

## Chapter 1: Introduction

When Australian television journalist Virginia Haussegger dashed off an impassioned article to the *Age* newspaper in July 2002, she was driven by grief at her childlessness. But Haussegger also had a grievance. She was angry at feminists, those “outspoken women who demanded a better deal for all women” but who had lied when they promised women could “have it all”:

The point is that while encouraging women in the '70s and '80s to reach for the sky, none of our purple-clad, feminist mothers thought to tell us the truth about the biological clock...I am childless and I am angry. Angry that I was so foolish to take the word of my feminist mothers as gospel. Angry that I was daft enough to believe female fulfilment came with a leather briefcase. It was wrong. It was crap.<sup>1</sup>

The article triggered a media frenzy, as commentators variously applauded and derided Haussegger's intervention. Feminists who had been active in the 1970s and 1980s felt aggrieved in turn: “We were there,” they protested, “and we never said that!”

Perhaps unintentionally, Haussegger's article and subsequent book joined an already lively body of commentary in Australia about the “failures of feminism.” At its more outlandish extremes, this body of commentary blames feminism for all kinds of problems, from binge-drinking to anorexia. At its core, though, are concerns about work, care, motherhood and fertility. The claim most often repeated is that second-wave feminism over-emphasised paid work at the expense of women's caring roles.<sup>2</sup> As a consequence, it is argued, women are now finding that they have “left it too late” to have children after devoting their most fertile years to education and a career, or are

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<sup>1</sup> Virginia Haussegger, ‘The Sins of our Feminist Mothers’, *Age*, 23 July 2002, <<http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2002/07/22/1026898972150.html?oneclick=true>> (accessed 28 May 2007). See also Virginia Haussegger, *Wonder Woman: The Myth of “Having it All”*, Crows Nest, New South Wales (NSW): Allen and Unwin, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Examples include: Alex May, ‘The Feminists Kept Mum on the Real Story of Motherhood’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 June 2002, p. 18; Joanna Murray-Smith, ‘Feminism's Booby Trap’, *Age*, 19 Nov. 2004, p. 15; Jane Fraser, ‘An Inconceivable Dilemma’, *Australian*, 11 Jan. 2005, p. 11; Hugh Mackay, ‘I Want It All...’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 June 2004, Spectrum section, p. 4.

becoming disillusioned by the struggle to integrate motherhood with ever more demanding work roles. More sophisticated analyses recognise the complexity of demographic change and individual choices while calling for a new approach that values care. Yet such analyses also tend to contrast their vision with “1970s feminism” and its supposedly mistaken emphasis on women’s access to employment.<sup>3</sup>

As Haussegger has pointed out, her article resonated with so many women because there *is* a problem. Exhaustion, guilt and disappointment accompany many women’s attempts to create fulfilling lives that include motherhood and meaningful paid work. Many women are all too aware that making motherhood their primary occupation is likely to diminish their status and independence. These experiences might be expected to generate frustration among women that the broadest aims of feminism have not yet been achieved, and perhaps even anger at the governments, businesses and individuals who have resisted change. Yet in the popular debate, women’s grievances are not typically represented in gender-based claims for justice or a better deal — claims we might describe as feminist. Rather, the “failures of feminism” commentaries, which dominate public debate, turn away from any such implied identification with feminism as a (potentially) continuing political project. Instead, feminism is portrayed as an entity that had enormous power over society but which wielded this power in a wrong way, making wrong decisions about what to value and what to pursue.

This thesis is a response to the “failures of feminism” commentaries. It argues that portraying feminism as an entity that made bad decisions about work and care misrepresents historical experience. For those who wish to transform the politics of work and care, portraying feminism in this way leads us in the wrong direction: away from detailed understanding about how social change can be envisaged and achieved. Conversely, developing a more concrete account of “what feminism has done,” and in particular a better account of feminist decision-making, can help us to reflect more intelligently on the possibilities for agency in social change.

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<sup>3</sup> David McKnight, *Beyond Right and Left: New Politics and Culture Wars*, Crows Nest, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 2005, pp. 172–201.

To develop a better account of feminist decision-making we need more than popular images of feminism, which lack historical grounding. We need a concept of feminism that enables us to consider the deliberations and actions of individual participants and collectives, as well as feminism's broader meaning. "The women's movement" is such a concept. Examining feminism as the women's movement — as a social movement — allows us to build a more realistic and dynamic picture than the empty figure invoked by the "failures of feminism" commentaries. In these commentaries, the emphasis is often on the "messages" that feminism supposedly gives to women (as in Haussegger's "reach for the sky"). The implication is that feminism should somehow simply decide to change its messages. When we focus our attention on the women's movement, we find that we cannot properly describe feminism through the metaphor of a public-relations manager issuing media releases. In a social movement, multiple individuals and groups engage in different but linked projects in ways that are more complex than can be expressed by the idea of "sending a message." Accordingly, the prospects for deciding to "change the message" of feminism are not so straightforward.

While there was no simple message, the second-wave women's movement did develop a generally consistent position on the issues of work and care. The movement emphasised women's access to employment as a high priority, above any need to support women to be "stay-at-home mums." There is little doubt that this emphasis was influential both in policy terms and in terms of widespread perceptions about women's roles and the women's movement. Even though there was no central body controlling the movement's direction, it would seem misleading to say that the movement's direction was unintentional. When we no longer rely on the simplistic image of feminism deciding to act in a certain way or deciding to send a particular message, the question then becomes how the movement's position on work and care was developed.

In criticising the movement's emphasis on employment, commentators of the "failures of feminism" school invoke the idea that there were risks that second-wave feminists should have been foreseen and avoided. The most important of these is the risk that emphasising employment would reinforce the under-valuing of women's caring roles and hence the gendered division of labour. Critics believe feminists failed to understand that the movement could damage the prospects for the achievement of an important

feminist goal (the valuing of women's caring roles) by choosing to pursue a relatively more limited and less promising objective (access to employment). This is not the first time feminists have been accused of damaging the prospects for more fundamental feminist change by taking certain positions on issues of work and care. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, maternal feminists elevated women's supposedly innate capacity for mothering to the status of a global program of reform for peace and justice. As part of this program, in the interwar years (1919–1938) feminists campaigned for the state to introduce motherhood endowment to recognise the contribution of mothers and to give them a source of income separate from the men on whom they were generally forced to depend. Especially since the second-wave women's movement, however, these reformers have often been viewed unfavourably, as having helped to lock women into the maternal role by relying on the social value of motherhood in their claims-making.

The evaluation that emerges from each of these criticisms is that the movement was ineffective as a strategic actor. In the first case, the argument is that in choosing a strategy of labour force participation, second-wave feminism failed to foresee and prevent the outcome: that such an extension would simply further integrate women into the capitalist economy without transforming the gendered division of labour or valuing women's caring work. That is, this strategy offered women a place in the labour market, but on terms still defined as masculine. In the second case, the argument is that, in staking claims for women's citizenship on their function as mothers, maternal feminists failed to comprehend that this would further lock women into a restrictive stereotype of motherhood. While campaigns such as motherhood endowment held out the hope of independence for women, they reinforced the idea of motherhood as the socially appropriate role for women, indeed as the essence of womanhood — an idea that came to be understood as oppressive to women. To what extent, though, could the women's movement in either of these periods have made decisions to strategically avoid such discursive risks?

An obvious weakness of these criticisms of past feminism is that they are insufficiently attentive to the political contexts that women's movement actors faced in each period. "Different times" produce different ideas about what to do. Difference, though, does not

necessarily mean discontinuity. Feminist historians have given much attention to the continuities as well as the differences between eras of women's movement action in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Despite the evident differences, feminists in both the interwar years and the second-wave movement were concerned to obtain economic independence for women. A great deal of historical evidence has been gathered to document the continuous concern with economic independence in Australian feminism, while showing how this ideal was pursued in different ways in different times.<sup>4</sup> Both workforce participation and motherhood endowment could be seen, then, as different strategies aimed at achieving the same goal. In this view, while the goal was relatively constant, the different conditions faced by feminists in different eras meant that they had to adopt different means of working towards their objective. It is not clear, though, whether feminists in the two eras considered their aims in the same way. Nor is it clear to what extent they actually assessed different options. Viewing workforce participation and motherhood endowment as different, historically situated means to the same end therefore raises the problem of how free social movement actors are to choose consciously from a range of strategies in response to their political contexts.

The central research question addressed in this thesis is to what extent the Australian women's movement in the interwar years and in the 1970s and 1980s had the capacity to act strategically on issues of work and care in relation to high-level discursive risks. From this question two others flow. To what extent does it make sense to view the two approaches identified above (workforce participation and motherhood endowment) as different means, chosen in response to different conditions, to achieve the same goal (women's economic independence)? Finally, how can we understand the overall positions and directions taken by social movements as intentional, without resorting to a crude picture of the movement as an entity that simply decides?

These questions were answered through empirical research and theory-building. I conducted two historical studies to examine the nature and extent of strategising in Australian feminist activism on work and care issues during the interwar years and in

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<sup>4</sup> Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism*, St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1999; Marilyn Lake, 'The Independence of Women and the Brotherhood of Man: Debates in the Labor Movement over Equal Pay and Motherhood Endowment in the 1920s', *Labour History*, vol. 63, 1992, pp. 1–24.

the 1970s and 1980s. The main sources for these studies were archival movement records and oral history interviews with participants. Chapter 3 presents a more extensive discussion of methodological considerations and further details about the sources and research methods used for the empirical enquiry. Drawing on pragmatist and feminist philosophy, I also developed a new theoretical model of social movement action, and examined the findings of the empirical studies in the light of this model.

The thesis argues that it is not tenable to judge the Australian women's movement for adopting the wrong strategies on work and care, because the movement as such did not strategise. Even at the level of individuals and organisations, explicit strategising was only one limited aspect of social movement action. These findings draw into question the assumption that social movements can be characterised in terms of collective agents acting rationally. Instead of rejecting the idea of the movement as a collective agent, however, I develop an alternative account that does not rely on conventional notions of rational action. At the centre of my alternative approach is an original "organisation-direction" model of movement action. In this model, collective intentions are seen to be formed in the more densely-organised nodes of a movement, with the capacity to pull the movement in certain directions. I also argue that an adequate alternative approach to understanding collective agency requires an expanded concept of reasoning and action. In such an expanded concept, we can see that non-instrumental aspects of social movements (such as emotion) are constitutive of reasoning, and that goals and means are generated together in action, rather than in a linear sequence.

### **The structure of the thesis**

The following chapter, Chapter 2, reviews two relevant sets of literature: feminist historiography and studies of the women's movement; and social movement theory. It is argued that while each of these bodies of literature helps to expand our understanding of women's movement action, further research is needed to adequately answer the question of to what extent the women's movement has decided strategically on issues of work and care. Historical studies of the women's movement alert us to the importance of placing movement action in its historical context, and of seeing both the continuities and

differences in movement goals and methods over time. In developing narratives of feminist agency, however, historical studies often invoke an image of feminists collectively deciding on their actions, without considering in detail the extent and nature of decision-making. For this reason, these studies do not tell us enough about women's movement participants' views on the risks, constraints and options they faced. Existing feminist historiography would be usefully complemented by studies with a more explicit focus on organisation and political engagement, as well as on individual resistance and identity.

The dominant approaches in social movement studies, on the other hand, do focus on organisation and political engagement but rely heavily on assumptions that actors behave instrumentally, that organisations can be viewed as strategic actors, and that the cross-movement determinants of mobilisation are more worthy of analysis than the historically specific discursive risks faced by participants. The literature review shows how the "movement CEO" viewpoint adopted by many social movement studies assumes rather than investigates strategising in movement action. It is argued that a more adequate approach would question these assumptions and would examine goal formation and deliberation about means in a way that does not exclude the non-instrumental features of movement action (such as emotion). The ideas generated for and about the women's movement in feminist historiography and other feminist studies are identified as potentially useful sources for enriching social movement studies.

Addressing the gaps and challenges presented by the literature, Chapter 3 lays out the research approach and the methods used in this study. I draw on the work of feminist philosopher Genevieve Lloyd to develop an alternative viewpoint to take the place of the "movement CEO": this is the viewpoint of a respondent in a politically collective "we," reflecting on the decisions and actions taken in earlier phases of the women's movement. The chapter explains in more detail how the research problem was addressed and the rationales for the methods chosen. I develop further the concepts of strategic decision-making and risk and clarify how these were operationalised in the historical research. In this chapter I also specify the scope of the research in terms of the issues and periods covered and explain what I mean by "the movement," particularly in

relation to movement organisations. The criteria used for selecting sources are described and potential limitations of the research methods are noted.

Chapter 4 presents the first of the two historical studies. This study of the Australian women's movement in the interwar period focuses on two key sets of organisations: the Australian Federation of Women Voters (AFWV) and its affiliates; and the National Councils of Women (NCW). The chapter documents the campaigns for motherhood endowment that were conducted by these and other women's organisations during the period. Women's organisations' engagement with the conflict over the family wage is considered, with particular attention to their involvement in the Royal Commission on Child Endowment or Family Allowances (RCCE). The study examines the evidence that women's movement actors were aware of and took action against different kinds of discursive risks, such as the risk of appealing to arguments about the birth rate, and considers to what extent participants engaged in self-conscious assessment of their "maternalist project." The chapter also investigates the reasons behind the women's movement's shift towards equality-based and employment-oriented demands in the 1930s.

Chapter 5 presents the second of the historical studies: a study of the Australian second-wave women's movement's apparent "choice" to pursue workforce participation over care-centred approaches. The chapter traces the development of the two main strands of the movement, women's liberation and the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL), and discusses the differences and commonalities in their modes of operation. The role of practical projects is considered, together with the nature of organising and representation within the movement. The study documents the reasoning behind the general rejection of "mother's wage" and "wages for housework" proposals, and explains the shift to demanding childcare as a means to enable mothers to work, as opposed to the earlier emphasis on childcare as a community responsibility. The chapter also discusses the reflexive thinking that developed about the purpose and functioning of the movement, showing how important this was in maintaining movement cohesion.

The historical studies indicate that the movement as a whole did not have the capacity for — and was not generally oriented towards — strategic decision-making on work and

care issues at the level of the broad discursive risks identified by later critics (such as the risk of reinforcing the stereotype of women as mothers, or the risk of reinforcing the low status of women's caring labour). The historical studies therefore confirm that the criticisms of the movement as a whole for making poor decisions on work and care issues are misplaced. This, however, is not a satisfactory finishing-point. The fact that high-level strategising was largely absent does not mean the positions developed by the women's movement were devoid of intention or reasoning. From the viewpoint of a respondent in a politically collective "we," the fact that no-one was controlling past movement actions does not eliminate responsibility, in either the positive or negative sense. To reconcile these observations with the findings of the historical studies, Chapter 6 develops a different model of social movement action. The starting point for this model is the idea of the moral agent, which underpins conventional accounts of responsibility. I use pragmatist and feminist philosophy to constructively reconstitute the characteristics of the moral agent (unity, agency and rationality) in a way that might enable us to apply them to social movements. From this reconstruction an "organisation-direction" model of social movement action is developed, together with accounts of the temporal dimensions of social movement agency and the possibilities for an expanded concept of reason.

The organisation-direction model sees the movement's emergent direction as partly shaped, but not determined, by the intentions and reasoning of participants. Organisation, which is unevenly concentrated in particular groups and structures within the movement, forms nodes in which collective intentions can be created and, to a certain extent, strategic action taken. Organisation can thereby pull the movement in certain directions, and for this reason the visibility of organised groups, the creation of representative bodies and the public presentation of the movement are matters of contention within the movement. The chapter further shows that we need an expanded conception of reasoning and action to understand how social movements form directions. Two arguments are developed to form such an expanded conception. First, non-instrumental elements including emotion, communication and movement knowledge are irreducible parts of reasoned, interpretable action. Second, goals and means are co-constituted through engagement in concrete action-situations, rather than proceeding in a linear way from deliberation to action. I also consider how we might

apply to social movements a theory of agency developed by Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische, which describes agency as composed of temporal orientations (habitual, projective and practical-evaluative).

Chapter 7 analyses the two historical studies together, drawing together significant themes and re-examining the findings in the light of the ideas developed in Chapter 6. The chapter first discusses in more detail the instrumental and strategic action taken in relation to discursive risks, showing that strategising tended to apply movement knowledge to the immediate problems of political engagement, rather than addressing the kind of high-level discursive risks that are visible in retrospect and which often only become apparent because the movement itself has brought new knowledge into use. The chapter then considers how the political context in each era affected the decisions made and analyses the relationship between activism and the relevant “dominant discourses,” before discussing participants’ underlying beliefs about how social and political change could be achieved. The chapter examines how overall movement directions changed in both periods, and addresses the question of how organisation emerged and operated within the movement in the two eras. It is argued that in both eras organisations mediated between individual and collective levels of movement action, and that more intensively organised parts of the movement achieved influence over the overall movement direction by their greater visibility, and through the fact that they were able to develop collective intentions through articulating goals and means.

The means-end schema itself is then considered in more detail, and it is shown that goals and methods were called forth and developed as the movement engaged in the political arena: not devised in deliberation prior to action but developed through action. Non-instrumental elements such as emotion, communication and relationships are shown to have been constitutive of the movement’s reasoned action in both eras and to have formed the conditions for mobilisation. The findings of the historical studies suggest it is useful to consider the temporal dimensions of agency but that movement actors do not tend to explicitly reflect on the movement’s past in relation to future-oriented projects in the ways that might be expected. Movement knowledge and theory are found to have guided action in a way that is difficult to integrate with the temporal model of agency. Finally, the chapter argues that it is fruitful to abandon the more

stringent demands of rational actor theory, and instead to analyse movements as exercising reason that can be interpreted.

Chapter 8 offers some concluding remarks, reviews the limitations of the findings and proposes some implications for feminist historiography and women's movement studies, for social movement theory, and for debates about the failures of feminism more generally.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

In responding to claims that Australian feminism made the wrong strategic choices in the past, we need to consider the history of the women's movement and the nature of social movement action more generally. Both of these topics have generated extensive scholarship. Some of this scholarship throws light on the research question, which asks to what extent the Australian women's movement was able to make strategic decisions about issues of work and care. This chapter reviews the contributions of feminist historiography and studies of the women's movement and social movement studies, finding that significant work remains to be done to fully understand how movements decide on their orientations to key issues, and how these decisions should be retrospectively evaluated.

This literature review focuses on general issues raised by the research problem. More detailed references to the literature on each of the two eras of women's movement mobilisation are provided in the relevant chapters (Chapters 4 and 5). Here, I first provide a detailed review of feminist historiography and consider some feminist theories of agency and other studies of the women's movement. Following this, I review the social movement literature, with particular attention to the emerging emphasis on strategy as a focus for scholarship.

### **Feminist historiography and studies of the women's movement**

As the Introduction showed, criticisms of past feminism are prominent in Australian politics. These criticisms are used in popular debates to advance ideas about how gender politics should proceed in the present and future. Ideas about "what feminism did wrong" on work and care also feature, in more subtle forms, in scholarly discussions of gender issues. Often, these contributions aim to offer new strategic directions for feminism. For example, writing in the field of feminist economics, Susan Himmelweit has criticised the move within second-wave feminism to portray women's domestic

activities as “unpaid work.”<sup>1</sup> Himmelweit argues that we should focus instead on transcending the work/non-work dichotomy. But this prescription, and those like it, issue from a disembodied perspective, ignoring questions about who the feminists were who mobilised the idea of “unpaid work,” why and how they did so, and how they perceived their options. In ignoring these questions, such accounts of past feminism direct us away from genuine consideration of the capacity for collective action, and obscure the motivations, contexts, concrete activities and means of the people and organisations who took up the position being debunked. Arguments such as Himmelweit’s, while sophisticated in many respects, do not engage with past feminists’ actual interpretations of the political risks and capacities that shaped their activism.

If we wish to understand the way positions were taken on issues of work and care by Australian feminists, we need to know more about the history of the women’s movement. Feminist historiography examines past feminist activism in a way that is more concrete and sensitive to political contexts than popular and academic accounts of “what feminism did wrong.” Histories of feminist activism have been especially concerned with identifying continuities and differences in feminism over time. This literature has therefore shed light on the way the women’s movement has both reproduced and challenged dominant ideas about “women’s role” in different eras.

Histories of women’s movement activism in Australia, as in other Western countries, have developed a broad account of the transition from “maternal feminism” to “equality feminism,” expressed in two “waves” of activism beginning in the 1890s and the late 1960s respectively. In “maternal feminism” women’s contributions and qualities as mothers were promoted as the basis for protection, rights and citizenship,<sup>2</sup> while the “second wave” is characterised as a quest for equality with men in all fields of life, particularly those formerly preserved for men.<sup>3</sup> Feminist valorisation of women’s paid work emerges, then, as part of a shift in emphasis from “difference” to “equality.” Yet, as discussed in Chapter 5, this image overlays a more complicated picture, in which a

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Himmelweit, “The Discovery of “Unpaid Work”: The Social Consequences of the Expansion of “Work””, *Feminist Economics*, vol. 1 no. 2, 1995, pp. 1–19.

<sup>2</sup> See the contributions to Seth Koven and Sonya Michel (eds), *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*, New York: Routledge, 1993.

<sup>3</sup> Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism*, St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1999.

strong strand of women's movement activity in the 1970s and 1980s pursued personal-transformative methods that were substantially different from those associated with the goal of equality.

Recent historical work on Australian feminism, most prominently Marilyn Lake's *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism*, has done much to illuminate the nature of feminist claims during the twentieth century and to identify continuity in the movement despite differences in goals and methods over time.<sup>4</sup> Historians, especially Lake, have discredited the idea that there was an uninteresting lull between the waves of late nineteenth century suffrage activism and the women's movement that began to flourish in Australia in the late 1960s.<sup>5</sup> Lake has documented the many Australian women's groups and campaigns that continued between World War I and World War II, as well as throughout the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>6</sup> She argues that one of the reasons why the interwar period is neglected is because the specific (maternalist) goals that feminists of that era pursued are ones that do not sit comfortably with current (equality-focused) conceptions of what feminism is.<sup>7</sup> Lake thereby identifies an important way in which past feminist action can be misunderstood: by not properly recognising continuities (such as the continuous attention to achieving economic independence for women) as well as differences (such as the conflict between uplifting motherhood in the 1920s and removing the oppressions associated with motherhood in the 1970s).

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<sup>4</sup> Lake, *Getting Equal*. Other major works on the history of the Australian women's movement include Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans (eds), *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation*, Marrickville, NSW: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992; Gisela Kaplan, *The Meagre Harvest: The Australian Women's Movement 1950s–1990s*, St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1996; and Ann Curthoys, *For and Against Feminism: A Personal Journey into Feminist Theory and History*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1988.

<sup>5</sup> Suffrage was achieved in 1902 for most women in Australia. However, the Commonwealth Franchise Act that came into force in 1902 excluded Aboriginal women and men (and the "natives" of some other lands) from voting in Commonwealth elections, unless they were deemed eligible to vote under section 41 of the Commonwealth Constitution. Section 41 ensured Commonwealth voting rights for all people who had voting rights at state level. Aboriginal enfranchisement was uneven across the States until a further Commonwealth Act was passed in 1962. Aboriginal people in Queensland (Qld) and Western Australia (WA) had no state or Commonwealth voting rights until that year. Audrey Oldfield, *Woman Suffrage in Australia: A Gift or a Struggle?*, Cambridge, UK and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 59–66.

<sup>6</sup> Lake, *Getting Equal*.

<sup>7</sup> Marilyn Lake, 'The Limits to Equality', speech to the Sydney Institute, 8 March 2000, *Sydney Papers*, Autumn 2000, pp. 41–49, p. 42.

While studies such as Lake's alert us to the overlapping continuities and differences in the history of the women's movement, they are less informative about why and how changes occur in the nature of goals pursued. This is because historical narratives of this kind tend not to discuss how goals are formulated, or "how activism is done" more generally. Feminist historiography tends to explain changes in feminist goals in either of two ways. Sometimes, structural explanations are given, in which changes in feminism reflects changes in demography, dominant discourses or political culture. At other times, feminist historiography gives the impression that the women's movement simply made a decision to adopt a different position. Neither of these approaches is adequate.

For example, discussing the maternalist approaches of Western Australian (WA) feminists in the 1920s, Clare Ozich argues that, "Feminists only operate within the constraints of the discourses available to them at any particular historical period."<sup>8</sup> Yet this does not explain how feminists are able to extricate themselves sufficiently from some discourses to challenge them, while continuing to unquestioningly accept others. "Available discourses" and other contextual factors are also affected by women's movement activism (and other activism); that is, by people's intentional efforts to change things. One of the central features of activism, including feminist activism, is that it is action intended to change society. This is recognised in the common terminology with which historians describe social movements as part of social change, invoking the image of the movement as a unitary decision-making entity. For example, Lake summarises that:

The most challenging demand in the 1920s was for women's right to an income, the right to economic independence, the right to an income from the state to do the work of being a mother. Not surprisingly, *this was not successful. So feminists turned to the workforce*, recognising that the only way to get economic independence was to join men in the paid workforce. Feminists began to focus on the paid workforce in the 1930s and 1940s, demanding equal rights and opportunities.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Clare Ozich, "'The Great Bond of Motherhood': Maternal Citizenship and Perth Feminists in the 1920s', *Studies in Western Australian History*, vol. 19, 1999, pp. 127–138, p. 129.

<sup>9</sup> Lake, 'The Limits to Equality', p. 49. Emphasis added.

Lake's account suggests that the women's movement decided on a new strategy in response to the failure of the old one. While invoking conscious decision-making, this account does not describe how it occurred. Similarly, Ozich both hints at intentionality (even instrumentalism) and glosses over it in her statement that, "The idea of maternalism *was used* by early twentieth century feminists to argue for citizenship rights, which included economic independence."<sup>10</sup> Katie Spearritt similarly highlights the "*rhetorical strategies appropriated* by first wave feminists" arguing that although the construction of masculinity and femininity in terms of "separate spheres" was limiting for women, feminists adopted strategies aiming to "protect women better within the private sphere."<sup>11</sup> In Spearritt's view, these strategies were adopted partly in response to demographic realities (the intense predominance of marriage and childbearing among women) and partly in response to the more general "dominance of the separate spheres doctrine."<sup>12</sup> This seems a reasonable assessment of the general context in which feminists adopted the aim of protecting women, but it does not actually establish how "strategic" feminists were in doing so, or the reasoning they used.

Joy Damousi also employs language suggesting the instrumental use of dominant discourses by women's movement activists. She argues that Peace Army members during World War I "*exploited...the concept* of women as mothers of the race...In their rhetoric, they emphasised that women were more concerned with love, justice and liberty because of their feminine, nurturing temperament."<sup>13</sup> Damousi, however, acknowledges the multi-directional flow of influences: "Women activists were at once shaping, and being influenced by prevailing views about gender relations, as they were also using these discourses for their own ends."<sup>14</sup>

Discussing the changes that occurred in the women's movement after 1970, Jill Matthews describes a process through which feminists and feminism responded to

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<sup>10</sup> Ozich, "The Great Bond of Motherhood", p. 130. Emphasis added.

<sup>11</sup> Katie Spearritt, 'New Dawns: First Wave Feminism 1880–1914', in Saunders and Evans, *Gender Relations in Australia*, pp. 325–349, pp. 338–339. Emphasis added.

<sup>12</sup> Spearritt, 'New Dawns', pp. 338–339.

<sup>13</sup> Joy Damousi, 'Marching to Different Drums: Women's Mobilisations 1914–1939', in Saunders and Evans, *Gender Relations in Australia*, pp. 350–375, p. 359. Emphasis added.

<sup>14</sup> Damousi, 'Marching to Different Drums', p. 353.

changing conditions and experiences. In doing so, she too evokes a form of feminist collective agency that is capable of comprehending its circumstances and of forming organisational and theoretical responses:

[A]s more and more women learnt the feminist language of suffering and invisibility, they laid claim to it in order to constitute themselves as distinct groups demanding liberation...*In response, feminism embraced a politics of difference and diversity, attempting to recreate itself as a collective politics without either centre or margins.*<sup>15</sup>

These invocations of collective agency do not provide us with a picture of the actual nature and extent of conscious decision-making, or consider the complications of deciding in the context of a decentralised array of individuals and organisations. To be fair, historians rarely endeavour to consider decision-making in this way, and doing so may fall outside the perceived scope of historiography. Yet there needs to be some place in our accounts for the intentionality and conscious agency of activists; that is, this intentionality and agency needs to be examined and questioned closely as a focus, rather than simply assumed, or conflated with the existence of a changing feminism or women's movement. Certainly it is difficult to locate and analyse decisions, especially collective decisions of the kind suggested above. Broad histories inevitably require some simplification and aggregation. My point here is that invoking conscious collective decision-making fulfils an important need in history-writing, showing that feminists meant to make a difference and did so, but this decision-making deserves greater analysis in its own terms.

It is in discussions of agency that feminist studies have come closest to directly considering intentional actions in social change. In women's history, however, these discussions have focused more on the general question of individual women's capacity to act against the forces of oppression than on the collective generation of goals and the organisation of action in political contexts. To understand the reasons for this focus on individuals rather than on collective action, it is necessary to briefly trace the

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<sup>15</sup> Jill Matthews, 'New Challenges for Feminist History', *Lilith*, vol. 12, 2003, pp. 1–5, p. 1. Emphasis added.

development of the field of women's history in terms of its interest in agency. The initial expansion of scholarship on women's history in Australia in the 1970s, as in the UK and USA, was focused on documenting and explaining the oppression of women through history, taking its lead from the key early American texts of women's liberation.<sup>16</sup> From this focus a further concern developed: how have women challenged this oppression? The developing interest in "women's agency" co-evolved with feminists' growing recognition that their present struggles had historical antecedents.

There was not widespread knowledge among young movement women in the early 1970s about the continuities between their issues and methods and those of earlier feminists. In Ann Curthoys' words, "We had no past — or so, at first, we thought."<sup>17</sup> This changed with the growing public prominence of the women's movement and the development of academic resources. New accounts of the women previously "hidden from history"<sup>18</sup> challenged the assumption that the 1970s movement was entirely unique and unprecedented. Yet the recognition of continuity with women's agency in the past took conflicting forms, as feminist historians argued about how best to interpret women's political actions in the past.

A debate in 1972–1974 in the Australian women's movement journal *Refractory Girl* illuminates the issues at stake. In a 1972–3 issue, in an article called "The Heroine as Myth, or Male Cultural Baggage We've Been Forced to Carry," Suzanne Bellamy challenged the historiographic convention of separating public and private life, and criticised the study of women's history as the study of "exceptional women." She argued, "There have been *no* successes, and change does not come via mystification.

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<sup>16</sup> Susan Magarey, 'What is Happening to Women's History in Australia at the Beginning of the Third Millennium?', *Women's History Review*, vol. 16 no. 1, 2007, pp. 1–18, pp. 3–4; Ann Curthoys and John Docker, *Is History Fiction?*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005, pp. 162–163. Key American women's liberation texts of this era included: Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*, New York: Doubleday, 1970; Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*, New York: William Morrow, 1970. Major early works of Australian women's history are: Anne Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police*, Camberwell, Victoria (Vic.): Penguin, 2002 (first published 1975); Beverley Kingston, *My Wife, My Daughter, and Poor Mary Ann: Women and Work in Australia*, Melbourne: Nelson, 1975; Miriam Dixson, *The Real Matilda: Woman and Identity in Australia, 1788 to 1975*, Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1976.

<sup>17</sup> Ann Curthoys, 'Towards a Feminist Labour History', *Labour History*, no. 29, 1975, special issue: Ann Curthoys, Susan Eade (Magarey) and Peter Spearritt (eds) *Women at Work*, pp. 88–95, p. 89.

<sup>18</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden from History: 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight Against It*, London: Pluto Press, 1973.

Don't seek heroines; they are baggage too heavy for us to carry if we want to see clearly the way ahead now."<sup>19</sup> Bellamy criticised the "mystification, glorification & passive celebration of those areas which have been given the nod as acceptable."<sup>20</sup>

In response, in 1974, Elizabeth Reid (in "The Women We Ignore") expressed frustration that "The main preoccupation of the women's movement in Australia at present is the contemplation of its own navel."<sup>21</sup> Reid agreed that we need to look beyond the "exceptional" women "groomed for acceptability by past historians,"<sup>22</sup> but used the example of Muriel Heagney, feminist and labour movement activist from the 1920s into the 1950s, to argue that many of the "heroines" who Bellamy rejects:

fought, they learned how to fight and they learnt what methods society has for dealing with irritants and dissidents...And they didn't just fight (were not *mere* reformers), they learnt from their experiences and defeats, they developed strategies and theories and attempted to envisage what we might call a post-feminist revolutionary society...Dropping bundles is not just an academic pastime: it is a rejection of living people who were and are part of the continuum of the tradition, of which we too are merely a *part*.<sup>23</sup>

Susan Magarey records that, by the 1980s, very much along the lines advocated by Reid, the growing focus on women's agency:

allowed a widening of the historical lens that we directed towards the women of the past; we wanted to know about women shaping the conditions of their lives. We wanted to know this, it then become clear, even if those women were "exceptional."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Suzanne Bellamy, 'The Heroine as Myth, or Male Cultural Baggage We've Been Forced to Carry', *Refractory Girl*, no. 1, 1972–1973, pp. 30–31, p. 31.

<sup>20</sup> Bellamy, 'The Heroine as Myth', p. 31.

<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth Reid, 'The Women We Ignore', *Refractory Girl*, no. 6, 1974, pp. 9–12, p. 11.

<sup>22</sup> Reid, 'The Women We Ignore', p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Reid, 'The Women We Ignore', p. 12. Emphasis in original.

<sup>24</sup> Magarey, 'What is Happening to Women's History', p. 4.

As evidence, Magarey lists several studies of politically active women such as Alice Henry (an Australian-born feminist who became a union leader in the USA) and Faith Bandler (a South Sea Islander woman who was among the leadership of several campaigns, including the successful campaign for Australia's 1967 referendum on Aboriginal affairs).<sup>25</sup> While the interest in individual women as political leaders has given feminist historians a way to consider agency, there has been comparatively less historical analysis of women's collective organising for feminist change. It is significant, for example, that Magarey identifies the growing focus on women's agency with the flowering of biographies.

Feminist historians' theoretical debates about the nature of women's agency have also been focused on the potential for individual women to act against the gendered institutions that oppress them.<sup>26</sup> Feminist historian and theorist Joan Scott takes a sceptical view, arguing against the kind of political-historical project endorsed by Reid. For Scott, in contrast, agency is an effect of discourse rather than an attribute or competency embodied in the actions of individual people.<sup>27</sup> Scott warns against making "the existence of feminism...depend on some inherent, timeless agency of women."<sup>28</sup> For her, the apparent historical continuity of feminism is a "fantasy echo," in which feminist identity is actually "an effect of a rhetorical political strategy invoked differently by different feminists at different times."<sup>29</sup>

Scott's work is significant in correcting a tendency in women's history to conflate the concepts of "women's agency" and "feminism." She usefully emphasises that feminist agency may have different meanings at different times in history. Perhaps because Scott

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<sup>25</sup> Diane Kirkby, *Alice Henry: The Power of Pen and Voice, The Life of an Australian-American Labor Reformer*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991; Marilyn Lake, *Faith: Faith Bandler, Gentle Activist*, Crows Nest, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 2002.

<sup>26</sup> See for example the debate between Joan W. Scott and Linda Gordon in the feminist journal *Signs*, vol. 15 no. 4, Summer 1990: Scott, 'Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence by Linda Gordon (Book Review)', pp. 848–852; Gordon, 'Response to Scott', pp. 852–853; Gordon, 'Gender and the Politics of History by Joan Wallach Scott (Book Review)', pp. 853–858; Scott, 'Response to Gordon', pp. 859–860.

<sup>27</sup> Scott, 'Heroes of Their Own Lives', p. 851.

<sup>28</sup> Joan W. Scott, 'Fantasy Echo: History and the Construction of Identity', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 27 no. 2, 2001, pp. 284–304, p. 286.

<sup>29</sup> Scott, 'Fantasy Echo', p. 286. Australian historian Penny Russell has criticised Susan Magarey's work on the "first wave feminists" in a similar vein. See Penny Russell, 'Feminist Echoes: Review of Passions of the First Wave Feminists by Susan Magarey', *Australian Review of Public Affairs*, 8 Feb. 2002, <<http://www.australianreview.net/digest/2002/02/russell.html>> (accessed 28 May 2007).

is so concerned with exposing the “fantasy” of feminist agency, however, she neglects the capacity shown by feminists to create durable organisations and networks that sustain identification with the political project of feminism over long periods. She gives little attention to the relationships in which feminists make claims on the loyalty and effort of other women. Scott also underestimates the degree to which feminists constructively differentiate their goals and collective identities from those of feminists in the past. There may, therefore, be a greater degree of reflexivity and self-questioning in feminist organising than she assumes.

Instead of pursuing Scott’s deconstructionist project, it is possible to respond to her critique by focusing more directly on the history of feminism as political action and the creation of collective identities. Perhaps inadvertently, grounds for this are given by Scott herself. Although she objects to locating agency within actual people, it seems that she too finds it impossible to build a wholly depersonalised account of feminism. By explaining the apparent continuity of feminism as “an effect of a rhetorical political strategy,” Scott implicitly appeals to a strong form of discursive agency exercised by actual people: the “different feminists” who mobilise the “rhetoric” of feminist identity. Where Scott’s approach is to unveil feminist identity as *artificial*, we could instead ask how, in concrete terms, it has been *created* by these “different feminists.”

Another influential feminist account of agency is Judith Butler’s theory of performativity. Butler argues that gender is constituted in, and can therefore be resisted through, performances enacted by subjects.<sup>30</sup> As Terry Lovell points out, Butler’s approach in locating agency in the individual makes it difficult to establish a connection between her theory of performativity and actual instances of transformative social change in history.<sup>31</sup> In response, Lovell identifies collective action as the missing link between individual acts of resistance and the transformative social changes that are visible in historical perspective.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York and London: Routledge, 1999 (second edition); Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, New York and London: Routledge, 1997.

<sup>31</sup> Terry Lovell, ‘Resisting with Authority: Historical Specificity, Agency and the Performative Self’, *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol. 20 no. 1, pp. 1–17, p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> On the inability of Butler’s model to explain political action and the emergence of new social forms, see also Louise McNay, *Gender and Agency: Reconfiguring the Subject in Feminist Thought and Social Theory*, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2000, pp. 130–132.

Butler's focus on "speech acts" suggests connections to the political world of organised protest, representation, and advocacy. Her hopes appear to be pinned, though, on symbolic transgressions performed by those in marginal positions. Butler does not specify how these transgressions relate to broader political engagement. This lack of attention to existing politics can be seen in the way Butler illustrates the idea of the "speech act" through the example of Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her seat on a race-segregated public bus in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955.<sup>33</sup> As Lovell observes in response to Butler:

The authority of Parks' act of defiance was not endowed on it...by Parks alone, but by the endorsement and publicity given to it by the nascent civil rights movement and by the people who supported the boycott with such impressive solidarity and in the face of great personal hardship.<sup>34</sup>

This example also shows that symbolic transgressions are often only retrospectively recognised as historically transformative, and that this recognition occurs in the context of many other factors, especially social movements.<sup>35</sup> Patrocínio Schweickart likewise argues that the focus on individual acts of resistance cannot account for the full impact or importance of feminism, which as a force in politics is inevitably both singular and plural:

The ghost of the "collective subject" haunts feminist discourse no less than it does Marxist discourse...[T]he theoretical problem of agency has to be linked to the practical problem of collective will formation. The full theoretical articulation of feminist politics requires that the issue of agency be addressed in relation the difficult and hazardous issue of collectivity, for feminist politics — like politics in general — is constituted precisely

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<sup>33</sup> Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 147. See also Herb Boyd, 'In Memoriam: Rosa Parks', *Black Scholar*, vol. 35 no.4, 2005, pp. 42–44.

<sup>34</sup> Lovell, 'Resisting with Authority', p. 9.

<sup>35</sup> Lovell, 'Resisting with Authority', p. 9.

by the interaction, coordination, and mutual implication of individual and collective interests, needs, desires, and perspectives.<sup>36</sup>

A number of recent historical feminist works have begun to consider some of the problems and omissions described above. These works are distinctive in that they directly address the present political significance of the way we remember feminism and describe its “legacy.” Addressing the political present, feminist researchers are increasingly engaging with public debates about the alleged failures of feminism.<sup>37</sup>

Media representations of past feminism clearly influence women’s willingness to identify with feminism in the present, by shaping perceptions of what feminism stands for. Exploring the representation of past feminism, Natasha Campo has documented the way Australian media accounts in the 1980s and 1990s developed a distorted view of feminism, caricaturing it as a promise of “having it all.”<sup>38</sup> As Campo points out, the narrative of “having it all” existed in the media in diverse forms from the 1970s and even earlier, but was consolidated as a negative representation of feminism itself when a number of factors combined in the 1990s: the fading away of overtly oppositional feminist activism and networks, economic change and the election of a conservative federal government, as well as generational conflict about the meaning and effects of feminism.

Generational conflict was prompted by the publication in 1994 of Anne Summers’ “Letter to the Next Generation,”<sup>39</sup> which criticised young women for not taking up the feminist struggles of the 1970s and 1980s, and Helen Garner’s *The First Stone*,<sup>40</sup> which lamented the “victim feminism” that led young women in the Osmond College sexual harassment case to “resort to” legal action. The debates that followed included the publication of two key “gen-X” texts in 1996: *D.I.Y. Feminism*, a collection edited by

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<sup>36</sup> Patrocínio P. Schweickart, ‘What Are We Doing? What Do We Want? Who Are We? Comprehending the Subject of Feminism’, in Judith Kegan Gardiner (ed.), *Provoking Agents: Gender and Agency in Theory and Practice*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995, pp. 229–248, p. 230.

<sup>37</sup> Monica Dux and Zora Simic, *The Great Feminist Denial*, Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Publishing, 2008.

<sup>38</sup> Natasha Campo, “‘Childless but not by Choice’ or “24-Hour Women Having it All”? Remembering Australian Feminism’, *Lilith*, vol. 13, 2004, pp. 106–116.

<sup>39</sup> Anne Summers, ‘Letter to the Next Generation’, *Age*, 29 Jan. 1994, p. 16.

<sup>40</sup> Helen Garner, *The First Stone: Some Questions About Sex and Power*, Sydney: Picador, 1995.

Kathy Bail; and Virginia Trioli's *Generation F: Sex, Power and the Young Feminist*.<sup>41</sup> Both of these texts, and other responses from young women, argued that the current conditions and hence the feminist responses of young women were very different from those prevailing in the 1970s. Yet these books did not attempt to examine the past conditions of feminist action in any detail.

Jane Long has noted that the image of generational cleavage, all-too-readily deployed in the media, constrains feminist discussion and obscures the diversity of views and individuals in both the past and present.<sup>42</sup> More generally, Campo observes that the generational debates were made possible by a broader process of forgetting:

[A]s the history of Australian feminism was forgotten or lost, a new generation of women began to draw on accounts of the past that were expressed in the writings and images of popular culture (such as newspapers), rather than drawing on historical texts.<sup>43</sup>

Campo also shows how the negative characterisation of feminism became focused on the issue of combining full-time employment with motherhood, and in particular on the idea that feminism had promised women they could “have it all” but that women were now, as a result, finding themselves childless or painfully torn between mothering and paid work. As this “narrative shift” was made complete, Campo argues, “articles that attempted to ground their narratives in historical sources for accuracy’s sake appeared less frequently...”<sup>44</sup> This suggests that an important task for feminist historiography is to generate substantial knowledge about what feminists in the past did (and thought they were doing) about issues of work and motherhood.

In considering the legacy of second-wave feminism and other social movements, Julie Stephens has criticised the “tally-sheet” approach common among retrospective

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<sup>41</sup> Kathy Bail (ed.), *D.I.Y. Feminism*, St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1996; Virginia Trioli, *Generation F: Sex, Power and the Young Feminist*, Port Melbourne, Vic.: Minerva, 1996.

<sup>42</sup> Jane Long, “‘A Certain Kind of Modern Feminism’: Memory, Feminist Futures and ‘Generational Cleavage’ in Historical Perspective”, *Outskirts*, vol. 8, May 2001, <<http://www.chloe.uwa.edu.au/outskirts/archive/volume8/long>> (accessed 16 July 2008).

<sup>43</sup> Campo, ‘Remembering Australian Feminism’, p. 68.

<sup>44</sup> Campo, ‘Remembering Australian Feminism’, p. 70.

accounts. In this form of retrospective evaluation, as Stephens argues, “successes” and “failures” are accounted for, building an almost-numerical assessment of a movement’s achievements.<sup>45</sup> She points out that such a form of remembering neglects crucial aspects of movements’ internal lives. Particularly important are the strong emotions involved, as in the vexed relationship between feminism and maternity.<sup>46</sup> This is an important point, which is echoed in the social movement literature highlighting emotion and collective identity (some of which is discussed below).<sup>47</sup>

Stephens’ work shows that, while accounts of cultural memory cannot substitute for detailed and corroborated information about the past,<sup>48</sup> the emotion-charged memories and meanings attached to feminism have a weight and force that cannot readily be debunked or supplanted by accounts of “what actually happened.”<sup>49</sup> Clearly the “tally-sheet” tells, at best, only a part of the story. We should not assume, however, that the essence of the movement lies in emotion and transformation, separate from goal-oriented change. Aspects of the movement were and are goal-oriented, working to intentionally change society in specific ways, making notions of achievement unavoidable.<sup>50</sup> It is important, then, to explore more carefully the development and articulation of goals, without either reverting to the “tally-sheet” approach or seeing goals as separate from transformation and emotion. Goals and the methods conceived to achieve them also need to be considered in the context of broader political and institutional changes.

As a legal historian, Ann Genovese examines feminist interventions and institutional developments in order to better inform discussions about the legacies of feminism. In a recent article, Genovese responds to claims by conservative Australian historian

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<sup>45</sup> Julie Stephens, *Anti-Disciplinary Protest: Sixties Radicalism and Postmodernism*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 4-5, p. 18, p.121.

<sup>46</sup> Julie Stephens, ‘Cultural Memory, Feminism and Motherhood’, *Arena*, no. 24, 2005, pp. 69–83.

<sup>47</sup> Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper and Francesca Polletta, ‘Introduction: Why Emotions Matter’, in Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper and Francesca Polletta (eds), *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001, pp. 7–24.

<sup>48</sup> Stephens, ‘Cultural Memory’, p. 76.

<sup>49</sup> On the intense states of being that arise from newfound belonging and the disappointments of exclusion, see Kimberley Curtis, ‘Rapture and Rupture: Ruminations On Enclave Politics, Political Oblivion, and the Need for Recognition in the Early Women’s Liberation Movement’, *Constellations*, vol. 11 no. 4, 2004, pp. 551–574.

<sup>50</sup> Sarah Maddison, ‘Young Women in the Australian Women’s Movement’, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, vol. 6 no. 2, 2004, pp. 234–256, p. 235.

John Hirst that the Australian Family Court is a corrupted institution that shows a systematic bias against men by permitting non-compliant mothers to be treated “softly.”<sup>51</sup> Genovese argues that Hirst’s essay implicitly mobilises the view that feminism has been a victory for women at men’s expense, a view that coexists, paradoxically, with the charge that feminism has failed women by promising (but not ensuring) that they could “have it all.”<sup>52</sup> Genovese shows that Hirst failed to understand that the Family Court resulted from a historically specific interaction between feminist claims for substantive equality and a particular kind of liberal state, which has since changed considerably. In her view, the questions that we can productively direct towards and about feminism in the present are obscured by “blindness as to the historical specificity of the curtailed nature of feminist strategies for equality-based change in relation to a changing state.”<sup>53</sup> Here Genovese directs our attention to the constraints and risks that feminists faced in trying to achieve change in real political contexts, as distinct from the empty figure of feminism as it appears in debates about how it failed women or debilitated men.

Discussing feminism in the present is problematic, however. As Anthea Taylor has shown, the label “feminism” has become integrated into public usage in a way that is more widespread, but also more diffuse and ill-defined, than earlier feminists could have imagined.<sup>54</sup> This combination of currency and ambiguity, Taylor argues, lends feminism a kind of “visible invisibility.”<sup>55</sup> In her view, however, there is little hope for projects that respond to this volatile haziness by attempting to identify an “inner core” of “real” feminism, distinct from its representations. For Taylor, rather than *representing* feminism, media culture actually *constitutes* feminism’s public identity, so that there is no “inner core” to access.<sup>56</sup> Taylor points out the weakness of participants’ claims that they are able to represent “real feminism” (on the basis that “we were there”). Taylor argues that such claims invoke an untenable image of second-wave

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<sup>51</sup> Ann Genovese, ‘Family Histories: John Hirst v. Feminism, in the Family Court of Australia’, *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 21 no. 50, 2006, pp. 173–196.

<sup>52</sup> Genovese, ‘Family Histories’, p. 188.

<sup>53</sup> Genovese, ‘Family Histories’, p. 174.

<sup>54</sup> Anthea Taylor, *Stones, Ripples, Waves: Refiguring the First Stone Media Event*, PhD thesis, University of NSW, 2005.

<sup>55</sup> Taylor, *Stones, Ripples, Waves*, p. 20.

<sup>56</sup> Taylor, *Stones, Ripples, Waves*, p. 21.

feminism in Australia as homogeneous, and fail to acknowledge the limited nature of their authors' own perspectives.<sup>57</sup>

In a similar way, Margaret Henderson has criticised recent autobiographical writing by prominent feminists. For Henderson, these texts act as “regulative fictions” in seeking to fix the history of Australian second-wave feminism in the “liberal feminist” image of their authors.<sup>58</sup> Yet the unmasking of fictions is not the only possible response to such problems and, alone, is not adequate. If debates about feminism invoke a feminist past that includes activism and “being there” as key elements, and if part of the problem with this is the distorting homogenisation that can result, then more diverse and detailed engagement with those historical elements can usefully enrich and inform debate.<sup>59</sup> This position accords with Genovese's view that the development of more historically specific understandings of feminism is an important response to contemporary debates about its meaning and potential.<sup>60</sup>

Historical specificity need not require an exclusive focus on activism or activists, or on overt forms of “politics.” For example, in their special issue on the seventies, the editors of *Australian Feminist Studies* note the importance of “popular feminism”: showing the impact of feminist ideas during this period, well beyond the individual women who might be seen as constituting the activist core of the movement.<sup>61</sup> The specific activist projects and events of the movement are, indeed, commonly and misleadingly conflated with the movement itself. Yet there are also important aspects of these projects and events that are not well understood, even in feminist scholarship. In particular, there has been little attention to the means of action available to feminist activists at different times, and to the political constraints and risks they faced.

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<sup>57</sup> Taylor, *Stones, Ripples, Waves*, pp. 113, pp. 159–160, p. 178.

<sup>58</sup> Margaret Henderson, ‘The Tidiest Revolution: Regulative Feminist Autobiography and the De-facement of the Australian Women's Movement’, *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 20 no. 3, May 2002, pp. 178–191.

<sup>59</sup> Henderson makes a creative contribution in this direction with her own “fragmentary autograph” of images and lyrics. Henderson, ‘The Tidiest Revolution’, pp. 187–189.

<sup>60</sup> Genovese, ‘Family Histories’.

<sup>61</sup> Michelle Arrow and Mary Spongberg, ‘Editorial’, *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 22 no. 53, 2007, pp. 159–161. In the same issue see especially: Megan Le Masurier, ‘My Other, My Self: Cleo Magazine and Feminism in 1970s Australia’, pp. 191–211; Beth Spencer, ‘Bras, Breasts and Living in the Seventies’, pp. 231–245.

For Elisabeth Armstrong, feminist history writing now has to “consolidate and reassess a movement past in relation to a movement future.”<sup>62</sup> In this context, she argues, feminist historiography must attempt to reconcile the individual and the collective in memories of feminist activism. Armstrong argues that a focus on organisation gives us a way to keep both in mind:

Recent books about the women’s movement often center on individuals in and around feminist politics. But this ostensible focus allows another construction and intervention to enter as if by allegory: the radical movements of feminism...But feminism and the women’s movement as objects of study are notoriously hard to grasp, hard to pin down to a particular definition, formation or site. To speak of the women’s movement demands a jump from singular to plural and back again. These personal/historical memories visualize a women’s movement, unitary only in the moment of its evocation. As soon as the story of feminism begins, the movement multiplies, intersects and contradicts itself. The collectivity of feminism changes with each perspective, but also as it projects infinite possibilities...We forget about the emergence and maintenance of revolutionary feminism when we focus so determinedly on questions of identity and subjectivity divorced from organization.<sup>63</sup>

As we have seen, in feminist historiography and theories of agency, there is surprisingly little explicit consideration of feminist agency operating through movement organisation and other collective efforts at change.<sup>64</sup> Linda Gordon observes more generally that “historians are underdeveloped in analyzing social movements.”<sup>65</sup> She expresses concern that historians are not doing enough to counter ignorance about past eras of activism. In Gordon’s view, “Preserving, interpreting, and communicating our

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<sup>62</sup> Elisabeth Armstrong, ‘Contingency Plans for the Feminist Revolution’, *Science and Society*, vol. 65 no. 1, Spring 2001, pp. 39–71, p. 41.

<sup>63</sup> Armstrong, ‘Contingency Plans’, pp. 41–42.

<sup>64</sup> Gerda Lerner, ‘U.S. Women’s History: Past, Present, and Future’, *Journal of Women’s History*, vol. 16 no. 4, 2004, pp. 10–27; Joan Hoff, ‘Agency and Collective Action vs. Diversity and Difference’, *Journal of Women’s History*, vol. 20 no. 1, 2008, pp. 19–25.

<sup>65</sup> Linda Gordon, ‘Social Movements, Leadership, and Democracy: Toward More Utopian Mistakes’, *Journal of Women’s History*, vol. 14 no. 2, 2002, pp. 102–117, p. 103.

legacy of movements for social change is vital...”<sup>66</sup> For this reason she pleads for historians to pay more attention to social movement studies.

As the following section of this chapter shows, it is not clear that social movement theory currently supports the kind of politically-engaged reflection that Gordon proposes. In particular, Gordon’s sympathetic identification with movement concerns is rarely echoed in social movement theory, which is more commonly focused in an ostensibly impartial manner on the determinants and variables of mobilisation. There are, however, works of women’s movement research that specifically attend to the concerns of women’s movements in their historical and contemporary forms, and incorporate ideas from social movement theory.<sup>67</sup> Many such works focus on the changing relationships between women’s movements and their respective states, and on the policy and other developments that result from this interaction. For example, scholars have considered why some of the policy changes brought about through second-wave feminist activism have proven less durable than expected, suggesting that with less publicly visible evidence of an oppositional, autonomous women’s movement, the state was no longer compelled to respond.<sup>68</sup>

To a greater degree than in feminist historiography, studies of women’s movements’ interactions with the state tend to make explicit reference to movements’ strategies and choices.<sup>69</sup> Such a study might note, for instance, that a women’s movement adopted a strategy of pursuing change from both inside and outside formal politics. In this vein, the Australian women’s movement’s distinctive engagement with government is often referred to as “the femocrat strategy.”<sup>70</sup> The image of strategising is reinforced by the

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<sup>66</sup> Gordon, ‘Social Movements’, p. 103.

<sup>67</sup> Jo Reger and Verta Taylor, ‘Women’s Movement Research and Social Movement Theory: A Symbiotic Relationship’, in Betty A. Dobratz, Timothy Buzzell and Lisa K. Waldner (eds), *Sociological Views on Political Participation in the 21st Century*, Research in Political Sociology Series, vol. 10, 2002, Amsterdam and New York: JAI, pp. 85–121.

<sup>68</sup> Louise A. Chappell, *Gendering Government: Feminist Engagement with the State in Australia and Canada*, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2002, p.44; Lee Ann Banaszak, Karen Beckwith and Dieter Rucht, ‘When Power Relocates: Interactive Changes in Women’s Movements and States’, in Lee Ann Banaszak, Karen Beckwith and Dieter Rucht (eds), *Women’s Movements Facing the Reconfigured State*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 1–29.

<sup>69</sup> For example Banaszak et al., ‘When Power Relocates’, p. 17; Solveig Bergman, ‘Collective Organizing and Claim Making on Child Care in Norden: Blurring the Boundaries between the Inside and the Outside’, *Social Politics*, vol. 11 no.2, 2004, pp. 217–246.

<sup>70</sup> For example Louise A. Chappell, ‘The “Femocrat” Strategy: Expanding the Repertoire of Feminist Activists’, *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol. 55 no. 1, 2002, pp. 85–98.

influential notion of “framing,” as developed in social movement theory and widely used in studies of women’s movements.<sup>71</sup>

While studies of women’s movements and states pay more attention to organisation than does feminist historiography, such studies tend to be similarly non-specific about the nature of the strategic actions to which they refer.<sup>72</sup> An important exception is Barbara Hobson and Marika Lindholm’s article on the Swedish women’s movement in the 1930s, in which the authors argue that its relative success in influencing the developing national welfare state derived in part from the movement’s deliberate efforts to link the goal of women’s employment with the amenable “master frame” of the state as a “folkhem” or “people’s home.”<sup>73</sup> In their account, this linking was achieved through the careful composing of constituencies and alliances, and sensitive attention to discursive political opportunities. That is, Hobson and Lindholm do point to the capacity for women’s movements to strategically choose the discourses that they use and to shape these. It is not clear, though, whether all discourses are equally open to strategic decision-making. For example, as Myra Marx Ferree and David A. Merrill suggest, some discourses may be so pervasive that they are taken as given rather than “used.”<sup>74</sup> Some feminist studies have suggested that certain discourses are so powerfully gendered that they resist (and co-opt) feminist attempts at remaking.<sup>75</sup> Research that is attentive to collective decision-making and to the extent of discursive strategising is needed to address these problems.

Alongside research focused on interactions with the state, other women’s movement studies, particularly from the USA, have emphasised the importance of cultural elements in the development of the women’s movement. In particular, these studies have shown how movement cultures, emotions, collective identities and networks have

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<sup>71</sup> Susan Franceschet, ‘Explaining Social Movement Outcomes: Collective Action Frames and Strategic Choices in First- and Second-Wave Feminism in Chile’, *Comparative Political Studies*, vol. 37 no. 5, pp. 499–530.

<sup>72</sup> Merrindahl Andrew, ‘Questioning Women’s Movement “Strategies”’: Australian Activism on Work and Care’, *Social Politics*, vol. 15 no. 3, 2008, pp. 369–395.

<sup>73</sup> Barbara Hobson and Marika Lindholm, ‘Collective Identities, Women’s Power Resources, and the Making of Welfare States’, *Theory and Society*, vol. 26 no. 4, 1997, pp. 475–508.

<sup>74</sup> Myra Marx Ferree and David A. Merrill, ‘Hot Movements, Cold Cognition: Thinking about Social Movements in Gendered Frames’, *Contemporary Sociology*, vol. 29 no.3, 2000, pp. 454–462.

<sup>75</sup> Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, ‘A Genealogy of “Dependency”’: Tracing a Keyword of the USA Welfare State’, *Signs*, vol. 19, Winter 1994, pp. 309–336.

contributed to the women's movement's continuity and to the development of structures and organisations within it.<sup>76</sup> These studies highlight the complex internal world of the movement in a way that shows it is more than an aggregation of goal-seeking actors. If we are going to look for evidence of women's movement strategising, then, we should not assume that we will find such strategising to be the core function or purpose of the movement, or that it can be interpreted as somehow separate from the movement cultures and identities that persist over time. Rather, we might expect to see the articulated goals and means of movement action as arising out of a broader field made up of more "micro" concerns and relationships.

As Jo Reger and Verta Taylor point out, by highlighting culture, emotion, collective identity and networks, women's movement research has made a significant contribution to social movement theory.<sup>77</sup> They argue that while social movement theory has given women's movement scholars new ways to understand feminism, women's movement research has also challenged and expanded mainstream social movement theory — and should continue to do so. The following section looks in more detail at the social movement literature, noting those areas in which a more detailed historical analysis of women's movement strategy could contribute a constructive challenge.

### **Social movement studies**

The field of social movement studies grew out of, and partly in opposition to, the sociological study of collective behaviour.<sup>78</sup> In the analysis of collective behaviour, social movements were typically seen as arising from social crises, from deprivation or the inability of existing social structures to maintain cohesion. In some cases researchers of collective behaviour viewed mass protest in a negative way as a sign of individuals' unhealthy malintegration into traditional social structures; others saw social movements in a functionalist sense as embodying responses or adjustments between social sub-

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<sup>76</sup> Suzanne Staggenborg and Verta Taylor, 'Whatever Happened to the Women's Movement?', *Mobilization*, vol. 10 no. 1, pp. 37–52.

<sup>77</sup> Reger and Taylor, 'Women's Movement Research'.

<sup>78</sup> A detailed account of the development of the social movement studies field is provided in Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2006 (second edition).

systems, and in some cases as developing new shared beliefs.<sup>79</sup> The norm-generating capacity of social movements was taken up by symbolic interactionists, who stress the significance of social movements as meaning-laden and meaning-creating in a society viewed as constantly undergoing transformation. Herbert Blumer, as a founder of this tradition, defined social movements as “collective enterprises to establish a new order of life.”<sup>80</sup> In this view, conflict between groups, an inevitable part of social transformation, generates the need for new norms, which movements play an important role in generating.

The symbolic interactionist approach to collective behaviour continues to be influential in shaping inquiry into social movements as generating meanings and norms, and has made a recent reappearance in framing theory (discussed further below). There has, however, been a strong reaction against other tendencies within the collective behaviour tradition — those in which social movements, together with phenomena such as panics, crazes and hostile outbursts, are seen as animated by some kind of social pathology. See, for example, Neil J. Smelser’s suggestions that suicide “arises from some of the same kinds of social malintegration that underlie many collective outbursts.”<sup>81</sup> In response, Ralph H. Turner and Lewis M. Killian have stressed the need for researchers to avoid mistaking conformity for rationality:

When an individual uncritically follows the courses of action that are sanctioned in his society, we think of him as a reasonable person, largely because he is (1) like us and (2) predictable and therefore easy to deal with. When a person challenges the established dictates or is forced to act when cultural dictates are nonexistent, vague, or contradictory, his behaviour becomes unpredictable to others about him, making him hard to deal with, and his fellows may find it difficult to understand his behaviour. Hence he is said to be acting emotionally or irrationally.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Neil J. Smelser, *Theory of Collective Behavior*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962, p. 384.

<sup>80</sup> Herbert Blumer, ‘Social Movements’, in Alfred McClung Lee (ed.), *New Outline of the Principles of Sociology*, College Outline Series, New York: Barnes and Noble, 1951 (second edition), pp. 199–220, p. 199.

<sup>81</sup> Smelser, *Theory of Collective Behavior*, p. 387.

<sup>82</sup> Ralph H. Turner and Lewis M. Killian, *Collective Behavior*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1972 (first published 1957), p. 10.

The seriousness of movements' substantive concerns with the structures of oppression also seemed to demand more careful attention from researchers. From the 1970s onwards, two divergent strands have addressed these issues. The first of these comprises the resource mobilisation and, later, political process models developed in the USA by researchers including John D. McCarthy, Mayer N. Zald, and Doug McAdam<sup>83</sup>; the second is made up of the collective identity and cultural approaches associated with European theorists Alain Touraine and Alberto Melucci.<sup>84</sup>

Resource mobilisation is an approach that sees social movements as “politics by other means,” in which organisations behave rationally in mobilising resources to advance the collective interests of their members.<sup>85</sup> Researchers in this tradition oppose the tendency to view social movement action as spontaneous and irrational. Instead, responding to Mancur Olson's influential ideas about collective action, they take as their starting point the question of why, despite the fact that grievances are almost always in existence, these are not uniformly translated into effective social movement action.<sup>86</sup> Resource mobilisation theory initially found the answer in groups' access to and ability to mobilise resources, including their structures and networks.<sup>87</sup>

It is often noted that the resource mobilisation approach was developed in reaction against the pathologizing tendencies of the collective behaviour tradition, and that the researchers developing resource mobilisation theory were sensitised by their

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<sup>83</sup> John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, 'Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 82 no. 6, May 1977, pp. 1212–1241; Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.

<sup>84</sup> Alberto Melucci, *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society*, London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989; Alberto Melucci, 'The Process of Collective Identity', in Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans (eds), *Social Movements and Culture*, Social Movements, Protest, and Contention series vol. 4, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995, pp. 41–63; Alain Touraine, 'An Introduction to the Study of Social Movements', *Social Research*, vol. 52 no. 4, 1985, pp. 749–787; See also Alain Touraine, *The Return of the Actor: Social Theory in Postindustrial Society*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.

<sup>85</sup> William A. Gamson, *The Strategy of Social Protest*, Homewood, Illinois: Dorsey Press, 1975, p. 139.

<sup>86</sup> Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965.

<sup>87</sup> Mayer N. Zald and John D. McCarthy, 'Introduction', in Mayer N. Zald and John D. McCarthy (eds), *The Dynamics of Social Movements: Resource Mobilization, Social Control, and Tactics*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Withrop, 1979, pp. 1–5.

participation in and sympathy for social movements.<sup>88</sup> The introductory statements of early resource mobilisation texts suggest this is correct.<sup>89</sup> Nevertheless, it is also significant that Zald and McCarthy, key initiators of the tradition, defined their work as challenging and complementing both the sociological preoccupation with “structural strain, generalized belief, and deprivation” at the expense of the strategic dilemmas faced by movements *and* the partial and perhaps biased handbooks and treatises generated by movement leaders (such as Mao, Lenin, Saul Alinsky and Martin Luther King):

[The resource mobilisation approach] provides a corrective to the practical theorists, who naturally are most concerned with justifying their own tactical choices; and it also adds realism, power and depth to the truncated research on and analysis of social movements offered by many social scientists.<sup>90</sup>

This is significant, since it helps to explain why social movement research in this tradition tends to adopt the subject position of the movement leader facing strategic dilemmas (discussed further below), while attempting to apply a more “objective” cross-movement approach to discovering the mechanisms and determinants of movement formation and action.

Instead of attempting to uncover common mechanisms of mobilisation across movements, collective identity and cultural approaches have sought to give greater attention to the specific meaning of the emergence of new social movements in the 1960s and 1970s. Often described as new social movement theory, in this approach Touraine, Melucci and others have pointed to movements including the gay rights, peace, and environmental movements to argue that these do not represent “interests” in the usual sense but rather struggles over identity and meaning. These ideas were developed in direct contrast to the resource mobilisation approach, which was seen as

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<sup>88</sup> Ferree and Merrill, ‘Hot Movements, Cold Cognition’, p. 458.

<sup>89</sup> Zald and McCarthy, ‘Introduction’.

<sup>90</sup> Zald and McCarthy, ‘Introduction’, p. 1.

offering only an attenuated account of the meaning of social movements. As Touraine explains, the notion of resource mobilisation is often:

used to eliminate enquiries about the meaning of collective action as if resource mobilization could be defined independently from the nature of the goals and the social relations of the actor, as if all actors were finally led by a logic of economic rationality.<sup>91</sup>

For Touraine, in true social movements (as opposed to other forms of collective political action), what is at stake is the social control of the main cultural patterns.<sup>92</sup> The phenomenon of new social movements is seen as expressing society's increasing capacity for self-production, also called "post-industrialism," and signalling the evolution of new social classes replacing labour and capital. Like Touraine, Melucci has highlighted the post-materialist nature of many social movements, arguing that new social movements are fundamentally oriented to challenging the constraints on human action imposed by the ever-intensifying "system."<sup>93</sup> Further, in Melucci's view, new social movements do not seek material gain within established political systems of interest aggregation but rather the transformation of politics within society itself.<sup>94</sup>

In seeking to establish the "meaning of collective action" as something that is by definition novel, this approach has made sweeping interpretations about the essence of new social movements. These are open to challenge on empirical grounds.<sup>95</sup> In terms of the women's movement, it is notable that feminists have pursued both material and non-material goals with some continuity (as well as differences) over periods including many decades preceding the 1960s.<sup>96</sup> Melucci's identification of movements as fundamentally oriented to defending social life against the state and market is difficult

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<sup>91</sup> Touraine, 'An Introduction to the Study of Social Movements', p. 769.

<sup>92</sup> Touraine, 'An Introduction to the Study of Social Movements'.

<sup>93</sup> Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*; Melucci, 'The Process of Collective Identity'.

<sup>94</sup> See also Claus Offe, 'New Social Movements: Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics', *Social Research*, vol. 52 no. 4, 1985, pp. 817–868.

<sup>95</sup> Jean L. Cohen, 'Strategy or Identity: New Theoretical Paradigms and Contemporary Social Movements', *Social Research*, vol. 52 no.4, 1985, pp. 663–716, p. 665.

<sup>96</sup> More generally, Craig Calhoun has questioned the "newness" of "new social movements," arguing that there are greater continuities with past movements than is generally acknowledged. Craig Calhoun, "'New Social Movements' of the Early Nineteenth Century", in Mark Traugott (ed.), *Repertoires and Cycles of Collective Action*, Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, pp. 173–216.

to reconcile with, for example, feminist demands for more stringent laws against domestic violence. More importantly for the purposes of this thesis, the focus on social movement action as necessarily anti-systemic and innovative has limited the extent to which new social movement theory can account for the way political goals and projects and new institutions, as well as new identities, grow out of social movements such as feminism.<sup>97</sup> This second gap is related to the first: if the significance of social movements is identified mainly at the broadest (cross-movement) level, the particular projects of a social movement, some of which might not be so innovative or novel, easily slip from view. So do the movement theories and ideas about organisation that might provide a link between the mundane and the transformative.

More recently, and partly in response to criticisms from the collective identity/culturalist perspective, the resource mobilisation stream of research has evolved to give more attention to the specifically political and discursive contexts of social movement action. While maintaining the interest in generalizable determinants, this revised approach, political process theory, also incorporates the analysis of two further key elements of social movement activity: framing processes and political opportunities.<sup>98</sup> In this modified form, political process theory is now the dominant framework for research into social movements, although some researchers have noted that the inclusiveness on which this dominance is based has been achieved with the loss of clarity about certain concepts.<sup>99</sup>

Some social movement researchers in the political process tradition have recently reiterated concerns about the rationalism inherent in prevailing political process model and, in contrast, have emphasised the importance of meaning, subjectivity, culture, collective identity, and emotion.<sup>100</sup> As noted above, political process theory has

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<sup>97</sup> An example of research that integrates the insights of collective identity studies with an analysis of goal-oriented choices is Francesca Polletta and James M. Jasper, 'Collective Identity and Social Movements', *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 27, 2001, pp. 283–305, pp. 292–293.

<sup>98</sup> Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, 'Introduction: Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Framing Processes – Toward a Synthetic, Comparative Perspective on Social Movements', in Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald (eds), *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures and Cultural Framings*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 1–20.

<sup>99</sup> David S. Meyer and Debra C. Minkoff, 'Conceptualizing Political Opportunity', *Social Forces*, June 2004, vol. 82 no. 4, pp. 1457–1492.

<sup>100</sup> Jean-Pierre Reed, 'Making Sense of Political Contention: Approaches, Substantive Issues, and Interpretation in Social Movement Analysis', *Theory and Society*, vol. 34 nos. 5–6, 2005, pp. 613–627.

responded to criticism that it neglects such factors by incorporating new mechanisms in its conceptual framework. Richard Flacks observes that political process theorists have successfully maintained their hegemony in the field by readily accepting the need to “bring culture and meaning in.”<sup>101</sup> The development of “framing theory” has been particularly relevant in this respect. Alongside opportunities, resources, and mobilising structures, “framing” is seen in the modified political process theory as providing the cognitive link in mobilisation. Yet even in this form political process theory tends to assume instrumentalism and to reconfigure non-instrumental features in instrumental terms, as discussed further below.<sup>102</sup>

In their overview and assessment of the framing approach, Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow write that:

Social movement scholars interested in framing processes begin by taking as problematic what until the mid-1980s the literature largely ignored: meaning work — the struggle over the production of mobilizing and countermobilizing ideas and meanings.<sup>103</sup>

In Erving Goffman’s foundational text, frames are “schemata of interpretation” that enable individuals to navigate through the different situations of their lives.<sup>104</sup> In social movement studies the concept of framing has become more active and intentional: collective action frames are “intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists.”<sup>105</sup> As noted above, many studies of feminist activism use the concepts of framing and collective action frames.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Richard Flacks, ‘Knowledge for What? Thoughts on the State of Social Movement Studies’, in Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper (eds), *Rethinking Social Movements: Structure, Meaning, and Emotion*, Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003, pp. 135–153, pp. 137–138.

<sup>102</sup> Deborah B. Gould, ‘Passionate Political Processes: Bringing Emotions Back Into the Study of Social Movements’, in Goodwin and Jasper, *Rethinking Social Movements*, pp. 155–175, pp. 158–160.

<sup>103</sup> Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, ‘Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment’, *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 26, 2000, pp. 611–639, p. 613.

<sup>104</sup> Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986 (first published 1974), p.21.

<sup>105</sup> David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford, ‘Ideology, Frame Resonance and Participant Mobilization’, *International Social Movement Research*, vol. 1, 1988, pp. 197–219, p. 198.

<sup>106</sup> For example Franceschet, ‘Explaining Social Movement Outcomes’; Ellen Reese and Garnett Newcombe, ‘Income Rights, Mothers’ Rights, or Workers’ Rights?: Collective Action Frames, Organizational Ideologies, and the American Welfare Rights Movement’, *Social Problems*, vol. 50 no. 2, pp. 294–318.

Although frames concern values and ideas, the emphasis is on political actors strategically deploying resonant frames in order to attract adherents and outmanoeuvre opponents in public discursive battles.<sup>107</sup> Collective actors are construed as engaging in self-conscious and coherent decision-making.<sup>108</sup> Some social movement scholars have begun to question the limitations of framing theory, and challenge its presumption that social movement messages are instrumental and deliberate.<sup>109</sup> While many social movement studies describe framing as a strategic process, a more explicit focus on strategy could consider to what extent social movement actors engaged in political processes can choose their frames to avoid negative outcomes. As Pamela E. Oliver and Hank Johnson have pointed out, in emphasising the deliberate creation and use of frames (what they call the “marketing and resonating” aspects of the concept), framing literature sometimes underemphasises the importance of values, systems of belief and thinking (what they call ideology).<sup>110</sup> It is therefore necessary to be alert to the way in which underlying values and beliefs about how the world works are expressed in movement behaviour, alongside more instrumental and strategic action.

There are related concerns about the widely-used idea of political opportunity structures. It might be expected that the concept of political opportunity structure would better describe the constraints faced by social movement actors, offering a useful corrective to the image of social movements as free to choose between limitless options for action. It appears, though, that the concept of political opportunity structure is meant to refer to the general determinants of movement emergence and decline rather than the constraints faced by movement actors in particular situations. As Sidney Tarrow puts it, the political opportunity structure describes the “consistent — but not necessarily formal or permanent — dimensions of the political environment” in which social movement organisations operate, and which partially determine their growth and

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<sup>107</sup> Pamela E. Oliver and Hank Johnston, ‘What a Good Idea! Ideologies and Frames in Social Movement Research’, *Mobilization*, vol. 5 no. 1, 2000, pp. 37–54

<sup>108</sup> For example Doug McAdam, ‘The Framing Function of Movement Tactics: Strategic Dramaturgy in the American Civil Rights Movement’, in McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*, pp. 338–355.

<sup>109</sup> Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper, ‘Caught in a Winding, Snarling Vine: The Structural Bias of Political Process Theory’, *Sociological Forum*, vol. 14 no. 1, 1999, pp. 27–54, pp. 48–49.

<sup>110</sup> Oliver and Johnston, ‘What a Good Idea!’, pp. 46–49.

disappearance.<sup>111</sup> An example of such a political opportunity structure would be the presence of an “open” or “closed” system of government. Yet there are important issue-specific opportunities and constraints as well as general ones, as David S. Meyer and Debra C. Minkoff have noted.<sup>112</sup> Social movement actors can also alter the political opportunity structure, leading to different conditions for their own activism and for subsequent mobilisations.

In focusing on political opportunity structures as variables of activity across movements, political process studies tend not to account for the particular discursive risks and possibilities faced by movement participants, or their capacity to respond creatively to these. In contrast, Hobson and Lindholm’s study (mentioned above) shows how the Swedish women’s movement both responded to and shaped the political environment in the 1930s, by composing constituencies in support of a new discursive consensus that incorporated gender equality within the developing national welfare state discourse. Rather than attempting to explain the emergence or disappearance of movements, analyses such as Hobson and Lindholm’s seek to understand the mutual effects of the political environment and the way movement participants decide upon, articulate and mobilise their claims.<sup>113</sup> This is a more promising approach to studying political opportunities. An outstanding problem, though, is that while “political opportunity” implies strategic action, it is not clear how or to what extent activists actually conceptualise and respond to such opportunities.<sup>114</sup> While Hobson and Lindholm have documented a conscious and fairly united intervention by women’s movement activists in the political environment in the Swedish case, it does not follow that such a capacity is inherent to movements in all times and places (as the authors emphasise).

Another important criticism of political process studies of social movements is that, in focusing on the determinants of mobilisation across movements, they tend not to deal

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<sup>111</sup> Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 85.

<sup>112</sup> Meyer and Minkoff, ‘Conceptualizing Political Opportunity’, p. 1459.

<sup>113</sup> Hobson and Lindholm, ‘Collective Identities’, p. 499.

<sup>114</sup> Ruud Koopmans, ‘The Missing Link Between Structure and Agency: Outline of an Evolutionary Approach to Social Movements’, *Mobilization*, vol. 10 no. 1, pp. 19–33; Monique Kremer, ‘The Politics of Ideals of Care: Danish and Flemish Child Care Policy Compared’, *Social Politics*, vol. 13 no. 2, 2006, pp. 261–285, p. 270.

seriously with these movements' substantive aims. This literature tends to look across movements as if their similar or dissimilar forms were more important than their particular contents. The professionalization of social movement studies as an academic sociological subdiscipline has fostered a focus on comparison and cross-movement analysis rather than detailed consideration of the particular aims of the movements studied.<sup>115</sup> However, as well as professionalization, this focus may also reflect the assumption that the social movements that flowered from the 1960s onward were both new and related, in that they were “of the left,” without being “old left.” This set of assumptions has allowed the political process approach to proceed in a way that takes the aims and goals of social movement activity as given, as not needing inquiry in themselves, while scholars could concentrate on discovering universal mechanisms of mobilisation (a project with at least the prospect of applicability *for* movements).<sup>116</sup> However, in giving only slight attention to the specific goals and desires of social movements, such studies are unable to really consider the full implications and validity of key concepts such as strategic framing, political opportunity structure and collective identity. In part this is because it is difficult, within the political process approach, to analyse movement reflexivity: movement actors may themselves problematise political process concepts and act both instrumentally and non-instrumentally in relation to the understandings they develop.

Because much activist knowledge is specific and local, it is difficult for broad theories of mobilisation to incorporate or synthesise this knowledge.<sup>117</sup> Yet taking movements' broad goals as given neglects the extent to which movement actors work to generate goals, as well as operating with their own assumptions about the purpose of their activism. In relation to the women's movement this is a problem, given the claim made by some participants, that “we are the thing itself”; that is, that form and content are

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<sup>115</sup> Flacks, ‘Knowledge for What?’, p. 136.

<sup>116</sup> Recent challenges to these assumptions have attempted, in one direction, to critique and reconsider the focus of social movement studies on left-wing movements and to bring right-wing movements into the purview of social movement studies, and, in another direction, to broaden the framework beyond “social movements” to “contentious politics.” See Douglas McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001; Francesca Polletta, ‘Mobilization Forum: Awkward Movements’ (editorial introduction to forum), *Mobilization*, vol. 11 no. 4, 2006, pp. 475–478 and contributors.

<sup>117</sup> Sarah Maddison and Sean Scalmer, *Activist Wisdom: Practical Knowledge and Creative Tension in Social Movements*, Sydney: University of NSW Press, 2006.

merged.<sup>118</sup> The 1970s women's movement philosophy of rejecting a division between means and ends was a kind of "prefigurative politics" that was shared with many social movement groups of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>119</sup> In this respect, the large literature developed by and focused on the women's movement specifically, such as Hobson and Lindholm's contribution, is well-positioned to reflect on substantive feminist concerns while responding to some parts of social movement theory, and simultaneously enriching that theory, in the "symbiotic" relationship noted by Reger and Taylor.<sup>120</sup>

Criticisms such as the ones noted here about political opportunity structure have led Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper to argue that the field of social movement studies is caught in a "snarling, winding vine" of structuralism.<sup>121</sup> Similarly, Aldon Morris argues that political process models of social movements overemphasize external factors and neglect the human agency within movements themselves.<sup>122</sup> From this view, the emphasis on opportunity structures and on the determinants of mobilisation neglects the ability of individuals and groups within movements to intentionally, and in some cases effectively, act to create opportunities and engender mobilisation. As critics have noted, too, the model has tended to underemphasize the cultural and emotional aspects of social movement agency, instead seeing such aspects as separate or even opposite to the goal-directed action that is usually seen as the hallmark of agency.<sup>123</sup>

A key but often unarticulated problem in investigating the capacity for agency is its relationship to instrumentalism. Instrumentalism is understood here to mean an approach in which actions are conceived as a means to an end, rather than as ends in themselves.<sup>124</sup> The problem of instrumentalism in social movements is highlighted by

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<sup>118</sup> Suzanne Bellamy, 'Form: We Are the Thing Itself', in The Convenors (ed.) *Third Women and Labour Conference Papers*, vol. 2, 1982, pp. 293–303.

<sup>119</sup> Wini Breines, *Community and Organization in the New Left, 1962–1968: The Great Refusal*, New York: Praeger, 1982, pp. 46–52.

<sup>120</sup> Reger and Taylor, 'Women's Movement Research'.

<sup>121</sup> Goodwin and Jasper, 'Caught in a Winding, Snarling Vine'.

<sup>122</sup> Aldon Morris, 'Reflections on Social Movement Theory: Criticisms and Proposals', *Contemporary Sociology*, vol. 29 no. 3, 2000, pp. 445–454. See also Kimberly Dugan and Jo Reger, 'Voice and Agency in Social Movement Outcomes', *Qualitative Sociology*, vol. 29, 2006, pp. 467–484.

<sup>123</sup> Francesca Polletta, 'Snarls, Quacks, and Quarrels: Culture and Structure in Political Process Theory', *Sociological Forum*, vol. 14 no. 1, 1999, pp. 63–70.

<sup>124</sup> 'Instrumentalism', in Craig Calhoun (ed.), *Dictionary of the Social Sciences*, Oxford Reference Online: Oxford University Press, 2002, access provided by the ANU, <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t104.e838>> (accessed 8 Sept. 2008).

Deborah B. Gould in her discussion of emotion. Gould argues that emotion can be “domesticated” into political process theory by stressing the instrumentalist use of emotion by movement leaders to mobilise support and maintain commitment.<sup>125</sup> Indeed, as Gould notes, both Benford and Tarrow have acknowledged the role of emotions as “resources” used by leaders to mobilise supporters, particularly through framing.<sup>126</sup> Gould shows, however, that this leaves an emptiness at the heart of our account of social movements. While careful not to revert to “collective behaviour” models of social movements as irrational and therefore aberrant, authors such as Gould seek to “bring emotions back in” to social movement studies, in a way that acknowledges the non-instrumental as well as intentional elements of emotion in social movements. Echoing Gould’s comments about the “domestication of emotion” within political process theories, Flacks notes that despite the integration of “culture” into the mainstream of social movement theory (via concepts of collective identity and framing), “their emphasis continued to be on understanding such dimensions as ‘strategic’ rather than as ends in themselves.”<sup>127</sup>

Attempts to “bring back in” elements such as meaning, subjectivity, culture, collective identity, and emotion naturally provide fuller accounts of social movement action than models that assume their absence. A more difficult challenge lies in showing how these elements might be constitutive of means-end type reasoning, without relegating them once again to the status of instrumentally manipulated tools. Gould illustrates the potential of such an approach in her discussion of the political funerals staged by AIDS activists, in which, she argues, emotion cannot be reduced either to a blind force driving action or to a merely tactical repertoire in mobilising symbolic political events.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Gould ‘Passionate Political Processes’, p. 158.

<sup>126</sup> Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998 (second edition), p. 112; Robert D. Benford, ‘An Insider’s Critique of the Social Movement Framing Perspective’, *Sociological Inquiry*, vol. 67 no. 4, 1997, pp. 409–430, p. 419.

<sup>127</sup> Flacks, ‘Knowledge for What?’, p. 137.

<sup>128</sup> Gould reconstructs the role of emotion in social movement mobilisation through a theory of “emotives,” which proposes that emotional utterances actually change the feelings to which they imperfectly refer. Gould, ‘Passionate Political Processes’, p. 170. See also James M. Jasper, ‘Emotions and the Microfoundations of Politics: Rethinking Ends and Means’, in Simon Clarke, Paul Hoggett and Simon Thompson (eds), *Emotion, Politics and Society*, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, pp. 14–30.

Efforts to reintegrate culture, emotion and identity with political process theories are under way, and several authors have been influential in challenging other social movement theorists to develop less narrowly rationalistic accounts of social movement action.<sup>129</sup> So far, though, there has been less attention to strategy itself as a particular mode or component of social movement action. Some scholars have recently called for an explicit focus on movement actors' strategic choices and dilemmas as a way to balance the structuralism discussed above,<sup>130</sup> yet in most social movement studies strategy remains more of an assumption than a phenomenon to be investigated. As Jasper points out, a great deal of effort is made to model the variables that affect the emergence and activity of movements, but less attention is given to the strategic choices of movement actors.<sup>131</sup> Instead of directly considering choices and decisions, political process studies tend to merely imbue their accounts with a sense of agency by adopting (but not actually examining) the viewpoint of a movement leader facing opportunities, deploying frames and so on. This assumed "movement CEO" viewpoint is unsuitable in important ways, as I show in the following sections.

One of the implicit attractions of the strategic viewpoint is that it holds out the promise of delivering movement-relevant and possibly applicable findings for activists.<sup>132</sup> Flacks notes that this promise was seen as the primary value of early works such as William A. Gamson's *Strategy of Social Protest* and Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward's *Poor People's Movements*.<sup>133</sup> It seems, however, that with the professionalization of social movement studies, scholars now do not see it as their legitimate role to make recommendations for particular movements.<sup>134</sup> Paradoxically,

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<sup>129</sup> Oliver and Johnston, 'What a Good Idea!'; Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta, 'Why Emotions Matter'.

<sup>130</sup> James M. Jasper, 'A Strategic Approach to Collective Action: Looking for Agency in Social Movement Choices', *Mobilization*, vol. 9 no. 1, 2004, pp. 1–16; Goodwin and Jasper, 'Caught in a Winding, Snarling Vine'; Debra C. Minkoff and John D. McCarthy, 'Reinvigorating the Study of Organizational Processes in Social Movements', *Mobilization*, vol. 10 no. 2, 2005, pp. 289–308, pp. 298–301; Maddison and Scalmer, *Activist Wisdom*.

<sup>131</sup> Jasper, 'A Strategic Approach'.

<sup>132</sup> Douglas Bevington and Chris Dixon argue that social movement studies should address themselves to what is useful for movements. Douglas Bevington and Chris Dixon, 'Movement-Relevant Theory: Rethinking Social Movement Scholarship and Activism', *Social Movement Studies*, vol. 4 no. 3, 2005, pp. 185–208.

<sup>133</sup> Flacks, 'Knowledge for What?', p. 136; Gamson, *The Strategy of Social Protest*; Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail*, New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

<sup>134</sup> Colin Barker and Laurence Cox, 'What Have the Romans Ever Done for Us? Academic and Activist Forms of Movement Theorizing,' paper to Alternative Futures and Popular Protest 8th Annual Conference, Manchester Metropolitan University, April 2002.

even though social movement theorists tend to distance themselves from the substantive concerns of social movement groups and actors, they often write as if trying to discover general rules that might then be *used* by these groups and actors.<sup>135</sup>

Jean L. Cohen makes a similar observation about Charles Tilly's methodology for analysing collective action: "Its purpose is to enable one to assess the organisational, structural, and situational chances for a group with articulated interests to engage in collective action."<sup>136</sup> In Cohen's view, resource mobilisation approaches (and by implication their political process successors) are characterised by their emphasis on instrumental-strategic action; they are not oriented to analysing the meaning of social movements, or the related question of how and why solidarity exists. Rather, the aim is to discover how groups can pursue their (presupposed) shared interests, without defining those interests too closely, since this would compromise the ability to generalise findings. This, in Cohen's view is precisely the problem: "an analytical perspective that focuses on strategic-instrumental action cannot provide an answer to the question of the origin and logic of group solidarity."<sup>137</sup> Further, Cohen criticises:

Analysis does not proceed from an hermeneutic relation to the ideology or self-understanding of collective actors. Instead, the standpoint of analysis approximates that of the movement organizer concerned with the imperatives of mobilization, on the one hand, and a more general observer's overview of the political environment, on the other.<sup>138</sup>

Similarly, "where the organizations rather than the individuals are regarded as the rational actors," Hans Joas observes that:

The perspective here is no longer that of a single individual who reflects upon his [*sic*] membership in an organization or his participation in a collective act... Rather it is the vantage point of the "general secretary" of an interest group in a society where social movements are commonplace

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<sup>135</sup> Jasper makes a similar criticism: Jasper, 'A Strategic Approach', p. 4.

<sup>136</sup> Cohen, 'Strategy or Identity', p. 684.

<sup>137</sup> Cohen, 'Strategy or Identity', p. 677.

<sup>138</sup> Cohen, 'Strategy or Identity', p. 676.

but have become highly professionalized and indeed partially commercialized.<sup>139</sup>

Indeed, the “movement CEO” viewpoint adopted in much resource mobilisation and political process literature brings social movement studies closer to the disciplines of organisational analysis and strategic management, which have traditionally been geared to informing the decisions of corporate senior management with useful generalisations or “lessons” from case studies.<sup>140</sup> There is, therefore, a kind of convergence of social movement studies with the types of aims traditionally pursued by organisational analysis. Interestingly, the presumption that the purpose of analysis is the provision of better advice to managers is being critiqued in organisational/strategy studies, but such self-questioning is uncommon in social movement studies.<sup>141</sup>

In organisational studies, proponents of the “strategy-as-practice” approach argue that strategy should no longer be seen as something an organisation has (as in “a diversification strategy”), but in more concrete terms, as a form of work that managers carry out (for example, through meeting and talking, deploying discourses and using technologies).<sup>142</sup> Even more radically, Chris Carter, Stewart R. Clegg and Martin Kornberger are concerned about the issues commonly excluded from discussions of strategy (such as the environmental and health consequences of firms’ activities).<sup>143</sup> Carter et al. even propose that strategy researchers should facilitate an interplay between “the official voices” of a corporation and the activist NGOs that pursue such issues.<sup>144</sup>

Although social movement studies rarely problematize strategy in this way, there are alternatives to taking the standpoint of the movement leader-as-strategist. Flacks, for example, has argued for an explicit focus on the relationships between “the leaders” and “the led,” thereby questioning the extent to which strategy from the top is a force in

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<sup>139</sup> Hans Joas, *The Creativity of Action*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, p. 203.

<sup>140</sup> Chris Carter, Stewart R. Clegg and Martin Kornberger, ‘Strategy as Practice?’, *Strategic Organization*, vol. 6 no. 1, 2008, pp. 83–99, pp. 87–88.

<sup>141</sup> Some exceptions are Jesse Lemisch, ‘2.5 Cheers for Bridging the Gap between Activism and the Academy; Or, Stay and Fight’, *Radical History Review*, no. 85, 2003, pp. 239–48; Bevington and Dixon, ‘Movement-Relevant Theory’ and Barker and Cox, ‘What Have the Romans Ever Done for Us?’.

<sup>142</sup> Paula Jarzabkowski and Richard Whittington, ‘Hard to Disagree, Mostly’, *Strategic Organization*, vol. 6 no. 1, 2008, pp. 101–106, p. 101.

<sup>143</sup> Carter et al., ‘Strategy as Practice?’, p. 93.

<sup>144</sup> Carter et al., ‘Strategy as Practice?’, pp. 94–95.

movement deliberations.<sup>145</sup> In practice, social movement participants are often passionately engaged in attempts to understand and transform relationships between “leaders” and “followers,” and between the more and less organised parts of the movement. Such attempts are characteristic of the movements originating in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>146</sup> Social movement participants have themselves produced important theories about leadership and internal organisation.<sup>147</sup> It is important for scholarly studies of social movements to be able to incorporate such movement-generated knowledge.<sup>148</sup>

The analytical perspective of the “movement CEO” makes it all too easy for untenable rational-choice assumptions (such as self-interest and instrumentalism) to enter our interpretation of social movement action in an unconsidered way.<sup>149</sup> On similar grounds, the resource mobilisation/political process tradition has been criticised for excluding consideration of social movements as processes of collective identity, consciousness and solidarity.<sup>150</sup> As discussed above, it is partly on this basis that new social movement approaches were advanced as a challenge. Yet, in presenting social movements as challenges to instrumental rationality per se, new social movement theories tend not to explore how social movements actually do generate and pursue goals.

A number of scholars have recently called for a more direct focus on social movement strategies and strategic choices. These proposals can be contrasted both with the implicit “movement CEO” perspective adopted in many social movement studies, and with the emphasis in new social movement theory on collective identity at the expense of goals and means. Authors including Goodwin and Jasper have proposed paying closer attention to strategic choices as a way to counter the “structural bias” of political opportunity models and to explore the nature of social movement agency.<sup>151</sup> Minkoff

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<sup>145</sup> Flacks, ‘Knowledge for What?’, pp. 142–144.

<sup>146</sup> Breines, *Community and Organization*.

<sup>147</sup> Jo Freeman’s famous paper is a good example: Jo Freeman aka Joreen, ‘The Tyranny of Structurelessness’, <<http://www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.htm>> (accessed 8 Sept. 2008) (first published 1972).

<sup>148</sup> Maddison and Scalmer, *Activist Wisdom*.

<sup>149</sup> Jasper, ‘A Strategic Approach’, p. 4.

<sup>150</sup> Touraine, ‘An Introduction to the Study of Social Movements’, p. 769; Melucci, ‘The Process of Collective Identity’.

<sup>151</sup> Jasper, ‘A Strategic Approach’, Goodwin and Jasper, ‘Caught in a Winding, Snarling Vine’; James M. Jasper and Jeff Goodwin (writing as Jaswin), ‘Trouble in Paradigms’, *Sociological Forum*, vol. 14 no. 1, 1999, pp. 107–125.

and McCarthy have argued that analysing strategic decisions could reinvigorate social movement studies by bringing it into dialogue with organisational studies.<sup>152</sup> As Dennis J. Downey and Deana A. Rohlinger point out, there has been in recent years a “renewed interest in strategy as an explanatory variable.”<sup>153</sup> In their view, this focus on strategic choice is helping “to bridge the gap between structure and agency in social movement research, giving us a more nuanced understanding of the ways that collective actors can bring about social change.”<sup>154</sup>

Despite frequent usage, it is rare to find extensive and systematic treatment of the terms “strategic” or “strategy” in the social movement literature.<sup>155</sup> John Lofland offers a discussion of strategies in his guide to studying social movement organisation (SMOs).<sup>156</sup> In line with generic definitions, Lofland identifies the unifying idea as that of “*ends* (or goals) for which one devises *means*,”<sup>157</sup> while noting that:

anything any SMO does can be seen as strategy. Or, at least, all actions are “strategic” in the sense that they can be presumed (or guessed) to be in *some* way goal oriented and ends-means calculative. While all action may be strategic in this broad sense, SMO researchers nonetheless tend to restrict the concept to actions consciously undertaken to achieve a SMO’s *stated, major goals*.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Minkoff and McCarthy, ‘Reinvigorating the Study of Organizational Processes’, pp. 298–301.

<sup>153</sup> Dennis J. Downey and Deana A. Rohlinger, ‘Linking Strategic Choice with Macro-organizational Dynamics: Strategy and Social Movement Articulation’, *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, vol. 28, 2008, pp. 3–38, p. 4.

<sup>154</sup> Downey and Rohlinger, ‘Linking Strategic Choice’, p. 4.

<sup>155</sup> The theoretical under-development of “strategy” in social movement studies is also noted by David L. Westby, ‘Strategic Imperative, Ideology and Frames’, in Hank Johnston and John A. Noakes (eds), *Frames of Protest: Social Movements and the Framing Perspective*, Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005, pp. 217–235, p. 231, note 1; and by David S. Meyer and Suzanne Staggenborg, ‘Opposing Movement Strategies in U.S. Abortion Politics’, *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, vol. 28, 2008, pp. 207–238, p. 208.

<sup>156</sup> John Lofland, *Social Movement Organizations: Guide to Research on Insurgent Realities*, New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1996, pp. 257–303.

<sup>157</sup> Lofland, *Social Movement Organizations*, p. 257. Emphasis in original.

<sup>158</sup> Lofland, *Social Movement Organizations*, p. 258. Emphasis in original.

Similar accounts of strategy as the conscious connection between goals and the actions taken to achieve them are given by Marshall Ganz and by Downey and Rohlinger.<sup>159</sup> Perhaps the most extensive treatment of “strategy” in the social movement literature has been developed by Jasper, who conceptualises social movement protesters as future-oriented players devising means to pursue goals in a field of strategic contestation that includes the prospect of resistance from other players, and in which each player is an audience for the actions and statements of others.<sup>160</sup> Strategy, in Jasper’s view, is a social and interactive exercise, which is not separable from cultural or institutional factors. On the other hand, goal-oriented action is not displaced by culture or emotions, but incorporates these:

Even the most culturally saturated group or individual makes choices, carries out strategies, anticipates the reactions of others, and has some sense of what it would mean to “win.” All of their intentions, understandings, and actions are filtered through cultural and psychological lenses.<sup>161</sup>

Jasper pays special attention to the strategic dilemmas (or tradeoffs) that social movement actors encounter. He proposes that empirical research on these dilemmas could enliven what is otherwise, in sociology, a relatively hollow notion of agency.<sup>162</sup> Jasper’s work on strategy presents possibilities for the present study in two important ways. First, Jasper highlights the importance of not assuming that all types of “players” are the same, and emphasizes the need to be specific about where choices are made:

If we emphasize strategic choice, we must be careful to specify who exactly is making which decisions. The “unit of analysis” in this research must comprise both individuals and organizations...A sound strategic

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<sup>159</sup> Marshall Ganz, ‘Why David Sometimes Wins: Strategic Capacity in Social Movements’, in Goodwin and Jasper, *Rethinking Social Movements*, pp. 177–198, p. 181; Downey and Rohlinger, ‘Linking Strategic Choice’, p. 5.

<sup>160</sup> Jasper, ‘A Strategic Approach’. See also Jasper’s work on strategy more generally (beyond social movements): James M. Jasper, *Getting Your Way: Strategic Dilemmas in the Real World*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

<sup>161</sup> Jasper, ‘A Strategic Approach’, p. 6.

<sup>162</sup> See also Steven Hitlin and Glen H. Elder, ‘Time, Self, and the Curiously Abstract Concept of Agency’, *Sociological Theory*, vol. 25 no. 2, 2007, pp. 170–191, pp. 170–171.

approach must incorporate both simple [individual] and complex [collective] players, but contrary to game theory the two are not formally equivalent, as the latter include the former. We must attend to control and coordination and other strategic processes out of which complex players derive decisions.<sup>163</sup>

Jasper's model thereby raises the question of how and to what extent collective players (including movements at the broadest level) are able to constitute themselves as unitary in order to make and endorse decisions. An exploration of this question would provide more detailed information about how social movement decisions are made.

Second, Jasper points out that not all actions in social movements result from conscious choices, and that not all dilemmas are recognised as such by actors.<sup>164</sup> In his view, therefore, "We need to ask what cultural, psychological, emotional, and structural factors influence which choices are consciously made instead of being left as implicit tradeoffs."<sup>165</sup> Following on from this, it is likely that some types of dilemmas are more open to strategic decision-making than others, and that dilemmas can sometimes be recognised by an observer that are not apparent to a participant (and vice versa). In the present research, I am responding to criticisms that a social movement made the wrong strategic choice at a "macro" discursive level. It is therefore useful to ask to what extent participants were able to identify the dilemma and make a decision at that level. On the other hand, we might find that choices made at slightly more "micro" levels affected the overall direction of the movement at the broader discursive level. Participants' perspectives on their own activism are therefore a vital resource for studying social movement strategising.

To summarise, the main problem with the "movement CEO" viewpoint is that, given the collective nature of social movement organising work, the standpoint of a single movement organiser is an unrealistic way in which to view the formation of movement

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<sup>163</sup> Jasper, 'A Strategic Approach', p. 7, p. 14, note 3.

<sup>164</sup> A similar point is made by Downey and Rohlinger, who argue that collective actors have a "general logic" or "strategic orientation" to the question of how to achieve social change. Downey and Rohlinger, 'Linking Strategic Choice', p. 6.

<sup>165</sup> Jasper, 'A Strategic Approach', p. 11.

directions. It also often leads to the introduction of narrowly rationalist assumptions about the motivations and behaviour of social movement actors. Unfortunately, although new social movement theory recognises the inadequacy of this viewpoint, it tends to lead us away from questions about the development of goals and means. The developing interest in strategy in social movement studies goes some way to addressing these questions, but can be usefully extended by more explicit consideration of how decision-making occurs (and when it does not occur) in the context of a broad, decentralised movement field. Such an alternative approach, in which the development of goals and means is analysed in the setting of a collective, is outlined in the following chapter.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has critically examined the contributions of feminist historiography and studies of the women's movement and social movement studies, to find what answers these bodies of literature might give to the question of to what extent the women's movement was able to make strategic decisions in forming its different positions on work and care issues. It was shown that feminist historiography helps to contextualise the positions taken by the movement at different times and demonstrates both continuity and difference in the movement's history. However, history-writing tends to evoke the image of movements making deliberate decisions about what to do, and rarely addresses directly the question of how and to what extent such decision-making actually occurs. Feminist theory has given some attention to the related topic of women's agency, but often focuses on individual resistance and neglects the collective processes of organisation. Further work is needed to understand how women's movement participants, exploring their shared concerns and organising to pursue them, have responded to the risks and constraints of political engagement.

In addressing the dynamics of engagement between movements and their political contexts, social movement theory offers some answers to the questions raised by women's historiography. The dominant political process model represents an attempt to integrate cultural and cognitive factors by stressing the importance of framing. This

model also highlights the interaction of movements with their institutional contexts by studying the political opportunity structures that influence movement emergence and decline. This tradition tends to take the aims of movement action as given, and has little to say about the way movement participants generate — and problematize — goals and means. Studies tend either to assume or to ignore strategic instrumentalism in social movement action, rather than treating it as a feature whose nature, scope and limitations can be explored. The “movement CEO” viewpoint employed in many social movement studies needs to be replaced with a more detailed empirical focus on the collective and decentralised processes of decision-making. The following chapter lays out such an alternative approach.

## Chapter 3: Theory and Method

As the previous chapter showed, neither feminist historiography nor social movement theory provides avenues of inquiry directly to address the research problem: to what extent was the Australian women's movement able to act strategically in the formation of its different directions on work and care? This chapter outlines the ideas that inform my research approach and explains the methods I used in exploring women's movement decision-making, organisation and collective agency in the interwar years (1919–1938) and in the 1970s and 1980s in Australia. Historical enquiry into these processes can provide a more concrete and nuanced account of the nature and extent of movement decision-making, instead of either assuming that movements are effectively led by strategic decision-makers, or downplaying the development of goals and means. Such an empirical inquiry into women's movement organising can also enrich feminist historiography by generating knowledge about how collective agency has been achieved, without relying on the image of the women's movements as a unitary actor capable of making strategic decisions.

### **Responsibility and the movement as a moral agent**

Despite a growing emphasis on strategy as a focus for inquiry, the existing social movement literature is marked by ambivalence about whether to use strategy as an explanatory variable or to make recommendations on how to do strategy better. As discussed in the previous chapter, although the “movement CEO” viewpoint prevalent in the literature gives the impression of an inside-out “practical” perspective on “what works” for the social movement organiser, this is an artificial vantage point. It neglects the fact that a great deal of social movement organising work is itself interpretive and reflexive about the meaning of action, and the fact that many social movements are characterised by an explicit commitment to non-centralised decision-making. Here I propose to focus on strategy in a particular way, by emphasising women's movement organising. The problem of organisation is encountered and addressed within movements, but this need not take the form of strategic decisions made by a leader and

adhered to by followers. Rather, the problem of organisation may be addressed by participants in their relations with one another.

If the “strategic CEO” viewpoint is not appropriate, what should replace it? The viewpoint I develop here is that of someone responding in, for, and to a politically collective “we.” To explain what I mean by this, I return to the research problem itself, and the setting in which it becomes significant: statements blaming the women’s movement for having adopted wrong strategies on issues of work and care. Returning to the setting of the research problem in this way goes “against the grain” of academic convention, in which the problem-setting context is usually stripped away to leave the essence of the research question. In contrast, I wish to keep in view and take seriously the motivation for inquiry. I assume that this motivation — the desire to respond to the statements blaming the women’s movement for taking the wrong direction — has qualities important for the actual development of inquiry, not only to give the reader an “entry point,” to “set the scene,” or to hint at “applications” for the findings. Rather, the approach I take has affinities with philosophical pragmatism, in particular with Charles Sanders Peirce’s maxim: that the whole meaning of a statement or theory is its significance for us in practice. (In interpreting this maxim, it is important to keep in mind that, for Peirce and the other pragmatists, practice was not a simple thing, and in particular it was not to be perceived in overly individualistic or material terms.)<sup>1</sup> Another way to understand this approach, also consistent with philosophical pragmatism, is that inquiry is ultimately oriented towards a problem-situation, and that the appropriate role of inquiry is bringing intelligence to bear on that problem-situation (though, again, not in a necessarily blunt, direct or material way). In this sense, keeping the motivation for inquiry (the problem-situation or the significance-in-practice) in view may aid and enrich inquiry.

The problem-situation can be expressed in the following terms: statements blaming feminism call forth, in those who identify with feminism, a need to respond to these statements in terms of responsibility. This, in turn, generates reflection on belonging to

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Sanders Peirce, ‘How to Make Our Ideas Clear’, in Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (eds), *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce: Volume V Pragmatism and Pragmaticism*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1934, pp. 248–271, pp. 258–259.

the collective subject who is held responsible (the women's movement). We therefore cannot help but engage with conventional accounts of responsibility, in which responsibility attaches appropriately to a moral agent, described in the following terms by Sandra Lee Bartky:

Agents or subjects that can act freely are called “moral agents” or “moral subjects” by philosophers: a moral agent is someone whose actions can be evaluated according to moral criteria, i.e., whose deeds can be vicious or virtuous, praiseworthy or blameworthy. The moral evaluation of the actions of a subject assumes not only the freedom, hence the responsibility, of the one acting, but, in addition, the rationality and maturity of this subject as well.<sup>2</sup>

It is clear that there are many features of this account of a moral agent that do not accord with what we know of social movements. First, as discussed in the previous chapter, the extent to which social movements and social movement participants are “free” (for example to make strategic discursive choices) is very unclear. Second, the “one acting”, the movement, is also multiple and diffuse. Finally, while various theories have assumed that social movement action was by definition rational or irrational, assuming this is not sufficient to determine whether a movement should be considered a rational subject. All of these points suggest that it is not legitimate to treat a social movement as a moral agent. Yet unless we wish to abandon the idea that a social movement can be a force for positive social change, we are unavoidably bound to address questions of responsibility. In Chapter 6 I revisit the attributes of the moral agent in detail. Here, we need to answer a more general question to guide the historical investigation: In what sense is it tenable to consider past feminism in terms of responsibility?

Despite the poor fit between Bartky's moral agent and our knowledge of social movements, we might not, in fact, wish to abandon an objectivised view of the women's movement as an agent in history. Without employing a crude model of progress, it

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<sup>2</sup> Sandra Lee Bartky, ‘Agency: What's the Problem?’, in Judith Kegan Gardiner (ed.), *Provoking Agents: Gender and Agency in Theory and Practice*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995, pp. 178–193, p. 178.

would be rash to deny that feminism has had effects or that these effects correspond (though of course not directly or neatly) with our reasonable understandings about feminists' intentions and beliefs about their feminism. To deny these effects would also place our analysis at odds with participants' self-understandings, in a way that would then require some accounting for.<sup>3</sup> This is not to suggest that social movement participants generally have a simplistic view of their action as somehow directly effecting change, or that they see themselves in a self-aggrandising sense as "making history."<sup>4</sup> However, to some extent at least, the desire for change does project into the future, imagining a point at which participants (and others) would be able to look back and attribute at least part of the change achieved to movement actions. However partial or, at times, even self-deluding this projection may be, participants seeking to change society and seeing themselves as responsible for change is something without which it would be difficult to recognise social movement action. It is also an aspect that holds out the promise of responsibility in the positive sense of achievement and, inevitably, the negative possibility of failure and blame.

There is another way in which we can consider responsibility for past feminism, which leads away from a direct focus on achievement, praise, failure and blame. While not addressing her considerations to the women's movement or social movements, feminist philosopher Genevieve Lloyd has made some compelling remarks on responsibility in her efforts to develop "less individualistic ways of thinking of selfhood."<sup>5</sup> Lloyd points out that individuals sometimes take responsibility for events or action over which they do not have control.<sup>6</sup> Importantly, this includes events or actions that occurred in the past:

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<sup>3</sup> Hans Joas, *The Creativity of Action*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, p. 112.

<sup>4</sup> See for example the reflections of activists in Sarah Maddison and Sean Scalmer, *Activist Wisdom: Practical Knowledge and Creative Tension in Social Movements*, Sydney: University of NSW Press, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Genevieve Lloyd, 'Individuals, Responsibility, and Philosophical Imagination', in Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar (eds), *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 112–123.

<sup>6</sup> Lloyd, 'Individuals, Responsibility, and Philosophical Imagination', p. 114. See also Ralph H. Turner and Lewis M. Killian, *Collective Behavior*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1972 (first published 1957), p. 7.

Selves struggle for coherence, for unity — struggle to make themselves well-functioning temporal, no less than spatial, wholes, brought together out of the rich but confusing deliverance of memory and imagination...The capacity to have a past and to reflect on it is crucial to selfhood; and having, in the relevant sense, a past is not something that admits of tidy borders between the individual existence that is mine and the collective existence that proceeds me, into which I am born.<sup>7</sup>

For Lloyd, the issue is not whether or in what circumstances individuals should be held responsible for collectives, or under what conditions collectives can be held responsible in a way analogous to individuals. Rather, she is concerned to show how entering into relations of sympathy and solidarity with others, which is a normal part of life, involves the experience of responsibility for acts or events over which one has no control.

Following Lloyd, I am suggesting that individuals can and do, in identifying themselves as part of the political collectivity known as feminism and as part of this “struggle for coherence,” experience a kind of responsibility for the actions taken in the past in the name of feminism. Lloyd mentions that this kind of responsibility is specifically not dependent on the person having control over the relevant acts or events.<sup>8</sup> Applying this insight to the research problem investigated by the thesis, this suggests that the lack of structure and control in social movement action does not necessarily mean that questions of responsibility are irrelevant. Rather, responsibility can be seen as arising partly from identification or solidarity.<sup>9</sup> Lloyd’s discussion of responsibility suggests an alternative to the “movement CEO” viewpoint: that of a respondent in a politically collective “we.” Responding to the criticisms of feminism outlined in the Introduction, we can begin by asking what it is that we become responsible for when we identify with feminism as a movement persisting through time. The question of what we become responsible for can only be adequately answered through an empirical-historical enquiry that is sensitive to the collective and decentralised nature of social movement decision-making, rather than assuming, as in the “movement CEO” approach, that there is central

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<sup>7</sup> Lloyd, ‘Individuals, Responsibility, and Philosophical Imagination’, p. 122.

<sup>8</sup> Lloyd, ‘Individuals, Responsibility, and Philosophical Imagination’, p. 120.

<sup>9</sup> Clearly, too, Lloyd’s analysis could be extended to instances where people take responsibility for the actions in the present of a social movement of which they are part.

control. The following sections explain the concepts and methods used for this investigation.

### **Studying strategic decision-making: What are we looking for?**

In responding to criticisms of past feminism, an obvious approach is to assess the consequences of feminism. Difficult as it is properly to model the outcomes of social movements, this is not in principle a meaningless pursuit.<sup>10</sup> Yet such modelling would still leave unanswered important questions about the capacity for social movement participants consciously and intelligently to shape the overall direction and hence impact of the movement. I need to be clear that I am not, here, analysing the consequences of feminist activism, even though these consequences are certainly relevant to any evaluation. To be satisfactory, an analysis of consequences would require a more explicit theory of social and political change than is developed here. Such an analysis of consequences (conceived as “external” to the movement) could complement the study of (“internal”) strategising developed here, although any deeper analysis would quickly complicate this division between internal and external. Indeed, the subsequent chapters question the extent to which there an internal or prior process of strategising or decision-making separate from a subsequent effect on the situation and context. I acknowledge, then, the importance of inquiry into the broader topic of social change, in which intentions and outcomes are inextricably entwined. Yet criticisms of past feminism invoke a notion of agency that specifically demands a response in terms of the conscious intentions of participants. It is therefore important to focus directly on the capacity for strategising at the level of the movement’s overall direction.

My empirical research investigated strategising in Australian feminist activism on work and care issues in the interwar years (1919–1938) and in the 1970s and 1980s. Since the thesis responds to criticisms that suggest the women’s movement should have made better strategic decisions, the empirical research focused on the question of to what

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<sup>10</sup> See for example Charles Tilly, ‘Conclusion: From Interactions to Outcomes in Social Movements’, in Marco Giugni, Doug McAdam and Charles Tilly (eds), *How Social Movements Matter*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, pp. 253–270.

extent the movement's direction was shaped by decision-making and what capacity movement participants had to be strategic in such decision-making, relative to other factors influencing the movement's direction. The research therefore sought information about movement decision-making and deliberation, as well as considering the other factors that affected movement action. In particular, the historical studies sought evidence of strategic decisions made about issues of work and care.

The term "strategic," as used here, describes conscious planning and action towards the achievement of a major objective, in a way that responds to the risks and opportunities presented by interaction with surrounding conditions, opponents and allies over time. In addition to this generic notion of "strategic," it is necessary to delineate a particular notion of "risk," which is present not only in criticisms of feminism but also in feminist debates about what the movement should do. This notion of risk is ideological, discursive, and political. It derives from a view of the women's movement as helping to shape the possibilities for women's identities, and the terms on which gender politics can be conducted in the future. For example, the criticism that the second-wave movement failed women by overemphasising access to paid work at the expense of women's caring roles implies that feminists should have foreseen and avoided a particular risk: the risk that campaigning for employment rights might further reinforce the undervaluing of caring labour, offering women full inclusion in the masculine world of work only on the condition that they give up the possibility of mothering. Likewise, the view that the feminists of the early twentieth century locked women into the mothering role by relying on maternalism suggests that feminists should have foreseen that evoking the "citizen mother" would increase expectations of the quality (and quantity) of the mothering that women would provide, while further reducing the chances for women to achieve security and status on any other grounds.

Such understandings of risk derive from evaluations that judge women's movement action against a particularly high standard: that of the possibility of total transformation of social life. Yet the relevant notion of risk also implicitly recognises competing and potentially corrupting forces that come into play through women's movements engagement with more immediate political possibilities. For example, in more thoughtful analyses, the criticism that second-wave feminists over-emphasised paid

work is often coupled with the observation that providing limited rights to women as workers was a relatively easy way for “the system” to placate (and co-opt) the women’s movement.<sup>11</sup> Many of the debates about “reform versus revolution” revolved around a similar concept of the risks of political engagement. The understanding that engagement with mainstream politics is risky for the women’s movement constitutes a kind of knowledge developed within feminism, formed through experience and reflexive critique.

In the present research, then, the focus on strategic decision-making involved special attention to high-level decisions consciously taken in response to discursive and political risks that relate to the overall impact and significance of the movement.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, it was recognised that movement actors may make decisions, for example when deciding on an organisational structure or formulating a policy position, that can be called “strategic,” but do not explicitly refer to risks involving the movement’s fundamental concerns. Such “lower level” decisions nevertheless influence the overall direction of the movement. The research therefore sought to investigate all relevant decisions on issues of work and care but was particularly concerned to identify those that incorporated consideration of high level discursive and political risks.

### **Selection of periods and issues: Rationale and limitations**

Having specified the kinds of decision-making the research sought to identify, it is necessary to justify (and acknowledge the limitations of) the periods and issues selected for study. Apart from referring to significant criticisms of feminism, attention to activism on work and care issues in these two periods also enabled investigation of both the continuities and discontinuities of the movement through the twentieth century. As discussed in Chapter 2, movement continuity/discontinuity has been a major concern in

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<sup>11</sup> Barbara Pocock, *The Work/Life Collision: What Work is Doing to Australians and What to Do About It*, Annandale, NSW: Federation Press, 2003, p. 8; Hester Eisenstein, ‘A Dangerous Liaison? Feminism and Corporate Globalisation’, *Science and Society*, vol. 69 no. 3, 2005, pp. 487–518.

<sup>12</sup> The concepts of strategic decision-making and risk used here are similar to those used by Louise Clery, *Social Movement Strategy between Pragmatism and Praxis: Environmentalists and Regional Forest Agreements*, PhD Thesis, Australian National University (ANU), 2006. Clery’s thesis aims to discover what kinds of actions best enable the environment movement to act in “integrity” with their “grand strategy” or overall program of social change.

feminist historiography. In the periods under consideration here, movement continuity is represented by the common pursuit of women's economic independence, while discontinuity is represented by the "different means" (access to paid work; motherhood endowment) by which feminists in the different periods attempted to achieve this overarching goal. As we shall see, however, this schema has only a limited capacity to extend understanding of the different positions taken by the movement.

Specification of the scope of the research was complicated by the fact that, for this study, the periods selected did not refer only to the temporal limits for investigation. In this study, the selection of periods was by definition not neutral, reflecting as it did an interest in particular phenomena already identified as having occurring in those periods. This means that the study does not claim, for example, to have *established* that the Australian second-wave women's movement adopted work as its main priority in the period under consideration (as the research did not survey the movement in terms of its entire range of concerns, of which work was one). Rather, the significance of these campaigns (access to paid work; motherhood endowment) in the two periods was understood as having been established by existing historiography.

It has not been established, however, that in each of these two periods the relevant means to economic independence was the single most important priority of the movement. It is therefore necessary to make explicit a further rationale, so far only implicitly proposed. The study proceeded on the basis that access to paid work and motherhood endowment were the major proposals put forward in the two eras, respectively, in relation to a particular problem identified by feminists: that the mutually reinforcing conditions of economic dependence on a male partner and responsibility for children placed women in a position of vulnerability and disadvantage in various ways (cultural, economic and political). A focus on the way feminists conceived of and responded to this problem therefore represented an important limit on the scope of investigation. This does not mean that other concerns of the movement were ignored. In fact, without considering these other concerns, it would be impossible to gain a proper understanding of how feminists formed goals and methods in relation to the problem of economic dependence.

A focus on the problem of economic dependence and on the characteristic responses of feminists in the two different eras is also not meant to imply that these are the only two responses possible, or that there is some kind paradox or contradiction at work in the fact that these two different responses were made by feminists at different times. It is also acknowledged that independence as a goal is culturally specific, not universal.<sup>13</sup> While authors such as Ruth Lister have drawn attention to the dilemma feminists face between valuing work and valuing care,<sup>14</sup> and in fact the feminists studied here have faced aspects of this dilemma in their activism, the study is not a consideration of “which of these is best.” As elaborated in subsequent chapters, practical argumentation about what is best tends to be geared towards organisational and political considerations in the present, and only to a limited extent towards incorporating assessments of past strategies. Rather, the focus here is on how women’s movement actors made (and did not make) decisions that would impact on the direction that the movement would take on the issues of work and care, and how factors other than decision-making also influenced this direction.

The approach taken is informed by the political insight that no proposal, no matter how well-argued or comprehensive, will in itself be able to determine what is to be done by society or by politicians or even by the women’s movement. There is always a need for political actors to consider *how* their ideas can influence the broader world. Therefore, while the criticisms to which the thesis responds are clearly part of broader debates, the thesis limits itself to a particular issue: the assumption that the movement is able to make high-level strategic decisions (but made the wrong ones and can therefore be blamed for this failure). It therefore aims to introduce a sense of the difficulty and complexity, especially in terms of the organisation of political activity, involved in mobilising any idea about “what should be done.”

In historical research, there is always a risk that the selection of specific dates for the beginning and end of the period under investigation will be somewhat arbitrary. This problem is apparent in the present study. As noted above, however, the selection of

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<sup>13</sup> See for example Marilyn Lake, ‘Between Old World “Barbarism” and Stone Age “Primitivism”: The Double Difference of the White Australian Feminist’, in Norma Grieve and Ailsa Burns (eds), *Australian Women: Contemporary Feminist Thought*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 80–91, p. 90.

<sup>14</sup> Ruth Lister, *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997.

periods did not represent a neutral means of limiting the sample, but was guided by an interpretive schema established through existing feminist historiography and debates about the movement. This means that the selection of specific dates had less potential to “skew” the research findings than would be the case in more formal studies. Nevertheless, it was necessary to place some limits on the investigations. “The 1970s” (incorporating the end of 1969, when the first Australian women’s liberation groups were formed) is acknowledged in existing literature as the period in which the surge of activity began that would later be known as the second-wave movement.<sup>15</sup> In the present study, this was extended to include “the 1980s,” since there appeared to be broad continuity in terms of the groups active and the activities undertaken between the 1970s and this decade. As elaborated in Chapter 5, however, there were certainly changes within this period, and extension of the investigation into the 1980s allowed further consideration of some of these changes. Given that many elements of the movement present in the 1970s and 1980s extend into the present (such as the activities of certain organisations and feminist services), it is difficult to find a clear basis on which to decide a “cut-off” date. Indeed, the Australian Research Council recently approved funding for a major research project on the evolution of social movements, one purpose of which is to define under what circumstances a movement can be said to be “over.”<sup>16</sup> It is true, however, that by the 1990s there were certainly fewer publicly-visible manifestations of the movement. In terms of the specific concerns of this thesis, it is also significant that the federal Sex Discrimination Act was passed in 1984 and the Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act in 1986. The introduction of these two laws represented a culmination of the movement’s demands for government action on women’s access to employment (though it by no means represented the end of feminist activity in this area).

In relation to the earlier period, historians such as Marilyn Lake have identified the 1920s as a distinctive era of Australian feminist activism, one in which maternal

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<sup>15</sup>Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism*, St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1999; Ann Curthoys, ‘Doing it for Themselves: The Contemporary Women’s Movement’, in Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans (eds), *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation*, Marrickville, NSW: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992, pp. 425–447.

<sup>16</sup> ‘The Evolution of Social Movements’ project is to be led by Marian Sawer and Sarah Maddison. See Australian Research Council, ‘Summary of Discovery Projects Proposals by Primary Class Code for Funding to Commence in 2008’, project number DP0878688, 2008, <[http://www.arc.gov.au/word/dp08\\_rfcd.doc](http://www.arc.gov.au/word/dp08_rfcd.doc)> (accessed 6 August 2008), p. 271.

feminist ideas were taken up by new, explicitly political organisations with an intensified focus on national and international affairs, under the banner of equal citizenship.<sup>17</sup> As Lake has shown, in the 1930s, women's groups became increasingly concerned with equality and, in particular, women's right to work. Again, extending the investigation into the 1930s allows us to consider the nature of this change, and the extent to which it was "strategic." In this case, a "natural" endpoint occurred with the outbreak of World War II, which created significant changes for the sexual division of labour and for left-wing politics more generally. As with any other such "cut-off," however, the beginning of World War II is arbitrary in the sense that feminist activities did not cease or find themselves immediately transfigured at this point. Most of the major organisations present before the war continued afterwards, and altered but did not drastically revise their principles and projects.

### **Conceptualising "the movement"**

So far in this chapter I have been relying on some implicit understandings about what a movement is. To bring these into the foreground, I can summarise that the term "social movement" is used here to mean collective action directed towards social change, involving the identification and solidarity of participants with an oppositional social change project, which is sustained over time, and which is to some degree united around core values but not centrally controlled. However, in order to direct our empirical research, we need a more concrete understanding of what we are looking at when we look at a movement. How are we to conceive of the movement as a whole, while still recognising that it is made up of disparate (and changing) elements?

A number of scholars, including Bert Klandermans, Debra C. Minkoff and John D. McCarthy have endorsed the conceptual framework of the "organisational field" for analysing social movements.<sup>18</sup> An "organisational field" comprises multiple

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<sup>17</sup> Lake, *Getting Equal*.

<sup>18</sup> Bert Klandermans, 'The Social Construction of Protest and Multiorganizational Fields', in Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (eds), *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1992, pp. 77–103; Debra C. Minkoff and John D. McCarthy, 'Reinvigorating the Study of Organizational Processes in Social Movements', *Mobilization*, vol. 10 no. 2, 2005, pp. 289–308.

different and interacting organisations. This approach tends to give priority to the analysis of organisations, and can create the impression that these are the basic components of social movements. Social movement scholars have pointed out the methodological benefits of focusing on organisations. For example, Jennifer Leigh Disney and Joyce Gelb argue that, although movements are more than the organisations they include, “Organizational analysis remains an important component of social movement research, as organizations provide a material entity through which one can assess the identity and cultural aspects of movements.”<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, it is not only researchers who find organisations useful: more positively, in formulating and working on movement projects, individuals within social movements create and maintain diverse organisations, and these organisations often carry forward movement culture, “repertoires” of action and knowledge.<sup>20</sup> Yet a focus on specific organisations can also be limiting.

As well as tending to neglect cultural and ideological aspects,<sup>21</sup> a focus on particular organisations can also deflect our attention from the changing macro-level structures of movements.<sup>22</sup> For example, such an approach does not address the uneven distribution of organisation and activity across the movement. In addition, organisational analysis alone cannot explain the way movement unity is understood and created by participants despite differences and decentralisation. Alberto Melucci, for example, stresses that:

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<sup>19</sup> Jennifer Leigh Disney and Joyce Gelb, ‘Feminist Organizational “Success”: The State of U.S. Women’s Movement Organizations in the 1990s’, *Women and Politics*, vol. 21 no. 4, 2000, pp. 39–76, p. 42.

<sup>20</sup> Beth Schaefer Caniglia and JoAnn Carmin, ‘Scholarship on Social Movement Organizations: Classic Views and Emerging Trends’, *Mobilization*, vol. 10 no. 2, 2005, pp. 201–212, pp. 205–206. See also Francesca Polletta, ‘How Participatory Democracy Became White: Culture and Organizational Choice’, *Mobilization*, vol. 10 no. 2, 2005, pp. 271–288.

<sup>21</sup> William A. Gamson, ‘Introduction’, in Mayer N. Zald and John D. McCarthy (eds), *Social Movements in an Organizational Society*, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1997, pp. 1–7, pp. 6–7.

<sup>22</sup> Debra C. Minkoff, ‘Macro-Organizational Analysis’, in Bert Klandermans and Suzanne Staggenborg (eds), *Methods of Social Movement Research*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002, pp. 260–286.

[T]he empirical unity of a social movement (in particular, a social movement constituted by diverse organizations) should be considered an outcome rather than a starting point — a fact to be explained.<sup>23</sup>

Some scholars address this problem by viewing movements as informal networks, which may incorporate formal organisations, but are conceptually distinct from them. Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani argue for preserving a place in our analysis for individuals' experiences of connection and solidarity, separate from the question of whether they formally belong to any movement organisation.<sup>24</sup> In their view, a social movement should be seen not as a set of organisations but as a fluid social process characterised by conflictual relations with opponents, dense informal networks and a shared collective identity.<sup>25</sup> The present research employs a concept of the movement that is consistent with della Porta and Diani's, but also recognises the special role that organisations (and organising) play in the development and maintenance of movement identity and movement projects, and is attentive to how organisations fit into the overall changing structure and direction of the movement as a whole.<sup>26</sup>

### **Scope and sources: Rationale and limitations**

Instead of focusing on the movement's role in public affairs, the research sought information about the deliberative and other processes within the movement and the reasoning used by participants, wherever possible using the "internal" records created by organisations and individuals involved in the movement, together with oral history interviews.<sup>27</sup> Information gathered from these sources was contextualised in the historical studies by reference to broader records.

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<sup>23</sup> Alberto Melucci, 'The Process of Collective Identity', in Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans (eds), *Social Movements and Culture*, Social Movements, Protest, and Contention series vol. 4, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995, pp. 41–63, p. 43.

<sup>24</sup> Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2006 (second edition), pp. 20–22.

<sup>25</sup> della Porta and Diani, *Social Movements*, pp. 131–134.

<sup>26</sup> Myra Marx Ferree and Patricia Yancey Martin, 'Doing the Work of the Movement: Feminist Organizations', in Myra Marx Ferree and Patricia Yancey Martin (eds), *Feminist Organizations: Harvest of the New Women's Movement*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995, pp. 3–23.

<sup>27</sup> Susan R. Grayzel, 'Fighting for Their Rights: A Comparative Perspective on Twentieth-Century Women's Movements in Australia, Great Britain, and the United States', *Journal of Women's History*, vol. 11 no. 1, 1999, pp. 210–218, p. 212.

In order to investigate the extent of strategic decision-making and the impact of this on movement direction relative to other factors, the research addressed multiple units of analysis: the movement as a whole, organisations within the movement, and individual participants. As the previous chapter argued, each of these levels of analysis, and the interactions between them, are relevant. In the historical research, an effort was made to access the deliberation and decision-making that occurred, rather than relying on external sources such as media or parliamentary records. Different sources of information were used to construct accounts of movement decision-making at each of these levels (with some overlap). At the individual level, correspondence, autobiography, and testimony in interviews conducted by the author (see below) and by others were the main sources of information. At the organisational level, the major sources were minutes, correspondence, conference records and organisational newsletters. Individual interviews also provided information about the nature and extent of organisational deliberation. Another kind of overlap was constituted by oral evidence given before commissions of inquiry: this evidence was delivered by individuals but it was typically presented on behalf of organisations. At the movement level, given its disaggregated nature, it was necessary to rely in part on external sources and on participants' written and oral reflections on the movement as a whole. In an important sense, all accounts of "the movement as a whole" are made from the imagined position of "the outside looking in," even when such accounts are given by participants. At the same time, descriptions of the internal workings of the movement are inevitably partial. The "movement as a whole" resists accurate representation.

While existing studies use some "internal" sources in conjunction with broader public accounts, the present research is unusual in that it was deliberately designed to focus on the deliberation and decision-making that might occur in organisational and relational spaces that are to some degree separate from public politics. The study therefore highlights some of the possibilities and limitations of such an approach, which tries to "look beneath" public representations (both in terms of the movement's self-presentation, and in terms of the way the movement is represented in public discourse).

By necessity, some of the sources used crossed the boundary between internal and external. One such source that was used extensively was the oral evidence given by women's organisation representatives to the RCCE. While such evidence is not strictly internal to the movement, in that it is a public presentation as part of a policy process, it was included because it presented an ideal opportunity to examine the different positions and the (publicly-presented) reasoning of a range of women's groups and individuals. In addition, the fact that the evidence was presented "live" and included only-partly-scripted interactions between the Commissioners and witnesses adds to the relative immediacy of the source. Of course, it would be foolish to assume that this or indeed any such record gives the researcher unmediated access to the subject of inquiry, let alone its internal workings. Another set of sources that crosses the boundary between internal and external consists of the movement newsletters and newspapers produced in both periods. While these were largely created for and read by participants in the movement rather than the general public, there were undoubtedly many matters relevant to the question of how decisions were made that were not included in such publications. While some such omissions may have arisen from concern for the image of the group or the movement (for example, a desire to emphasise unity rather than conflict), it is likely that much of the process of decision-making was simply not conducive to communication in that format.

More fundamentally, as explored in subsequent chapters, it is likely that in some cases the processes through which directions and actions are determined are not actually transparent to participants in a way that could be communicated or recorded. An underlying principle of this research is, however, that this uncertainty need not (and should not) prevent us from inquiring into such processes. Furthermore, because the phenomena we are concerned with are not accessible in a way that is separate from participants' self-presentations and interpretations, we are justified in directly seeking out and using participants' own reflections on the research questions. This is especially relevant in relation to the interviews conducted by the author with women who had been active in the second period (see below). As discussed further in Chapters 7 and 8, this research method places some limitations on the kinds of conclusions that can be drawn from the study. However, the use of multiple types of sources and the corroboration of participants' statements with other sources minimises the risk that the research will

unduly reflect the views of those participants who were consulted. In a positive sense, engaging participants' views on the research questions potentially allows the thesis to contribute in a more substantive way to the debates that inspired it.

There were some differences between the two periods in terms of the sources that were available. In part, these were attributable to differences in the forms of activity undertaken in the two periods. For example, feminists in the earlier period employed relatively more formal meeting procedures, leading to the more comprehensive recording of minutes. By contrast, the second-wave movement was more intensely engaged in the creation of artworks (such as screen-printed posters) and music, which provide more explicit records of movement culture. Compared with the feminists of the interwar period, participants of the 1970s and 1980s have more readily recorded their own intellectual and emotional reflections on their participation and on the movement as a whole. As Patricia Grimshaw observes, many women in earlier periods did not consider their personal records to be significant and therefore worthy of retention.<sup>28</sup> Other practical limitations also played a part. In particular, while I was able to conduct interviews with women who had been active in the 1970s and 1980s, the generation of women who had been actively involved in the movement in the earlier period had passed away. I was, however, able to use previously-recorded interviews with some of these women.

In terms of selection, it was practically impossible to survey all possible sources in the categories listed above. Furthermore, because the sources are so dispersed and differentiated, they could not be grouped into relevant populations. It was therefore not possible to employ the formal sampling techniques typically used to reduce the number of items to be surveyed in any population while retaining representativeness. Rather, sources were chosen according to the researcher's informed judgement about the whole field of possible relevant sources. This technique is also known as "purposive sampling." For this movement, as for other social movements, there are no reliable quantitative estimates of "membership" and its characteristics. The representativeness of any sample therefore rests on informed judgments about the composition of the

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<sup>28</sup> Patricia Grimshaw, 'Keeping the Records Safe: Reflections on Preserving Sources for Feminist History', *Lilith*, no. 14, 2005, pp. 14–19, p. 16.

movement. The focus on “internal” deliberation discussed above provided one such limit. It is also necessary, however, to explain why the project used information about and from certain individuals and groups rather than others.

Several criteria were used. First, individuals and groups were chosen who had been active on the relevant issues of work and care. Second, individuals and groups were selected who identified themselves and were identified by others as being part of the women’s movement or active feminists. While it is acknowledged that the movement and feminism extend beyond those who self-consciously engage in action oriented to social change, it was assumed that the question of strategising would best be answered with reference to such actors. This criterion suggests a further limitation of the study: taking this focus, it is not possible to advance findings about the total effects of the movement or of feminism, since such findings would need not only to identify its myriad impacts and processes but also to specify the mechanisms through which all these effects occurred. The focus here is more modest: it is assumed that the self-consciously social-change-oriented actions of feminists are significant, though not determining, in the total effects of the movement, and on this basis these actions are analysed. For similar reasons, while there were certainly feminists active on the relevant issues in the labour movement in both periods, and while some of these feminists are discussed, the thesis makes no claim to analyse in detail the (undoubtedly significant) decision-making processes undertaken within that movement.

Third, an attempt was made to reflect the diversity of the movement in the two periods. While it was impossible to fully represent this diversity, the sources reflect the fact that the movement in both periods included numerous groups variously situated on a spectrum of radicalism, and with different traditions of action. Thus, no one group was interpreted as being representative of the movement. Nevertheless, a decision was made to focus on groups that were acknowledged as relatively prominent in each period. This focus allowed consideration of leadership and representation within the movement, which are always contested. While the research was conducted in a way that was sensitive to these contestations, it also inevitably excluded some voices. More details about the groups considered are given in Chapters 4 and 5.

In both periods the movement was largely made up of white and, to a less pronounced extent, middle-class women. In terms of scope and sources, the research reflected this composition. There are important debates about race and class in relation to feminism and some of these debates relate to the positions taken by feminists on issues of work and care. For example, it is often noted that second-wave efforts to free women from the confines of the family were not welcomed by Aboriginal women, many of whose families had been deliberately torn apart by the racially-motivated removal policies of successive white governments. In the interwar period, organisations such as the AFWV explicitly campaigned for the rights of Aboriginal people, and particularly for the rights of Aboriginal women as mothers. Yet maternal feminism was also linked with concerns about the future of the white race. Such issues, and those concerning the place of migrant and working class women in the women's movement, have received considerable attention from scholars and activists in the last three decades.<sup>29</sup> While the historical studies in Chapters 4 and 5 contain material relevant to some of these debates, my focus in this research is on the nature of decision-making and the way broad positions were formed on issues of work and care within the movement as it developed historically. As explained more fully in the subsequent chapters, the social positions and taken-for-granted beliefs of participants were among the factors that influenced the positions formed.

While the focus in this research is on feminist activity in Australia, in both the interwar period and in the 1970s and 1980s the Australian women's movement was part of a broader international movement. This was true not only in the sense that similar mobilisations were occurring in a number of countries at once, but also in the sense that participants, ideas and projects moved between countries, in some cases through international women's organisations and networks.<sup>30</sup> The historical studies in Chapters 4 and 5 give some indication of how the Australian movement was informed and inspired by developments elsewhere, especially the USA and UK, and how

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<sup>29</sup> For example, Pat O'Shane, 'Is There Any Relevance in the Women's Movement for Aboriginal Women?', *Refractory Girl*, no. 12, 1976, pp. 31–34; Jackie Huggins, 'A Contemporary View of Aboriginal Women's Relationship to the White Women's Movement', in Grieve and Burns, *Australian Women: Contemporary Feminist Thought*, pp. 70–79; Patricia Grimshaw, Marilyn Lake, Ann McGrath and Marian Quartly, *Creating a Nation*, Ringwood, Victoria (Vic.): McPhee Gribble, 1994.

<sup>30</sup> Barbara Caine, 'International Links', in Barbara Caine, Moira Gatens, Emma Grahame, Jan Larbalestier, Sophie Watson and Elizabeth Webby (eds), *Australian Feminism: A Companion*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 158–168.

Australian feminists were involved in international feminist activities. While many participants saw their efforts as part of a global movement, issues of work and care were actively addressed at the local and national level, and it is on this activity that the research focuses.

### **Interviews conducted**

It is necessary to explain in more detail the selection of people for interview by the researcher for the second historical study, and the interview process used.<sup>31</sup> The thirteen women interviewed by the author between Oct. 2006 and Dec. 2007 were chosen as broadly representative of those involved in the Australian women's movement in the 1970s and 1980s. It is widely observed by scholars of the Australian second-wave movement that it comprised two major groupings, with some overlap: women's liberation and WEL, together with other smaller groups and organisations.<sup>32</sup> There is also general agreement that the movement encompassed feminists working in academia as well as in the union movement and other social movements, and that with the development of women's policy machinery many activists obtained positions as "femocrats," that is, as feminist bureaucrats in state or federal governments.<sup>33</sup> Consistent with this profile, those interviewed included five women who had been members of WEL, three who had been affiliated with women's liberation, four who had belonged to both groupings (at different times or simultaneously) and one who reported that she had not been active in either group and mainly engaged in feminist activism within her workplace (a university). Individual interviewees were identified through analysis of primary and secondary sources and by referral from key informants (including other interviewees).

While a number of interviewees had been central or leading figures within their respective groups, some had been less involved. That is, the interviewees were

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<sup>31</sup> The interview research was conducted in accordance with ANU Human Ethics Protocol no. 2008/029. A number of interviews recorded by other researchers and historians were also used. Details are provided in Chapter 5.

<sup>32</sup> Lake, *Getting Equal*; Curthoys, 'Doing it for Themselves'.

<sup>33</sup> Hester Eisenstein, *Inside Agitators: Australian Femocrats and the State*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996.

deliberately selected to represent not only movement “leaders” but also those with a less central involvement. Three respondents had held senior positions as “femocrats,” while several had at some point worked as feminist academics. Some of the respondents were also active in other movements such as the union movement, the welfare rights movement and the environment movement. The interviewees also represent a wide, if not comprehensive, geographical spread, with a number having been based in Canberra, Perth, and Adelaide, as well as some who had been involved in the larger centres of activity in Sydney and Melbourne. The names of interviewees are listed in Appendix A, and their affiliations are noted where they are referred to in the text by name.

In semi-structured interviews ranging from approximately one to 2.5 hours in length, respondents were requested to describe the positions and actions taken on issues of work and care during the 1970s and 1980s in the groups in which they were active. They were also asked to describe how positions and actions were decided and what factors impacted on these, including reasoning in relation to the movement’s past. The questions asked of respondents are included as Appendix B. Although each interview covered all the areas indicated by the interview question format, in some cases answers were provided in such a way that more than one question was answered at a time, and most interviews ranged beyond the specific questions to include general reflection on the topic of the women’s movement, its failures and successes. As indicated in Appendix B, after the set questions were addressed, the interview format allowed for the researcher to discuss some of the study’s developing findings with interviewees. This format reflected a practical recognition that, due to the nature of the interview topic and the commitments and interests of interviewees, it would not be feasible to exclude reciprocal exchanges of this kind. Rather, an attempt was made to restrict such discussions to a time after the interview questions had been addressed, thus limiting the extent to which interviewees would be “led” in their responses by the researcher’s developing views.

The interviews were transcribed, common themes and statements were noted and where relevant patterns relating to the characteristics and affiliations of respondents were identified. I decided not to use qualitative analysis software to formally code and analyse the transcripts, as the number of interviewees was relatively small, meaning that

the data management capacity of such software programs was not required, and because the type of information sought (involving organisational processes and reasoning in relation to certain types of considerations) was particularly complex and contextual. While substantial space has been devoted here to explaining the interview methods used, these thirteen interviews represent only one portion of the total empirical sources used for the second of two historical studies.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the theoretical approach taken in the research and explained the rationale for the empirical methods used. I first returned to the setting of the research problem — accusations of wrong decisions made — to clarify that the problem is one of responsibility for past movement actions. It was argued that, in investigating past movement actions in terms of responsibility, the perspective of a respondent in a politically-collective “we” is more appropriate than that of a disembodied and unrealistic “movement CEO.” I also explained the research focus on the conscious strategising of activists, while recognising that this occurs within a broader process of social change. Having described the theoretical background of the enquiry, I then specified the research methods used and the rationales for their selection. Particular attention was given to issues of representativeness, the validity of sources, and the special problems involved in trying to locate strategic decisions in social movement histories. The following chapters lay out the results of the historical research, and begin to analyse the influence of movement strategising in the context of the other factors shaping the movement’s directions in the two periods.

## Chapter 4: Interwar Activism on Work and Care

Beyond within the vision, side by side,  
 Woman and Man, the humans free and equal,  
 Together building for the sight and soul  
 The great World Beautiful! — The world, so long  
 Without its mother, now comes home to find  
 (As a child finds two upon the loving hearth)  
 Two in its councils, two beside the helm:  
 The mother-heart completing the round  
 That circle which is yet but half described...

The interwar years in Australia were a period of lively activity and change for feminists. In the 1920s, maternal feminism was rejuvenated by new surges of national and international organising. At first, the demand for equality was part of maternalism, as in the vision of “the great World Beautiful.”<sup>1</sup> As the period progressed, demands for women’s equality intensified and lent a different tone to women’s movement activism in the 1930s. Campaigns to advance the economic independence of women were at the centre of women’s movement activity throughout the era, focusing on motherhood endowment and equal pay.

As mentioned in the Introduction, maternal feminism has been criticised by later feminists, especially those of the “second wave,” for reinforcing the idea that women were to be respected only as mothers. The literature review in Chapter 2 also noted that some scholars have suggested that the limitations of maternal “strategies” prompted feminists in the latter part of the interwar period to focus more on equality and women’s right to employment. This chapter develops a historical account of feminist activism in the interwar years to consider the extent to which feminists had the capacity to strategically choose their positions, and to explore the factors and processes involved.

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<sup>1</sup> The verse is from E.G. (Ellinor) Walker, ‘The Springs of Power: A Short Pageant Play of the Woman Movement’, Papers and Objects of Bessie Rischbieth, National Library of Australia (NLA) MS 2004/5/9, p. 9.

After introducing the range of women's organisations and their concerns during the interwar years, the chapter considers in some detail the political context of attempts to advance the economic independence of women by campaigning for the introduction of motherhood and child endowment. The chapter then discusses how movement groups engaged with the politics of the basic wage, and the factors, especially the organisational factors, that influenced the formation of positions. The chapter addresses the extent to which women's organisations behaved in an instrumental manner in shaping their claims, and explains the kinds of strategic action that were taken. The chapter then considers why the movement changed in the 1930s to give increased attention to equal pay and women's right to work as targets for political action. Finally, the chapter examines participants' views about their place in history, organisations' adaptations and innovations in response to federalism and international institution-building, and tensions over representation.

### **The women's movement in the interwar years**

In the years immediately after the end of World War I there were many active groups specifically made up of and focused on women. These included the conservative Australian Women's National League (AWNL), the State-based Housewives Associations, which were later to form into a national body, the longstanding Woman's Christian Temperance Union of Australasia (WCTU), the Federation of University Women, the Feminist Clubs and the Militant Women's Group, which was formed by Communist women. It is not an aim of this thesis to define a rationale for including or excluding groups from feminism, but it must be acknowledged that it would be misleading to portray all such groups as by definition feminist.<sup>2</sup> Some of these groups are better characterised as having aimed to gather the (often charitable) efforts of women for the greater social good than to promote social changes to benefit women

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<sup>2</sup> Katie Pickles, 'Thinking Beyond Celebration: Woman Icons, Feminism and History', paper to the International Federation for Research in Women's History Conference, Sydney, 8–9 July 2005; Caitriona Beaumont, 'Citizens not Feminists: The Boundary Negotiated between Citizenship and Feminism by Mainstream Women's Organisations in England, 1928–39', *Women's History Review*, vol. 9 no. 2, 2000, pp. 411–429.

specifically, even though there was often a good deal of overlap between those objectives. The groups most intensively analysed in this chapter, the AFWV and the NCW, had an explicit commitment, if not always to feminism per se, then to improving the situation of women and to organising women to influence public life, albeit in different ways explored below. Although the terms “woman movement” [*sic*] and “feminists” were in use in the interwar years, participants in the sources consulted more commonly used the collective term “organised women” to refer to themselves and those with whom they identified. The term “organised women” appears to have been used with some pride and sense of achievement, and reflects the mutual emphasis on women’s role in public life, and on efficient reform (discussed further below).

There were a number of significant developments in women’s organising during the interwar years. First, a number of new national-level federated bodies were formed, most importantly the AFWV<sup>3</sup> in 1921 and the United Associations of Women (UA) in 1929, and other older organisations such as the NCW<sup>4</sup> and the Labor Women’s Organisations developed federal structures out of State-based bodies.<sup>5</sup> There was also an intensification of engagement with politics and policy in reaction against what some participant saw as having been a loss of organisational energy after the achievement of suffrage for most women in 1902.<sup>6</sup> With this intensification of engagement a good deal of attention was given to how Australian women might best use the vote and to the

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<sup>3</sup> This organisation was called “the Australian Federation of Women’s Societies for Equal Citizenship” from its establishment in 1921 until 1924, when it was renamed “Australian Federation of Women Voters.” National Foundation for Australian Women (NFAW), ‘Australian Federation of Women Voters (1921–1982)’, Australian Women’s Archives Project (AWAP) Web Site, 2001, <<http://www.womenaustralia.info/biogs/AWE0117b.htm>> (accessed 25 August 2008).

<sup>4</sup> It was not until 1931 that a formal body called “The National Council of Women of Australia” was established. Before that time “matters of Australian concern” were dealt with by a Federal Council, which was formed in 1924 by the State bodies. The State bodies were and still are called National Councils of Women (e.g. National Council of Women of WA). NFAW, ‘National Council of Women of Australia (1931–)’, AWAP Web Site, 2001, <<http://www.womenaustralia.info/biogs/AWE0067b.htm>> (accessed 25 August 2008).

<sup>5</sup> The first Federal Conference of Labor Women was held in the Melbourne Trades Hall in March 1929, with May Holman as its first President and Muriel Heagney as its first Secretary. Muriel Heagney, Victorian Labor Women and Labour Women’s Contribution to Human Welfare (notes towards a history of women in the labour movement, unpublished), n.d., Muriel Heagney Papers, State Library of Victoria (SLV) MS 9106/1162/6(a), p.5.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Impressions of the Annual Congress of the Women’s Service Guilds of Western Australia Inc. (Non-Party), 1926’, *Dawn*, 15 June 1926, p. 3. See Chapter 2 of this thesis, note 5 for more information on the history of suffrage in Australia.

development, particularly by the AFWV and later the UA, of the principle of equal citizenship.<sup>7</sup>

Equal citizenship entailed women's equal influence in the shaping of the social world. Increasingly through the period, feminists sought to reform inequitable laws and practices. While this was a practically-oriented stream of activism with an emphasis on lobbying and achievable legislative change, the visions animating activists' political action cannot be reduced to progressive reformism — see for example the feminist utopia described in Henrietta Dugdale's *A Few Hours in a Far-off Age* and the appreciation shown for Olive Schreiner's dreams of woman's path to the "land of freedom."<sup>8</sup> Many of the articles published by the WSG and the AFWV in their "official organ" *The Dawn* show that participants were indignant about the plight of other women, and felt responsible to those women "who of necessity must remain inarticulate, being unorganized."<sup>9</sup> Injustices were publicised, for example by Millicent Preston-Stanley's play "Whose Child?," which drew attention to the way in which women's custody over their children could be judicially removed if they pursued a career.<sup>10</sup> The offensive comments of powerful men were mocked.<sup>11</sup> Demonstrations and disruptive protests were not common but did occur. The first International Women's Day rally was held in 1928, organised by the Militant Women's Group.<sup>12</sup> Then-member Edna Ryan (later a founding member of WEL) recalled in a 1981 interview that the same group invaded an industrial peace conference in Sydney Town

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<sup>7</sup> Mrs M. Cooper (of Strathkeller, Vic.), 'Women in Politics', *Dawn*, 14 April 1923, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> H.A. (Henrietta Augusta) Dugdale, *A Few Hours in a Far-off Age*, Melbourne: M'Carron, Bird, 1883; Susan Magarey, *Passions of the First Wave Feminists*, Sydney: University of NSW Press, 2001, pp. 179–184; Olive Schreiner, *Dreams*, 1998, Project Gutenberg Etext No. 1439, <<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/1439>> (accessed 31 May 2008) (first published 1890).

<sup>9</sup> BMR (probably Bessie Mabel Rischbieth), 'Proposed Commonwealth Conference of Women — And the Maternity Allowance', *Dawn*, 17 Jan. 1923, p. 3. Various Australian women's journals have been called '*The Dawn*.' The publication to which this thesis refers was produced by the Women's Service Guilds of WA and the AFWV from 1919 to 1949. Bessie Rischbieth was its honorary editor for thirty years. For this research the NLA microform holdings of *The Dawn* were consulted.

<sup>10</sup> Heather Radi, 'Whose Child?', in Judy Mackinolty and Heather Radi (eds), *In Pursuit of Justice: Australian Women and the Law, 1788–1979*, Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1979.

<sup>11</sup> See for example 'Editorial: The Status of Women', *Dawn*, 14 Sept. 1926, p. 3. The editorial is sceptical about Nationalist Party Prime Minister Bruce's "eulogistic" speech lauding women's capacity for organisation and flattering himself for always having consulted with women's party political associations. The author suggests that Bruce's attitude to these associations is solely to do with their usefulness as a source of strength for himself, as opposed to any positive attitude to women's contribution in itself.

<sup>12</sup> NFAW, 'International Women's Day (1928–)', AWAP Web Site, 2000, <<http://www.womenaustralia.info/biogs/AWE0020b.htm>> (accessed 9 Sept. 2008).

Hall and was threatened with eviction by police.<sup>13</sup> This form of action was more common among women of the labour movement and the Communist Party, and unrest grew with increasing unemployment in the 1930s.

Alongside the labour movement tradition of agitating for better conditions for workers, the philosophy guiding women's organising that was most in evidence at the opening of the interwar period was that of maternalism. As described by Marilyn Lake and others, women's activism at the turn of the century and in the early decades of the twentieth century articulated women's claim to full social and political citizenship in terms of their qualities as mothers.<sup>14</sup> Fears about the birth-rate brought motherhood to prominence as a collective rather than a particularistic concern.<sup>15</sup> Women's movement activists pointed to the physical risks and costs of motherhood, drawing parallels with the contributions of soldiers in war and arguing that women performed vital work for society in giving birth to and raising children.<sup>16</sup> In the view of many, this work deserved remuneration. Activists were also concerned to protect women from "degradation" at the hands of husbands on whom they were economically dependent. Writing in *The Dawn* in 1927, Gwendolyn Jones expressed the frustration of organised women:

As long as each woman is economically dependent on some one man he stand[s] as the gateway between her and the rest of the world. It is through him that her necessities, her pleasures, her opinions must come...[T]he very essence of dependency is irksome and degenerating.<sup>17</sup>

An important goal for the early twentieth century Australian women's movement, and for the women's movement worldwide, was therefore "economic independence for women." While some organised women advocated equal pay for women in paid work,

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<sup>13</sup> Megan McMurchy, Margot Oliver and Jeni Thornley, *For Love or Money: A Pictorial History of Women and Work in Australia*, Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1983, p. 95.

<sup>14</sup> Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism*, St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1999; Marilyn Lake, 'The Independence of Women and the Brotherhood of Man: Debates in the Labor Movement over Equal Pay and Motherhood Endowment in the 1920s', *Labour History*, vol. 63, 1992, pp. 1–24.

<sup>15</sup> Magarey, *Passions*, pp. 184–186.

<sup>16</sup> Marilyn Lake, 'A Revolution in the Family: The Challenge and Contradictions of Maternal Citizenship in Australia', in Seth Koven and Sonya Michel (eds), *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*, New York: Routledge, 1993, pp. 395–378.

<sup>17</sup> Gwendolyn Jones, 'Equal Economic Rights for Women', *Dawn*, 14 June 1927, pp. 11–12, p. 11.

the major vehicles for the independence of mothers were envisaged as motherhood and child endowment.<sup>18</sup> Many groups and individual women were active in the campaign for the economic independence of women throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s. The most prominent national organisations among these were the NCW and the AFWV. Non-party individuals such as Bessie Rischbieth (AFWV) and Jessie Street were active in the campaign, as were women's groups and individuals associated with the parties, including Muriel Heagney of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and Edith Cowan and Irene Longman of the Nationalist Party.

The Australian campaign for motherhood endowment drew extensively on the work of Eleanor Rathbone, a British reformer and the foremost proponent of family allowances. In her major work, *The Disinherited Family*, Rathbone criticised the family-wage system for entrenching poverty and undermining the status of mothers.<sup>19</sup> Rathbone saw the system of paying separation allowances to wives during the war as a model for the direct endowment of mothers.<sup>20</sup> Australian advocates followed her lead in arguing that separation allowances established a precedent and a mechanism for motherhood endowment.<sup>21</sup> The reference to war separations also echoed the commonly-drawn analogy between the dangers of warfare and the dangers of childbirth.<sup>22</sup> While Rathbone identified herself as a feminist, she self-consciously differentiated her maternalist approach from the earlier demand for equal voting rights:

[T]o the new school of [post-suffrage] feminists the habit of continually measuring women's wants by men's achievements seems out-of-date, ignominious and intolerably boring.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Lake, 'The Independence of Women', p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> Eleanor Rathbone, *The Disinherited Family: A Plea for the Endowment of the Family*, London: Edward Arnold, 1924. See also Eleanor Rathbone, 'The Remuneration of Women's Services', *Economic Journal*, March 1917, reprinted in *Population and Development Review*, vol. 25 no.1, 1999, pp. 145–158.

<sup>20</sup> Johanna Alberti, *Eleanor Rathbone*, Women of Ideas series, London: Sage, 1996, pp. 40–41.

<sup>21</sup> 'International News — The Question of the Endowment of Motherhood — Great Britain', *Dawn*, 21 July 1921, p. 8; Elizabeth Clapham, 'Endowment of Motherhood: Talk by Mrs Clapham Broadcasted from the WA Farmers' Wireless Station, Perth', *Dawn*, 14 Jan. 1925, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> Albert Bathurst Piddington, *The Next Step: A Basic Family Income*, Melbourne: Macmillan, 1921, p. 59.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Jane Lewis, 'Eleanor Rathbone and the Family', *New Society*, vol. 27, Jan. 1983, pp. 137–139, p. 137.

Since the second-wave movement, the maternalist reformers of the early twentieth century have often been viewed by feminist historians as having unintentionally locked women into a restrictive normative model by relying on the social value of motherhood in making their claims.<sup>24</sup> Women's groups' campaigns for state endowment of motherhood were a central part of the activism of this period. As Clare Ungerson points out, such campaigns "run the risk, at an ideological level, of merely confirming the link between being a woman and necessarily, therefore, becoming a mother."<sup>25</sup> But was this risk perceptible to the reformers of the time? And how did the context in which they operated influence the development of these campaigns?

### **Political context: Contestation over the basic wage**

The landscape in which women's organisations were trying to advance their visions of different futures was shaped by powerful forces, particularly the erosion of real wages during World War I (1914–1918), which led to heightened industrial conflict. In this context, the principle and implementation of the basic (family) wage was a major issue of contention.

The political environment of the early 1920s was inevitably marked by the experience of the war. Although there was widespread faith in the new science of "planning" and commitment to the rational reconstruction of economic and social life,<sup>26</sup> national endeavours were fraught with political conflict. The solidification of labour movement opposition to conscription during the war, along with the growing organisation of anti-labour interests, created new levels of acrimony within formal politics. Rising prices and stagnant wages before and during the war provided a backdrop for many heated industrial disputes, such as the 1917 "great strike," which involved nearly 100,000

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<sup>24</sup> Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993, pp. 119–120; Susan Pedersen, 'The Failure of Feminism in the Making of the British Welfare State', *Radical History Review*, vol. 43, Winter 1989, pp. 86–110.

<sup>25</sup> Clare Ungerson, 'Introduction: Women and Social Security — Motherhood', in Clare Ungerson (ed.), *Women and Social Policy: A Reader*, Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1985, pp. 3–8, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> Joanne Pemberton, 'The Middle Way: The Discourse of Planning in Britain, Australia and at the League in the Interwar Years', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 52 no.1, 2006, pp. 48–63.

workers Australia-wide.<sup>27</sup> Disputes continued through the 1920s, culminating in the conservative Bruce Government's 1928 Transport Workers Act (the "Dog-Collar Act") which, through a 1929 amendment, sought to break unionism on the wharves by introducing a system to license employees. In 1929, strikes across Australia led to the loss of 4,461,000 working days.<sup>28</sup>

In the context of intensifying industrial conflict, the union movement was determined to defend its gains. Foremost among these was the concept of the "living wage." Justice Henry Bournes Higgins' famous 1907 Harvester decision established a minimum "family wage" on the principle that employers must be required to meet the needs of the worker, deemed to include income sufficient to support a wife and three children.<sup>29</sup> Justice Higgins' 1912 Fruitpickers decision formalised a division between "men's jobs" and "women's jobs," with higher pay for the former.<sup>30</sup> Together, these decisions entrenched the "male breadwinner norm," promoted gendered labour force segregation and prevented (formal) equal pay for women from being introduced until the 1970s. They also distinctively shaped the context of women's movement activism in Australia.<sup>31</sup>

In both mainstream welfare state accounts and feminist studies, the family wage has come to be seen as part of an institutional "settlement" (the "wage earners' welfare state").<sup>32</sup> In the 1920s, however, it was far from settled, as conflict over the efficiency and adequacy of the family-wage system raged throughout the decade. While Higgins'

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<sup>27</sup> Robert Bollard, *The Active Chorus: The Mass Strike of 1917 in Eastern Australia*, PhD thesis, Victoria University, 2007, p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> Bobbie Oliver, *Shaping the Nation: John Curtin and Australia*, Curtin University of Technology, 2002, <<http://john.curtin.edu.au/shapingthenation/essay/index.html>> (accessed 6 July 2006).

<sup>29</sup> Australian Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration, 'Ex parte H.V. McKay', 2 CAR 1 (the Harvester Judgment), 1907, <<http://www.aph.gov.au/library/intguide/law/harvester.pdf>> (accessed 28 August 2008).

<sup>30</sup> Mark Hearn, 'Making Liberal Citizens: Justice Higgins and His Witnesses', *Labour History*, vol. 93, Nov. 2007, pp. 57–72.

<sup>31</sup> Edna Ryan and Anne Conlon, *Gentle Invaders: Australian Women at Work*, Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1989 (first published 1975); Gillian Whitehouse, 'From Family Wage to Parental Leave: The Changing Relationship between Arbitration and the Family', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 46 no. 4, 2004, pp. 400–412; Bettina Cass, 'Redistribution to Children and to Mothers: A History of Child Endowment and Family Allowances', in Cora V. Baldock and Bettina Cass (eds), *Women, Social Welfare and the State in Australia*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1983, pp. 54–84.

<sup>32</sup> Francis G. Castles, 'The Wage Earners' Welfare State Revisited: Refurbishing the Established Model of Australian Social Protection, 1983–93', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 29 no.2, 1994, pp. 120–45, pp. 130–131.

estimate of 7s per day was based on painstaking accounts of prices for goods required for an “average standard of comfort,” this standard was never fully agreed upon by all parties, and Higgins himself later acknowledged the urgent need for a more “scientific” basis for the living wage.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, in practice Higgins was constrained by the need to take into account prevailing wages and the capacity of industry to pay. This led unions to claim that the amount had never been adequate to meet the needs of a “normal” family, an argument upon which they relied extensively in their claims for higher wages in this period.<sup>34</sup>

Wage fixation was, therefore, a complex and fiercely contested process. The principle that wages must meet the needs of the worker was undermined by a failure to reach agreement at any point about the amount actually required to meet these needs or, indeed, what these needs even were. This was a basic conflict that became even more important with increases in the cost of living. On the visionary but shaky basis of Higgins’ living-wage concept, employer groups and unions fought bitterly over issues such as the indexation of margins for skill, estimates of the cost of living, and the question of whether the Harvester principle was meant to be applied only to the barest needs of the “lowest class” of workers, or to workers of “higher” grades too. Differences between the various State and Commonwealth arbitration systems in terms of the number of children included in the family unit and the amount of the basic wage also contributed to this conflict.<sup>35</sup>

The goal of industrial peace was a key reason for the re-elected Hughes Government’s establishment of a Basic Wage Commission in 1919 (the Piddington inquiry). Concern about the adequacy of the basic wage as a system of social provision also contributed to the establishment of two further Royal Commissions (the Royal Commission on National Insurance in 1926 and the RCCE in 1927).

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<sup>33</sup> RCCE, *Report* (incorporating the Majority and Minority Reports), Australian Parliamentary Papers no. 1929/20, Canberra: Government Printer, 1929, p. 50. The Report quotes Mr Justice Higgins’ decision in the Engineers’ Case, 15 Commonwealth Arbitration Report (CAR) 306.

<sup>34</sup> See for example the evidence given to the RCCE by Charles Crofts, Secretary of the Australasian Council of Trade Unions: RCCE, *Minutes of Evidence*, Canberra: Government Printer, 1928–1929, pp. 1174–1175.

<sup>35</sup> ALP WA, *Report to a Special Conference of Unions to Consider Child Endowment*, 1927. Jean Beadle Papers, Battye Library, State Library of Western Australia (BL SLWA) MN 914 ACC 3114A.

Through each of these inquiries organised women pursued their goal of “placing motherhood in a position of security.”<sup>36</sup> Royal Commissions were widely reported in the press and presented important opportunities for women’s groups to make claims through public hearings and submissions.

### **The Royal Commission on the Basic Wage**

Because of the family-wage concept, contention over the adequacy of the basic wage had important implications for the economic independence of women. Yet for women’s groups, as for participants in the debate generally, the problem was articulated in terms of methods, rather than underpinning principles. In part, this is because it was assumed there was agreement about the basic wage concept. Prime Minister Hughes, in proposing a Royal Commission on the Basic Wage (RCBW) in his policy speech on 30 Oct. 1919, for the general election of that year, stated:

Now, once it is admitted that it is in the interests of the community that such a wage should be paid as will enable a man to marry and bring up children in decent, wholesome conditions — and that point has been settled long ago — it seems obvious that we must devise better machinery for insuring the payment of such a wage than at present exists.<sup>37</sup>

In response to ongoing conflict over the adequacy of the basic wage, the Commission inquiry headed by Arthur Bathurst Piddington was held in 1919–1920 to investigate the real cost of living. Piddington was sympathetic to labour, often having represented unions as a barrister in the Arbitration Court. Piddington had led a Royal Commission on women and children in industry in 1912.<sup>38</sup> Like many others, he was concerned about “race suicide,” the prospect that white women of British heritage would not breed

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<sup>36</sup> The quote “placing motherhood in a position of security” was used by May Barron Vallance, representing the Women’s Service Guilds of WA. RCCE, *Minutes of Evidence*, p. 366.

<sup>37</sup> Reported in *The Age*, 31 Oct. 1919, quoted in RCBW, *Report (together with evidence)*, Melbourne: Victorian Government Printer, 1920, p. 7.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Roe, ‘Piddington, Albert Bathurst (1862–1945)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Online Edition, 1988, <<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A110230b.htm>> (accessed 28 August 2008).

enough to avoid Australia being “swamped” by other races.<sup>39</sup> Piddington also saw women’s employment in factories as contributing to this risk.<sup>40</sup> He had earlier attempted to have the working week limited for women and young people. In contrast to his views of women’s factory work, however, Piddington supported the retention of women as teachers and after marriage.

Under Piddington’s direction, the Commission’s report was generous in its estimation of the cost of living for a family, resulting in the recommendation that provision be made to meet a cost of living of £5 16s, which was well above prevailing wages.<sup>41</sup> Two of the commissioners, Ernest E. Keep and W.D. Gilfillan, submitted a minority report specifying that they dissented from any implication in the main report that the existing basic wage was too low, or that the amount decided on must necessarily become the basic wage.<sup>42</sup> In response to criticism that his estimation was unfeasible, Piddington proposed child endowment of 12s per week for each child after the first, to bridge the gap between the existing basic wage and the Royal Commission’s calculated cost of living. This proposal was published as a Memorandum to the Royal Commission Report.<sup>43</sup> The high cost of living estimated by the Piddington Royal Commission was rejected by the Hughes Government, but was used extensively by unions in mounting wage claims.

Piddington’s finding was harshly criticised by Justice Higgins, who had established the family-wage concept with his 1907 Harvester decision:

It would obviously be much better for all parties — union and employers — to begin again and press for an inquiry that will replace the Harvester judgment on scientific lines than to press for payment of this so-called

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<sup>39</sup> This concern was widely shared by social reformers of the era, and was often linked with claims for endowment and other benefits for mothers. See for example Amelia Macdonald, ‘National Endowment of Motherhood: Child Welfare Conference, Tuesday 20th Sept. 1921’, *Dawn*, 12 Oct. 1921, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> Ryan and Conlon, *Gentle Invaders*, pp. 72–76; Morris Graham, *A.B. Piddington: The Last Radical Liberal*, Kensington, NSW: University of NSW Press, 1995, pp. 43–51.

<sup>41</sup> The Commission actually estimated the cost of living separately for seven Australian cities, ranging from £5 6s 2d in Brisbane to £5 17s in Sydney. The figure of £5 16s is an approximation that was used both by Piddington and by other participants during the aftermath of the Commission. RCBW, *Report*, p. 58.

<sup>42</sup> RCBW, *Report*, pp. 61–62.

<sup>43</sup> RCBW, *Report*, pp. 88–93.

“basic wage” of the Commission, which is not a true basic wage but a will-o-the-wisp that will lead them into the ditch.<sup>44</sup>

This view was typical of those who felt Piddington had estimated the cost of living at a level so unachievable as to be actively destructive of workers’ chances to achieve a “living wage.”<sup>45</sup>

Although criticised by some, through the debates over the basic wage and child endowment Piddington became an important ally of those who supported the economic independence of women. Not only did he support the concept of allowances in general, he had explicitly advocated the remuneration of mothering work:

Such service to the community is just as real and just as valuable as the work of the factory hand or of the farmer which results in the visible products of industry. In bringing forth and nurturing the human factor in the production of wealth, woman does her share in its creation. It is just that this service should be recognised in precisely the same way, and according to the same standard as is the service of the worker himself.<sup>46</sup>

As a result, Piddington was embraced as a leading thinker by some women’s organisations. *The Dawn*, official organ of the Women’s Service Guilds of WA (WSG) (and later of the AFWV),<sup>47</sup> published several articles by him, and relied heavily on his arguments about “mythical” children and wives.<sup>48</sup> The leaders of these organisations consulted him directly about the impact of various welfare proposals on the campaign for endowment.<sup>49</sup> Piddington also became deeply involved in the development of a child endowment scheme in New South Wales (NSW).

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<sup>44</sup> Mr Justice Higgins’ decision in the Engineers’ Case (15 CAR 306), quoted in RCCE, *Report*, p. 50.

<sup>45</sup> For example, the Commonwealth Statistician, G.H. Knibbs, claimed that the whole wealth of the country, including the profit share, was not enough to pay for Piddington’s proposed new wage. Piddington, *The Next Step*, p. 22.

<sup>46</sup> Piddington, *The Next Step*, p. 59.

<sup>47</sup> The Women’s Service Guilds of WA was the base from which the AFWV was formed and continued to provide many of the AFWV’s office bearers and do much of the Federation’s organisational work (such as the publication of *The Dawn*) through the interwar years.

<sup>48</sup> Piddington, *The Next Step*, p.33.

<sup>49</sup> ‘VITAL: Federal Action for Widows Pensions’, *Dawn*, 15 March 1926, pp. 7–8. Piddington addressed a special meeting of NCW Vic. on the issue of endowment on 12 May 1925. NCW Vic. Minutes, NLA Mfm G 7541.

### **Child endowment in New South Wales**

In NSW child endowment was only instituted after a long and difficult process. In 1919 the ex-Labor and then Nationalist Premier Holman had introduced a Bill designed to pre-empt a Board of Trade decision likely to increase wages from £3 to £3 17s.<sup>50</sup> The Bill would have changed the wage unit from a husband, wife and two children, to a husband and wife, to be supplemented by endowment of 7s 6d per child paid to the wage-earner, funded by a levy of 8s from employers. The Bill was opposed both by unions and by employers, and was defeated in the Legislative Council. The Board of Trade declared the wage at £3 17s. In 1920 the Holman Government was defeated and in 1921 the new Labor Government introduced a Bill confirming the unit as a man, wife and two children, with allowances to be paid for each extra child. This Bill was also rejected by the Legislative Council.<sup>51</sup>

Piddington, meanwhile, strongly criticised the Federal Government, which brought him into favour with the Lang Labor Government that came to power in New South Wales (NSW) in 1926. He was appointed as Industrial Commissioner of NSW, with sole power over the Industrial Arbitration Court.<sup>52</sup> In this capacity Piddington pushed further on child endowment, devising a scheme that led to the Family Endowment Bill. The plan was for the universal payment of child endowment, funded by a mixture of employer levies and government revenue. Piddington abandoned the plan of a wage for wives, accepting that the maintenance of wives would continue to be covered by the basic wage.

A NSW scheme of child endowment was finally introduced in 1927, partly at the insistence of women's movement activists.<sup>53</sup> By the time the Bill passed through Parliament in 1927 the amount was reduced to 5s for every child under the age of 14

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<sup>50</sup> Cass, 'Redistribution to Children and to Mothers', pp. 67–69; RCCE, *Report*, p. 29.

<sup>51</sup> Cass, 'Redistribution to Children and to Mothers', pp. 67–69; RCCE, *Report*, p. 29.

<sup>52</sup> Roe, 'Piddington'.

<sup>53</sup> Kate Deverall, 'They Did Not Know Their Place: The Politics of Annie Golding and Kate Dwyer', *Labour History*, no. 87, 2004, pp. 31–48.

and the income test was made more restrictive, excluding around 150,000 children.<sup>54</sup> A levy of three per cent of total wages was applied to private employers only (compared with the initial proposal of raising a 6.5 per cent payroll tax on all employers, including the Crown).<sup>55</sup> A smaller number of claims was received than expected, which led to suspension of the levy.<sup>56</sup>

### **The Royal Commission on National Insurance**

The 1923–1927 Royal Commission on National Insurance (the Millen inquiry) recommended the establishment of a National Insurance Fund to provide for sickness, invalidity, maternity and superannuation benefits and the establishment of a National Health Scheme.<sup>57</sup> Following this inquiry, legislation to establish a national insurance scheme was introduced in 1928, but lapsed when the Nationalist Bruce Government was defeated.<sup>58</sup> The report of the Royal Commission on National Insurance declined to recommend a system of insurance for unemployment, instead leaving this to State governments, and unemployment insurance was therefore not included in the 1928 Bill.<sup>59</sup>

Jessie Street was a feminist reformer, later to become the founder of the UA and, later still, a prominent socialist.<sup>60</sup> Street developed a comprehensive plan for national insurance, which she also presented to the RCCE.<sup>61</sup> Street argued that national insurance

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<sup>54</sup> There was also a system of child endowment operating in the Commonwealth Public service, which redistributed money from childless wage earners to those with dependent children. Cass, 'Redistribution to Children and to Mothers', pp. 70–71, 73.

<sup>55</sup> Cass, 'Redistribution to Children and to Mothers', p. 73.

<sup>56</sup> RCCE, *Report*, pp. 29–30.

<sup>57</sup> Parliament of Australia Parliamentary Library, 'Welfare Law', Law Internet Resources, <<http://www.aph.gov.au/library/intguide/LAW/welfarelaw.htm>> (accessed 28 August 2008); Taryn Schubert, 'Did Australia's Political and Social System "Pass" the Test During the Twenties?', *Cabbages and Kings: Selected Essays in History and Australian Studies*, vol. 18, 1990, pp. 86–92, pp. 88–89.

<sup>58</sup> Leslie Nielson and Barbara Harris, 'Chronology of Superannuation and Retirement Income in Australia', Parliament of Australia Parliamentary Library Background Note, 6 Feb. 2008, <[http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/BN/2008-09/Chron\\_Superannuation.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/BN/2008-09/Chron_Superannuation.htm)> (accessed 28 August 2008).

<sup>59</sup> Schubert, 'Political and Social System', p. 88.

<sup>60</sup> Heather Radi, 'Street, Jessie Mary Grey (1889–1970)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Online Edition, 2002, <<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A160396b.htm>> (accessed 9 Sept. 2008).

<sup>61</sup> RCCE, *Minutes of Evidence*, pp. 906–916.

should include payments to all unwaged people, including to mothers for the support of children and for their own maintenance.<sup>62</sup> This conflicted with women's movement claims for a stand-alone system of endowment and was an issue for tactical consideration by women's movement organisations such as the AFWV.<sup>63</sup>

Taryn Schubert argues that the national insurance scheme failed because of state and federal rivalry, "opposition from friendly societies and employers" (who would be required to match employees' payments), "lack of interest from trade unions and the public" and the difficulty faced by the federal government in finding revenue.<sup>64</sup>

### **The Royal Commission on Child Endowment**

By the mid-1920s, the introduction of a national endowment scheme seemed a plausible prospect. The major women's organisations were all calling for such a measure, Prime Minister Bruce in 1925 had pronounced it a "question of...vital interest," and a conference of Federal Ministers and State Premiers in July 1927 appeared to give at least in-principle agreement to the concept by approving terms of reference for the RCCE.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, organised women had successfully defended attacks on the Maternity Allowance (also known as the Baby Bonus, or Maternity Bonus), which had been introduced by the Fisher Labor Government in 1912. Women's organisation such as the AFWV saw the Maternity Allowance a first instalment of mothers' rights, which had, they felt:

given a recognition to the Motherhood of the country, which as its implications become realised, will...lead on in time to a scheme of Motherhood Endowment which will help the race at its source.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> RCCE, *Minutes of Evidence*, pp. 906–916.

<sup>63</sup> 'Royal Commission on National Insurance — Child Endowment', *Dawn*, 12 Dec. 1923, p.2; 'Maternity Bonus an Acknowledgement of Motherhood: Is This Principle Threatened by New Legislation?', *Dawn*, 13 Feb. 1926, p. 5; 'Resolution', *Dawn*, 17 May 1927, p. 8.

<sup>64</sup> Schubert, 'Political and Social System', p. 89.

<sup>65</sup> 'VITAL: Federal Action for Widows Pensions'; 'Editorial: Women on Commissions', *Dawn*, 16 August 1927, p. 1.

<sup>66</sup> 'Editorial: Impressions of the Annual Congress of the Women's Service Guilds', *Dawn*, 15 June 1926, p. 3.

In 1923, a special conference of women, organised by the NCW Victoria (Vic.), resulted in a resounding declaration: “hands off the Maternity Bonus!”<sup>67</sup> Participants’ reports show the indignation and anger felt at the threat to the Allowance, and the confidence gained by the fact that this threat was averted.<sup>68</sup>

The labour movement was in favour of child endowment: on the instigation of the Women’s Organising Committee in Vic., the State Labor Conference had incorporated the principle into their 1919 platform, and the Australian Trade Union Congress had done so in 1921.<sup>69</sup> An article in *The Dawn* optimistically concluded that “the subject is above Party politics in Australia.”<sup>70</sup> The AFWV and NCW had pushed successfully for the appointment to the inquiry into Child Endowment of one of the first women to ever become a Royal Commissioner: Mildred Muscio.<sup>71</sup> Muscio was Federal President of the NCW, and had an interest in industrial psychology.<sup>72</sup> The other Commissioners of the inquiry were Thomas Shuldham O’Halloran (Chair), John Curtin, Ivor Evans and Stephen Mills.<sup>73</sup>

The barrier posed by the “family needs” principle to women’s efforts to obtain motherhood endowment has been examined at length by authors such as Lake and Bettina Cass.<sup>74</sup> Giving evidence before the RCCE, women’s organisation representatives put the argument that, fixed as it was to a given number of children, not only did the family wage provide for hundreds of thousands of children who did not

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<sup>67</sup> ‘Conference of Australian Women from All States’, *Dawn*, 14 April 1923, p. 4.

<sup>68</sup> ‘Conference of Australian Women from All States’; ‘The Maternity Allowance’, *Dawn*, 14 March 1923, p. 7.

<sup>69</sup> ALP Vic. Executive, Decisions of a Joint Conference of the Victorian ALP Executive and the Melbourne Trades Hall Council Executive, 23 August 1927, Muriel Heagney Papers, SLV MS 9106/1173/1(d); Lake, ‘The Independence of Women’, p. 8.

<sup>70</sup> John Chambers Eldridge, ‘Child Endowment: Main Provisions and Procedure of the Family Endowment Act of New South Wales’, *Dawn*, 16 Aug 1927, p. 2. Eldridge based his optimistic assessment on the fact that the Lang Labor Government was introducing a scheme, while the Bruce Nationalist Government had, he claimed, pledged its support, evidence of which was the establishment of the Royal Commission.

<sup>71</sup> ‘Appointment of Commission for Child Endowment’, *Dawn*, 20 Sept 1927, p. 4.

<sup>72</sup> Meredith Foley, ‘The Women’s Movement in New South Wales and Victoria, 1918–1938’, PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1985, pp. 266–267; James Walter and Tod Moore, ‘The New Social Order? Australia’s Contribution to “New Liberal” Thinking in the Interwar Period’, paper to the Jubilee Conference of the Australasian Political Studies Association, ANU, Canberra, Oct. 2002, p. 47.

<sup>73</sup> RCCE, *Report*, p. 3, p. 7.

<sup>74</sup> Lake, ‘The Independence of Women’; Cass, ‘Redistribution to Children and to Mothers’.

exist, it also failed to provide adequately for many very real ones. This argument challenged the efficiency and fairness of the family-wage system, rather than the system's basic principle. The "family-needs" principle could therefore be used against the family-wage system but, as many commentators have noted, such arguments tend to subsume women's claims to economic independence in their own right.

As both Lake and Cass have pointed out, endowment meant different things to different people.<sup>75</sup> In this way, the campaign for child and motherhood endowment is a clear case of both the usefulness and riskiness of ambiguity in policy development.<sup>76</sup> As became apparent through the Royal Commission inquiry, unions and the labour movement saw child endowment as a payment to supplement wages, while employers thought endowment should be financed by deduction of the component "included" in wages for the maintenance of children. While endowment was envisaged as a payment made to mothers, neither employers nor unions saw it as replacing that portion of the family wage that was ostensibly devoted to maintenance of a man's wife. Feminists arguing for endowment believed that endowment should recognise the work of the mother and give her a measure of economic independence, as well as covering the costs of raising children. Given that the principle and application of the basic wage was already the focus of intense and unresolved disputes (as described above), proposals for endowment became a site of contention rather than consensus.<sup>77</sup>

### **The difficulty of endowment for the National Councils of Women**

What is less obvious from existing secondary accounts of activism on this issue is the conflict and confusion it engendered within organisations themselves. In the NCW, proposals for a resolution confirming the organisation's support for child endowment were referred back and forth between the Federal Council and the State bodies for years before finally being adopted. This reflected both a lack of organisational capacity and a lack of unanimity on the matter. At the Federal Council Meeting on 23 July 1926:

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<sup>75</sup> Lake, 'The Independence of Women', p. 8; Cass; 'Redistribution to Children and to Mothers.'

<sup>76</sup> Deborah Stone, *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1997.

<sup>77</sup> ALP WA, *Report to a Special Conference*.

Mrs Cumbrae-Stewart (Queensland [Qld]) stated that she did not think the matter had been discussed in Queensland Council and moved...that the matter should be postponed until the next meeting of the Federal Council.

The President [Mrs D.A. Skene] objected to this and explained that the matter had been brought up for discussion four years ago and had twice been referred back to the State Councils and could not be deferred any longer...<sup>78</sup>

At the beginning of this meeting, Mrs Muscio, representing NSW, had moved “that the National Councils of Women of Australia approve the principle of child endowment,” a motion warmly supported by other NSW delegates, the WA delegates (but only for “necessitous cases”) and particularly by Eleanor Glencross (of the Housewives Association and NCW Vic.), a strong advocate. But opposition from the South Australian (SA) representatives forced the rewording of the motion to “approve of child endowment by re-adjustment of the basic wage.” The motion was further amended to specify “the present method of payment of the basic wage,” before the President “suggested that as the term ‘basic wage’ seemed to cause some difficulty, the word ‘wages’ be substituted.” The final motion, carried on 26 July by the votes of all States except SA, who voted against, and WA, who abstained, was vague, but seemed designed to reassure employers and taxpayers that they would not be footing the bill:

The National Councils of Women of Australia approve of the principle of family endowment by a re-adjustment of the method of payment of wages.<sup>79</sup>

The extent of this circuitous process, carried on over years of referrals and then days of debate, indicates that the women of the NCW were aware of the acrimonious politics

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<sup>78</sup> Minutes of the Federal Council, 23 July 1926, Records of the NCW of Australia, NLA MS7583/12.

<sup>79</sup> Minutes of the Federal Council, 26 July 1926, Records of the NCW of Australia, NLA MS7583/12.

involved in the interaction of payments with wage setting. By contrast, a motion at the same meeting to oppose the professional inequality of women was adopted unanimously without debate.

In part, the difficulties faced by the NCW in coming to a position on endowment also reflected more general problems of organising and deliberating across vast distances, with limited means of communication between relatively isolated groups. This problem was not confined to the NCW. A letter from Bessie Rischbieth (in WA) to a colleague in Qld indicates both the frustration and occasional humour arising from this situation: “Are you and your Officers dead!!!! It seems such a long time since we heard anything of you or your society.”<sup>80</sup>

When the Victorian NCW passed a motion in support of Piddington’s endowment scheme in 1925, one of its members, the AWNL, as a conservative group allied with the Nationalist Party and later the United Australia Party, registered its official disapproval.<sup>81</sup> This may have resulted from the AWNL’s stern insistence on the protection of the family and opposition to any form of “socialism,” despite the fact that the Nationalist Prime Minister Bruce had endorsed a national debate on endowment.<sup>82</sup> The minutes of the NCW Vic. Executive meeting of 7 July 1925 record that the secretary was to write, “regretting that the AWNL could not see eye to eye with the majority of the Council.”<sup>83</sup>

The internal divisions of the NCW were partly due to the fact that it claimed the broadest possible constituency (women’s organisations of all kinds) and insisted that it

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<sup>80</sup> Copy of a letter from Bessie Rischbieth to Miss Ross Patterson, 14 Jan. 1929, Papers and Objects of Bessie Rischbieth, NLA MS 2004/5/773. Rischbieth may have been referring to the Qld Country Women’s Association. The same letter proposes that Mrs J.H. Fairfax (Ruth Fairfax), who in 1922 became the first State president of that organisation, be nominated as the Qld delegate to the British Commonwealth League of Women. The British Commonwealth League was an international body co-founded by Rischbieth in 1925. Martha Rutledge, ‘Fairfax, Ruth Beatrice (1878–1948)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Online Edition, 1981, <<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A080487b.htm>> (accessed 4 Sept. 2008).

<sup>81</sup> Minutes of Executive meeting, 7 July 1925, NCW Vic. Minutes, NLA Mfm G 7541.

<sup>82</sup> Marian Quartly, ‘Defending “The Purity of Home Life” Against Socialism: the Founding Years of the Australian Women’s National League’, *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 20 no. 2, 2004, pp. 178–193.

<sup>83</sup> Minutes of Executive meeting, 7 July 1925, NCW Vic. Minutes, NLA Mfm G 7541.

was “organised in the interests of no one propaganda, and [had] no power over the [organisations] which constitute it beyond that of suggestion and sympathy.”<sup>84</sup>

### **The “independence of women” or “the man and his wife”?**

The AFWV, by contrast, was smaller and organised explicitly around an agenda of “equal citizenship.” It seemed, therefore, less prone to internal divisions over matters of policy. Reports in *The Dawn* indicate a consistent position in favour of endowment throughout the 1920s. There was, however, considerable inconsistency in the way endowment was envisaged. In particular, while the ultimate goal of endowment was to give economic independence to women, and while supporting the principle of equal pay, the AFWV did not insist upon the logical extension of this: that the wage should be based on the unit of the individual. Instead, insofar as details were discussed, it gave support to Piddington’s proposal to readjust the family-wage unit to “a man and his wife.”<sup>85</sup> Indeed, it was this model, a wage for a man and his wife plus child endowment, that was to be most consistently endorsed by women activists (from all organisations) in their evidence to the Royal Commission. This model was not, however, supported by all in the union movement, some of whom saw child endowment simply as a way for employers to reduce the overall wages bill. Giving evidence before the Royal Commission, some union representatives were critical of the NSW scheme as having provided for the reduction of wages without commensurate compensation through endowment.<sup>86</sup>

Speaking before the Commission, Linda Littlejohn, on behalf of the AFWV, rejected the prospect of making the individual (man) the basic unit, even where this indicated a possibility for a separate allowance for wives:

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<sup>84</sup> ‘Constitution of the National Council of Women of Australia’, n.d. c1930, Records of the NCW of Australia, NLA, MS7583/11. This wording mirrors the 1888 founding declaration of the International Council of Women, as quoted in Heloise Brown, *The Truest Form of Patriotism: Pacifist Feminism in Britain, 1870–1902*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 149.

<sup>85</sup> Child Endowment — Main Points agreed by Inter State Congress of AFWV, Sydney, 1924, Records of the AFWV, NLA MS2818/10; ‘Motherhood Endowment’, *Dawn*, 12 Feb. 1924, pp. 7–8.

<sup>86</sup> For example, evidence given by John Ryan, Secretary of the Labour Research and Information Bureau, Trades and Labour Council of NSW, RCCE, *Minutes of Evidence*, p. 984.

The Chairman — That was just the reason why I suggested the possibility of the single man being the better unit to adopt, and then to provide an allowance for a wife, whenever he got one, with a child endowment for the children as they come along?

Mrs Littlejohn — No, I do not like the idea of interfering with a man and wife as the unit. It has been a sort of sentimental unit right down through the ages.<sup>87</sup>

In general, women's organisation representatives were careful to phrase their arguments in conciliatory terms, and to link them with broader concerns. Littlejohn's statements to the Commission are representative of the reasons for endowment that were put forward at this time by women's organisations:

[H]appier and more settled conditions; increased production; decrease in maternal mortality; higher standards of education; greater efficiency; improved conditions in the homes through the lessening of a mother's anxiety over finance; and the promotion of a healthier race.<sup>88</sup>

One of the few proposals put before the Commission for the complete independence of women was by Irene Longman, then representing NCW Qld (later to become both the first woman to stand for and the first woman to be elected to the Qld Parliament). As a corollary to motherhood endowment, Longman was clear about the need to abolish the family wage: "We do not wish the wage to be based on the man and his wife only... We think it should be based on the unit of an adult worker."<sup>89</sup> Longman also proposed that the scheme should allow married women separated from their husbands to be economically independent. The Commissioners were concerned that such a form of endowment would encourage family breakdown. Commissioner Evans commented, "That is an alteration of the existing conditions." Longman replied, "Yes, absolutely. It is revolutionary, and that is what we wish."<sup>90</sup> The radical nature of Longman's

<sup>87</sup> RCCE, *Minutes of Evidence*, p. 874.

<sup>88</sup> RCCE, *Minutes of Evidence*, p. 873.

<sup>89</sup> RCCE, *Minutes of Evidence*, p. 6.

<sup>90</sup> RCCE, *Minutes of Evidence*, p. 8

proposals certainly produced awkward moments for the Brisbane branch of the Mothers' Union (MU), a body affiliated with NCW Qld. As discussed below, the MU representatives stridently distanced themselves from Longman's comments when they appeared before the Commission a week later.<sup>91</sup>

Lake comments that Longman's evidence was met with disbelief by the Commissioners.<sup>92</sup> Yet the orientation of the Commissioners to the direct endowment of mothers was not always straightforward. In fact, representatives of women's organisations often found themselves actively resisting Commissioners' attempts to lead them to endorse motherhood (as distinct from child) endowment:

The Chairman (Mr O'Halloran) — I gather from your statement that you regard child endowment as a first instalment and a step towards something else. Is the second step motherhood endowment, or what had you in mind when you spoke of placing motherhood in a position of security?

Mrs Vallance (WSG) — That the mother should feel safe in having a family and feel that she always had something behind her.

The Chairman — Is it intended that something be added later one, or would the granting of child endowment be the final step. Your statement rather points to something in addition?

Mrs Vallance — I do not think we considered there would be anything more to come financially.<sup>93</sup>

It is not clear why the Commissioners were so eager to explore the possibility of motherhood endowment to bypass the "family wage," but given the firmness of their eventual recommendation against this model, it seems likely that their leading questioning does not indicate support for the idea. Evidence for this interpretation is

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<sup>91</sup> RCCE, *Minutes of Evidence*, pp. 113–114.

<sup>92</sup> Lake, 'The Independence of Women', p. 19.

<sup>93</sup> RCCE, *Minutes of Evidence*, p. 367.

contained in a document titled “Points for Consideration — General,” which is appended to a volume compiling the correspondence of the Commission. In this document, it is suggested (by who is not clear) that the Commissioners consider:

Is not the most logical method of Child Endowment to take the single man as the unit, fix the wage on his needs, add endowment for wife when he got one, and endowment for children as they come?<sup>94</sup>

The “Points for Consideration” as a whole align closely with an underlying scepticism in the line of questioning and, in turn, with the general thinking behind the majority report recommending against Child Endowment.<sup>95</sup> The guidelines include many “leading” questions, such as:

If wage fixing tribunals with their present powers are continued and a Commonwealth scheme of Child Endowment established, would there be a possible and undesirable conflict between the two sets of tribunals as to the proper amount of the Child Endowment?<sup>96</sup>

These were concerns that featured prominently in both the questioning and the majority report. In this light, it is plausible to consider that the Commissioners may have been testing women’s organisation representatives against what they saw as a weakness of the argument behind Child Endowment: that it logically implied a wage based on a single man, with state payments for mother and child. Significantly, nearly all of the women’s organisation representatives who appeared before the Commission seemed to be alert to the risks of discrediting the most palatable form of endowment (child endowment), by associating it with a more radical scheme. Yet in confining their public advocacy to child endowment, rather than motherhood endowment, this gave implicit

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<sup>94</sup> RCCE, Correspondence, (includes lists of witnesses and a summary of points for the Commission’s consideration), 1928, held in the National Archives of Australia online collection, <<http://naa12.naa.gov.au/scripts/ItemDetail.asp?M=0&B=261952>> (accessed 9 Sept. 1008), p. 4.

<sup>95</sup> Mildred Muscio and John Curtin issued a minority report recommending endowment for each child after the second, in line with the labour movement’s position that endowment should supplement, not offset, the family wage. RCCE, *Report*. This report earned Muscio a congratulatory telegram from Bessie Rischbieth of the AFWV: Bessie Rischbieth to Mildred Muscio, telegram, 20 March 1929, Papers and Objects of Bessie Rischbieth, NLA MS2004/5/802.

<sup>96</sup> RCCE, Correspondence, p. 3.

support to treating the issue as one in which women did not have any interests separate from those of their children.<sup>97</sup>

### **Endowment rejected**

The Commissioners were critical of some proposals for their lack of affordability. Proponents of endowment often responded by pointing to the vast sums spent on warfare. For example, the Chairman of the Commission challenged Lena Lynch of the Labor Women's Organising Committee:

There are men getting £500 a year who are in very responsible positions. If they did not receive the endowment the labourer with ten children would get the same amount, or more. According to the figures of the Government Statistician there are 1,630,000 children of workers whose income does not exceed £300, and the child endowment in those classes alone would amount to £84,000,000 a year. Do you think Australia could stand that. [*sic*] It is equal to about one and a half times the total amount realized from the Australian wool clip last year? —

Lynch replied:

There was a greater amount than that found and used to destroy life during the last war. I do not see why we could not use that sum, if procurable, to ensure a better and more efficient life in Australia.<sup>98</sup>

Efficiency, especially the efficiency of mothers, was a major theme of the inquiry, with many witnesses and the Commissioners themselves questioning whether the problems of poverty and distress cited by those in favour of endowment could be better addressed by greater efficiency in the home (the principle of efficiency is discussed in more detail

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<sup>97</sup> An example of this treatment of the issue is a labour movement article that lauds the ideal of endowment without any reference to women: 'A Labor Ideal', *Labor Call*, 24 Feb. 1927, p. 2.

<sup>98</sup> RCCE, *Minutes of Evidence*, p. 922.

below). In rejecting endowment, the final report of the inquiry quotes from *The World's Health*, Oct. 1926:

It does not appear to matter greatly what the family income is; if the mother is efficient the children will grow up normally...The so-called economic facts are apparently no longer the obstacle; ignorance is the main enemy to be combatted.<sup>99</sup>

This view was given considerable support by some women's organisations that appeared before the Commission. The NCW's emphasis on questioning the efficiency and competence of women in the home was certainly echoed in the majority Royal Commission report, in rejecting proposals for payments to mothers. NCW Vic. had a particular interest in this. Its minutes show that, at the instigation of Dr Elizabeth Barrett and Dr Constance Ellis, NCW Vic. had been questioning the Maternity Allowance on "medical" and "efficiency" grounds for several years, and wondering if the money could be better spent on services.<sup>100</sup> The organisation even received a letter from a parliamentarian offering to be part of a campaign against the Allowance.<sup>101</sup> Interestingly, NCW Vic. was the organisation that hosted the open conference in 1923 that, as mentioned above, strongly demanded the Allowance be continued. This conference was an example of deliberate inclusiveness on the part of NCW Vic., as documented by the painstaking communication and planning involved.<sup>102</sup> NCW Vic.'s efforts to develop a broader consensus among women's organisations on the question of the Maternity Allowance may also have been prompted by differences in opinion both within NCW Vic. and between it and the other State NCWs.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> RCCE, *Report*, p. 87.

<sup>100</sup> Minutes of monthly meetings, 28 July 1921 and 25 August 1921, NCW Vic. Minutes, NLA Mfm G 7541, pp. 166, 170.

<sup>101</sup> The minutes of the NCW Vic. monthly meeting on 25 August 1921 record that the organisation received a letter from a Senator Payne offering to help in a campaign against the Baby Bonus: NCW Vic. Minutes, NLA Mfm G 7541, p. 169. It seems likely Senator Payne was Herbert James Mockford Payne, who was a Nationalist and United Australia Party federal Senator for Tasmania from 1919 to 1937. Scott Bennett, 'Payne, Herbert James Mockford (1866–1944)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Online Edition, 1988, <<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A110176b.htm>> (accessed 27 August 2008).

<sup>102</sup> Minutes of Executive meetings, 16 Feb. 1923, 26 Feb. 1923, 8 March 1923 and 17 March 1923, NCW Vic. Minutes, NLA Mfm G 7541.

<sup>103</sup> For example, the President of the NCW NSW argued in favour of the Allowance at the 1923 conference, defending it as having "the merit of fully recognising and respecting the mother's personal rights." Mrs M.W. MacCallum, 'The Maternity Bonus', *Dawn*, 12 Dec. 1923, pp. 2–4, p. 2.

The Commissioners also acknowledged concerns about whether the Maternity Allowance should be diverted to services as, they argued, some was not being spent well.<sup>104</sup> Further, they surmised, “the perfecting of such services would achieve nearly all that is aimed at by advocates of Child Endowment.”<sup>105</sup>

The majority Commissioners were pointedly critical of the concept of a separate payment for the wife (even though few witnesses actually proposed this model):

While not recommending Child Endowment, we have reached the conclusion that if Child Endowment be established, the most suitable family unit to be adopted in determining a basic wage is man and wife. This excludes the idea of treating the wife as a separate economic unit on the pay-roll of the State. As Professor Gray points out...that idea involves a claim that — “It is to the State that the woman renders a service in bearing a child, and it is to the State that she is justified in looking for sustenance and reward while she is doing the State’s work.” He further says: — “Once it is definitely accepted that child-bearing is a service rendered to the State, a very powerful solvent is introduced into family life as we know it”...[W]e are opposed to a scheme which would treat the mother as a salaried servant of the State, by virtue of her child-bearing. In the sections of this report which follow we have, therefore, invariably used the term, and discussed the subject of, Child Endowment.<sup>106</sup>

The final majority report noted that “the assumption seems to be (and this was the point of view of numerous witnesses) that this provision of funds should be wholly an addition to the sums now paid as wages.”<sup>107</sup> This, certainly, was the view of the union movement. In 1927, a union committee chaired by John Curtin had vehemently opposed

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<sup>104</sup> RCCE, *Report*, p. 89.

<sup>105</sup> RCCE, *Report*, p. 90.

<sup>106</sup> RCCE, *Report*, p. 63. “Professor Gray” was Alexander Gray, a prominent critic of Eleanor Rathbone’s proposals for endowment. See Susan Pedersen, *Family, Dependence, and the Origins of the Welfare State: Britain and France, 1914–1945*, Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 181-182.

<sup>107</sup> RCCE, *Report*, p. 9.

any attempt by the Bruce Federal Government to fund endowment by “adjusting” the wages of single or childless workers.<sup>108</sup>

The Royal Commission report recommended against the introduction of a scheme of child endowment, finding that the claim that wages are insufficient had not been established and that either additional taxation for public financing or a levy on industry would have disastrous effects. The report stated that an essential precondition for the introduction of a child endowment scheme was for the basic wage to be “reduced by the elimination of the provision for children which is now an integral part of that wage,” a proposal unacceptable to organised labour. In addition, the report expressed the concern that “by removing from parents all financial responsibility for children, parental responsibility would be weakened, incentive to effort reduced and the sense of unity of interest lessened.”<sup>109</sup> Explaining the Commission’s rejection of endowment, the majority report argued:

To use a colloquialism, many people are interested in “having it both ways.” They wish to retain as an “industrial matter” all the endowment content of the present wage, and add a whole scheme of endowment, designated as “the discharge of a social obligation.” Unless guided and restrained by very clear statutory declarations, wage-fixing tribunals may, more or less consciously, aid in the effectuation of that purpose...<sup>110</sup>

And further:

It seems to us that the claim for child endowment rests on the doctrine of “needs”... The proper maintenance of his children is, in the first place, an obligation of the father, and it is only after he has done his best to provide for his children and failed, that an obligation is cast upon the community...<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> ALP WA, *Report to a Special Conference*. See also Oliver, *Shaping the Nation*.

<sup>109</sup> RCCE, *Report*, p. 9.

<sup>110</sup> RCCE, *Report*, p. 35.

<sup>111</sup> RCCE, *Report*, p. 60.

While the domestic efficiency of mothers was seen as important, the Commissioners emphasised fathers,' rather than mothers,' material responsibility for children. The Commissioners' conclusions made it clear that fathers' responsibilities gave rise to certain kinds of rights (the right to a "family wage"), for which mothers were not eligible. As Lake has shown, this inequality extended to divorce laws, which denied women the right to maintain custody of their children.<sup>112</sup> Maternal feminists opposed this inequality, believing that mothers also had rights connected to their special role and responsibility in caring for children.<sup>113</sup>

While limited child endowment schemes were instituted in the Commonwealth public service from 1925 and, as shown, in NSW from 1927, women's organisations were not ultimately able to persuade interwar policy-makers of the benefits of a national system of state payments to recognise the work of mothers.<sup>114</sup> It was not until 1941, in very different circumstances, that a national system of child (not motherhood) endowment was introduced.<sup>115</sup> To view this outcome in context, it is important to remember that almost no new national social welfare measures were introduced between the wars.<sup>116</sup> Francis G. Castles and John Uhr suggest this lull was due to "anxieties and implicit demarcation lines" relating to the federal division of powers,<sup>117</sup> while Peter Yeend points to the fact that the Commonwealth's lack of access to revenue sources meant it did not have the capacity to introduce new programs in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>118</sup>

Feminist historical accounts have highlighted specific cultural and political reasons for the failure to achieve motherhood endowment and equal pay in this era. Such accounts

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<sup>112</sup> Marilyn Lake, 'Dealing with Sexual Difference', *Alternative Law Journal*, vol. 24 no. 6, Dec. 1999, pp. 265–268, p. 278, p. 267.

<sup>113</sup> Lake, 'The Independence of Women'.

<sup>114</sup> RCCE, *Report*, pp. 29–31, pp. 33–34.

<sup>115</sup> Cass, 'Redistribution to Children and to Mothers', pp. 77–80.

<sup>116</sup> Peter Yeend, 'Welfare Review', Australian Parliamentary Library E-Brief, Sept. 2000, <<http://www.aph.gov.au/library/intguide/SP/welfarebrief.htm>> (accessed 6 July 2006).

<sup>117</sup> Francis G. Castles and John Uhr, 'Federalism and the Welfare State: Australia', First Semester Seminar, Political Science Program, Research School of Social Sciences, ANU, 2002, <<http://dspace.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/41804>> (accessed 21 Sept. 2008), p.16. Castles and Uhr note that Labor held power at the national level for only two years of the interwar period, while all the initiatives at the state level occurred under Labor governments. They also observe that the industrial arbitration system led to reduced support for contributory models of social insurance, because unions saw contributions as a tax on the "living wage," while employers feared that contributions would be used to justify wage increases.

<sup>118</sup> Yeend, 'Welfare Review'.

argue, first, that unions and Labor politicians rejected the plan because it would reduce wages for single men, who received pay deemed sufficient for a couple and three children and, second, that there was widespread concern about the effects on family cohesion of reducing wives' dependence on their husbands. As Lake notes, these factors have been identified by feminist scholars as "fraternal," "patriarchal" and "chivalric."<sup>119</sup> While these factors were certainly evident, such accounts can wrongly imply that there was a two-way interaction between women's movement activists and those who held power. As shown here, however, women's organisations' claims for endowment required engagement with complex political contests between powerful forces that were not generally concerned about the goal of women's economic independence. The family-wage discourse and the discourses of family needs associated with the family wage were so deeply gendered that, despite feminists and labour activists' best efforts, they were not amenable to being adapted for the purposes of achieving women's economic independence.

### **Efficiency: An alternative site of consensus**

While the consensus over endowment fell apart, a different kind of consensus was flourishing. This was the view that social problems, especially social conflicts, could be solved by greater attention to efficiency, science and expertise. Most prominently, as noted above, the efficiency of the mother was seen as a substitute for increased income in achieving child and family health. While the importance of the mother's role in promoting a healthy family was a major argument used by feminists in claiming endowment, the RCCE shows how this idea can be used against women's claims for payments, by questioning their personal adequacy.

In her book *The Disenchantment of the Home*, Kerreen Reiger has shown how, during the twentieth century, mothers' management of children and the home came to be seen as a matter of expertise.<sup>120</sup> Domestic activities were politically reconstructed as tasks

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<sup>119</sup> Lake, 'The Independence of Women', pp. 3–4.

<sup>120</sup> Kerreen Reiger, *The Disenchantment of the Home: Modernizing the Australian Family, 1880–1940*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1985.

requiring skills, specialist knowledge and training for women, both as paid domestic staff and as unpaid wives and mothers.<sup>121</sup> This reconstruction opened new and exciting possibilities for women's organisation participants. For example, in 1921 at NCW Vic.'s 19 Sept. monthly meeting, the Honorary Secretary commented that "she thought it shocking that to date women had been content to be casual labourers at their own trade, viz. household work."<sup>122</sup> What she had in mind was not the commodification of household work as wage labour but the development of household work as expertise with the respect accorded to other professions.

Many women's organisations engaged in the political reconstruction of domestic work, agitating for more widespread training in domestic sciences for all girls, especially wards of the state, and the establishment of domestic science institutes within universities.<sup>123</sup> Such measures, it was said, would allow the girls to command better wages if they entered domestic service. It was also hoped the expansion of training in domestic science, together with raising the school leaving age, would help to solve the severe shortage of "domestics." Concern about the shortage of domestics was not confined to women's organisations, but many of the leaders of these organisations themselves relied on domestic help. In this sense, their plans for domestic science reflected their class interests. At the same time, middle and upper class women's ability to extricate themselves from domestic duties was crucial in enabling their political involvement and broader presence in civil society (a long-standing problem for feminism).

Articulating the uneasy link between domestic competence and citizenship, Lady Forster, patroness of the NCW and wife of the Governor General, argued in 1921:

that the NC can do much towards the teaching of the right kind of citizenship, but urged that it was no use teaching a spirit of citizenship that did not take into account the making of the right kind of home, and

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<sup>121</sup> Evidence to RCCE by Eleanor Glencross, representing NCW Vic., the Housewives' Association of Vic. and Australian Federated Housewives, RCCE, *Minutes of Evidence*, pp. 635.

<sup>122</sup> Minutes of Executive meeting, 19 Sept. 1921, NCW Vic. Minutes, NLA Mfm G 7541, pp. 177–178.

<sup>123</sup> Reiger, *The Disenchantment of the Home*, p. 58; 'The Broad Field of Domestic Science', *Dawn*, 15 Nov. 1927, p. 8; Minutes of monthly meeting, 30 June 1921, NCW Vic. Minutes, NLA Mfm G 7541, p. 163.

thought that all women should be trained in home-making. She suggested that there should be certificates of household efficiency which women should be proud to own when they reached the age to marry.<sup>124</sup>

Faith in expertise and science was widely evident. While questioning Zina Cumbrae-Stewart and Ada Arnold of the MU, RCCE Commissioner Mills even raised the possibility that scientific experiments could be conducted on real families, in which these families would be isolated and studied in order to ascertain the true “cost of living.”<sup>125</sup> Expertise and scientific knowledge could be expected to solve conflicts, especially class and political conflict. Likewise, at the NCW Vic. meeting on 24 August 1922, Miss Brennan “suggested that there should be a species of scholarship for investigation into industrial legislation and felt sure that if the public had a real understanding of facts we should do away with industrial strife.”<sup>126</sup>

Elsewhere, Mildred Muscio observed:

Our Parliaments in Australia are neither sufficiently representative nor sufficiently expert...If the party system is to continue, that party which recognises the value of the expert...and encourages such men in its counsels will be able to dominate the politics of the Commonwealth or the State...In science we are beginning to encourage the expert; he is as necessary in government also.<sup>127</sup>

It was not only “he” whose expertise was needed. Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s important feminist book *Women and Economics* was advertised in *The Dawn* with the rousing instruction, “The would-be reformers must become experts in their field.”<sup>128</sup> The women’s organisation representatives appearing before the RCCE were often made to play the role of investigators reporting on the conditions of women in need. Many, as

<sup>124</sup> Minutes of monthly meeting, 19 Sept. 1921, NCW Vic. Minutes, NLA Mfm G 7541, p. 177.

<sup>125</sup> RCCE, *Minutes of Evidence*, p. 115.

<sup>126</sup> Minutes of meeting, 24 Aug 1922, NCW Vic. Minutes, NLA Mfm G 7541, p. 198.

<sup>127</sup> Mildred Muscio, ‘Reflections on Party Politics’, *Australian Quarterly*, vol. 3, Sept. 1929, pp. 90–100, pp. 94–95.

<sup>128</sup> Advertisement for Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s Book ‘Women and Economics’, *Dawn*, 12 Jan. 1921, p. 8; Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution*, New York: Harper and Row, 1966 (first published 1898).

social workers, felt comfortable in this role. In other cases, the questioning appears incongruous: feminists eager to speak on mothers' rights to equal citizenship found themselves responding to detailed questions about the incomes and living arrangements of families surviving on the basic wage, with the assumption that they would naturally be in touch with many such families.<sup>129</sup> This questioning by the Commissioners was, in part, prompted by the evident lack of income and demographic data. It was also shaped by the close association of women's organisations with the charitable sector and welfare work generally. As explained further below, it was against this background that feminists such as Rischbieth created explicitly political groups, promoting these in contrast with "older" forms of women's charitable activity.

### **Strategic responses to inhospitable politics?**

The shift in emphasis from the endowment of motherhood to the maintenance of children has been noted as part of a general pattern affecting women's movement attempts to achieve state support for mothering: that such support is only forthcoming, and that arguments for it are only effective, when claims are made on behalf of children, not for women themselves.<sup>130</sup> In this respect, however, the women's movement had its own ambiguity.

It might be expected that women's organisations would strategically use claims for child endowment to gain support for their position in public forums, such as Commission hearings, while "privately" being committed to an overall agenda of direct endowment of mothers for their economic independence. However, this ambiguity is also present in the internal minutes and reports of women's organisations. For example, some reports included sections titled "Motherhood Endowment" that speak exclusively of "child endowment" or "family endowment."<sup>131</sup> This kind of "slippage," it appears, was not simply imposed by a hostile environment, but was fostered within movement thinking.

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<sup>129</sup> See, for example, the Commissioners' questioning of May Barron Valance and Ada Bromham, representing the WSG. RCCE, *Minutes of Evidence*, p. 367.

<sup>130</sup> Lake, *Getting Equal*, p. 360.

<sup>131</sup> 'Motherhood Endowment', *Dawn*, 19 July 1927, p. 11.

It was not that organised women shifted ground from rights for mothers to benefits for children but rather that these ideas were genuinely intermingled in activists' thinking. There is no evidence that benefits for children were used instrumentally to get rights for women. The consistent preoccupation with child health and protection suggests, rather, that activist women experienced these concerns as a commitment or value, rather than a discursive tactic.

This is not to say that women's organisations were not strategic or tactical in their approach to politics. In fact, there is considerable evidence of a capacity for discursive manoeuvring, pre-emption of consequences, and the weighing of long and short term results. For example, women's organisations considered the risks of pursuing benefits for women through limited but achievable means, where these might rule out broader measures. In 1926, *The Dawn* published an urgent plea for organisations to consider the consequences of pressing for Widows' Pensions: "Would Motherhood Endowment be Imperilled?"<sup>132</sup>

Some participants invoked men's interests to support their cases. For instance, in 1923, NCW Vic., like many organisations of the era, appealed to men's desire to rid their industries of women:

[I]n the economic sphere...man's best protection was economic justice, viz: — equal pay for equal work; this would exclude from man's activities women, who were doing work for which nature did not intend them.<sup>133</sup>

This can be contrasted with the support given for the professional equality of women, just three years later, by the national body of the NCW, as noted above.

Through the assaults on the Maternity Allowance, it seems that women's movement activists became keenly aware of the risks of appealing to broad social concerns rather

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<sup>132</sup> 'VITAL: Federal Action for Widows Pensions'. See also the rejection of proposals to establish an endowment scheme to be funded by gambling: 'Motherhood Endowment Scheme and a State Lottery Bill', *Dawn*, 12 Feb. 1921, p. 5.

<sup>133</sup> Minutes of the Annual Meeting, 22 March 1923 (the Chair, Mrs Henderson speaking), NCW Vic. Minutes, NLA Mfm G7541.

than women's entitlements. One of the main arguments for abolishing the Allowance was that it had not increased the birth rate. Concern for Australia's white population was certainly one of the key reasons the measure had been introduced, even if Prime Minister Fisher had wished to recognise motherhood as a dangerous and worthy undertaking. Noting this weakness in the rationale for the Allowance, women's movement activists defended themselves — "We do not know who made the promise on behalf of mothers of the Commonwealth that an increased birth rate would result from the Bonus"<sup>134</sup> — and were often careful to avoid explicitly basing their claims for endowment on arguments that it would increase the birth rate.<sup>135</sup> Articles about endowment in *The Dawn* tended to stress that it was not to be seen as a means to increase the birth rate, strongly rejecting the insinuation that mothers might be so mercenary as to give birth for financial benefit.<sup>136</sup>

If confusing mothers' rights with the needs of children (or the need of the country for children) is one "discursive risk," then identifying the category of "woman" with that of "mother" is an even more serious one. Women's organisations came close to addressing this question in the international controversy over protective legislation, which sought to introduce industrial regulations restricting the kinds of work that women could do and providing special conditions for maternity. Many women's organisations, especially those allied with socialist and union movements, were committed to the maintenance of protective legislation for women and, where it was absent, to its introduction. Many feminists, especially those who were to form Open Door International, were convinced that such legislation served mainly to exclude women from paid work, and pointed to growing attacks on married women's right to work as evidence of the risks involved in any program of reform not based on absolute equality.

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<sup>134</sup> 'Conference of Australian Women from All States'.

<sup>135</sup> 'Maternity Bonus' (a manifesto forwarded to the Prime Minister and all members of parliament, and presented to the NCW Vic. conference on the Maternity Allowance), *Dawn*, 14 April 1923, p. 4. An appeal to the birth-rate argument nevertheless reappeared in the lobbying by the UA in the 1930s. See for example 'Child Endowment', *Standard* (newsletter of the UA), 15 Oct. 1937, p. 6, Muriel Heagney Papers, SLV MS 9106/1146/1(a).

<sup>136</sup> 'Maternity Allowance', *Dawn*, 15 April 1926, p. 8; Macdonald 'National Endowment of Motherhood'. Macdonald refers to Dr Richard Arthur's evidence to the 1919 RCBW refuting suggestions that women might have babies simply to gain the benefit of endowment. For a contemporary parallel, see Genevieve Heard, 'The Use of the Fertility Issue in the Australian Campaign for Paid Maternity Leave', *Just Policy*, no. 48, June 2008, pp. 16–21. Heard argues that proponents of paid maternity leave should use gender equity arguments rather than arguments based on fertility.

These issues were widely debated in *The Dawn* and within the AFWV. The Australian representative of the international committee on “Equal Pay and the Right to Work” was Elizabeth Clapham. As well as being a member of AFWV, Clapham was a member of the Perth Organisation of Labor Women.<sup>137</sup> She described how, in 1924, the Equal Pay and Right to Work committee was forced by its parent body, the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA), to change its name to “Like Conditions of Work for Men and Women,” a sign of what she saw as the disregard for the working conditions of ordinary women.<sup>138</sup> Clapham was scathing about “so-called ‘feminists’” who, in their eagerness to abolish protective legislation, were willing to sacrifice the conditions of those at the bottom of the ladder in order to achieve equality for a minority at the top.<sup>139</sup> Clapham resigned around 1932, as the debate over protective legislation continued to escalate.<sup>140</sup> The heated discussions around this time clearly reflect awareness of the conflicts between equality-oriented and maternalist arguments, and the different interests bound up the two positions.

By contrast, advocacy on motherhood and child endowment was not contested in the same terms. It might have been logical for people to consider, in reasoning similar to their concerns about protective legislation, “We want economic independence for women but we need to be careful about reinforcing the idea that women are mothers rather than workers.” In fact there appears to have been no open consideration of any risks involved in identifying women’s interests as mothers’ interests by arguing for endowment. In other words, the extent to which strategic thinking was applied to this risk at the very broad discursive level seems to have been very limited.

One major reason for the lack of strategic thinking at this level seems to be that the understanding of roles and stereotypes as powerful in themselves had not yet been adopted. While some activists were careful to avoid basing their claims on arguments that could later be used against them (such as the birth rate), or were trying to gain

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<sup>137</sup> Minutes of meeting, 29 Sept. 1926, Records of the Labor Women’s Organisation, BL SLWA MN 407 ACC 2011A vols. 1–2.

<sup>138</sup> Elizabeth Clapham, ‘Protection for Women in Industry’, *Dawn*, 18 Jan. 1928, pp. 10–12; Elizabeth Clapham, ‘Like Conditions of Work for Men and Women’, *Dawn*, 19 July 1927, pp. 10–11.

<sup>139</sup> Clapham, ‘Like Conditions of Work’, p. 11.

<sup>140</sup> ‘Annual Report on Progress of Work of AFWV — June 1931 to May 1932’, AFWV Minutes and Reports, Records of the AFWV, NLA MS2818/Box15/Folder118, p. 1.

practical protections for women or prevent practical restrictions on their choices (as in “protective legislation”), these more immediate considerations were not fundamentally about shaping “society’s view of women” or about stereotypes.<sup>141</sup>

A further reason for the fact that women’s movement actors did not act strategically at this broad level is their implicit understandings of the divisions of social life. It is true that, as Lake argues, activist women were using a many-pronged strategy to cater for women in different situations (working-class mothers who wanted and were encouraged to stay at home on one hand; single women and professional women who wanted equal pay on the other).<sup>142</sup> But this approach also kept employment and motherhood conceptually separate. It was tacitly understood that there would not be any interaction between strategies for women in paid work and strategies for mothers: this was important in maintaining the consensus about endowment. To the extent that work and motherhood were viewed as overlapping, it was in terms of the supposedly negative impact of work on the mothering performed by working class-mothers.<sup>143</sup> Work was simply not yet seen as something desirable for most women (professional women were a partial exception), and it was only with the intensification of threats to married women’s right to work in the 1930s and 1940s that the positive value of work was widely articulated in the movement.

It is not always clear to what extent issues, goals, and areas of activity are strategically chosen, or instead emerge in an organic way from the experiences, and particularly the grievances, of social movement participants. The evidence presented in this chapter suggests that neither of these characterisations is wholly satisfactory. The activist women discussed here did not consider themselves to be primarily seeking benefits on their own behalf. The prevalence of “social work” among organised women of the era also indicates that many feminists felt that their activism was directed not towards improving their own circumstances, or liberating themselves, but to improving

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<sup>141</sup> A speech by trade unionist and equal pay campaigner Eileen Powell to the AFWV’s 1954 conference indicates an emerging interest in “conditioning” as a barrier to women. Powell quotes Simone de Beauvoir on this idea. Eileen Powell, Speech to AFWV Conference 1954, Eileen Powell Papers, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, (ML SLNSW) MSS 6646.

<sup>142</sup> Lake, ‘The Independence of Women’.

<sup>143</sup> Shurlee Swain, Ellen Warne and Patricia Grimshaw, ‘Constructing the Working Mother: Australian Perspectives, 1920 to 1970’, *Hecate*, vol. 31 no. 2, 2005, pp. 21–33.

conditions for “those less fortunate.” It was a somewhat different picture for labour women, many of whom experienced poverty, discrimination and workplace restrictions in ways that fuelled their activism. However, for all “organised women,” their self-conscious engagement as advocates in the political sphere meant that their selection of projects and actions inevitably derived not only from grievances and personal experience, but also (and, in some cases, perhaps mainly) from assessments of the political situation. At the same time, while the contention over the family wage helped to shape endowment proposals, this was not simple opportunism: women’s organisations’ concerns about children and about poverty were genuine and were shared with a range of other groups.

This does not mean that women’s organisations in the 1920s and 1930s were driven only by instrumentalist reasoning. The records of their actions, writing and speech show that they were animated, if not always by passion, then by convictions and shared values that definitely lie beyond the weighing of risks and benefits. It is also possible to see how women’s movement groups, once established, may experience a need to find viable goals and targets for their activism. That is, when organisations exist and are “geared up” for action, then those in the organisation may seek new targets for their energies if existing projects prove to be blocked or unfeasible in the short or long term. This reasoning may help to explain the increasing emphasis on women’s right to equality, especially in the field of work, from the 1930s onwards, which is discussed further below. Accordingly, it is perhaps at the level of more concrete goals, such as widow’s pensions and divorce law reform, that we can best gauge the nature of change within the movement. At this level, it becomes clearer that the work of feminist activism in this era lay not strictly in the translation of ideology into ideologically-consistent action, but in the maintenance of the work itself, the selection of specific goals, the monitoring of progress on these, and the sharing of achievements and setbacks, all within a broad and not perfectly defined sense of common purpose.

## The campaign for endowment and the labour movement

Another puzzle in analysing women's movement activism for endowment is whether feminists consciously used the high-stakes struggle over the basic wage, or were dangerously unaware of it. As indicated above, there was some recognition of the difficulties involved in challenges to the family-wage system, but these did not seem to be openly discussed or resolved.

Naturally, Labor women were particularly sensitive to the need to protect the gains made by and for workers. Muriel Heagney, for example, told the Commissioners that her organisation, the Women's Organising Committee of the ALP (Vic. Branch):

warmly supports the principle of child endowment and desires the speedy accomplishment of a scheme which, whilst bringing a measure of social and economic security to every child, shall not rob other sections of workers of their hard-won rights and privileges.<sup>144</sup>

Women in non-party organisations such as the AFWV and NCW, however, relied extensively on the notion that the basic wage was catering for hundreds of thousands of “mythical” wives and children,<sup>145</sup> an argument explicitly rejected by the unions. While this can be seen as a defence of men's privileges, unionists understood themselves to be protecting the wage share of the working class. In responding to the obvious weakness of the family-wage argument, women's organisation representatives did not highlight the defence of male privilege as such, but rather emphasised the inefficiency of the family-wage system. This was true of the statements recorded both in public forums and in internal meetings.

One AFWV spokesperson, Ethel McDonnell of the Women's Non-Party Association of SA, was so unconcerned about alienating the labour movement that she explicitly used unionists' estimate that workers had lost £9,000,000 as a result of the NSW scheme in order to argue that an endowment system would be beneficial — precisely because

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<sup>144</sup> RCCE, *Minutes of Evidence*, p. 1115.

<sup>145</sup> Piddington, *The Next Step*, p.33.

industry would gain by the same proportion.<sup>146</sup> Labor women arguing for endowment were placed in a difficult position by statements such as this, as they were by the many less extreme instances in which women's organisation activists showed they had no great reverence for the wage-setting principles cherished by the labour movement. To some extent, the way NCW and AFWV approached issues of work and income reflected the relatively privileged social positions of many of their office-bearers.<sup>147</sup> This social position was also illustrated by the efforts, described above, to institute domestic science training programs.

Lake observes that women's organising in the era was informed by labour women and that the needs of working-class mothers were prominent in the platforms of all major women's organisations.<sup>148</sup> There is indeed evidence for this at the policy/platform level, and to some extent in terms of individual participation overlapping between organisations and projects. For example, it was Jean Beadle (1868–1942) — founding member of the Labor Women's Organisation in Vic., and later a delegate to the Eastern Goldfields Council of the WA State ALP and convenor of the first WA Labor Women's Conference in 1912 — who successfully moved a motion at the 1926 WSG Annual Congress urging members to “take advantage of the present favourable opportunity” to press for the establishment of a motherhood endowment scheme.<sup>149</sup> Another example is Lucy Woodcock (1889–1968), a Teachers' Federation executive member who co-chaired the Council of Action for Equal Pay (CAEP) with Heagney and later became the vice-president and president of the UA (see below on the special relationship between female teachers and the UA).<sup>150</sup> Yet there are few if any documented instances in which the evident problems were addressed and joint approaches decided. This meant that in their ongoing engagement with policy processes such as the RCCE, non-party women's

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<sup>146</sup> RCCE, *Minutes of Evidence*, p. 511.

<sup>147</sup> Foley, 'The Women's Movement', pp. 256–257.

<sup>148</sup> Lake, 'The Independence of Women'.

<sup>149</sup> 'Mrs Jean Beadle, J.P.', *Dawn*, 15 June 1926, p. 6. See also Bobbie Oliver, "'A Truly Great Australian Woman': Jean Beadle's Work among Western Australian Women and Children, 1901–1942", in Patricia Crawford and Judy Skene (eds), *Women and Citizenship: Suffrage Centenary*, Nedlands, WA: University of WA Press, 1999, pp. 87–98.

<sup>150</sup> Bruce Mitchell, 'Woodcock, Lucy Godiva (1889–1968)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Online Edition, 1990, <<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A120625b.htm>> (accessed 10 Sept. 2008). See also Winifred Mitchell, *50 Years of Feminist Achievement: A History of the United Associations of Women*, Sydney: UA, n.d. probably 1979.

organisations did not always support labour women's concerns in their advocacy of the apparently shared goal of endowment.

For reasons of differing social position, values and organisational capacity, organised women were not in agreement about what they wanted to do with the family wage. They could agree that it was not adequate, but for different reasons. Some were in favour of piecework and payment for output, which could be used as a means to "equal pay,"<sup>151</sup> while labour women saw that this approach would undermine the labour movement's progress on centralised wage-setting. Instead, they argued the wage was too little and not implemented properly.<sup>152</sup> Some, such as Heagney, saw that the gendered family-wage concept was hindering progress to equal pay, which was why she stressed her claim that working women, like men, had dependents to support.<sup>153</sup> As a union worker, though, she was constrained from openly opposing the family wage.

The phrase "readjustment of the basic wage" reflected the idea that there would be a net-neutral transfer from men to women, which the labour movement could not accept, not only because it would undermine men's position as providers and hence the moral basis of their claims, but also because it was net-neutral, despite the fact that real wages had been stagnant or worse for over a decade. Why, in this context, were feminists all too willing to play the "fictional children" card, even knowing the potential benefit to industry and loss to workers? Some of them probably were more sympathetic to industry than to labour, but they also believed this was a realistic chance to achieve a step towards economic independence for (many) women.

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<sup>151</sup> For example, Edith Cowan, then representing the NCW of WA, argued before the RCCE that "the true basis of economic stability is that of payment for work done" irrespective of sex. RCCE, *Minutes of Evidence*, p. 433. At a monthly meeting of NCW Vic. Mrs Abraham and Mrs Dobson spoke in favour of piecework. Minutes of monthly meeting, 24 August 1922, NCW Vic. Minutes, NLA Mfm G 7541, p. 201.

<sup>152</sup> For example, May Holman of the WA Labor Women's Executive told the RCCE that wages were inadequate and the wage system did not provide fair and reasonable remuneration. RCCE, *Minutes of Evidence*, p. 441.

<sup>153</sup> Muriel Heagney, 'Cost of Living Investigation Made for the Grand Council of the Amalgamated Clothing and Allied Trades Union of Australia: Memorandum', 1927, Muriel Heagney Papers, MS 9106/1159/1(a).

### **The rise of “equality,” equal pay and women’s right to work**

As discussed in Chapter 2, historians such as Lake have suggested that because of the failure to achieve a maternally-focused form of independence for women (endowment), the women’s movement turned increasingly to strategies of equality, with a particular emphasis on work. My research supports the view that there was an increasing level of activity on work and equality issues, but questions the extent to which this shift occurred as a result of a deliberate re-evaluation of overall strategies. To begin with, concerns for equality coexisted with maternal claims from early in this period. Women’s movement publications such as *The Dawn* provided forums in which radical new interpretations of the women’s movement’s goals could be aired, without necessarily endorsing them. For example, Linda Littlejohn, reviewing articles by UK feminists, baldly stated in agreement that “women do not need to give up their work on their marriage.”<sup>154</sup> Similarly, in 1923 *The Dawn*’s editor noted approvingly the USA feminist journal *Equal Rights*:

We are impressed with the definite and logical manner in which the case for Women’s Rights is advocated in this paper. There is no compromise. They demand no privileges, but equality of opportunity for all; and we can understand how our American sisters are “getting there.”<sup>155</sup>

More vehement was an article by Gwendolyn Jones, which condemned “female parasitism,” and accused women of using children as an excuse for not being productive. Jones pleaded, “for the sake of her soul and man’s too heavily burdened back, throw open the doors of labor to her!”<sup>156</sup> In a similar vein, the reformer and eugenicist Angela Booth argued that equal pay and access to work would give women (better) protection “by eliminating the necessity of the sale of women’s sex, in marriage or out of it, and by eliminating the parasitic woman.”<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> ‘Women’s Place’, *Dawn*, 15 Feb. 1928, pp. 10–11.

<sup>155</sup> “‘Equal Rights’”, *Dawn*, 14 July 1923, p. 2.

<sup>156</sup> Jones, ‘Equal Economic Rights for Women’, p. 11.

<sup>157</sup> Mrs John Booth, *The Payment of Women’s Work: A Review*, 1918, quoted in Margaret Fitzherbert, *Liberal Women: Federation to 1949*, Annandale, NSW: Federation Press, 2004, p. 143.

At the same time, *The Dawn* also printed articles that were much more critical of this uncompromising emphasis on equality. Carrie Chapman Catt, then president of IWSA, wrote an article “Too Many Rights — Women Leaders Who Would Go Beyond All Decent Limits.”<sup>158</sup> Catt warned feminists against taking rights too far, for example by seeking to keep their names after marriage or to have children out of wedlock. She presented the idea of “true rights,” in contrast to “sham rights” (that is, those that interfere with the rights of others, especially children) and consigns to the past the view that there is actually a need for more rights. In her view, true leaders would say, “let women prove themselves worthy of those rights gained.” In NCW Vic., Lady Forster warned that “on no account should we encourage sex antagonism — the great deal of [the NCW] should be that each should do their share for the betterment of all.”<sup>159</sup> For the AFWV, the organisation that published *The Dawn*, the overarching goal was equal citizenship, within which the AFWV aimed to improve the status of mothers. The AFWV acknowledged the evident disagreements but sought to steer a middle course while openly airing different views.<sup>160</sup>

In terms of the economic independence of women, the other great goal of interwar feminism, apart from endowment, was equal pay. There had been equal pay claims earlier, such as the Vic. Lady Teachers’ Association’s unsuccessful application in 1914. In 1918 the Federal Court had for the first time attempted to establish a “living wage” for women in the clothing trades, delivering a figure just over half the male rate.<sup>161</sup> Equal pay activity became more prominent throughout the 1920s and flourished as a focus for activism in the 1930s. Throughout the 1930s, there was much mutual effort towards equal pay and against restrictions on women’s employment, especially by Street (of the UA), Heagney, Littlejohn and union organiser Eileen Powell.<sup>162</sup> These efforts coincided with the development of the Australian Open Door Council, of which

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<sup>158</sup> Carrie Chapman Catt, ‘Too Many Rights — Women Leaders Who Would Go Beyond All Decent Limits’, *Dawn*, 17 Jan. 1923, p. 4.

<sup>159</sup> Minutes of monthly meeting, 19 Sept. 1921, NCW Vic. Minutes, NLA Mfm G 7541, p. 177.

<sup>160</sup> See for example the editorial note prefacing Ella Anker, ‘Family Endowment’, *Dawn*, 14 Oct. 1925, p. 10. This note states, “we propose to reprint articles [on questions such as endowment and protective legislation] by leading thinkers from time to time, both ‘for’ and ‘against.’”

<sup>161</sup> McMurphy et al., *For Love or Money*, p. 66.

<sup>162</sup> Lenore Coltheart, ‘Jessie Street and the Pursuit of Equal Pay’, paper to The Past Is Before Us, Ninth Annual Labour History Conference, University of Sydney, 30 June – 2 July, 2005, pp. 253–304, <[http://asslh.econ.usyd.edu.au/BLHG\\_Proceedings.PDF](http://asslh.econ.usyd.edu.au/BLHG_Proceedings.PDF)> (accessed 13 Sept. 2008); Wendy Paterson, ‘Ultimate Ambition: Eileen Powell’s Contribution to Equal Pay Activism in Australia, 1929–1969’, paper to The Past Is Before Us conference, pp. 191–198.

Street was for a time president. In this capacity she rejected the 1936 inter-State Ministerial Conference's recommendation that protective legislation for women in industry be introduced.<sup>163</sup> Together with others, Heagney established CAEP at an equal pay conference of the NSW Clerks' Union on 22 May 1937.<sup>164</sup>

With the Depression from 1929 and increasing unemployment, there were intensifying calls for those women who were in the workforce to withdraw in favour of unemployed men.<sup>165</sup> This occurred at the same time as the industrial downturn led to male job losses and employers offered lower-paid jobs to women, while high unemployment meant that women were more likely to seek work to compensate for the loss of men's contribution to family income. Attacks on married women's work were not confined to debates in the media: in 1932 the NSW parliament passed the Married Women (Teachers and Lecturers) Dismissal Act, leading to the dismissal of 220 married female teachers. It was not until 1947 that this Act was repealed, while in Vic. a similar law was still in effect as late as 1956.

Winifred Mitchell's history of the UA notes that, as a result of that organisation's vigorous campaign against the NSW Act, "so many of the teachers joined the U.A. that a teacher's section was formed, and this group had regular meetings which arranged publicity, petitions, lobbying of and deputations to members of parliament."<sup>166</sup> In 1935 Street herself wrote to this group (the Married Teachers' Committee) proposing compromise terms for a Bill to repeal the offending Act, to guide deputations to parliament, and reminding members to pay their 5s annual subscription dues.<sup>167</sup> In 1934 *The Dawn* published a speech by the British activist Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence reacting to similar threats in the UK to married women's jobs: "This mass meeting protests against the increasing practice...of making celibacy a condition of employment

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<sup>163</sup> Coltheart, 'Jessie Street', p. 254.

<sup>164</sup> Beverley Symons, 'Muriel Heagney and the Fight for Equal Pay During World War Two', *Hummer* (publication of the Sydney Branch of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History), vol. 3 no. 1, Summer 1998–1999, <<http://www.asslh.org.au/sydney/hummer/vol3no1/heagney.htm>> (accessed 9 Sept. 2008).

<sup>165</sup> Margaret Power, 'Women and Economic Crises: The Great Depression and the Present Crisis', paper to the Women and Labour Conference, Macquarie University, Sydney, May 1978.

<sup>166</sup> Mitchell, *50 Years of Feminist Achievement*, p. 15.

<sup>167</sup> Jessie Street, 'Teachers' Section: Proposed Terms for Bill to Repeal the Married Women Teachers and Lecturers Dismissal Act', 1935, UA Collection, ML SLNSW MS 2/60 <<http://www.reasoninrevolt.net.au/pdf/a000142.pdf>> (accessed 14 Sept. 2008).

for women and suggesting that the unemployment problem can be solved by turning married women out of industry.”<sup>168</sup>

Reacting to the scarcity of jobs for men, some unions were also very active in agitating against married women’s employment in this period. Apart from the tacit expectations that women would simply not seek certain kinds of work, there were also explicit campaigns. The Clothing Trades Union and the Shop Assistants Union asked the Qld Labor Government to ban married women’s employment, while in Vic. the Grocers’ Union, the Clothing Trades Union and even the Female Confectioners’ Union all restricted married women’s access to jobs.<sup>169</sup>

The contradictory pressures and the evident injustice of blaming women for men’s unemployment prompted action from organised women both within and beyond the labour movement. Very important in this respect was Heagney’s 1935 book *Are Women Taking Men’s Jobs?*, in which Heagney pointed to the many care responsibilities borne by women, in order to argue for women’s rights to employment and equal pay.<sup>170</sup> In this text, Heagney drew on the extensive survey of women’s living arrangements and expenses that she had conducted for the Amalgamated Clothing and Allied Trades Union in 1927.<sup>171</sup>

Meanwhile, women’s organisations continued to argue for endowment as well as equal pay. This was true even of those organisations, such as the UA, that were most obviously part of the emerging trend towards seeking equality.<sup>172</sup> However, the changed economic conditions and government responses altered the landscape in which the

<sup>168</sup> Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, ‘The Right of Married Women to Earn’, *Dawn*, 17 Jan. 1934, p. 2.

<sup>169</sup> McMurchy et al, *For Love or Money*, p86. The Confectioners’ Union was very successful at recruiting female workers in that industry and claimed to have established the first women’s trade union journal, the *Woman’s Clarion*. Joy Damousi, ‘Wearne, Margaret (1893–1967)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Online Edition, 2002, <<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A160607b.htm>> (accessed 24 Sept. 2008). In 1927, Jean Daley represented the Confectioners Union as an entrant in the “Popular Girl Competition” that was held as part of that year’s Eight Hours Procession. ‘Eight Hours and Labor Day’, *Labor Call*, 10 March 1927, p. 15. See photograph in McMurchy et al, *For Love or Money*, p. 93.

<sup>170</sup> Muriel Heagney, *Are Women Taking Men’s Jobs? A Survey of Women’s Work in Victoria with Special Regard to Equal Status, Equal Pay, and Equality of Opportunity*, Melbourne: Hilton and Veitch, 1935.

<sup>171</sup> Heagney, ‘Cost of Living Investigation’. See also Jenny Bremner, ‘Equal Status, Equal Pay and Equality of Opportunity: Muriel Heagney and the Status of Women in the Great Depression’, *Women and Labour Conference Papers*, no.1, 1980, pp. 304–315.

<sup>172</sup> Letter from Jessie Street (President UA) to Miss U.F. Ellison (Honorary Secretary CAEP), 20 Aug 1937, Muriel Heagney Papers, SLV MS 9106/1146/1(a).

claim for economic independence was being made. As Lenore Coltheart notes, the 1931 decision taken by the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration as a response to the Depression reduced the basic wage by ten per cent, on the basis of the incapacity of the industry to pay.<sup>173</sup> Coltheart argues that this introduced a new principle into federal wage fixing, thereby overturning the family-wage principle. This may be so in a formal sense, but unionists and equal pay campaigners including Heagney had for many years highlighted that the Harvester decision and the wage-fixing system built upon it responded more to industry's capacity to pay than to realistic assessments of family needs.<sup>174</sup>

Even between those groups who were advocating for equal pay, considerable conflict emerged over the different approaches that could be taken. The "gradualist" program put forward by Street and the UA was designed with consideration for employers' ability to pay, and the possible consequences for women's jobs if their wage rates were increased too quickly. But this conflicted with the hardening stance taken by Heagney and the CAEP, which demanded an immediate shift to an "equal minimum wage" via the Federal Basic Wage Cases and the Clerks' Union case in NSW during the late 1930s. Eventually, the UA withdrew its membership of the CAEP in 1940 over this issue.<sup>175</sup>

It is impossible to analyse here in full the equal pay and right to work campaigns of the period, and their relationship with endowment claims. It seems, however, that the intensification of work-related demands did not occur as a result of actors critically viewing and rejecting maternalist endowment strategies because they were seen to have failed or to be inconsistent with developing movement philosophies. Rather, it seems that the shift towards equality-oriented projects resulted from decisions taken on a day-to-day basis in response to factors such as political opportunities, beliefs, organisational positioning and the influx of new participants (as in the teacher's campaign conducted by the UA). All of these factors were affected by the need to respond to the increasing

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<sup>173</sup> Coltheart, 'Jessie Street', p. 255.

<sup>174</sup> Heagney, 'Cost of Living Investigation'.

<sup>175</sup> Letter from Miss Jennings (Secretary UA) to Muriel Heagney (Honorary Secretary CAEP), 9 Aug 1940, Muriel Heagney Papers, SLV MS 9106/1169/6. See the many letters between CAEP and UA dating from 1937 to 1942 on the issue. SLV MS 9106/1146-1169.

threats to women's right to work — a need made all the more pressing because of the increasingly stark effects of women's exclusion in terms of poverty and blatant discrimination.

### **Self-consciousness of organisational place in history**

One feature that did change notably during the period was the mode of organising. Where women's organisations earlier tended to claim their legitimacy through their traditional links to charity work, increasingly through the interwar decades the principle of gender equality in representation and citizenship came to dominate. As Rischbieth argued, this distinction could be drawn in terms of older and newer forms of organising:

Women today may be divided into two types: those who belong to the great majority and are working along the old established lines of trying to alleviate social conditions by charitable efforts, and those who are hoping through constructive laws to establish a human basis of citizenship in all countries.<sup>176</sup>

In making these comments, Rischbieth, addressing the IWSA Congress in 1923 in Rome, had no doubt in which category she and her AFWV belonged. She promoted the work of the Federation in terms of its modernity, to distinguish it from what she presented as earlier forms of women's movement activity. This rationale had several important aspects. In part, Rischbieth was staking a claim in the landscape of women's movement organisations, most notably in competition with the NCW. In doing so she was also making a claim about the progress of the women's movement, its history, and the action now required to fulfil its destiny in the specific conditions of the moment. Later, Street justified the need for her newly-formed UA in similar terms.

While the NCW was characterised by Rischbieth as an “old-fashioned” organisation, it was undergoing its own internal struggles to modernise, while retaining its organisational philosophy based on “social work,” as the President made clear:

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<sup>176</sup> ‘The IWSA Congress — Public Meeting — Women of All Continents’, *Dawn*, 14 August 1923, p. 2.

There should be authority to teach the care of human beings. The constitution of the National Council gives authority to bring laws before the public, and make concrete recommendations, for the passing of these laws. Standing committees should get information from experts and women should be pledged to support each other. Work must be done systematically to show how to be effective. We want to give people something to do, and something definite. Women's work [has] developed in the most marvelous manner during the last few years, and demands recognition.<sup>177</sup>

At the same time, it was important to the NCW to avoid the uglier side of politics wherever possible:

The chairwoman [Mrs Henderson] then said that she wanted to clear up a small misapprehension that seemed to have arisen viz. that the NC of W was being used for propaganda. She pointed out that this was not so at all, but naturally in the discussion political subjects were occasionally touched upon.<sup>178</sup>

### **Federalism, nation-building and internationalism**

One of the "new conditions" to which feminists of the 1920s and 1930s had to respond was the operation of federal systems of government. The challenge of federalism is a good example of how changes in conditions can present opportunities to social movement organisations, especially those in the process of formation, but also create difficulties for older organisations whose internal structures can be less easily adapted.

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<sup>177</sup> 'President's Report' (Mrs Henderson), incorporated in the minutes of the Annual Meeting, 16 Nov. 1921, NCW Vic. Minutes, NLA Mfm G7541.

<sup>178</sup> Minutes of monthly meeting, 19 Sept. 1921, NCW Vic. Minutes, NLA Mfm G 7541, pp. 174–175.

In the first category the AFWV was formed with an explicit intention of creating a national level structure supported and informed by State affiliates, working with a common purpose (equal citizenship). The national level approach was so important to the AFWV that it convened a conference with the theme “An All Australia Outlook” in 1927, and emblazoned the banner of its publication, *The Dawn*, with that slogan and a specially commissioned logo.<sup>179</sup> A colleague, Isabel Johnston, commented on Rischbieth’s personal dissatisfaction with State-based approaches:

She has often said the many States of Australia are confined like so many hat-boxes with the lids tightly shut. She would open them and merge them into one.<sup>180</sup>

The organisational structure planned by Rischbieth as part of this All Australia Outlook differed substantially, and self-consciously, from that of most older organisations, although the first national women’s organisation in Australia was the WCTU, which created a federal structure in 1891.<sup>181</sup> In the case of the NCW, this organisation operated until 1931 as separate State councils, joined only by an inter-State executive council with ambiguous and limited power to make representations on behalf of the Councils as a whole. The need to create systems by which a national body could speak for the State NCWs at a Federal government level became pressing enough for major discussions to be held about the development of a new constitution in 1924.<sup>182</sup>

In terms of the issues, too, the creation of national-level legislation was becoming more important. For example, women’s organisations of the 1920s were very concerned about the need for uniform laws covering marriage, divorce and the rights of wives to property. This national focus, as opposed to State-centred activities, was also promoted by the growth and increasing influence of international bodies such as the

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<sup>179</sup> Bessie Rischbieth, ‘The First Essential — An All Australia Outlook’, *Dawn*, 14 Dec. 1926, p. 6. See the front page banner, *Dawn*, 19 Dec. 1927, p. 1, and the photograph on p. 209 of this thesis.

<sup>180</sup> Biographical notes, Isabel Johnston Papers, State Records Office of WA, Perth, WA, ACC3926A/15, quoted in Dianne Davidson, ‘A Citizen of Australia and of the World: A Reappraisal of Bessie Mabel Rischbieth’, *Studies in Western Australian History*, vol. 19, 1999, pp. 99–113, p. 105.

<sup>181</sup> NFAW, ‘The National Woman’s Christian Temperance Union of Australia (1891–)’, AWAP Web Site, 2004, <<http://www.womenaustralia.info/biogs/AWE0993b.htm>> (accessed 21 Sept. 2008).

<sup>182</sup> Minutes of the Federal Council Meeting at National Conference, 1924, Records of the NCW of Australia, NLA MS7583/12, Minute Book 1924–1928.

League of Nations and the International Labour Office. At the same time, international women's organisations were flourishing, as awareness of the potential gains to be achieved through the international sphere came to be better understood. As other scholars have shown, these international developments were not narrowly organisational but were built upon bonds of friendship and affection, sustained by correspondence and visits made possible by long journeys.<sup>183</sup>

These international and nation-building processes placed demands on local and national organisations, as they had to create or reconfigure structures to allow for representation and coordination between the international, national, State and local levels. On occasion, this challenged existing centres of power within organisations, as when, for example, Mrs Michaelis of NCW Vic. worried that Australia's new status as a country (rather than as several separate colonies) within the International Council of Women (ICW) might unfairly remove the Vic. Council's right to deal directly with the international body.<sup>184</sup>

The need to change to a federal structure was, however, increasingly recognised by the NCW:

Mrs Skene spoke of the proposal to form the Interstate Conference into a Federal Council, and asked Mrs Glencross to speak on the subject. Mrs Glencross said that as the result of attending State conferences she was convinced of the necessity of forming an Australian Council, she referred to the fact that several of the affiliated organizations already had Federal Associations, such as the WCTU, the Woman Graduates Association, the YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association] and the Housewives' Association. As a Council we are weakened as a force if we have not a strong federated body...<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Verta Taylor and Leila J. Rupp, 'Loving Internationalism: The Emotion Culture of Transnational Women's Organizations, 1888–1945', *Mobilization*, vol. 7 no. 2, 2002, pp. 141–158; Miranda Walker, "'A League of Friendship and Understanding': The Friendship Networks of Australian and British First Wave Feminists', *Lilith*, no. 13, 2004, pp. 93–105.

<sup>184</sup> Minutes of the Federal Council Meeting at National Conference, 22 Oct. 1924, Records of the NCW of Australia, NLA MS7583/12, Minute Book 1924–1928, p. 34.

<sup>185</sup> Minutes of monthly meeting, 27 March 1924, NCW Vic. Minutes, NLA Mfm G 7541, p. 237.

For the AFWV, and to a lesser extent for the NCW, the creation of federal structures was not just a matter of adaption but also represented a substantive commitment to nation-building, and to creating a political force that would more effectively improve the position of women in Australia and internationally.

### **Representation and conflict**

One of the ways in which the NCW was able to maintain a large membership, incorporating a wide variety of member organisations, was through the practice of not requiring members to be bound by NCW policies and commitments. As might be expected, a corollary of this was that the NCW often operated without internal structures of decision-making that involved members. This can be seen in the evidence given by NCW Qld and by one of its member organisations, the MU, before the RCCE in 1928.

As mentioned above, NCW Qld was represented before the RCCE by honorary life member and former president, Irene Longman, together with then-president Zina Cumbrae-Stewart. In this capacity Longman argued in support of endowment, like other women's organisation witnesses, but also, more radically, proposed that the single adult worker should be the unit on which wages were decided, and that there should be equal pay for men and women. A week later, Cumbrae-Stewart appeared again, this time with Ada Arnold, to represent the Brisbane branch of the MU. On this occasion Cumbrae-Stewart and Arnold firmly distanced their organisation from NCW Qld and Longman's comments.<sup>186</sup> They strongly opposed endowment as a force that would break up family life and expressed particular concern about the possibility that endowment might (as did the Maternity Allowance) put unmarried mothers on a par with "the respectable wives and mothers who belong to the Mothers' Union."<sup>187</sup> The conflict between the positions taken by NCW Qld and the MU suggests there were no systems to ensure organisational unity in representation. Cumbrae-Stewart and Arnold also admitted that they had not

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<sup>186</sup> RCCE, *Minutes of Evidence*, pp. 113–114.

<sup>187</sup> RCCE, *Minutes of Evidence*, p. 113.

consulted with the members of the MU in deciding on their evidence before the Commission. Cumbrae-Stewart attempted to justify the conflicting positions by stating, “we are here to-day more as individuals than as representatives of the Mothers’ Union.”<sup>188</sup> Even though they had been introduced as witnesses representing the MU, under questioning Arnold conceded:

We have not consulted our members in regard to giving evidence before this Royal Commission on Child Endowment, and therefore we do not want any statements we make to be taken as representing the official views of the Mothers’ Union.

Arnold did, however, report that:

During the luncheon interval [of the MU’s quarterly meeting] I put a direct question to the mothers as to whether they would give their support to any scheme which would tend to break up or militate against home life, such as the scheme put forward on behalf of the National Council of Women; the mothers replied emphatically and decidedly that they would not stand for anything that might upset the present standard of home life.<sup>189</sup>

In contrast, Rischbieth hoped to resolve the problems of federalism and representation by creating an explicitly federal structure based not on vast numbers of affiliated (but barely involved) organisations, but rather on State-based affiliates with representative status in the national body, united in their purpose: equal citizenship. This different way of operating brought the AFWV into conflict with the NCW over the question of which organisation more fully represented Australian women.

The conflict over representation came to a head during the 1923 IWSA Congress in Rome, at which Australia was represented by the AFWV (then still known as the Australian Federation of Women’s Societies for Equal Citizenship).<sup>190</sup> In previous

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<sup>188</sup> RCCE, *Minutes of Evidence*, p. 113.

<sup>189</sup> RCCE, *Minutes of Evidence*, p. 113.

<sup>190</sup> ‘The International Women’s [*sic*] Suffrage Alliance and the Australian Federation of Women’s Societies’, *Dawn*, 14 Nov. 1923, pp. 1–2.

years, before the League of Nations was formed and the British dominions (including Australia) attained nation status, the dominions had been represented at IWSA congresses by delegations of the British Dominions Women Citizens' Union. On the formation of the AFWV in 1921, the AFWV had applied for and been accepted as the Australian affiliate of IWSA. It was on this basis that the AFWV represented Australia at the 1923 Congress. It seems the Australian NCW was offended by the implication that the AFWV represented all Australian women and by the fact that no NCW representatives were included in the delegation. Some State NCWs decided to send an urgent overseas telegram to Lady Aberdeen, President of the ICW, which was also represented at the Congress, informing her that the Australian delegation was in fact not representative, since the Australian NCWs had no representatives attending.<sup>191</sup>

In response, Rischbieth criticised the NCW for presenting itself as a political rather than a charitable and social body, and for claiming to “speak on public matters for many hundreds of women connected with it indirectly through its charitable bodies.”<sup>192</sup> In contrast to this way of working, Rischbieth commended structures of “active organisations whose constitution provides for discussion on questions of the day, controversial and otherwise, with a vote to be taken on the matter before action can be claimed on public matters in their name.”<sup>193</sup>

Despite Rischbieth's criticism of the NCW, she avoided open conflict, stressing the “friendship and co-operation” between the two bodies, at both the international and national levels.<sup>194</sup> At the Rome Congress, too, the majority of delegates had wished to maintain the two bodies separately and at a respectful distance. When the ICW proposed the merging of the two international bodies, this proposal was rejected in favour of “co-operation.”<sup>195</sup> Rischbieth later illustrated her point about the unrepresentative structures of the Australian NCW by commenting that although the ICW had proposed this international amalgamation, she believed that “not more than one or two, if any, of

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<sup>191</sup> Minutes of monthly meeting, 26 April 1923, NCW Vic. Minutes, NLA Mfm G 7541.

<sup>192</sup> The Editor (probably Bessie Rischbieth), ‘N.C. Women and Political Controversy — An Open Letter to Women Social Workers’, *Dawn*, 19 Jan. 1924, p. 5.

<sup>193</sup> The Editor, ‘N.C. Women and Political Controversy’.

<sup>194</sup> ‘The International Women's Suffrage Alliance’, p. 1.

<sup>195</sup> ‘The International Women's Suffrage Alliance’, p. 2.

these affiliated local societies ever discussed the said scheme...”<sup>196</sup> The more structured model of representation advocated by Rischbieth can be contrasted with the NCW’s approach, in which cohesion was a matter of “suggestion and sympathy” rather than votes and platforms.<sup>197</sup>

## Conclusion

This historical study shows that women’s movement participants in the interwar years did act strategically in their activism on work and care issues, but that their strategising occurred mainly at a detailed level. Strategic decisions were often made in response to “external” factors, rather than as deliberate approaches to broad discursive risks, such as the risk of identifying womanhood with motherhood. Participants’ engagement was based on practically-focussed diagnoses of what was wrong: economic dependence, lack of status for motherhood, poverty and women’s lack of representation. These diagnoses of what was wrong were not developed at an ideological level into the idea of “the oppression of women as a group by men as a group,” as occurred later, in the second wave. Feminists of the interwar years had their own well-developed conceptual framework, which was centred on the idea of maternal citizenship and the commitment to social reform.

The study also shows that the constraints on action were significant. While conflict between powerful political interests can present opportunities for social movement organisations to advance their claims, it is very difficult for these smaller actors to shift the dominant terms of the debates. In this case, conflict over the basic wage presented an opportunity for women’s organisations to press for endowment, but their particular argument for this provision (the entitlement of mothers to remuneration for their work and their right to their own income) remained largely outside the terms of the debate, which was focused on the cost of living, the adequacy of the male wage and the capacity and responsibility of industry to pay.

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<sup>196</sup> The Editor, ‘N.C. Women and Political Controversy’.

<sup>197</sup> ‘Constitution of the National Council of Women of Australia’.

The 1920s campaigns for motherhood and child endowment were distinguished by a remarkably broad but shallow consensus. Ambiguity about the precise form of the measure allowed all major organised interests to support the idea. It also facilitated an unusual level of agreement among women's organisations, despite the divisions between activist women on questions of purpose, representation and engagement with formal politics. The consensus on endowment was undone by differences and conflicts over the interaction of endowment schemes with the basic wage — conflicts with significant gender aspects that were not explicit in the public debate of the time.

Decision-making by women's movement participants of the period was affected by the internal and external challenges that they faced, as well as by their beliefs and visions. The conflicts between organisations could be interpreted as a form of deliberation over issues of principle and strategy, but this interpretation is challenged by the fact that no forum ever provided a context in which any overarching position could be reached. Instead, organised women were responding to the imperatives of political action on a more detailed level. The increasing emphasis on equality and women's right to work in the 1930s, for example, did not result from any high-level decision to adopt a less maternally-focused mode of claims-making. Rather, this shift occurred through responses to attacks on married women's employment and was informed by developing feminist knowledge.

This is not to say that activist women in this period were naïve or un-strategic in their actions. Participants were willing to use elements of the broader political conflicts for their own ends and, to a certain extent, were aware of risks arising from these manoeuvres. But they were deeply embedded and entangled in the politics of their time, and driven by their own values. While the international disputes concerning protective industrial legislation raised important questions about what would later be called the gendered division of labour, the idea of motherhood endowment did not provoke similar debates. In large part, this was because motherhood and employment were implicitly understood as separate matters. The ideological "risk" of valorising motherhood, as described by Ungerson above, only makes sense when viewed in terms of sex-role stereotyping, an interpretation that did not become prevalent until later in the twentieth

century. The following chapter takes up the story of the second-wave women's movement as it grew to prominence in Australia from the late 1960s.

## Chapter 5: Second-Wave Activism on Work and Care

Don't be too polite, girls, don't be too polite,  
Show a little fight, girls, show a little fight...

On 16 September 1985 a group of about thirty women boarded a Melbourne tram, refusing to pay more than 67c of the \$1 fare. They were protesting against the fact that women were still paid, on average, just 67 per cent of male weekly earnings. The female conductor let them all through. It was a festive atmosphere. The women started to sing a feminist song, adapted from an old Australian shearing ballad: "Don't be fearful of offending in case you get the sack, just recognise your value and we won't look back." The folk tune and the fact that the women knew the lyrics by heart made it seem an old song, long laid down in Australian cultural memory. But the feminist version had been written by Glen Tomasetti only one and a half decades earlier to support the 1969 equal pay case. The 1985 tram ride was a re-enactment of the equal pay demonstrations of the early 1970s, and included one of the original instigators, Zelda D'Aprano. In the years that had passed, "Don't Be Too Polite Girls" had become an anthem of the lively and quickly growing feminist movement — a movement with its own traditions, new and old.<sup>1</sup>

The movement that flourished in the 1970s in Australia was very different from that of the interwar years. Politeness was rejected, direct action embraced. In a new way, everyday life became politically charged. Yet some of the issues were similar. Feminists were still concerned with women's economic dependence on men and the conditions arising from this dependence, as they had been throughout the twentieth century.

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<sup>1</sup> Film Australia and the Women's Bureau of the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations, *Time's Up: The Story of the Campaign for Equal Pay*, video recording, Sydney: Film Australia, 1986; NFAW, 'Tomasetti, Glenys Ann (Glen) (1929–2003)', AWAP Web Site, 2003, <<http://www.womenaustralia.info/biogs/AWE0600b.htm>> (accessed 10 Sept. 2008); Yvonne Smith, *Taking Time: A Women's Historical Data Kit*, Melbourne: Union of Australian Women (Vic.), 1988, p. 28, p. 39.

As in the interwar period, feminist responses to the problem of economic dependence were complex, but overall directions can be discerned. Feminists of the 1920s and 1930s lobbied for government to pay endowment to mothers to improve their status and give them a measure of independence, alongside an increasing focus on equality in employment during the 1930s. The women's movement of the 1970s and 1980s did not generally ask for state support to enable women to be full-time mothers but sought access for women to employment, demanding more education, childcare, and legislative protection to make this a substantive right. This chapter considers why this different approach emerged in the second-wave women's movement. Was it a strategic decision taken in response to changed conditions? As the Introduction explained, second-wave feminism is now strongly criticised for having made the wrong decision in pursuing paid work. But how did feminists actually see and assess their options? To answer these questions we need to look in detail not only at the public statements and protests of the movement but also at its internal organisation and participants' own thoughts about the movement's direction.

The chapter begins by providing an overview of the Australian second-wave women's movement, its political context and developments in the areas of work and care. The following section looks in more detail at the early women's liberation groups that heralded the resurgence and transformation of the women's movement in Australia from late 1969. The movement ethic of basing action on personal analysis and transformation is discussed. The chapter then describes the growth of practical action oriented to external political goals, giving examples of how practical projects promoted continuity with earlier eras of feminist action, alongside deep generational divisions in philosophies and styles. The chapter discusses the different views held by participants on the relationship between ideology and methods, before examining why those parts of the movement that were engaged in goal-oriented political reform adopted the position of promoting women's access to employment, rather than other measures such as the mothers' wage. The process of responding to political opposition and defending partial gains is noted, together with participants' awareness of the risk of reinforcing oppressive sex roles. The chapter demonstrates that even reform-oriented activism was influenced by a decentralist philosophy of encouraging individual women and small groups to determine their own actions. It is shown that, even so, political engagement

brought the imperative of representation and interest construction. The chapter then considers the conceptual frameworks developed by women involved in reformist projects to understand their own activism as part of a diverse but ideologically coherent women's movement. Finally, the chapter briefly examines how the lack of a peak body and the relative neglect of "discursive politics" may have affected the Australian movement.

### **The second-wave women's movement: Context and development**

The previous chapter showed how interwar women's organisations engaged with struggles over the family wage to promote their vision for endowment to "place motherhood in a position of security." At a broader level, the formal institution of the family wage is an important aspect of the particular way in which the Australian state has developed: as a liberal capitalist system with, however, a relatively high level of popular support for intervention to redress social inequality.<sup>2</sup> As a result of the strong history of union influence, this created what Francis G. Castles has called a "wage-earner's welfare state."<sup>3</sup> Yet by the 1970s the efforts of feminists and others also expanded the role of the state to encompass social services and other measures to promote equality of opportunity. Marian Sawer has identified the dominant political philosophy guiding these developments as that of "social liberalism."<sup>4</sup>

In the early 1970s, social liberal reforms intensified under the Whitlam Labor Government, partly in response to social movements including second-wave feminism.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the "post-materialist" nature of some of these movements and reforms (such as Indigenous rights and multiculturalism) marked a shift of left politics away from traditional labour movement concerns. From the 1980s on, the tradition of social liberal reform was challenged by a neoliberal economic agenda, which undermined

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<sup>2</sup> Jessica Lindvert, 'The Rules of the Game: Organizing Gender Policies in Australia and Sweden', *Social Politics*, vol. 14 no. 2, pp. 238–257, p. 245.

<sup>3</sup> Francis G. Castles, 'The Wage Earners' Welfare State Revisited: Refurbishing the Established Model of Australian Social Protection, 1983–93', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 29 no.2, 1994, pp. 120–45.

<sup>4</sup> Marian Sawer, *The Ethical State?: Social Liberalism in Australia*, Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Sawer, *The Ethical State?*.

feminist attempts to embed gender-equity frameworks within government practices.<sup>6</sup> There has also been, since the mid-1990s, a neoconservative backlash both within and beyond government, against the supposedly “elite” concerns of 1970s social movements.<sup>7</sup> This too has created a hostile political environment for feminist activism, echoing experiences in some other Western countries.<sup>8</sup> It is within this hostile political environment that Australian discourses of blaming feminism have become influential.

Studies of the Australian second-wave women’s movement have highlighted the unusual degree to which feminist goals and processes were institutionalised in the Australian state from an early stage.<sup>9</sup> This was achieved in large part by the “femocrats,” feminist bureaucrats who took advantage of political receptivity, especially from the Federal Whitlam (1972–1975) and Hawke (1983–1991) Labor Governments, to enter government in roles explicitly created to address gender equity.<sup>10</sup> More recently, the erosion of Australian women’s policy machinery and feminist-inspired programs has been recorded.<sup>11</sup> Importantly, as noted in Chapter 2, one of the factors identified as contributing to this erosion is the gradual disappearance from public view of an autonomous, active and oppositional women’s movement.<sup>12</sup>

There were, of course, considerable tensions about the extent to which the movement should pursue what came to be known as the “femocrat strategy.”<sup>13</sup> These tensions reflected the different origins of the major strands of the Australian movement. The first actions and meetings of the new movement emerged from anti-Vietnam activism and

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<sup>6</sup> Hester Eisenstein, *Inside Agitators: Australian Femocrats and the State*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996.

<sup>7</sup> Barry Hindess and Marian Sawyer, ‘Introduction’, in Marian Sawyer and Barry Hindess (eds), *Us and Them: Anti-Elitism in Australia*, Perth: Australian Public Intellectual Network, 2004, pp. 1–14.

<sup>8</sup> Sylvia Bashevkin, *Women on the Defensive: Living Through Conservative Times*, Chicago and Toronto: University of Chicago Press and University of Toronto Press, 1998.

<sup>9</sup> Louise A. Chappell, *Gendering Government: Feminist Engagement with the State in Australia and Canada*, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2002.

<sup>10</sup> Marian Sawyer, *Sisters in Suits: Women and Public Policy in Australia*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1990; Eisenstein, *Inside Agitators*.

<sup>11</sup> Sarah Maddison and Emma Partridge, *How Well does Australian Democracy Serve Australian Women?*, Democratic Audit of Australia Focussed Audit no. 8, Canberra: ANU, 2007; Katherine Teghtsoonian and Louise A. Chappell, ‘The Rise and Decline of Women’s Policy Machinery in British Columbia and New South Wales: A Cautionary Tale’, *International Political Science Review*, vol. 29 no.1, 2008, pp. 29–51.

<sup>12</sup> Maddison and Partridge, *How well does Australian Democracy Serve Australian Women?*, p. 102.

<sup>13</sup> Anne Summers, *Ducks on the Pond: An Autobiography 1945–1976*, Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 2000; Susan Ryan, *Catching the Waves: Life in and out of Politics*, Pymble, NSW: HarperCollins, 1999.

left political circles to become women's liberation in late 1969.<sup>14</sup> As discussed in more detail below, these groups were focused on consciousness-raising but also took direct action against external targets to express their rejection of sexism. Women's liberation groups, along with others, later became involved in establishing refuges and women's health centres.<sup>15</sup> With some overlap but also many new members, WEL was formed to conduct a candidate survey for the 1972 federal election.<sup>16</sup> After 1972, WEL continued to pursue changes through government machinery and policy. Several movement-wide conferences were held, but no umbrella organisation or peak body developed. Instead, the movement diversified without an organisational or deliberative centre. While the effects and off-shoot projects of the women's liberation groups are manifold, this stream of the movement has not been institutionalised or maintained by a structure, in contrast with WEL, which still has an organisational identity and some (fairly minimal) structures.

Alongside these autonomous women's groups, the movement has also involved women active in political parties and elected as parliamentarians (especially though not exclusively those elected as Labor Party members), union women, older women's groups pre-dating the 1970s, such as the AFWV, newer vocational women's groups such as women in policing, and feminists working in non-gender-specific organisations, such as migrant groups. As the following sections illustrate, the movement as a whole was deeply concerned with issues of work, income and care.

Of all the activities of Australian second-wave feminism, the effort to open employment opportunities for women remains the movement's most publicly recognisable legacy. Natasha Campo shows that the media has misrepresented the Australian movement by portraying feminists as fixated on career success and "having it all."<sup>17</sup> While such misrepresentations are commonplace, the movement's preoccupation with work is not,

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<sup>14</sup> Ann Curthoys, 'Doing it for Themselves: The Contemporary Women's Movement', in Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans (eds), *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation*, Marrickville, NSW: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992, pp. 425–447.

<sup>15</sup> Sylvia Kinder, 'Adelaide Women's Liberation: The First Five Years', in Margaret Bevege, Margaret James and Carmel Shute (eds), *Worth Her Salt: Women at Work in Australia*, Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1982, pp. 367–378.

<sup>16</sup> Marian Sawyer, *Making Women Count: A History of the Women's Electoral Lobby*, Sydney: University of NSW Press, 2008.

<sup>17</sup> Natasha Campo, "'Childless but not by Choice' or "24-Hour Women Having it All"? Remembering Australian Feminism', *Lilith*, vol. 13, 2004, pp. 106–116.

in itself, a media distortion: the documents and biographical accounts of the period clearly demonstrate that the sexual division of labour and the undervaluing of women's work were central concerns for the Australian women's movement as a whole in the 1970s and 1980s.

Broadly speaking, the demands generated by these concerns included equal pay, an end to sex discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace, community-based childcare, recognition for women's unpaid domestic and caring labour, and equal sharing of this labour by men.<sup>18</sup> Some of these areas have seen significant policy developments. The 1970s and 1980s saw the creation of government-funded childcare programs,<sup>19</sup> while State and Federal governments established agencies and legislation for affirmative action and equal opportunity in employment.<sup>20</sup> Penalties for sexual harassment at work were introduced<sup>21</sup> and there was even, briefly, a public education campaign encouraging men to do a fair share of housework.<sup>22</sup> More recently, policy attention to "work and family" issues has seen the introduction of "family-friendly" provisions, such as flexible hours, in some employment contracts.<sup>23</sup> Such work-related developments are among the most visible and demographically far-reaching impacts of second-wave feminism. As argued below, however, it is inaccurate to view these demands or policy changes as, in any simple way, representing the goals or means of the movement acting as a whole.

It is now widely accepted in Australian society that women's paid work is economically necessary and to be expected.<sup>24</sup> However, although the "family wage" has disappeared and women's employment is growing, scholars note that the male breadwinner model

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<sup>18</sup> Sawyer, *Making Women Count*.

<sup>19</sup> Deborah Brennan, 'Babies, Budgets, and Birthrates: Work/Family Policy in Australia 1996–2006', *Social Politics*, vol. 14 no.1, 2007, pp. 31–57, pp. 45–46.

<sup>20</sup> Gretchen Poiner and Sue Wills, *The Gifthouse: A Critical Look at Equal Employment Opportunity in Australia*, North Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1991.

<sup>21</sup> Gail Mason and Anna Chapman, 'Defining Sexual Harassment: A History of the Commonwealth Legislation and its Critiques', *Federal Law Review*, vol. 31 no.1, 2003, pp. 195–224.

<sup>22</sup> Marian Sawyer, 'The Commonwealth Sex Discrimination Act: Aspirations and Apprehensions', speech to a forum marking the 20th anniversary of the Sex Discrimination Act, University of Sydney, 3 August 2004, p. 14.

<sup>23</sup> Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), *It's About Time: Women, Men, Work and Family – Final Paper*, Sydney: HREOC, 2007.

<sup>24</sup> M.D.R. Evans and Jonathan Kelley, 'Changes in Public Attitudes to Maternal Employment: Australia, 1984 to 2001', *People and Place*, vol. 10 no. 1, 2002, pp. 42–57.

has not been deposed but rather modified to accommodate partnered mothers as secondary earners.<sup>25</sup> As Deborah Brennan has reported, the last decade has seen contradictory approaches from the national government, in which tax and benefit policies have encouraged “secondary earners” to stay at home, while single parents subject to income assistance regimes are being coerced into the workforce.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, as explained in Chapter 1, there are frequently voiced attacks on the women’s movement itself for allegedly misleading women that they can “have it all,” overemphasising paid work and denigrating the contribution of “stay-at-home mums.”<sup>27</sup> Katha Pollitt notes the emergence of similar trends of “blaming feminism” in the USA, as do Sheila Rowbotham and Lynne Segal in the UK.<sup>28</sup> This constitutes a major discursive challenge for feminists now engaged in “work and family” politics. Australian feminists’ claims for women’s right to work are popularly recognised — but frequently disparaged. In part, this may be because the developments through which work became so influential as a focus for political action are poorly understood. It is to this question, how the movement’s priorities emerged, that the chapter now turns. This involves understanding how concerns about work and care were conceptualised, how these concerns were operationalised into goals and actions by some groups within the movement, and how the movement as a whole changed with the developing directions of different groups within it.

### **Women’s liberation: “The personal is political”**

Although social movement studies have historically drawn attention to “grievances” as preconditions for mobilisation, there has been comparatively less attention given to the

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<sup>25</sup> Gillian Whitehouse, ‘From Family Wage to Parental Leave: The Changing Relationship between Arbitration and the Family’, *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 64 no. 4, 2004, pp. 400–412.

<sup>26</sup> Brennan, ‘Babies, Budgets, and Birthrates’.

<sup>27</sup> See also Merrindahl Andrew, ‘Campaigning on Work, Care and Income: Learning from Histories of Australian Women’s Activism’, paper to Our Work Our Lives National Conference on Women and Industrial Relations, Adelaide, 2007.

<sup>28</sup> Katha Pollitt, ‘US: Feminism Lite’, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 17 July 2003; Sheila Rowbotham, ‘Introduction: Mapping the Women’s Movement’, in Monica Threlfall (ed.), *Mapping the Women’s Movement: Feminist Politics and Social Transformation in the North*, London and New York: Verso, 1996, pp. 1–16; Lynne Segal, *Making Trouble: Life and Politics*, London: Serpent’s Tail, 2007.

processes through which participants come to understand themselves as oppressed,<sup>29</sup> and little consideration of how this affects later organisational developments. As in the USA, from where some early participants brought ideas and pamphlets, the very early stages of the Australian second-wave women's movement were focused on consciousness-raising. Initially, this involved women gathering in small groups to engage in personal testimony. According to Gayle Graham Yates, consciousness-raising was inspired by the personal testimony presented by Black activists in the civil rights movement, as well as Mao's slogan, "speak pain to recall pain."<sup>30</sup>

The intellectual work of developing an analysis of women's oppression was supported by participants' exposure to formal education and to the ideas of other radical movements. Throughout the twentieth century, women's educational attainment had been steadily increasing. As in all the emerging European and North American movements of the era, students and junior academics were involved in forming early groups. Universities were important sites for women's liberation groups' first agitations.<sup>31</sup>

The thinking in early women's liberation groups was also illuminated by initially sparse but increasingly prolific feminist literature. Together with the various pamphlets and essays copied and distributed among participants, Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970, originally published as an essay in 1968) is frequently mentioned as having been a major influence.<sup>32</sup> Other articles and books from the USA and UK increasingly became available throughout the 1970s and were used by women's liberation groups. Australian Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970) was a widely-read inspiration for women who entered the Australian movement after 1970.<sup>33</sup> In 1990, when Sara Dowse interviewed Julia Ryan for the National Library of Australia (NLA) Oral History

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<sup>29</sup> David A. Snow, E. Burke Rochford Jr, Steven K. Worden and Robert D. Benford, 'Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation', *American Sociological Review*, vol. 51 no. 4, 1986, pp. 464–481, pp. 465–466.

<sup>30</sup> Gayle Graham Yates, *What Women Want: The Ideas of the Movement*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1975, pp. 103–104. See also Eva Cheng, 'Vietnam and the Women's Liberation Movement: Interview with Sandra Hawker and Helen Jarvis', *Green Left Weekly*, 26 April 1995, <<http://www.greenleft.org.au/1995/184/12210>> (accessed 3 Jan. 2008).

<sup>31</sup> Summers, *Ducks on the Pond*.

<sup>32</sup> Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*, New York: Doubleday, 1970.

<sup>33</sup> Greer, though, was not personally involved in the Australian movement as such, having left Australia in 1964. Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch*, London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1970.

Collection, the former Canberra women's liberation participants agreed that Greer's and Millett's books, together with Shulamith Firestone's (1970) *The Dialectic of Sex*, were the key feminist books of the early 1970s.<sup>34</sup> Australian participants also began to produce newspapers and journals, such as *Mejane*, *Refractory Girl* and *Mabel*. These publications were not intended for a scholarly audience but drew on the writing and conceptual skills of the mostly young and educated women who produced them.

In keeping with the tradition of personal testimony, in 1973 and 1974 "Women's Commissions" were organised, which were open to the public and in which any woman could speak about her experiences before a supportive audience.<sup>35</sup> By exposing women's experiences of violence and abuse, these Commissions also influenced the development of refuges.<sup>36</sup> In events such as the Commissions, and in general, participants' ideas were also informed by models from the anti-war and anti-racism movements in which many were active.<sup>37</sup>

Through these processes, participants developed "an analysis" of sexism and a commitment to challenging it. Women's discovery of sexism in their own lives, and the action taken against it in personal terms, was understood as part of dismantling sexism in society at large. While many participants, particularly those who joined the movement through WEL or in later years, did not participate in consciousness-raising groups as such, most were deeply affected by the revelation that what they had seen as their personal problems as women could be explained and potentially transformed, on both an individual and social level.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Julia Ryan interviewed by Sara Dowse, 26 Sept. 1990, NLA ORAL TRC 2651; Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*, New York: William Morrow, 1970.

<sup>35</sup> Janet Ramsay, 'Contested Representations of Women in NSW Politics', in Deborah Brennan and Louise Chappell (eds), *"No Fit Place for Women"? Women in New South Wales Politics*, Sydney: University of NSW Press, pp. 59–83, pp. 62–64. Ramsay notes that the advertisements for the first Commission do not mention domestic violence, although they do refer to rape under the heading "Women as Sex Objects." This supports Ramsay's argument that the movement was not focused on domestic violence by male partners until the Commission created a space for the articulation of this experience. See also 'Women's Commission 1973: Are You Happy As a Woman?', promotional leaflet, Sydney: Comment Publishing Company, 1973.

<sup>36</sup> Julia Ryan interviewed by Sara Dowse.

<sup>37</sup> Curthoys, 'Doing it for Themselves', pp. 432–433.

<sup>38</sup> Sawyer, *Making Women Count*.

It is difficult in a historical account to encompass the heightened passions of the time, and the ways in which early participants felt their involvement to be a rupture in their own lives and an invention in the experiences of women. For this reason among others, it has been valuable to consult sources other than written documents.<sup>39</sup> As most participants acknowledge, too, the story of the women's movement is one that can and should be told from many perspectives, including the perspectives of those who did not belong to (and might in fact have been alienated by) the particularly close groups in which women's liberation in Australia is said to have begun, such as the share house at 67 Glebe Point Road in Sydney.<sup>40</sup> While some, such as artist and scholar Suzanne Bellamy, feel themselves to be guardians of this early period, the recognition that no-one "owns" the movement or its history tempers any impulse to fix it into a definitive form.<sup>41</sup> This widespread recognition does not, however, mean that the emotions generated by such heightened experiences are any less pressing, and at times painful.

In their 1990 interview, Sara Dowse and Julia Ryan reflected on the fact that women's liberation had been a discovery of and response to the oppression of women in general, and yet entailed a kind of life-changing involvement that would have been completely alien for most other women:

Sara Dowse

...it was very hard, in a way, to avoid putting many women who really needed to know what we were talking about offside just simply through our own bravado, our own language, our own...

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<sup>39</sup> In addition to reading first-hand accounts and movement publications, a sense of the tone and feeling of the early movement can be obtained through its enormous creative output, which includes music, visual art and poetry. One example is the Handbill collection held at ML SLNSW, which contains hand screen-printed calendars and posters. Several items in this collection are also quite humorous, such as a poster showing a photograph of a "Heinz Beginners Brains" jar with a spoon, and text reading, "If you care, give them Socialist-feminism. It's better value" (item no. 203). Handbills Relating to Women's Issues, 1977–1989, ML SLNSW PXD 673/142-204. Audio recordings are also evocative sources. For example, the NLA holds sound recordings of the first Women and Labour Conference at Macquarie University, NSW, 1978. NLA ORAL TRC 670.

<sup>40</sup> Suzanne Bellamy interviewed by the author, Canberra, 18 Dec. 2007.

<sup>41</sup> Suzanne Bellamy interviewed by Elizabeth (Biff) Ward, 10 March 2000, NLA ORAL TRC 3988.

Julia Ryan

Yes, I mean, it was such an extraordinary time. I remember we were at Bremer Street and Eileen was living there and she was so triumphant because she got her possessions down to one dress. That was very extreme but it was thought to be a worthy aim and, of course, for most women that was an extraordinary ambition. (Both laugh.)<sup>42</sup>

Some participants were spurred to join the movement because of their isolation in suburbia but there was no “natural” process through which the pre-existing grievances of housewives denied a place in public life were translated into the mobilisation for women’s liberation.<sup>43</sup> Significant numbers of women were already employed by the early 1970s, and women’s education levels had been rising throughout the twentieth century.<sup>44</sup> Many women were not denied access to employment as such, but were underpaid within it and restricted in advancement and recognition. Furthermore, as pointed out by social movement participants and scholars, a distinction needs to be made between the quite small numbers of women who were actively involved in creating the movement as such, and the much larger numbers who were affected by its ideas and identified with it to varying degrees.<sup>45</sup>

There was also a commitment to growing the movement by exposing women to its ideas and inviting them to adopt its analysis. Despite the organic way in which the early movement seemed to grow, this often resulted from a great deal of organising work and deliberate efforts to share insights and “remove the scales” from other women’s eyes.<sup>46</sup> The Women’s Commissions mentioned above are one example; another is the outreach courses that were convened with some success by women’s liberationists to reach housewives who might not otherwise encounter feminism.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Julia Ryan interviewed by Sara Dowse.

<sup>43</sup> Robyn Hartley and Dianne Parsons, ‘Women’s Liberation in Diamond Valley’, in Margaret Bevege, Margaret James and Carmel Shute (eds), *Worth Her Salt: Women at Work in Australia*, Sydney: Hale and Remonger, 1982, pp. 379–388.

<sup>44</sup> Sol Encel, Norman MacKenzie and Margaret Tebbutt, *Women and Society: An Australian Study*, Melbourne: Cheshire, 1974.

<sup>45</sup> Richard Flacks, ‘Knowledge for What? Thoughts on the State of Social Movement Studies’, in Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper (eds), *Rethinking Social Movements: Structure, Meaning, and Emotion*, Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003, pp. 135–153, pp. 142–144.

<sup>46</sup> Elizabeth (Biff) Ward interviewed by the author, Canberra, 13 Nov. 2007.

<sup>47</sup> Suzanne Bellamy, ‘Freedom from Unreal Loyalties’, in Jocelynne Scutt (ed.), *Different Lives*, Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1987, pp. 188–199.

A commitment to personal transformation as the core of social change was important to those in the women's liberation stream of the movement. This affected the extent to which some activists were inclined to engage on issues of employment and economic dependency. Many participants were more involved in other issues — those with which they personally identified. As Biff Ward, a founding participant in Canberra women's liberation recalls, most of the early local group was already employed or in university study, so “we were okay.” The group discussed women's economic dependence on men as a general problem, but it was not a central concern:

It was something we used to be horrified by rather than personally enraged about...we would look back historically at our mothers or grandmothers and go, how terrible and how they were trapped...but I didn't identify with that in my personal life.<sup>48</sup>

While class differences are clearly important in this example, as the interviewee herself acknowledged, her reluctance was also shaped by the practice of social change to which the group was committed. This involved first exploring “what is the personal” in an issue, and only on that basis proceeding to develop and share an analysis. Since she did not identify personally with the predicament of economic dependence at that time, political action on some general problem of economic dependence would have felt false, in conflict with “this method by which we'd analyse things and then move on to some sort of action.”

Of course, not all women's liberationists were committed to such a rigorous method of personal exploration as the basis of political action. Neither should such a commitment be understood as ruling out policy-oriented politics. Indeed, the Canberra women's liberation group itself engaged in proto-WEL-style lobbying when it wrote a submission on family law reform in early 1972.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, many women involved in women's liberation groups, such as the suburban groups in Diamond Valley, Vic., *were* motivated

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<sup>48</sup> Biff Ward interviewed by the author.

<sup>49</sup> Sawer, *Making Women Count*.

by their own experiences of economic dependence.<sup>50</sup> Yet as women's liberation groups developed, the principle of personal transformation as fundamental to political action became central to that strand of the women's movement. Therefore, despite a common ideology rejecting sex roles, there was no platform seen as authoritative in guiding coordinated political action on issues of work and care.

This is illustrated by the short-lived SA Working Women's Group, which was established by Adelaide women's liberationists in 1973 as a result of encouragement from groups in other States. By 1975, the group had foundered due to the lack of direct involvement from working-class women, according to Sylvia Kinder, a participant-historian.<sup>51</sup> Kinder compares the Adelaide and Melbourne groups in terms of personal experience, observing that the involvement of militant working-class women in the Melbourne group "ensured a greater understanding of initiatives suited to their needs."<sup>52</sup>

The original Adelaide women's liberation group was formed in 1969 by university women. It was guided by a Marxist model of revolution: leadership of the masses by a vanguard armed with a theoretical analysis.<sup>53</sup> Unlike the Sydney group, early actions in Adelaide were therefore not concerned with self-liberation from internalised sexism, but with protesting to raise public awareness about sexism in society, for example in advertising.<sup>54</sup> Increasingly, however, such externally-oriented protests were seen as inadequate. This helps to explain why, by 1975, Adelaide women's liberationists disbanded their Working Women's Group. They did not consider it sufficient to have a *theory* of women's oppression in the workforce. In their view, action had to emerge from the *experiences* of the oppressed themselves. Adelaide women's liberationists could have protested against the injustices faced by women in the workforce by copying tactics from elsewhere, as had happened earlier with protests against beauty pageants.<sup>55</sup> But the rejection of instrumentalist political action made this unacceptable.

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<sup>50</sup> Hartley and Parsons, 'Women's Liberation in Diamond Valley'.

<sup>51</sup> Kinder, 'Adelaide Women's Liberation', p. 376.

<sup>52</sup> Kinder, 'Adelaide Women's Liberation', p. 376.

<sup>53</sup> Kinder, 'Adelaide Women's Liberation', p. 368.

<sup>54</sup> Summers, *Ducks on the Pond*.

<sup>55</sup> Summers, *Ducks on the Pond*.

Several women interviewed by the author stressed that the groups they were involved in disapproved of action in which means and ends were treated as separate. Some participants applied an explicitly non-directional philosophy to the idea of the movement itself. Speaking at the 1975 Women and Politics Conference, a participant insisted:

The main thing I want to comment on is this business about what is the best thing to do... We're not a Bolshevik party. We're not going to say, next Tuesday we'll do this, and on Wednesday that, and so forth. We can see the whole, which bits we get involved in, and out of those bits come the new bits, and we change ourselves. I'm quite a different person from what I was five years ago. And I think that question is just irrelevant. Once you're in there you're there.<sup>56</sup>

For such participants, the slogan “the personal is political” has meant more than just a statement that formerly private issues such as abortion or depression can and should be seen as political issues affecting the whole of society, and women in particular. More fundamentally, “the personal is political” challenged the very existence of a private self protected and separate from politics, and demanded that political action should be based on personal experience.

### **The growth of practical action**

As the movement developed, employment and income issues became closely associated with “reformist” efforts to use government policy to achieve structural change for all women. However, it was not the case that only reform-minded feminists were interested in work, or that work was only considered in policy-oriented terms. For example, there were serious efforts to transform the meaning of work itself, not only in terms of what

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<sup>56</sup> Unidentified participant, Women and Politics Conference, Canberra, 1975. Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC), *Papers and Proceedings: The Women and Politics Conference 1975 – Volume Two*, Canberra: Australian Government Printing Service (AGPS), 1977, p. 146. With support from the Office of the Prime Minister and the Women's Affairs Branch in DPMC, the conference organisers were able to record, transcribe and publish discussions held at the conference. Apart from those presenting papers, participants in these discussions were not identified by name.

came to be known as “unpaid work,” but also in terms of creativity, technology and the labour of uncovering and developing “women’s culture.” This was the intention behind the groundbreaking first Women and Labour Conference in 1978.<sup>57</sup> Speaking at that conference, Stella Nord argued that innovative ways of viewing work were actually essential to prevent the movement’s action on these issues being reduced to sterile slogans by other political actors:

One of the things that I think we have to do, now one of the reasons why the women’s liberation movement has been so successful is because we’ve been innovative, we’ve been creative, we’ve set new standards, new ideas about human relationships and I really feel that we’ve got to bring this sort of thing into our demands around jobs...We have to be bold, we’ve got to be daring, and we’ve got to advance new ideas. I mean we’re not going to solve the answers here; someone said to me I don’t think we’re going to make any decisions and resolve anything, I don’t think this conference is to resolve anything; this conference is to try and stimulate thought...I believe that’s what we’ve got to do, because if we don’t advance alternatives, we’re just going to get nowhere, they’re going to generalise, they’re going to say “right of married women to work.” I mean, what? Where? Even single women haven’t got the right to work.<sup>58</sup>

One possible response to the gendered division of labour that was considered and generally found to be unfeasible was the collectivisation of domestic work. The Canberra women’s liberation group placed a notice in *The Canberra Times* advertising a public discussion on collective living as a way to solve the problems of housework and domestic relations.<sup>59</sup> As one of the main proponents, along with Biff Ward, Julia Ryan recalls:

...there were lots of wonderful fantasies, of course, about all the equipment you could buy and we actually got to the stage of looking at

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<sup>57</sup> Suzanne Bellamy interviewed by the author. Suzanne Bellamy was the principal organiser of the 1978 conference.

<sup>58</sup> Women and Labour Conference, sound recording, 1978, NLA ORAL TRC 670-22/s1.

<sup>59</sup> Julia Ryan interviewed by Sara Dowse.

empty premises. We looked, I remember, at the former Danish Chancellery or Embassy or something.<sup>60</sup>

Yet after visiting Mavis Robertson's and Joyce Stephens' attempt to create such a collective living arrangement in Sydney, Ward and Ryan eventually decided not to proceed:

Mavis and Joyce were less than enthusiastic about the whole venture, and the thing that struck Biff and me was that everything that happened related to them. Now that they didn't have the burden or responsibility of the single household, the two of them had the burden, a much greater burden of responsibility of this conglomerate — that they were actually still doing the traditional women's role of running the household. I'm not saying they did all the work — they didn't — but they organised all the work and they made sure the rosters worked. So they were... sort of had moved up the style of the managerial skills that come into housekeeping but it was still oppressive and, of course, it was undervalued, et cetera. They weren't being recognised for these skills; just the whole thing would've fallen apart if they didn't ... and we were struck by this. They didn't articulate it as much as we did later, talking about it, and we could see what was happening, or what we thought was happening.

So we decided that, when we come back to Canberra ... we thought, "Well, we won't call a meeting of the group. We'll just see if one of them takes the initiative, to see if they do," and nobody ever did, of course. It would've been exactly the same situation; Biff and I would've run this very large household.<sup>61</sup>

Apart from such experimental forms and ideas about redefining work, as the movement became more publicly visible and responded to political challenges and opportunities, issues of work and income came to be a major focus of its structural/goal-directed

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<sup>60</sup> Julia Ryan interviewed by Sara Dowse.

<sup>61</sup> Julia Ryan interviewed by Sara Dowse.

political activity. Perhaps inevitably too, Nord's fear that the definitions of others would dominate was, in part, borne out.

From very early in the 1970s, there was a developing impetus within the movement towards "practical" action, in part because the movement quickly broadened its base to include more women who had feminist commitments, skills and energy but were less oriented to personal-transformative change.<sup>62</sup> Some women's liberationists, too, felt compelled by the suffering exposed in testimonials and the growing movement literature to take action for women beyond their consciousness-raising groups. Practical action also gave feminists a way to work across class and other divides. Joan Staples, a former WEL member who has also worked in the environment movement and consumer organisations, comments that the early period of the women's movement "was the first time I'd seen a movement really reach out...trying to move out of its class" (the middle class) through initiatives such as women's health centres.<sup>63</sup>

Two streams of practical action can be identified: services (including refuges and women's health services), which were developed by women's liberation groups together with some WEL groups, and lobbying and policy development, which was undertaken mainly by WEL and the femocrats.<sup>64</sup> Several women interviewed by the author referred to the distance that developed between those who explored the personal and those who concentrated on achieving externally-identifiable change through some form of collective action. Deborah McCulloch was an early participant in women's liberation who went on to co-found WEL SA and became the first Women's Adviser to the Premier of that State. She recalls:

Not everybody did it and there was a greater gap at that point between women who went into the personal, what stopped us from becoming what we wanted, and [other] women who were much more into collective, less

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<sup>62</sup> Sawyer, *Making Women Count*.

<sup>63</sup> Joan Staples interviewed by the author, Sydney, 8 Feb. 2007.

<sup>64</sup> Similar patterns of movement development have been identified in other Western countries. Lee Ann Banaszak, Karen Beckwith and Dieter Rucht, 'When Power Relocates: Interactive Changes in Women's Movements and States', in Lee Ann Banaszak, Karen Beckwith and Dieter Rucht (eds), *Women's Movements Facing the Reconfigured State*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 1–29, p. 21.

personal action. So it [the 1980s] was one of the times when the gap between us was large.<sup>65</sup>

For other participants, however, the differences were not so much between different individuals, as between different approaches. In this view, many feminists perceived themselves as committed to a total transformation in gender relations, while pragmatically expressing a need to make practical changes. Val Marsden of WEL WA reflected:

Thinking about the different kinds of feminism that we've since become aware of...like radical feminism, liberal feminism and socialist feminism...I suppose in our heads we were more radical feminists, we recognised that patriarchy was the problem, we couldn't wait to overturn patriarchy to get changes made [but] we were working more as liberal feminists...seeing that we needed to make change through policy and through the legal structure in order to achieve equality for women — better educational access and legal equality.<sup>66</sup>

This suggests, too, that the common typology distinguishing liberal, radical and socialist feminism should be used with care in the Australian case, and with recognition that it does not necessarily reflect the distinctions made by participants at the time. The weakness of the three-way typology is also emphasised by women's liberation participant Sue Jackson in a 1997 interview with Ruth Ford: "...this neat categorisation....None of it recognises that it wasn't that neat, or that people, individuals, could have been more than one of those things at various times, or even at the same time."<sup>67</sup> Elizabeth Reid, for example, was a women's liberation and WEL participant who became the first Women's Adviser to the Australian Prime Minister. Reid identified herself as a "radical feminist," yet worked within the government for reformist goals, a practice that was a hallmark of the supposedly "liberal" feminist of

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<sup>65</sup> Deborah McCulloch interviewed by the author, Adelaide, 21 Sept. 2007.

<sup>66</sup> Val Marsden interviewed by the author, Perth, 26 Oct. 2006.

<sup>67</sup> Susan Magarey, 'Memory and Desire: Feminists Re-membering Feminism', *Lilith*, no. 14, 2005, pp. 1–13, p. 10.

later criticism.<sup>68</sup> In such cases, feminists pursued the methods of action that they saw as being open to them and potentially effective, even where these methods did not fully express all aspects of their feminist analysis.

Women involved in WEL, in particular, have described their involvement in WEL's outward-focused activities (such as the candidate surveys and submission-writing) in terms of an intoxicating sense of empowerment and the utilisation of previously dormant skills.<sup>69</sup> Action on identifiable targets of change, even if those targets were recognised as representing only a small part of the complex mosaic of patriarchy, seems to have fulfilled powerful desires for the women involved. This suggests that discussions of emotion and transformation in the movement should not be confined to the experiences of those groups, such as women's liberation groups, that were overtly radical and committed to new forms of action.

### **Continuity and generational overlap**

The increasing importance of practical, goal-oriented action reflects the changing composition and opportunities of the movement in the 1970s and into the 1980s.<sup>70</sup> New participants joined the movement and Labor governments were elected at the federal level (1972 and 1983) and at the state level in NSW (1976) and SA (1970). From another perspective, though, the development of "practical" feminist responses represented a return to, or continuity with, pre-women's-liberation modes of feminist activity. For instance, the Women's Bureau within the Federal Department of Employment and Industrial Relations had been established in 1963, partly in response to lobbying from organisations such as the AFWV over several decades.<sup>71</sup> The Bureau became an important inspiration and template for the development of policy machinery to promote "women's interests" within government from the 1970s and 1980s. Practical

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<sup>68</sup> 'Gloria Steinem and Elizabeth Reid Talk about Revolution', *Ms.*, Jan. 1976, pp. 65–67, p. 84, pp. 88–90.

<sup>69</sup> Sawyer, *Making Women Count*.

<sup>70</sup> Chappell, *Gendering Government*.

<sup>71</sup> Lani Russell and Marian Sawyer, 'The Rise and Fall of the Australian Women's Bureau', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 45 no. 3, 1999, pp. 362–275.

reforms and projects helped the movement to conceive of itself more broadly as continuous and coherent in history and philosophy.<sup>72</sup>

As women's liberation activity gathered pace in the early 1970s, generational conflicts emerged between feminists who became involved during the second wave and those who had been active in the previous decades. Many younger feminists knew little about earlier campaigns or organisations, and assumed they were the first to address the movement's key concerns.<sup>73</sup> Continuity in practical action sometimes helped to bridge the generations, bringing longer-standing and newer participants together. Bessie Guthrie (1905–1977) was a designer and publisher who, from the 1950s, worked to improve the situation of women and girls caught up in the criminal justice and welfare systems.<sup>74</sup> As documented by Suzanne Bellamy, in 1970, Guthrie joined with the women's liberationists of Glebe, Sydney, to organise protests on similar issues, to assist in the publication of the newspaper *Mejane*, and to establish the first women's refuge, Elsie.<sup>75</sup> Bellamy also recalls the Glebe women's liberation group organising a direct action with women of the Communist Party to force a local inn to open its male-only bar to women:

...we all dressed up as men and we met the Working Women's Group on the corner of Parramatta Road and Crystal Street and we went to liberate the public bar at the Petersham Inn, and this was in 1970 and it was a wonderful coming together of two styles. You know, they had the leaflets and they were in the floral frocks — that they really wore! And they all

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<sup>72</sup> Australian National Advisory Committee on International Women's Year (ANAC), *International Women's Year: Report of the Australian National Advisory Committee*, Canberra: Australian Government Printer, 1976, p. 20.

<sup>73</sup> An example of this is the assumption that the practice of surveying election candidates on feminist issues, which WEL copied from the USA in 1972, was then without precedent in Australia. In fact, various women's organisations had been conducting election questionnaires since the late nineteenth century. See for example Deborah Jordan, "'There is no Question More Perplexing at the Present Time and More Frequently Discussed than Women's Place in Society": Léontine Cooper and the Queensland Suffrage Movement, 1888–1903', *Hecate*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2004, pp. 81–102, p. 94; 'State Executive — Questionnaire Issued to all Federal Candidates', *Dawn*, 15 Oct. 1925, p. 7.

<sup>74</sup> Suzanne Bellamy, 'Guthrie, Bessie Jean Thompson (1905–1977)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Online Edition, 1996, <<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A140394b.htm>> (accessed 25 August 2008).

<sup>75</sup> Bellamy, 'Guthrie'. Suzanne Bellamy was a founding member of the Glebe women's liberation group and became a close friend of Guthrie. Bellamy also worked with Judy Rapley to research and produce a radio documentary about Guthrie: Australian Broadcasting Commission, 'Creating a Space: The Life of Bessie Guthrie', sound recording, Radio National, 28 Oct. 2007.

turned up after work...and they looked, I remember Joyce Stevens tells the story, she said they were on one side of the road and they looked across and they thought, what are those funny-looking men all standing there? And it was us! We had gone to considerable lengths. My dad had actually lent me his suit... Gale Kelly...dressed up as a boiler-maker's apprentice and Barbara Levy was an East End Jew, she was marvellous...we had characters, oh yes, because we loved this!...And you know, Kate Jennings, who had grown up in the country was this country hick with a straw hanging out of her mouth...<sup>76</sup>

Irene Greenwood (1898–1992) was a broadcaster and feminist who in 1930 had herself been “welcomed with open arms” into the United Associations of Women by older feminists Linda Littlejohn and Jessie Street: “I found myself being a secretary to their many committees and in this way I learnt to know the feminist movement and was greatly helped by them.”<sup>77</sup> In 1975, and then aged 75, Greenwood was still sufficiently active and committed to take up an invitation to join the National Advisory Council to support Elizabeth Reid in planning the Australian government’s activities for International Women’s Year (IWY) (discussed further below). Greenwood generally welcomed the different approaches of the newer participants and reflected on the differences in feminist activism that she had witnessed in her lifetime. In a 1976 interview she observed that the feminist tradition in which she had begun her activism in the 1920s had itself rejected the older style of philanthropy and embraced lobbying, legislative change and parliamentary representation. Greenwood noted that such activity was now (in the 1970s) called “reformist,” though “we did not use the term then.”<sup>78</sup>

In 1980, Greenwood, then vice-president of the AFWV, had recorded the burden of responsibility she felt about the future of the organisation and her hopes for WEL to take over its roles.<sup>79</sup> Greenwood’s sense of responsibility was especially acute because her own mother, Mary Driver, had been among the generation of WA feminists who

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<sup>76</sup> Suzanne Bellamy interviewed by the author.

<sup>77</sup> Irene Greenwood interviewed by Hazel de Berg, 7 March 1976, de Berg Collection, NLA ORAL TRC 1/916.

<sup>78</sup> Irene Greenwood interviewed by Hazel de Berg.

<sup>79</sup> Irene Greenwood, Diary, 1980, Irene Greenwood Collection, Murdoch University Library, Box 10.

founded the Women's Service Guilds and the AFWV. In 1982 the AFWV formally disbanded and in doing so passed on to WEL its status of affiliation to the International Alliance of Women (IAW, formerly IWSA).<sup>80</sup>

Encounters between activists of the second wave and those whose feminism began earlier were sometimes disconcerting for the latter, while the more recent participants were seemingly absorbed by their conviction that specifically new forms of action were needed. In her own notes, Greenwood lamented the lack of understanding among the new women's movement participants about the ideals and motivations of earlier feminists:

How can I explain the moral force that drove them forward to a readership which dismisses it as old-fashioned and dated, to a generation reared in pragmatic opportunism?...I find myself using old-fashioned terms to described these women as individuals and in the group. They believed in "eternal verities"...There is need of *interpretation* of such ideals regarded as at worst *dangerous* and at best *quaint* by today's younger feminists. *Behaviour* rooted in tradition has little appeal and is not regarded with much tolerance....I despair in my attempt to interpret the women of my mother's generation to the young radical (lesbian) feminists (among others)...<sup>81</sup>

Yet Greenwood also saw how important it was that the new movement made women's personal lives a legitimate focus for struggle. Greenwood related the "clash of loyalties" in her own life to the "perpetual problem" of women, to "win time for herself" while being "at the behest of others always." She observed, "The New Feminist Movement has given women a sense of value and significance basically to/for themselves and secondarily to the larger community."<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Sawyer, *Making Women Count*, pp. 259–260.

<sup>81</sup> Irene Greenwood, *Research and Other Notes* (handwritten exercise book), Irene Greenwood Collection, n.d., Murdoch University Library, Box 10. Emphasis in original.

<sup>82</sup> Greenwood, *Research and Other Notes*.

Some of the older feminists took the often striking differences in style in their stride. For example, Ruby Rich (1888–1988) was a former active office-bearer in the UA and the IAW. Rich was present at the Sept. 1975 Women and Politics Conference reception at Parliament House, at which then-Prime Minister Gough Whitlam spoke. At this reception some activist women caused a media uproar by dressing as men and graffiti-ing the bathroom mirrors with lipstick.<sup>83</sup> Interviewed the following year, Rich first commented on the “real togetherness” at the conference, and Whitlam’s “beautiful” speech, before adding, “There will always be controversies; it’s just one part and parcel of life.”<sup>84</sup> Other older women’s movement activists found not only the style but the demands and philosophy of the new movement perplexing. Helen Moyes (1881–1979) was an author who had been involved in the Women’s Social and Political Union’s suffrage campaigns in England and Scotland before resigning in rejection of the Pankhursts’ “violent tactics.” Moyes was later treasurer of the YWCA in Sydney for seven years. Interviewed in 1975, Moyes expressed a critique of women’s liberation that indicated, perhaps at the utmost extreme, the deep differences between maternalist and second-wave philosophies of feminism:

...some of the women’s liberation ideas are extreme and rather foolish because men in the world do all the material heavy work; women don’t build bridges, they don’t lay railways, they don’t build great structures. They haven’t really written any of the great books of the world, they’ve never done the great sculptures of the world, let’s acknowledge it. Men have excelled in all the world’s material things and why we should challenge it I can never make out. Woman has her own function which is different. Her great function in the deep sense is mothering...<sup>85</sup>

To those women’s liberationists then calling for “24 Hour Childcare” and also to the WEL members beginning to lobby for female apprenticeships in male-dominated heavy

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<sup>83</sup> A statue of King George V was adorned with a placard reading “Women and Revolution, not Women and Bureaucracy” and “Lesbians are Lovely.” The bathroom graffiti conveyed similar messages. Elizabeth Reid, ‘The Child of Our Movement: A Movement of Women’, in Jocelyne A. Scutt (ed.), *Different Lives: Reflections on the Women’s Movement and Visions of its Future*, Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1987, pp. 9–20, p. 19.

<sup>84</sup> Ruby Rich interviewed by Hazel de Berg, 4 August 1976, de Berg Collection, NLA ORAL TRC 1/994.

<sup>85</sup> Helen Moyes interviewed by Hazel de Berg, 28 August 1975, de Berg Collection, NLA ORAL TRC 1/850.

industries, such sentiments would (had Moyes aired them more broadly) have been deeply objectionable, especially coming from “a sister.”

### **Methods and ideology**

Among the activists of the 1970s and 1980s, the key distinctions were often perceived as being between methods of action rather than underlying ideology, since there was a presumption of unity on key ideological issues, particularly on the need to break down sex roles. For many, there was a pragmatic acceptance that simply doing “what could be done” would not change fundamental problems in gender relations. Speaking about her experience as a WEL activist in the WA context, academic Joan Eveline recalls:

Even though a lot of those people were also women’s liberationists and they knew when they had their women’s liberation hat on that there’s really nothing you can do except get out there and revolutionise the world, they would still put on the WEL hat and go and work in a different way.<sup>86</sup>

Patricia Crawford, a historian involved in feminist activism at the University of WA, comments:

We were working...to try to get the equal opportunity legislation and the affirmative action legislation and we certainly felt that they were significant gains, but I think we were all — the people I worked with — were very aware that, I mean, this is the kind of stuff you can campaign for; within a liberal tradition they’ve got to grant it to you because it’s palpably unjust but it doesn’t actually address the issues.<sup>87</sup>

As this quote illustrates, the method of action chosen affects the choice of issues: women’s rights to and at work offered definite possibilities for feminists who were prepared to engage with the state.

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<sup>86</sup> Joan Eveline interviewed by the author, Perth, 24 Oct. 2006.

<sup>87</sup> Patricia Crawford interviewed by the author, Perth, 24 Oct. 2006.

Of course, the degree to which methods of action were considered to be ideological issues is itself a matter on which feminists differed greatly, as evidenced by the concerns about “means and ends” discussed elsewhere in this chapter. In an interview by Biff Ward in 2000, Suzanne Bellamy addressed the question of funding, which had been a divisive issue for the movement. In doing so, she lamented what she saw as the loss of a kind of attentiveness to other levels of meaning that attach to actions:

...funding de-emphasised our autonomy, and I don't mean that we shouldn't have had the money that was our money. It was never about not having the money. It was about seeing the implications of it, and I think we lost the sort of internal process conversation at some point.... We used to talk a lot about the implications of everything we did, and at some point that was lost. It was well and truly lost by the '80s, and our divisions became more and more marked.<sup>88</sup>

While many women's movement participants were certainly less concerned in general by these problems of method and philosophy, the potential extent of the differences in approach can be seen by contrasting Bellamy's quote with a quote from Eva Cox, one of the founding members of WEL. In the introduction to her paper, “Research as Politics,” which she presented to the 1975 Women and Politics Conference, Cox argued that additional effort should be devoted to feminist research on women's paid work to counter the biased and sexist findings of mainstream studies:

The name of the game is politics, and politics is about power and influence. I am not trying to work out why, but whatever the reasons figures, statistics, percentages and “facts” are part of the game we are all playing.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Suzanne Bellamy interviewed by Biff Ward.

<sup>89</sup> Eva Cox, ‘Research as Politics’, in DPMC, *Papers and Proceedings: The Women and Politics Conference 1975 — Volume One*, Canberra: AGPS, 1977, pp. 114–118; p. 114.

Other feminists, while less explicitly embracing “the game,” were similarly frustrated by what they saw as fruitless introspection, as in Elizabeth Reid’s 1974 comment that: “The main preoccupation of the women’s movement in Australia at present is the contemplation of its own navel.”<sup>90</sup> Some, such as this unidentified participant in the 1975 Women and Politics Conference, became more convinced of the need for mainstream political influence: commenting at the end of the “Campaigning” session, she said, “I have suddenly realised, through this conference, that I’ll probably have to now join a party, and see what I can do further. I’ve never joined a political party but I think possibly political power has to be achieved somehow.”<sup>91</sup>

### **Commitments and instrumental action**

So far this chapter has described the increasing prominence of publicly-visible, goal-oriented activism within the Australian movement, and shown how this was well-suited to the articulation of specific goals, such as equal opportunity legislation. It remains to be explained, however, why particular groups tended to pursue workforce participation and equal opportunity more vigorously than other approaches, such as payments to women in the home. They also made tactical choices about how to engage with the public politics of work and care.

In keeping with the all-encompassing nature of early second-wave feminist analysis, employment rights were not, initially, seen as separate from claims relating to care and support for non-employed mothers. As recalled by Helen Creed, who was involved in women’s liberation and the welfare rights movement in Melbourne and later in Perth, rather than experiencing a choice between workforce and care oriented strategies, it was “all about valuing women’s work.”<sup>92</sup> In 1973, for example, WEL WA resolved to demand an increase in child endowment to reflect the increased cost of living, at the

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<sup>90</sup> Elizabeth Reid, ‘The Women we Ignore’, *Refractory Girl*, no. 6, June 1974, pp. 9–12, p. 11.

<sup>91</sup> Unidentified participant, DPMC, *Women and Politics Conference — Volume One*, p. 113. See note 56 of this chapter.

<sup>92</sup> Helen Creed interviewed by the author, Perth, 26 Oct. 2006.

same time as pursuing women's access to the workforce.<sup>93</sup> However, as movement organisations developed to engage with policy arenas, visible feminist activism prompted often heated opposition, particularly in the context of increasing unemployment.<sup>94</sup> Feminists concerned with achieving change through public politics found themselves having to consolidate their positions and consider the political risks that they faced. This translated into a public emphasis on women's right to work, and the need for legal protections and services to enable women's workforce participation.

The process of political adaptation can be seen in feminist activism on childcare. Childcare was one of the unifying goals of Australian second-wave feminism, yet the way this goal was understood and articulated evolved significantly during the 1970s and 1980s. Childcare has come to be associated almost exclusively with a claim for women's need to be freed of care responsibilities in order to participate in employment. However, arguments for childcare were initially conceived in terms of the community's responsibilities for children, and the need for collective models of living, to break down the isolation of nuclear family units. Several interviewees commented on the change in emphasis, as the holistic model became more focused and utilitarian. As Helen Creed explained:

Unlike now where we tend to look at childcare in terms of, and link it to, women's ability to work,...in those days it was very much, "it's a community responsibility for children," and in the women's movement it was part of the attack on patriarchy and the family, with childcare being a community responsibility.<sup>95</sup>

Importantly, given the goal of "growing the movement," childcare was also seen as enabling women to come into contact with other women, and hence take action against

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<sup>93</sup> 'Reports from Subcommittees', *Broadsheet* (WEL WA), vol. 1 no. 2, 1973, p. 14; 'Child Endowment', *Broadsheet* (WEL WA), vol. 1 no. 3, 1973, p. 15. Note that there were various State and national WEL newsletters called "Broadsheet."

<sup>94</sup> Margaret Power, 'Women and Economic Crises: The Great Depression and the Present Crisis', paper to the Women and Labour Conference, Sydney, 1978. Suzanne Bellamy has also commented on the increased opposition that was mobilised as the movement became more visible. Suzanne Bellamy interviewed by the author.

<sup>95</sup> Helen Creed interviewed by the author.

their common oppression. For some, this very broad understanding of the need for childcare meant that it should be linked to policy areas as diverse as town planning:

Surely the most elementary thing to make the women's movement stronger would be to release women from child care and to also give the children a good family set up...Surely we could apply to the Minister for Housing in these newly developing suburbs to have our homes around a central area. We'd still have our own individual homes but around a central area where there would be someone to look after the children.<sup>96</sup>

This very broad and visionary approach gave way, with increasing government interest in the childcare issue, to arguments based on women's employment and on children's welfare.<sup>97</sup> Eva Cox explains this in terms consistent with strategic framing:

We did not have a heavy emphasis on...individualism...That whole individualistic choice stuff really came up I think in the 1980s, as a response to the changing economic environment. And we made decisions at that point [with the establishment of a women's economic think tank] to use the rhetoric of neoliberal economics, to get something, so we pushed childcare as an attachment to mothers working quite deliberately in order to get funding...[P]ossibly some of the mess of childcare now is because we pushed childcare as a service to working mothers, so there was no rationale for keeping it as a community service, while we certainly opposed the idea of funding the commercial sector.<sup>98</sup>

Elizabeth Reid makes a similar point, emphasising that although feminists were trying to give women choices, this was always in relation to the fact that "the patriarchal pathway for women didn't involve any choice." In this view, the problem was "a lack of agency, a lack of autonomy":

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<sup>96</sup> Unidentified participant, DPMC, *Women and Politics Conference — Volume Two*, p. 146. See note 55.

<sup>97</sup> A similar shift has been identified in the Canadian context. Alexandra Dobrowolsky and Jane Jenson, 'Shifting Representations of Citizenship: Canadian Politics of "Women" and "Children"', *Social Politics*, vol. 11 no. 2, 2004, pp. 154–180.

<sup>98</sup> Eva Cox interviewed by the author, Sydney, 16 Jan. 2007.

We articulated this in terms of choice but in a very different sense...from the concept used in neoliberalism...because it was used to describe a sense of agency which had no atomism about it. It was about addressing systemic restrictions on women's lives and about women working together to achieve this.<sup>99</sup>

Eva Cox recalls that, when the WEL national conference in 1974 adopted "women in the workforce" as its highest priority,<sup>100</sup> this was in part a way to pre-empt predicted attacks on women's employment:

Inflation was going up and unemployment was going up, so we were conscious of the fact that we were trying for women in the workforce at a time of unemployment, so therefore I think we decided to take it up as an issue.<sup>101</sup>

This prediction proved to be correct. By the mid-late 1970s there were growing attacks on married women's employment in the context of rising joblessness. The Assistant General Manager of the Bank of NSW, Russell Prowse argued in *The Stock Exchange Journal* that "...if there were no married women in the workforce, or the percentage was the same as it was in the 1930s, we would have virtually no unemployment in Australia" (Oct. 1977). "If Mum quit work there'd be jobs for the boys (and girls)," proclaimed *The Weekend Australian* (Jan. 1978).<sup>102</sup>

Commitment to concrete goals, such as childcare, in the context of rising political opposition also guided the choices made by feminists such as Cox:

I thought you are not going to get childcare if people think mothers should stay at home...and that it was a good idea to, in a sense, make it easy for women to work because they were still tied down with all the stuff that we

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<sup>99</sup> Elizabeth Reid interviewed by the author, Canberra, 1 March 2007.

<sup>100</sup> 'National Conference January 18–20', *Broadsheet* (WEL Australia), vol. 3 no. 24, 1974, pp. 6–11.

<sup>101</sup> Eva Cox interviewed by the author.

<sup>102</sup> Both of these quotes are from Mary Owen, 'Notions about the Employment/Unemployment of Women', paper to the Women and Labour Conference, Sydney, 1978.

were fighting, the child psychiatrists, the other people who were saying the women shouldn't be working.<sup>103</sup>

Such decisions, concerning concrete possibilities and risks, were also evident in the eventual rejection of proposals for a “mother’s wage” or “wages for housework” by most groups within the movement, including those best-placed to push for such initiatives, such as WEL and key insiders like Elizabeth Reid. The Advisory Committee for IWY noted pragmatically that a mother’s wage “would drain money away from child care centres.”<sup>104</sup> A conversation between Reid and Gloria Steinem, which was published in *Ms* magazine shortly after Reid resigned as Women’s Adviser, further illuminates the reasons for rejecting a “mother’s wage”:

Gloria Steinem:

What if labor at home, whether done by women or men, were given at least the minimum wage? If this was an organized populist demand, complete with strikes and so on, could it put an unbearable stress on the system?

Elizabeth Reid:

I think it would be one of the most backward steps that has happened to the Women’s Movement for some time. All that does is reinforce the existing sex roles in society. It doesn’t question them at all. Wages for mothers, wages for housework, is a right-wing demand. Every fascist and reactionary political party in history has asked for it. It is one of the most effective means of keeping women where the fascists think we ought to be — in the house.<sup>105</sup>

These decisions were not merely tactical ones taken for short-term reasons. They also reflected deep ideological commitments. Among the diverse groups of women’s movement participants, there was a common belief that socially imposed sex roles were

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<sup>103</sup> Eva Cox interviewed by the author.

<sup>104</sup> ANAC, *International Women’s Year*, p. 30.

<sup>105</sup> ‘Gloria Steinem and Elizabeth Reid Talk’, p. 88.

the cause of women's oppression. The reinforcement of sex roles was therefore seen as the most significant risk to be avoided when assessing proposals such as the mothers' wage or wages for housework.<sup>106</sup> In Bellamy's words, for example, the idea of wages for housework just had "too much baggage."<sup>107</sup> Responding to political opposition, groups such as WEL therefore made decisions on given policy issues (such as childcare and the "mother's wage") to promote women's paid work above other options. Yet such decisions posed another problem in terms of the movement's constituency.

### **Differences between women**

In addition to the movement's diverse methods and philosophies of action, there were conflicts between women of different backgrounds and needs.<sup>108</sup> Increasingly, it had to be acknowledged that the general message of valuing women's domestic labour might come to be seen as a platitude, when so much of the movement's publicly visible activity was oriented to helping women escape from domestic isolation into education and jobs.<sup>109</sup> This issue was brought to a head by the counter-mobilisation from the mid-1970s of groups such as Women's Action Alliance, who were working to defend the male breadwinner model and protect women from having to seek employment. The report on IWY addressed this issue head on, and sought to refocus the debate on the need for structural change:

The activities of the Australian National Advisory Committee have been criticised on the basis that a large section of women in the community were being ignored, or that at least there was a lack of concern for the position of the wife or mother who chooses to work at home, rather than in the paid workforce... [But the] insistence on a special role for women in the home must be replaced by a more balanced view of the range of equally possible roles. It is only when we have recognised the special

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<sup>106</sup> Judith Malcolm and Ruth Devrell, 'Against a Stay at Home Wage (or Shit Workers of the World Unite)', paper to the WEL National Conference, Melbourne, 1974.

<sup>107</sup> Suzanne Bellamy interviewed by the author.

<sup>108</sup> While I focus here on the division between women in the labour force and women in unpaid caring roles, there were other important rifts and disputes discussed in detail elsewhere. As in the USA, the most prominent among these concerned racism and homophobia in the women's movement.

<sup>109</sup> Meredith Edwards, 'Child Care Allowance', in DPMC, *Women and Politics Conference — Volume Two*, pp. 148–153.

problems which the woman in our society faces, and developed measures to remove all disadvantages, that we can achieve responsible freedom of choice and a real and continuing independence.<sup>110</sup>

Several interviewees mentioned “us and them” conflicts between women at work and women at home. As a former WEL SA activist and early women’s liberation participant, Viv Szekeres recalls, “The women at home felt that they were treated as kind of poor relations, and the women at work felt slightly irritated by them.”<sup>111</sup>

At a time when public debate emphasised the supposed damage that working mothers did to their children by using childcare, some feminists were very concerned to counter this idea. For Eva Cox, this imperative to respond overrode the risk of alienating “stay-at-home mothers”:

Eva Cox

...we just thought that if we were going to be full citizens, we should share the responsibility also of bringing in the money.

Interviewer

Do you think that risked giving the message to women that weren’t in paid work, that they weren’t taking responsibility?

Eva Cox

I guess I didn’t care....I mean, if it is not for the benefit of the child to stay home, why should it be recognised?<sup>112</sup>

Many feminists, however, did not take such a firm line, and some tried to articulate policy goals in a way that constructed women’s interests in common. For example, recognising the dangers of a split in the movement, feminist academic Meredith Edwards proposed a form of childcare allowance to be paid to all mothers,

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<sup>110</sup> ANAC, *International Women’s Year*, p. 27, p. 29.

<sup>111</sup> Viv Szekeres interviewed by the author, Adelaide, 20 Sept. 2007.

<sup>112</sup> Eva Cox interviewed by the author.

deliberately to unify women at home with women in the workforce through a common interest.<sup>113</sup> This, however, was never taken up and, in the context of increasingly organised and vocal opposition, many influential feminists such as Cox placed the highest priority on overcoming the strong public disapproval of mothers' employment, through policy and legislation.

### **Organisation and representation**

As the chapter has shown, organisations such as WEL became strongly oriented towards the use of instrumental political action to protect women's right to work. Yet, despite particular instances such as the 1974 WEL national conference's rejection of the mother's wage,<sup>114</sup> it would be inaccurate to characterise WEL's advocacy on these issues as highly-structured or centralised. As the conference report noted, for example, the "recommendations have no other status than as suggestions for WEL groups throughout Australia."<sup>115</sup> This statement echoes the self-limiting philosophy of the NCW in the interwar years, which was discussed in the previous chapter. Operating in this way limited the extent to which strategies were actually debated within a central forum. Several interviewees highlighted this point, when questioned about WEL's programs for political action. Discussing WEL WA's methods, Joan Eveline comments:

We never saw ourselves as a body that was centrally organised that should put this, that or something else on the agenda — that only happened very occasionally. Most of the time we were out there beavering away on particular [issues]....It wasn't that there was, kind of, debates within WEL as to whether WEL should be doing this or should be doing that. Because it was run in that way, it wasn't an issue, because nobody controlled it. It was groups who were independently picking up what they thought was important and what they could pull most people in around.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Edwards, 'Child Care Allowance', p. 148.

<sup>114</sup> 'National Conference January 18–20', p. 10.

<sup>115</sup> 'National Conference January 18–20', p. 6.

<sup>116</sup> Joan Eveline interviewed by the author.

However, WEL groups recognised the need to present a united front. This applied to WEL itself, but also led WEL to represent its actions as being on behalf of the women's movement, or women's interests more generally. Joan Eveline recalls how WEL WA operated:

You had lots of different groups and you just talk about, we just use those terms "women's liberation" and "Women's Electoral Lobby"... For the sake of some of the campaigns we projected it as if we were all going in the same direction. The issue there of course is that the people coming along behind us and the media and all, believed that! They believed that; we did a really good job of convincing them that there was a kind of unified movement.<sup>117</sup>

Julia Ryan places this in a broader context, arguing that the media has always been eager to proclaim the death of the women's movement, and that although the lack of identifiable structure has made it easier for them to do so, many participants always knew it was not so simple, or so bleak:

I mean the media had a lovely time gloating that the women's movement was dead because there was no longer...I mean, it was always pretty hard to get hold of some central spokesperson or anything like that. Then, of course, for a long time WEL kind of seemed to be the thing they fastened onto to get an opinion on anything but, of course, we knew all the time that our energy hadn't slackened and so forth and it wasn't that things... it's just that they weren't happening in the way they had at the beginning. Yes, I think that we've always just moved on, I mean, to whatever's appropriate and necessary at the time, as a form of organisation.<sup>118</sup>

While the second-wave women's movement has been criticised since the 1980s for allegedly assuming the universal common interests of women, as Jill Vickers has

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<sup>117</sup> Joan Eveline interviewed by the author.

<sup>118</sup> Julia Ryan interviewed by Sara Dowse.

shown, the process of engaging with political systems entails a powerful imperative to construct interests to represent.<sup>119</sup>

For women involved in reformist projects such as WEL, it was important not only to project an image of unity, but to understand their own activism as part of a diverse but ideologically coherent women's movement. This was achieved through two important and related ideas. One was the idea of a continuum of radicalism, in which the more extreme forms of feminism were seen as functional in "creating space" for reformist groups like WEL. This idea was mentioned by almost all of the author's interviewees who were WEL members or femocrats, in remarkably similar terms. Viv Szekeres reasons:

It was only because there were women in women's liberation who were out there, and who were wearing the boiler suits or whatever it was, out in front of the movement that we could continue to do the things that we were then doing...<sup>120</sup>

Similarly, Val Marsden comments:

We needed them, they were the cutting edge people...we all went out on marches together...you know, it was pro-choice marches or whatever, [we] recognised that they would do things that we wouldn't do...so we could trail along behind them and be more reasonable and maybe get what we wanted, and they would offend people, but that's necessary.<sup>121</sup>

Some WEL members acknowledged the importance of the women's liberation groups not only in "creating space" for more reform-oriented activism, but also in expanding their own knowledge and willingness to act. Robyn Murphy, who was active in WEL

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<sup>119</sup> Jill Vickers, 'The Problem with Interests: Making Political Claims for "Women"', in Louise A. Chappell and Lisa Hill (eds), *The Politics of Women's Interests: New Comparative Perspectives*, New York: Routledge, 2006, pp. 2–38.

<sup>120</sup> Viv Szekeres interviewed by the author.

<sup>121</sup> Val Marsden interviewed by the author. See also 'Summaries of Workshops, Session 1: WEL as a Feminist Lobby', WEL National Conference, Melbourne, 18–20 Jan. 1974, Records of WEL (Australia) NLA MS3683.

branches in Ballarat (regional Vic.), Darwin (Northern Territory) and Perth and also attended women's liberation activities, recalls that the women's liberationists: "certainly challenged my thinking...I read books that I wouldn't otherwise have read, and I probably was more vocal than I would otherwise have been."<sup>122</sup>

Alongside the idea of a continuum of radicalism, the other related notion was that reform was acceptable, so long as it created the "preconditions" for revolution — a revolution that was then seen as a real possibility.<sup>123</sup> An influential article in which American Charlotte Bunch argued this case was circulated in Australia.<sup>124</sup> Helen Creed remembered encountering this article:

I thought it was one of the best articles because basically what it did was say, listen, you need to be moving in the right direction and it doesn't matter as long as you're not going backwards, as long as you're not undermining then it's OK to be involved in reform, because the debate was always reform vs revolution and those who were involved in reform were seen to have sold out.<sup>125</sup>

This rationale was important in justifying feminists' efforts to gain women's access to paid work, particularly in the context of the poor quality of work that many women could expect to obtain:

Is one of the solutions to encourage women to enter the workforce? The answer to this must be yes. Of course with the limited types of work available — work in factories, the mail exchange, the typing pool — it is no panacea. But by working in a social situation the possibilities for social, cultural, political and trade union involvement become feasible on a far greater scale.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Robyn Murphy interviewed by the author, Perth, 26 Oct. 2006.

<sup>123</sup> 'Gloria Steinem and Elizabeth Reid Talk'.

<sup>124</sup> Charlotte Bunch, 'The Reform Toolkit', in Quest Staff (eds), *Building Feminist Theory: Essays from Quest*, New York and London: Longman, 1981, pp. 198–201, (first published 1974 in *Quest: A Feminist Quarterly*, vol. 1 no. 2).

<sup>125</sup> Helen Creed interviewed by the author.

<sup>126</sup> Sandra Zurbo, 'Wages for Housework: A Non-Solution', paper to the National Women's Conference on Feminism and Socialism, Melbourne, 1974, p. 58.

The Women's Work Project Group similarly argued:

In their isolated domestic labour, women are unlikely to organise together because they do not have the opportunity to share and accumulate common experiences with other workers and women.<sup>127</sup>

As these quotes indicate, feminists' orientations to work were also shaped by the broader philosophies of left politics. As well as the socialist idea of bringing women into "the social situation," the new left antipathy towards "careers" was influential. Sara Dowse, who was an early member of Canberra women's liberation, served as head of the Women's Affairs Section in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) from its establishment in 1974 until 1977. She recalls:

...the expectation about women's work was quite different from what it is now. None of us thought of having careers. And, you know, your job was something to give you economic freedom, to give you social interaction, because staying at home with children was often quite a lonely business.... [but] the sense that we would all be rocket scientists or even lawyers was not very strong in the movement, because the movement was left oriented and we didn't believe in careers anyway.<sup>128</sup>

A theory linking reform to revolution through "preconditions," together with an understanding of the movement as functionally composed of different parts, enabled many feminists to reconcile their political action with a vision of the movement as a broader whole seeking revolutionary social change. These understandings provided a sense of coherence for many movement participants, even as they found themselves having to represent "women's interests" and articulate policy goals in a way that

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<sup>127</sup> Women's Work Project Group, 'The Myth of Wages for Housework', Melbourne: Women's Work Project Group, 1976, p. 1.

<sup>128</sup> Sara Dowse interviewed by the author, Sydney, 28 Jan. 2007. Dowse resigned in protest when the section, by then called the Office of Women's Affairs, was removed from DPM&C. After her resignation she also became a member of WEL.

conflicted with the movement philosophy of acting in small groups on individual women's concerns.<sup>129</sup>

It is important to note that the sense of functional coherence within the movement conflicts with some other participants' impressions of loss. For these participants, the dominant understanding of Australian feminism is marred by an overemphasis on practical, externally-focused action, and disconnection from the personal-transformative methods and elements of the movement. As Biff Ward explains, "It's not that I decry the practical stuff; what I decry is that their stuff became it and our stuff disappeared."<sup>130</sup>

### **Peak bodies and discursive politics**

Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to evaluate the success of Australian women's movement activism, it is worth noting the connections between this historical study and some of the international comparative literature on women's movements and their effectiveness in influencing social policy. The features of the Australian movement that I highlight here are the lack of a peak body and the relative attention given to "practical" rather than discursive politics. Both of these relate to the commitment to action flowing from the personal experiences of movement participants, rather than developing political platforms for public representation of the movement as a whole.

While the policy changes brought about through Australian feminist activism in the 1970s and 1980s were significant, they have proven less durable than expected, for various reasons.<sup>131</sup> In particular, the legal and policy instruments introduced by the femocrats were vulnerable to state restructuring and the rise of neoliberal economic ideology within government from the late 1980s onward. Also, there was no longer enough publicly visible evidence of an oppositional, autonomous women's movement,

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<sup>129</sup> Pam Oldmeadow interviewed by Biff Ward on 2xx Canberra Community Radio, July 1977, NLA ORAL TRC 547/1.

<sup>130</sup> Biff Ward interviewed by the author.

<sup>131</sup> Teghtsoonian and Chappell, 'The Rise and Decline'.

to which the state would feel compelled to respond.<sup>132</sup> These factors have similarly been identified in the international comparative literature.<sup>133</sup>

As discussed in Chapter 2, in their important article on the Swedish women's movement in the 1930s, Barbara Hobson and Marika Lindholm suggest that its relative success in influencing the developing national welfare state derived in part from the movement's deliberate efforts to link the goal of women's employment with the amenable "master frame" of the state as a "folkhem" or "people's home."<sup>134</sup> In their account, this was achieved through the careful composing of constituencies and alliances, and sensitive attention to discursive political opportunities. Jessica Lindvert, in her comparison of Australian and Swedish gender policies, suggests that in Australia, organisational skills were more important to feminists' abilities to influence policy, while in Sweden feminists relied more on their discursive capacity.<sup>135</sup> Louise A. Chappell also emphasises Australian feminists' use of positive openings and shifts in the bureaucracy.<sup>136</sup> This was a pragmatic, policy-oriented approach that gave comparatively less attention to shifting and challenging broader public political discourses about gender, citizenship and work, even as women's movement participants themselves understood this broader challenge as an important goal. Furthermore, as this chapter shows, the relatively unstructured and diversified way in which Australian feminist organisations and groups mobilised further limited the extent to which attention could be given to "strategic framing" and "frame extension" projects.<sup>137</sup>

Australian feminists' success in legitimising a gender perspective as part of policy development has proven vulnerable, in part because broader discursive changes to the political culture have remained elusive in Australia. The Swedish "folkhem" can be contrasted with the relevant dominant "master frame" facing activists in the Australian political culture of the 1970s: the "fair go," interpreted as the state's responsibility to guarantee the (notionally male) wage-earner a chance to earn a living. Australian

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<sup>132</sup> Maddison and Partridge, *How well does Australian Democracy Serve Australian Women?*, p. 102.

<sup>133</sup> Chappell, *Gendering Government*, p. 44; Banaszak et al., 'When Power Relocates'.

<sup>134</sup> Barbara Hobson and Marika Lindholm, 'Collective Identities, Women's Power Resources, and the Making of Welfare States', *Theory and Society*, vol. 26 no. 4, 1997, pp. 475–508.

<sup>135</sup> Lindvert, 'The Rules of the Game'.

<sup>136</sup> Chappell, *Gendering Government*, p. 173.

<sup>137</sup> Snow et al., 'Frame Alignment Processes'.

feminists were not unaware of or untroubled by dominant discourses about women and work. Rather, as in many other countries, the Australian women's movement's engagement with government policy required a relatively narrow, pragmatic construction of claims, a process which, in itself, was not able to generate the extensive political-cultural change desired.<sup>138</sup>

It is important not to underestimate the difficulty faced by activists who ask themselves, and each other, *how* they can achieve change. It is certainly possible to see how Australia's strong gendered norms about work and income meant that challenging these norms directly could be seen as relatively less fruitful than pursuing more limited policy-oriented gains, such as anti-discrimination legislation. Yet there was never a deliberative forum in which the movement as a whole could contemplate those options and decide to adopt one rather than the other. Furthermore, an injunction to "directly challenge gendered norms about work and income" would in itself lead back to the question "how?" In the Australian case, many activists experienced a deep need to "do something": political targets must be identified, even if these are explicitly acknowledged as being limited and partial.

As Joni Lovenduski et al. found in their study of political representation, feminist successes are strongly related to the cohesion of the women's movement in question.<sup>139</sup> While the existence of a peak body does not guarantee unity in political action, Chappell's analysis of the Canadian women's movement shows that a peak body can generate cohesion in the sense of a forum for "ongoing dialogue."<sup>140</sup> In Australia, as elsewhere, an early sense of unity was generated by common grievances and outrage at women's exclusion and oppression.<sup>141</sup> This was supported by personal connections between the active participants, which for a time transcended differences in group affiliation and ideology. An image of this unity continued to be invoked by those

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<sup>138</sup> David S. Meyer, 'Restating the Woman Question: Women's Movements and State Restructuring', in Banaszak et al., *Women's Movements Facing the Reconfigured State*, pp. 275–294, p. 283, p. 287.

<sup>139</sup> Joni Lovenduski, Claudie Baudino, Marila Guadagnini, Petra Meier and Diane Salisbury, 'Conclusions: State Feminism and Political Representation', in Joni Lovenduski (ed.), *State Feminism and Political Representation*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 260–293, pp. 282–284.

<sup>140</sup> Chappell, *Gendering Government*, p. 47.

<sup>141</sup> Meyer, 'Restating the Woman Question', p. 278, p. 285.

organisations which, like WEL, sought to represent women's interests in public politics. Yet this unity was not sustained in an organisational form.

The lack of a peak body is important not only in terms of the presentation of a "united front" in hostile politics, but also in terms of deliberation. Chappell discusses the efforts of Dr Carmen Lawrence, who was formerly an active member of WEL and from 1994 to 1996 was Minister for the Status of Women in the Keating Labor Government, to encourage the development of a peak women's organisation:

...Lawrence was aware of feminists' fear of being forced to speak in a single voice. However, she claimed that, in a de facto sense, this was already happening because there was no mechanism in place to enable women's organizations to "thrash out their views."<sup>142</sup>

It is possible that different organisational formations (such as an umbrella organisation or peak body) and stronger articulation across the movement might have led feminists to a position where they could choose to, and be able to, do more to change policies and attitudes on work, income and care issues. However, even if the movement had formed itself into a single strategically-deciding unit, it would not necessarily have had better outcomes, or been able to insist on a more holistic view of women's work, income and care issues. In a sense, the movement's refusal to define itself may even have helped to leave the way open for invention.<sup>143</sup> And to view the movement critically through the lens of its lack of strategic political decision-making is in some ways to miss the point: for large parts of the movement, instrumentalism and strategy were anathema to the personal-transformative method that they saw as its main contribution. It is also possible that the movement may not have attracted so many active participants and developed such momentum without such an inclusive emphasis on individuals' contributions, as a higher priority than structural cohesion.

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<sup>142</sup> Chappell, *Gendering Government*, p. 43.

<sup>143</sup> Elisabeth Armstrong, 'Contingency Plans for the Feminist Revolution', *Science and Society*, vol. 65 no. 1, Spring 2001, pp. 39–71, p. 41.

A movement can be imagined as a deliberative forum, in which approaches to social change are debated, and an externally-oriented strategy agreed and then implemented, but this is not an accurate way to understand the Australian women's movement's advocacy of employment rights for women in the 1970s and 1980s. There were certainly debates about what to do, but because there was no central body representing and coordinating the movement, these debates could not be resolved in a way that would guide action. Action, nevertheless, continued. David S. Meyer argues that "social movements are opportunistic, even if activists are not conscious of their opportunism."<sup>144</sup> While the findings of this study are consistent with Meyer's argument, if we are to take social movement actors' perspectives seriously, it may require more cautious use of concepts such as "opportunism," "strategy" and "choice."

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has argued that the Australian second-wave women's movement as a whole was centrally concerned with the sexual division of labour and the undervaluing of women's work, and rejected the social norms that restricted women to the roles of wife and mother. However, it did not, as a movement, make a strategic decision to pursue paid work above other methods of achieving economic independence and status. Such a decision was not possible, since the movement itself was multiple and dynamic in form, not unified and stable, and because it did not feature a central or umbrella body in which decisions about the direction of the movement could be made.

The movement's lack of unified action arose not from major differences over the question of paid work as a right and need for women, since feminists generally agreed on this, but because individuals and groups pursued social change in decentralised processes "made up as they went along." The emphasis on access to employment emerged from the responses of goal-oriented parts of the movement to political opposition and to perceptions of the risks of reinforcing oppressive sex roles. While some feminists were more willing to engage in instrumentalist political action than others, the movement was characterised by a commitment to taking seriously and giving expression to the priorities and perspectives of the individual women involved, instead

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<sup>144</sup> Meyer, 'Restating the Woman Question', p. 279.

of developing political platforms that participants would be expected to follow. This is not to say that strategic action was absent: it occurred, but on a less grand scale than is often assumed, and in response to specific political risks and ideological commitments.

This chapter and the previous chapter presented historical studies of women's movement activism in the interwar period and in the 1970s and 1980s. These studies have found that it is not accurate to characterise the directions formed on issues of work and care as strategic decisions made by the movement as a whole. The studies have also called into question the assumption that there is strategic decision-making at the level of organisations and individuals. The next two chapters turn to the task of developing a more adequate model of social movement agency and analysing the historical studies further in relation to this model.

## Chapter 6: Developing a New Model of Social Movement Action

The previous two chapters explored women's movement activity on issues of work and care in the interwar period (1919–1938) and in the 1970s and 1980s. These studies established that decision-making on these issues was not generally strategic in terms of participants taking into account the high-level political-discursive risks invoked by common criticisms of feminism. Participants' deliberations about what to do were not oriented towards strategy on this level, although there was strategic thinking in the development of certain actions and political positions. The studies indicate that the overall direction of the movement in each of these two periods was affected by organisational processes and by the imperative of responding to threats and injustices, as well as by participants' reasoning and their background beliefs.

The study so far has shown, then, the inadequacies of the image of movements (and movement actors) strategically assessing high-level risks and opportunities. The women's movement as such did not have the capacity for, or an orientation towards, the kind of strategic decision-making that later critics seem to assume. Yet the historical studies show that there were reasons — and in many cases reasoning — behind movement actions. Despite the passions concerned, these actions were not inarticulate reactions. The reasonableness of movement actions is particularly evident when these actions are considered in historical context and in relation to the constraints faced by participants trying to create social change. There is therefore a need for a more positive account of movement action that does not assume central strategic decision-making, but is able to make sense of the movement as a whole in terms of the intentional actions within it.

The fact that no high-level strategising guided the movement does not remove the problem of responsibility either. It was noted in Chapter 3 that responsibility is normally understood as applying to a moral agent, defined in the following terms:

Agents or subjects that can act freely are called “moral agents” or “moral subjects” by philosophers: a moral agent is someone whose actions can be evaluated according to moral criteria, i.e., whose deeds can be vicious or virtuous, praiseworthy or blameworthy. The moral evaluation of the actions of a subject assumes not only the freedom, hence the responsibility, of the one acting, but, in addition, the rationality and maturity of this subject as well.<sup>1</sup>

This definition implies that to be considered a responsible subject for moral evaluation, three conditions must be met: first, there must be “one” who acts (unity); second, this one must be free to act (agency); and third, this one must be a rational actor (rationality). This definition of a moral agent does not neatly fit our understandings of what social movements are and do. Yet, as argued in Chapter 3, responsibility for a movement’s actions can be created by bonds of solidarity and identification that persist through time, in a way that challenges conventional boundaries between self and other.<sup>2</sup> It was on this basis that an alternative viewpoint, that of a respondent in a politically collective “we,” was adopted. From this viewpoint we can reflect on the conventional notion of responsibility, which evokes the image of a singular moral agent, even though this image is inconsistent with many features of social movements. The contradictions inherent in this reflection suggest that it would be productive to examine more closely the elements that constitute a moral agent, and to create different accounts of these elements. Furthermore, we need to do this in a way that does not reintroduce the narrowly rationalistic image of the “movement CEO” who strategically controls and directs movement actions and can therefore be “held responsible.”

While recognising the limitations of the idea of the movement as a moral agent, I do not close off inquiry into this idea. Instead, in this chapter I consider how the qualities of such an agent might be re-interpreted in ways more appropriate to our understanding of

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<sup>1</sup> Sandra Lee Bartky, ‘Agency: What’s the Problem?’, in Judith Kegan Gardiner (ed.), *Provoking Agents: Gender and Agency in Theory and Practice*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995, pp. 178–193, p. 178.

<sup>2</sup> This argument builds on the work of Genevieve Lloyd, ‘Individuals, Responsibility, and Philosophical Imagination’, in Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar (eds), *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 112–123.

the women's movement. As social movement scholar Deborah B. Gould has shown, understanding social movements may require us to look outside social movement studies and adapt ideas from other disciplines and fields. Gould observes that, "We have become so focused on questions of movement emergence and decline that we tend to overlook broader questions of concern to social theorists."<sup>3</sup> According to Gould, such questions include "the texture and scope of human agency, the processes of meaning-making...and the relationship between the individual and the collective..."<sup>4</sup> In this chapter I follow Gould's suggestion by using ideas from philosophical pragmatism, sociological theory and feminist philosophy to build a broader account of social movement action. This account avoids the assumption that movements are led by strategic decision-making, but still allows for the possibility of purposive collective action. The investigation is conducted in the following sections, in terms of: first, the movement as a collective actor; second, the movement as free to act (exercising agency); and finally, the movement as a rational actor. In the next chapter, I return to consider the findings of the historical studies in the light of the ideas developed here.

### **The movement as a collective actor**

Alberto Melucci has argued persuasively that to speak of "a movement doing" or "wanting" something is a misunderstanding: a reification or misplaced concreteness.<sup>5</sup> For Melucci and many others social movements are, in contrast, collective *processes*, not things. From this perspective, it does not make sense to attribute responsibility to a social movement, since it is not a thing that acts but a process of becoming. Yet actions *are* taken in and for the sake of movements and, as discussed above, the taking of responsibility can extend beyond acts over which control has been exercised by a unitary entity. We therefore need an account of the social movement that incorporates both of these qualities: as a process, and as a collective actor. While it is relatively easy

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<sup>3</sup> Deborah B. Gould, 'Passionate Political Processes: Bringing Emotions Back Into the Study of Social Movements', in Goodwin and Jasper, *Rethinking Social Movements*, pp. 155–175, p. 173.

<sup>4</sup> Gould, 'Passionate Political Processes', p. 173. See also James M. Jasper, 'Emotions and the Microfoundations of Politics: Rethinking Ends and Means', in Simon Clarke, Paul Hoggett and Simon Thompson (eds), *Emotions, Politics and Society*, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, pp. 14–30.

<sup>5</sup> Alberto Melucci, 'The Process of Collective Identity', in Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans (eds), *Social Movements and Culture*, Social Movements, Protest, and Contention series vol. 4, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995, pp. 41–63; See also Ralph H. Turner and Lewis M. Killian, *Collective Behavior*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1972 (first published 1957), p. 7.

to see a social movement in terms of people acting together “as one,” it is more difficult to locate the intentions that might guide this collective action as a whole.

Philosopher Deborah Tollefsen has observed that it is commonplace to attribute intentional states to collective entities.<sup>6</sup> Journalists, for example, describe corporations as trying to outdo their competitors. Seeking to explain such attributions, Tollefsen considers the possibility that such statements are merely metaphorical. She rejects this proposition because such attributions of intentionality form the basis for real sanctions imposed when collective entities are identified as responsible for their actions. Tollefsen then considers the possibility that there really are intentions associated with organisations or groups, but that, in reality, these intentions only belong to the individuals that comprise the organisation. Tollefsen rejects this possibility also, since it does not account for the fact that attributing intentionality to groups is effective in generating explanations for group action, even though we often have no knowledge about the intentions of individuals within the group. Tollefsen concludes in contrast that a collective really can have intentions, but that this relies on internal organisational structure and control. These features, she argues, allow an organisation to form a single point of view in the same way that an individual might:

The structure of the organization provides a way of synthesizing the disparate perspectives of individuals into a united perspective from which goals and subgoals can be set and achieved. This rational point of view is expressed in organizational policy, the structure of the organization, and in the history of its decision making...[A] rational point of view is a perspective from which deliberation takes place. When individuals deliberate in an organizational setting, they adopt the rational point of view of the organization.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Deborah Tollefsen, ‘Organizations as True Believers’, *Journal of Social Philosophy*, vol. 33 no. 3, 2002, pp. 395–410.

<sup>7</sup> Tollefsen, ‘Organizations as True Believers’, p. 401. See also Deborah Tollefsen, ‘Collective Intentionality’, *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2004, <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/c/coll-int.htm>> (accessed 29 July 2008).

Tollefsen is clear that not all collectives have the attributes necessary for the formation of a rational point of view:

I define organizations as collectives oriented to the pursuit of relatively specific goals that exhibit a high degree of formalization. It is the high goal specificity and relatively high formalization that distinguish organizations from other types of collectives such as primary groups, families, communities, and social movements.<sup>8</sup>

This qualification is consistent with social movement scholars' observation that organisations are very different from movements in terms of formalisation, goal specificity and explicit structure.<sup>9</sup>

There are several implications of Tollefsen's argument for the present study. In Tollefsen's account, organisational structure synthesises individuals' perspectives into a united point of view that can produce and pursue goals. What are the qualities of organisational structure that have the power to perform this synthesis? Are these qualities really found in formal organisations, and are they really found nowhere else? First, although Tollefsen is certainly correct to argue that social movements are not intention-forming organisations in her particular terms, social movements do include actual organisations and, more broadly, processes of organisation. Social movements often involve coordination (as well as, sometimes, competition) between organisations, and between organisations and less formally-organised groups and individuals. In this process of coordination there are attempts to form or appeal to a "united perspective from which goals and subgoals can be set and achieved,"<sup>10</sup> even though there may be no overarching or central forum in which this can occur. Second, studies of organisational sociology suggests that despite the apparent self-evidence of the model Tollefsen proposes, it is not clear that organisational structure actually functions to produce the rational unity she describes.<sup>11</sup> Tollefsen stresses the way individuals' behaviour is

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<sup>8</sup> Tollefsen, 'Organizations as True Believers', p. 407, note 1.

<sup>9</sup> Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2006 (second edition), pp. 25–28.

<sup>10</sup> Tollefsen, 'Organizations as True Believers', p. 401.

<sup>11</sup> John W. Meyer and Brian Rowan, 'Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 83 no. 2, 1977, pp. 340–363.

controlled and coordinated in logical chains of means and ends designed to achieve organisational goals. In contrast, much work in recent organisational and management studies has been devoted to showing how such accounts only imperfectly capture organisational processes.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, social movement participants engage in reciprocal coordination in lateral rather than vertical arrangements, in which goals and means are developed but are also open to questioning and revision. Rather than saying, then, that organisations exhibit unity and movements do not, it might be more accurate to see the difference in terms of the kind or intensity of unity. Third, Tollefsen models her “rational point of view” on the goal-seeking individual. As argued below, this model is itself not without problems. Even for individuals, the idea that action is best viewed as the pursuit of pre-conceived goals has been challenged.

If we relax the requirement for formal organisation contained in Tollefsen’s account, we can see how there are processes of organisation through which a social movement might produce intentional collective action: through the internal deliberation and coordination undertaken within social movement groups, and through the deliberation and coordination that occurs through the interaction between organisations and individuals within the movement as a whole. The nature and extent of deliberation and coordination can therefore be a subject for empirical investigation.<sup>13</sup> Unlike in formal organisations, however, there are few established systems for the documentation and legitimisation of collective intentions in movements.<sup>14</sup> Where Tollefsen says that “organizational policy, the structure of the organization, and...the history of its decision making” are the ways in which a rational collective point of view is produced or expressed, we might instead see these organisational features as *licensing*, *documenting* or *fixing* particular interpretations of a more fluid collective intentionality.

Conceiving of collective intentionality in the way outlined above poses certain further problems. How are we to understand “the movement” as an entity? What are the units of

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Mats Alvesson and Hugh Willmott, ‘Identity Regulation as Organizational Control: Producing the Appropriate Individual’, *Journal of Management Studies*, vol. 39 no. 5, 2002, pp. 619–644.

<sup>13</sup> Donatella della Porta, for example, has highlighted the semi-deliberative processes developed by networks of groups and individuals across the anti-globalisation movement. Donatella della Porta, ‘Making the Polis: Social Forums and Democracy in the Global Justice Movement’, *Mobilization*, vol. 10 no. 1, 2005, pp. 73–94.

<sup>14</sup> Peak movement bodies are an exception here, although it could be argued that the existence of such a body signals a transition from a movement to an institution or organisation.

analysis? Following the argument presented above, we need to be able to acknowledge organisation as key in the formation of intentions, without suggesting that it is only in visible organisations that relevant intentions are formed. This is especially relevant for studies of women's movements, which are characterised by "submerged networks" and forms of "unobtrusive mobilisation" as well as formal organisations and public displays.<sup>15</sup>

Where many social movement scholars such as Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani contrast the fluidity of movements with the formality of organisations,<sup>16</sup> another way to understand movement organisations is to see them as the structures through which broader movement ideas and projects are crystallised. Myra Marx Ferree and Beth B. Hess, for example, argue that "'Social movement organizations' are the formal structures designed to achieve the goals of the movement."<sup>17</sup> While Ferree and Hess's definition is clearly a simplification, the questions that it raises are productive. Specifically, how are organisations actually formed? Are they, as such, designed to achieve goals? How and by whom are the goals of the movement to be determined? As foreshadowed above, one way to respond to such questions is to shift from a focus on organisations as things to organising as a process.<sup>18</sup> In this sense, Ferree and Hess's definition usefully highlights the strong relationship between collective goal formation and organisation. Without organisation in a movement, it would be difficult to discern collective goals (as distinct from the desires and ideas of individuals). Organisation involves the coordination of different active parts into a larger process, and the emergence of shared purposes, but does not necessarily culminate in a formally legitimised unity. Organisation is therefore a useful concept to take the place of "internal structure" in explanations of how collective intentions emerge, such as Tollefsen's above. Social movement organising can be seen as the process through which people coordinate their activities with one another, developing shared purposes

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<sup>15</sup> Sarah Maddison, 'Young Women in the Australian Women's Movement', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, vol. 6 no. 2, 2004, pp. 234–256; Mary Fainsod Katzenstein, 'Feminism within American Institutions: Unobtrusive Mobilization in the 1980s', *Signs*, vol. 16 no. 1, 1990, pp. 27–54.

<sup>16</sup> della Porta and Diani, *Social Movements*.

<sup>17</sup> Myra Marx Ferree and Beth B. Hess, *Controversy and Coalition: The New Feminist Movement Across Three Decades of Change*, New York and Toronto: Twayne and Maxwell Macmillan Canada, 1994 (revised edition), pp. 1–2.

<sup>18</sup> A shift in emphasis from organisation as a noun to organisation as a verb is an important trend in organisational studies. See for example Andrew H. Van de Ven and Marshall Scott Poole, 'Alternative Approaches for Studying Organizational Change', *Organization Studies*, vol. 26, 2005, pp. 1377–1404.

and forming collectivities of varying formality and durability. There are, of course, social movement organisers who deliberately take a central role in undertaking this coordination, in some cases with the explicit aim of building the movement.<sup>19</sup> But we should not assume that it is only through the instrumental actions of such organisers that organisation occurs in a movement.

Employing Melucci's concept of movement unity as an outcome to be explained, Sandra R. Levitsky has studied the Chicago gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex movement, with a particular emphasis on organisation.<sup>20</sup> Based on her analysis of activists' understandings, Levitsky argues that organisational diversity enhances a unified movement identity. For Levitsky, this is a reflexive element of movement organisation. That is, the unity that Melucci sees as a fact to be explained (by the researcher) is also something created by participants' understandings. As Levitsky argues, "activists often maintain a collaborative understanding of the complexity of movement goals, viewing social reform as taking place in both political and cultural arenas, and requiring a variety of strategic approaches."<sup>21</sup> Accounts such as Levitsky's highlight the internal differentiation of movements, and the importance of participants' perspectives on this differentiation.<sup>22</sup> Through their often complex views of the movement, participants may be doing some of the work of "holding the movement together," creating it as an entity, even if this unity can never be definitively established or documented.

In focusing on social movement organising as a process, we need not wholly abandon organisations. Some organisational theorists do propose "stamping out nouns" altogether in a total shift to process-based thinking.<sup>23</sup> This seems unfeasible, since, as

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<sup>19</sup> Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals: A Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals*, New York: Random House, 1971. See also Susan Stall and Randy Stoecker, 'Community Organizing or Organizing Community? Gender and the Crafts of Empowerment', *Gender and Society*, vol. 12, 1998, pp. 729–756.

<sup>20</sup> Sandra R. Levitsky, 'Niche Activism: Constructing a Unified Movement Identity in a Heterogeneous Organizational Field', *Mobilization*, vol. 12 no. 3, pp. 271–286.

<sup>21</sup> Levitsky, 'Niche Activism', p. 271.

<sup>22</sup> See also John Lofland, *Polite Protesters: The American Peace Movement of the 1980s*, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1993, pp. 37–38; Luther P. Gerlach and Virginia H. Hine, *People, Power, Change: Movements of Social Transformation*, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970.

<sup>23</sup> Tore Bakken and Tor Hernes, 'Organizing is Both a Verb and a Noun: Weick Meets Whitehead', *Organization Studies*, vol. 27 no. 11, 2006, pp. 1599–1616, p. 1600–1601; Bakken and Hernes (p. 1601) quote Karl E. Weick, *The Social Psychology of Organizing*, New York: Random House, 1979 (second edition), p. 44 as arguing that we should "stamp out nouns."

Tore Bakken and Tor Hernes point out, the identification of real entities is indispensable for human sense-making. If, as they argue, “we are incapable of thinking purely in terms of process,”<sup>24</sup> this applies also to social movement participants. Even though participants might understand movement organising as a process, it may be both inevitable and desirable to create entities within this process. “The movement” itself can be seen as a creation in this sense.

I propose, then, a model of the social movement as a moving field in which organisation, viewed as coordination and deliberation among groups and individuals, creates the capacity for intentional collective action. But organisation is unevenly (and in a shifting way) distributed throughout the movement, creating a number of more densely-organised nodes where collective intentions may be more readily formed and made visible. Such a node might be an organisation, a group or even an event that brings people into relations of coordination and deliberation with each other in activities viewed as meaningful in terms of the substantive concerns of the movement. The decentralisation implicit in this model is countered by participants’ (varying degrees and manifestations of) shared oppositional consciousness and shared identification as part of a larger whole. At the same time, participants are creating and mobilising complex understandings of internal movement differentiation and their own views of the totality of the movement, in terms of what it is and what it should be and do. To pursue the visual metaphor, instead of thinking of the field in “flat” terms, as comprising groups and individuals on the same level, we could think of the field as topographically three-dimensional. In this view, the more densely-organised nodes can be visualised as protrusions rising from the field, in which collective action is more explicitly intentional and also more visible to other participants and non-participants (including opponents).

The model, as developed so far, is relatively static and does not elaborate on how organisation relates to the movement’s overall concerns or purpose. Clearly it is overly simplistic to take literally the idea of a social movement as a unified actor on the stage of history. But this does not mean it is impossible or undesirable to form a reasonable account of the overall intentions of a movement — what might otherwise be called its

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<sup>24</sup> Bakken and Hernes draw on Alfred North Whitehead to make this argument. Bakken and Hernes, ‘Organizing is Both a Verb and a Noun’, p. 1601.

overarching goals. To build such an account, it needs to be remembered, first, that a movement is a movement *towards* something (and usually against something): it is a social process of imagining, projecting and prefiguring change. The substantive nature of that change is always subject to alterations of course, to multiple articulations and different emphases. Here, therefore, an approximating notion is proposed: the movement's *direction*. The idea of movement direction has the advantage of not seeking to fix the overarching purpose of the movement in static terms, but it still allows for substantive discussion of the movement's purpose and meaning. Furthermore, it is possible to link movement direction to organisation, so that we can see how organisation within a movement can shift its overall direction. By developing intentional collective activity that is visibly linked to the overall concerns of the movement, organisation has the capacity to "pull" the movement in certain directions, thereby altering its overall course. This can occur whether participants literally intend to shape the movement's overall direction, or see themselves as simply pursuing certain projects. Clearly, too, a movement can be pulled in different directions by the forces developing in different nodes of organisation, and at times this can appear as conflict or competition. Returning to the visual metaphor, we can imagine the movement as a moving three-dimensional field in which the protruding nodes of more densely-organised activity pull the movement in certain directions, affecting its overall shape and purpose.

It is important to note that organisation is shaped and given substance by other qualities of the movement, such as the underlying beliefs, grievances, solidarity networks, friendships, cultural enterprises, lifestyle attributes and the social positions of participants. These factors can be expected to affect the extent to which any given organising effort can "stretch" the movement in certain directions. Such factors also provide independent sources of impetus and direction, and imbue organised action with overtones and meanings that deeply affect the way the movement is understood, both by participants and others.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the "external" conditions faced by movement groups both limit and provide material for movement activity, reinforcing that the

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<sup>25</sup> Pamela E. Oliver, 'Bringing the Crowd Back In: The Nonorganizational Elements of Social Movements', *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts, and Change*, vol. 14, 1989, pp. 1–30.

movement's overall direction is never simply determined by the independently conceived intentions and ideas of its participants.<sup>26</sup>

As flagged by the imprecision of the term “direction,” accounts of the kind proposed here are approximations. This imprecision is deliberate. The interpreted direction of a movement incorporates an understanding of the intentions of movement participants, together with impressions of overall movement action. The fact that this interpretation is unable to access a more “pure core” of intentionality is not only a result of the distance between the observer and movement participants, or of methodological challenges. It is also because, as discussed further below, concepts such as “intention” and “goal” are not as simple as they initially appear, even for the persons or groups who “have” them. It is for this reason that participants in movements are themselves more likely to talk substantively about the direction of the movement as a whole, and only more speculatively about its purpose or intention. They too are approximately describing something: something that their status as participants does not give them the capacity to define. As for whether accounts of a movement's overall direction are desirable, it may be observed that it is impossible to discuss a social movement in non-abstract terms without having recourse to accounts of what it has sought and done. This does not mean that such accounts have to exclude artificially the complexity through which the movement's directions are formed.

### **The movement exercising agency**

In sociological thought, agency is typically counterposed to structure, “emphasizing implicitly the undetermined nature of human action, as opposed to the alleged determinism of structural theories.”<sup>27</sup> Social movements, then, appear to offer a powerful example of agency in practice: movement actors take self-determined autonomous action against entrenched structures that they oppose, in order to overthrow

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<sup>26</sup> Oliver, ‘Bringing the Crowd Back In’.

<sup>27</sup> ‘Agency’, John Scott and Gordon Marshall, *Dictionary of Sociology*, Oxford Reference Online, 2005, access provided by the ANU  
<<http://www.oxfordreference.com.virtual.anu.edu.au/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t88.e41>> (accessed 11 Sept. 2008).

or alter those structures.<sup>28</sup> For social theorists, social movements also appear to offer a way to integrate micro-level accounts of human action with macro-level ideas of social systems and structures, as Hans Joas notes:

By focusing on collective action, rather than purely individual action, it becomes much easier to proceed to issues such as the emergence, reproduction and transformation of social order. This is true in the two-fold sense that not only do collective forms of action and social movements contribute significantly to developing and changing social order, but they can also be understood in themselves as models of social order in the process of self-generation.<sup>29</sup>

Although social movements do not exhaust the concept of human agency, they are particularly interesting sites for studying agency, since it is in social movements that people are most explicitly (to themselves as well as to others) attempting to change their own circumstances and society generally. While many people hold strong views and publicise them, in social movement action the question of “how” is not only raised but collectively problematised. That is, activists certainly think about “how to achieve their objectives” but also more difficult questions prior to and beyond this formulation, such as: What are our objectives and why? How do we know what to pursue? And, importantly, when we say “we” will do something, who is “we”? Such questions highlight the importance of organisation in social movement agency.

The concept of agency is particularly important in assessing the past actions of social movements, since it only makes sense to evaluate social movement and their campaigns if they could have done otherwise. This “capacity to do otherwise” is a central feature of the notion of agency as undetermined human action. In both popular and academic thought, historical accounts of social movement activity are therefore important ways in which we talk about collective human agency in social change.<sup>30</sup> Within social movement studies, however, agency is rarely explicitly addressed or problematised.

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<sup>28</sup> For an alternative sceptical view see the discussion on Blühdorn and Luhmann below.

<sup>29</sup> Hans Joas, *The Creativity of Action*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, p. 199.

<sup>30</sup> Oliver, ‘Bringing the Crowd Back In’.

Many social movement studies themselves repeat an oddly empty notion of agency, albeit in positive terms. Thus, “collective agency” is rarely analysed or defined, nor placed in the context of broader concerns about the viability and meaning of the concept “agency.” This leaves many questions to consider, particularly about the effects of social movement activity and about the extent to which agency is willed, intentional, rational, means-ends in nature, and so on. These questions have not been established even for individual agency, let alone agency on a collective scale.

In any academic work, there are concepts used that rely on tacit meanings and are not problematised. It is possible, therefore, that the “failure” to elucidate agency in social movement studies results not from a belief that agency is unimportant or non-existent, but that it can be taken as given or does not need to be explored.<sup>31</sup> However, an exploration of agency in relation to social movements can help to make social movement studies more relevant to other fields of inquiry that are more centrally concerned with agency, such as social theory (as noted by Gould).<sup>32</sup> More importantly, such an exploration brings the analysis of social movements into meaningful communication with problems faced by movements themselves. The literature review in Chapter 2 discussed some of the ways that agency has been addressed within feminist theory; here we examine some conceptualisations of agency that appear in sociology more generally, and consider how these could be used to analyse social movements.

Sociologists have begun to criticise the way in which their discipline often uses a relatively hollow notion of “agency.” As Steven Hitlin and Glen H. Elder observe, “It seems often as if sociologists use ‘agency’ as a placeholder for some vague sense of human freedom or individual volition within a broader model.”<sup>33</sup> This, as Hitlin and Elder suggest, makes agency an almost residual category in contrast to the more elaborated concept of “structure.”<sup>34</sup> Attempts to transcend the dualism of structure and

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<sup>31</sup> Ralph H. Turner makes a similar point about models of rationality in behavioural studies. Ralph H. Turner, ‘The Use and Misuse of Rational Models in Collective Behavior and Social Psychology’, *Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, vol. 32 no.1, 1991, pp. 84–109, p. 93.

<sup>32</sup> Gould, ‘Passionate Political Processes’, pp. 158–160, p. 173.

<sup>33</sup> Steven Hitlin and Glen H. Elder, ‘Time, Self, and the Curiously Abstract Concept of Agency’, *Sociological Theory*, vol. 25 no. 2, 2007, pp. 170–191, pp. 170–171.

<sup>34</sup> Stephan Fuchs has articulated an explicit defence of this treatment, arguing that what we call “agency” is actually “a residual, consisting of that portion of variance unaccounted for by social structure. Agency is not the cause, but the effect, of failures at prediction.” Stephan Fuchs, ‘Beyond Agency’, *Sociological Theory*, vol. 19 no.1, 2001, pp. 24–40, p. 34. See also the discussion of Fuchs below.

agency have been made by sociologists such as Pierre Bourdieu (through the concept of “habitus”) and Anthony Giddens (via “structuration”).<sup>35</sup> These theories both emphasise how human agency can *reproduce* patterns and structures in social life. Extending this strand of thought, another body of literature stresses the capacity for *adaptation*.<sup>36</sup> However, these views of agency often neglect the projects through which people try to *create change*. For this reason, it is not clear that they can provide a good framework for the study of agency in social movements.<sup>37</sup>

Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische, in contrast, argue that the integration of structure and agency into a single model may not be the most fruitful path; in fact it might be premature, when the concept of agency has not yet been elaborated as more than a residual category.<sup>38</sup> Emirbayer and Mische develop a more substantive notion of agency by disaggregating it into three key dimensions, articulated in temporal terms. In their account, agency is:

a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment.)<sup>39</sup>

This temporal account of agency is based on the view that, while “reality exists in a present,” humans experience time through having to reconstruct the past and form an orientation to the future in response to events of “emergence” that disturb continuity.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1984; Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, translated by Richard Nice, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

<sup>36</sup> See for example, Paula Jarzabkowski’s review of adaptation theories for the purpose of organisation studies. Paula Jarzabkowski, ‘Strategy as Practice: Recursiveness, Adaptation, and Practices-in-Use’, *Organization Studies*, vol. 25 no. 4, pp. 529–560.

<sup>37</sup> See, however, Randolph Haluza-DeLay, ‘A Theory of Practice for Social Movements: Environmentalism and Ecological Habitus’, *Mobilization*, vol. 13 no. 2, 2008, pp. 205–218.

<sup>38</sup> Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische, ‘What Is Agency?’, *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 103 no. 4, 1998, pp. 962–1023.

<sup>39</sup> Emirbayer and Mische, ‘What Is Agency?’, p. 963.

<sup>40</sup> George Herbert Mead, *The Philosophy of the Present*, in Robert Throop and Lloyd Gordon Ward (eds) *Mead Project 2.0*, Toronto: The Mead Project, 2007, <[http://www.brocku.ca/MeadProject/Mead/pubs2/philpres/Mead\\_1932\\_toc.html](http://www.brocku.ca/MeadProject/Mead/pubs2/philpres/Mead_1932_toc.html)> (accessed 20 September 2008) (first published 1932), p. 1.

Agency is therefore most fully expressed in the capacity for “imaginative and critical intervention” in the flow of time.<sup>41</sup> This suggests that there may be differing degrees of agency, according to actors’ differing capacities to explicitly address their present conditions in terms of both the past and future. In terms of actors’ experiences, however, there might not be clear boundaries between the past, present and future.<sup>42</sup>

Some social movement scholars have recently turned their attention to temporal elements of agency. For example, in terms of iteration, Nick Crossley has attempted to integrate Bourdieu’s concept of “habitus” into the study of social movements, positing the existence of a “radical habitus” that fosters social movement action against taken-for-granted conditions.<sup>43</sup> Mische has developed the concept of projectivity in relation to social movements (discussed further below).<sup>44</sup> Here I consider the potential of the temporal model as a whole for investigating the agency exercised by social movements. To what extent can we observe the three temporal dimensions of agency (iterative, projective, practical-evaluative) in movement action? Is observed social movement action consistent with the model of intelligent, reflexive, deliberated intervention in the social situation? Given the internal differentiation discussed in the previous section of this chapter, to what extent and through which structures or processes do social movements achieve this? For example, it was suggested above that there may be nodes of more intensive organisation that allow for intentions to emerge and be mobilised: do these more intensively organised clusters in the movement offer more opportunity for practical-evaluative agency? (And how would we know if they did?) Finally, to what extent do social movements explicitly address the past and the future in their “practical-evaluative” deliberations?

It is important to note that some currents in sociology directly challenge the validity of attempts such as Emirbayer and Mische’s to develop the concept of agency. In particular, sociologists such as the German systems theorist Niklas Luhmann and

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<sup>41</sup> Emirbayer and Mische, ‘What Is Agency?’, p. 970.

<sup>42</sup> Emirbayer and Mische, ‘What Is Agency?’, pp. 971–972.

<sup>43</sup> Nick Crossley, ‘From Reproduction to Transformation: Social Movement Fields and the Radical Habitus’, *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol. 20 no. 6, 2003, pp. 43–68.

<sup>44</sup> Ann Mische, ‘Projects, Identities, and Social Networks: Brazilian Youth Mobilization and the Making of Civic Culture’, paper to the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, Toronto, 1997, pp. 7–8, quoted in Emirbayer and Mische, ‘What Is Agency?’, pp. 992–993, note 18.

American network-position theorist Stephan Fuchs have argued against agency and action as primary categories of sociological thought. Luhmann, building on extensive empirical evidence that actual organisations are not goal-oriented in the Weberian sense, adopts a functionalist perspective that shifts the analysis of action to a second-order level:

Of course, one can still say that human beings act. But since that always occurs in situations, the question remains whether and to what extent the action is attributed to the individual human being or to the situation. If one wants to bring about a decision of this question, one must observe, not the human being in the situation, but the process of attribution...Actions are artefacts of processes of attribution, the results of observing observers...which emerge when a system operates recursively on the level of second-order observation. The action theory preferred by contemporary sociologists is sustained by the *corpus mysticum* of the subject. It is also sustained by the empirical plausibility, the daily visibility of self-inspired actions by human beings. But conceptually as well as empirically these are superficial “frames.”<sup>45</sup>

Fuchs likewise argues that “The results of...theorizing [about agency] are mostly trivial — actor has plans and will travel; plans don’t work as planned; actor adjusts plans over time. This is pretty thin for a novel, as well as for a sociological science.”<sup>46</sup> Rather, Fuchs suggests, we should address a higher-order problem: that of scientifically analysing how attributions of agency and structure vary with the different positions of observers in social networks. For example, Fuchs explains, bureaucratic systems suppress agency-attributions, while academic systems control attributions of agency, as in the conventions of authorship.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems*, translated by John Bednarz Jr, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995, pp. xliii–xliv. When Luhmann refers to the “corpus mysticum” of the subject, he means the subject as the individual human self, in his view also an untenable foundation for sociology, and an untenable concept generally (pp. xxxviii–xliv).

<sup>46</sup> Fuchs, ‘Beyond Agency’, p. 29.

<sup>47</sup> Fuchs, ‘Beyond Agency’, p. 35, p. 37.

Luhmann's and Fuchs' criticisms of agency and action theory are relevant in that they caution us against using these concepts in a way that simply relies on their tacit appeal. Their critiques encourage us to be explicit about how concepts of agency and action are to be used, and they also warn that attempts to build sociological theory from these concepts are fraught with difficulty. The purpose here is not to build a comprehensive theory, or to refute functionalism. However, there are three points that are important to make in response. First, as Joas has pointed out, unlike the pragmatist John Dewey, on whom Luhmann draws in critiquing conventional means-ends notions of action, Luhmann's analysis is precisely not oriented towards any positive possibility for action (and this applies also to Fuchs' analysis).<sup>48</sup> As Chapter 3 makes clear, there might be very good reasons to adopt a positive conception of action, in this case as respondents in/to/for a politically collective "we." That these reasons can be explained in functionalist terms does not exhaust their significance. Second, as the traditional criticisms of functionalism have pointed out, functionalist theories have difficulty in accounting for social change, differentiation and power.<sup>49</sup> These are key concerns for social movements.<sup>50</sup> Finally, neo-functionalists such as Luhmann and Fuchs attempt to resolve these difficulties by shifting to second-order analysis. While this move might succeed in closing off avenues for criticism of their theories, it further removes theorising from contact with other social contexts. As Joas notes, "If it is not to lapse into academic sterility, sociological theory must continually debate the important public issues and approaches to social theory that arise outside its own boundaries. Otherwise, [it] is in danger of occupying itself with merely self-posed problems without hope of capturing the public's interest..."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Joas, *The Creativity of Action*, p. 153.

<sup>49</sup> 'Functionalism', in Craig Calhoun (ed.), *Dictionary of the Social Sciences*, Oxford Reference Online, 2002, access provided by the ANU, <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Mainandentry=t104.e661>> (accessed 20 May 2008).

<sup>50</sup> Ingolfur Blühdorn, 'Self-Experience in the Theme Park of Radical Action?: Social Movements and Political Articulation in the Late-Modern Condition', *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 9 no. 1, 2006, pp. 23–42. Blühdorn, following Luhmann, has attempted a systems-functionalist analysis of social movements, arguing that they are, "irrespective of their own declared motivations and objectives, offering exactly what late-modern society urgently requires...From this perspective, the significance of social movement politics lies not so much in the demonstration of protest and opposition for the purpose of political change, but in the demonstration, performance and experience of something that is desperately needed in the late-modern condition but that has no place in the established socio-economic system: autonomy, identity, and agency" (p. 36). Being mindful of participants' very different perceptions of their activism, Blühdorn is compelled to stress that his analysis, like Luhmann's and Fuchs', operates only on a second-order level.

<sup>51</sup> Hans Joas, *Pragmatism and Social Theory*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993, p. 155.

### **The movement as a rational actor**

So far I have considered the first two characteristics of a moral agent, unity and agency, to explain how these might apply to social movements. Here I turn to the third characteristic, rationality. In contrast to the demanding models of rational action used, for example, in game theory, I begin by presenting some work codifying commonplace understandings that rationality need not be construed as self-interested and instrumental, but can be understood as “interpretable reason.” This, I argue, is a particularly useful way to see social movements, which almost by definition appear unreasonable to the broader society on their emergence. In a negative sense, this removes from the concept of rationality some of the features that fit least well with social movement action. Then, in a positive sense, I use feminist and pragmatist critiques of rational action to suggest a way of examining social movements that sees emotions as part of reasoning, and sees goals and means as produced together in action rather than following a sequence in which cognition precedes action.

In their discussion of emotion in social movement action, Mustafa Emirbayer and Chad Alan Goldberg describe how both those collective behaviour theories that pathologised the irrational tendencies of mass protest *and* their challengers, resource mobilisation and political process theories, have maintained a hierarchical duality between reason and emotion.<sup>52</sup> Emirbayer and Goldberg point out that whereas many collective behaviour theorists saw mass protest as irrational and irresponsible, social movement theorists of the resource mobilisation and political process traditions, such as Charles Tilly and Doug McAdam, tend to assert the opposite: that social movements are best characterised as rational and organised action for the achievement of ends that are in the shared interests of group members.<sup>53</sup> Both schools of thought, however, maintain a separation between reason and emotion, and value the former over the latter.

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<sup>52</sup> Mustafa Emirbayer and Chad Alan Goldberg, ‘Pragmatism, Bourdieu, and Collective Emotions in Contentious Politics’, *Theory and Society*, vol. 34, 2005, pp. 469–518, pp. 474–475.

<sup>53</sup> Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1909 (first published 1805); Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1978; Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1982.

As Emirbayer and Goldberg suggest, one of the negative consequences of accepting this hierarchy is that there is a tendency to view social movements as controlled by rational leaders who manipulate emotional followers.<sup>54</sup> In this respect, it is interesting to observe the similarities between mainstream accounts of “framing,” and the conclusions reached by Gustave Le Bon, who found that crowds are suggestible and affected by “the judicious employment of words and formulas.”<sup>55</sup> Le Bon argued that, “[h]andled with art, [words and formulas] possess in sober truth the mysterious power formerly attributed to them by the adepts of magic.”<sup>56</sup> Of course, most scholars of framing are much more sympathetic to social movements. Le Bon warned that “A pyramid far loftier than that of old Cheops could be raised merely with the bones of men who have been victims of the power of words and formulas.”<sup>57</sup> In contrast, political process theorists generally present framing in positive or at least neutral terms. Frames, unlike images of contagion, were originally understood in political process theories as incorporating problem analysis and diagnosis, inherently reason-like features.<sup>58</sup> Yet, in suggesting that movement leaders present motivating images, the two accounts bear a notable similarity. Both attribute reason and strategic capacity to leaders who influence (or manipulate) the less-reasoned, non-strategic responses of followers.

To attempt to develop an alternative approach, I begin here with Mancur Olson’s 1965 book *The Logic of Collective Action*.<sup>59</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 2, this text has made a major contribution to the explanation of collective behaviour, and has been an important starting point for many later social movement studies. Taking a utilitarian view of rationality, Olson asks why, given shared interests, some people with the same interests do *not* join in collective action. His response is to highlight the “free-rider” problem and articulate conditions under which this may be overcome (namely, where group leaders have recourse to coercion, where groups are small enough to shame non-participants into action, and where groups are able to offer advantages to participants, from which they are able to exclude non-participants).

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<sup>54</sup> Emirbayer and Goldberg, ‘Pragmatism’, pp. 476–477.

<sup>55</sup> Le Bon, *The Crowd*, p. 94.

<sup>56</sup> Le Bon, *The Crowd*, p. 94.

<sup>57</sup> Le Bon, *The Crowd*, pp. 94–95.

<sup>58</sup> David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford, ‘Ideology, Frame Resonance and Participant Mobilization’, *International Social Movement Research*, vol. 1, 1988, pp. 197–219.

<sup>59</sup> Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965.

One of the major critical responses to Olson's theory has been to reject its assumption of self-interested individuals: scholars sensitive to the value-focused, often explicitly unselfish nature of much social action (including many social movements) tend to find this objectionable. Olson himself accepts that his theory is less clearly applicable to non-self-interested reasons for action, thereby acknowledging the existence of such reasons:

The theory is not at all sufficient where philanthropic lobbies, that is, lobbies that voice concern about some group other than the group that supports the lobby, or religious lobbies, are concerned. In philanthropic and religious lobbies the relationships between the purposes and interests of the individual member, and the purposes and interests of the organization, may be so rich and obscure that a theory of the sort developed here cannot provide much insight.<sup>60</sup>

Olson notes that it is possible to analyse "philanthropic lobbies" using his theory. However, he warns that in some cases this might require us to analyse actors' altruistic reasons as if they were self-interested, for instance, as if individuals contributing to such lobbies thereby gained "*individual, noncollective* satisfaction in the form of a feeling of personal moral worth, or because of a desire for respectability or praise."<sup>61</sup> Olson stresses that this could stretch his theory beyond its usefulness. He thereby foreshadows some criticisms of certain applications of the rational choice theory that he is credited with founding:

For when all action — even charitable action — is defined or assumed to be rational [self-interested], then this theory (or any other theory) becomes correct simply by virtue of its logical consistency, and is no longer capable of empirical refutation.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action*, p. 160.

<sup>61</sup> Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action*, p. 160. Emphasis in original.

<sup>62</sup> Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action*, p. 160.

Another problem in Olson's account is that, in entering political debate, a collective's "interests" must be articulated as meanings with normative dimensions, for both internal and external "audiences." Yet, in Olson's theory, interests remain given as motivating essences within individuals. The "new" social movements of the 1960s and 1970s clearly demonstrated that interests are inherently related to identities that require articulation and mutual recognition. In this sense, collective action creates interests as well as expressing them. A related problem is that interests must be translated into action, but it is not clear how this occurs. Olson uses the idea of a group's "objective," but he conflates this with the shared interest, rather than separately defining it in terms that might help us to understand group action. For example, Olson explains:

If the members of some group have a common *interest or objective*, and if they would all be better off if the *objective* were achieved, it has been thought to follow logically that the individuals in that group would, if they were rational and self-interested, act to achieve that *objective*.<sup>63</sup>

As with interests, objectives in politics must be articulated, by individuals to themselves, within groups, and (usually) by the group to the rest of the political world. This articulation process leaves objectives open to revision, innovation, reconstruction, appropriation by other groups and so on. If a group of people have a shared interest in, say, protecting their property against tax increases, they might march on the legislature to protest. Yet unless this occurs purely spontaneously, it will require the articulation of objectives among members of the group.

For every "shared interest," there are also various possible objectives or goals, of varying specificity and scope. For Olson, the important question is whether or not individuals join the group that acts (pursues an objective). Yet the reason for joining or not joining might not be related to the "free-rider" problem but to the way the group's objectives are articulated. Apart from "sharing an interest," the prospective joiner needs be sympathetic to the group's anticipated objectives and methods and to identify with

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<sup>63</sup> Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action*, p. 33. Emphasis added.

the image of the participant that these objectives and methods help to construct (“activist,” “rebel,” “reformer” and so on).<sup>64</sup>

Much concern has resulted from perceptions that the category of rational action has been “stretched” too far, particularly through the application of rational choice theory to diverse areas of sociology such as collective behaviour. Critics do not tend to argue for increased attention to the “irrational,”<sup>65</sup> but rather for “weaker” or less demanding models of rationality; that is, models that do not require certain features of action to be present in order that behaviour be appraised as rational.

In this vein, French sociologist Raymond Boudon has argued against sociology’s increasing reliance on rational choice theory.<sup>66</sup> In Boudon’s account, rational choice theory is a powerful explanatory model that imposes six strict postulates: that any social phenomenon is the effect of individual decisions, actions, attitudes and so on; that, in principle at least, an action can be understood; that actions are caused by reasons in the minds of individuals; that these reasons derive from consideration by the actor of the consequences of his or her actions as he or she sees them; that actors are concerned mainly with the consequences to themselves of their own action; and that actors are able to distinguish the costs and benefits of alternative lines of action and that they choose the line of action with the most favourable balance.<sup>67</sup>

As Boudon points out, such models, while powerfully explanatory for certain types of social behaviour, fail to encompass individuals’ beliefs and to explain reactions that do not and cannot arise from self-interest.<sup>68</sup> Boudon suggests, instead, a less stringent

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<sup>64</sup> Francesca Polletta and James M Jasper, ‘Collective Identity and Social Movements’ *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 27, 2001, pp. 283–305.

<sup>65</sup> Christian Borch, however, does just that. Christian Borch, ‘The Exclusion of the Crowd: The Destiny of a Sociological Figure of the Irrational’, *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 9 no.1, 2006, pp. 83–102. Borch revisits the late nineteenth century social theories of Gustave Le Bon and Gabriel Tarde to stress two arguments about crowds: first, “the idea that irrationality is intrinsic to society” and, second, the related claim that instead of insisting on the individual as the point of departure for sociological inquiry, one might observe how “the individual loses his/her individuality in the crowd and is, however temporarily, absorbed in a collective entity that levels all personal characteristics and suspends his/her reasoning” (pp. 83–84).

<sup>66</sup> Raymond Boudon, ‘Beyond Rational Choice Theory’, *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 29, 2003, pp. 1–21.

<sup>67</sup> Boudon, ‘Beyond Rational Choice Theory’, pp. 3–4.

<sup>68</sup> Boudon, ‘Beyond Rational Choice Theory’, pp. 8–9.

“cognitivist theory or action,” which does not rely upon assumptions of consequentialism, egoism, maximisation and optimisation. While still assuming that collective phenomena result from individual human actions, Boudon stresses that individuals’ actions do not need to be instrumentalist to be rational. In this approach, rather, “action has to be explained by its meaning to the actor.” Rather than judging action against the requirements of rational choice theory, it is assumed that action is “meaningful to the actor, or, in other words, that it is grounded in the actor’s eyes on a system of reasons that he or she perceives to be strong.”<sup>69</sup> This appears to be a promising approach in studying social movements, especially since the “system of reasons” motivating social movement action is often not comprehensible to the wider society. Indeed, one of the main motivations of the social movement may be to bring a “system of reasons” into being and make it comprehensible.

American sociologist Ralph H. Turner has also criticised the “misuse of rational models in collective behaviour and social psychology.”<sup>70</sup> Turner focuses on the internal steps of decision-making that “strong” rational choice models require. In these models, actors are assumed to self-consciously hold a clear goal, actively identify options, explore and compare potential benefits and costs for each plausible course of action, assess relevant constraints and resources, assign probabilities to relevant factors, reach a decision based on weighted values and probabilities, monitor the unfolding action and interaction, and make appropriate corrections.<sup>71</sup> Clearly, as Turner points out, this is a very demanding model. “Weaker” accounts of rationality recognise that not all of these steps will normally be undertaken in decision-making.

Turner is particularly sceptical about the extent to which actors fulfil the more onerous criteria of the “strong” model of rational action. For example, one of the requirements of “strong” rationality is to “actively identify one’s options — the various potential means for achieving one’s goal.”<sup>72</sup> As Turner notes, the identification of options is not simply a

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<sup>69</sup> Boudon, ‘Beyond Rational Choice Theory’, p. 18.

<sup>70</sup> Turner, ‘The Use and Misuse of Rational Models’.

<sup>71</sup> Turner, ‘The Use and Misuse of Rational Models’, pp. 89–90. A similar image of rational action as including experimentation and adjustment is used by John Lofland: “Social movement practitioners are practical theorists who devise hypotheses, act on them, assess their actions, confirm or revise the theory, and act again.” Lofland, *Polite Protesters*, p. 23.

<sup>72</sup> Turner, ‘The Use and Misuse of Rational Models’, p. 89.

matter of selecting from pre-existing possibilities. This can be seen in social movement action, in which the development of options for action is at least partly a creative process. As for individuals, it is also likely that some potential means will either not be considered at all or will be simply unacceptable and will not be considered on an equal basis with others. For example, it is likely that, for the women's movement in 1920s Australia, widespread entry of women (especially married women with children) into paid work was not considered as an option on par with others. We might expect, rather, that workforce participation became an option and is now seen as an available approach as a result of social change, including actions taken by women's movement actors.

An important attempt explicitly to delineate “weak” rationality is Herbert Simon's behavioural model of rational choice, which came to be known as “bounded rationality.”<sup>73</sup> This theory holds that individuals are not always rational and are sometimes irrational (emotional). Note that the theory does not go so far as to argue that emotions and other experiences deemed non-rational may be constitutive in reasoning, a point taken up below. Accounts of bounded rationality usefully highlight that in most cases individuals will not assess all possible courses of action or incorporate all relevant information. Furthermore, this “failure” cannot be deemed “irrational,” since a truly comprehensive decision-process would be counterproductive.

While Simon retains the basic dichotomy between rationality and irrationality, Turner, in contrast, argues for a third category: that of *arational* (or non-rational) behaviour:

Behaviour is clearly irrational when the actor is aware of circumstances that make one course of action less promising than another, but nevertheless chooses the less promising alternative. Behavior is arational when the individual acts on the basis of habit, custom, instruction from others, or impulse, or acts without formulating a goal on the basis of which the advantages of alternative courses of action could be assessed.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Herbert A. Simon, ‘A Behavioral Model of Rational Choice’, *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, vol. 69 no. 1, 1955, pp. 99–118.

<sup>74</sup> Turner, ‘The Use and Misuse of Rational Models’, p. 91.

Although it is often not explicitly addressed, there is a strong evaluative element to discussions of behaviour in terms of rationality. In this view, the move to develop a category of “arational” action acts to soften the opprobrium levelled at irrational behaviour. It still, however, retains a residual category of behaviour defined in terms of it not being rational. This is problematic. As Joas argues:

Any typology of action can be said to be complete, formally speaking, if it overtly or covertly deploys a residual category into which all those phenomena fall which it cannot explicitly grasp conceptually. It by no means follows, however, that such a typology actually has the power to reveal phenomena.<sup>75</sup>

Following Joas, we turn here from the relaxation of criteria to a more positive reconstruction of reason, in a way that might be useful for analysis of social movements. The failure of rationality models to “reveal phenomena” is particularly limiting when one considers the gendered hierarchy of values assigned to the two poles of this duality. Over at least three decades, feminist philosophers have sought to overturn such hierarchies.<sup>76</sup> Many of these works have concentrated on the analysis of emotion: an important residual-negative element typically devalued in accounts of rationality. In her influential work on epistemology, feminist philosopher Alison Jaggar challenges the reason/emotion split by showing that emotions have qualities and effects that are constitutive of knowing and reasoning, rather than opposed to the capacity to know and to reason.<sup>77</sup> Jaggar shows, for instance, that emotions can be intentional, that they can be social constructs and that they may involve active engagement. In Jaggar’s view, emotions assist the inquirer in discerning values, forming hypotheses and

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<sup>75</sup> Joas, *The Creativity of Action*, p. 145.

<sup>76</sup> Other works contributing to the feminist critique, and in some cases reconstruction, of reason include: Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985; Seyla Benhabib, ‘Feminism and Postmodernism: An Uneasy Alliance’, in Seyla Benhabib, Judith Butler, Drucilla Cornell, Nancy Fraser (eds), *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*, New York: Routledge, 1995, pp. 17–34; Judith Butler, ‘Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of “Postmodernism”’, in Benhabib et al. (eds), *Feminist Contentions*, pp. 35–58; Helen Longino, ‘Circles of Reason: Some Feminist Reflections on Reason and Rationality’, *Episteme*, June 2005, pp. 79–88.

<sup>77</sup> Alison M. Jaggar, ‘Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology’, in Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall (eds), *Women, Knowledge, and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*, New York: Routledge, 1996 (second edition), pp. 166–190.

communicating about results, capacities that are indispensable to the conduct of scientific inquiry, even if scientific inquiry presents itself as dispassionate and value-free. Having argued that the ideal of dispassionate inquiry is a myth, Jaggar suggests that this “myth promotes a conception of epistemological justification vindicating the silencing of those, especially women, who are defined culturally as the bearers of emotion and so are perceived as more ‘subjective,’ biased, and irrational.”<sup>78</sup>

Importantly, Jaggar argues that it is not that men, or scientists, are unemotional, but that certain emotions are “conventionally prescribed” and socially approved, giving them an appearance of “rationality.”<sup>79</sup> In contrast, subordinate groups are more likely to experience “outlaw emotions,” such as discomfort or fear in the presence of male sexual banter.<sup>80</sup> Since, in Jaggar’s account, emotions are constitutive of knowledge, the shared experience of such emotions lays the basis for their transformative collective reappraisal:

Women may come to believe that they are “emotionally disturbed” and that the embarrassment or fear aroused in them by male sexual innuendo is prudery or paranoia. When certain emotions are shared or validated by others, however, the basis exists for forming a subculture defined by perceptions, norms, and values that systematically oppose the prevailing perceptions, norms, and values. By constituting the basis for such a subculture, outlaw emotions may be politically (because epistemologically) subversive.<sup>81</sup>

The consideration of rationality in studies of feminist movements is therefore doubly problematic. As Jaggar’s work shows, feminist thinking explicitly challenges the strong cultural association between femininity, emotions and irrationality (taken together as inferior residual categories in relation to their opposites). Feminists’ “reasons” for their activism therefore incorporate “outlaw emotions,” which by definition are not

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<sup>78</sup> Jaggar, ‘Love and Knowledge’, pp. 17–179.

<sup>79</sup> Jaggar, ‘Love and Knowledge’, p. 180.

<sup>80</sup> Jaggar, ‘Love and Knowledge’, pp. 180–181.

<sup>81</sup> Jaggar, ‘Love and Knowledge’, p. 180.

immediately comprehensible to others in a social system of subordination. Assessing the “rationality” of feminist movements’ actions and decisions is therefore not straightforward. In feminist activism, standard components of rationality, such as “goals” and “means,” might not only be obscure to the observer, but are implicitly and explicitly drawn into question in feminist thinking itself. In this context, it may be most fruitful to follow the approach proposed by Boudon (above), in which “action has to be explained by its meaning to the actor.”

Explicitly addressing the gendered separation of reason from emotion in the study of social movements, similar points are highlighted by Myra Marx Ferree and David A. Merrill. They argue:

[T]he separation of cognition and emotion is related to the separation of objectivity and values, itself part of an ideology of “value-neutrality” in science. The separation of cognition and emotion becomes part of the way of presenting sociology as science that would allow it to evade fundamental questions about whose perspectives and needs shape its particular relevance.<sup>82</sup>

Furthermore, they argue, the “gendering of the political as male” tends to obscure those types of social movement activity that women are often involved in (such as grassroots networking and organising).<sup>83</sup> However, focusing on women’s movements as essentially challenging (rather than engaging in) the practice of politics is also likely to obscure important parts of their activity. Again the task of studying women’s movement presents itself as a multi-layered problem. Le Bon’s (1805) description of the irrationality of crowds as feminine can now be read in a humorous light, but it also provides a reminder of the historical significance of analysing rationality in women’s movement action:

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<sup>82</sup> Myra Marx Ferree and David A. Merrill, ‘Hot Movements, Cold Cognition: Thinking about Social Movements in Gendered Frames’, *Contemporary Sociology*, vol. 29 no. 3, 2000, pp. 454–462, p. 457.

<sup>83</sup> Ferree and Merrill, ‘Hot Movements, Cold Cognition’, p. 460.

[A]mong the special characteristics of crowds there are several — such as impulsiveness, irritability, incapacity to reason, the absence of judgment and of the critical spirit, the exaggeration of the sentiments, and others besides — which are almost always observed in beings belonging to inferior forms of evolution — in women, savages, and children, for instance...Crowds are everywhere distinguished by feminine characteristics, but Latin crowds are the most feminine of all.<sup>84</sup>

One of the most difficult questions to be addressed when discussing rationality in social movements is the status of goals. As Joas notes, “The idea that human action can best be understood as the pursuit of preconceived goals is linked to other tacit assumptions which are deeply rooted in the traditions of western philosophy.”<sup>85</sup> In formal accounts of rationality such as Boudon’s above, goals are a key category. With Turner and Boudon, we have considered how actors might not follow detailed decision-procedures and, in particular, how goals need not be self-interested. But what constitutes the pursuit of a goal in social movement action? Are goals an indispensable part of reasoned action? And are goals prior to action?

Drawing attention to the socially constructed nature of rational action, Turner points out that actions are often retrospectively made rational, which allows others to respect and make sense of the actor:

[P]eople are normally expected to behave rationally. Rational accounts of behavior serve as socially sanctioned mechanisms for maintaining personal dignity in most situations. They assure the actor and others that the actors are firmly in control of their own behavior and can be dependable. Hence we learn to engage in retrospection whereby we transform our own irrational and non-rational behavior into rational behaviour.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Le Bon, *The Crowd*, p. 31, p. 34.

<sup>85</sup> Joas, *The Creativity of Action*, p. 156.

<sup>86</sup> Turner, ‘The Use and Misuse of Rational Models’, p. 90.

This insight can be extended to social movement action: that in demanding that politics or the broader public take notice of and respond to social movement claims and protests, social movement groups will, at times, engage in post hoc rationalisation and presentation of their actions as rational, that is to say as coherently formed in terms of means towards explicable ends. This account also illuminates both political debates over the value of given social movements, and their retrospective presentation by proponents, in which the reasonableness of social movement action is at issue. Turner notes that one of the key ways in which post hoc rationalisation occurs is through the retrospective “revision or formulation of suitable goals.”<sup>87</sup> Thus, accounts of the type “we wanted to...” or “they aimed to...” are not simple representations of a goal held in the past and recalled in the present: they are accounts building a model of actors’ reasonable motivations and decisions. This is not just a problem of the unfaithfulness of memory and the impulse towards positive self-presentation by actors: it is also because actors are themselves building on the sense made *through* their actions.

This is not to argue that actors, including social movement actors, do not actually develop goals as part of projects for the future. It is possible to view the development and articulation of goals as a qualitatively distinctive mode or aspect of the process by which social movements develop their directions. When social movement groups state goals, this may be, at least to some extent, a partial crystallisation of a less well-defined intentionality, developed in order to create the possibility for other social actors to participate in some dimly-understood or difficult-to-communicate sense of desired change. The desire for change cannot be reduced to a reaction or protest against the conditions of the present (since it also includes an orientation to the future — an orientation that may not be clear but is not empty) nor, in any simple sense, to the achievement of a preconceived end-state. Discussing social movements, Mische develops a similar idea in elaborating her view of projects and “projectivity.” This view rejects the division between rational choice and norm-based action, and between rational choice and cultural determinism:

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<sup>87</sup> Turner, ‘The Use and Misuse of Rational Models’, p. 105.

Projects are simultaneously moral, practical, and political in scope, weaving together ideals and interests, protest and proposals, utopian alternatives and pragmatic assessments of opportunity structures...Projects are the means by which actors imaginatively formulate purposive actions, but these are always composed from the cultural narratives and repertoires at hand...In contrast to the abstract voluntarism of rational-choice theory, moreover, the construction of projects is situationally contingent, subject to learning processes and revision, and always surrounded by a high degree of uncertainty.<sup>88</sup>

Attempts to articulate the desired end-state or goal reveal themselves as partial expressions or actually as, themselves, “means to an end.” In terms of the topic of this study, “women’s economic independence” can be conceived as a desired end-state, towards which there are various means of working, and that at different times, women’s movement actors in Australia selected different means (state payments in the 1920s, workforce participation in the 1970s). But this template of means and ends may be a misleading interpretive device. Women’s economic independence was certainly developed as an important goal in both periods, and those political directions were taken by the movement in the respective periods. But the means-ends schema does not adequately account for the process by which this articulated objective or the specific actions “towards it” were developed, and it gives the goal a misleading image of self-evident weight.

As in the discussions above about viewpoint and agency, some guidance for this endeavour is provided by the philosophical tradition of pragmatism represented by thinkers such as George Herbert Mead, Charles Peirce, Henry James, and John Dewey, as well as, more recently, the action theory of Hans Joas. It is beyond the scope of the thesis to provide a comprehensive account of the different strands of this rich and diverse tradition, but a brief overview is desirable.<sup>89</sup> Pragmatism is generally understood as a philosophy that teaches that ideas are only as important as their usefulness. This is

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<sup>88</sup> Mische, ‘Projects, Identities, and Social Networks’, pp. 7–8, quoted in Emirbayer and Mische, ‘What Is Agency?’, pp. 992–993, note 18.

<sup>89</sup> Good accounts are provided in Joas, *Pragmatism and Social Theory* and in Joas, *The Creativity of Action*, pp. 126–144.

often interpreted as endorsing a kind of utilitarianism in relation to ideas and principles, sometimes tending to moral relativism. However, pragmatism can be interpreted in a different way (more consistent with the philosophers' original intention), as pointing out that we do not and cannot begin with doubt alone: preconceived problems, ideas, purposes and prejudices are built into the foundations of each instance of inquiry and thought. One interpretation of this is that, to discover the "true meaning" of any theory it needs to be translated into a maxim about what should be done in some circumstance.<sup>90</sup> A significant implication of this is a resistance to the insistence on foundational causes or essences of action.<sup>91</sup> Susan Bickford identifies pragmatism (like poststructuralism) as an antifoundational philosophy:

By antifoundational, I mean theories that reject an ahistorical, absolute foundation for knowledge and, relatedly, for the human self. Antifoundationalism does not refer to a source outside of history and society to justify its knowledge claims. But since they do make such claims, antifoundational theories are not ungrounded; however, the grounds invoked tend to be contextual rather than transcendent.<sup>92</sup>

Unlike poststructuralism, pragmatist thinkers have traditionally seen their contributions as directed towards a broader socially progressive project. The link between pragmatism as a philosophical tradition and pragmatism as an approach to politics has been highlighted by James T. Kloppenberg:

Between 1870 and 1920, two generations of American and European thinkers created a transatlantic community of discourse in philosophy and political theory. Discarding accepted distinctions between idealism and empiricism in epistemology, between intuitionism and utilitarianism in

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<sup>90</sup> Charles Sanders Peirce, 'How to Make Our Ideas Clear', in Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (eds), *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce: Volume V Pragmatism and Pragmaticism*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1934, pp. 248–271.

<sup>91</sup> See for example Dewey's argument that political philosophy has largely failed to take to heart the lesson from natural philosophy that it only progressed after an intellectual revolution in which it abandoned the "search for causes and forces and turn[ed] to the analysis of what is going on and how it goes on." John Dewey, *The Public and its Problems: An Essay in Political Inquiry*, Chicago: Gateway Books, 1946 (first published 1927), p. 21.

<sup>92</sup> Susan Bickford, 'Why We Listen to Lunatics: Antifoundational Theories and Feminist Politics', *Hypatia*, vol. 8 no. 2, 1993, pp. 104–123, p. 105.

ethics, and between revolutionary socialism and laissez-faire liberalism in politics, they converged toward a *via media* in philosophy and toward the political theories of social democracy and progressivism.<sup>93</sup>

There is also a connection between this community of discourse and “social liberal” feminism, a stream of social reformism that was influential in Australia, as documented by Marian Sawer.<sup>94</sup>

Philosophical pragmatism is linked to a view of intellectual work as a contribution made within a community considering problems.<sup>95</sup> Against Descartes’ “establishment of the self-certainty of the thinking and doubting ego as the firm foundation of a philosophy,”<sup>96</sup> Peirce described his approach thus:

We cannot begin with complete doubt. We must begin with all the prejudices which we actually have when we enter upon the study of philosophy. These prejudices are not to be dispelled by a maxim, for they are things which it does not occur to us *can* be questioned. Hence this initial skepticism will be a mere self-deception, and not real doubt; and no one who follows the Cartesian method will ever be satisfied until he has formally recovered all those beliefs which in form he has taken up. It is, therefore, as useless a preliminary as going to the North Pole would be in order to get to Constantinople by coming down regularly upon a meridian.

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<sup>93</sup> James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870–1920*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986, p.3.

<sup>94</sup> Marian Sawer, *The Ethical State?: Social Liberalism in Australia*, Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2003. This connection is also indicated by the participation of key figures Beatrice and Sidney Webb in both traditions, as documented by Sawer and Kloppenberg. Sawer, *The Ethical State*, p. 88; Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory*, p. 229. On the links between feminism and pragmatism more generally, see also Erin McKenna, ‘Pragmatism and Feminism: Engaged Philosophy’, *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy*, vol. 24 no. 1, 2003, pp. 3–21; Charlene Haddock Seigfried, *Pragmatism and Feminism: Reweaving the Social Fabric*, Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

<sup>95</sup> But see also the work of Richard Rorty, whose self-declared pragmatism appears to eschew the possibility of a link between pragmatist philosophy and political action. Despite this scepticism, Rorty has attempted to provide feminism with some pragmatist “ammunition.” Richard Rorty, ‘Feminism and Pragmatism’, in Russell B. Goodman (ed.), *Pragmatism: A Contemporary Reader*, London: Routledge, 1995, pp. 125–148. For feminist responses to Rorty’s offer, see Nancy Fraser, ‘From Irony to Prophecy to Politics: A Response to Richard Rorty’, in Goodman, *Pragmatism*, pp. 154–159 and Carol Bacchi, “‘Pragmatism’ be Damned: Richard Rorty’s Death Wish for Feminism’, *Hecate*, vol. 18, no. 2, 1992, pp. 97–105.

<sup>96</sup> Joas, *Pragmatism and Social Theory*, p. 18.

A person may, it is true, in the course of his studies, find reason to doubt what he began by believing; but in that case he doubts because he has positive reason for it, and not on account of the Cartesian maxim. Let us not pretend to doubt in philosophy what we do not doubt in our hearts.<sup>97</sup>

Pragmatism is sometimes understood, or misunderstood, as a justification of instrumentalism in human action; that is, as a philosophy that sees all human action as simply means to the achievement of ends (often interpreted to mean self-interested or utilitarian ends). While pragmatism does place action, rather than thought, at the centre of its analysis, it does not presume the orientation of action towards pre-established ends. In pragmatist thought, action is considered as engagement in concrete situations, rather than as the pursuit of pre-determined goals. In this flow of interaction between a person and a situation, thought coalesces into the selection of an end and the development of means only at certain times. Goals and means are therefore developed together, rather than in a linear sequence. This understanding of action makes an important contribution to the framework of the thesis. It gives us a way to consider purposive action without pre-judging what form this will take or introducing an evaluative framework favouring either spontaneity or planning in social movement action. A pragmatist concept of action gives us a way to remain open to the intentional aspects of social movement action, and hence to the idea that social movements intentionally change the world, while not taking at face value the language of goals. We need not reduce intentional social movement activity to a self-delusion, to be unveiled as such by the researcher. At the same time, we can inquire further into the way goals are developed, rather than taking them as given.

To the extent that evaluative distinctions are drawn in pragmatist thought between different kinds of actions, these distinctions are not between rationality and irrationality. Rather, philosophical pragmatism distinguishes between reflective, deliberate and intelligent engagement with a situation, and engagement that is unreflective, non-deliberate and unintelligent. For example, when Dewey discusses the formation of states as “an experimental process,” he says that this can be blind groping and fumbling

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<sup>97</sup> Peirce, ‘How to Make Our Ideas Clear’, p. 156.

without insight or an idea of what is sought, or it can proceed “more intelligently.”<sup>98</sup> But, according to Dewey, “it is still experimental.”<sup>99</sup> This is a much less rigid model, which focuses on reasonable action in specific situations, rather than on general criteria for evaluating the rationality of action (as in rational choice theory).

Joas’ theory of the creativity of action is a recent contribution that makes extensive use of, and builds on, the pragmatist critique of rational action theories.<sup>100</sup> Joas’ detailed arguments can only be briefly sketched here. Through a “reconstructive introduction,”<sup>101</sup> Joas considers three tacit assumptions behind ideas of rational action and reconfigures these in more satisfactory forms, which highlight the creativity required for their fulfilment. First, Joas considers the means-ends schema in which it is assumed that the actor has pre-conceived goals that exist prior to action and independent of the situation.<sup>102</sup> In its place he proposes a non-teleological account of intentionality in which goals are generated through imaginative engagement in concrete action-situations. Second, Joas considers the assumption that actors control their bodies. In response, he argues that we relate in various ways to our body, only one of which is to treat it instrumentally, as a tool.<sup>103</sup> Finally, Joas considers the (already much-critiqued) assumption of the autonomy of the individual actor, arguing for a “primary sociality,” which forms the precondition for the emergence of autonomy.<sup>104</sup>

Joas’ and other pragmatist approaches to action suggest a fruitful way to understand social movements, since they do not require a first-step choice between understanding social movement action as rational and understanding it as irrational. Rather, they encourage us to identify what, in social movement action, is taken as given and what is brought into the scope of decision-making, rather than unrealistically examining social movement action as if everything is decided “from scratch” or as if everything is a spontaneous or automatic reaction. In this approach, the different facets of action are seen as meaningfully co-existing without any of them being interpreted as a basic

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<sup>98</sup> Dewey, *The Public and its Problems*, p. 33.

<sup>99</sup> Dewey, *The Public and its Problems*, p. 33.

<sup>100</sup> Joas, *The Creativity of Action*.

<sup>101</sup> Joas, *The Creativity of Action*, p. 147.

<sup>102</sup> Joas, *The Creativity of Action*, pp. 148–167.

<sup>103</sup> Joas, *The Creativity of Action*, pp. 167–184.

<sup>104</sup> Joas, *The Creativity of Action*, pp. 184–195.

negation or as a residual category of any other. Questions still remain, though, about how this “works” in social movement action. Following Joas, seeing action as creative might allow us to understand social movements as intentional even when they do not adhere to the means-end schema. The idea of “primary sociality” also suggests how “going beyond oneself” in collectives such as the women’s movement might create different capacities to act, while Joas’ discussion of the body encourages inquiry into how people participating in social movements can adopt both instrumental and non-instrumental orientations to their actions.

In terms of instrumentalism, I conclude this discussion with the observation that social movement participants have, themselves, often articulated complex, ambivalent attitudes towards instrumentalism.<sup>105</sup> In fact, analysts such as Melucci, Touraine and André Gorz tend to interpret “new” social movements as heralding not simply the mobilisation of new grievances but also new conceptions of the self that value expression and creativity, against what many sociologists, from Max Weber on, have diagnosed as the rise of instrumental rationality.<sup>106</sup> As Barry Hindess has argued:

A massive extension of instrumental rationality has occurred in the modern period. Compared with non-Western societies and with the West in the past, the modern period has seen an extensive development of specialized discourses and techniques in which areas of social life are represented as fields of instrumental action.<sup>107</sup>

Disquiet about the perceived dominance of instrumental rationality was a motivation for Jürgen Habermas in the development of his normative theory of “communicative rationality.”<sup>108</sup> While disagreeing with Habermas in certain respects, Melucci also draws

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<sup>105</sup> Sarah Maddison and Sean Scalmer, *Activist Wisdom: Practical Knowledge and Creative Tension in Social Movements*, Sydney: University of NSW Press, 2006.

<sup>106</sup> Alberto Melucci, *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society*, London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989; Melucci, ‘The Process of Collective Identity’; Alain Touraine, ‘An Introduction to the Study of Social Movements’, *Social Research*, vol. 52 no. 4, 1985, pp. 749–787; Alain Touraine, *The Return of the Actor: Social Theory in Postindustrial Society*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988; André Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class: An Essay on Post-Industrial Socialism*, translated by Michael Sonenscher, London and Sydney: Pluto, 1982.

<sup>107</sup> Barry Hindess, ‘Rationality and Modern Society’, *Sociological Theory*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1991, pp. 216–227, p. 225.

<sup>108</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, translated by Thomas McCarthy, Boston: Beacon Press, 1984 and 1987.

attention to the way in which “new” social movements represent a break with instrumental rationality.<sup>109</sup> However, in seeing social movements as significant because of their allegedly anti-instrumental nature, Melucci relegates the goals and outcomes of social movement action either to the status of “traditional political” concerns (and therefore out of scope for his analysis) or to the status of useful fictions. Participant accounts and histories of the second-wave women’s movement indicate that not only were articulated goals and means a very important part of the movement, the movement as a whole problematised questions of instrumentalism through, for example, debates about reform versus revolution, as well as other discussions about how to proceed. Together with the foregoing discussion of agency and rationality, then, this suggests that it is possible to see instrumental action as one among other types of reasoned action emerging from different parts of a movement at different times. Further, we can look to processes of organisation within the movement as key ways in which the capacity for different kinds of action can emerge. Within this broader and more variegated framework it will also be possible to consider whether the women’s movement did exhibit a change in the extent to which it engaged in, or problematised, instrumental action over time.

## **Conclusion**

In developing a new model of social movement action, this chapter first reintroduced the ideas about responsibility and moral agency that were initially presented in Chapter 3. Holding the women’s movement responsible for alleged failures invokes the image of a unitary moral agent, which is at odds with much of what we know about social movements. Yet the problem of responsibility is not so easily dismissed. Instead of viewing responsibility as applying only to individuals’ self-controlled actions, it was proposed that we could view it in terms of people taking responsibility for events over which they may not have had control. From this perspective, the chapter proceeded to reflect on the conventional account of the moral agent. The chapter examined the three key characteristics of the actor as a moral agent (unity, agency and rationality), drawing on feminist and pragmatist philosophy to discuss how these characteristics might be

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<sup>109</sup> Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, p. 12, pp. 55–57.

constructively understood and adapted to apply to social movements. From this discussion was generated an understanding of the social movement as capable of forming intentional action through organisation, but not necessarily as forming intentions in an even or unitary way. Rather, an image was proposed of the social movement as a field in which more intensively organised nodes provide the capacity for intentional action. In terms of aggregate intentions, the notion of a movement “direction” was proposed as an interpretive way to discuss the overall intention and impact of a movement while recognising internal differentiation. It was argued that the more densely-organised nodes of movements allow for the formation of collective intentions that can “pull” the movement in certain directions.

In terms of agency, it was argued that positing agency simply as the opposite of structure is not adequate and that a more useful approach would be to give attention to the extent to which the temporal dimensions of agency (iterative, projective and practical-evaluative) are evident in social movement action. In particular, it was argued, we need to examine the extent to which (and the means through which) these dimensions appear in conscious, reflective form. Turning, finally, to rationality, it was argued that we need not insist on rationality as inherently self-interested, or as involving rigorous decision procedures. More positively, I drew on feminist critiques of reason and pragmatist conceptions of action to present emotions as part of reasoning, and goals and means as produced together in action rather than following a sequence in which cognition precedes action. Finally, it was argued that instead of seeing movements as essentially anti-instrumentalist, we could investigate the extent and form of instrumental and non-instrumental action, and the way in which instrumentalism itself is problematised in movement organisation and deliberation. In the next chapter I draw out significant themes from the two historical studies and consider these studies in the light of the model and concepts developed here.



Demonstration in Melbourne to mark International Women's Day, 8 March 1975. Image courtesy of the National Archives of Australia, A6180, 19/3/75/4.



Women attending an Australian Federation of Women Voters conference, 1930. Image courtesy of the State Library of South Australia, SLSA: B 58320. The banner at the rear reads, "Cultivate an All Australia Outlook."

## Chapter 7: Drawing the Threads Together

Chapters 4 and 5 examined the women's movement in the interwar period (1919–1938) and in the 1970s and 1980s, and considered the extent to which participants were able to make strategic decisions about work and care issues at the broadest level. These studies found that in these two eras the women's movement as a whole was not capable of, and not oriented to, strategic decision-making in this way. Having established that the model of the movement as a strategic actor is not adequate, the previous chapter, Chapter 6, then turned to the task of developing a more adequate model of social movement action. It was argued that social movements do form directions that are influenced by the collective intentions of participants, and that these collective intentions can be created through organisation. Chapter 6 also developed an account of social movement agency as temporal, and proposed a different approach to rationality and reason in movement action.

In this chapter I revisit the two historical studies to draw together key themes and examine their findings in the light of the ideas presented in the previous chapter. I begin by looking more closely at the nature and extent of strategic action in the two periods. The chapter then considers how the political context in each era affected the decisions made, and analyses the relationship between activism and the relevant “dominant discourses.” Following this, the chapter discusses participants' underlying beliefs about how social and political change could be achieved. I then ask how it was that overall movement directions changed in the two periods, and show how organisation emerged and operated within the movement in the two eras. The means-end schema is considered in more detail in relation to the two eras, showing how goals and methods related to the less tangible aspects of movement action, and how non-instrumental elements influenced the formation of projects. Finally, the chapter analyses the historical studies in relation to the temporal model of agency introduced in the last chapter, and asks whether, on the basis of the research, it seems to make sense to approach movements as reasonable and interpretable, abandoning the more stringent demands of rational actor theory.

### **Was strategic action taken in response to discursive risks?**

This thesis has focused on feminists' interpretations of and responses to particular kinds of risks: those potential political, ideological and discursive consequences that shape the possibilities for women's identities, and the terms on which gender politics will be able to be conducted in the future. This focus arose from criticisms implying that the women's movement in the past was insufficiently attentive to such risks: in the case of the 1920s and 1930s movement, the risk that advocacy on the basis of maternity would lock women into the role of motherhood; and, in the case of the 1970s and 1980s, the risk that pressing for women's workforce participation would further undervalue women's non-market caring work. The thesis has found that it is true that, in the two periods studied, strategic attention to these risks, at the broad levels indicated, was limited. However, closer analysis of the activism of the two periods suggests that we should not expect to see strategising on such broad discursive levels, and that reasonable accounts of movement responsibility should not rely on such criteria.

One of the reasons why this kind of strategising is limited is because the relevant risks often only become apparent retrospectively as a result of movement learning and new analysis. The most notable example in this study is the way in which, between the two periods, feminists and others had developed the concepts of roles and stereotypes to explain oppression and social order. This meant that an analysis of the risk of reinforcing the mothering role was, in a way, not available to feminists in the 1920s and 1930s, since this analysis was actually made possible by ideas that were adopted after this period. Clearly, at this point it is necessary to reiterate that the creation of knowledge is not a simple matter of revealing always-present truths. The relevant, specifically feminist knowledge of the dangers of stereotypes emerged from the articulated, shared and interpreted experiences of some women in a way that is irreducibly political. That is, mobilisations of this knowledge are part of broader political projects involving relations of solidarity and identification, not impartial revelations. In a similar way, it can be seen that the identification of the other risk considered here (the risk of undervaluing women's care work by emphasising access to employment) might represent a kind of emergent knowledge — one that is also undeniably politicised.

In terms of the actions taken in the historical periods studied, a strikingly consistent finding is that, while strategy at the level of broad strategic risks was generally absent, some movement groups were undeniably capable of and inclined to take strategic and instrumental action in relation to particular political risks. For instance, as we have seen, groups in the 1920s such as the AFWV considered the implications of pursuing the more specific measure of the widows' pension for their broader goal of motherhood endowment. Such strategising was not limited to the earlier period, in which women's groups followed more obviously lobbying-based models of action: in the 1970s, for example, one of the reasons WEL rejected proposals for a mother's wage, was because such a payment would jeopardise the movement's claims for government-funded childcare. It is not argued, therefore, that the women's movement has been essentially non-strategic. Rather, the study presents clear evidence of strategising in both periods.

The fact that strategising was evident in both periods is a particularly significant finding in relation to the claims by some theorists that movement identity and culture, rather than strategy, are the defining and significant features of the "new" social movements that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s (including the women's movement). Strictly speaking, these findings do not make it untenable for theorists to argue that the "essential significance" of these movements lies in their non-strategic or anti-instrumental features. The findings do, however, make it necessary for such arguments to account for the possible co-existence of strategic and non-strategic action, where this appears.

While the study found evidence of strategising at the level of the immediate political situation, it found there was little explicit strategic consideration given to the broader discursive risks. Apart from the historical-developmental reasons discussed above, a number of explanations for this are suggested. First, the imperative to continue responding in already-existing and evolving situations seems to have limited the extent to which participants strategically deliberated about the ultimate discursive effects of their activism. By this I mean that there was no space prior to action in which such considerations could be discussed and resolved; rather, action continued, with deliberation and strategising occurring on a smaller scale within that continuing action.

This is not to say that little thought was given to the ultimate meaning and purpose of the movement: clearly in both eras, and particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, a great deal of creative effort and communication went into projecting visions of possible future societies and possible future identities for women. But where, alongside and partly animated by these visions, consideration turned to the question of *how* to achieve change (remembering that the specific nature of this change was not agreed as a prior condition of action), this very question (*how?*) brought prospects for action to a more tangible and less general level. It may be, simply, that is not possible to act in direct relation to the ultimate meaning and purpose of the movement, or even, indeed, to the discursive effects of movement action, even where these are considered and problematised. This is to say that even if the discursive risks discussed above could have been identified by women's movement participants, it does not follow that they would, in any straightforward way, have been able to "act on them."

In the previous chapter it was suggested that deliberation, both within organisations and between organisations and individuals within the movement as a whole, might be a way in which collective intentions (and hence, perhaps, strategic capacity) could be formed. As discussed in Chapter 5, this idea relates to the findings of studies of women's movements and the state, which suggest that the development of peak or umbrella bodies to represent the movement can improve effectiveness and inclusiveness. Despite attempts to form such a body, and despite the federal government's establishment of various national women's advisory committees in the later decades of the twentieth century, the Australian women's movement has never had and indeed has resisted the formation of a body to represent it and within which decisions could be made. Part of the analysis of movement-wide deliberation must, therefore, be left to studies of other countries in which such bodies have been established (for example, Louise A. Chappell's study comparing the interaction of the Canadian and Australian women's movements with their respective states).<sup>1</sup>

National representative bodies are only one of many possible manifestations of deliberation, and themselves rest on other forms of coordination within a movement.

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<sup>1</sup> Louise A. Chappell, *Gendering Government: Feminist Engagement with the State in Australia and Canada*, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2002.

However, the concept of deliberation does direct our attention to structures and the decisions made within them. It was in part for this reason that the study looked closely at several women's organisations to examine the extent of deliberation. Conferences were also important potential forums for deliberation. As we have seen, the extent of recorded deliberation at the movement-wide was fairly limited. Except perhaps in relation to specific issues within fairly small groups, there were rarely deliberations that conclusively guided action, in terms of action following from a decision. This is not to argue that the movement was without communication and organisation between groups and individuals, but rather that these forms of coordination did not generally involve final agreements or reach decisive, binding conclusions. It is beyond the scope of this study to consider in detail, but it is worth noting too that studies of women's movements in other countries suggest that even where formal structures have existed for movement-wide deliberation (as in Canada) this often takes a messier form than might be expected, suggesting that deliberation might in any case be an ideal that can only be imperfectly approximated.

### **What was the political context and how did it affect decisions?**

In each era, the political context significantly shaped possibilities for women's movement actors to articulate claims and analyses. The context affected both organisational forms and political claims (and as discussed below organisational form also affected the way political claims were articulated). It is clearly inadequate to analyse movement "choices" as if decisions were made "in a vacuum." However, it is not sufficient to describe the context only in terms of constraints and opportunities, as this assumes a level of separation or distinctness between the context and movement that is not tenable.

While it is useful to think about political context, it is difficult to disentangle the context from the movement, and to specify the "mechanism of effect." For instance, the broader political debate about the family wage certainly helped to shape feminist proposals for endowment in the 1920s, but it was definitely more complex a matter than feminists rationally using the debate as an opportunity to pursue their overall goal of women's

economic independence. Their feminism incorporated many commitments held in common with other relevant political actors in the debate — such as a concern for child health and the adequacy of incomes for poor families — in such a way that their participation in the debate was not just a response to an external opportunity. This supports the idea that it is useful to see action not as a response from a separate actor to an external context, but as involvement in a situation in which “internal” and “external” are blurred. This is evident, for instance, in the way AFWV and NCW created federal structures to better engage with the developing federal government. Even where the action taken concerned explicit efforts to rearrange the organisations in response to the context, there were also other dynamics and forms of reasoning involved, in particular the visions for social reform bound up in “nation-building.” So it was not simply that participants saw that a federal structure mirroring the new government structure would make lobbying easier or more logical; rather, the pursuit of national-level unity and coordination was seen (particularly by AFWV) in more substantive and direct terms as a process of “collective will formation”<sup>2</sup> in which (some) Australian women could participate as well as have their interests articulated and represented.

We can discern, however, important elements of the political context that did operate at a greater “distance” from women’s movement actors, and greatly influenced their ability to achieve social change. In this category we can see, for example, how the basic wage debate, to a very large extent, excluded consideration of the particular position of women, in contrast to the efforts of the women’s movement to generate a focus on the position of women as part of the debate. However, while the relevant context here (the lack of concern for the particular position of women) certainly constrained movement action, action was also provoked by this context and sought to change it. The fact that this context appears historically as a constraint is in part due to the fact that women’s movement action was unable at that time to shift attention to women’s position. At this point, the analysis of contexts and opportunities appears to lose traction, since exclusion or failure of this kind represents a kind of difference in power that is the actual target of activism.

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<sup>2</sup> Patrocínio P. Schweickart, ‘What Are We Doing? What Do We Want? Who Are We? Comprehending the Subject of Feminism’, in Judith Kegan Gardiner (ed.), *Provoking Agents: Gender and Agency in Theory and Practice*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995, pp. 229–248, p. 230.

In the second period, too, the political context was influential, but the “mechanisms” through which this influence occurred are far from distinct. In the first place we can distinguish different levels or proximities of context. One immediate context was the New Left and liberationist politics from which many participants entered women’s liberation activities. This context provided important ideas about the inadequacy of “politics as usual” and, at the same time, settings in which the lack of emancipation achieved by women up to that point became especially stark. At a broader level, the Whitlam Labor Government held out the political promise of the very recognition denied to earlier feminists: that is, recognition of women’s particular position in society. This clearly presented openings for goal-oriented strands of the movement.

In terms of the movement’s directions in each period (promoting women’s access to work in the 1970s and 1980s and motherhood endowment in the interwar period), it can of course be noted that the different political contexts were influential, in that advocacy for these entitlements “fitted” to a degree with general norms and practices already in existence in those eras. For example, the increasing numbers of women in paid employment by the 1970s, compared with the interwar period, no doubt increased support for feminist positions on issues such as sexual harassment at work. There is also some support for the theory that “contradictions” in social and economic conditions can incite and shape activism. For example, in the earlier period there was a mismatch between the expectation that (white Anglo-Australian) families would efficiently provide a healthy population and social cohesion, and the economic difficulties and social impediments placed in the way of those (that is, women) on whom this responsibility actually rested. As shown, it was often feminists themselves who propagated this expectation, while highlighting the injustices involved, under the more general principle of the uplifting of motherhood. It is not, however, satisfactory to view this either as a basically rhetorical tactic, or a simple reproduction of gender roles. Rather, we can see this (and the second-wave activism on paid work) as a kind of creative interaction in which some elements of prevailing social conditions were reproduced, but in a way that incorporated new proposals and visions within these conditions. This is a more dynamic view of movement action, enabled by relaxing the image of a strict division between movement and context.

### **What was the relationship between activism and “dominant discourses”?**

In considering how the political context affected the different positions taken by the women’s movement in the two eras, it is difficult to avoid the concept of “dominant discourses.” As previously discussed, while dominant discourses are generally seen as constraining women’s movement activism, studies such as Barbara Hobson and Marika Lindholm’s show how women’s movements have at times been able to use and adapt amenable “master frames.”<sup>3</sup> This does not seem to have been true of the Australian movement in the two eras considered in this study, at least not to the extent achieved by the Swedish women’s movement, as described by Hobson and Lindholm.

In the first place, the amenable Swedish “master frame” of the “folkhem” or people’s home had no parallel, in either period, in Australia. The most powerful relevant concept accepted at a similar level of social consensus in the first period was the family wage. As we have seen, despite partially-successful attempts by feminists to engage in family-wage wage debates, the deeply gendered character of this guiding notion severely limited the capacity to adapt it into a broad framework within which feminist projects could be pursued (as Hobson and Lindholm argued occurred with the “folkhem”). In the second period, feminists appealed with some institutional success to widely accepted social liberal principles of equal opportunity, but as pointed out by many scholars (and as observed by many participants at the time, including those actually involved in the campaigns), this project was only to a limited extent able to imbue equal opportunity structures with substantively feminist principles. It was also observed in Chapter 5 that the relative lack of direct attention by feminists to public-discursive change (compared with institutional-policy change) in the 1970s and 1980s, together with the movement’s resistance to the formation of constituencies represented in a central forum, may also have limited the capacity to develop socially broader discourses of feminism. It can be seen, however, that elements of feminism have been adopted into accepted notions of the “fair go.”

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<sup>3</sup> Barbara Hobson and Marika Lindholm, ‘Collective Identities, Women’s Power Resources, and the Making of Welfare States’, *Theory and Society*, vol. 26 no. 4, 1997, pp. 475–508.

### **What were participants' understandings of how to achieve social change?**

It has been noted that, despite the horrors of World War I, reformers in the West during the 1920s and 1930s were animated by belief in progress.<sup>4</sup> This may be especially apparent, even misleadingly so, from the vantage point of the “late-“ or “post-modern era,” in which this faith has been severely challenged. It is not correct to assume that Australian feminists of the interwar years simply shared a single vision of social progress with other liberal reformers. In particular, their visions addressed the future of humanity in a way that generated new concerns about women’s relations to men, and the struggles that might be needed to achieve a more equal co-existence. Yet the historical evidence does support the view that feminists shared an optimistic expectation that a force of liberal progress existed which could be hindered or hastened but which nevertheless moved forward. While some feminists of the 1970s and 1980s shared elements of this liberal hopefulness and similarly believed that their activism was part of an inexorable historical force of progress, the second period was marked by a more skeptical attitude about the extent to which entrenched patriarchal interests could be expected to wither away.

The question remains, too, of *how* feminists in each period believed change could be achieved. These beliefs are related to the different analyses through which feminists explained the wrongs they were attempting to overcome. In interpreting both, we should be cautious about the extent to which historical research can definitively “access” this kind of information. In particular, we should avoid assuming that recorded actions necessarily reflect the ideas of participants about how social change is achieved, since, as we have seen, the necessity of engaging in concrete action-situations limits the range of viable approaches. Keeping these qualifications in mind, we can see that feminists in the 1920s did, to a large degree, seem to believe that through concerted lobbying the then-expanding functions of government could be made to enshrine, or at least work towards, women’s equal citizenship. This might give the impression of narrow focus on policy solutions, but women’s equal citizenship was also seen in terms of

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<sup>4</sup> Joanne Pemberton, ‘The Middle Way: The Discourse of Planning in Britain, Australia and at the League in the Interwar Years’, *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 52 no.1, 2006, pp. 48–63.

transcendence, as indicated by the many references to women's participation in public life helping to overcome entrenched divisions such as the conflict between labour and capital. Yet, in comparison with women's liberation in the 1970s, the methods of this transcendence were not so clearly identified. For many feminists in later era, the theory of social roles and stereotypes provided a link between the concrete and the transcendent in gender politics. And there was, for some, a belief in the horizontal rather than hierarchical possibility of change: that the revelation of feminism could reach other women, and that personal transformation was changing the world. This is clearly very different from earlier feminists' understandings of social change.

It is also apparent that feminists in the interwar period were less inclined to problematise the methods of social change than feminists in the 1970s and 1980s. Whereas feminists in the second period extensively debated "reform versus revolution" and related issues, the earlier feminists appear to have operated from largely un-problematized mutual understandings about how social change could be achieved. Again, however, it is important to acknowledge methodological limitations: it is possible that the apparently limited degree to which interwar feminists problematized how to achieve change is actually a result of the limited "access" of the researcher to the thoughts and conversations of individuals in the more distant past. Interviews and autobiographical material of the earlier feminists are comparatively rare. The fact that feminists of the 1970s and 1980s recorded their considerations about methods is, however, in itself a notable indication that this they saw this as important. Participants' higher levels of education and the movement's links with university life in the second period may also have contributed to the greater reflexivity in movement thinking and the tendency to problematise methods and goals.

### **How did changes in overall movement direction occur?**

In both the earlier and later periods studied, previous research has identified significant shifts in position on issues of work and care. In terms of the overall research focus on the extent of strategic decision-making, it is useful to analyse shifts such as these by asking to what extent they were the results of learning, deliberation and coordination,

or, conversely, of other factors or dynamics. In some ways, as we have seen, the early focus on motherhood endowment represented an effort to develop the movement's claims beyond achieving the vote. In the 1930s, as Marilyn Lake and others have argued, there was, in contrast, a shift towards defending women's right to work. In the 1970s and 1980s feminist activism seems to have coalesced, too, on a position of arguing for women's access to the workforce, rejecting proposals such as the "wages for housework" and a "mother's wage."

This study has found that in both eras some individuals and groups made statements advocating particular movement directions on the basis of their interpretations of knowledge gained, as in WEL's rejection of the "mother's wage" proposal on the basis that this would reinforce gender stereotypes. Yet despite statements of this kind, the study suggests it makes more sense to see major changes in movement direction as resulting from the combined effect of many such decisions, together with other actions, especially, those taken in reaction against policies or other mobilisations threatening dearly-held principles or entitlements. For example, in both the 1930s and in the 1970s, economic downturns led to the expansion of threats to married women's right to work, prompting, in turn, feminist mobilisation in defense of rights previously gained. The fact that these mobilisations entailed the development of new arguments and reasoning does not mean that these arguments and reasons were the primary forces animating activism; neither, however, should it be assumed that such reasoning is merely post hoc rationalisation. As argued in the previous chapter, for example, the sharing of "outlaw emotions" in reaction to mistreatment and the solidarity that arises from this should be seen as genuinely constitutive of new knowledge.

In examining changes of direction in social movements, it is important to observe that specific claims and projects are rarely, in any direct sense, supplanted by major shifts. Rather, they persist in a way that overlaps with newer proposals, actions and demands.<sup>5</sup> This can be seen very clearly in the 1930s: actions in support of maternally-oriented projects (such as motherhood endowment) continued to be a feature of the movement,

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<sup>5</sup> See also Judith Smart, 'Christian Women and Changing Concepts of Citizenship Rights and Responsibilities in Interwar Australia', in Joy Damousi and Katherine Ellinghaus (eds), *Citizenship, Women and Social Justice: International Historical Perspectives*, Melbourne: University of Melbourne, 1999, pp. 190–203, p. 191.

even as an increasing amount of effort went into advocating for the principle of women's equal citizenship (including the growing impetus for the removal of protective legislation affecting women's access to paid work). Similarly, while changes within the movement in the 1970s and 1980s saw the increasing prominence of policy-oriented claims for women's access to employment, this co-existed, as we have seen, with the persistence (and evolution) of different strands of the movement, especially those concerned with personal-transformative methods of change, and direct practical assistance to women.

Looking back at both eras, the philosophical conflicts between the various efforts are readily apparent. It was only to a limited extent, however, that these conflicts were explicitly addressed as overarching questions to be decided in determining the direction of the movement as a whole. There are a number of reasons for this. Most prominently, there was in both eras a degree of recognition that different autonomous groups within the movement had their own concerns and ways of operating. These groups were not expected to fall into line under any movement-wide platform. In the 1970s, this tacit understanding became more explicit and ideologically developed. As we have seen, this did not stop individuals and groups from passionately advancing their visions for the movement. However, both outright conflict and explicit coordination seem to have been focused more on immediate political issues than on high-level movement direction. For instance, the women's movement came together in 1923 to defend the Maternity Allowance and was split in the same year by wrangling over representation in international forums. Yet there is little evidence that feminists in the movement's different groupings explicitly addressed, to each other, their partly-conflicting and partly-harmonious visions in terms of the movement's direction as a whole. While the 1970s and 1980s saw more discussion about the purpose and meaning of the movement, for example through the many conferences held in this time, the era also saw an intensification of the principle of decentralisation. This meant there were few instances in which feminists explicitly considered the possibility of deliberately shaping the movement's direction through deliberation over central philosophical issues. Again, too, a great deal of attention was focused on more immediate political issues and opportunities: for many feminists these appear to have taken the form of imperatives for action.

To the extent that feminists in each era did attempt to advance particular directions for feminism as such, this tended to be manifested in efforts to build organisations and networks and, in the 1970s and 1980s in particular, to draw new participants into these. This needs to be distinguished from more obviously numerical tactics, such as those employed in “branch stacking,” where a particular candidate or faction deliberately enrolls large numbers of new members to a local branch of a political party in order to influence voting in that branch. While the existence of definite power resources (such as representative positions) makes “branch stacking” attractive, efforts to mobilise more people in feminist groups are directed at less tangible gains (new knowledge, ideas, networks, skills, time and energy) as well as at the prospect of affirming and spreading the group’s convictions, and building the movement as a whole.

In the sense of building organisations and support, then, there has certainly been competition between groups. In some instances, organisations have been formed with the explicit intention of drawing a range of women’s groups together in a unified direction, as in the cases of AFWV and the United Associations of Women. Yet even in these cases, the programmatic content of these calls to unite was open-ended rather than dogmatic. For example, the AFWV was formed on the platform of equal citizenship, a principle that distinguished the AFWV from the philanthropic groups of the time, but did not confine joint action to a particular set of claims. Indeed, we can see that after formation the AFWV monitored Australian and international politics to identify issues and claims that it could pick up, which were consistent with its overarching principle.

It is certainly true that both the AFWV and UA were more committed to the principle of women’s formal equality than was the NCW, the actions of which more closely reflected the “social work” concerns of their affiliated groups. There was, however, considerable overlap. Often, as in these cases, and also the later formation of groups such as WEL, the establishment of new organisations does not necessarily represent dissatisfaction with the stated policies or goals of older organisations, but often reflects impatience with the older forms and processes of action, and lack of identification with the internal cultures and personalities of the established groups. We can see, then, that a shift in the direction of a movement can arise from the interacting effects of the varying

emphases and claims mobilised by established and emerging groups, together with shifts in the levels of energy invested in these groups by new and continuing participants. Surrounding and also affecting and mediating these shifts are the movement-context dynamics discussed above

### **How did organisation develop and operate in the movement?**

A notable difference between the movement's two eras is the extent to which feminists identified with and embraced organisation. Whereas in the 1920s and 30s, many feminists were proud to identify themselves as "organised women" (a collective noun that performed a similar role as the term "the women's movement"), in the 1970s and 1980s there was much more ambivalence about organisation, as part of a more thorough-going critique of the structures of society. Yet in both eras processes of organisation occurred, and organisations were formed, while some organisations, such as the NCW, were already in existence by the 1920s and survive to this day.

In discussing organisation, it is important not to neglect the "mechanics" involved. In the 1920s and 30s, coordination was dominated by formal meeting procedures in which groups would consider and adopt precisely worded motions and platforms to reflect agreements on actions to be taken and principles to be followed. Due to the geographical distance between groups in networks of affiliation, regular conferences and correspondence were important in achieving the coordination required for concerted lobbying. Visits in Australian and abroad by travelling patrons and leading figures helped to connect Australian groups with each other and with like-minded groups internationally. In terms of the social networks underlying feminist organisation, these are indicated by members' shared participation in other groups. While the development of organisational capacity through strengthened federal structures was in itself innovative, the detailed systems of organisation tended to follow fairly well-established patterns.

In contrast, in the 1970s and 1980s, feminist groups were formed which explicitly challenged standard models for organisation. The resulting experimentation, together

with the problematisation of instrumental action itself, led to a great deal of debate about methods of organisation. This included Jo Freeman's famous paper, "The Tyranny of Structurelessness," in which Freeman argued that the apparent lack of leaders and structures did not eliminate power in groups, but rather displaced it onto unaccountable friendship groups and cliques.<sup>6</sup> Freeman's article reinvigorated attention to matters of fair process, inclusion and accountability within groups, and was welcomed by those groups, such as many WEL groups, that had themselves adopted procedures such as minutes and (rotating) positions of chairperson to improve efficiency and openness.

In both eras, organisations were intermediate structures in which women could develop both their concerns and identities as individuals, and the concerns and identities that they hoped to have represented at the collective level by the movement as a whole. Yet the interaction that occurred in organisations between individual women and the collective was quite different in each era. In the interwar years, by joining and participating in organisations, individual women saw themselves as making contributions to a cause conceived in general terms as affecting all women. Their own personal empowerment or liberation, or even equality, appears not to have been articulated as part of the cause itself. A certain impartial distance was kept between the cause and their own persons. It was this impartiality that permitted organisations to fulfill a relatively unproblematised role in working towards the cause: if it was the cause that was all-important, and specifically not in terms of the biographical or bodily details of the individuals working for it, then it was fitting for the cause to be pursued by organisations in which individuals were present mainly in terms of their functions and positions.

Another word of caution is necessary here: there may in fact have been strong personal reasons for individuals' participation, and in some cases individuals' own experiences may have been revelatory in terms of their awareness of the need for reforms in women's interests. Further, it is highly unlikely that the solidarity and dedication necessary to establish and maintain organisations could develop without the emotional

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<sup>6</sup> Jo Freeman aka Joreen, 'The Tyranny of Structurelessness', <<http://www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.htm>> (accessed 8 Sept. 2008) (first published 1972).

commitment of participants. Some of the movement's writings, for example in *The Dawn*, show passionate identification with the plight of other women, particularly poorer women and those caught up in unfair custody laws. Yet it is notable that the records kept by organisations and individual participants indicate that, in this period, individual experiences of discrimination or "degradation" were not generally presented as a basis for activism. Again, this may partly reflect the inherent limitations of the historical method and its inability to truly "access" individuals' reasoning. It is also likely that, even if individuals were motivated by their first-hand experiences, the extent to which they would be likely to publicise this motivation would, for many, have been severely limited by the stigma and shame associated with experiences such as divorce or assault, and by the social unacceptability of openly voicing, for example, dissatisfaction with one's marriage.

It was precisely this silence that was broken by participants in women's liberation in the later period. In this process, as we have seen, there developed an ethic of feminist consciousness and action in which the individual's specific experience and understanding were seen as the legitimate basis for activism. While the earlier tradition of advocacy on behalf of all women was continued (in a form modified by the impact of women's liberation), one of the significant results of the emphasis on women's experiences was the problematisation of organisational structure. If there was no platform or external cause that took precedence over the emergent knowledge arising from women's own experiences, then this drew into question the fundamental legitimacy of structures, especially hierarchical structures, designed to advance causes. Indeed, in this view, a fixed structure could pre-empt and destroy the potential meaning of the emerging collective, by dictating a form and, by implication, a target (politics as usual). It is interesting, however, that this strand, the women's liberation strand of the 1970s and 1980s movement was so vigorous (along with other groups) in advancing the practical projects that were seen as meeting the immediate needs of women, such as refuges and women's health centres. As we have seen, these projects were animated by the same kind of hunger for practical action that was expressed in WEL's electoral activities. Notably, both required organisation. In refuges and women's health centres, feminists continued to engage with difficult issues of organisation, reflecting their deep

unease with the concept of acting “for” or “on behalf of,” as opposed to their preference for acting “alongside” and “in solidarity with” other women.

In terms of the movement as a whole, we can see that in both eras, some parts of the movement organised more intensively; that is, they coordinated participants in relatively durable structures to act as part of joint projects directed at fairly specific aims. In the interwar years, the AFWV was able to do this to a greater extent, for example, than the NCW, whose capacity to organise tended to be reduced by their loose affiliations, fairly autonomous state-based units, and the promise not to bind affiliates to any position. In the 1970s and 1980s, WEL developed a fairly strong organising capacity compared with other parts of the movement, though it too espoused principles of decentralisation and saw itself as fundamentally guided by participants’ own interests and views about actions to be taken.

These findings can be viewed in terms consistent with the spatial metaphor proposed in the previous chapter: the movement as a three-dimensional field, in which more intensively organised “nodes” are represented by protrusions extending from the surrounding “landscape.” Two related aspects of this metaphor also help to elucidate the formation of movement directions in relation to organisation. First, it is these more intensively organised “nodes” that are most visible, both to contemporaries and in historical view. For this reason, the claims and projects articulated by the most organised parts of the movement have a relatively strong influence on the movement’s direction, as interpreted by “outsiders,” and also by participants. Second, in a more substantive sense, organisation allows participants to form collective intentions in a way that incorporates more explicitly articulated elements such as goals and means. In this sense, too, organisation influences the movement’s direction. It does not follow that organisation alone determines the movement’s overall direction: for example, widespread mobilisation expressing different meanings and purposes for the movement would draw into question the extent to which given organised intentions were really representative — but representation in this sense is representation of a “moving terrain,” not of a fixed set of interests or identities. This kind of conflict was evident in the contention about the direction of the movement in the 1980s in particular, as feminists exploring personal-transformative methods began to feel a growing gulf between the

movement as they saw it and the movement as represented by reform-oriented and instrumentally-minded feminists.

### **How were goals and means developed?**

While the findings discussed so far in this chapter bring into question the applicability of the means-end schema for interpreting movement action, it is also evident that goals were formed and methods devised as part of feminist activism in the two periods under consideration. It is necessary, therefore, to consider how goals and means emerged, and how these related to other aspects of the movement. To reiterate a point made in the previous chapter, powerful norms make it a sign of reasonableness to communicate about action in terms of means and ends. By making this point, I do not mean to signal a distancing or sceptical perspective on the way the women's movement has articulated its goals and methods. In particular, I am not suggesting that movement actors were only "pretending" to operate, or "presenting themselves" as operating, according to specified goals and means. Rather, I wish to suggest the very act of communicating about action may call forth means and ends. Since social movement mobilisation generally occurs through communication about action (action that others should take, action that "we" should take, changes that society should make), it is not surprising that goals and methods are so prominent in the descriptions and self-descriptions of movement action.

While the means-end schema may be inextricably bound up in how we communicate about action, there are also other observations that can be made about goals and methods in relation to the two periods of activism under consideration. In addition to general norms regarding accounts of action, the political arena seems to impose its own particular demands. It is a piece of lobbying folk-wisdom that advocacy directed to government should contain definite claims rather than diffuse sentiments. Social movement scholars have likewise noted that engagement with policy processes imposes on social movement groups an imperative to narrow and specify their claims, and not

“merely” to express their grievances.<sup>7</sup> The findings of the present study support these arguments and also suggest that, in a more fundamental way, the logic of the political arena calls forth the formation of goals and methods by social movement groups addressing that arena. These goals and methods do not emerge, however, in the rational sequence suggested by the means-end schema. In the 1970s and 1980s in particular, we saw that specific goals and claims of the movement (such as equal employment opportunity) developed through engagement with the political sphere, not in some separate, prior space of deliberation. This interpretation is consistent with pragmatist understandings of actors creatively involved in action-situations. The development of goals and means through engagement in the political situation was made particularly obvious in the later period by the existence of a strand of the movement that was opposed to the kinds of instrumental action evoked by the political arena.

The limitations of the means-ends schema become even more apparent when we look in more detail at the substantive issues addressed by movement action. In the opening chapters of the thesis, I introduced the possibility of seeing the two periods of movement action on work and care in terms of “different means to the same goal.” In this way we can designate women’s economic independence as the goal, and motherhood endowment and women’s access to employment as the different means devised to work towards the goal. As we have seen, this model is useful in that it highlights continuity in the movement across major differences in the political contexts and movement cultures of the two eras. It is particularly notable that economic independence has been a continuous concern for Australian feminists. Yet it is an oversimplification to view this, in the two different eras, as precisely the same goal. For a start, despite the similarities, economic independence was envisaged in quite different ways by feminists in the two eras. In the interwar years, although degradation and exploitation were certainly identified as results of economic dependence, this dependence was not generally conceived in terms of a *system* through which men as a group controlled women as a group. Thus, in this period the goal of independence was typically understood and presented in terms of rational redistribution to prevent social

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<sup>7</sup> David S. Meyer, ‘Restating the Woman Question: Women’s Movements and State Restructuring’, in Lee Ann Banaszak, Karen Beckwith and Dieter Rucht (eds), *Women’s Movements Facing the Reconfigured State*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 275–294, p. 283, p. 287.

harms, although there were some reformers who also saw dependence as stunting women's humanity.<sup>8</sup> In the 1970s and 1980s, economic independence took on the additional significance of a challenge to gender oppression and control (that is, to patriarchy). In the second-wave movement, feminist thinkers also began to develop a critique in which the social stigma attached to dependence was itself identified as a form of gender oppression, thus problematising independence as a goal and expanding the feminist project to encompass problems of discourse and symbolic value.

Recognising the ways in which the goal of economic independence had significantly different qualities in the different eras also suggests that the separation of goals and means might not be as definite as presented in the means-end schema. That is, the historical studies suggest that the goal of economic independence cannot be envisaged in a way that is devoid of content: the goal itself entails (shifting and endlessly re-created) images of women's future lives and of the incomes or other social changes that would remove their dependence on men. These images or projections are therefore generated in such a way that they already contain aspects of the more concrete projects (such as motherhood endowment and employment access) that we might think of as the methods that social movements devise to meet their goals. We can see this, then, as a kind of co-creation of goals and methods in concrete situations that do not permit an orderly sequence in which goal are specified and means derived.

The limitations of viewing motherhood endowment and employment as different means to the same goal of economic independence are made even clearer when it is recognised that these "means" had their own meanings and histories. These means and histories overlapped with but were not fully encompassed by the supposedly overarching goal of economic independence. In the interwar years, for instance, we can see that claims for motherhood endowment (and child endowment) were at least as significant in terms of the expanding welfare state and its potential for supplementing or supplanting the

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<sup>8</sup> For example Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution*, New York: Harper and Row, 1966 (first published 1898); Mrs John Booth, *The Payment of Women's Work: A Review*, 1918, quoted in Margaret Fitzherbert, *Liberal Women: Federation to 1949*, Annandale, NSW: Federation Press, 2004, p. 143; Gwendolyn Jones, 'Equal Economic Rights for Women', *Dawn*, 14 June 1927, pp. 11–12. Eleanor Rathbone was also concerned about women's dependence encouraging in men the urge to dominate women, which she called the "Turk complex." Eleanor Rathbone, *The Disinherited Family: A Plea for the Endowment of the Family*, London: Edward Arnold, 1924, pp. 268–274.

family wage as they were in terms of their feminist meaning (as a way to promote women's economic independence). In the later period, the demand for access to employment, already a feminist concern for several decades, was given new significance and passion by women's liberation activism, but it was also overlaid upon ongoing industrial restructuring, technological change and the heavy tides of fluctuating demand for extra labour.

On one level, we can see this overlap in the public reasoning deployed by activists: in both periods some feminists sought to promote their demands by highlighting other benefits to be achieved by some desired reform. In a more fundamental way, as discussed above, we can also see that there is not a distinct boundary between the movement and its context: the movement to some extent grows out of what is already actually happening in politics and the economy. One important implication of this is that, often, means are not strictly developed by movements in relation to specified goals, as much as they are inherited, adopted, adapted, invested with new meanings, and pushed in particular directions.

### **How did non-instrumental elements influence movement direction?**

It is clear from the account developed so far in this chapter that while there may be instrumental (conscious means-end type) attempts to shape movement direction, and while various specific instrumental decisions are made in relation to more concrete political issues, the direction of the movement as a whole is not, itself, open to such decision-making. So far we have focused on organisational reasons for this. Having thus shown that there are inherent limits to instrumental decision-making in social movement action, we also need to consider the influence of other, non-instrumental elements.

One such element is emotion. As discussed in the previous chapter, the work of feminist philosophers such as Allison Jaggar, together with that of social movement scholars such as Deborah B. Gould, has suggested we should pay more attention to emotion, not in terms of its opposition to instrumental rationality, but as a constitutive part of an expanded concept of reasoning and reasoned action. As we have seen in both eras,

emotions including hope, annoyance, betrayal, confidence, belonging, pride, anger and despair have been intimately intertwined with the decisions and actions of movement participants. For example, in the 1920s, the determination of women's groups to push for motherhood endowment was enhanced by the confidence they gained from the solidarity and success achieved at the movement-wide conference to resist "attacks" on the maternity payment. This conference itself was only made possible by the extent of organised women's indignation at the threat to remove the payment. In the 1970s, likewise, anger at the prospect of renewed opposition to married women's employment was an important element of the reasoning that led to WEL's decision to make "women in the workforce" their major campaign in 1974.

In many cases, instead of alternating with or undermining reason, these emotions have formed part of reasoning in the movement. This is particularly true of the way in which grievances are developed as participants identify and react to injustices. It is difficult to imagine how this could occur without the involvement of emotions, especially anger. Unless one wishes to dismiss the experiences in question as delusional, emotions such as anger can be seen as constitutive in the formation of reasonable grievances. Likewise, without some hopefulness and confidence, it is difficult to understand how participants could even begin to project future possibilities. Since, as argued above, the projection of future possibilities actually gives content and meaning to the goals and methods adopted by movement participants, even apparently instrumental reasoning relies on emotional energy.

By illustrating how emotions can be constitutive of reasoned mobilisation in this way, I do not mean to obscure the fact that emotions are also subject to deliberate or semi-deliberate action on the part of women's movement participants. However, such action cannot be reduced to the manipulatively instrumental uses of emotion suggested by some streams of social movement scholarship. In both periods, feminists made deliberate efforts to publicise injustices, for example through promotion of the 1932 play "Whose Child," which highlighted the harshness of custody laws.<sup>9</sup> An important aspect of such efforts to publicise injustices is the expectation that, being faced with

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<sup>9</sup> Heather Radi, 'Whose Child?', in Judy Mackinolty and Heather Radi (eds), *In Pursuit of Justice: Australian Women and the Law, 1788–1979*, Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1979.

such evidence, women will reasonably react with emotions of anger and unease, and hence will be more likely to lend their support to the movement opposing such injustices. In this way, feminists had a reasonable expectation of certain emotional reactions, which, in turn cannot be categorised as irrational, since anger is a reasonable reaction to injustice.<sup>10</sup> This is a further illustration of the constitutive role of emotions in reasoning, and one which cannot be reduced to instrumental manipulation. Feminists publicising such cases believed that they constituted genuine injustices, that it was in women's interests to know and respond with anger to these injustices, and that the movement was, by definition, the way in which such injustices could be eliminated. So long as one is willing to accept that such belief is real and at least minimally reasonable, this insight provides a useful model for interpreting movement action generally. In this view, while instrumental action certainly exists, it should be interpreted in terms of the reasoning employed by movement actors, and we should expect that this reasoning will go beyond the strictly instrumental.

As well as forming conditions for responding to "external" situations, emotions play an important part in the extent to which internal relationships and connections are maintained. These relationships and connections give cohesion to the groups within the movement, and to some degree to the movement as a whole, which in turn provides the basis for attempts at organisation and the formation of collective intentions. As we have seen, both positive and negative emotions emerge in the often highly-charged relationships between women in the movement, and these have the capacity to integrate and divide movement groups. The pride and belonging experienced as a member of a group, perhaps a group in which intensely personal revelations have been made, can be accompanied (or even replaced) by disappointment and resentment. The pleasurable establishment of shared identities can exist alongside unease and shame where the criteria for belonging are not met, or change.<sup>11</sup> This was particularly apparent in the 1970s and 1980s, when, as we have seen, many women tried to dismantle within their own selves the barrier between "the personal" and external politics. In the interwar

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<sup>10</sup> Alison M. Jaggar, 'Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology', in Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall (eds), *Women, Knowledge, and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*, New York: Routledge, 1996 (second edition), pp. 166–190.

<sup>11</sup> Kimberley Curtis, 'Rapture and Rupture: Ruminations On Enclave Politics, Political Oblivion, and the Need for Recognition in the Early Women's Liberation Movement', *Constellations*, vol. 11 no. 4, 2004, pp. 551–574.

period, before this ethic of dismantling had developed, emotions were less readily expressed (and recorded). However, some similar dynamics can be seen in the at times bitter competition between the AFWV and NCW. “Inter-generational” change in the movement has often involved strong emotions of identification and rejection: as we have seen in the movement’s changing historical understanding in the 1970s, these emotions profoundly shape not only the movement’s self-understanding but also the actions and projects it considers appropriate.

It is also important to remember that, in a practical way, emotions and relationships form the conditions for (as well as the constraints on) the claims that movement participants can make on the efforts of others, including efforts to form projects and make strategic decisions. Social movement action is, by definition, demanding for participants. Without feelings of responsibility arising from specific relationships to others, groups dissolve and projects stall. While in the earlier period, formal organisational structures and roles to some extent institutionalised this sense of responsibility, this was less so in the later women’s movement. The distrust of formal organisation and the priority given to action as developed from and arising out of individuals’ experiences and interests meant that the later movement relied to a greater extent on the emotional identification and friendships of participants.

### **Is it useful to see agency in temporal terms?**

In the previous chapter, I suggested that Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische’s temporal model of agency might be a fruitful way to investigate social movement action. To recap, Emirbayer and Mische develop the concept of agency as:

a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a

capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment).<sup>12</sup>

To some extent, the two periods of women's movement activism examined in this thesis are consistent with this model of agency as a "temporally embedded process of social engagement." Here I look briefly at the three temporal orientations in turn, indicating the model's limitations as well as its potential to illuminate social movement action.

Turning first to the way in which movement action is informed by the past (its habitual or iterative aspect), it is clear that participants individually and the groups in which they were active did have habitual aspects — assumptions, ingrained practices and social expectations — that form the background for action. Such aspects ordered and limited the options for action considered by participants. For example, we could say, in retrospect, that feminists in the 1920s had the "option" of pursuing women's workforce participation as the major means to economic independence, but simply chose not to pursue this option, favouring others. Attention to the iterative aspect of action helps us to identify the assumption — that women would not normally be in the workforce — which meant movement participants did not straightforwardly consider this as one option among several; in fact it appears that most did not consider it at all. This should not detract, however, from the degree to which some measures proposed were radical at the time; motherhood endowment, threatening as it did the family wage, is a good example. In terms of the forms that action took, while there was some organisational innovation, most elements, such as standard meeting procedures, annual conferences, deputations and submissions, appear to have continued accepted practice (albeit at times intensified in frequency and expanded in topic).

In the later period, in which vigorous (self-)questioning and the problematisation of everyday life became such an important part of movement action, the iterative aspect is a little less obvious. This may be a result of our historical "proximity" to the period, which leaves us perhaps more vulnerable to identifying with the movement's self-proclaimed novelty. Likewise, it is perhaps our historical "distance" from the period of

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<sup>12</sup> Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische, 'What Is Agency?', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 103 no. 4, 1998, pp. 962–1023, p. 963.

the earlier feminists that makes their assumptions appear so stark to us, in their difference from present norms. If we look, however, to the “radical habitus” (to use Nick Crossley’s term) of the New Left and liberation movements of the 1960s, we can see how many early second-wave feminists, radicalised within these movements, did operate with certain assumptions and “ways of doing things.”<sup>13</sup> In this respect, as we have seen, concepts such as racism and colonialism provided important templates for early attempts to define women’s oppression, while actions drew on existing “repertoires” (such as “rap groups,” marches and street theatre) that were developed in other movements. The less radical currents of the movement had their own templates of analysis (such as equal rights) and established repertoires of action (such as submission-writing), often flowing with hardly an alteration from the practices of pre-women’s liberation groups. While issues of work and care were certainly not settled in the form of unproblematised assumptions about appropriate norms, the very fact that so many women had by this time experienced higher education and employment led to a widespread sense of expectation and entitlement, which formed a background for feminist action.

The second “temporal orientation” is the projective aspect: the capacity to imagine future possibilities. It is perhaps this aspect of agency that is most commonly and obviously identified with social movements, partly as a result of participants’ own self-presentations (as in the rallying cry “another world is possible”). Throughout this chapter, and the thesis as a whole, extensive reference has been made to the visions, projects and future possibilities that the movement developed. For this reason, having established that the projective capacity to imagine future possibilities is inherent to social movement action, I do not attempt to recap here all the ways that the movement exercised this capacity.

I wish to highlight, instead, the difficulty involved in separating the projective aspect of social movement action from the other dimensions. Emirbayer and Mische stress that all three temporal orientations coexist in action, and also highlight instances of overlap (such as “experimental enactment” which in their view is a projective, that is, future

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<sup>13</sup> Nick Crossley, ‘From Reproduction to Transformation: Social Movement Fields and the Radical Habitus,’ *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol. 20 no. 6, 2003, pp. 43–68

oriented form of action, but which also to some extent blurs the boundary with present-oriented practical-evaluative action). Yet the particular challenges involved in studying the women's movement suggest a further problem of interpretation.

In each of the eras studied, the women's movement's imaginings of future possibilities were conducted to some degree "in public." Emirbayer and Mische acknowledge the social, relational and "dialogical" nature of agency in their model, and the findings of the present study support their argument in this respect. If we are concerned as we are here with movements and movement groups as collective actors, it is, indeed, not adequate to view movements as aggregations of individual participants, each with a separately-developed and separately-held, yet somehow unifying, vision of the future. We need to look for the ways in which collective visions are developed. Yet in discerning and interpreting the collective visions of social movements, it is very difficult to disentangle these visions from the practical projects of the movement. As social movements operate in and towards public debates and struggles, their visions are political creations. In the two eras of women's movement action studied here, the relevant imagining of future possibilities has occurred in communication between participants, and in public more generally.

Communication about future possibilities was often international in scale and, through various media, especially writing, bridged gaps in time, social networks and geography. Such communication rarely occurred separately from more present-oriented practical-evaluative action, and in particular action taken deliberately to build the movement and influence its direction in certain ways. For example, women's liberationists in the 1970s and 1980s certainly developed among themselves visions of future possibilities (a world in which sex roles would be dissolved and women's identities unconstrained: a world without sexism). Likewise, the feminists of the interwar years generated shared visions of a world in which maternal principles would transform human life from conflict to harmonious progress. But in both eras it was uncommon for these visions to be presented in a way that did not include analysis of the opposing negative forces and structures holding women (or society) back, and corollary suggestions about the kinds of intermediate changes that would be needed to bring forth the desired society. Furthermore, the articulation of these visions was also purposively and practically

directed to others: to women not yet part of the movement, and to society at large. For these reasons, it appears that we cannot draw a clear distinction between the projective and practical-evaluative dimensions of social movement action. We should also resist the tendency for this distinction to become, by implication, a proxy for the distinction between normative and instrumental action. Instead, we can see how the distinction between normative and instrumental is challenged by the detailed analysis of social movement action.

The third aspect of agency, the present-oriented practical-evaluative dimension of action, is perhaps the most difficult to achieve (and to analyse), as it involves the capacity to reflect on past habits and future projects in terms of present contingencies. Emirbayer and Mische suggest that, although the iterative and projective dimensions are not separate from agency, it is this practical-evaluative dimension that is essential for effective agency. While there is clearly a vast range of different ways in which women's movement action could be analysed in terms of practical-evaluation, here I focus on some specific features relevant to this study's focus on strategic decisions about movement directions on work and care.

It was not clear from the evidence gathered that movement action was to any great degree guided by "reflection on past habits," or learning from the past. As we have seen, participants in the 1970s movement initially had very limited historical knowledge of antecedent mobilisations. Although general knowledge about earlier feminists developed as the decade progressed, the records and interviews used for the present study show that there was very little explicit consideration given to the movement's past, or problematisation of accepted movement assumptions, in relation to the substantive positions to be taken on work and care. We did not find, for example, reasoning in terms of "well, it has not worked to lobby for better support for mothers; we must push for better access to the workforce." As discussed above, to see these as two "options" is itself an unrealistic portrayal of the perspectives of participants. Yet even in more subtle terms, there was little reference to the movement's past experience or previous assumptions about work and care. In part this can be attributed to the great sense among many participants in the second-wave movement that their mobilisation was novel, unprecedented and unique in history. The idea of a collective actor with the

capacity to reflect on its past is, in this way, challenged by the self-perceptions of participants who believed they were actually creating a fundamentally new collective subject.

Although the sense of novelty was less pronounced in the interwar era, feminists in this period also did not reflect in any detailed way on previous actions or decisions taken in relation to the specific issues. Rather, as we have seen, the large degree of overlap and continuity in actual methods and projects undertaken shows that there was not a “point” at which this reflection could take place. The relative lack, in both periods, of separate, explicit reflection on the past is consistent with the pragmatist suggestion that, instead of reflection preceding action, action and reflection proceed together.

We can see, however, that in participants’ articulations of the need for new, different forms of organisation and collective action, there was some explicit reflection on the movement’s past and its future projects in terms of the present. Thus, for example, Bessie Rischbieth’s rationale for establishing the AFWV included an assessment of the past (in terms of the inadequacy, in her view, of philanthropically-based organisation), future possibilities (building an explicit commitment to women’s equal citizenship) and present contingencies (the developing federal structure of government). Again it must be emphasised that Rischbieth’s reasoning took the form of a public, political statement, meaning it cannot be simply interpreted as an internal decision process. Similarly, in the 1970s, in calling for the creation of a new movement, participants criticised the traditional reliance in politics on formal procedures and argued that small non-hierarchical groups were more suited to the present needs of women attempting to eliminate sexism through personal transformation as well as outward action.

In relation to workforce access and motherhood endowment as particular projects developed to achieve women’s economic independence, the observations presented above could be interpreted as meaning that the decisions taken (to the extent that decisions were taken) to pursue these projects were taken in an unreflective way. Although it is true that these projects were not developed in a linear process of reasoning suggested by the model of practical-evaluative action, it is not the case that

the thinking involved was unreasoned or unreflective.<sup>14</sup> It is here, in fact, that movement theory and knowledge play an important part. For instance, WEL's 1974 rejection of the "mother's wage" proposal cannot adequately be described in terms of the contextualising of past habits and future projects in relation to present contingencies, as this formulation cannot encompass the feminist knowledge which was perhaps most influential in shaping this decision: knowledge about the dangers for women of reinforcing feminine stereotypes and sex roles. In the earlier period, the extensive body of knowledge developed by feminist reformers such as Eleanor Rathbone about the inadequacy of the family-wage system for addressing poverty and uplifting motherhood had a powerful influence on feminists' adoption of endowment as a goal. Such knowledge represented for movement participants a kind of timeless truth, albeit a politically-charged one, with the power to illuminate past, present and future. It is therefore difficult to place such knowledge in the temporal model of practical-evaluative action.

In sum, while the model of agency as a temporally embedded process usefully encourages us to identify the different temporal aspects of social movement action, it sits uncomfortably with certain important political, communicative, and knowledge-based aspects. While it is relatively easy to identify the iterative dimension of movement action, it is more difficult to specify the other two dimensions. Visions of possible futures were clearly major aspects of both periods, but these were rarely separate from the analysis of wrongs and the presentation of proposed changes: that is, these visions had a political character that is practical and instrumental at the same time as principled and normative. Evidence of explicit, separate reflection on the past was particularly limited, supporting pragmatist views that action and reflection proceed together rather than in sequence.

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<sup>14</sup> While Emirbayer and Mische argue that their model should not be viewed in linear terms, it does not seem viable to operationalise it in any other way. In fact, their description of practical-evaluative action as a sequence (problematization, characterisation, deliberation, decision, and execution) strongly suggests this way of operationalising the concept in research. Emirbayer and Mische, 'What Is Agency?', pp. 997–1000.

### **Is it useful to approach movements as reasonable and interpretable?**

Finally, I wish to consider briefly the question of whether it makes sense, as earlier proposed, to understand movement action in terms of its reasonability and interpretability, rather than in the more stringent senses of rationality. The study clearly confirms that the rigorous decision procedures and the assumption of self-interest contained in rational actor models are not well-suited to the analysis of social movements. If we had insisted upon these criteria, we would only be able to view the two periods of women's movement action as irrational or as, in some other way, separate from reasonable human behaviour. Not only would this introduce a fundamentally conservative bias into analysis, as political process theorists would acknowledge, it would also restrict the extent to which we can actually understand the detailed actions taken in the movement. It is only because this study has sought, following Raymond Boudon,<sup>15</sup> to understand action as arising from systems of reasoning that make sense to the actor, that it has been able to answer further questions that should be of interest to those concerned with reason and rationality: questions about the extent of strategic decision-making, and about the structures and processes that might allow such decision-making.

A more contentious problem is whether viewing action in terms of reasonability and interpretability allows us to escape, or at least demote, the means-end schema. The present study has certainly found that instrumentalism was only part of social movement action, and in many cases the non-instrumental features of action were themselves constitutive of the capacity for reasoned action, in a way that cannot be designated as irrational or arational — or even as non-intentional. This finding is consistent both with Hans Joas' concept of the creativity of action, and with feminist theories of knowledge and emotion.

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<sup>15</sup> Raymond Boudon, 'Beyond Rational Choice Theory', *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 29, 2003, pp. 1–21.

## Conclusion

This chapter has drawn out significant themes from the historical studies and analysed these studies in the light of the theoretical model developed. The chapter first addressed in more detail the central question of to what extent strategic action was taken on high-level discursive risks, arguing that we should expect to see such action. The relationship between the structure and organisation of the movement and its capacity for deliberation and strategic decisions was also discussed. I then considered how the political context in each era affected the decisions made, noting that it is often difficult to delineate the context from the movement and suggesting that the relationship of the movement to the context may best be characterised as one of creative interaction. The relationship between activism and “dominant discourses” was analysed, with regard to Australian feminists’ capacity to use and adapt such discourses as in some other countries. It was argued that the relative lack of amenable discourses, together with the movement’s organisational structure and relative inattention to discursive change, have limited the extent to which this has occurred. Participants’ underlying beliefs about how social and political change could be achieved were discussed, contrasting the progressive, reform-oriented approach of the earlier period with the more systemic rejection of patriarchy in the latter. It was shown that both eras of activism had transcendent and practical elements and that feminists in the 1970s and 80s problematised the question of methods to a greater extent than earlier feminists.

The chapter also addressed the question of how it was that overall movement directions changed during the two periods. I argued that instead of seeing such changes as arising from central deliberation, it makes more sense to see them as resulting often incrementally from the combined effect of many smaller decisions, together with other actions, including, in particular, those taken in reaction against threatening policies, and from conflict and coordination between elements in the movement. This led to a consideration of the process and structures through which organisation emerged and operated within the movement in the two eras. Feminists’ very different orientations towards organisation in the two eras were highlighted, although in both eras organisations were shown to have mediated the individual and collective levels of movement action. It was argued that more intensively organised nodes within the

movement achieved influence over the overall movement direction by their greater visibility, and through the fact that they were able to develop collective intentions through articulating goals and means.

The chapter considered how goals and methods were called forth and developed as the movement engaged in the political arena, emphasising that these were not devised in deliberation prior to action, but developed through action. I argued that it is not viable to view motherhood endowment and workforce access simply as different means to the same end of economic independence, since both the goal and the means had fundamentally different and specific meanings in the different eras. The question of how non-instrumental elements influenced the formation of projects was addressed, showing how emotion was constitutive of the movement's reasoned action in both eras and how relationships formed the conditions for movement action.

The study's findings were considered in relation to the temporal model of agency presented in the previous chapter. It was argued that while it is useful to give attention to the past-, future- and present-oriented dimensions of movement action, there are not always clear distinctions between these dimensions, and the model sits uneasily with the more political and communicative aspects of feminist action. I also noted that much less explicit reflection on the movement's past was evident than might be expected, and that movement knowledge and theory guided action in a way that is difficult to integrate with the model. Finally, I argued that it does make sense to analyse movements as reasonable and interpretable, abandoning the more stringent demands of rational actor theory. Doing so allows a more thorough analysis of social movement action, in both its instrumental and non-instrumental aspects, than would otherwise be possible.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

This thesis has addressed the question of to what extent the Australian women's movement has acted strategically in assessing discursive risks and forming positions on issues of work and care. This question was addressed both through theory-building and through empirical historical studies of Australian women's movement activism in the interwar years (1919–1938) and the 1970s and 1980s. It has been argued that widely-held perceptions that social movements make strategic decisions actually misrepresent the way such movements exercise collective agency. In particular, while movement directions are shaped by organising within the movement, these directions are also shaped by non-instrumental factors such as emotion and movement knowledge. Furthermore, goals and means are constituted in the course of practical engagement rather than proceeding in a linear fashion from overarching objectives to detailed actions.

### **Implications of the research: Responding in the public debate**

The thesis makes a contribution to public debate about the legacy of feminism by correcting a widespread misperception about the way the movement's directions have been formed. Feminism is often blamed for having adopting wrong strategies in the past by failing to see how pursuing its goals through certain methods would actually lend support to the very structures, stereotypes and identities that are now seen as counter to feminist aims. The thesis shows not only that this criticism is insufficiently aware of historical contexts, but also that it misunderstands the nature of feminism as a social movement (rather than just a political ideology). In the women's movement, action was not controlled by central decision-making, and did not proceed in a linear fashion from ultimate goals to specific means. This does not mean that women's movement activism has been devoid of organisation or has lacked a discernible overall movement direction affected by the intentions of participants. Participants in the women's movement generally have acted intentionally and for comprehensible reasons, and these intentions and reasons have been constituted in part by emotions evoked in reaction to perceived

injustices. Along with other factors and processes, through instances of organisation the intentions and reasons of participants have influenced discernible movement directions. Further, within this variegated field of action, some groups and individuals have at times been notably strategic in their political engagement. At the same time, women's movement activism has itself helped to create the very knowledge that enables us to see in retrospect the kinds of discursive risks to which past activism did not respond, and was not oriented to responding. The movement was not structured to allow the kind of strategising suggested by the common criticisms of feminism.

For participants in the debate about the legacy of feminism, the thesis provides support to those who wish to argue against criticising feminism as a failure. Yet it does so in a particular way that contributes a new aspect to the debate. Rejections of such criticisms have tended to argue from substantive claims about the often under-recognised benefits that feminism has provided to women, together with reminders of what life was like for women before the feminist interventions in question. While these arguments are well-founded, there are two related features that limit their usefulness for feminist activism. First, the enumeration of benefits calls forth the enumeration of disadvantages or, at the very least, of measures of progress not yet made. Yet accusations that feminism has failed are not only, or even mainly, based on unfavourable assessments of the balance between the benefits of feminism and the progress yet to be made: these accusations reflect a more fundamental sense of misgiving about how feminism has not been able to achieve its promise, the transformation of gender relations, and how the reforms and rights that have grown out of feminism have in fact been woven into some of the very structures that are still problematic for women. These accusations therefore reflect deeper concerns about the extent to which society can be changed, and so will not be appeased by "tally-sheet" approaches.

Second, and for related reasons, the enumeration of benefits tends to close the door to present and future feminist activism. On one level, this is an unproductive element of what occurs in the so-called "generational" debates. The enumeration of benefits can give the somewhat pompous impression of "one generation" saying to "the next," "look at all we have done for you; you should be grateful and now turn your hand to those few remaining chores we were not able to finish." Yet even if a "new generation" of

potential feminist activists were generous enough to look beyond the patronising implications and accept this assessment in general terms, such an understanding of the task at hand is unlikely to motivate the kind of activism envisaged. Even if we were to interpret the purpose of any new or renewed movement to be the remedying of already-identified problems, studies of women's movements and the state suggest that such changes cannot be achieved in a permanent way without a visible, oppositional mobilisation. Feminist historiography, including the historical studies in this thesis, shows that the intensity of engagement required for actual political action is rarely motivated by such a straightforward rationale of tasks unfinished. It is more likely to be animated by participants' responses to their present conditions and experiences, and their creative interpretation of the potential and purposes of the women's movement.

On another level, enumerating benefits closes the door to further social movement action by directing attention away from the question of "how," and by not responding to way in which the question of "how" is implicit in the accusations themselves. An alternative response is possible and, I believe, desirable. The kind of criticisms considered here can be productively interpreted as action-oriented critiques that propose approaches to be taken. They point out problems that have not been fixed by feminism, such as the undervaluing of caring work, while at the same time expressing underlying skepticism about the prospect of effective action for social change. They direct attention to the failures, perhaps even by implication the futility, of past action, rather than to possible ways that we might promote the approaches (such as the valuing of caring work) that are implicitly endorsed. These criticisms of feminism actually indicate a form of identification with feminism as potentially valuable but they show a lack of awareness about how feminism has been embodied by collective organising rather than by individuals' formulations of "what is best" (or of what has been done wrong).

In contrast with the enumeration of benefits, it might often be more appropriate to respond to criticisms of feminism in this spirit by explaining "well, that is not really how it worked; *this* is what happened..." (as this thesis has). This leaves the door open to further social movement action by showing what past feminists were actually able to do. This thesis has documented what those who have been movement activists already know: that there was (and probably is) no way for any single view on the purpose,

means and methods of the movement, strategic or otherwise, to guide or control movement action, but that there were (and probably are) vast creative opportunities for individuals with such views to form groups, projects and organisations to pursue them. On this basis and in a genuine way, those criticising past feminism can be encouraged to pursue their concerns, for example through organising and further communication, but with a better understanding of the limits and possibilities of past feminist action.

Clearly, this response is most suited to criticisms that are put forward in good faith and with at least a minimal level of identification with feminism, even if this identification takes the form of a kind of wounded disappointment. However, conservative antagonists also sometimes point to the “failures of feminism” to support their views about the illegitimacy and offensiveness of all feminist efforts to change the gender order, and at other times use the failures of feminism discourse to promote cynicism and enmity among those who might otherwise identify with feminism. Other ways of arguing may be more appropriate for responses to such antagonists, such as the arguments about the substantive benefits of feminism mentioned above. Nevertheless, since conservative antagonists of feminism mobilise ideas about the failures of feminism to soften the way for their own more far-reaching project to maintain a conservative gender order (which are often not explicitly acknowledged as such), it is important for feminists to have detailed and attentive responses to the “failures of feminism” discourse.

### **Social movement studies**

It was shown in Chapter 2 that social movement studies tend to either assume or ignore instrumentalism in social movement action. That is, scholarship in this field tends either to treat social movements as, by definition, composed of rationally acting organisations directed by strategic leaders (political process theory), or as, by definition, animated by values that are opposed to instrumental rationality (new social movement theory). The findings of this thesis support the view that neither of these approaches can encompass the complexity of movement action. In particular, the study suggests that implicitly “strategic” notions such as framing and political opportunity should be used more carefully than they often are, and that scholars should be wary of the obvious temptation

to attribute strategic intentionality to changes or actions within movements where it cannot be demonstrated that these were present.

While the study demonstrates the need to be wary of casual attributions of strategy, it does, however, confirm that it is fruitful to consider instrumentalism and strategy as features of movement action that are sometimes but not always present. This opens new avenues for social movement research, as research can take as one of its tasks the investigation of the extent and nature of instrumental action. At the same time, the study confirms the value of investigating non-instrumental aspects of action, such as emotion, relationships and communication, in a way that appreciates their constitutive role in reasoning and the development of movement knowledge. In doing so, the study has shown that it is feasible to take up Deborah B. Gould's challenge for social movement studies to engage more directly with the concerns of social theory. It has also confirmed that it is valuable for social movement studies to look beyond its own boundaries for concepts and approaches: in this study, for example, philosophical pragmatism and feminist philosophy shed useful light on certain important questions that are often elided by social movement studies (such as the extent of instrumentalism, and the nature of reason in social movement action).

The thesis has also made a contribution to social movement studies, and to the sociological study of collective action more generally, by developing a model (or, more accurately, a visual metaphor) for how a movement can be said to form an identifiable direction on a set of issues, and how this contains the intentions of participants, even though there is likely to be no central coordination or forum for deliberation through which such intentions could be explicitly unified. In this image, the movement is conceptualised as a three-dimensional moving terrain in which multiple groups and individuals are active, and in which more intensively organised parts of the movement form nodes that rise up from the field as protrusions, becoming more visible to others and acting as opportunities for collective intentions to be articulated. Through these nodes, organisation can pull the movement in certain directions, but does not strictly determine movement direction, as the movement is also animated by less-organised communication and interaction, and is porous to other influences beyond the specific concerns of the movement. While this model is attentive to internal processes, analysis

of these processes cannot be used to build a definitive account of movement direction that is separate from observers' and participants' views and representations of the movement as a whole. But while it is acknowledged that there may be no single, final, definitive view that fixes the movement as a whole, the movement as a whole is treated as something of which it is meaningful, and not incoherent, to speak. This model is significant in that it offers a way to understand how a social movement operates both as an aggregation of individual people and groups, and as a collective entity with a kind of intentionality, albeit one that is internally differentiated, pulling in different directions and partial in the extent to which it determines the overall actions or impact of the movement.

While this model is admittedly imprecise, it more accurately conveys the self-understanding of the women's movement than does the dominant social movement theory, political process theory. The political process model (resource mobilisation; political opportunities; mobilising structures; framing) avoids the difficult question of whether intentionality and direction are attributes that the movement as a whole might have, and how these might emerge. Political process theory therefore operates separately from the question of whether and in what respects social movements might be ways for people to intentionally exercise collective agency. Instead, political process theory tends to assume, to an unrealistic degree, that intentionality and direction can be found in movement organisations, as in the assumptions of strategising. Further, as new social movement theorists have long argued, political process models tend to neglect the collective generation of shared meanings in movement action, which extends beyond organisational boundaries and cannot be encompassed by the implicitly strategic concept of framing.

The benefit of the political process approach in comparison with the organisation-direction model presented here is that political process studies tend to focus on organisations as those units of analysis in which social movement actors can clearly be said to collectively "do things." They do not need to rely on hazy, partisan interpretations, such as participants' views about the direction and purpose of the movement as a whole. Political process theory also appears to provide for more straightforward integration with studies of the policy process and political science

generally. If, however, as suggested in Chapter 2, most existing work in the political process tradition does not problematise the creation of goals and methods (as, in fact, activists themselves do to some extent), then it is unable to perceive and analyse a major aspect of social movement action. The model developed here, in contrast, both problematises the creation of goals and methods, and takes seriously, without taking at face value, participants' views that there is a movement expressing intentional collective agency.

Other contributions of the study to social movement theory relate to the ongoing process by which women's movement research informs social movement theory more generally. First, the study affirms the importance of paying attention to substantive movement issues. While movement scholars may work diligently towards finding the cross-movement *determinants* of mobilisation, it is difficult to generate knowledge about the *processes* of mobilisation without close attention to and understanding of the actual concerns and aims that animate action. Such attention to movement issues is most informative when it is employed as part of a living dialogue within a movement, broadly defined. Scholars operating within a feminist framework tend to study the women's movement both as a process of political and social change and as a process of knowledge formation of which they are part. This is one reason why such scholars are able to present important reflections about social movement theory. This is also true of the present thesis: without such close attention to the contemporary debates and historical activism about particularly sensitive feminist issues (issues of work and care), discussions of, for instance, the extent of movement strategising would have been empty abstract and divorced from their significance for the movement.

In a related way, the study also continues the approach used by Suzanne Staggenborg and Verta Taylor in their research on different forms of social movement activity, and by Mary Fainsod Katzenstein in her study of "unobtrusive mobilization."<sup>1</sup> In these works, the authors took a women's movement problem or issue (reports of the "death of feminism" and laments about its invisibility) as a starting point for investigations that

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<sup>1</sup> Suzanne Staggenborg and Verta Taylor, 'Whatever Happened to the Women's Movement?', *Mobilization*, vol. 10 no.1, pp. 37-52; Mary Fainsod Katzenstein, 'Feminism within American Institutions: Unobtrusive Mobilization in the 1980s', *Signs*, vol. 16 no. 1, 1990, pp. 27-54.

yielded significant insights improving social movement knowledge generally. In the case of this thesis, the women's movement problem (feminism being accused of having failed women) prompted an investigation that has produced knowledge of significance for social movement studies generally: that we should not assume (or ignore) strategising and instrumentalism but investigate these as aspects of social movement action. In all of these cases, the contribution of feminist studies is not merely compensatory, in terms of balancing a preoccupation with the forms of social movement action typically associated with men and masculinity, but is also expansive, in that these studies open up new problems and responses that would not otherwise become apparent.

### **Feminist historiography**

The major theoretical contribution of the thesis has been to the field of social movement studies, and history-writing was one of the "methods" by which that contribution was developed. However, the thesis has also expanded historical knowledge about Australian feminism in the two eras studied in a way that has some more general implications. In both historical studies, the research adopted an innovative approach by focusing on movement-internal sources and explicitly investigating the internal structure and dynamics of the movement. This complements the more common historical project of discussing the general impact or role of the movement. In adopting this internal movement focus, the research has also explored the limitations of efforts to "look inside" the intentions of individuals and groups in the past (or for that matter in the present), arguing that while such efforts are always incomplete, our commonplace attributions of historical intentionality make it important to address these questions directly.

In Chapter 2 it was argued that feminist historiography and other studies of the women's movement tends to evoke an image of deliberated movement action, particularly in the descriptions of changes in movement direction, but rarely addresses the extent to which such deliberation actually occurred. The extent and nature of women's movement agency, for example in relation to dominant or available discourses, was also identified as a difficulty in the way we describe past eras of activism. In general, the findings of

the thesis suggest that it is possible and desirable to focus explicitly on these issues as questions in historical research, and that such inquiries are best conducted at the detailed level of actual groups and individuals engaging in the politics of their time. Having adopted such an approach, the thesis suggests that it is meaningful to speak of women's movement agency, but that in doing so we should be specific rather than general in our descriptions. In particular, the research shows that women's movement participants in the two periods discussed were not generally able to, and could not logically be expected to, act directly and intentionally at the level of dominant or available discourses. Rather, engagement with the wider political culture brought participants into more specific action-situations with their own imperatives, limitations and internal logics. Engagement in these situations certainly had broader discursive significance, but Australian women's movement action tended not to be explicitly oriented to using or changing dominant discourses.

In describing the interwar campaigns on economic independence, the thesis adds to the body of history-writing that documents women's movement activism "between the waves." It also contributes to understanding of the often-vexed intersection between the women's movement and labour movement, by showing how the campaign for motherhood endowment united these movements in a consensus that was eventually undone by conflict over the interaction between endowment and the basic wage. The research brings new evidence to bear on the question of how different feminists understood their advocacy in the context of their concerns about poverty and the labour movement's efforts to protect against further erosion of real wages. The research also considered women's organisations' intensifying emphasis on equal pay and women's right to work in the 1930s, exploring the idea that this change resulted from recognition of the failures of the more maternally-oriented claims (such as endowment). In contrast, it was argued that this shift is better characterised as one that resulting from many smaller decisions and responses made in relation to concrete political opportunities and challenges, and overlaid upon considerable continuity in movement action and principles.

The study of the 1970s and 1980s movement contributes to scholarly knowledge of this period of the women's movement, which academic historiography has only recently

begun to consider as a topic. In doing so, the research encountered the particular challenges and possibilities involved in attempting to historically encapsulate a recent era of activism, when many participants are still living and are strongly attached to the movement as it emerged and grew in that era. It was therefore important to reflect the internal differentiation of the movement and participants' different perspectives on it as a whole. Nevertheless, the thesis did establish a narrative account of how the movement developed, focusing on how differences in modes of action interacted with the different possible positions that could be taken on the issues of work and care. In this account, the second-wave movement developed from overlapping strands of older groups and issues, the new women's liberation groups and their commitment to personal analysis and transformation as the basis of political change, and the intensification of practical action, particularly the goal-oriented policy engagement most prominently pursued by WEL. Again, as in the study of the earlier period, special attention was given to the way participants understood their own action in relation to key movement problems of the time (in the earlier period, interaction with the labour movement and the basic wage; in the latter period, the "reform versus revolution" debate).

Apart from historiography and social movement studies, the thesis made extensive use of sociological theory and philosophy. The thesis generally applied and adapted such ideas, rather than attempting to make new contributions specifically to those bodies of literature. Nevertheless, it is important to note that these ideas, particularly pragmatist ideas about action and feminist ideas about reason and knowledge, offered very fruitful avenues for understanding and exploring the topic, especially compared with the rational actor models that have more commonly been used to analyse social movement action. The thesis has helped to develop linkages between these bodies of thought, by demonstrating their mutual relevance.

### **Possibilities for future research**

Through the contributions outlined above, the thesis has opened several pathways for further research. This is not meant to suggest that there is no relevant work already being conducted. Rather, it is hoped that these proposals and the thesis as a whole will invite reconsideration of existing and current work, as well as help to influence projects yet to be designed. Many of these suggestions correspond to the empirical limitations of the thesis, and to the possibilities for applying the framework developed to other cases.

First, the empirical studies included in the thesis focused only on Australia and only on the women's movement. It would be possible to apply a similar approach to a different social movement, or to the women's movement in a different country. This would be especially useful because the framework developed draws extensively on philosophical pragmatism. As noted in Chapter 6 there may be a special affinity between feminism and pragmatism, and between Australian social liberalism and pragmatism. It would be interesting to "test" the applicability of this pragmatist-inspired framework in cases of social movement action with less obvious philosophical links to pragmatism. For example, would we find similar processes in the environmental movement in Australia? Louise Clery's study of environmental activism and regional forest agreements in Australia suggests an ultimate "grand strategy" of social change that may be more clearly defined than is the case for feminism.<sup>2</sup>

A further limitation, and corresponding possibility for research, is the fact that the thesis has only looked at past activism. Some studies have suggested that the nature of social movement action has changed and is, for example, now more concerned with the personal experience of self and other than with collective identity oriented towards political projects.<sup>3</sup> This may affect the extent to which it is viable to identify a "movement as a whole" and the extent to which we might see political goal-oriented

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<sup>2</sup> Louise Clery, *Social Movement Strategy between Pragmatism and Praxis: Environmentalists and Regional Forest Agreements*, PhD Thesis, ANU, 2006. Clery's thesis advocates a strategic approach for the environmental movement in which shorter term goals are assessed in relation to the movement's general program of social change. The purpose of the thesis, to provide strategic recommendations to the environment movement, is therefore different to that of the present study. Clery's discussion of the capacity for "grand strategy" should be interpreted in this light.

<sup>3</sup> Kevin McDonald, 'Oneself as Another: From Social Movement to Experience Movement', *Current Sociology*, vol. 52 no. 4, 2004, pp. 575–593.

projects grow out of movements. In this respect, it would be useful to compare present “movement activism” with the results of this study. More extensive investigation could, for example, apply a similar approach to studying a present social movement, through participant-observation and interviews. However, the differences observed would have to be considered in relation to methodological implications too; that is, the affects of differences in the types of evidence available.

In terms of women’s movement activism, the thesis focused on just one set of issues (work and care). It is possible that the dynamics observed and the framework developed disproportionately reflects women’s movement’s activism on these particular issues. One notably different set of issues, those concerning sexuality, has also been the subject of “failures of feminism” commentaries (as in the claim that by emphasising women’s sexual freedom, second-wave feminism merely helped to make women into sexual objects for men). On this issue, earlier phases of feminism have also been seen as making mistakes (as in observations about the problems caused by representing women as needing protection against men’s sexuality). It would therefore be interesting to conduct a similar study of the way the women’s movement came to adopt positions on issues of sexuality, and how, for example, these positions have been influenced by engagement on concrete political issues.

In broader terms, the thesis has focused on examining the extent of movement-internal deliberation and reasoning because this seemed to be aspect most acutely missing from accounts. This has proven to be a productive approach but this focus means that the thesis has not explicitly analysed the impact of the movement. Clearly, too, other social forces have interacted with and affected the indirect consequences of the movement. Apart from being an important question in terms of the analysis of social change generally, it is also an important area of inquiry raised by the research problem. The criticisms of feminism to which the thesis responds are actually two-fold in nature: they state not only that the movement made wrong decisions but also that it therefore had a bad impact. Further research could work to integrate the model developed in this thesis with studies of movement impact and more general theories of social change.

Another problem raised by the project is the fact that the thesis used concepts from pragmatist philosophies of action and agency and found these valuable, thereby lending support to these schools of thought, but did not address the question of what is distinctive about social movement action compared with other forms of action. Further research could address this question, by examining, for example, those aspects of social movement action that do not seem to fit in a straightforward manner with Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische's model of agency (communication about action; movement knowledge). Such research could ask whether this discordance results from specific features of social movement action compared with individual action. The present study presented evidence to support the pragmatist idea that, in social movements, goals and means emerge together in concrete action-situations. It did not attempt to identify other studies that apply pragmatist philosophy to different forms of action through empirical research. This too may be an interesting avenue of inquiry.

Another important question to consider is what is different about social movement action compared with other forms of *political* action, in terms of the research questions. The findings of this thesis suggest that the answer to this question might lie in features such as decentralisation and the creation of new knowledge through "outlaw emotions." Yet, as noted in Chapter 6, sociologists and organisational theorists have questioned the extent to which the processes of even relatively discrete, centrally controlled organisations, such as political parties, are actually determined by formal structures and decision processes. Similarly, some policy theorists have questioned the extent to which policy knowledge and actions are developed through the rational models long held to describe the policy process.<sup>4</sup> While these emerging bodies of literature suggest there may be similarities with political action in other types of institutions and systems, it is likely that social movements have certain specific features or have them to unusual degrees. For example, Catherine Althaus defines politicians' engagement with "political risk" as arising from the imperative to maintain "rule."<sup>5</sup> Yet my study suggests that political actors without formal positions of "rule" also engage to some extent with political risks. Does this mean that "political risk" is different for different types of

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<sup>4</sup> Hal K. Colebatch, 'Doing Policy, Doing Analysis: Accounting for Policy in Australia', paper to Public Policy Network Conference, Perth, WA, 2–3 Feb. 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Catherine Althaus, *Policy Design and the Calculation of Political Risk*, PhD Thesis, Griffith University, 2004.

actors, or that what Althaus identifies as “rule” could be expanded to a broader concept (such as power-from-representation) that might also be applicable to social movement actors? Further research may be useful to consider this question.

There are also concepts used by the thesis that further research could extend or challenge. For example, the thesis looked for strategy in women’s movement histories, using a flexible and contextually-interpreted notion of strategising rather than developing the kind of “code-able” item used in more formal social science projects. Further research could attempt to refine the definition of strategising, or make methodological suggestions for more systematic ways to discern it in social movement action. Likewise, the thesis used the concept of movement knowledge to help explain why, in exercising agency, participants did not (and did not need to) “start from scratch” in problematising their situations and the action to be taken. In particular, the movement knowledge of the oppressiveness of sex stereotypes was highlighted. However, beyond briefly discussing elsewhere how “outlaw emotions” might produce knowledge, the thesis did not show how this process had occurred. Further research could attempt at both a theoretical and an empirical level to address this issue.

Finally, extensive consideration is currently being given by feminist scholars and others to collective memory and cultural memory. There are several points of contact between the body of work on memory and this thesis. In producing historical studies of feminism, this thesis has drawn on and responded to contests over the cultural memory of feminism, and has potentially contributed to this memory. In investigating the usefulness of a temporal model of agency, the study has also given special consideration to the way women’s movement participants in the interwar years and in the 1970s and 1980s remembered and understood earlier phases of the movement, and how they contextualised their activities in relation to those understandings. The thesis has therefore generated a historical account of cultural memory in action. As highlighted here, however, participants’ understandings of the movement’s past do not influence action in a straightforward way. While movement knowledge certainly affects the decisions and projects formed by participants, there is no clear evidence that this process is one of issue-related “learning from the past.” Participants were more likely to contextualise the newness of their present actions in terms of the limits of past *methods*

of activism than in terms of superseded beliefs or values. This suggests that research on the cultural memory of feminism could investigate further the memory of how things were done in the movement. This is presently an under-explored dimension, in comparison with memories of values and experiences. Memories of how things were done are particularly important because feminist cultural memory is at risk of being overrun by mainstream political culture. As Margaret Henderson notes, “Feminists are obviously one group that produces cultural memory and forms a specific memory community, but they are also subject to the dominant culture’s version of how radical political movements did and did not happen.”<sup>6</sup>

Existing studies show that collective memory facilitates activism by fostering collective identity,<sup>7</sup> but there has been little exploration of how collective movement memory influences ideas in the present about “what is to be done” or “what can be done.” If social movement activism is intentional but not linear in forming goals and means, how do those who identify with feminism make sense of the movement’s memories of activism, as they (potentially) create action in the present? As histories and biographical recollections of the second-wave women’s movement proliferate, it will be possible to analyse more closely the way people remember the intentions within activism. Such scholarship would help to counter the suggestion that the women’s movement is something that exists only in the past and that its meaning can be fixed in place, separate from the actions taken or not taken now.

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<sup>6</sup> Margaret Henderson, *Marking Feminist Times: Remembering the Longest Revolution in Australia*, Bern: Peter Lang European University Studies, 2006, p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> See for example Timothy B. Gongaware, ‘Collective Memories and Collective Identities: Maintaining Unity in Native American Educational Social Movements’, *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, vol. 32 no. 5, Oct. 2003, pp. 483-520.

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## Appendix A: List of Interviews

The following interviews were conducted by the author. Recording and transcripts are in the author's possession.

Suzanne Bellamy, Canberra, 18 Dec. 2007.

Eva Cox, Sydney, 16 Jan. 2007.

Patricia Crawford, Perth, 24 Oct. 2006.

Helen Creed, Perth, 26 Oct. 2006.

Sara Dowse, Sydney, 28 Jan. 2007.

Joan Eveline, Perth, 24 Oct. 2006.

Val Marsden, Perth, 26 Oct. 2006.

Deborah McCulloch, Adelaide, 21 Sep. 2007.

Robyn Murphy, Perth, 26 Oct. 2006.

Elizabeth Reid, Canberra, 1 March 2007.

Joan Staples, Sydney, 8 Feb. 2007.

Viv Szekeres, Adelaide, 20 Sep. 2007.

Elizabeth (Biff) Ward, Canberra, 13 Nov. 2007.

## Appendix B: Interview Format

This document was used to guide interviews with respondents listed in Appendix A. It was provided to each interviewee in advance of the interview.

### **Research Study - Women's movement activism on work and income** [working title]

Please note: these questions will be used in an open-ended and semi-structured format, with opportunities for interviewees to speak on other relevant matters. Depending on the wishes of the interviewee and the progress of the interview, some of these questions might not be covered.

#### PART 1

a) Please describe your involvement in the women's movement (e.g. how you got involved, what organisations you were part of, any positions held)

b) Thinking about issues of income & work (both paid and unpaid), how important were these issues for the group(s) you were involved in?

c) How, generally, would you describe the position (ideological, principled) taken on these issues

- by the group(s)?
- by you individually?
- by 'the movement' as a whole?

(Without thinking for the moment about how good these ideas were, or how effective attempts to achieve them were)

d) If those were the positions taken, how would you describe the means used to achieve the relevant goals?

(If you think this separation between goals and means does not reflect the reality of your experience, please elaborate)

e) What did people take into account when deciding on goals & methods? E.g. practical factors, capacity of organisations & individuals, ideological factors, political feasibility?

f) How did you/the groups you were involved in conceptualise your ideas and activism in relation to your understandings of the earlier phases of the women's movement (e.g. the 'first wave')?

g) In retrospect, what do you now think about

- these goals?
- these methods?
- the process of deciding?

h) How, if at all, do you think activism in that period (roughly 1970–1985) has affected things now?

- in terms of outcomes (demographic, policy)
- in terms of the debates & people's thinking
- in terms of how the women's movement operates
- in terms of how the women's movement is viewed by others

## PART 2

In Part 2 of the interview, the researcher will briefly describe some of her initial findings, and invite the interviewee to reflect on these.