



COUNTERFUTURES

Left thought & practice Aotearoa

Feminism and Marxism (and More) in Contemporary Radical Left Politics

An Unhappy Marriage or a Friendship with Benefits?

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IT IS OVER a quarter of a century since Heidi Hartmann, in an issue of *Capital and Class*, called for marxism and feminism to establish a 'healthier marriage' or get a 'divorce'.¹ Her argument at the time, which prompted significant debate, was that attempts to bring marxism and feminism together had resulted in a subsumption of feminist concerns and struggles 'into

¹ Heidi Hartmann, *The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*, *Capital & Class* 3/2, 1979, p.1.

the “larger” struggle against capital’.² ‘The “marriage” of marxism and feminism’, she asserted, ‘has been like the marriage of husband and wife depicted in English common law: marxism and feminism are one, and that one is marxism’.³ Hartmann saw marxism as tending to reduce the oppression (and liberation) of women to questions of class and production. And in that context, she argued, political concern focuses on the relationship of women and men to ‘the economic system’ rather than men and women to one another.⁴ She objected to what she considered an assumption that through analysis of capitalism relations between women and men could be explicated. A version of Hartmann’s article was re-published two years later as the leading text in an edited collection.⁵ This text, *Women and Revolution*, can be read as a point of reference for a range of left wing feminists in the 1980s and ‘90s: women who were frequently grappling with the realities of day-to-day political struggle in male-dominated organisations. And while *Women and Revolution* was written by feminist activists in the United States, the issues it described and theoretical questions it began to explore were not dissimilar to some of those that began to frequent the pages of Aotearoa’s feminist magazine *Broadsheet*.⁶

Earlier this year I found myself transported back in time, with a degree of nostalgia and apprehension, as I met with a group of friends and activists huddled over a bottle of wine and a copy of

2 Ibid, p.1.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid, p.2.

5 Heidi Hartmann, *The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*, in Lydia Sargent, ed., *Women and Revolution*, Boston 1981, pp.1-41. This edited collection was re-printed by Pluto Press, London, in 1986 with a different title: *The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: A Debate on Class and Patriarchy*.

6 See, for example: Christine Bird, *The Invisible Working Class Feminist*, in Pat Rosier, ed., *Broadsheet: Twenty Years of Broadsheet Magazine*, Auckland 1992, pp. 47-50 (originally published in *Broadsheet* #115, December 1983); and Sandra Coney, *Coalition Politics*, in Pat Rosier, ed., *Broadsheet: Twenty Years of Broadsheet Magazine*, Auckland 1992, pp. 33-6 (originally published in *Broadsheet* #92, September 1981).

the book, discussing – once again – that infamous (and singular?) relationship between feminism and marxism. It prompted me to revisit the text myself, noting how dated the arguments now feel: a re-reading that emphasised for me the significance of history, as interpreted from the vantage point of the 21st century. Yet as I watch and try to make sense of the radical left in Aotearoa at the moment I have found myself revisiting some of the questions that Heidi Hartmann and others were asking all those years ago. Much has changed. And yet if there are currently stirrings of new life amongst the radical left in Aotearoa – manifest, perhaps, in the scale of opposition to the TPPA signing; in the launch of this journal; in the formation of Economic and Social Research Aotearoa (a new radical left think tank); and in the emergence of an annual Social Movements, Resistance and Social Change conference – where does feminism sit in relation to, and as part of, such possibilities? This article is the beginning of my attempts to make sense of that.

A quick glance at the abstracts for the 2015 Social Movements, Resistance and Social Change conference at AUT suggests that feminism may have contributed implicitly to the theoretical underpinning of some of the papers.⁷ It was seldom mentioned explicitly. Kassie Hartendorp makes the point that when she thinks of ‘radical politics’ what comes to mind are the ‘women and gender minorities’ she knows who are fighting various struggles.⁸

When I look at socialist or political media, I have struggled to find these voices present. There could be a million reasons for why this is, however I know it is not for a lack of women and gender minorities wanting to change the world and to end capitalism. We cannot

7 Social Movements, Resistance and Social Change II: Possibilities, Ideas, Demands. Auckland University of Technology, 2-4 September 2015, Paper Abstracts (unpublished).

8 Kassie Hartendorp, Editorial, *Fightback*, Special Edition: Voices of Women and Gender Minorities, 2015, p. 4.

afford to have this absence of strong leftwing political voices from our communities.... More than ever, we need analysis and action that comes from a place of feminism, socialism, decolonisation and intersectionality.⁹

In this article I outline some of the debates that historically manifest in that (frequently contentious) space where feminism and socialism, or more specifically feminism and marxism, inform, influence and change the co-ordinates of one another. I outline what was identified by feminists in the 1970s and 80s as the domination of feminism by marxism, and contemplate the possibility that there has subsequently been something of a separation of these two (apparently cohesive?) 'bodies' of thought – not least as the credibility of marxism, and of the left more generally, appeared to diminish in an era of emerging neoliberal hegemony. In addition to sketching some of the theoretical discussions that have taken place between marxism and feminism, and over which silence appeared to descend towards the end of the 20th century,¹⁰ I echo the concerns of Nancy Fraser: that some of the most meaningful aspirations of second-wave feminism (caught up in a neoliberal consensus and increasingly severed from analysis of capitalism) play(ed) into complex and ongoing processes involving the global reconstitution and reconfiguration of capital.¹¹ The ideas of Fredric Jameson provide a way of understanding such developments historically, at least in part in relation to the logic of capital, and I tentatively suggest Jacques Rancière's notions of dissensus and of political subjectivity as guides to support a reinvigoration of the contemporary communist-leaning left

9 Hartendorp, 'Editorial', pp. 4-5.

10 Susan Ferguson & David McNally, *Capital, Labour-Power, and Gender-Relations*, in Lise Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*, Boston 2013, p. xvii

11 Due to the constraints of time and wordage, in this article I have been unable to detail the history of marxism in New Zealand during the decades of neoliberalism, or to pay significant attention to the ways in which second-wave feminism may have interacted with and impacted upon marxist and communist organisations during that time. There is certainly more to be written and researched on such topics.

and feminism (in the context of an ongoing state of colonisation), in relationship with – and through – one another. I suggest that such work does not lie entirely in the future. Its beginnings are already apparent in the operations and yearnings of radical politics in contemporary Aotearoa.

Feminism on Marxism, in the 1970s and 80s

In her reading of *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Hartmann considered Engels to have identified the subordinate position of women, in comparison to men, as derived from ‘the institution of private property’.¹² In ‘the old communistic household’ of previous ages, argues Engels, there may have been a division of labour along gender lines, yet women’s role in ‘household management’ was inextricably public and social, and therefore comparable with – if different to – men’s.¹³ With the development and consolidation of private property,¹⁴ which saw the breaking down of large household units and the development in particular of ‘the single monogamous family’, such management of the household came to belong to a newly emergent private sphere in which ‘the wife’ – particularly the bourgeois wife – was ‘head servant’ and men’s work occurred in a public arena where independent earnings could be secured.¹⁵ Monogamous family units also enabled family lineage to be traced down paternal lines, and patrilineal forms of inheritance and of property ownership to be secured.¹⁶

12 Hartmann, *The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*, p. 3

13 Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, London 1972, p. 137.

14 See also Eleanor Burke Leacock, ‘Introduction’, in Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, London 1972, p. 41.

15 Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, p. 137.

16 *Ibid.*, pp. 106 & 119-120.

While the value of the anthropological data from which Engels drew his arguments has been the source of controversy,¹⁷ one of Hartmann's primary critiques was that Engels considered proletarian women to be closer to emancipation than middle class women because necessity forced them into the paid workforce.¹⁸ It is in their capacity as workers that women hold the potential to unite and liberate themselves from oppression. Some decades later Lenin reiterated a similar focus:

It is the chief task of the working women's movement to fight for economic and social equality, and not only formal equality, for women. The chief thing is to get women to take part in socially productive labour, to liberate them from "domestic slavery", to free them from their stupefying and humiliating subjugation to the eternal drudgery of the kitchen and the nursery.¹⁹

For Hartmann such emphases speak of the prioritisation within marxism of the 'woman's question' – the relationship of women to production – rather than of feminist concerns, which she defined as the ways in which, and reasons why, 'women are oppressed as women'.²⁰ Hartmann holds firm to the idea that it is not simply that capitalism benefits from women occupying subordinate positions within society. '[M]en benefitted' too, she suggested, 'from not having to do housework, from having their wives and daughters serve them and from having the better places in the labor market'.²¹ Such questions, Hartmann felt, could not be adequately addressed so long as consideration of questions concerning women focused upon the relationship of women to a given mode of production rather than to men themselves.

17 For a discussion of some of these debates from a viewpoint sympathetic to Engels, see Chris Knight, *Early Human Kinship Was Matrilineal*, in Nicholas Allen, Hilary Callan, Robin Dunbar & Wendy James, eds., *Early Human Kinship*, Oxford 2008, pp. 61- 82.

18 Hartmann, 'The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism', p. 3.

19 Vladimir Lenin, *International Working Women's Day*, *VI Lenin: Collected Works Volume 30*, George Hanna trans., Moscow 1965, p.409.

20 Hartmann, *The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*, p.3.

21 *Ibid.*

Hartmann suggests that rather than prioritising analysis of a particular mode of production, capitalism coexists alongside, albeit intertwined with, a separate system of oppression that is patriarchy. Thus she pointed towards the need for consideration of ‘the contradictions of the patriarchal system’ in relation to ‘the contradictions of capitalism’.²²

There were different responses to such a suggestion, which in its various formulations came to be known as dual systems theory. Iris Young refused to see patriarchy and capitalism as two distinct yet intertwined systems. Far from assuming that marxism was the One of marxist-feminism, she suggested that ‘As long as feminists are willing to cede the theory of material social relations arising out of labouring activity to traditional marxism ... the marriage between marxism and feminism cannot be happy’.²³ Put slightly differently, feminism needed to take responsibility for ensuring that any theory of the social relations of production assumed ‘gender relations and the situation of women as core elements’ of its analysis.²⁴ ‘Instead of marrying marxism, feminism must take over marxism and transform it into such a theory’.²⁵ Christine Riddiough argued that Hartmann’s thesis had not dealt adequately with questions of ‘gay/lesbian liberation’,²⁶ and Gloria Joseph noted that Hartmann had ignored questions of racism.²⁷ Joseph gestured towards the existence of not so much an ‘unhappy marriage’ but an ‘incompatible ménage à trois: marxism, feminism and racism’.

²² Ibid, p.22.

²³ Iris Young, *Beyond the Unhappy Marriage*, in Lydia Sargent, ed., *Women and Revolution*, Boston 1981, p. 49.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 50.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Christine Riddiough, *Socialism, Feminism and Gay/Lesbian Liberation*, in Lydia Sargent, ed., *Women and Revolution*, Boston, 1981, p. 74.

²⁷ Gloria Joseph, *The Incompatible Ménage à Trois*, in Lydia Sargent, ed., *Women and Revolution*, Boston, 1981, p. 92.

Just as women cannot trust men to “liberate” them, Black women cannot trust white women to “liberate” them during or “after the revolution,” in part because there is little reason to think that they would know how; and in part because white women’s immediate self-interest lies in continued racial oppression.²⁸

While such discussions are documented within the US context in the Women and Revolution collection, Aotearoa was far from immune from such debates. Related tensions were manifest within the women’s liberation movement and left activism in Aotearoa in the late 1970s and 80s. Sue Kedgley notes that ‘by 1977, the frenetic activism of the early years of the womens liberation movement was running out of steam, and had begun to disintegrate into internal struggles and splits, between radical lesbians, socialists, and other strands’.²⁹ The 1978 Piha conference of the women’s liberation movement has been identified as the moment when the ‘contradictions’ and antagonisms within the movement ‘came to a head and exploded’.³⁰ Ideas of Māori self-determination were, in the words of New Zealand feminist Gay Simpkin, ‘formally introduced’, and theories of ‘heterosexual privilege’ put forward. By contrast, a ‘group of socialist feminists’ was expelled from the conference.³¹

We were part of an historic moment when various strands of social movements encountered each other. This dispassionate account underplays the real personal distress of the conference – that of lesbian feminists whose carefully thought out positions on political lesbianism were rubbished by women of the left, and that of women of the left whose very basis of analysis was being challenged.³²

28 Ibid, pp. 104-5.

29 Sue Kedgley, The Working Women’s Charter, from a Feminist Perspective, Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2009, <https://home.greens.org.nz/speeches/working-women%E2%80%99s-charter-feminist-perspectivesue-kedgley>

30 Gay Simpkin, in Kerry Taylor, *Feminism and the Left*, in Pat Maloney & Kerry Taylor, eds., *On the Left*, Dunedin 2002, p. 140.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

It was in such a context of ongoing discussions and disagreements that the 1980s saw radical left organisations and individuals beginning to distance themselves from some of the most obvious examples of economic reductionism on the left in Aotearoa. Organisations such as the Workers Communist League adopted what was termed the ‘tripod theory’ in which oppression was seen to manifest through the pillars of class, race and gender exploitation.³³ Activists working from ideological perspectives explicitly influenced by communism and marxism began to take on board the importance and the challenges of wider social movements – most significantly indigenous activism and feminism – within their analysis of, and activism in, Aotearoa.³⁴

Second Wave Feminism and Neoliberalism

In the current moment, after decades of subdued silence on the topic of marxism and feminism,³⁵ the context of any relationship between the two is very different to that of the 1970s and ‘80s. Women’s participation in the New Zealand labour force is considerably higher than it was three decades ago.³⁶ Levels of educational attainment have increased for women.³⁷ And feminists such as Nina Power in England have noted how feminism

33 Ibid, pp. 142-3. See also Sue Bradford cited in Cybèle Locke, *Maori Sovereignty, Black Feminism, and the New Zealand Trade Union Movement*, Carol Williams, ed., *Indigenous Women and Work*, Champaign IL 2012, p. 264.

34 See, for example, Rob Steven, *Three Decades of Shifting Sand for the Left, 1973-1998*, in Rosemary Du Plessis & Geoff Fougere, eds., *He Pounamu Korero* Christchurch 1998, p.102.

35 A quick library search on the topic of marxism and feminism suggests that little was published about the relationship of the two between the late 1980s and the end of the first decade of the 21st century, albeit with a few exceptions.

36 More women in the labour force, fewer stay-at-home parents than 1986, Statistics New Zealand, accessed May 10 2016, http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/income-and-work/employment_and_unemployment/30-years-hlfs-mr.aspx.

37 Qualification Attainment, Ministry for Women, accessed May 10 2016, <http://women.govt.nz/our-work/education-and-training/education-and-skills/qualification-attainment>.

was strategically deployed as a reason for the US to wage war on Afghanistan.³⁸ In direct contrast to this apparent mainstreaming of feminist concerns (to which I return below), marxism has struggled to retain legitimacy in an ideological climate in which neoliberalism has been increasingly normalised, and constituted quite simply as common sense. It is in this context that current talk about marxism and feminism has come to assume an altered tenor in relation to the discussions of the early 1980s.

Over recent years a spate of articles have emerged out of the US making reference to the possibility not of marxism dominating feminism, but rather of a ‘dangerous liaison’ between ‘feminism and corporate globalization’;³⁹ of a ‘happy marriage of capitalism and feminism’.⁴⁰ Nancy Fraser (2009) develops a related argument when she notes, rather uncomfortably, ‘that second-wave feminism and neoliberalism prospered in tandem’. Was this, she suggests, ‘mere coincidence’? Or, ‘was there some perverse, subterranean elective affinity’ between the two? While aware of the ‘heretical’ nature of such a question, Fraser suggests that ‘we fail to investigate it at our peril’.⁴¹

Fraser’s basic premise is that much of the innovation of second wave feminism lay in its capacity to address gender inequality as found in three inextricably linked dimensions: economic, cultural and political. Over recent decades she considers analyses of these strands to have not only been separated from each other, but to have also become severed from ‘the critique of capitalism’.⁴² As a result what started out as ‘utopian desires’

38 Nina Power, *One Dimensional Woman*, Winchester 2009, p. 8.

39 Hester Eisenstein. A dangerous liaison? Feminism and corporate globalization, *Science & Society*, 2005, pp. 487-518.

40 Christine Williams, The Happy Marriage of Capitalism and Feminism, *Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews* 43/1 2014, pp. 58-61.

41 Nancy Fraser, Feminism, capitalism and the cunning of history, *New Left Review* 56/2 2009, pp. 108.

42 Ibid, p. 99.

(in the most positive and progressive sense of that term) – as desires relating to a better world, to ‘a just society’ – have therefore served to legitimate the transition to ‘post-Fordist, transnational, neoliberal’ capitalism.⁴³

If this is the case it is perhaps symbolically significant that Hartmann’s article on the unhappy marriage was first published in *Capital and Class* in 1979, the year that Margaret Thatcher came to power in the UK. The edited collection on the topic was published two years later in the year that Ronald Reagan became president of the United States. Both of these political leaders were synonymous with, ‘publicly championed’ in the words of Fraser,⁴⁴ an era of deep and at times vicious class politics; radical political and economic restructuring along neoliberal lines; and foreign policy that reinvigorated Cold War politics in the run-up to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Some now call this the beginnings, or at least the entrenchment, of neoliberalism, as enacted in Aotearoa by the 1984 election and the period of Rogernomics. It was also the period, following the end of the Cold War, in which it was possible for Francis Fukuyama to suggest that the end of history may have been reached: the end of ideological difference, and the victory of the political formations of the western capitalist marketplace.⁴⁵

All of this can be considered the broad historical context within, and of which, the shifting valences of second wave feminism are identified as both a critique and as inadvertently – ‘perverse[ly]’ to use Fraser’s terminology⁴⁶ – partially constitutive. In the discussion that follows I draw upon the work of Fraser to discuss how issues of employment, critiques of hierarchy and questions of identity were approached by many sec-

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid, p. 107.

45 Francis Fukuyama, *The end of history?* *The National Interest*, 16 1989, pp. 3-18.

46 Fraser, ‘Feminism, capitalism and the cunning of history’, p.108.

ond wave feminists, and can also be seen as having subsequently been drawn into the legitimisation processes of global capitalism.⁴⁷

Employment and the Family Wage

Fraser speaks of how feminists, particularly socialist-feminists of the second wave:

uncovered the deep-structural connections between women’s responsibility for the lion’s share of unpaid caregiving, their subordination in marriage and personal life, the gender segmentation of labour markets, men’s domination of the political system, and the androcentrism of welfare provision, industrial policy and development schemes. In effect, they exposed the family wage as the point where gender maldistribution, misrecognition and misrepresentation converged.⁴⁸

This issue of the family wage has particular historical significance in Aotearoa. In 1936, under the first New Zealand Labour Government, the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act was amended and enshrined in law, promoting ‘a minimum wage sufficient to support a man, his wife and three children’.⁴⁹ It was integral, write Annabel Cooper and Maureen Molloy, to a ‘radical’ Labour Party election platform premised upon ‘the idea that there were sufficient resources, if properly distributed, to guarantee everyone in the country a “decent standard of living”’.⁵⁰ Despite the apparently socialist – or perhaps more accurately social democratic – intent of such legislation, subsequent femi-

47 I would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers of an earlier draft of this piece, who suggested that this process whereby aspects of feminism are drawn into neoliberalism, may be related to the strength within second wave feminism of liberal feminism. As a result, in a neoliberal climate in which the left was largely discredited, it was not difficult for liberal strands of feminism to become ‘absorbed by neoliberalism’, and for such feminism to become equated with feminism tout court.

48 Fraser, *Feminism, capitalism and the cunning of history*, pp. 104-5.

49 Annabel Cooper & Maureen Molloy, *Poverty, Dependence and ‘Women’ Gender & History*, 9/1 1997, p. 38.

50 Cooper & Molloy, *Poverty, Dependence and ‘Women’*, p. 38.

nist critique has highlighted the economic dependence of women enacted and assumed by such legislation.⁵¹ The family wage, denied to women including single parent mothers, can be seen as less a family wage than a male wage.⁵²

For Fraser, writing in the US, the family wage (however much it escaped reality for many families) remained a ‘social ideal’ that had a powerful effect in terms of prescribing and reinforcing highly gendered norms around, not least, the division of (paid and unpaid) labour in the mid-20th century.⁵³ It also, she suggests, served as an ideological tool ‘to discipline those who would contravene’ such norms.⁵⁴ The notion of the family wage thereby reiterated not only the ideal citizen of liberalism as a male head of family, but also (it might be added) the ideal worker of the workers’ movement as what Fraser refers to as ‘an ethnic-majority male worker – a breadwinner and a family man’.⁵⁵ And certainly in Aotearoa, key demands of the Women’s Liberation Movement such as ‘equal pay and opportunity’, the overthrowing of ‘the stereotype role’ of women in which she is ‘forced to live vicariously through her husband and children’, and state subsidised ‘24 hour childcare centres’⁵⁶ were not easily accommodated by, or integrated into, the existing ideological frameworks from which traditional working class organisations such as trade unions operated – perhaps particularly those organisations representing workers from what Cybèle Locke refers to as the ‘top tier’ of the ‘working class hierarchy’.⁵⁷ As Locke documents, ‘[u]

51 See, for example, Charlotte Macdonald, *Mid-century rumblings*, in Charlotte Macdonald, ed. *The Vote, The Pill and The Demon Drink*, Wellington 1993, p. 123; Cooper & Molloy, *Poverty, Dependence and ‘Women’*, pp. 36-59.

52 See, for example, Cooper & Molloy, *Poverty, Dependence and ‘Women’*.

53 Fraser, *Feminism, capitalism and the cunning of history*, pp. 101-2.

54 *Ibid.*, p.101.

55 *Ibid.*

56 *Women’s Liberation*, in Charlotte Macdonald, ed., *The Vote, The Pill and The Demon Drink*, p. 165.

57 Cybèle Locke, *Workers in the Margins*, Wellington 2012, p. 10. Henceforward WM.

sed as a buffer within the labour force and segregated by sex into low-paid jobs, women were dealt a weak hand in the union movement'.⁵⁸ And 'Māori and Pasifika migrants', in addition to women, constituted the 'bottom tier of New Zealand's working class' in the post-war period.⁵⁹

The situation of women in relation to paid employment shifted considerably in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, although certain issues remain. The percentage of women in the full-time workforce more than doubled between 1951 and 2001 (a rise from 23.2% to 46.8%).⁶⁰ The overall gender pay differential has reduced since 1998 (albeit with fluctuations), yet women's wages remain lower than men's.⁶¹ While feminism may have been influential in processes such as establishing more equal pay, what remains invisible in this seeming trajectory towards women's emancipation – and in the absence of a broader structural analysis of the operation of capital over the past 30 years – is the stagnation or relative reduction in wages for the vast majority of workers, in comparison to a very few.⁶² As Power puts it:

In the 1950s, a male breadwinners wage was enough to support an entire "classical" family, now both partners must (in most cases)

58 Ibid, p. 16.

59 Ibid, p. 10.

60 Statistics New Zealand Long Term Data Series (LTDS), Te Ara, The Encyclopedia of New Zealand, accessed August 2 2016: <http://www.teara.govt.nz/files/g-22690-data.txt> (TEARA story: Women in full-time employment 1936-2006, Te Ara, The Encyclopedia of New Zealand, accessed August 2 2016, <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/graph/22690/women-in-full-time-employment-1936-2006>)

61 Gender Pay Gap, Ministry for Women, accessed May 11 2015, <http://women.govt.nz/our-work/utilising-womens-skills/income/gender-pay-gap>.

62 In the US context see: Josh Bivens, Elise Gould, Lawrence Mishel & Heidi Shierholz, Raising America's Pay, Washington DC, 4 June 2014, accessed May 11 2016, <http://www.epi.org/publication/raising-americas-pay/>. See also: Josh Bivens & Lawrence Mishel, Understanding the Historic Divergence Between Productivity and a Typical Worker's Pay, Washington DC, 2 Sept 2015, accessed May 11 2016, <http://www.epi.org/publication/understanding-the-historic-divergence-between-productivity-and-a-typical-workers-pay-why-it-matters-and-why-its-real/>.

work to earn anywhere near the same amount. If women are now fully included in the workforce it is because men's wages have been depressed, even as women still fail to earn as much as their male counterparts.⁶³

Locke refers to similar processes in New Zealand, in which neo-liberal reforms, the introduction of 'structural unemployment', and one might now add the attempted normalisation of precarious working conditions through mechanisms such as zero-hours contracts, have marginalised increasing numbers of workers: 'the marginal has become normalised'.⁶⁴

Where once a Labour government introduced a 'family wage', broadly comparable talk around wage levels today refers to a 'minimum wage' or at best a 'living wage'. The fact that New Zealand has networks such as the Living Wage Movement suggests that the minimum wage hardly supports workers – let alone dependent families and children – to participate in the various processes that might currently be defined as living. To put it bluntly: 'The statutory minimum wage is not a Living Wage'.⁶⁵ In the US context Nancy Maclean notes that it may be the 'break-down of a family-wage system', rather than feminism itself, that is most helpful in enabling explanation of 'much recent gender history'.⁶⁶ And similar arguments can be made in relation to Aotearoa. In academic analysis of New Zealand government policy around women and work from early this century it is noted that 'despite drawing upon feminist discourses to warrant its vision, the policy is driven by capitalist goals of increased produc-

63 Nina Power, Non-Reproductive Futurism, *borderlands*, 8/2 2009, p.5.

64 WM, p. 13.

65 Living Wage Aotearoa New Zealand, A living wage: where did it all begin? (information sheet 3), accessed May 11 2016, http://www.livingwage.org.nz/information_sheets.

66 Nancy MacLean, Postwar Women's History, in Jean-Christophe Agnew & Roy Rosenzweig, eds., *A companion to post-1945 America*, Malden MA 2002, p. 238.

tivity and economic growth rather than the needs of women'.⁶⁷ Furthermore, data from the Human Rights Commission reveals that two thirds of people on the minimum wage aged over 25 years are women (2014 data), and the hourly rate of Māori and Pacific women tends to be less than that of women of European descent.⁶⁸

Fraser also gestures towards the ease with which feminist critique of the family wage – again separated from wider social, cultural and economic analysis – has been all too easily deployed to support capital's disavowal of the value of unpaid labour. In her own words:

second-wave feminism's critique of the family wage has enjoyed a perverse afterlife. Once the centrepiece of a radical analysis of capitalism's androcentrism, it serves today to intensify capitalism's valorization of waged labour.⁶⁹

Where radical left activists in Aotearoa who were influenced by feminism once campaigned for the rights of women to work, and for structural supports – such as 24-hour childcare, contraception, and abortion rights – to enable them to do so, beneficiary advocacy organisations such as Auckland Action Against Poverty (AAP) today work in a very different, seemingly antithetical, context. In the face of a neoliberal government driving a particular understanding of productivity, a spokesperson for AAP refers to the recent Support for Children in Hardship Bill as requiring parents to 'look for work from the time their youngest child turns 3', thereby creating a situation in which parents are driven towards 'lowpaid casual work': employment of the most precarious kinds.⁷⁰ Radical political advocacy therefore comes to

67 Ella Kahu & Mandy Morgan, A critical discourse analysis of New Zealand government policy, *Women's Studies International Forum*, 30/2 2007, p. 134.

68 Human Rights Commission, Tracking equality at work. Issue: Pay, 2015, accessed May 19 2016, <http://tracking-equality.hrc.co.nz/#/issue/pay>.

69 Fraser, *Feminism, capitalism and the cunning of history*, p. 111.

70 Auckland Action Against Poverty, 'Media Release: Sugarcoated Welfare Reform

focus, at least in part, upon fighting for conditions in which parents, still most likely women, can afford to stay at home to care for their pre-school children. The work-focused emphasis of 21st century welfare reforms has resulted in a situation that, in the words of Louise Humpage and Susan St John, 'wipes away any notion that our social security system is about ensuring everyone can participate as citizens. Instead, it makes getting people into a job, any job, the fundamental duty of citizenship'.⁷¹

The state has also gone some way towards improving state-funding of childcare since the 1990s,⁷² which has long been a feminist demand. However, this has occurred in a policy context oriented towards tapping into the economic potential of women's labour⁷³ – particularly in a country with documented skills shortages⁷⁴ – in a deregulated market. To draw upon the words of Fraser: in the grips of neoliberal ideology, the 'sow's ear' of depreciated living standards, increased precarity, and the conflation of productivity with paid employment, has been turned 'into a silk purse by elaborating a new romance of female advancement and gender justice'.⁷⁵

Critiquing Hierarchy and Bureaucratic Paternalism

In addition to demands for equal pay and equal opportunities for paid employment on gender grounds, second wave feminists

Hides Further Attacks on Benefits', 4 Dec 2014, accessed May 18 2015, http://www.aaap.org.nz/media_release_sugarcoated_welfare_reform_hides_further_attacks_on_benefits.

71 Louise Humpage & Susan St John, A bill the poor will pay for, *New Zealand Herald*, 11 June 2007, accessed May 12 2016, http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10444701.

72 Celia Briar, Babies and bosses, *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy* 3-4/17 2006, pp. 51.

73 Markie Twist, A Response to the Babies and Bosses Report, *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy*, 3-4/17 2005, pp. 67-77.

74 See, for example, OECD, Babies and Bosses - Reconciling Work and Family Life (Volume 3): New Zealand, Portugal and Switzerland, Paris 2004, p. 31.

75 Fraser, Feminism, capitalism and the cunning of history, p. 110.

developed powerful critiques of hierarchical decision-making and organisational structures. The institutions of the liberal democratic state were identified as elitist and masculinist, claiming to operate (much as the patriarchal family itself) in the interests of those at the bottom whilst failing to incorporate in decision-making those whom they were deemed to represent.⁷⁶ As Alison Jaggar notes, many feminists were also critical of the organisational structures of the traditional left and of marxism-leninism in particular.⁷⁷ In this vein feminists built upon well-known critiques of the vanguard party, and added that such modes of organisation tend to stifle the voices of less confident comrades (often women) and dismiss the significance of ‘feeling or emotion’ (to which women tend to be socialised to be highly attuned) in favour of ‘tasks’ and analysis of ‘the “objective” political situation’.⁷⁸ In contrast, feminists were more likely to prioritise the development of organisations in which hierarchical structures were replaced with focus upon horizontalism and what Fraser refers to as a ‘counter-ethos of sisterly connection’.⁷⁹

In Aotearoa women’s liberation groups were deliberately developed along horizontalist lines, tending to incorporate consensus decision-making and avoiding overt hierarchy.⁸⁰ Consciousness raising groups were a part of such developments in the early stages of the Women’s Liberation Movement: informal structureless groups in which women could talk about personal experiences with other women, connections could be made, and understanding therefore emerge around the shared political and social relevance of such experiences.⁸¹

76 See, for example, Fraser, *Feminism, capitalism and the cunning of history*, p. 105.

77 Alison Jaggar, *Feminist politics and human nature*, Totowa N.J. 1983, pp. 230-3.

78 *Ibid.*, p. 232.

79 Fraser, *Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History*, p. 105.

80 Jane Vanderpyl, *Aspiring for Unity and Equality*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Auckland, ResearchSpace@Auckland 2004, pp. 105-106.

81 See, for example, Gay Simpkim, *Feminism and the Left*, pp. 138-9.; For more gen-

Despite the importance of such groups, and their significance in redefining what it meant to be political,⁸² they were not without their difficulties. It was as early as 1970 that Jo Freeman in the USA wrote about what she considered to be ‘the tyranny of structurelessness’. Her article was aimed specifically at informing a women’s liberation movement that she suggested had turned structurelessness into ‘a goddess in its own right’.⁸³ She argued that apparently structureless groups necessarily develop inadvertent and informal *modus operandi*. Such disavowed mechanisms of organising emerge as a result of factors such as friendship groups, personalities, the confidence and background of different members. The idea of structurelessness therefore operates as a ‘mask’⁸⁴ or a ‘smokescreen’⁸⁵ enabling potentially un- or even anti-democratic operations to be normalised and go unchecked. Although some feminists disagreed with Freeman,⁸⁶ there were others who shared her sentiments. In New Zealand Joss Shawyer, for example, wrote for *Broadsheet* identifying the 1979 United Women’s Convention at Piha as exemplifying Freeman’s argument.⁸⁷

Freeman also suggested that the ideology of structurelessness had limitations beyond a veiling of undemocratic practices:

Unstructured groups may be very effective in getting women to talk about their lives; they aren’t very good for getting things done. It

eral discussion of consciousness raising groups see Sheila Rowbotham, *The Past is Before Us*, Middlesex 1990, pp. 5-7.

82 This might be seen as epitomised in the feminist slogan ‘the personal is political’.

83 Jo Freeman, *The Tyranny of Structurelessness*, *Women’s Studies Quarterly*, 3-4/41 2013, p. 231. Accessed May 12 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23611519>.

84 *Ibid*, p. 234.

85 *Ibid*, p. 232.

86 Vanderpyl, *Aspiring for Unity and Equality*, p.51, provides a discussion of some of the debates around Freeman’s work.

87 See, for example, Joss Shawyer, *Although at the time it did seem to me that there was a sinister plot afoot....*, *Broadsheet*, June 1979, p. 25.

is when people get tired of “just talking” and want to do something more than the groups flounder, unless they change the nature of their operation.⁸⁸

While unstructured feminist groups were powerful responses to state hierarchy and to the top-down structures of some marxist-leninist groups, in so far as structurelessness was fetishized there is an argument that such organisations reached their limit points when large scale collective and group action were most needed.⁸⁹ Indeed, literature suggests that feminist organisations often move towards formal hierarchical and/or bureaucratic structures as they grow and as different degrees and types of work therefore need to be carried out.⁹⁰ In Aotearoa feminist organisations have experienced pressure to develop more hierarchical structures – differentiating roles along ‘vertical’ as well as ‘horizontal’ lines – once they have grown to the extent that they can, or need, to employ workers.⁹¹

Feminist organisations that have accepted funding from external sources such as the state have also found pressure to shift their structures to accommodate the requirements of funders (not least following the state’s introduction of contract purchasing of community group services).⁹² There is evidence

88 Freeman, *The Tyranny of Structurelessness*, p. 239.

89 Dylan Taylor makes a related point in his recent analysis of the Occupy movement: *Claiming the Century*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Auckland, 2015. He notes that within Occupy ‘consensus decision-making was fetishized’ (p. 244). In this context on the one hand informal networks and individuals came to assume power for which they were not held accountable or responsible, and on the other there was a failure to produce a movement that could last beyond the physical space and moment of the occupation. He concludes that the ‘politics that dominated Occupy were successful in creating an inclusive space capable of incorporating large numbers of people’ and he adds ‘in large part because it is compatible with the individualist mindset fostered under neoliberalism’ (p.274). However, he notes, ‘it was unable to foster a collective subject capable of effectively challenging capital’ (pp. 274-75).

90 Vanderypyl, *Aspiring for Unity and Equality*, p. 65; Stephanie Riger, *Challenges of success*, *Feminist Studies* 2/20 1994, pp. 275-300.

91 *Ibid.*, p. 233 (see also pp. 227-233).

92 *Ibid.*

that such groups have often experienced internal tensions and conflicts as a result of such pressures.⁹³ Yet however controversial it may seem, there is also a case to be made that in the political climate of the last few decades, aspects of the feminist critique of bureaucratic hierarchical structures (particularly if severed from analysis of political economy) were particularly susceptible to being absorbed by the discourses of neoliberalism. Jonathan Dean suggests in reference to a text written by a woman's aid organisation, that talk of 'self-help, empowerment and inclusion, to enable survivors to take control of their own lives' is rooted in 'the autonomous strands of the women's movement'.⁹⁴ However, in a discursive context that 'frames survivors as "service users"' there is a danger that such language resonates more with notions of "customer service" and individualism characteristic of the "new public management" and the general encroachment of private sector discourse into the provision of public services'.⁹⁵

Fraser gestures towards aspects of 'feminist anti-étatisme' and the feminist critique of bureaucratic hierarchy being all too easily 'resigned' in support of a rapidly developing neoliberal agenda of rolling back the frontiers of the state.⁹⁶ For example, many feminists have been politically oriented towards the grass-roots type of organising prevalent in NGOs, yet the proliferation of feminist NGOs in certain parts of the world towards the end of the 20th century has also been identified as a neoliberal strategy on the part of inter-governmental and financial institutions.⁹⁷ Fraser refers to the fact that NGOs in the 'postcolonies' simultaneously supported the provision of 'urgently needed material aid to populations bereft of public services', whilst often inad-

93 Ibid, p. i.

94 Ibid, p. 124.

95 Ibid.

96 Fraser, *Feminism, capitalism and the cunning of history*, p. 111.

97 See also Sonia Alvarez, *Beyond NGOization?*, *Development*, 2/52 2009, p.176.

vertently ‘skew[ing]’ local agendas towards alignment with the funding regimes of ‘First-World funders’.⁹⁸ There is also recent evidence of not for profit organisations working in communities in Aotearoa feeling a need to curb their advocacy and adopt market-based language, in order to secure contracts.⁹⁹

Neoliberalism may have had a fraught relationship with aspects of feminist horizontalism. However, it is also possible to identify a ‘cunning of history’ in the way that feminist critiques of hierarchy and ‘bureaucratic paternalism’ coincided with (some might even say have been used to legitimise) the right wing dismantling of aspects of state bureaucracies, not least the welfare state, as capital increasingly dictates the operations of daily living.¹⁰⁰

Culture and Identity

As feminism moved towards the 21st century, questions and challenges regarding culture and identity became increasingly integral to feminist struggle and politics. As New Zealand feminists have acknowledged, ‘the construction of “women” as a political category’ was a huge achievement for 19th and 20th century feminists.¹⁰¹ However, as the 20th century drew to a close it was widely acknowledged that assumptions regarding ‘commonality’ between women were problematic and contestable, and were subject in feminist scholarly work to deconstruction.¹⁰² Rosemary De Plessis and Alice Lynne note that such issues have particular

98 Fraser, *Feminism, capitalism and the cunning of history*, p. 111.

99 See, for example, Sue Elliott & David Haigh, *Advocacy in the New Zealand Not-for-profit Sector*, *Third Sector Review* 19/2 2013, pp. 157-78.

100 Fraser, *Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History*, p.112.

101 Rosemary Du Plessis & Alice Lynne, Introduction: *Feminisms, Connections, and Differences* in Rosemary Du Plessis & Alice Lynne, eds., *Feminist Thought in Aotearoa/New Zealand Differences and Connections*, Auckland 1998, p. xv.

102 Ibid.

significance in Aotearoa, which is founded upon Te Tiriti o Waitangi, a document that ‘articulates a particular relationship between Māori, the original inhabitants of these islands, and up to six generations of more recent settlers’.¹⁰³ It is noteworthy in this respect that the initial three parts of the ground breaking text by Donna Awatere, *Maori Sovereignty*, were first published in the New Zealand feminist magazine *Broadsheet*.¹⁰⁴ In this sense the relationship between tino rangitiratanga and feminism is indisputable. In the words of Awatere:

It is important for white women to understand the take of Maori sovereignty, to understand us as Maori women. Therefore in this sense, the Maori Sovereignty article was a keynote article in relations between white and Maori women. Yet the cover of *Broadsheet* for that month was of globules representing pink and white tits. This is an insult to Maori women and to the Maori people. As though breast cancer is as important as the cancerous intrusion of Pakeha into and on the Maori of Aotearoa. As though breast cancer is more important than what we are as a people.¹⁰⁵

Awatere speaks elsewhere in *Maori Sovereignty* of ‘[w]hite feminists’ as ‘defining “feminism” for this country’, of ‘using their white power, status and privilege to ensure that their definition of “feminism” supercedes that of Maori women’.¹⁰⁶ And in this context of the historical and ongoing operation of colonial power it was of utmost importance that Pākehā feminists seek to understand the ways in which their own assumptions, actions and cultural upbringings, oppress and silence Māori, and to change and challenge such processes.

In the late 1970s the category of ‘woman’ was, as mentioned above, challenged by lesbian and bisexual feminists for its

103 Ibid.

104 See the publication information at the front of Donna Awatere, *Maori Sovereignty*, Auckland 1984.

105 Ibid, p. 45.

106 Ibid, p. 42.

assumed heteronormativity, as well as by Māori feminists. And, more recently, accusations of transphobia have been levelled at prominent second-wave feminists.¹⁰⁷ The category of ‘women’ assumed by many second wave feminists has, according to Rachael Simon-Kumar, been increasingly ‘dissolved in public discourse’, and taking its place is reference to ‘specific identities, such as Māori women, professional women, refugee women, rape victims, single mothers, and so on’.¹⁰⁸ She notes a paralleling of this ‘disaggregation’ of the category women with ‘theoretical shifts in feminist theory that invalidate an essentialist notion of “women”’. Yet the political effect, she suggests, has been that it is ‘harder to justify a core set of gender issues or a feminist agenda’.¹⁰⁹ Simon-Kumar also discerns a shift of public focus away from a now seemingly archaic emphasis upon gender towards awareness of cultural and ethnic diversity, a shift that she suggests is underpinned by a ‘strong subtext’ of the potential economic wins to be made by accessing and mobilising such markets.¹¹⁰ And certainly the emergence of terms such as ‘diversity dividend’ in the research agendas of New Zealand universities gestures towards the economic significance of cultural diversity in contemporary Aotearoa.¹¹¹

107 Heather Saul, Germaine Greer defends ‘grossly offensive’ comments about transgender women, *The Independent*, 27 Oct 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/germaine-greer-defends-grossly-offensive-comments-about-transgender-women-just-because-you-lop-off-a6709061.html>. See also Louise McCudden, To Julie Birchill, Suzanne Moore and all feminists, *The Independent*, 15 January 2013, accessed May 12 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/to-julie-burchill-suzanne-moore-and-all-feminists-the-absence-of-trans-people-in-the-media-is-as-8450401.html>.

108 Rachel Simon-Kumar, Differences that matter, *Women’s Studies Journal* 25/2 2011, p. 80.

109 Ibid, p. 80.

110 Ibid, p. 84.

111 Overview, Capturing the Diversity Dividend of Aotearoa/New Zealand, accessed May 20 2016, http://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/learning/departments/centres-research/caddanz/background/background_home.cfm.

To return to Fraser's analysis, corresponding to the ascendance and consolidation of neoliberalism was a shift within the language of justice towards a focus upon the 'recognition of identity and difference'.¹¹² In this context, pressure mounted for feminism to become 'a variant of identity politics' in which calls for cultural critique increasingly overrode the concerns of socio-economic analysis.¹¹³ Locke explains such an argument in the context of Aotearoa:

New social movements mobilised around a shared identity – a collective subject position, such as women, gay or Māori, from which to champion a set of rights – and for some this became an end in itself, rather than the means to eliminate poverty and oppression.¹¹⁴

She contrasts this with the unemployed workers and beneficiaries' movement of the 1980s, which brought together women, Māori, beneficiaries and some of the most disenfranchised groups in New Zealand society around questions of poverty and unemployment. She notes that the movement adopted a 'bicultural structure', was committed to many of the concerns of the new social movements, and that this came together with an understanding of 'member groups' as 'dispossessed workers and therefore members of the working class'.¹¹⁵

Yet to draw upon the work of Fraser, as the 20th century drew to a close there was a tendency for important feminist critiques of 'economism' (which can be read as in part a reaction to the economic reductionism of some manifestations of marxism) to shift to 'an equally one-sided culturalism'.¹¹⁶ And she adds, the timing of this 'could not have been worse':

112 Fraser, *Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History*, p. 108.

113 *Ibid*, p. 108. See also Nancy Fraser, *From redistribution to recognition*, *New Left Review* 1/212 1995, pp. 68-93.

114 *WM*, p. 16.

115 *Ibid*, p. 17.

116 Fraser, *Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History*, p.108. See also pp.103-4.

The turn to recognition dovetailed all too neatly with a rising neo-liberalism that wanted nothing more than to repress all memory of social egalitarianism. Thus, feminists absolutized the critique of culture at precisely the moment when circumstances required redoubled attention to the critique of political economy.¹¹⁷

And so there is a sense in which the moment of what some have called postmodernism, of diffusion, fragmentation and identity, was also the moment in which capital became most universalising. Hopes of emancipation through paid employment, aspirations of unity, and understandings of leadership and direction, appeared to be lost at precisely that moment in which capitalism began to penetrate into more and more areas of everyday life and consciousness. And indeed, perhaps it could not have been otherwise.

Fredric Jameson: the Logic of Capital

I have suggested that 30 or more years ago feminism made important and necessary critiques of the traditional marxist left. Drawing upon the work of Nancy Fraser I have also proposed that some of the most aspirational facets of second wave feminism – such as employment demands, critiques of bureaucratic hierarchy, and recognition of difference – have now been inadvertently drawn into the legitimation mechanisms and ideological supports of contemporary capitalism. In this section I deploy the work of Fredric Jameson as a way of attempting to make sense of such developments. This enables the subject matter to be located as inextricably, and historically, bound with the logic of capitalism.¹¹⁸ Through Jameson's work I arrive at a contex-

117 WM, p.109.

118 Fraser herself draws upon the work of Luc Boltanski & Eve Chiapello in *The New Spirit of Capitalism* to develop her own argument, talking about the capacity of contemporary capitalism to recuperate some of the elements most critical of it – in this context, aspects of feminism – with the effect of revitalising and regenerating itself. Boltanski & Eve's work has been read as making unrealistic assumptions about

tualisation of social movements such as contemporary feminism as simultaneously (albeit incompatibly) effects of the current historical moment and agents of systemic change. This presents important challenges for radical politics today, and for the relationship of feminism and marxism within that, upon which I elaborate below.

For Jameson, capitalism's resilience lies in part with the 'discontinuous but [nevertheless] expansive' character of its movement: 'With each crisis, it mutates into a larger sphere of activity and a wider field of penetration, of control, investment, and transformation'.¹¹⁹ In the work of Ernest Mandel, upon whose narrative of historical periodisation Jameson draws, an early moment of 'market capitalism' was followed by a stage of monopoly or imperialist capitalism and a later stage, from approximately 1945 onwards, of 'late capitalism' – also at times referred to as 'multinational' or (however inaccurately) 'postindustrial' capitalism.¹²⁰ Whatever the disputes around the precise dates, or even existence, of such 'stages' of capitalism, the strength of such an analysis lies with the emphasis that it places upon the adaptability of capital, and the logic – in terms of its own survival – of its persistent (albeit discontinuous) expansion not only geographically, but also into areas of life that had not previously been commodified. The productive dimensions of this expansion are not only premised upon exploitation of workers. They also require the subsumption to capital of areas of life that were previously largely beyond its reaches. The home is a pertinent example of

the possibilities for change within contemporary capitalism, and of failing to anticipate a world beyond capitalism – see Sebastian Budgen, A new 'Spirit of Capitalism', *New Left Review* 1 2000, p.156; Howard Brick, Is anti-capitalism enough, *Solidarity*, accessed July 26 2016, <https://www.solidarity-us.org/node/2036>. My own approach therefore develops in a more explicitly marxist direction by drawing upon the work of Fredric Jameson.

119 Fredric Jameson, Culture and finance capital, *Critical Inquiry*, 24/1 1997, p. 248.

120 Ernest Mandel, cited in Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, London 1991, p. 35.

this. The drawing of increasing numbers of women into the paid workforce not only provides a relatively cheap and previously untapped source of labour.¹²¹ It also simultaneously opens up new markets for exploitation – for what Hartmann refers to as ‘replacement services’ such as childcare or fast food.¹²² As Marx and Engels wrote of the bourgeoisie, in relation to its need for ‘a constantly expanding market for its products’: ‘It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere’.¹²³ And as a dark underbelly to such universalising tendencies, capital ruptures and tears apart societies and communities in grasping for its own proliferation. Within the diversity of competing understandings of colonialism,¹²⁴ the brutal history of colonialism was read by Marx and Engels as closely related to such universalising tendencies of capital: a growing bourgeoisie (even in its very early stages) extended its views beyond Europe and was consolidated not least by the possibilities for trade and commerce resulting from land, resources and peoples across the globe.¹²⁵ Contemporary globalisation can be read as another ongoing manifestation of such geographical expansion, as global corporations situate their operations in far corners of the world, uprooting and relocating as market conditions change or fluctuate. Yet in so far as this is the case, where extremely diverse knowledges and ways of living are torn asunder and subsumed by the logic of capitalist expansion, so too emerges the potential for resistance and opposition. Where previously a way of living may have been relatively unencumbered, it increasingly must be defended, fought for and protected if it is to be retained at all. Regional, national and eth-

121 See, for example, Hester Eisenstein. *A dangerous liaison?*, *Science & Society*, 2005, pp. 489-90.

122 Hartmann, cited in Eisenstein. *A dangerous liaison?*, p. 490.

123 Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *The communist manifesto*, in Leo Panitch & Colin Leys, eds., *The Communist Manifesto Now: Socialist Register 1998*, New York and Halifax 1998, p. 243.

124 See, for example, Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler colonialism*, Basingstoke 2010.

125 Marx & Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, pp. 241-3.

nic struggles gain import. And so, suggests Jameson, there is an intensely ideological dimension to late 20th century claims that the new social movements emerge in the place where class politics lost its relevance, dwindled and was discredited.

How classes could be expected to disappear, save in the unique special-case scenario of socialism, has never been clear to me; but the global restructuration of production and the introduction of radically new technologies – that have flung workers in archaic factories out of work, displaced new kinds of industry to unexpected parts of the world, and recruited work forces different from the traditional ones in a variety of features, from gender to skill and nationality – explain why so many people have been willing to think so, at least for a time.¹²⁶

Furthermore, suggests Jameson, the ‘micropolitics’ of social movements that emerge as capital impacts upon areas and populations previously largely untouched by its logic, are ‘available for the more obscene celebrations of contemporary capitalist pluralism and democracy’.¹²⁷ This might be glimpsed in the celebration of increasing numbers of women in the workplace (however precarious and low paid their work); in the neoliberal valorisation of community diversity and involvement in voluntary-sector organisations (whilst the funding of these groups is diminished); or in media claims that the prevalence of rich female celebrities points to the success of feminism.

And so, at such an historical moment, in which the political importance of social and cultural difference and identity is both unquestionable and wrought with tension, questions emerge around the possibilities and challenges for a re-emergence of radical left politics. Dylan Taylor makes the point in the context of 21st century Aotearoa that ‘[w]hile the “old left” needed to be challenged over its complacency, patriarchal chauvinism, mori-

126 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, London 1991, p. 319. Henceforward *PCLLC*

127 *Ibid.*, pp.319-20.

bund statism, disregard for the environment and hollow rhetoric, no substantial new politics has followed from this challenge'.¹²⁸ Jameson poses the question as follows:

In short, and no longer to put so fine a point on it, are the “new social movements” consequences and after effects of late capitalism? Are they new units generated by the system itself in its interminable inner self-differentiation and self-reproduction? Or are they very precisely new “agents of history” who spring into being in resistance to the system as forms of opposition to it, forcing it against the direction of its own internal logic into new reforms and internal modifications?¹²⁹

He goes on to suggest that it is precisely such an opposition between the dynamics of human agency and of socio-political system, between being symptomatic of and ‘being in resistance to’, that is problematic. More than that, perhaps it is in the ‘theoretical dilemma’¹³⁰ that emerges in the dichotomous positioning of the two, the assumption that both are or can be, mutually exclusive, that some of the most productive and radical political work needs to be done. ‘In reality’, he states, ‘there is no such choice’.¹³¹ And if we assume such a choice we become part of the problem by normalising – and reinforcing – the reification of agency or structure, or both, failing to work productively with the contradictions of our time and place.¹³²

128 Dylan Taylor, *Claiming the Century*, p.273.

129 *PCLLC*, p. 326.

130 *Ibid.*

131 *Ibid.*

132 One of the difficulties of Jameson’s work, as suggested by Jacqueline Rose, is that whilst Jameson acknowledges the significance of movements such as feminism in his work, radical feminism ‘is later re-absorbed into a priority of class division’, Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, London 2005, p. 11. And in so far as this is the case it returns to what Hartmann spoke of as, the subsumption of feminism into marxism. However, my premise is that it is only because of the influence of feminism/s – alongside other social movements – and their critique/s of marxism, that a contemporary marxist such as Jameson is able, at the point that he did, to write such an analysis and to acknowledge (however perhaps begrudgingly) the importance of new social movements in relation to contemporary social change. In this sense feminism cannot be separated from contemporary marxism: it is integral to the ways in which marxism

Rather than falling into something of a ‘third way’ approach in which agency and structure might be apparently collapsed into a middle ground, where the focus is on rights and justice within the context of an acceptance of the main tenets of contemporary capitalism, Jameson’s work suggests forms of thought more adept to the development of radical possibilities. In relation to the positioning of social movements as either ‘agency’ or ‘system’ Jameson says:

both explanations or models – absolutely inconsistent with each other – are also incommensurable with each other and must be rigorously separated at the same time that they are deployed simultaneously.¹³³

In such a context challenges arise around how to develop ways of thinking and working in political movements that can simultaneously honour the radical drives and potentials of newly emergent social movements and political identities, whilst working productively and politically in the spaces in which such movements (with which the radical left is necessarily bound) operate as legitimators of often unacknowledged operations of power. This article has presented the history of marxism and feminism in such a way as to gesture towards the radical importance of such work, identifying moments when both strands of activism have operated as defences of, as well as powerful forces against, the contemporary social fabric. Yet in the complexity of the contemporary conditions in which agents of radical political change are also constituted through and by the internal generation and reproduction of the system, Jameson appears relatively non-committal on the forms and actions that new transformative left politics might productively assume. I therefore turn to the work of Rancière for further guidance on such questions.

has been pushed to reconstitute itself, and to think more dialectically, more complexly, about agency and structure; class and gender; about social movements more generally. 133 *PCLLC*, p. 326.

Jacques Rancière: Dissensus and Political Subjectivation as Radical Possibilities

The turn to Rancière is as much a strategic and political move as a theoretical one. Recently, the work of Jacques Rancière has been referred to by activists on the radical left in Aotearoa in order to grapple with how it might be possible to hold onto the political importance of universalism without obliterating the particularity of different struggles. Such discussions have, for example, focused on the fields of queer politics and student activism.¹³⁴ By using the work of Rancière to consider the relationship of feminism and marxism, and of how feminism and marxism might relate to wider social movements in a rejuvenated left politics, I take theoretical ideas that are politically current in left activism and push them beyond the parameters in which they are being used. I do not propose the work of Rancière as either an answer or solution. Rather I tentatively pose it as an avenue of consideration for a newly emerging left who might begin to work politically with some of the questions raised in this article.

For Rancière politics is not about the achievement of what he refers to as consensus. Consensus, for Rancière, refers to a configuration in which the assumptions or ‘givens’ of a ‘collective situation’ are normalised and ‘objectified’ in such a manner that they are placed beyond debate.¹³⁵ As a result, politics comes

134 In left-wing political meetings in Auckland I have noticed the work of Rancière being referred to upon numerous occasions. See also Tim Lamusse, *Contesting homonormativity*, paper given at the Social Movements, Resistance and Social Change II conference, Auckland University of Technology, September 2015; Caroline Skelton, *The commons and breaking the consensus*, Evening Report, 18 Feb 2016, <http://eveningreport.nz/2016/02/18/the-commons-breaking-the-consensus-social-movements-resistance-social-change-conference-ii/>; T. Lamusse, S. Morgan, E. Rāketē, & A.R. Birchall, *Reading and Rioting*, *New Zealand Sociology*, 30/2 2015, p.77.

135 Jacques Rancière, *Contemporary art and the politics of aesthetics*, in Beth Hinderliter, William Kaizen, Vered Maimon et al, eds., *Communities of Sense*, Durham 2009, p. 48.

alive in the rupturing and breaking through of consensus; in the places where the unvoiced, the unspeakable, that which is rendered incomprehensible within the framework of the consensus, makes itself heard. In relation to this, Rancière identifies what he considered a lack of politics at the end of the 20th century as indicative of an historical conjuncture in which ‘management of the local consequences of global economic necessity’ had become the ‘condition’ for democratic debate.¹³⁶ He sees this context as imposing a convergence of ‘solutions’ between left and right, and consensus in relation to these ‘solutions’ was held-up as the epitome of democracy.¹³⁷ Thus it was possible for it to be assumed, however temporarily, that the ‘end of history’ had been reached.

Rancière challenges the assumption of politics as a domain of rational debate and ‘inter-comprehension’ (as seen in Jürgen Habermas’s work, for example), noting instead that speech – and therefore the ability to participate in so called political debate – is not a ‘physical capacity’ but a ‘symbolic division’.¹³⁸ Thus it is not sufficient to speak in order to be heard.

Traditionally, it had been enough not to hear what came out of the mouths of the majority of human beings – slaves, women, workers, colonised peoples, etc. – as language, and instead to hear only cries of hunger, rage, or hysteria, in order to deny them the quality of being political animals.¹³⁹

It is therefore the point at which those who are ‘outside the count’ demand to be heard that politics happens.¹⁴⁰ Politics, for Rancière, constitutes the disruption of the consensus, of ‘the divisions of common and private, visible and invisible, audible and

136 Jacques Rancière, *Introducing disagreement*, *Angelaki* 9/3 2004, p. 4.

137 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

138 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

139 *Ibid.*

140 *Ibid.*

inaudible'.¹⁴¹ And in this context it is not difficult to see how the emergence of second wave feminism can – both in relation to mainstream society but also in relation to marxism and the traditional left – be identified as highly political.

Identity politics may be important – for Rancière, however, it is insufficient to constitute a radical politics.¹⁴² Rancière understands radically democratic politics as being about 'declassifying' rather than 'identifying',¹⁴³ within this the assumption and demonstration of equality becomes pivotal.¹⁴⁴ To illustrate such a point Keith Bassett explains, drawing upon the work of Todd May, that the Zapatista movement has fought for 'indigenous rights' while also struggling 'to promote equality within the indigenous population and amongst themselves, across class and gender differences'.¹⁴⁵ The Zapatista movement has, therefore, been interpreted as speaking more intimately to Rancière's understandings of democracy and politics than more specifically identity focused movements might.¹⁴⁶ As summarised by Bassett: 'the test then is whether equality takes precedence over identitarian impulses'.¹⁴⁷ If this is the case, the degree to which discussion around difference and identity in feminism in Aotearoa has become, to return to the words of Locke, 'an end in itself',¹⁴⁸ may

141 Ibid, p. 6.

142 Keith Bassett, Rancière, politics, and the Occupy movement, *Environment and Planning: Society and Space*, 32 2014, p. 890.

143 Ibid.

144 For Rancière '... equality is not a value given in the essence of Humanity or Reason. Equality exists, and makes universal values exist, to the extent that it is enacted. Equality is not a value to which one appeals; it is a universal that must be supposed, verified, and demonstrated in each case'. Jacques Rancière, Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization, *October*, 61 Summer 1992, p. 60.

145 Bassett, Rancière, politics, and the Occupy movement, p. 890. In this quotation Bassett is describing the work of Todd May.

146 See Todd May, *Contemporary Political Movements and the Thought of Jacques Rancière*, Edinburgh 2010.

147 Bassett, Rancière, politics, and the Occupy movement, p. 890.

148 *WM*, p. 16.

also suggest the extent to which such politics has been drawn into the acceptable parameters of debate (the consensus) of the contemporary capitalist moment.

In order to move beyond what he perceives as ‘the current dead end of political reflection and action’ that he sees as emerging as a result of ‘the identification of politics with the self of a community’,¹⁴⁹ Rancière differentiates between processes of identification and of subjectivisation. Political subjects, he says, ‘are always defined by an interval between identities’.¹⁵⁰ And from such a premise it becomes possible to see that ‘the politics of emancipation is the politics of the self as an other’.¹⁵¹ Explained slightly differently, emancipation ‘is always enacted in the name of a category denied either the principle or the consequences of that equality: workers, women, people of color, or others’.¹⁵² It is an assertion of that which is other to the count or to consensus and a claim that equality be extended to that group. It is therefore in the gap between the assertion of the group and the self-identification of the mainstream that space opens for the emergence of the political subject. In the words of Rancière:

Political subjectivization is the enactment of equality – or the handling of a wrong – by people who are together to the extent that they are between. It is a crossing of identities, relying on a crossing of names: names that link the name of a group or class to the name of no group or no class, a being to a nonbeing or a not-yet-being.¹⁵³

To exemplify this, Rancière gestures towards the operation of radical political subjectivity in the May ’68 slogan ‘We are all German Jews’. Such a statement speaks of what Rancière re-

149 Rancière, *Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization*, p. 59.

150 Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of democracy*, London 2006, p. 59.

151 Rancière, *Politics, identification, and Subjectivization*, p. 59.

152 *Ibid.*

153 *Ibid.*, p. 61.

fers to as a ‘new politics of the in-between’,¹⁵⁴ gaining much of its power from the space – the play – between identities and the assertion of equality (‘we are all...’) in relation to ‘an absolutely essential wrong’.¹⁵⁵

In the context of Rancière’s work the words of Major Ana María of the Zapatista movement can also be seen to assume significance: ‘Behind us are the we that you are. Behind our balaclavas is the face of all excluded women. Of all the forgotten indigenous people...’ and she goes on to list ‘persecuted homosexuals’, ‘despised youth’, ‘humiliated workers’ and many other people and struggles.¹⁵⁶ It is in the slippage of ‘us’, ‘we’ and ‘you’, with simultaneous acknowledgement of an ‘all’, that radical politics plays out – that new possibilities, horizons and ‘benefits’ emerge.

In a situation where the political subject is not compelled to defend and reproduce a unitary sense of self, but can equally avoid the pitfalls of political nihilism, the possibility emerges of new horizons that reach past a stasis of consensus and identity. This is also, to refer back to Jameson, a possible way of cutting across the predominant understandings of agency and structure that can animate left thought. To reiterate in explanation of this point: the evocation of a particular identity (however apparently radical) can promise political agency while also generating (a perhaps new) consensus as to ‘what now counts’. In this process a production, or reproduction, occurs of aspects of existing social structures (however newly emerging those social structures may be) and associated divisions and hierarchies (albeit to differing degrees and with different effects).¹⁵⁷ However, the crossing of

154 Ibid, p. 63.

155 Ibid, p. 61.

156 Major Ana María, cited in Todd May, *Contemporary Political Movements and the Thought of Jacques Rancière*, p. 73.

157 Rancière does not assume that ‘identification of politics with the self of a community’ produces the same ‘outcomes’ or is ‘practically equivalent’ for different groups. These things will vary hugely depending upon whether the political self-identification

and playing with identities that can happen in dissensual spaces is animated by (and perhaps at a minimum requires, at least if there is to be any political commitment to such processes) an awareness of the continual probability of ‘falling back’ into the disarming comfort of consensus: the continual possibility of reproducing structurally limiting categories of representation that are symptomatic of a given historical moment. Part of the role of the political subject is thus one of living productively in and with the discomfort of being neither one thing nor another; of inviting others’ faces behind one’s own mask; of being continually aware of the potential of being displaced by those who are outside of one’s own count; of struggling for political change at the same time as being alert to the possibility (or even inevitability) of inadvertently reproducing socio-political power relations that may currently be beyond one’s grasp.

A Friendship with Benefits...?

I have narrated a shift from that which was designated an unhappy marriage of marxism and feminism, through a ‘ménage à trois’ of capitalism, sexism and racism, to an explosion of new social movements contending for cohabitation rights in a space that might previously have been occupied primarily by traditional class politics. In the context of a proliferation of new political and cultural identities since the 1970s, today it appears inaccurate and politically naïve to assume dual or tripod systems of oppression. In such analytic formulations, the operation of oppression through mechanisms as diverse as heteronormativity, homonormativity, ableism, ageism, and so on, is rendered invisible, manifesting ‘outside the count’ to use Rancière’s terms.

process occurs on the part of a large governing community or a smaller community fighting ‘against the hegemonic law of the ruling culture and identity’. What he claims is that both ‘stem’ from the same ‘identification’ that he considers to be ‘questionable’. All quotes here taken from Rancière, *Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization*, p. 59.

As more social groups have struggled to have their voices heard, and to be heard on their own terms, I have argued that another – powerful – logic is at work: that of capital. This is not to say that the social formation of capital exists in any total or absolute form, but that capitalism operates with a particular expansive and totalising logic: for capital to generate capital (however discontinuously this may occur). This has manifested through capital's drawing of different social groups (women and migrants to name but two) into the labour market (however transiently and unequally); in the proliferation of difference and identity through the production and maintenance of new niche markets and of productivity drives; and in a celebration of methods of community organisation that enable a range of voices to be expressed within the parameters of neoliberal consensus. If feminists are to take seriously some of the ways in which the most radical and promising aspects of the second-wave have been integrated into a neoliberal agenda, a need arises to situate the movement within the context of a capitalist logic that has had the effect of drawing its most fertile aspects (along with other more traditional ways of knowing and thinking) into its remit and auspices.

Furthermore, if 1970s feminism suggested that 'love and marriage offered an impossible promise, a fantasy of fixed union and mutuality',¹⁵⁸ such an insight now extends far beyond the feminist critique of marriage. The material conditions of late capital have been integrally bound with a delegitimation of visions of, and aspirations towards, idyllic union and wholeness – be that between individuals (as in marriage), theoretical approaches (as in marxism and feminism), or in relation to the individual subject. Perhaps as Lacan suggested of subjectivity as much as he did of sexual relationships, there is 'no such thing': the qualities of coherence, unity and oneness are but a necessary fantasy.

158 Sheila Rowbotham, *The Past is Before Us*, Middlesex 1990, p. 4.

In this context, rather than trying to embark upon the task of reconciling and creating union between two apparently diverse – if overlapping – strands of thought and activism (marxism and feminism), it seems significant that authors such as Rancière suggest the importance of developing political subjectivities that are capable of operating in in-between spaces without falling into political inertia. If radical politics has as (part of) its task to cut across the imperative of ‘consensus’, one of the more significant challenges of contemporary radicalism is the nurturing of political subjectivities that do not operate from the safety of fixed and incontestable identities or theories, but rather are capable of negotiating more tenuous spaces.

Perhaps it does not matter whether the words of Rancière are adhered to, or even grappled with, as new political movements in contemporary Aotearoa get underway. In the same way that feminism does not need a new husband, neither does the left more generally need a new master (not in the persona of a ‘Rancière’, nor in the form of a new consensus or of dissensus itself). What appears significant is the extent to which new political subjectivities are able to be nurtured, to shift from protection of self to more explicitly operating in the crevices that open-up through and between, and at times haunt and threaten, identities and associated theoretical frameworks. Such work is already beginning to happen. It is evident, for example, in the fact that ESRA’s kaupapa grew, in part, out of acknowledgement of the need for space in which the radical left can disagree without ‘tearing each other apart’.¹⁵⁹ While such terminology may operate as a reference to the history of left sects in the New Zealand context, it is equally relevant to the history of the broader feminist movement which also, as outlined above, suffered from deep political schisms and

159 Left Think Tank Project Kaupapa (draft), unpublished internal working document of Economic and Social Research Aotearoa, April 2015. The wording of the finalised kaupapa document varies slightly from this.

sectoral differences. As to the kinds of radical politics that might become possible in the important – if at times potentially uncomfortable – spaces such as that offered by ESRA, can hardly be predetermined. In the same way that feminism has been pivotal (if not exclusive) in facilitating reworking/s of sexual and gendered relationships, in enabling non-exploitative ways of relating to gain legitimation, work now lies ahead in rethinking and reworking the subjectivities that will enable new politics, and new political relations, to become possible.

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