

## **Feminism and ‘the S-Word’**

A roundtable discussion on socialism and feminism, chaired by Jo Littler, with Mandy Merck, Hilary Wainwright, Nira Yuval-Davis and Deborah Grayson.

**Jo** I first heard the phrase ‘the S-word’ being used by Nira Yuval-Davis in a *Soundings* seminar. It was being used to indicate how the S-word, socialism, is often an issue which is there but cannot be said: it’s the elephant in the room.<sup>1</sup> This struck a chord for me, because the S-word has long been a point of identification, whilst at the same time its currency within most of my lifetime has always seemed to be on a downward spiral: decreasingly socially acceptable, increasingly politically powerless, deeply unfashionable and often marked through association with dodgy sectarian groups. This is of course because I grew up as one of Thatcher’s children in the 1980s, a time when socialism moved from being a kind of living part of everyday cultural and political discourse, central to the socialised forms of the welfare state and the NHS, to being positioned instead as an ‘ideological’ term outside the centre. But one of the few places where I learnt about socialism - growing up mainly in a fairly centre-right family context - was through the legacies of second-wave feminist work, both activist and academic. This work tended to use the term ‘socialist feminism’ in a very open and experimental way to describe their position and the kind of equal society they wanted to see in the world.

Socialist feminism seemed at the time - and still seems to me - very salient, prescient and important, in three particular ways. Firstly it’s been concerned not only with the exploitation of paid labour but with inequalities inside the home, with thinking both those things together in what we now call ‘social reproduction’. Secondly, there has always been an emphasis on prefigurative politics, on how to become the change you want to see in the world, to try to practise a more equal and decentralised politics already, rather than solely grappling with more strategic institutional and larger-scale questions. Thirdly, it’s always challenged narrow, sectarian identity politics through its insistence that we are collective subjects: that it’s not possible to live in isolation. As Sheila Rowbotham argued in *Beyond the Fragments*, ‘people are more than one category of oppression, and we all develop our ideas and attitudes in relation to others’.<sup>1</sup> In many ways socialist feminism of the 1970s and 1980s was intersectional from the beginning, and I think it’s really important to remember that. The aim of this seminar is to reconsider from a number of different and intergenerational perspectives these influential and prescient currents of socialist feminism: to think about what happened to it and where it’s going.

**Mandy** Lately male political commentators have returned to the old complaint that second-wave feminism, the feminist movement that began in the late 1960s, ‘split the left’. I’ve already tangled on this point with the American political theorist Eli Zaretsky, who blames the author of the 1970 feminist manifesto *The Dialectic of Sex*, Shulamith Firestone, for this.<sup>2</sup> (Firestone was actually a fan of Marx and Engels, who dared to say that after workers seized the means of production, women had to take control of reproduction, from their own fertility to the institutions of childbearing and childrearing that enforce both mothers’ and children’s dependence. In February 2015 Jackson Lears argued that, while ‘No one can deny the legitimacy of the need by

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<sup>1</sup> Although it has now had a notable resurgence in public discourse post-Corbyn.

women and minorities to have equality on their own terms ... the preoccupation with racial and gender identity has hollowed out political language, [with] the void filled by ... the neoliberal discourse of antiseptic intervention abroad and efficient productivity at home'.<sup>3</sup> Lears goes on to blame us feminists for the presidential candidacy of the Iraq War hawk Hillary Clinton, which in my view is like blaming Mary Wollstonecraft for the coronation of Queen Victoria. So allow me to fill the void with some history of both US and UK socialist feminism.

Second-wave feminism was not created by a split within the left. In Britain it arguably strengthened the left, radicalising many women and enlarging the membership of the left, notably in the trade unions. Although some feminists withdrew from male dominated revolutionary groups, others remained in or chose to join organisations that responded more positively to feminist demands, ranging - at different times - from the International Marxist Group to Big Flame to the Labour and the Communist parties. To be sure, in Britain as in the US, autonomous organisation was seen as fundamental to the creation of a feminist agenda, by enabling women to build trust, raise consciousness, discuss political strategies, participate more fully in public meetings and carry out activities unhindered by male opposition or our own deference to men. And a small faction of feminist separatists argued that any participation in mixed groups would be doomed by these factors, and opposed co-operation with unions, broader campaigns and political parties. But the majority of feminist activists disagreed. 1970s UK feminism divided into three sub-sections - the separatist minority; women's rights campaigners like the Fawcett Society and professional organisations like Women in Publishing; and a substantial third group of socialist feminists. There was some overlap between the second and third groups, but very little between them and the separatists - because the separatists were pretty separate. But, contrary to the stereotype, lesbians were found in all three.

Although these political differences were strongly felt and sometimes fiercely expressed, feminists of every perspective would sometimes collaborate on important issues - like the defence of legal abortion. And in December 1982, 30,000 women circled the base at Greenham Common to oppose the deployment of US cruise missiles, but strangely enough Hillary Clinton was not among us. 'Women's lib' was - correctly - perceived by the British media as a left-wing initiative, and often attacked as such. Here another key campaign should be mentioned - the defence of women workers mainly of South Asian origin at the Grunwick photo-processing plant in North London, when they sought union support after being sacked for protesting about their working conditions and pay. In 1977 mass pickets of the plant brought together trade unionists (including large contingents of miners), members of revolutionary and centre left parties, anti-racist campaigners and many feminists. Some of us here today picketed at Grunwick with Lesbian Left, a group who met to support (and celebrate) our sexuality while engaging in campaigns to oppose racism, the then ascendant National Front and, during one of its periodic Jubilees, the British monarchy. Later on we would join with other gays and feminists in support of the 1984 Miner's Strike.

What did socialism feminism stand for? At its most basic, there was the argument that women's equality could not be realised under capitalism, because capitalism relies on our unpaid work - caring for partners, elders and children - to keep male wages low, and to get the next generation of workers to the factory ('the sphere of reproduction');

and because these obligations result in women's lesser participation, organisation and pay in the formal economy of 'production'.

But socialist feminism also dreamed utopian dreams. One of the most interesting documents from the 1970s is the manifesto and strategy paper by members of the Chicago Women's Liberation Union.<sup>4</sup> In a section subtitled 'Our Vision - Socialist Feminism is Desirable and Not Possible under the Existing System', the authors list 'the things we envision in the new order'. In addition to the standard control over our bodies and freedom to define sexual relationships, they mention:

'attractive, comfortable housing designed to allow for private and collective living'  
'social respect for the work people do, understanding that all jobs can be made socially necessary and important'  
'free, public quality education integrated with work and community activities for people of all ages'  
'a popular culture which enhances rather than degrades one's self respect and respect for others'.

One notable American socialist feminist of this period is the writer Barbara Ehrenreich, and she's my bridge from this history to the present day. In 1976 Ehrenreich wrote a manifesto, called 'What Is Socialist Feminism?' It has some of the utopian flavour of the Chicago Women when it says:

We understand that, in its search for markets, capitalism is driven to penetrate every nook and cranny of social existence ... So we cannot understand class struggle as something confined ... only to workplace issues. Class struggle occurs in every arena where the interests of classes conflict, and that includes education, health, art, music, etc. We aim to transform not only the ownership of the means of production, but the totality of social existence.<sup>5</sup>

But, although she ranges this widely, Ehrenreich takes a strong Marxist line on class contradictions, writing that: 'Only by waging a revolutionary struggle aimed at the seizure of state power can the working class free itself, and, ultimately, all people'. This is the same Barbara Ehrenreich who went on to be a very eloquent reporter on the daily oppression of working women in books like her 2001 *Nickle and Dimed*, with its brilliant discussion of the working conditions of women cleaners, and *Bait and Switch*. In 2005 she came to London and shared a platform with Polly Toynbee, the Guardian journalist who writes similar books like *Hard Work - Life in Low Pay Britain*. On that occasion, Ehrenreich declared her politics not as Marxist, and certainly not as revolutionary, but as 'social democratic'. The audience didn't ask what she meant by that, because we could assume that she meant the pursuit of some kind of progressive state with universal welfare benefits and trade union rights within a mixed economy. By then we were in the midst of neoliberalism, the huge rise in discrepancies between top and bottom incomes and the Blair-Bush alliance in Iraq. If Britain had ever had any social democratic features, these were increasingly reduced as state services became privatised and working-class people become 'chavs'. Around then I began to think that social democracy looked pretty appealing.

Since 2005, of course, we've had the continuing expense (in 'blood and treasure', in the quaint English expression) of the wars in the Middle East; the banking crash of 2008; the consequent debt loaded on public finances; Labour's brief attempt to revive the economy by borrowing and spending; and then five terrible years of Coalition austerity, austerity so bad that we wouldn't believe it if we hadn't just lived through it. Austerity which attempted (and failed) to reduce the budget deficit, arranged through measures that depended on 85 per cent expenditure cuts and only 15 per cent increases in tax revenue - while Britain became billionaires' heaven and individual executive remunerations were measured annually in the multi millions. Austerity we're promised even more of. We know that women bear the burden of this austerity. We're more dependent than men on social security benefits; we're harder hit by increases in VAT because these payments represent a larger share of lower incomes; we make up two-thirds of the public sector workforce, whose employment has been hit by the cuts. If women move to the private sector they find men's hourly pay rate exceeds theirs by an average 25 per cent. Those woman who became self-employed earned in 2010-11 an average of £9800 per year, as opposed to self-employed men, who on average earned £17,000 per year. As carers themselves, and as longer-living and usually single elders, women are harder hit by the 23 per cent cuts since 2010 in social care. Those in need of social housing have faced a 34 per cent reduction in investment there, as well as the bedroom tax. No wonder that by late 2013 two thirds of the 9 million Britons in severe debt were women. What chance for the transformation of education, health, art and music today? Since 2010, early childhood education has been cut 19 per cent, schools 11 per cent and future and higher education 33 per cent.

In outlining these appalling developments, I've been assisted by a recent article in *Feminist Review* by Ruth Pearson and Diane Elson, which pleads for 'Plan F - a feminist economic strategy' - better training, rights and pay for care workers; more support from public services for unpaid carers; a higher minimum wage; investment in social housing rather than subsidising private mortgages; taxing wealthy people and companies instead of taxing high earners at levels below those in most other G20 countries, including Spain, Greece and Slovenia.<sup>6</sup> As Pearson and Elson point out, they first contributed to *Feminist Review* thirty-five years ago. They've lived through the whole history of socialist feminism, but it's notable that they don't use the term at all. Does it have any meaning left? Pearson and Elson remind us that British governments are legally required to consider the equalities impact of their policies. But when the Fawcett Society filed for a retrospective judicial review of the June 2010 budget on these grounds, permission was not granted. I think it's time to try this again: this time with *all of us* as parties to the petition for judicial review. But such an effort is not exactly a seizure of state power. Indeed, it could easily be accomplished within a capitalist society, and the cuts reversed, and women's pay increased, so long as we continue to be paid less than the value of what we do. And who argues about that anymore?

**Hilary** This might be perverse, but I want to talk about feminist socialism rather than socialist feminism. Looking back to the beginnings of the movement in Oxford, my whole world was being shaken. My vision of the world up to that point was very hierarchical. For women it meant climbing up the hierarchy: being *in* there, getting *up* there, and so on. The way feminism emerged, at that point, completely turned that over. It completely challenged those hierarchies. There was a cartoon saying

‘Equality? We’ve got something better in mind’. And that was the idea: that we weren’t actually about ‘equal opportunities’, or equality within the existing system, we were about *something completely different* and we were experimenting with it. At the same time, feminism was very personal. To change the world, we started from our own experience, so we had this immense personal confidence and a sense of power as a result of the quite intimate forms of solidarity created by what we called consciousness-raising groups. It gave us the sense that change would begin with ourselves. This prefiguration that Jo referred to, expressing and working toward in our own daily lives the change we want to see, took the form of consciously changing ourselves.

As a kid, I’d been quite tomboyish and loud, but somehow in these meetings of the left, like the Oxford Revolutionary Socialist Students, I was really quiet, and I couldn’t understand it. It was partly to do with the blokes in the room, maybe one or two I fancied; somehow it made me into this rather quiet, pathetic person. Feminism allowed me to understand why and break out of it, particularly in solidarity and collaboration with other women. I suppose, politically, that time (and it was 1968, so it was a good time) has given me confidence to keep fighting, keep the optimism that comes from glimpsing a possibility. But I rejected liberalism. I’d been brought up as a liberal, and I knew that liberalism, though it claimed a sort of equality, actually wasn’t going to deliver it; because in the end things like wealth taxes and corporate taxes were going to challenge capitalism and it wasn’t prepared to do that. I knew I was a socialist but I knew I rejected the Soviet model and the Harold Wilson model; so I was experimenting with a knowledge that the ending of capitalism was necessary but without knowing what socialism *was*. So for me feminism and the making of feminism and making of socialism in my mind converged and fused. Looking back, feminism provided me with the tools to work toward a new kind of socialism, which is why my contribution to *Beyond the Fragments* was called ‘Feminism and the making of Socialism’.

I’ll mention two or three ‘tools’ that I felt I learnt through my feminism and why I talk about a feminist socialism. I think feminist socialism hasn’t been realised, and yet I also think what we were saying in *Beyond the Fragments* and so on was so obvious! I mean, it’s almost so obvious it seems not worth printing. Then I’m always shocked by the fact that it hasn’t been taken on board, that the left has trudged on as usual, pretty much, as if feminism had never really done more than ‘put women on the agenda’. It adopted policies towards women, yes, but not a fundamental rethink of socialism, which is what I felt feminism was enabling us to do. The first tool is about power, the second knowledge, and the third the relationship between the individual and the social.

What I learnt about the transformative nature of power was that we had power in a daily sense. We were implicitly - I think Betty Freidan talks about this - reproducing our oppression as sexual partners, as mothers, as in work - in all sorts of ways: in our passivity, in our representations of ourselves. We faced a choice between reproducing or refusing; and in refusing, we were seeking to *transform*. So there was that sense of a power that lay within ourselves and in our own capacity to transform social relations. This helped me become clear about why I rejected the so-called Leninist relations of state power and party power, and the Fabian understandings of power whereby the state delivered concessions and policies, rather than *power coming from*

*within ourselves*. That led me to recognise work people have done on different sources of power. There's power as domination, which could effectively be what we think about when we think about government - taking power to then use the levers of government to deliver policies. Sometimes that's referred to as 'power over'. Then there's power as transformative capacity: the power to change things, to *do* things. That was the power the women's movement was illustrating, transformative power and capacity, and I think that's a very useful concept now. Much of what Occupy and the Indignados are about is power as transformative capacity. They have been in the squares, they have been creating a different kind of society, illustrating a different kind of society in their daily practice.

I was also influenced by the shop steward/trade union movement at its most radical and alternative: when they weren't simply refusing redundancies and closures by occupying factories, but saying 'we have skills, practical skills that can be the basis of different kinds of production'. Socially useful products rather than missiles, for example, or working towards the conversion of industry to a low-carbon economy. This recognition of a transformative capacity that lies amongst the mass of people completely changes the nature of socialism, which has most often been based on the idea of *power over* - when you capture the means of power over production, over resources, and deliver it in this paternalistic way without any recognition of the kind of power people actually have in their own capacity to refuse, and to change. Without any recognition of the dependence of existing power structures on *actual people*.

Secondly, knowledge. What I learnt from consciousness-raising groups and from shop stewards - who were mainly men, but interesting anyway - was the importance of different forms of knowledge. Most traditional socialist parties, be they Leninist or Fabian, believe in intellectual leadership. (Beatrice Webb made the classic Fabian statement that, whilst the average man could describe the problem, he couldn't provide the solution; for that professionals were needed.)

Knowledge was traditionally understood in a very scientific way, involving laws that could be codified, centralised and then through a central apparatus, put through a scientific form of planning. Whereas the women's movement, with its consciousness-raising groups, often began with gossip, with forms that were not acknowledged, knowledge carried in emotion and daily experience, but which ended up producing policies; well-women clinics, a large range of educational projects, rape crisis centres - all kinds of women's centres. These were policies which were developed through women actually defining their experiences and their problems in a way that was rooted in their practical knowledge. Similarly, alternative shop stewards were not writing long papers according to scientific laws, but actually designing alternative products; they recognised their knowledge was tacit, was practical, but nevertheless could be socialised.

I once read Hayek, for my sins, and that was quite a shock, because he was writing about tacit knowledge, things we know but cannot tell; and he said that, whilst knowledge was constituted by the individual, it could only be co-ordinated through the spontaneous movement of the market. He used a notion of practical knowledge as the whole basis, in a way, of his theory of neoliberalism! I've argued that what we learned in the social movements is that it isn't a question of a choice between scientific knowledge and practical knowledge. Social movements and particularly the

women's movement have discovered and generated tacit knowledge as shareable and socialisable. This is what we were doing. Relationships were key. What are the relationships which are necessary for doing this? Practical knowledge needed to be socialised, to become the basis of planning, in the sense of seeing ahead whilst being constantly experimental and responsive to what's been discovered. Understanding power as both capacity and as domination, and knowledge as practical and tacit as well as scientific, laid the basis for a completely different understanding of socialism.

Third, the relationship between the individual and the social. The women's movement was about individual realisation; we were there as individuals, because of our own personal pain, oppression and feelings; but we understood very quickly that in no way could we realise our potential as women without a social movement, without a power - often in alliance with other social movements - without changing the structures that underlie those oppressive social relations. Today, the new forms of organisation emerging in the new politics, particularly in direct action, with their emphasis on horizontality and consensus, are very exciting. But sometimes they're expressed - particularly by young men - as if they're completely new! Now, we weren't using exactly the same language about networks, but our first women's groups were themselves networks, and they in turn were networked. We were exploring, in a practical, rooted way these net-worked forms of organisation. I don't want to be the person saying 'we knew that first!' but: does it make a difference that some of these thoughts and innovations have their roots in a movement of liberation, a movement that was shaped by the experience of struggling for emancipation against a particular hierarchy? How can we actually pay attention to the conditions that can realise the insights that people have as they struggle?

Another question is how to combine power-as-transformative capacity with power-as-domination. In the women's movement we tried to gain public resources for childcare centres, rape crisis centres, women's centres. All of this came out of exercising power-as-transformative-capacity, but we also needed public resources which we felt we had a right to. At the Greater London Council, where I worked, we made that a key principle. The state would not deliver all these facilities; nor would we hand them over to the market, because it doesn't have values of care or non-monetary measures of public benefit: everything in the market is about maximising profit. But we did *delegate resources* to 'transformative groups': to women's groups of different kinds, for example. Similarly, now, when parties that are rooted in social movements like Podemos and Syriza are seeking power over the state, what can we draw from the experience of feminist socialism working in and against the state? Was it actually a dead end? Were we emasculated and incorporated? Or was there a potential that wasn't realised, because feminist socialism hadn't been thorough-going enough?

**Nira** I realised I was part of the older generation when I started to feel that everybody around me was reinventing the wheel. All the things we have thought about and worked on are now being rediscovered. It also made me realise that, with a lot of the things that *we* thought were new, we were reinventing the wheel of previous generations. And, of course, being a feminist has been intergenerational now for more than one hundred years. I grew up in Israel, and when I first heard about feminism, the discourse was 'this is a worthless ideology because we already have had it with the kibbutzim, with the socialist Zionist movement'. It took me years living outside Israel to realise the depth of the militarised sexism prevalent in Zionism.

I was exposed to feminism and started to consider myself as feminist when I lived in the United States for several years at the end of the 1960s, and early 1970s. When I came to London, just after the publication of *Beyond the Fragments*, it was a great experience for me to discover what socialism, and socialist sociology as well, was all about. In some ways I'd arrived at my political and intellectual home. Yet I had also a certain sense of discomfort, and I want to discuss the implications of this sense for my own, and others' interpretations of socialist feminism.

The first major point I want to make is that for me 'socialist feminism' means that feminism is only *part* of a much larger emancipatory political project. It's not *just* about gender relations: but gender relations are central to any political project of emancipation. I'll relate this sense of discomfort to the consciousness-raising groups that Hilary mentioned. The assumption here was that everybody would have their consciousness raised, that they would reach THE feminist truth. This feminist truth was homogenous as long as the feminists were all white, middle-class women of similar ages. But already from the beginning, black women, working-class women and lesbian women started to rebel against these homogenised conclusions about what feminism was all about. Black feminists, for example, said 'you are talking about family, and quite often for us family is a haven from racist society'.

Secondly, for me, feminism, and socialist feminism particularly, was never just about British society, maybe because I was in a minority of diasporic Israeli women in London. Socialist feminism was also a global project, decentering the West and fighting racism. I remember when Floya Anthias I tried to raise issues about racism and nationalism within the Sex and Class group of the Conference of Socialist Economists, the idea seemed to be that it was important but 'it wasn't really what we are about'. But it was what *my/our* socialist feminism was about! At the same time, in similar debates in the European Forum of Socialist Feminists (EFSF) which I used to belong to, British feminists were generally much more sensitive to issues of racism than, for example, Scandinavian feminists, who tended to think that sex and class were what it was all about.

But decentering the West has not been just about racism, but related to situated gazes at the 'socialist project' itself. At a EFSF meeting which we organised after the fall of the Soviet Union, women from the former Soviet Union, as well as Southern Europe, were saying to us: 'We don't want to be called socialist feminists. Socialist parties rule our countries. Socialist parties are the ones who oppress us as women, and as workers'. So we had to change the name of the 'European Forum of Socialist Feminists' to 'European Forum of Left Feminists'. (In the end this organisation never sustained itself.) This also calls to attention what we mean by socialism as well as what we mean by socialist feminism.

Conceptualising socialist feminism as part of a larger political project made me consider intersectionality to be part of what socialist feminism is about. It's not just about class analysis, and it's not about homogenising women - as identity politics has done by making 'women' the same as any other fragmented part of society ('blacks', 'working class', and so on). It's not as if we all have one main identity, and we all have the same relationship to it. In consciousness-raising, it was assumed that everybody had the same attachments and understandings and experience, in relation to social inequality: so if we have different understandings, it just means our



consciousness is 'not raised enough'! No. Differential social positionings, identifications and normative understandings are very different for different people. The feminist epistemology of 'the situated gaze' enabled the development of an intersectional analysis - not, as it's often interpreted in the *Guardian*, as another form of fragmented identity politics, but as a way of understanding that, although there are different modes of production of inequality in concrete situations, you cannot separate them out because they are *constituted by* each other. Therefore you cannot homogenise or generalise about half of the population - which is what 'women' is - or about other parts of the population, like 'the working-class'; people within these broad categories have very different experiences of social inequality. For me, socialist feminism is a political project which tries to deal with these multiple, but not separate, forms of inequality.

Another important element is my socialist feminism which I started to get insight into with my solidarity work with Israeli and Palestinian women against the Occupation has been called by some of us transversal politics (and Cynthia Cockburn has been also majorly in this). Transversal politics developed as a counter to identity politics - both with women in militarised conflict zones and in UN conferences, in which some of us in NGOs were very active in in the 1990s - was a transversal politics, which meant: we do not homogenise all women who are part of a social collectivity.<sup>7</sup> We are not attempting to represent ourselves as women, as black, as British, or Israeli, but rather to see ourselves as *advocates* who share the same normative and emancipatory values system across borders and boundaries. What unites us is not the 'identity' of the oppressed, as in 'rainbow politics', but a shared normative value system. Italian feminists developed this in a feminist framework; they talked about 'routing' and 'shifting'. Routing means our politics have to be reflexive, that we have to be very aware of where we are and where we come from, because we cannot just make presumptions. We might be more educated or articulate, but we don't 'represent' other women and groups: we advocate for what we see as our shared values. On the other hand, we have also to shift: we have to emphasise, as well as respect, women whose situated gaze at the world is different, although they share values with us (values which are the boundaries of the dialogue).

So socialist feminism is for me a transversal politics with shared values but recognition that we are not all in the same position of power or collective identifications. It's very easy to talk about all women as oppressed. But I know many women who oppress other women as well as men. Therefore we cannot just generalise it in this easy way.

The last point I want to make that for me an ethics of care is central to socialist feminism. Not the ethics of care as some feminists have developed it, as a maternal model meaning that we all have to take care of everybody unconditionally. Sure, in some ways, as human rights defenders, we do have to defend the human rights of everybody. However - and this brings us back to transversalism - while we have to defend human rights, we have to be long-term allies only of those who share our values. For example, I'm one of the founders of Women Against Fundamentalism. As human rights defenders we have been against the Guantanamo Bay arrests, tortures and imprisonment; but we should not assume that those who have been imprisoned there share our human rights values. Amnesty International fell into this trap; the head of the Gender Department at Amnesty was unable to continue her work with them

after she pointed out that the way they approached the issue could be seen as justifying this kind of politics.

Similarly, the Stop the War coalition see themselves as left, but they rationalise *all* critique of *any* Muslim politics as racism - as 'Islamophobia against all Muslims'. No. That is homogenising. We have to defend rights, but criticise values that are not emancipatory, which are fundamentalist. This includes neoliberal and corporate values. In the US, for example, right-wing neoliberalism and religion can work very well together; just as Iran works very well with the World Bank and the IMF. It's not simply a question of The West against The Rest: it's much more complex, we have to be much more careful.

The ethics of care is part of citizenship. All of us have to realise that *after* we're born and before we die we need care by others. Care is part of our entitlement and duty as citizens. Not as mothers - which is a one-sided relationship - but through expectations of others as well as ourselves. In this sense, an ethics of care is the most important anti-neoliberal, anti-selfish gene theory. It stands against theories of public space which do not realise that corporate or financialised interests are parasites on all the infrastructure, and all the subsidies, that states are built from, from the collective effort of all the citizens. When I talk about citizens, I am not talking only about people entitled to carry a passport, but also about people who are becoming ever more marginalised, even though they are ever more essential to global neoliberalism - people who have become undocumented migrants or even documented denizens. The issue of class inequality is again racialised and needs to be de-homogenised in terms of ethnic, racial, gendered - and not just class - division in society.

**Deborah** I'm feeling a bit of the burden of representation, as apparently I'm the voice of the younger generation ... although of course I'm speaking for myself! When I was thinking about the issue of socialist feminism, I started thinking about identification. What does it mean to label yourself a socialist or a feminist? Part of it is perhaps about trying to communicate your political roots, your entry point: the issue that really grabbed you in the first place, which motivated you into action, which then becomes the main lens through which you see politics. I want to talk a bit about my personal experience as someone who came here not through feminism or socialism but through environmental issues; as someone who had a massive freak-out about climate change around 2008, which, a bit like a religious conversion, made me change my entire life and go into politics.

I'll talk about my encounter with feminism and socialism through that lens. Initially feminism seemed easy to 'get'. I'm a woman, I'm a queer woman, it's part of my lived experience. I got involved in Climate Rush, which was inspired by the suffragettes, and was set up to try to provide a model of environmental direct action that was a bit more participatory - particularly for women - than the Greenpeace-hero model. Here there was a lot of discussion about climate change as a women's issue, as disproportionately affecting women, which women could have a role in challenging; and about the historical links between feminism and ecology. Socialism, on the other hand, was pretty much absent from the conversation at that early stage. I'm not completely sure why, but I think the far left has pretty much ignored the environmental movement. I was involved in politics for maybe a year and half before I really understood what the Socialist Workers' Party was. If you'd asked me in 2009,

I'd have said something like: 'Well, actually existing socialism has been as bad for the environment as capitalism, and sometimes worse, because of the lack of accountability; that Marxist economics still treats the earth as providing free stuff to be exploited, rather than having intrinsic value'. I could have produced an answer that gave some sense of the historic tension between socialism and environmentalism. In truth, though, I didn't give it much thought. Which is strange because I definitely had the anti-capitalist view that climate change was a crisis of capitalism that solving it meant challenging and moving beyond capitalism. It's just that socialism wasn't really on the horizon as something that could be a *solution*. At that stage it just seemed irrelevant. Time passed, we had an election, got the Coalition government, and since then there's been a sense of needing to broaden out and see the connectedness of different issues, understanding that the barriers to taking action on climate change are various and huge, from our voting system to our media ownership; and a sense, with austerity, of needing to also fight immediate battles.

I came to have a better understanding of feminism and socialism. After I realised that socialists existed, I realised that I often had quite a lot in common with people who defined themselves this way. They had some good things to say, and socialism was a more diverse tradition than I actually thought it was; trade unions had fought for the rights of people who weren't just white men, and even though it had always required a struggle, that had actually happened. I guess I'd grown up with a set of stereotypes and clichés about what socialism was, but then I came to see it as a more diverse space. I also developed a growing appreciation and respect for the importance of institutions. It's quite common that if your route into politics is through direct action, you think 'bloody organisations, they're so big, so slow, so uncreative, what's the point?'. Then also you realise that short, punchy, media-orientated direct action is also not *necessarily* that effective; that maybe we need a diversity of tactics. Then you start to understand that the value and the difficulty of building sustainable alliances is key to the importance of institutions. One good example of that is the 2009 Put People First march. At the time, I thought, 'Oh God, another boring march'. It was only much later that I was able to look at it and think: 'That was actually really significant: people were marching under trade union banners for 1 million green jobs, and that took years of work to build, to overcome these historic divisions between trade unions and environmentalists; and the reason the trade unions were resistant was not because they wouldn't "get with the programme", but because of the problematic and oppressive class origins of the environmental movement'. I was coming to understand the importance of history.

Feminism, on the other hand, also has a more diverse tradition than I thought. As somebody who spends a lot of time in queer spaces, and has a trans partner, there are some controversial issues around the feminist movement right now which I really struggle to understand. At the same time, in some ways the most shocking thing for me was to encounter gender reductionism. It literally just had not occurred to me that you might look at all of the problems in the world and say 'well yeah that's ultimately about patriarchy'. In a conversation recently about feminist economics, someone said 'gender's not an issue, it's THE issue'. But if you come into politics via climate change, you will probably have gone through a phase of saying 'Well, you know, we've coexisted with patriarchy for thousands of years, whereas climate change is on course to kill everything and everyone on this planet in a couple of centuries, so if you want to play issue one-upmanship ...'. Then you would probably have got over that

phase, when you realised the reaction you got from other people, and that that just wasn't a very good way to do politics - to insist that everyone you form an alliance with recognises your issues as *the* fundamental issue and *the* most important thing in the world! But there are usually people standing up for non-gender essentialism too. Just as in socialist spaces, or trade unions, in feminist spaces there will be people you have strong alliances and connections with. Part of your role as an ally is to strengthen their hand.

I'll finish by talking about the importance of heritage and tradition. One of the things with climate change is that it's a genuinely new issue. There are things about climate change which are actually unprecedented. That can lead, on the one hand, to a problematic 'heritage and political tradition doesn't matter' discourse, which then ignores important continuities with previous problems; and, on the other hand, it can lead to a sense of alienation - when you go to look for a tradition and you can't find one that has space for the way you're looking at things. One of the best things for me has been finding older people who I have that kind of connection with, and these have often been the old 'Eurocommunists' through *Soundings* and Lawrence & Wishart. I understand the split in the Communist Party in the 1970s and 1980s as being between the 'Tankies' (I love that word), who fundamentally wanted to continue with communist orthodoxy, and the Eurocommunists, who tried to recognise that things had changed, history had changed, and that maybe they needed to have different tactics and pursue their ends through different, more democratic, means. The experience of recognising the new character of a moment is classic conjunctural politics, and so with these people there's been a real curiosity and interest in what is new about *now*, and what can young people tell us about their experiences. That has led me to think, 'that's the sort of person that I would have been'. If I was around in the 1970s I would have called myself a Eurocommunist. If I had been around in the 1980s, I would have been a municipal socialist. I'd like to encourage more of that: the value of recognising moments of identification, even if you give them different labels, or call them different things.

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#### Notes

1. Sheila Rowbotham, *Beyond the Fragments* XXX.
2. *History Workshop Online*, 6.10.13.
3. *London Review of Books*, 5 February 2015.
4. [www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/chisocfem.html](http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/chisocfem.html).
5. [www.marxists.org/subject/women/authors/ehrenreich-barbara/socialist-feminism](http://www.marxists.org/subject/women/authors/ehrenreich-barbara/socialist-feminism).
6. Ruth Pearson and Diane Elson, 'Transcending the Impact of the Financial Crisis in the United Kingdom', *Feminist Review* 109, 2015.
7. For more on this see *Transversal Politics*, *Soundings* 12, 1999, guest edited by Cynthia Cockburn and Lynette Hunter.