized welfare state. Yet Ann McPherson, who was a pioneer of opening up peer-based systems of enhancing access to such knowledge, was adamant in her opposition to the UK choice agenda in health services.

Chapter 6 also showed how some participants engaged in a series of 'close encounters' with the policy process, using both the knowledge elicited through research and their own activist agendas to influence, inform and evaluate policy initiatives. This led to a series of dilemmas – dilemmas concerning the proper relationship between research and policy, about the methods and ethical consequences of different approaches, about the value and utility of their work to practitioners, activists and those who were the subjects of the research. The role of activists in knowledge-work, then, opens up many of the same paradoxes as other forms of work: participants may have their work appropriated for purposes other than those which were intended; they may unintentionally be complicit with the elaboration of political projects that they do not support; and they may find their words being 'stolen' and resignified by actors promoting projects of exploitation rather than empowerment. Yet knowledge remains a locus of power, and participants all brought important political framings of the work in which they were engaged: making visible unrecognized patterns of exploitation and bringing silenced subjects to

voice; opening up public conversations and influencing decision-makers; and generating new practices and objects through forms of creative labour.

Chapter 7 looked across these substantive chapters in order to assess the ‘border work’ of participants as they attempted to work between activist projects and dominant ruling relations. It showed how, in doing so, they frequently occupied positions on the edge of mainstream institutions, acting as brokers, transactors and translators between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ networks, organizations and sources of power. Much of their work was concerned with partnering, joining up and reconciling difference. One of the perspectives on which I drew for understanding this work was that offered by Larner and Craig’s analysis of the role of ‘strategic brokers’ whose skills and knowledges were put to use in minimizing the fallout of an earlier phase of neoliberalism, softening its edges and addressing the fragmentations that had resulted. They were thus complicit in the turn to more ‘social’ governance strategies associated with the Third Way and the move from ‘roll-back’ neoliberalism with a ‘roll-out’ form in which the state played a more significant role in constituting neoliberal subjects (Peck and Tickell 2002). However, there may be tensions between the social and economic goals of neoliberalism, which could be exploited by those working its borders.

This brief chapter review demonstrates something of the multiplicity of neoliberalism. But how is this multiplicity to be understood? Ong (Ong 2007) treats neoliberalism as a ‘mobile assemblage’ comprising technologies, techniques and practices that are appropriated selectively as they come into contact with ‘local’ politics and cultures. They are mobile and connective rather than a ‘tidal wave’ that rolls out from dominant centres of power. There is a need, then, to distinguish between grand ideological projects and their uneven and fractured enactments at local level. From a governmentality perspective Li (Li 2007a) argues that most of the political work of neoliberalism involves practices of de- and re-articulation of existing elements into new configurations, assemblages or constellations. These are each perspectives that I have found productive in trying to analyse the ‘spaces of power’ discussed in previous chapters. As activist struggles and neoliberal projects encounter each other, rather than the former being erased, they are *selectively* appropriated into mobile configurations or assemblages that are always incomplete. The spaces of power that participants generated and occupied, then, were not ‘spaces of exception’ in a field of power dominated by neoliberalism; they were formed in a *dynamic* field marked by contradictions, strains, antagonisms and ambivalences.

Landscapes of antagonism

The previous section highlighted some of the sites in which feminist-inflected agency was selectively – and contradictorily – appropriated in new ruling relations. It suggested how feminist activism prefigured new governmentalities

of empowerment and community; how women's involvement in policymaking supported the emergence of new forms of governing based on partnership and participation; how feminism was ambiguously aligned with new organizational and leadership practices; and how the emphasis on experience-based forms of knowledge and research could be appropriated. These were, I want to emphasize, different political projects associated with multiple negotiations of new forms of rule. In highlighting multiplicity, however, I do not want to suggest that all projects carried equal weight, nor that each was a site in which neoliberal appropriations and erasures were successful. Rather, neoliberal projects and feminist politics encountered each other in differently constituted 'landscapes of antagonism'. To explore these I draw on two different analytical frameworks. The first is that of Raymond Williams, who, in contesting what he termed 'epochal' forms of analysis, argued that:

We have certainly still to speak of the 'dominant; and the 'effective', and in these senses of the hegemonic. But we find that we also have to speak, and indeed with further differentiation of each, of the 'residual' and the 'emergent', which in any real process, and at any moment in the process, are significant both in themselves and in what they reveal about the character of the 'dominant'. (Williams 1977: 121–2)

Feminism, I want to suggest, was the source of emergent forms of politics and practice which in turn opened up what I term 'prefigurative pathways', some of which were articulated into would-be hegemonic forms of rule to become a new 'dominant' formation. But in the process neoliberalism itself had to adapt and flex to take account of feminism: its claims and demands, and the cultural and politics shifts it had generated. Other pathways were configured with traces of 'residual' formations that continued as effective forces into the present in ways that disrupt readings of 'epochal' change.

This form of analysis problematizes concepts of 'after' and 'post' neoliberalism developed in some feminist literature (see discussion in Simon-Kumar 2011). But the argument I want to develop here is rather different and takes me to the second analytical framing: one that points to how new orderings of the 'dominant' emerge in conditions where counter projects and movements have formed a 'perverse alignment' with neoliberal logics. This concept, introduced in Chapter 3, is inspired by the work of the Brazilian scholar Evelina Dagnino who traced a 'perverse confluence' between popular participatory projects (represented in the success of struggles against the military dictatorship in Brazil) and the neoliberal conception of a minimal state. The perversity is located in the fact that despite 'pointing in opposite and even antagonistic directions, both projects require an active, proactive civil society' (Dagnino 2007: 335; see also Newman and Clarke 2009: 139). This offers a different, but sympathetic, reading of the 'elective affinities' between feminism and neoliberalism referred to by Fraser. I want to use it here to suggest the significance of the different 'perversities' generated in the multiple spaces of power traced in the previous section.

Chapter 3 traced the emergence of particular governmental concerns with ‘community’ in the United Kingdom in the 1970s in the Community Development Programmes that sought to contain and manage particularly ‘deprived’, and therefore potentially disruptive, communities. This opened new spaces of power that fostered emergent forms of anti-state and anti-capitalist activism that flourished through the 1980s. Under the Blair governments, while antagonisms continued, the socialist-inflected and anti-racist community activism that had been supported – and often funded – by local governments were displaced, in part, in the attempt to forge a new hegemonic settlement based on ideas of social inclusion and community cohesion. As in the Dagnino example, both political ‘resistance’ and neoliberal governmentality required a strong and active civil society: for community activists, this represented new configurations of resistance within, rather than outside, dominant projects; for neoliberalism, a strong and active civil society was a source of potential forms of innovation that could be appropriated by capitalism in the search for new sources of profit (as in Joseph’s conception of community as ‘excess’) as well as potentially displacing some forms of state expenditure.

This hegemonic settlement, I want to emphasize, was a project rather than an accomplishment. State expenditure in this period tended to grow rather than diminish, and activism flourished in ‘emergent’ spaces at the same time as older – more residual – activist projects became subject to processes of professionalization. Both contribute to the dominant projects of cuts and retrenchment in the present. In the United Kingdom, civil society is being recast, ideologically, as an alternative to public services and state welfare; the hoped for Big Society of David Cameron was explicitly depicted as an alternative to the (overgrown, dependency inducing, paternalistic) Big State. Emergent civil society forms generated by the opportunities of ‘competition’ and ‘choice’ in previous decades are becoming more mainstream, creating important shifts in the cultural and political landscape. However, these emergent (neoliberal) ideological forces are neither equivalent to actual (neoliberal) policies and projects, nor do they signal a coherent new (neoliberal) governmentality. In the United Kingdom, the policy agenda associated with the Big Society was weakened and had, to say the least, uneven political purchase, either within government, the Civil Service or popular consciousness. And its associated governmentalities – of self-reliance and mutuality – were, as we will see, in tension with other neoliberal logics. However, there is no doubt that the ideological project of vilifying the state and all its works and privileging the local community as a locus of moral and ethical values has been particularly successful.

This is, in part, due to its appropriation of residual and emergent vocabularies, sensibilities and practices. The Big Society and other policies on local devolution and active citizenship did not emerge fully formed from the pens of politicians and policymakers; they were prefigured by emerging critiques of New Labour’s hyper rational-instrumentalist mode of politics (Jordan 2010);

by residual attachments to moral, ethical and relational norms and values, including those of care and mutual responsibility espoused by many women; and by the emerging role of ‘faith actors’ in the marketplace for schools, care homes and other formerly ‘public’ services. This marks ‘the local’ as a field in which different forces and interests are played out. And its gendering is paradoxical: women are positioned as the vilified agents of state expansion and state paternalism of the (residual) past, and as the potential mobilizers of a more ethical and moral society characterized by mutual care and responsibility. However, women are already being profoundly disadvantaged by these new ideological framings and their consequences, not least the cuts to state services and the possibilities of state-funded employment.

The policy shifts traced in Chapter 4 suggest a different ‘perverse alignment’ in which both capital and the state sought to mobilize women as reflexive, educated worker citizens as well as cheap and flexible labour. In the affluent West, the dynamics of change privileged the former, using the possibilities of global migration or outsourcing to the global south to secure access to cheap labour. This mobilization is a critical point of alignment with second-wave feminist claims for economic and political independence. Emergent forces in that period prefigured the phenomena of gender mainstreaming, together with the (partial and conditional) recognition of issues of gender, race and sexuality in public policy, the professions and organizational practice.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s these emergent forces helped reconfigure the dominant orthodoxies of policy, management and business, such that ‘diversity’ was ideologically and discursively valorized as a source of innovation and a drive to enhanced performance. This can be read as a form of neoliberal ‘flexing’ to take account of unresolved contradictions, but the reframing of individualism and choice around notions of diversity and equality can be viewed as its attempt to smooth increasingly problematic antagonisms. In the process, as McRobbie argued, the political dimensions of feminist and other claims became residual; but they did not disappear. They continued as effective forces, persisting precisely because neoliberalism had not flexed sufficiently, had not erased the possibility of a feminist politics. Indeed, just as neoliberalism ‘stole’ some of the discursive repertoires of feminism and other struggles, so feminist actors sought to appropriate neoliberal repertoires (for example, those of efficiency and investment). Politics continued through alternative new vocabularies of action (LGBT rather than gay, human rights rather than recognition, migration and asylum rather than race). But older vocabularies that had been the focus of co-option – such as equality and fairness – remained as effective forces into the present; indeed, they came back into prominence in feminist institutions such as the Fawcett Society and Women’s Budget Group, as the disenchantment of women to Conservative-led coalition policies on cuts and state retrenchment became increasingly vocal (the Fawcett Society was backed by a coalition of charities, trade unions and academics – much in

the style of the policy entrepreneurship described in Chapter 4). The residual, perhaps, can bite back: though how sharp its teeth can be in the present political conjuncture is as yet uncertain.

Many of the ‘modernizing’ projects evident in the next set of mappings can also be read as points of potential perverse alignment between feminist claims and capitalist logics. Both feminism and neoliberalism privilege reflexive, flexible forms of subjectivity and ‘empowered’, information-rich actors. This produced what appears to be a new dominant formation characterized by post-Fordist organizational forms, ‘soft’ management skills, person-centred leadership and high levels of investment in the training and development of workforces. But this dominant formation generated new spaces that women could take up: as project workers, consultants, entrepreneurs, trainers, partners and leaders, many of whom levered or bent the dominant in ways that took account of very different projects (Newman 2005c). Post-Fordism also opened up space for the reframing of equality. The bureaucratic systems through which equal opportunities had become inscribed became threatened as bureaucracy itself became discredited. But this very process of de-bureaucratization created new spaces of power in which activists could bend the new logics, taking equality rationales into service provision by resignifying ‘quality’, inscribing equality into audit and performance management measures, linking ‘diversity’ to the expansion of participative technologies and so on (Brietenbach, Brown, Mackay and Webb 2002). At the same time bureaucracy, rather than being eradicated in the neoliberal search for mobile and flexible ways of organizing, was supplanted by new global imperatives of ‘good governance’ (see publications of the World Bank, International Labour Organization, World Health Organization and other transnational institutions). These became the focus of contestation (what was to be included), inscription (of feminist and other claims, especially those of ‘presence’), and indeed expansion (to accommodate new social justice claims that expanded feminist politics beyond the limits of the nation state). The power and capacity of ‘good governance’ to exert control over capitalist enterprises is of course extremely limited. The banking crisis of 2008 and beyond, and the failure of governments to extend control through regulation and other governance devices, demonstrates these limits in stark terms. However, ‘good governance’ is by no means a residual discourse, and remains the locus of antagonistic mobilizations and contested rationalities.

In Chapter 6 we can trace the contours of a perverse alignment in which both activist projects and neoliberal governmentalities seek to constitute more reflexive, knowledgeable actors. This has offered up multiple spaces of power that could be mobilized by activists, and in which the meanings and practices of new subjectivities could be negotiated. The evidence of this book, and of other research, is that subjects do not readily take on the subject positions offered to them; they may not ‘hear’ the summons or may use new forms of knowledge and power for ‘other’ purposes (Barnes and Prior 2009; Barnett,

Cloke, Clark and Malpass 2011; Clarke *et al.* 2007). They may hold on to older (supposedly residual) identifications as rights-bearing citizens, or may become part of emergent formations of connectivity and agency based on ethical, environmental or social justice claims that are not easily reconciled with governmental projects. In assessing the pattern of dominant, residual and emergent forces what seems to be significant is how knowledge is inscribed in particular assemblages. The work of Tania Li (Li 2007a; Li 2007b) is helpful here. She shows how the work of assemblage involves six practices: those of ‘forging alignments’; ‘rendering technical’; ‘authorizing knowledge’; ‘managing failures and contradictions’; ‘depoliticization’; and ‘reassembling’. In terms of the forms of knowledge-work described in Chapter 6, we saw how new alignments were forged between policymakers and academics, as well as between ‘experts’ and ‘ordinary people’. But experiential knowledge had to be ‘rendered technical’ – stripped of nuance and complexity – in order to be packaged for policymaking or policy evaluation. The accounts also show how some forms of knowledge became authorized, and how contradictions between experiential and more objective knowledge had to be managed. ‘Dominant’ and ‘residual’ forms of knowledge and knowledge-work are not, then, absolute categories but are aligned in different ways. However Li’s final two practices are of particular importance, returning to the processes of professionalization referred to in Chapters 3, 4 and 7. The process of ‘rendering technical’ serves to depoliticize the field from which knowledge is derived; expertise, this implies, becomes removed from the activism that brought individuals and groups into ‘close encounters’ with dominant ruling relations. Political questions of equality and justice tended to be reposed as matters of technique and transposed through the filtering devices of action plans, monitoring, auditing and so on. In a similar way the political question of the marginalization and exclusion of particular population groups came to be addressed through technologies of ‘public participation’ that privilege certain forms of knowledge and render others illegitimate (Barnes *et al.* 2007; Mahony 2008). But the book has also shown the significance of ‘reassembling’; how participants resignified existing discourses, deployed new capacities and resources, and combined existing elements in ways that serve to repoliticize a field of action.

This analysis has offered a way of reframing narratives of the decline or erasure of feminism through its inscription in policy and in organizational systems. It points to the multiple ways in which feminist politics and neoliberal projects encounter each other and to the contradictions – for both feminism and neoliberalism – that result. It shows how feminism, as well as neoliberalism, has the capacity to adapt and flex. Jain and Elson (Jain and Elson 2011) show how feminism continues to inflect development projects in China, India, Japan, Cuba, Africa and other nations, and how feminist knowledge can help shape public policy for a ‘post crisis’ world. But in neoliberal times, as Dagnino argued, politics becomes both more difficult and potentially dangerous: there

is greater likelihood that one's very words will be stolen, that the language through which politics was conducted will be appropriated, potentially leaving political movements 'lost for words'. Indeed, in Chapter 3 I quoted Jane Foot speaking angrily about how '*New Labour have stolen our language*', while Carole Harte, who had been promoting active citizenship through women's empowerment projects, spoke of her shock when Cameron began using the same language, and her feelings at how her words were coming back and '*biting me on the bum*'.

I do not, then, want to propose an optimistic image of agency in place of the pessimistic image of neoliberal triumph. In the face of processes of appropriation, displacement and co-option, it is difficult to delineate a common political project and to pursue it in the kinds of spaces of power I have traced in this book. But I do want to highlight the importance of readings of change that allow for continued points of conflict, disruption and antagonism. This takes me back to the work of Sasha Roseneil (quoted earlier in this chapter). The narrative of neoliberalism and the erasure of feminism offers a way of understanding dominant trends and tendencies, but overlooks both 'residual' and 'emergent' forms. It overlooks the continued existence of strong feminist institutions and orientations formed in an earlier political-cultural moment that are still effective in the present – and which can continue to 'speak to power'. It also overlooks emergent ways of reframing feminist struggle: ways that do not necessarily speak the language of 'equality' but which address issues that were on the margins of older feminist campaigns – on care work, migration, sex work, environmental issues, global social justice and so on. The study thus challenges narratives of feminist complicity with neoliberalism, showing how both are multiple formations that became aligned in particular ways in particular places at particular political-cultural moments. Mapping these as temporary and conditional alignments in landscapes of antagonism that are always in motion does not foreclose the possibility of politics.

Conclusion

What has been the value of this analysis for readings of the present political-cultural moment? In Chapter 1, I set out the theoretical and political goals of this research. Theoretically, this chapter has challenged a conception of both feminism and neoliberalism as singular entities that can be aligned – stitched together – in an overarching and epochal account of the present. Each 'mapping' generated from the research shows the coexistence of multiple neoliberal rationalities and intersecting activist projects, and suggests ways in which the antagonisms are worked, contained or reconfigured, in part, through gendered labour (see also Newman 2012a; Newman 2012c; Newman 2013).

Each also illuminates the current political moment through an understanding of the changes that have taken place over the previous sixty years. The spaces of power that participants in the research generated and occupied, then, were not ‘spaces of exception’ in a field of power dominated by neoliberalism; they were formed in a *dynamic* field marked by contradictions, strains, antagonisms and ambivalences. However, spaces of power, I argued in Chapter 7, are spaces of strain and discomfort; as ‘contact zones’ traversed by competing form of power and authority they are spaces that call on essentially political, rather than professional or managerial, skills.

Politically, the chapter has reviewed how the term ‘spaces of power’ opens up the possibility of contingent and temporary forms of intervention through which activist projects can be pursued. The research on which this book draws shows how women have generated such spaces by working the contradictions inherent in neoliberal projects, and have used them to lever resources and other forms of power in order to pursue activist goals. They have worked with multiple understandings of politics, and have performed that politics in very different ways, often changing their performance over a life-course. Their successes may be partial or temporary, but their work attests to the importance of finding alternatives to Ferguson’s politics of ‘negation and disdain’ in which narratives of neoliberal incorporation foreclose the possibility of political agency. The women on whose accounts I have drawn often themselves challenged feminism’s own accounts of incorporation and complicity:

Some of what’s happening might be subsumed under neoliberalism, but not all of it. There are still women working in public sectors who bring feminist and class-based agendas into their work. But then we had those same debates in the 1970s where we had debates between liberal and socialist feminism – we didn’t call it neoliberalism in the 1970 but we were debating those same questions. Nowadays neoliberal policies have become more hegemonic than before, but there are still lots of women who are struggling with these issues. But it is disappointing when there is some big name who says she now rejects feminism, or that it’s no longer relevant. It’s very disappointing when that happens. (Avtar Brah)

This extract shows the importance of bringing a historical perspective to political debates about liberalizing economic reforms. It warns against assumptions about the erasure of some of the forms of activism described in preceding chapters. But it also expresses a sense of disappointment about the rejection of earlier forms of political commitment and action on the part of ‘big names’. This, she argued, not only gave succour to an anti-feminist politics of the right, but also sent out harmful signals to younger women, the potential activists of the present and future. As younger women generate new ways of performing feminist politics there is a need for better narratives of the fate of those who came before.