‘Please Say More’: mediating conflict through letter-writing in British second wave feminist periodicals, 1970-1990

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For my grandmothers Lillian Wonders and Pieternella Rupke-van den Heuvel

Abstract

The Women's Liberation Movement of the 1970s and 1980s saw a surge in women's publishing that generated a woman-controlled communication infrastructure in the form of feminist periodicals. As a result of women actively contributing to the letter-to-the-editor pages, these periodicals offer rich source material for tracing the development of areas of feminist contention. While significant research has been done on the role of print-based feminist networks in the US by Agatha Beins and Martha Allan, its UK counterpart remains under-researched. By means of a systematic documentation and analysis of second wave feminist periodicals in the UK, this research aims to understand the primary role of these networks in facilitating the development of feminist ideas.

The research was conducted by means of a feminist archival methodology to access primary sources of correspondences found in pertinent periodicals. The selecting of material was predicated on a gradual identification of overarching disagreements in letter-to-the-editor pages, some of which transcended one particular periodical and re-emerged in other titles. As such, the periodicals in question are approached as a *networked* and *networking* infrastructure of communication and exchange. Tracing these debates not only resulted in highlighting the discursive and networking function, it additionally challenges popularised caricatures of the Women's Liberation Movement by evidencing polyvocal and multi-textual negotiations.

This thesis argues that the medium of the feminist periodical was especially well suited to mediating conflict, as it produced a collective body of theoretical knowledge within the movement, while also repeatedly inviting readers to contribute with a plurality of opinion. By documenting how these debates travelled across multiple periodical titles, new light is shed on how the development of feminist theory and practice was reliant on a webbed network of debate. Rather than understanding conflict as an indication of failure, it appears that it is in fact suggestive of feminist theorising reaching critical momentum. Letter-to-the-editor pages evidence a distinct rhetoric of considered disagreement which disavowed "final word" arguments and emphasised the *opening*, rather than *closing*, of political debate. This research contributes to the fields of women's history and feminist media studies by detailing how second wave feminist periodicals, through their correspondence pages, functioned as indispensable forums for the articulation of criticism and facilitated the advancement of feminist discourse.

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Author's Declaration

I, Bec Wonders (Rebecca Lillian Wonders Rupke) declare that the enclosed submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy consisting of a written thesis is my own work, and has not been submitted for any other academic award and has been approved by the Research Degrees Sub-Committee of The Glasgow School of Art.

Signed:  Date: 4 October 2021

Name: Bec Wonders (Rebecca Lillian Wonders Rupke)

Spinsters' rage at our affliction of apparent amnesia, which has been inflicted upon us by the patriarchal mind-controllers and lobotomists, will help to ensure that we will not allow the pattern to be lost again.

Mary Daly, "Foreword," in *Woman, Church & State: The Original Exposé of Male Collaboration Against the Female Sex*, Matilda Joslyn Gage (London: Persephone Press, 1980 (1893)). ix.

The most dreadful condemnation stray feminists have to fear here is dismissal with the last dinosaurs of the late sixties.

Meaghan Morris, *The Pirate's Fiancée: Feminism, Reading, Postmodernism* (London: Verso, 1988.) 69.

One serious cultural obstacle encountered by any feminist writer is that each feminist work has tended to be received as if it emerged from nowhere; as if each one of us had lived, thought, and worked without any historical past or contextual present. This is one of the ways in which women's work and thinking has been made to seem sporadic, errant, orphaned of any tradition of its own.

Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets and Silence* (London: Virago, 1980.) 11.

Introduction

General Introduction

This research provides a systematic documentation and analysis of second wave feminist periodicals in the UK between 1970-1990 for the purpose of revealing the role of print-based networks in facilitating the development of feminist ideas. Out of hundreds of second wave feminist periodical titles, seven are examined here in depth, namely:

- *Women's Information Referral Enquiry Service* (*WIRES*) (1975-1985)
- *Red Rag: A Magazine of Women's Liberation* (1972-1980)
- *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement* (1976-1982)
- *Outwrite: Women's Newspaper* (1982-1988)
- *Revolutionary & Radical Feminist Newsletter* (*Rev/Rad*) (1978–89)
- *Spare Rib: A Women's Liberation Magazine* (1972-1993)
- *Trouble & Strife: A Radical Feminist Magazine* (1983-2002)

My central thesis is that the material form of these periodicals produced a distinct set of conditions that facilitated discursive disagreements; especially the often overlooked correspondences which, when considered sequentially, constitute a significant body of documentary evidence for tracing political developments in British feminism.

This research also makes a timely contribution to the field of women's publishing history. As objects of research, feminist print material produced out of the British Women's Liberation Movement has a substantial presence in recent studies as part of the post-1990s increase in feminist archival intervention (Eichhorn, 2013). The perhaps best-known British second wave feminist periodical *Spare Rib* has received noteworthy attention as a primary source in feminist historical accounts (Delap and Strimpel, 2020; Sedgewick, 2020; Smith, 2017; Hollows, 2013; Cowman, 2010).[1] The feminist periodical *form*, due to its mediating and

[1] The British Library made *Spare Rib* available digitally under the "Spare Rib Digitisation Project," carried out between 2013-2015, which arguably influenced an uptake in research on the magazine. However, following the UK withdrawing from the EU, new copyright law introduced in 2021 has resulted in the online collection being removed from the British Library as of the publication date of this thesis.

discursive qualities, reveals within its pages a kaleidoscopic representation of feminism (Forster, 2015) and can counter stereotypes of homogeneity about supposedly distinct eras of feminism (Bazin and Waters, 2017; Waters, 2016). Such characteristics make second wave feminist periodicals ideal archival sources for tracing the development of, for example, a race-specific feminist theory (Thomlinson, 2016; Thompson, 2002), in addition to their role as facilitators of a feminist collective identity and set of political practices (Beins, 2017). Furthermore, because second wave feminist periodicals constituted a sizeable output of the Women in Print Movement (Travis, 2008; Cadman, 1981), it is possible to analyse individual titles in relation to the broader *network* of periodicals which connected the women's movement (Allen, 1988) and produced multi-textual and polyvocal locations for women to encounter feminism (Beins, 2017). In addition, network-thinking is discernible as a central attribute of how second wave feminist periodicals enacted utopic visions for a feminist future through the material circulation of information (McKinney, 2015).

The letter-to-the-editor pages within second wave feminist periodicals are the clearest evidence of these elements.[2] Functioning similarly to serialised fiction (Snyder and Sorensen, 2018), these letters were particularly suited for mediating difficult feelings (Waters, 2016) as they allowed exchanges of ideas, particularly disagreements and criticisms, to appear and develop over time. Letter-to-the-editor pages are additionally the most obvious means through which feminist periodicals invited their readers to become writers, thereby valuing them as more than a consumer base (Thoms Flannery, 2005) and instead as collaborators and experts in their own right (Beins, 2017). Moreover, such correspondences evidence a distinct rhetoric of sisterly concern (Jolly, 2008) throughout some of the most heated negotiations and debates, illustrating how letter-to-the-editor pages facilitated the articulation of disagreement for the sake of *expanding* and *advancing* feminist solidarity. As archival source material, letters affirm the network-thinking ethos of the periodical infrastructure, as well as the varying effects of how periodical editorial collectives attempted to enact open, democratic communication for engaging their readership on often controversial topics.

[2] Here and throughout this thesis I hyphenate "letter-to-the-editor" when used as an adjective preceding "pages," and spell it without hyphens as "letter to the editor" when used as a noun.

Even though there exists an abundant assemblage of second wave feminist periodical titles and their corresponding letter-to-the-editor pages,[3] there is a disproportionately small body of research which discusses the discursive function of the periodical form in connection with the various strands of theory and practice during the Women's Liberation Movement in the UK. In order to develop second wave feminist periodical research in the UK context with a methodological approach that has already been utilised to a similar extent within the US context (Beins, 2017; Allen, 1988), this thesis combines feminist network theory (McKinney, 2015; Daly, 1987), research on the mediating function of feminist periodicals (Bazin and Waters, 2017) and the formal qualities of the periodical genre (Beetham, 1989), epistolary literary analysis (Snyder and Sorensen, 2018; Jolly, 2008), and feminist conflict theory (Schulman, 2016; Thompson, 1993; Daly, 1984; Lyons, 1976; Kennedy, 1970).

I also position this research as a reaction to the erasure of women's archival records. Feminist scholar Dale Spender, in her 800-page reference study about women's suppressed political and theoretical contributions to society *Women of Ideas & What Men Have Done To Them*, compellingly argues that the patriarchal system is perpetuated by a methodical silencing of women's records; records which – when read by new generations of women – carry the transformative potential of unmasking the myth that "women have no visible past."[4] Spender observes that, as a result of this deliberate containment of women's records, "every fifty years women have to reinvent the wheel" in order to "start again to forge the meanings of women's existence in a patriarchal world."[5] In absence of these records, the complexity of feminist histories is mediated through what senior humanities lecturers Victoria Bazin and Melanie Waters call popularised "signal images" that "necessarily distort the past of a messily diverse and dynamic political movement."[6]

Against this background, my research has three main aims: the first aim is to document how second wave feminist periodicals produced both a networked, woman-controlled communication infrastructure through which ideas and information flowed; also, how the

[3] See Appendix 1 for a summary and analysis of British second wave feminist periodicals in David Doughan and Denise Sanchez, *Feminist Periodicals 1855-1984: An Annotated Critical Bibliography of British, Irish, Commonwealth and International Titles* (New York: New York University Press, 1987).
[4] Dale Spender, *Women of Ideas And What Men Have Done To Them* (London: Pandora Press, 1982). 14.
[5] Ibid. 13.
[6] Victoria Bazin and Melanie Waters, "Mediated and Mediating Feminisms: Periodical Culture from Suffrage to the Second Wave," *Women: A Cultural Review* 24, no. 7 (2017): 349. https://doi.org/10.1080/09574042.2017.1301125.

serialised *form* of the feminist periodical facilitated discursive forums, kaleidoscopic correspondences, generative disagreements and necessary, but painful, political conflicts. The second aim is to illustrate how feminist periodicals, as women's historical records, contributed polyvocal exchanges of conflicting opinions; thereby discouraging one-dimensional historical characterisations of the second wave of feminism. The third, more derivative and general aim is to prevent what Gerda Lerner recognises as the process of "women's creations [sinking] soundlessly into the sea, leaving barely a ripple;"[7] this is accomplished by fulfilling the first two aims. In other words, this research is an effort to give prominence to feminist archival material *longitudinally* for the purpose of activating intergenerational channels of knowledge transmission between women.

While my methodological framework is interdisciplinary, the collection of primary source material was principally conducted by means of a feminist archival intervention at four main women's archives across the UK: Glasgow Women's Library, Feminist Archive North, Feminist Archive South and the Feminist Library in London. Furthermore, the selection of second wave feminist periodical titles examined here has been based on the identification of extensive sequences of discursive negotiations across their correspondence pages using *situated*, *holistic* and *selective* reading methods. As a result, I have been able to concentrate on the rhetorical features of disagreements expressed in letter-to-the-editor pages in *relation* to the material elements of the periodical form. Also, by framing correspondence about difficult political questions as the central object of investigation, multiple periodical titles could be simultaneously examined given the way in which several conflicts travelled freely across the feminist periodical network. Moreover, this research does *not* offer detailed chronological accounts of each featured periodical's lifespan, *nor* does it attempt to assess the validity of the arguments presented by the various correspondents. Rather, for the purpose of satisfying the above stated aims, emphasis is placed on how a select few case studies of disagreements and conflicts can evidence a distinct set of expansive and self-reflexive rhetorical practices in the letter-to-the-editor pages.

[7] Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). 220.

Thesis Structure

The general introduction establishes the central research question, as formulated above. Additionally, three main research aims are identified. Subsequently, the literature review offers a survey of relevant literature which contextualises my thesis within feminist network theory (McKinney, 2015; Allen, 1988; Daly, 1987;), research on the Women in Print Movement (Waters, 2019; Gilley, 2016; Travis, 2008; Murray, 2004; Cadman, 1981), studies on the importance of feminist archives and feminist historiography (McDaneld, 2015; Eichhorn, 2013; Hewitt, 2010), research on feminist periodicals and letter-writing (Bazin and Waters, 2017; Beins, 2017; Forster, 2015; Jolly, 2008; Thoms Flannery, 2005) and finally, within feminist conflict theory (Schulman, 2016; Thompson, 1993; Daly, 1984; Lyons, 1976; Kennedy, 1970). My thesis constitutes a vital addition to these fields of research by documenting, analysing and activating overlooked and under-researched correspondences in British second wave feminist periodicals. The methodology section further details the interdisciplinary methodological framework, which encompasses my own activist background, the use of a feminist archival approach, my rationale behind the chosen scope and terminology, the selection process of the periodicals and their corresponding letter-to-the-editor pages, as well as attempts to visualise the second wave feminist periodical network.

Chapter 1 discusses the heated debate surrounding political lesbianism over approximately fourteen issues of the feminist periodical *Women's Information Referral Enquiry Service* (*WIRES*). I chronicle how the development of political lesbianism in Britain can be traced to American feminist groups such as the Radicalesbians, The Furies and the Collective Lesbian International Terrors which were particularly active during the early 1970s. Such developments happened alongside mass exoduses of lesbians from both the American and the British Gay Liberation Front after women began denouncing male-centred sexual politics. This chapter further details how the existence of sectarian divisions between socialist, radical and lesbian feminists produced a distinctly British formulation of political lesbianism – termed "revolutionary feminism" – through the medium of letter-writing in feminist periodicals. For instance, Sheila Jeffrey's 1977 conference paper "The Need For Revolutionary Feminism" was published and discussed in the socialist feminist periodical *Scarlet Women,* of which the readership reaction is further unpacked in chapter 2. The

principal catalyst for sparking debate about political lesbianism, however, was the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group's 1979 conference paper "Political Lesbianism: The Case Against Heterosexuality." This chapter traces how, when the "Political Lesbianism" paper was published in *WIRES*, it provoked heated correspondences and extensive debate in the newsletter's letter-to-the-editor pages. Notably, the disagreements evidence calls for *opening* and *expanding* the debate, demonstrating how communication through the periodical *form* avoided an ideological deadlock. This chapter concludes with reflections on how such examples of difficult correspondences about political lesbianism present a useful case study of how second wave feminist avoided a romanticised "sisterhood" and understood discursive conflict as a potentially *generative* tool for the women's movement.

Chapter 2 considers how two feminist periodicals, *Red Rag* and *Scarlet Women*, used the periodical form in distinctly different ways for the purpose of developing a socialist feminist theory and practice. A controversial debate during the Women's Liberation Movement centred on the question of whether to retain allegiances with the political Left or whether to prioritise a separate, women-only, autonomous movement. The two periodicals examined in this chapter both attempted, through the publications themselves, to create discursive bridges for the sake of avoiding ideological factionalism in the women's movement. *Red Rag* principally attempted to define the Marxist feminist political position through its editorials, articles and letters. This chapter reflects on how *Red Rag*'s aim of developing a discursive bridge between the women's movement and the organised labour movement was complicated by the editorial collective not having resolved principles of feminist collectivity to begin with. This highlighted the organisational and editorial obstacles to establishing egalitarian forums of discussion. The second periodical discussed here, *Scarlet Women*, was conceived as a means to create a socialist feminist network through which women could share information and discuss topics related to socialism and feminism. Details are given about how *Scarlet Women* facilitated criticism from its readership about their coverage on feminism in Northern Ireland, in addition to discussions about the origins of women's oppression and the role of reproduction. Lastly, I consider how the newsletter functioned as a *network* for socialist feminists through its reports and summaries of socialist feminist conferences in Europe. This chapter concludes with reflections on how *Red Rag* and *Scarlet Women*, through their diverging publishing strategies, produced records of communication which reveal distinct discursive attempts to carve out a Marxist and socialist feminist position.

Chapter 3 examines the coverage of and correspondence about racism, anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism in four feminist periodicals: *Outwrite, Revolutionary & Radical Feminist Newsletter* (*Rev/Rad*), *Spare Rib* and *Trouble & Strife.* I chronicle how *Spare Rib* experienced an editorial shift and power struggle when, for the first time in 1982, it was comprised of an equal number of Black women and white women collective members. This coincided with the effects of the 1982 Lebanon war resulting in an increase in coverage about anti-Zionism and anti-imperialism in feminist periodicals, the earliest coverage of which is featured in *Outwrite*. This chapter focuses primarily on the controversy stemming from *Spare Rib*'s newly formed editorial collective refusing to publish letters from Jewish women who felt that much of the coverage on Israel was anti-Semitic. While *Spare Rib* was trying to reinvent itself as an anti-racist magazine *for all women*, the critical correspondences from its readership – particularly from Black Jewish women – proved that such a shift was not a straight-forward mission. I demonstrate how the letter-to-the-editor pages were used by both readers and the editorial collective members themselves to try and work through complexities of supposedly competing, yet also interlinking, identities and oppressions. Chapter 3 also considers how this debate spilled over into other feminist periodicals such as *Rev/Rad* and *Trouble & Strife*, demonstrating the way in which correspondences travelled freely through the periodical network. The chapter ends with a reflection on the way in which *Spare Rib*'s ability in allowing these debates to unravel produced a crucial record of how the periodical form facilitated the formulation of what we understand today as intersectionality, even though the controversies remained unresolved and re-appeared throughout the publishing lifespan of the magazine.

The conclusion brings together the above case studies and reflects on how the examples discussed answer the thesis aims and research question presented in the introduction, in addition to identifying possibilities for future research and things that could be done differently. I summarise how the various correspondences examined evidence a networked communication infrastructure which could resist stagnation and closure in the face of heightened political disagreements. Moreover, outlined are the *formal* qualities of the second wave feminist periodical in relation to the distinct *rhetorical* expressions of disagreements and political negotiations it generated. I emphasise particularly noteworthy examples of calls for *expansion* and *clarification* in letter-to-the-editor pages, relating such features to the temporal process of publication as well as the constitutive editorial principles of feminist

periodicals.[8] Additionally, I reflect on how communication through letter-to-the-editor pages in feminist periodicals encouraged self-reflexivity and shifts in opinion among readers. This also relates to my observation that, while the case studies in this thesis contain instances of painful polarisations, these conflicts were in fact necessary for *generative* theory-building. The conclusion ends with the assertion that a central function of second wave feminist periodicals was the mediation of disagreement *through* – not in spite of – ideological conflict. As such, I summarise how feminist periodicals accommodated a plurality of voices which serves to dissuade researchers from ascribing any specific political positionality to the Women's Liberation Movement. Finally, I reiterate how this thesis can offer women today a channel through which to become contemporaries of the feminist past and break the cycle of intergenerational ruptures of feminist knowledge.

Appendix 1 is a summary and analysis of British second wave feminist periodicals listed in *Feminist Periodicals 1855-1984: An Annotated Critical Bibliography of British, Irish, Commonwealth and International Titles*. This annotated bibliographical work, published in 1987, was researched and compiled by librarian David Doughan and Denise Sanchez. In order to provide an overview of the landscape of second wave feminist periodicals in the UK, I analyse the entries from 1964 onwards (beginning with *Arena Three*) and identify ten overarching thematic categories which could loosely be used to classify each title, though several periodicals arguably belong to a multitude of categories. I identify a total of 450 second wave feminist periodicals in the UK listed in *Feminist Periodicals 1855-1984* and provide examples of titles within each thematic category, making Appendix 1 a useful source of information for further research in the field of feminist print media. Furthermore, this section offers an outline of the breadth and diversity of the printed feminist communication infrastructure during the Women's Liberation Movement.

Literature Review

This research is principally situated within, and contributes to, the field of women's publishing history. Being a naturally interdisciplinary field, it also encompasses feminist network theory, the Women in Print Movement, feminist archival intervention, as well as

[8] Here and throughout this thesis, the phrase "constitutive editorial principles" refers to the formative editorial vision of the publication rather than invoking the "constitution of" anything in particular.

feminist periodical studies, epistolary communication and feminist conflict theory. I combine all six areas of research in order to unpack the particularities of how second wave feminist periodicals, and their formal qualities, facilitated discursive and serialised correspondences between women on difficult and contested topics. Such qualities are examined by political science scholar Jessica Megarry in *The Limitations of Social Media Feminism: No Space of Our Own* and contrasted with the use of social media for contemporary feminist correspondence, concluding that "digital feminism" lacks the material continuity of feminist theorising which the second wave feminist periodical infrastructure produced.[9] Whereas Megarry rejects the use of network thinking for examining digital spaces, I argue that the material continuity of feminist periodicals is best evidenced through the connections between publications that resulted in a networked infrastructure of feminist communication. This is evidenced in studies such as the feminist media scholar Martha Allen's thesis *The Development of Communication Networks Among Women, 1963-1983: A History of Women's Media in the U.S.*,[10] and communication scholar Cait McKinney's journal article "Newsletter Networks in the Feminist History and Archives Movement."[11] The ethos underpinning such communication networks combined a feminist resistance against male-dominated media and an awareness that woman-controlled publishing systems could function as consciousness-raising tools, as detailed in the founder of *New Directions for Women* Paula Kassell's essay "The Birth, Success, Death and Lasting Influence of a Feminist Periodical: New Directions for Women (1972-1993-?)."[12] This research develops feminist network theory by tracing the networked infrastructure of feminist periodicals through the contentious communication featured in letter-to-the-editor pages.

Research which chronicles the emergence of second wave feminist publishing efforts – also dubbed "the Women in Print Movement" – include the literary historian Trysh Travis' journal article "The Women in Print Movement: History and Implications,"[13] the librarian

[9] Jessica Megarry, *The Limitations of Social Media Feminism: No Space of Our Own* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).
[10] Martha Leslie Allen, "History of Women's Media: The Development of Communication Networks Among Women, 1963-1983," *Women's Knowledge Digital Library*, accessed 29 September, 2021, https://www.womensdigitallibrary.org/items/show/584.
[11] Cait McKinney, "Newsletter Networks in the Feminist History and Archives Movement," *Feminist Theory* 16, no. 3 (2015). https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700115604135.
[12] Paula Kassell, "The Birth, Success, Death and Lasting Influence of a Feminist Periodical: New Directions for Women (1972-1993-?)," in *Women Transforming Communications: Global Intersections*, ed. Donna Allen, Ramona R. Rush and Susan J. Kaufman (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1996).
[13] Trysh Travis, "The Women in Print Movement: History and Implications," *Book History* 11 (2008). https://doi.org/10.1353/bh.0.0001.

Jennifer Gilley's essay "Feminist Publishing/Publishing Feminism: Experimentation in Second-Wave Book Publishing,"[14] as well as the booklet *Rolling Our Own: Women as Printers, Publishers and Distributors,* edited by Eileen Cadman, Gail Chester and Agnes Pivot.[15] Much research on the Women in Print Movement has focused on the question of how second wave feminists reconciled running a business – reliant on financial stability – with radical anti-capitalist aims. For example, Melanie Waters (introduced earlier) examines the business practices of the US feminist periodical *Ms. Magazine* in her paper "Risky Ms.ness? The Business of Women's Liberation Periodicals in the 1970s."[16] Investigating similar concerns regarding feminist presses in the UK, the media and literary scholar Simone Murray contrasts the more financially viable second wave feminist publishers, such as Virago and The Women's Press, with grassroots and non-hierarchical presses, such as Onlywomen and Sheba, in her seminal book *Mixed Media: Feminist Presses and Publishing Politics.*[17] Taking these studies into consideration, I move away from the particular motivations and contradictions of the business practices of the Women in Print Movement and instead focus on how its infrastructure facilitated a discursive network of communication.

Additionally, this research is part of what the media studies scholar Kate Eichhorn describes as a resurgence in feminist archival engagement from the mid-1990s onwards in her book *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order.*[18] By focusing on correspondences in feminist periodicals specifically, instead of merely giving a chronological account of the Women in Print Movement, my approach tests Eichhorn's argument that feminist archival research can *activate* the past. In this sense, I approach the archive as a means to be in communication with women featured in the material longitudinally. Other scholars have also identified the potential of feminist archival intervention in complicating over-simplified accounts of second wave feminism, such as English professor Jennifer McDaneld's article "Activating Archives in Women's Studies 101: New Stories About Old Feminism and the

[14] Jennifer Gilley, "Feminist Publishing/Publishing Feminism: Experimentation in Second-Wave Book Publishing," in *This Book Is an Action: Feminist Print Culture and Activist Aesthetics* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2016).
[15] Eileen Cadman, Gail Chester, and Agnes Pivot, *Rolling Our Own: Women as Printers, Publishers and Distributors* (London: Minority Press Group, 1981).
[16] Melanie Waters, "Risky Ms.Ness? The Business of Women's Liberation Periodicals in the 1970s" (paper presented at Purpose, Power and Profit: Feminist Ethical Enterprise and Cultural Industries Conference, University of Cambridge, Murray Edwards College, 12 July 2019.) https://blogs.sussex.ac.uk/businessofwomenswords/purpose-power-and-profit/.
[17] Simone Murray, *Mixed Media: Feminist Presses and Publishing Politics* (London: Pluto Press, 2004).
[18] Kate Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013).

Future."[19] Victoria Bazin and Melanie Waters also identify the feminist periodical as a source for encountering complicated and nuanced histories in a special edition of the journal *Women: A Cultural Review*, titled *Feminist Periodical Culture: From Suffrage to Second Wave*. The journal's introduction, titled "Mediated and Mediating Feminisms: Periodical Culture from Suffrage to the Second Wave,"[20] makes sense of feminist periodicals as mediated (and mediating) objects which gave space to dissent and disagreement within the Women's Liberation Movement. Moreover, the function of the feminist periodical as a discursive arena is attributed to the development of black women's body of thought in feminist historian Natalie Thomlinson's article "'Second-Wave' Black Feminist Periodicals in Britain."[21]

The flexible and kaleidoscopic nature of the women's *magazine* genre is examined in the feminist historian Laurel Forster's book *Magazine Movements: Women's Culture, Feminisms and Media Form*,[22] in which she observes that the formal qualities of magazines accommodate such exchanges of ideas. Similarly, women's studies professor Agatha Beins' book *Liberation in Print: Feminist Periodicals and Social Movement Identity*[23] analyses the relationship between the material form of second wave feminist periodicals in the US and the way in which their discursive characteristics related to the development of a political movement identity. In comparison, equivalent approaches for assessing second wave feminist periodicals in the UK remains under-researched and is a gap in research which I address. Additionally, epistolary communication and letter-writing between women is considered in depth in the cultural studies professor Margaretta Jolly's book *In Love and Struggle: Letters in Contemporary Feminism*,[24] which this research expands in the context of how correspondence in second wave feminist periodicals enabled feminist conflicts to be expressed.

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[19] Jen McDaneld, "Activating Archives in Women's Studies 101: New Stories About Old Feminism and the Future," *Feminist Teacher* 26 (2015). https://doi.org/10.5406/femteacher.26.1.0053.
[20] Bazin and Waters, "Mediated and Mediating Feminisms: Periodical Culture from Suffrage to the Second Wave."
[21] Natalie Thomlinson, "'Second-Wave' Black Feminist Periodicals in Britain," *Women: A Cultural Review* 24, no. 7 (2017). https://doi.org/10.1080/09574042.2017.1301129.
[22] Laurel Forster, *Magazine Movements: Women's Culture, Feminisms and Media Form* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).
[23] Agatha Beins, *Liberation in Print: Feminist Periodicals and Social Movement Identity* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2017).
[24] Margaretta Jolly, *In Love and Struggle: Letters in Contemporary Feminism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

Lastly, I make use of feminist conflict theory and communication theory for the purpose of approaching feminist disagreement as generative rather than destructive. Radical feminist theorists and philosophers, such as Janice Raymond in *A Passion for Friends: Towards a Philosophy of Female Affection*[25] and Mary Daly in *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy*,[26] emphasise that conflict between women is an inevitable occurrence and that only by addressing (and expecting) it can women avoid the dissolution of feminist comradery. Although the concept of "horizontal hostility" as first articulated by civil rights activist Florynce Kennedy in her essay "Institutionalized Oppression vs. The Female"[27] is useful for understanding the power struggles between editorial collective members of feminist periodicals, this research mainly applies activist Gracie Lyons' principles for "constructive criticism" in *Constructive Criticism: A Handbook*[28] to contextualise how the feminist periodical *form* avoided factionalism and encouraged the mediation of difference. Moreover, studies such as historian Sarah Schulman's *Conflict is Not Abuse: Overstating Harm, Community Responsibility, and the Duty of Repair*[29] and journalist Helen Lewis' *Difficult Women: A History of Feminism in 11 Fights*[30] anchor this research within attempts to unpack complex political disagreements and difference as generative sites of inquiry.

Working the Net

The British Government declared 1982 "Information Technology Year" during which considerable investments were made into the use of microcomputers and information technology. Kenneth Baker, then the Minister for Information Technology, characterised the applications of these new technologies as the "engine of economic growth for at least the rest of the century."[31] That same year, the West Yorkshire Women and New Technology Group warned the readers of the socialist feminist newsletter *Scarlet Women* that "there's a great urgency for women to recognise that within a patriarchal-capitalist society at a time of

[25] Janice G. Raymond, *A Passion for Friends: Toward a Philosophy of Female Affection* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986).
[26] Mary Daly, *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).
[27] Florynce Kennedy, "Institutionalized Oppression vs. The Female," in *Sisterhood Is Powerful*, ed. Robin Morgan (New York: Random House, 1970).
[28] Gracie Lyons, *Constructive Criticism: A Handbook* (Berkeley: Issues in Radical Therapy, 1976).
[29] Sarah Schulman, *Conflict Is Not Abuse: Overstating Harm, Community Responsibility, and the Duty of Repair* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2016).
[30] Helen Lewis, *Difficult Women: A History of Feminism in 11 Fights* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2020).
[31] Kenneth Baker, "Information Technology Year 1982" Department of Industry, (1982), accessed 3 October, 2021. http://www.computinghistory.org.uk/det/55201/Information-Technology-Year-1982/.

recession, the introduction of new technology is pretty bad news!"[32] The group was primarily worried about the implementation of computer technology and artificial intelligence in the workplace, and what implications such automations may have on the working class and women. One member, Pat McDougall, asks: "If new technology means that a computer can monitor us from the cradle to the grave and our lives are no longer our own then what kind of life is that?"[33] Little could McDougall have predicted that nearly four decades later, male-owned social media technologies have become dominant platforms on which some women rely on to communicate and organise politically.[34]

Beyond considering what significance such new technologies have on work and labour, there is a resurgence of feminist research which identifies – similarly to the Women in Print Movement as discussed further below – the repercussions that the corporate, male control over women's communication had for an autonomous feminist movement. One such example is the 2020 book *The Limitations of Social Media Feminism: No Space of Our Own* by Jessica Megarry, as introduced earlier. In it, she uses the Women's Liberation Movement as a reference from which to "consider whether social media is an aid or an obstacle to politically organising for women's liberation" today.[35] Megarry notes that contemporary feminist political negotiations are "taking place in publicly visible mixed-sex digital spaces hosted by multi-national corporations," marking a significant shift from the emphasis placed on women-only communication channels during previous feminist generations.[36] While second wave feminist newsletters offered the possibility for reflective theorising through their "material continuity," Megarry argues that the algorithmic features of social media create a fragmented, temporary and individualised "digital feminism" and impede the likelihood of women being exposed to the same information over time.[37]

By contrast, second wave feminist printed and circulated communication in periodicals produced a common knowledge of theoretical problems for the movement, aided by the much slower publishing and distribution cycle that allowed for deep reading, reflection and theory-

[32] West Yorkshire Women and New Technology Group, "Introduction," *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement*, no. 14 (1982): 1.
[33] Pat McDougall, "One Woman's Experience...," *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement*, no. 14 (1982): 12.
[34] Megarry, *The Limitations of Social Media Feminism: No Space of Our Own*. 2.
[35] Ibid. 4.
[36] Ibid. 2.
[37] Ibid. 194.

building.[38] This cycle, as opposed to near instantaneous social media communication, also supported a slower sequence of receiving, reading, formulating and mailing out responsive letters. Interestingly, Megarry rejects the use of social network analysis and network thinking for assessing how male dominance is manifested in digital spaces. She argues that network analysis obscures power relations between men and women by providing only a top-down perspective and, particularly when applied to social media, network analysis does not account for how the structural framework of these platforms influences women's communication and participation in feminism.

However, for the purpose of investigating the particular functions of second wave feminist periodicals, a feminist approach to network theory is essential. The central difference that makes this approach valuable is that second wave feminist periodicals created an idiosyncratic and decentralised network of communication which provided women with a material, woman-controlled location through which feminism could be theorised and organised. For instance, in her 1988 thesis *The Development of Communication Networks Among Women, 1963-1983: A History of Women's Media in the U.S.*, the director of the Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press, Martha Allen, considers second wave feminist periodicals in the US as individual components that, together, made up a networked communication infrastructure which was "too extensive, too complex, and too independent to be readily eradicated by the kinds of stereotyping and ridicule that had silenced women's rights movements in the past."[39] Individual issues of newsletters and magazines acted as entry points through which women would find themselves as belonging to the larger feminist project, or, as Allen puts it: "when a woman working on an issue of concern in her life began communicating through print […], she would discover that she was not isolated but was part of a network."[40]

More than just being an instance of alternative media, the second wave feminist communication network facilitated what anthropologist and interdisciplinary scholar Pilar Riaño-Alcalá calls the identification of "a common project, a sense of belonging (ours)" and

[38] Ibid. 211.
[39] Allen, "History of Women's Media: The Development of Communication Networks Among Women, 1963-1983."
[40] Ibid.

"the recognition of the participants as a collective subject (we)."[41] Mary Daly also recognises how networking offers transformative discoveries of shared common threads between women. She defines "the network" as a "tapestry of connections woven and re-woven by Spinsters and Websters" which produces a new kind of feminist space "created on the boundaries of patriarchal institutions where women create real alternatives and presence."[42] Sometimes made explicit, at other times an unnamed working principle, it is the *networked presence* which characterises second wave feminist periodicals and as such, this research is also situated within feminist network analysis.

One of the most compelling examples of using a feminist conceptualisation of *networks* and *networking* in feminist periodical research is communication scholar Cait McKinney's 2015 journal article "Newsletter Networks in the Feminist History and Archives Movement." In it, McKinney examines the US newsletter *Matrices: A Lesbian/Feminist Research Newsletter* to trace how network thinking has been a feature of feminist activism and knowledge production since before the Internet. *Matrices* functioned explicitly as a network for sharing information among any women doing research related to lesbian feminism. McKinney notes that such newsletters envisioned similar models of a networked communication infrastructure to the contemporary online "ListServ." Additionally, she situates *Matrices* in the larger constellation of feminist periodicals, and in doing so approaches the periodical as a *network*, rather than solely a physical bound volume of information. *Matrices* facilitated both the conceptual aim of envisaging networked communication as a political goal of the women's movement, as well as practical methods for bringing together researchers and activists. In other words, McKinney writes that "a newsletter network grounds feminism's more utopic visions in the modest pragmatism of ink, newsprint, stuffed envelopes, and stamps."[43] The distributed nature of *Matrices* promised a feminist future through its networked structure and location as a material record that would continue beyond the publication's active circulation. My research expands McKinney's approach by tracing the networking quality of the second wave feminist periodical infrastructure through conflicts and disagreements featured in letter-to-the-editor pages, and thus I demonstrate how multiple periodical titles were linked by (and indeed *networked* through) difficult communication and political negotiation.

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[41] Pilar Riaño Alcalá, ed., *Women in Grassroots Communication: Furthering Social Change* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1994). 35.
[42] Mary Daly and Jane Caputi, *Websters' First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987). 149.
[43] McKinney, "Newsletter Networks in the Feminist History and Archives Movement," 316.

The significance of networking in relation to women's communication is also used as an investigative framework in the 1996 volume *Women Transforming Communications: Global Intersections*, edited by Donna Allen, Ramona R. Rush and Susan J. Kaufman. The emphasis on networks is reproduced throughout the volume, with particular attention given to feminist periodicals and women's media initiatives. For example, when writing about the US second wave feminist periodical *New Directions for Women* (1972-1993), the founder Paula Kassell describes the paper as acting "as a consciousness-raising conduit to the women's movement."[44] The periodical medium clearly had an instrumental function in delivering feminist content, as well as connecting its audience to each other. Additionally, American feminist Fran P. Hosken tells the story of how and why she founded the periodical *Women's International Network* (*WIN*) *News* (1975-2003). Through her position as a journalist, Hosken had multiple contacts of women's organisations in Asia, Latin America and Africa. Based on these contacts, *WIN News* was established in order to circumnavigate the dependence on patriarchal communication systems. In part, the motivation for such a periodical came from the realisation that "the technology used to transmit the message, which often affects its form, is for the most part designed by men."[45] She states that the purpose of *WIN News* was to "develop a global network to deal with an enormous problem: worldwide communication by, for, and about women."[46] *WIN News* became a trailblazing example of a feminist periodical attempting to challenge male-dominated communication systems and, because of its application as a network, each individual issue functioned as an entry-point into the women's movement. Due to the site of the periodical not merely acting as a place for consuming content, but for *participating* in its creation, the mediated circulation of communication within feminist periodicals ensured an unusually dedicated readership. As such, in order to conduct a comprehensive analysis of UK second wave feminist periodicals, this research considers the purpose of each individual periodical as being a fundamental component in constituting the larger network of communication during the Women's Liberation Movement.

[44] Kassell, "The Birth, Success, Death and Lasting Influence of a Feminist Periodical: New Directions for Women (1972-1993-?)," 202.
[45] Fran P. Hosken, "Women and International Communication: The Story of WIN News," in *Women Transforming Communications: Global Intersections*, ed. Donna Allen; Ramona R. Rush; Susan J. Kaufman (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1996). 209.
[46] Ibid. 212.

The Women in Print Movement

The efficacy of the second wave feminist communication network had less to do with any one individual periodical and more to do with the wider feminist publishing infrastructure during the 1970s and 1980s that became international in its reach. Trysh Travis dubs this period the Women in Print Movement in her 2008 journal article "The Women in Print Movement: History and Implications," describing it as follows:

> The Women in Print Movement was an attempt by a group of allied practitioners to create an alternative communications circuit – a woman-centered [*US spelling*] network of readers and writers, editors, printers, publishers, distributors, and retailers through which ideas, objects and practices flowed in a continuous and dynamic loop.[47]

A defining moment of this period, as chronicled by Travis, was the 1976 First National Women in Print conference, held in Omaha, Nebraska. Authors were explicitly *excluded* from the conference because, as noted by Carol Seajay – the founder of Old Wives Tales bookstore and the *Feminist Bookstore News* newsletter – the attendees "were very influenced by Marxist ideas about laborers controlling their own labor. [*US spelling*] We didn't want to put the writers on a pedestal."[48] Travis highlights how one of the central premises of the Women in Print Movement was that, in order to further the development of feminist theory, women needed to take ownership of the means of cultural production by "liberating the written word from the material regime that had grown up to enforce the oppressive epistemological and moral structures of capitalist patriarchy."[49]

One of the principal organisers of the conference and founder of the publisher Daughters Inc, June Arnold, explained that feminists were motivated to construct their own publishing circuit because they considered the mainstream publishing houses to be deliberately working against the feminist cause by misrepresenting, appropriating or ignoring the movement's goals. She famously described the mainstream presses as "the finishing press" because it was

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[47] Travis, "The Women in Print Movement: History and Implications," 276.
[48] Elizabeth Sullivan, "Carol Seajay, Old Wives Tales and the Feminist Bookstore Network," FoundSF, n.d., accessed 23 September, 2021, https://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=Carol_Seajay,_Old_Wives_Tales_and_the_Feminist_Bookstore_Network.
[49] Travis, "The Women in Print Movement: History and Implications," 282.

the Women's Liberation Movement they intended to finish.[50] Accordingly, I show how this ideological opposition to male-controlled systems of publication and distribution was foundational in constructing an autonomous women's communication network. Travis' research into the inaugural Women in Print conference demonstrates that the ethos which underpinned the feminist publishing infrastructure posited that feminist theory, and the material means by which that theory is produced and circulated, were inextricably linked. Taking this into account, this research considers how feminist periodicals facilitated a particular process of feminist theorising by existing as regularly circulated forums within the larger feminist publishing network.

However, the Women in Print Movement also presented women with the problem of financially maintaining this infrastructure. Librarian Jennifer Gilley examines various ways in which feminist politics were infused with the book publishing industry in her 2016 essay "Feminist Publishing/Publishing Feminism: Experimentation in Second-Wave Book Publishing." She traces the publishing history of the 1970 anthology *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement* by Robin Morgan, as well as the 1981 anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, in order to document the debates about which publishing strategies better achieve the political goals of feminism. According to Gilley, the arguments surrounding the production of both anthologies focused on the question of whether it was preferable to choose a mainstream publisher with a broader audience, or an independent feminist press with limited resources. Instead of taking a stance as to whether the political ambitions of feminism can be reconciled with economic survival, Gilley concludes that insights into diverging strategies of feminist publishing uncover contrasting strands of feminist thought:

> Exploring the history of experimentation in feminist publishing/publishing feminism is crucial to our understanding of how the economic apparatus of publishing affects the ideological direction of feminism and allows us to make informed choices about the path forward.[51]

[50] June Arnold, "Feminist Presses and Feminist Politics," *Quest: A Feminist Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (1976): 19.
[51] Jennifer Gilley, "Feminist Publishing/Publishing Feminism: Experimentation in Second-Wave Book Publishing," in *This Book Is an Action: Feminist Print Culture and Activist Aesthetics,* ed. Jaime Harker and Cecilia Konchar Farr (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2016). 43.

Emphasising the central link between the mechanisms of publishing and material processes of organising, Gilley alerts us to the potential conflict between political sensibility and economic viability.

The question of whether the economic market can be harnessed to achieve the political goals of feminism was also taken up at the 2019 conference *Purpose, Power and Profit: Feminist Ethical Enterprise and Cultural Industries*, held at the University of Cambridge and organised by the research project *The Business of Women's Words*. Of particular relevance to this research was a paper presented by Melanie Waters titled "Risky Ms.ness? The Business of Women's Liberation Periodicals in the 1970s," in which Waters assesses the business practices of the US feminist periodical *Ms. Magazine.* The magazine was founded in 1972 by Gloria Steinem and Dorothy Pitman Hughes and was envisioned as a glossy, monthly, mass-circulated feminist publication. Waters notes how *Ms. Magazine* was not just a commercial gamble, but moreover posited a public relations risk, as many feminists saw the magazine as a "cynical exercise" to advance Steinem's career.[52] The emergence of *Ms. Magazine* is also explored in the 2020 feature film *The Glorias*, directed by Julie Taymore, which dramatises the life and legacy of Steinem. In the relevant scene, Steinem is pictured with lawyer and activist Florynce Kennedy putting together the first issue in a bustling office, surrounded by a dozen or so women using typewriters and making phone calls. Significantly, the women discuss putting together a critical feature on women's image in advertising, to which one of the editors responds: "Let's not alienate potential sponsors right out of the gate."[53] Steinem's rebuttal, however, is that such sponsors would not support the magazine in the first place. The inclusion of such a scene in a high production value film is indicative of how the contradictions faced by feminist businesses – in this case relating to feminist media enterprises – are of relevance to a contemporary audience.

Waters details that eventually *Ms. Magazine* adopted an "ethical advertising policy" which only allowed for advertisements which accurately reflected women, particularly as agents of change.[54] Nevertheless, she notes that there existed a general uneasiness about profit and business, given that the magazine operated as a commercial success within the context of a

[52] Waters, "Risky Ms.ness? The Business of Women's Liberation Periodicals in the 1970s."
[53] Julie Taymore, *The Glorias* (USA, 2020).
[54] Waters, "Risky Ms.ness? The Business of Women's Liberation Periodicals in the 1970s."

radical anti-capitalist feminist movement. In the end, Waters argues that the purpose and power of *Ms. Magazine* is most discernible by its "non-numerical impacts," that is, how the magazine offered women a discursive forum and became a bridge between the public and the Women's Liberation Movement.[55] Correspondingly, this research considers circulation figures and profit margins as inadequate for assessing the function of second wave feminist periodicals, as this approach underestimates the potency of short-lived publications in enabling feminist theorising.

While the scope of the aforementioned studies is focused on the US, other scholars have noted similar, parallel concerns and developments taking place in the UK For example, in her 2004 book *Mixed Media: Feminist Presses and Publishing Politics*, media and literary scholar Simone Murray examines the contradictory motivations of the second wave feminist publishing infrastructure in the UK and the simultaneous assimilation of feminists presses into the economic market. She argues that the better-known second wave feminist publishers Virago and The Women's Press have both achieved some degree of mainstream recognition, which has resulted in "an overly simplistic conflation in the public mind of these two individual presses with the phenomenon of feminist publishing as a whole."[56] In contrast, Murray cites the examples of Onlywomen Press, Feminist Books, Stramullion, Sheba Feminist Publishers and Black Woman Talk as radical feminist second wave publishers which produced cutting-edge texts that were later popularised by corporate feminist and multinational houses. Murray crucially observes that the motivation for a politically-engaged feminist publishing rationale "emerged from the separatist wing of the 1970s women's liberation movement"[57] and these ideas should not necessarily be interpreted as deficient simply because they did not enjoy the same longevity as Virago or The Women's Press. She highlights that one of the central tenets of the radical feminist publishing ethos was that the process of publishing was just as important as the final product:

> Radical women's presses were characterised by non-hierarchical, collectivist structures, an emphasis on political engagement over profit generation, and a heightened self-consciousness of their position *vis-à-vis* the corporate mainstream.[58]

[55] Ibid.
[56] Murray, *Mixed Media: Feminist Presses and Publishing Politics*. 126.
[57] Ibid. 127.
[58] Ibid.

However, it is precisely this exercise of remaining politically principled, while also working within a capitalist framework for financial survival, which Murray describes as having "severely taxed the energies of the separatist print movement."[59] She argues that the uncritical acceptance of non-hierarchical organising and the overall suspicion of profit-making account for the majority of "failure, self-recrimination and personal animosity that is the unfortunate legacy of much radical women's media activity."[60] I agree with Murray that a non-hierarchical and collective radical feminist publishing practice is often inherently fraught with difficulty and despair. Nevertheless, I disagree that such conflicts and the lack of longevity when it comes to radical feminist second wave publishing initiatives are indicative of "failure." Instead, this research considers – similarly to Melanie Waters' 2016 journal article "'Yours in Struggle': Bad Feelings and Revolutionary Politics in *Spare Rib*" – that the political effectiveness (and success) of feminist print media should be assessed *through* the difficulties and disagreements it enabled, "not in spite of it."[61]

Another crucial source for getting a sense of the composition of second wave feminist print activity in the UK is the 1981 booklet *Rolling Our Own: Women as Printers, Publishers and Distributors,* edited by Eileen Cadman, Gail Chester and Agnes Pivot. It was published by Minority Press Group as part of a series investigating radical media in the UK at the time. The authors were all directly involved with feminist publishing, and notably, Chester went on to research British feminist publishing and is still an active scholar in the field today. The booklet provides an overview of a wide range of feminist print activities, based on interviews with women working in the print trade as well as personal experience. Additionally, it offers self-reflexive commentary on the role of feminist publishers, including the striking observation that:

> A women's press is not a temple of culture, it is a forum for discussion and creativity; women have and are producing much literary, theoretical and visual work, and it is the job of a women's press to give them the network of communication they need.[62]

[59] Ibid. 129.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Melanie Waters, "'Yours in Struggle': Bad Feelings and Revolutionary Politics in *Spare Rib*," *Women: A Cultural Review* 27, no. 4 (2016): 462.
[62] Cadman, Chester, and Pivot, *Rolling Our Own: Women as Printers, Publishers and Distributors*. 29.

The topics covered in *Rolling Our Own* range from feminist writing, the difficulties of surviving in capitalism, the role of US feminist publishing, illustrators, typesetting and machinery, printing and collective organising, unions, periodicals, audience, distribution, sexism in the radical book trade; to specific write-ups on Virago, Onlywomen Press, The Women's Press, Sheba Feminist Publishers and Stramullion. Given that this booklet not only investigates the characteristics of second wave feminist publishing, but is itself also a product of those characteristics, it provides this research with insight into how feminists were critically examining their own practices at the time. Likewise, where such critical reflections are being resurfaced in contemporary film and theory – as detailed above – my investigation into second wave feminist communication networks is also positioned within the growing field of feminist archival research.

The Archival Turn

By the end of the 1990s, the infrastructure of the international Women in Print Movement had by and large disappeared, with only a select few publishers and periodicals remaining.[63] Susan Hawthorne, the co-founder of the Australian feminist publisher Spinifex, chronicles this shift in her 2014 book *Bibliodiversity: A Manifesto for Independent Publishing.* She identifies four principal developments which led to this demise. Firstly, she argues that the terminology that is specific to a radical feminist analysis (such as "sexism" and "misogyny") has been diluted by the popularisation of postmodern theory in universities (including the introduction of more ambiguous terms such as "queer" and "gender"). Hawthorne asserts that "these new words tore the radical heart out of mass social movements."[64] Additionally, she notes that this linguistic weakening removed "theorising out of the activist meetings" and placed it "into the ivory towers" which dissipated political energy.[65] This coincided with

[63]Examples of publishers and publications which survived this shift include: the UK feminist press Virago, which was sold to Little, Brown (owned by Hachette Livre) in 1995, the US periodical *Ms. Magazine* which underwent various transitions of ownership until it was purchased in 2001 by the non-profit Feminist Majority Foundation, and the US publisher The Feminist Press which already in 1972 became a not-for-profit organisation with tax-free status and held its headquarters at the City University of New York since 1985. The Indian feminist publisher Kali For Women, founded in 1984, also survived in a particular capacity by splitting into two different publishers in 2003: Zubaan and Women Unlimited, both still active today. The Australian feminist publisher Spinifex Press is also still active today, though as it was founded towards the end of the second wave of feminism in 1991, it was arguably able to develop strategies more effectively for surviving into the 21st century.

[64] Susan Hawthorne, *Bibliodiversity: A Manifesto for Independent Publishing* (North Geelong: Spinifex Press, 2014). 5.

[65] Ibid. 6.

feminists directing their energies into non-government organisations, universities and large corporations "instead of centres of activism."[66]

Secondly, the invention of the book superstore (such as Borders or Waterstones) is identified as a "nail in the coffin of feminist publishing."[67] Feminist publishers had insufficient stock for supplying these new retailers, and feminist bookstores lost customers as they were being vastly under-priced. Thirdly, what Hawthorne calls the "technologisation of the book industry"[68] meant that independent booksellers, who did not have the financial resources to computerise their stock, were at a significant disadvantage. And finally, she considers the establishment of amazon.com and the advent of the Internet as marking the "rise in a libertarian ideology of individual consumerist 'choice'" which dissolved centres for feminist ideas and activism.[69] Together, these developments resulted in the fragmentation and eventual collapse of the second wave feminist communication infrastructure.

It may at first seem contradictory, then, that Kate Eichhorn identifies a growing and persistent draw to archives as a site of feminist inquiry since the mid-1990s. In fact, her 2013 book *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order* explores how the increase of feminist engagement with archives is a *direct response* to the socio-political consequences which Hawthorne describes, namely, the erosion of feminist political agency and cultural production. Eichhorn argues that this "turn" in archival interventions is owed in part to the archive's ability to "restore to us what is routinely taken away under neoliberalism – not history itself but rather the ability to understand the conditions of our everyday lives longitudinally."[70] In this context, an archival practice can be conceived of as an attempt to regain political agency by making previous political possibilities visible again:

> The archive arguably strengthens contemporary feminism […] as a necessary and effective authorizing apparatus in an economy that is hostile to the production and circulation of works produced quite literally at the cost of profit.[71]

[66] Ibid. 9.
[67] Ibid. 6.
[68] Ibid. 9.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order*. 6.
[71] Ibid. 16.

The Archival Turn recognises the complex issues and questions arising out of feminist archival research and attempts to move beyond a nostalgic preservation of feminist material and towards a committed *activation* of feminist collections. Eichhorn approaches her case studies of feminist archival intervention not as a historian, but as an ethnographer and cultural theorist with an interest in the production, circulation, and use of texts, which she terms "methodological disloyalty."[72] My own research considers feminist periodicals held at women's archives in a similar way. Rather than attempting to present a succinct, neat chronology of second wave feminism, this research instead tries to complicate oversimplified historical caricatures and, in line with Eichhorn's methodology, is mostly concerned with the effects of periodical circulation and production.

The collapse of the Women in Print Movement also eliminated the possibility of any intergenerational continuity of women's records through woman-controlled communication and publishing channels. The lack of this continuity contributed to the proliferation of what Victoria Bazin and Melanie Waters call "signal images" of second wave feminism, such as the protest of the 1970s Miss World contest in London, which "linger in the public consciousness" as feminist victories, but also misrepresent a complex political movement by reducing the feminist historical timeline to one-dimensional generalisations.[73] With no women's communication infrastructure to tap into, such signal images easily construct an oversimplified version of a bygone feminism that is no longer relevant to younger generations. For example, in her 2015 journal article "Activating Archives in Women's Studies 101: New Stories About Old Feminism and the Future," Jennifer McDaneld describes how her students held "a kind of unstated but powerful sense that today's brand of progressive feminism […] was far more progressive, far more intersectional, than anything that had preceded it."[74] McDaneld characterises this attitude as an "imaginary" narrative which explicitly positions the contemporary feminist identity in *opposition* to the second wave:

> The second wave is compressed so that the third wave can be expanded – the charge that the second wave was not concerned with the diversity of women's experiences

[72] Ibid. 17.
[73] Bazin and Waters, "Mediated and Mediating Feminisms: Periodical Culture from Suffrage to the Second Wave," 349.
[74] McDaneld, "Activating Archives in Women's Studies 101: New Stories About Old Feminism and the Future," 54.

> offers a narrative foil for the third wave to emerge as a necessary and more progressive movement.[75]

As women's studies professor Nancy Hewitt points out in her 2010 book *No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of U.S. Feminism*, "feminists in each wave viewed themselves as both building on and improving the wave(s) that preceded them."[76] In other words, the second wave of feminism *also* claimed to be more transformative than the first. However, what is novel about the contemporary construction of the feminist past is that such oppositional positionings are made without archival interventions, that is, as I show in this research: the narrative foil of designating the second wave as white, middle class and US-centric is at odds with what can be evidenced in the communication found in second wave feminist periodicals. For example, when the founders of the Third Wave Foundation Vivien Labaton and Dawn Lundy Martin write in their 2004 anthology *The Fire This Time: Young Activists and the New Feminism* that second wave feminists "neglected the full range of experiences that inform women's lives,"[77] they fail to recognise what the antiracist activist and feminist scholar Becky Thompson describes as "the centrality of the feminism of women of color in second wave history."[78] McDaneld terms this a process of "feminist legitimation" for authorising a new movement that is "untainted by the problems of the past."[79]

In order to counter these dominant narratives, McDaneld led sessions on archival intervention and provided her students with access to digitised print material from the Duke University Libraries' digital collection of Women's Liberation Movement Print Culture. As a result, she notes how her students became more likely to identify with the women who are featured in the material itself and observes that "students wondered aloud several times why they had never heard that 'old' feminism was this diverse."[80] The potential of archival intervention, according to McDaneld, lies in forming active alliances with the feminist past that avoid

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[75] Ibid. 56.
[76] Nancy Hewitt, ed., *No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of U.S. Feminism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010). 2.
[77] Dawn Lundy Martin and Vivien Labaton, eds., *The Fire This Time: Young Activists and the New Feminism* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2004). xxvii, quoted in Hewitt, ed., *No Permanent Waves: Recasting Hisories of U.S. Feminism.* 4.
[78] Becky Thompson, "Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism," *Feminist Studies* 28, no. 2 (2002): 335. https://doi.org/10.2307/3178747.
[79] McDaneld, "Activating Archives in Women's Studies 101: New Stories About Old Feminism and the Future," 56.
[80] Ibid. 63.

"passive reiteration[s] of absorbed characterizations" and instead, archival discovery allows for these histories to exist in "dynamic conversation with the present."[81] Rather than being an act of "truth telling," my approach also utilises the archive as a site for building intergenerational coalitions with the women featured in the material by reintroducing complicated and difficult communication into the contemporary arena of feminist research. I show how debates about "the full range of experiences that inform women's lives" were not just present, but in fact defined entire print runs of feminist periodicals and often became the impetus for generating new periodicals or editorial policies.[82]

Feminist Periodicals and Letter-Writing

The serialised and discursive nature of second wave feminist periodicals has made them an opportune academic source for countering mass-mediated images of feminism. This is the central line of investigation in the 2016 special edition of the journal *Women: A Cultural Review*, titled *Feminist Periodical Culture: From Suffrage to Second Wave.* The introduction, written by Bazin and Waters, establishes the collection of articles as being the first significant exploration of periodicals in the UK spanning both the first and second waves of feminism. The periodicals under scrutiny are characterised as mediated (and mediating) objects that can offer "counternarratives to this dominant image of feminism and its histories."[83] One way in which this is apparent is how periodicals give voice to dissent and conflict within feminism, something which the authors describe as a "redirection" rather than irreparable damage. I expand this approach by focusing exclusively on difficult and conflicting communication in periodicals in order to demonstrate, similarly to Bazin and Waters, how feminist periodicals refuse to give a final, singular account of uniformity.

Included in this special issue of *Women: A Cultural Review* is Natalie Thomlinson's article "'Second-Wave' Black Feminist Periodicals in Britain." Thomlinson choses four periodicals from which to trace the development of Black feminism in Britain, namely *FOWAAD*, *Speak Out*, *We Are Here* and *Mukti*. She discusses both the general aims of each periodical, which vary from uncovering racism of the British state to feminist politics, while also identifying

[81] Ibid. 65, 64.
[82] Lundy Martin and Labaton, *The Fire This Time: Young Activists and the New Feminism*. xxvii.
[83] Bazin and Waters, "Mediated and Mediating Feminisms: Periodical Culture from Suffrage to the Second Wave," 349.

distinctions in close readings of each example. Through the mediated format of the periodical, she argues that Black women were able to develop a body of thought that was distinct and divergent from the broader (and mostly white) Women's Liberation Movement. Additionally, Thomlinson notes that black women faced additional hurdles, such as lack of time or economic resources, which could have prevented them from engaging with feminist periodicals. Nevertheless, Black women's periodicals provided a discursive arena for the development of race-specific theory and feminist critique. Although my research is predominantly interested in the communication mediated through feminist periodicals, rather than tracing any particular historical development, I similarly consider a variety of periodicals simultaneously in order to make judgments about the wider discursive field. Another important academic source, this time specifically on the genre of women's magazines, is Laurel Forster's 2015 book *Magazine Movements: Women's Culture, Feminisms and Media Form*. Forster has selected a range of magazines to examine and from which to draw conclusions. While the above studies focuses specifically on women's movement periodicals, Forster's material is spread across different modes of production and genres. She begins by looking at two examples of magazines addressing a mainstream audience, *Housewife* and *Houseparty*, and then moves on to look at how British sexual and racial minority groups considered themselves through print in *Arena Three* and *Mutki*. Forster then expands the traditional notion of a "magazine" by examining letter correspondences within a private club (*Co-operative Correspondence Club*) and a growing national radio program (BBC Radio 4's "Woman's Hour").

Lastly, and perhaps most pertinent to this research, she looks explicitly at magazines engaged directly in feminist politics across the various "waves" of feminism, including *Votes for Women* (1907-1918), *Spare Rib* (1972-1993), *the F-Word* (2001-ongoing) and the *Feminist Times* (2013-2014). She effectively manages to blend one magazine into the other by arguing that each version owed an intellectual debt to the print strategies of the previous "wave." In this sense, Forster claims that "feminist magazines anchor the movement" which is a central conceptual rationale through which I understand as the potency of the second wave feminist periodical network.[84] Specifically, as Forster observes, it is because the form of the magazine is flexible and accommodates differences between women that the "exchange and dialogism" keeps each issue current and thereby offers a kaleidoscopic lens for assessing contradictory

[84] Forster, *Magazine Movements: Women's Culture, Feminisms and Media Form*. 237.

and diverse feminist communication.[85] Whereas Forster is ultimately asking the question of what makes a women's magazine – feminist and otherwise – my analysis of second wave feminist periodicals expands her key insights into the magazine genre to discern how the publication form encouraged and mediated contentious communication.

In her 2005 book *Feminist Literacies 1968-70,* literary scholar Kathryn Thoms Flannery dedicates a chapter titled "Going Public with Pandora's Box: Feminist Periodicals" to the epistemological and pedagogical work of second wave feminist periodicals in the US. She argues that these publications constituted "counterinstitutions" to traditional universities and enabled women to engage in "participatory approaches to educating themselves as feminists."[86] Thoms Flannery's research consults the topic of self-health in a variety of feminist periodical titles such as *off our backs*, *Big Mama Rag, Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement, Lilith, No More Fun and Games,* and several others to assess how the materiality and content of the periodical generated new forms of knowledge for feminists. Similarly, this research focuses on how the periodical form produced the ideal conditions for discursive communication which was able to develop and expand on criticisms, thereby challenging "the traditional boundaries between writer and reader, expert and novice, teacher and learner."[87] Moreover, I reference Thoms Flannery's insights on the pedagogical effects of second wave feminist periodicals in order to assess the *generative* functions of complex disagreements and difficult correspondences in the letter-to-the-editor pages and to avoid – in her terms – "the desire to straighten all the threads."[88]

Potentially the most significant study for anchoring my inquiry in the field of feminist periodical research is Agatha Beins' 2017 book *Liberation in Print: Feminist Periodicals and Social Movement Identity*. The book constitutes the first analysis of how periodicals were essential in forming a feminist collective identity and set of political practices in the US during the second wave. Beins focuses on five different periodicals: *Distaff* (New Orleans, Louisiana); *Valley Women's Center Newsletter* (Northampton, Massachusetts); *Female Liberation Newsletter* (Cambridge, Massachusetts); *Ain't I a Woman?* (Iowa City, Iowa); and *L.A. Women's Liberation Newsletter*, later published as *Sister* (Los Angeles, California). In

[85] Ibid. 5.
[86] Kathryn Thoms Flannery, "Introduction," in *Feminist Literacies 1968-75* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2005). 17.
[87] Ibid. 18.
[88] Ibid. 22.

so doing, she chooses a combination of newsletters and newspapers which contain a mixture of editorials, announcements, information about resources, opinion pieces, calls to action, creative writing, letters from readers, and more. While there are divergences between the selected periodicals, all of them report on feminism in a broad sense, instead of focusing on a single area of concern.

Through her close readings of each periodical, echoing Forster's approach, Beins argues that the "striking polyvocality" and "multitextuality" of the periodical genre allowed for a kaleidoscopic manifestation of both a coherent feminist identity, as well as different and conflicting individual expressions of feminism.[89] Beins' focus on the formation of movement *identity* provides this research with essential reflections on how the periodical network not just withstood, but *encouraged* debate and criticism. It is this tension between homogeneity and specificity that can destabilise an oversimplified or uniform account of feminist history. While Beins' findings identify letters to the editor as a defining characteristic of each periodical she examines, as well as the broader egalitarian structure that typified feminist publishing, my own approach places difficult communication as the *primary* site of investigation for confronting mass-mediated images of feminism. Additionally, this research distinctly focuses on the British second wave feminist periodical network, which has yet to receive extensive academic attention as a productive infrastructure of debate and conflict.

Finally, my research follows the framing of epistolary communication and letter-writing between women as detailed in Margaretta Jolly's 2008 book *In Love and Struggle: Letters in Contemporary Feminism*. Jolly examines a variety of letters sent between women during the second wave of feminism, including love letters, epistolary novels, campaign letters, open letters, and letters to the editor. She argues that these intimate correspondences constitute a powerful record from which to glean insight into "women's unprecedented willingness to prioritize the relationships among themselves" as well as into the parallel emergence of "women's new demands of one another and the disappointments that often followed."[90] Jolly uses a feminist philosophy-of-care ethics framework to highlight how letters between women reveal a "culture of relationship."[91] In other words, more than just a means of communication,

[89] Beins, *Liberation in Print: Feminist Periodicals and Social Movement Identity*. 4.
[90] Jolly, *In Love and Struggle: Letters in Contemporary Feminism*. 2.
[91] Ibid. 3.

she demonstrates how "feminists' political self-consciousness turned private forms of writing towards a fantasized [*US spelling*] women's community."[92]

This framing also enables Jolly to understand political conflict in feminist letter-writing as covertly expressing "a rhetoric of love" which, I argue, enabled disagreements to unfold in letter-to-the-editor pages with the goal of advancing the ideal of feminist unity.[93] Accordingly, my interest in factious correspondence is not to look for evidence of "failure," but rather to establish how the understanding that political conflict between women must be expressed for the purpose of *solidarity* was fundamental to the feminist periodical network. As such, this research diverges from Jolly's focus on care ethics and instead reflects her observations about love, disappointment and relationality as it applies to the conflicts arising from political feminist theorising.

Feminist Conflict Theory

In order to fully appreciate the role of political conflicts in second wave feminist periodicals, this research places such difficult correspondences within the larger field of historical and theoretical research on conflict between women. A central study of the origins and varieties of female friendship – and notably, the challenges and obstacles presented by female friendships – is Janice Raymond's 1986 book *A Passion for Friends: Towards a Philosophy of Female Affection*. Raymond suggests that one of the most difficult occurrences in female friendships is when women betray other women, in addition to the presence of unrealistic expectations of what female friendship entails, concluding from her research that "women were not prepared to confront betrayal and disloyalty from women, especially women they had come to trust, often the response was to conclude that 'women were no better than men.'"[94]

Here she is referring to Mary Daly and what she calls "a crisis of feminist faith" when trust is broken between women and the "'illusion' becomes feminism itself."[95] Because women expect victimisation by men and therefore are less likely to foresee it coming from other

[92] Ibid. 8.
[93] Ibid. 71.
[94] Raymond, *A Passion for Friends: Toward a Philosophy of Female Affection*. 197-98.
[95] Daly, *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy*. 112.

women, Raymond argues, judgments of betrayal and hurt are twice as painful and can often lead to the unnecessary dissolution of feminist comradery. Though the material covered in this research evidences painful feelings and dissolution, it also demonstrates how the feminist periodical *form* provided a discursive space for conflict, which was both resistant to dissolution – by means of the periodical existing within a *networked* communication infrastructure – and also flexible in that the form accommodated multiple new and challenging voices. As such, the feminist periodicals discussed in this research constitute an example of the application of Raymond's emphasis on the need for women to be able to foresee "horizontal hostility" and to accept the fact that it will occur "heart-on."[96]

"Horizontal hostility" is a term which can be traced to civil rights activist Florynce Kennedy's essay "Institutionalized Oppression vs. The Female," first published in the now infamous 1970 *Sisterhood is Powerful* anthology edited by Robin Morgan.[97] Her essay was one of the first articulations of conflict within the Women's Liberation Movement. Kennedy defines the concept of "horizontal hostility" as a necessary component of the circularity of oppression in an institutionalised system. She argues that "where a system of oppression has become institutionalized it is unnecessary for individuals to be oppressive."[98] Emerging out of this context, Kennedy contends that those who are oppressed know only two states of being: "somebody's foot on their neck or their foot on somebody's neck," and therefore when oppressed people become liberated, they can inadvertently take on the role of the oppressor.[99] As a lawyer herself, she notes that she has often encountered female judges chastising her female clients about being overweight and refusing to place restraining orders against abusive husbands. She says:

> It is for this reason that I have considerable difficulty with the sisterhood mystique: "We are all sisters." "Don't criticize a 'sister' publicly," etc. [...] No, these judges are not my sisters. Such females, in my opinion, are agents of an oppressive System.[100]

[96] Raymond, *A Passion for Friends: Toward a Philosophy of Female Affection*. 198.
[97] Florynce Kennedy was an American black civil rights activist, feminist and lawyer. She founded the Feminist Party which eventually nominated Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, the first black woman elected to the United States Congress, for president in 1972. More recently, as chronicled above, she was depicted alongside Gloria Steinem in the 2020 film *The Glorias.*
[98] Kennedy, "Institutionalized Oppression vs. The Female," 439.
[99] Ibid. 441.
[100] Ibid.

In other words, Kennedy is re-framing the concept of oppression from something only exerted by individuals over other individuals, to something which is historically institutionalised. Particularly interesting, for the purpose of this research, is Kennedy's criticism of "the sisterhood mystique." Indeed, the difficult correspondences in second wave feminist periodicals reveal a similar realisation that the notion of "sisterhood" did not ensure ideological conformity, in fact, many of the disagreements examined by this research constitute negotiations about how to define sisterly behaviour and practice.

In her 1993 unpublished essay "A Discussion of the Problem of Horizontal Hostility," feminist scholar Denise Thompson uses Kennedy's framework to begin unpacking horizontal hostility in more depth. She notes that while Kennedy did not blame women for their own subordination, she did make a case for how oppression is not simply violently enforced, but that the social order requires a certain degree of complicity by women to be successful. However, Thompson highlights that patterns of domination between women differ significantly from those in which men exert power over women, arguing that "horizontal hostility between and among women typically involves forms of power-over which spring from a position of weakness not strength."[101] This observation is crucial for making sense of the internal power struggles between editorial collective members of the periodicals analysed in this research, especially in regards to accusations of censorship and lack of transparency. In other words, what on the surface seem like ideological disagreements within editorial collectives, in fact reveal deeper problems of editorial power and an absence of agreed-upon collective feminist working principles.

Similar to Raymond, Thompson argues that there is little women can do to completely avoid horizontal hostility from happening. However, she does draw on lesbian feminist linguist Julia Penelope's writingby suggesting that women should ask themselves if their motivation for hostility is to hurt, humiliate and demolish, or whether they are defending and clarifying what they really believe in?[102] The correspondences in second wave feminist periodicals, for the most part, demonstrate that difficult communication primarily involved the latter, that is, attempts to clarify and understand contentious arguments for the sake of *advancing* the women's movement. As such, this research moves away from the concept of "horizontal

[101] Denise Thompson, "A Discussion of the Problem of Horizontal Hostility," (1993): 1-2.
[102] Julia Penelope, "Do We Mean What We Say? Horizontal Hostility and the World We Would Create," in *Call Me Lesbian: Lesbian Lives, Lesbian Theory* (Freedom: The Crossing Press, 1992).

hostility" between women insofar as it refers to institutional oppression, and instead focuses on how the feminist periodical form encouraged discursive disagreement and constructive criticism that avoided an ideological deadlock and standstill between feminists.

One of the most fundamental texts that deals with internal political struggle is activist Gracie Lyon's 1976 *Constructive Criticism: A Handbook*. It was a small-press bestseller aimed at providing tools for honest and productive disagreement, based on the premise that criticism is necessary for any political movement to enact fundamental change. Lyons lays the groundwork by arguing that ideological conformity within political groups can be ineffective:

> The first mistake is to emphasize unity at all costs. People who fall into this position fail to make a correct distinction between allies and enemies, or between working-class and ruling-class ideology. As a result, they seek to smooth over differences. They think that any struggle is bad, instead of seeing the difference between principled struggle, which is necessary to advance the movement, and dogmatic factionalism.[103]

Indeed, the constitutive editorial principles of the feminist periodicals examined in this research approach *difference* between women as unavoidable and, similarly to Lyons, as *generative* for political and ideological development. Moreover, the periodical form was utilised by feminists in part because it was understood to provide a discursive framework for holding polyvocal arguments together and to avoid factionalism. Lyons emphasises that, instead of avoiding political struggles at all costs, such disunity is necessary to advance political movements and ideological thought. This research contextualises the correspondences between women in second wave feminist periodicals using Lyons' communication theory and, as such, constitutes an application of *Constructive Criticism* to evaluate archival feminist records.

Along similar lines to Lyons, historian Sarah Schulman's 2016 book *Conflict is Not Abuse: Overstating Harm, Community Responsibility, and the Duty of Repair* offers a detailed account of scapegoating and "shunning" in political movements. Schulman suggests that "conflict, after all, is rooted in difference and people are and always will be different," and

[103] Lyons, *Constructive Criticism: A Handbook*. 22.

that the process of communication and repair is the only means by which to reach mutual accountability.[104] As such, her approach offers a renewed understanding of Lyons' argument that difference is inevitable, but not necessarily destructive. A systematic analysis of second wave feminist periodicals necessitates coming to terms with the difficulty, complexity, disagreement, criticism and conflict discussed in letter-to-the-editor pages. By centring such communication in my inquiry, I expand on journalist Helen Lewis' appeal in her 2020 book *Difficult Women: A History of Feminism in 11 Fights* that "women's history should not be a shallow hunt for heroines."[105] Additionally, I apply communication and conflict theory in order to demonstrate how the feminist periodical form accommodated the expression of difference for the purpose of repair. Therefore, this research broadens and situates feminist conflict theory within tangible historical examples and resists the romanticisation of what a generative "sisterhood" really entails.

[104] Schulman, *Conflict Is Not Abuse: Overstating Harm, Community Responsibility, and the Duty of Repair*. 20.
[105] Lewis, *Difficult Women: A History of Feminism in 11 Fights*. 3.

Methodology

This research uses an interdisciplinary methodological approach to investigate the function of second wave feminist periodicals. At the core of my investigation is a feminist archival methodology which enabled serendipitous discovery and chance encounters with Women's Liberation Movement print ephemera, as well as the resurfacing of women's records by extending their life through renewed engagement. Once I identified feminist periodicals as the primary source material for this research, I then used *situated*, *holistic* and *selective* reading methods for sifting through their kaleidoscopic and multifaceted content. This resulted in identifying correspondence and letter pages as a useful thread to follow and, in turn, assess the discursive function of feminist periodicals and the networked spread of their communication. Though I initially employed Social Network Analysis (SNA) methods for visualising and mapping these communications, such tools eventually only proved useful for organising and making sense of the material rather than constituting a significant research methodology.

Background: The Vancouver Women's Library

Before I undertook this research, I already had an interest in the materiality of documents and intergenerational relationships. My grandmother Lillian Wonders, a lecturer in cartography at the University of Alberta, owned a fully functioning 1980 Chandler & Price letterpress which was set up in her garage in Victoria, British Columbia. She named it "The Wonder Press" and over the years made hundreds of flyers, business cards, napkins, posters and other print ephemera. When I was a young girl, she taught me how to set individual lead letters into the printing plate and terms such as "reverse type," "point-size" and "the California job case" still trigger fond memories of summers spent in my grandmother's garage. The Wonder Press is now housed within the University of Victoria's Special Collections and University Archives. Years later, informed by my existing interest in documents and materiality, I decided to pursue a Master of Publishing degree at Simon Fraser University. The field of publishing studies seemed to perfectly combine my background as an artist and knowledge of letterpress printing. While undertaking this degree, I became significantly interested in the spaces which house and make available documents after reading the librarian Kristen

Hogan's 2016 book *The Feminist Bookstore Movement: Lesbian Antiracism and Feminist Accountability*.

This legacy of women building a political presence around collections of writing inspired me to co-found the Vancouver Women's Library in 2017. It was conceived of as a free resource for women in the Vancouver area to not just access feminist books and other print ephemera, but also as a physical space for women to gather and generate discursive engagement with feminist records.[106] Of particular interest to me were periodicals we received as donations, such as the Vancouver-based feminist publications *Makara* (1975-1978) and *Pedestal* (1969-1974). These periodicals contained stories, images and information about Vancouver's feminist history which I had not encountered in my formal education and which dispelled a conception I had that there was little feminist history to speak of in Vancouver. I created a collage of advertisements that were published in *Makara* and displayed it in the library alongside the magazine itself (Figure 1) in order to showcase the landscape of Vancouver's feminist businesses, with the intention that the collage would inspire engagement with these histories. I conceived the collage as a "map" which could be viewed from multiple directions and turned around in the same way as one may use a geographic map of the city. This initial exposure to second wave feminist periodicals gave me a sense of the multifaceted histories featured in the periodical format, but it also presented me with the problem of how to select and analyse their varied content most effectively.

Feminist Archival Methodology

Having been introduced to the potential of archives as a site for discovery through my own involvement in setting up a women's library, this research initially began as a process of serendipitous discovery in British women's archives. Informed by the media studies scholar Kate Eichhorn's conception of the archive not just as "a site of preservation," but significantly as "an apparatus to legitimize new forms of knowledge," I decided to exclusively visit women's archives and adopt the methodological framework of a feminist archival practice.[107] This is because, as emphasised by history professor and curator Kären

[106] Much controversy surrounded the launch of the Vancouver Women's Library and our women-only policy, which I chronicle in detail in my 2018 dissertation "Counterpublics Revisited: A Case Study of the Vancouver Women's Library," available through the Simon Fraser University thesis repository.
[107] Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order*. 4.

M. Mason and the director of special collections at Z. Smith Reynolds Library Tanya Zanish-Belcher in their 2007 journal article "Raising the Archival Consciousness: How Women's Archives Challenge Traditional Approaches To Collecting and Use, Or, What's In A Name?" what is at stake for women's collection archivists is the preservation of women's history to "help women create, re-create, and own their memories."[108] Similar to my own surprise at the (to me) unknown histories documented in *Makara* and *Pedestal*, the feminist scholar Dale Spender asks in her 1982 book *Women of Ideas & What Men Have Done To Them*: "I began to wonder whether the disappearance of the women of the past was an accident. Why didn't we know about these women? Was it possible that we were not meant to?"[109]

Countering this disappearance, women's archives imbue women's records with credibility and believability, and perhaps most importantly with a location from which to carry feminist histories into the present. In other words, a feminist archival methodology allows the researcher to become a contemporary of the women featured in the material examined and confirms the historian Gerda Lerner's assertion that women "are and always have been actors and agents in history," but that women have also "been kept from knowing their history" through the male gatekeeping of women's records.[110] This, according to Spender, has resulted in each generation of women starting "virtually at the beginning" of feminist theorising and movement building, as well as having to "reinvent the wheel" every fifty years.[111] As such, this research uses a feminist archival methodology to repair the intergenerational rupture between the second wave of feminism and the supposed "present-day progressive feminist politics."[112] In order to achieve this, I visited four archives over the course of this research: The Feminist Library in London, the Feminist Archive South at the University of Bristol, the Feminist Archive North at Leeds University, and the Glasgow Women's Library (GWL).

Given that I conducted this study in Glasgow, the GWL became my primary site of inquiry. Additionally, the GWL lent itself to a process of serendipitous discovery as researchers can explore the archive's collection without having a preconceived idea of which material might

[108] Kären M. Mason and Tanya Zanish-Belcher, "Raising the Archival Consciousness: How Women's Archives Challenge Traditional Approaches to Collecting and Use, or, What's in a Name?," *Library Trends* 56, no. 2 (2007): 375. https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2008.0003.
[109] Spender, *Women of Ideas And What Men Have Done To Them*. 4.
[110] Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). 5.
[111] Spender, *Women of Ideas And What Men Have Done To Them*. 13.
[112] McDaneld, "Activating Archives in Women's Studies 101: New Stories About Old Feminism and the Future," 65.

be of interest. This contrasts with the University-held Feminist Archive North and South, for which a select list of limited material must be submitted to the archivist in advance. As I began familiarising myself with the British landscape of second wave feminist print material, long afternoons were spent reading feminist periodicals and I quickly recognised the necessary function the periodical format had for developing and negotiating feminist politics.

The Women's Liberation Movement: Scope and Terminology

Before engaging in the process of selecting the primary source material for this research, I set the formal parameters of only considering material published as part of the Women's Liberation Movement in the UK between the years 1970-1990. However, I am also aware that my goal of trying to unsettle oversimplified caricatures about this period of feminism, while setting such parameters, introduces a significant contradiction. The feminist archival methodological framework of this research rests on the idea that by reintroducing second wave feminist communication into the contemporary field of feminist research, such archival records can provoke intergenerational coalitions with the women featured in the material itself and thereby alleviate some of the perceived divisions between "waves" of feminism. The dilemma of attempting to unpack particular characteristics of a feminist "wave" without ignoring overlapping movements and chronologies is problematised in 2010 anthology *No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of U.S. Feminism.* The editor, Nancy Hewitt, explains that the feminist wave metaphor can encourage an artificial rendering of feminist histories by designating decades before 1848 or between 1920-60 as "feminist-free zones."[113]

One of the contributors to the anthology, international studies professor Leela Fernandes, writes in her essay "Unsettling 'Third Wave Feminism': Feminist Waves, Intersectionality and Identity Politics in Retrospect" that the periodisation of feminist waves presents "an image of homogenous waves of knowledge that underestimates the differences and divergences among writers located within specific waves."[114] This is a tendency which my own approach is specifically working against by placing opposing and conflicting communication in second wave feminist periodicals at the centre of my inquiry. And yet, the

[113] Hewitt, *No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of U.S. Feminism.* 5.
[114] Leela Fernandes, "Unsettling 'Third Wave Feminism': Feminist Waves, Intersectionality, and Identity Politics in Retrospect," in *No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of U.S. Feminism*, ed. Nancy Hewitt (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010). 102.

networked infrastructure of feminist periodicals and the feminist publishing ethos which understood woman-controlled debate and discourse as essential for strengthening the Women's Liberation Movement *does* provide this research with an approximate timeframe and scope. That is, even though the designation of feminist waves as belonging to set decades is at best inaccurate, and at worst potentially harmful to intergenerational solidarity, I justify the selection of my timescale by highlighting that the decades between 1970-1990 were characterised by a feminist sensibility of pre-digital printed and networked correspondence. Accordingly, while the use of the term "second wave" is problematic in that it contributes to an unreliable chronology of overlapping feminist histories, I nevertheless decided to use the term in relation to my source material for the sake of clarity and comprehensibility. However, I do refrain from making generalisations under the term "second wave feminism" and instead use the descriptor "the Women's Liberation Movement" as a contextual framework within which to unpack the role of feminist periodicals.

Moreover, while my focus remains on the Women's Liberation Movement in the UK, I sometimes use material which originated in the US in order to evidence the way in which feminist periodicals enabled transatlantic communication. However, due to limitations of scope, this research does not offer a comparison of geographically distinct iterations of Women's Liberation Movements. Instead, using a material-first approach (as outlined further down), this research concentrates on British primary source evidence relating to the question of what function second wave feminist periodicals served in mediating communication.

Reading Periodicals

The seriality and discursiveness of second wave feminist periodicals differentiates them from other feminist print ephemera such as political pamphlets and posters. Since part of the motivation for using a feminist archival methodology in this research is to counter one-dimensional caricatures about second wave feminism, periodicals became an obvious choice for dispelling the narrative that this period of feminism was "white, middle class, and liberal in political orientation."[115] This is because the periodical format inherently occupies a position of contradiction: on the one hand, a periodical needs to repeat certain qualities over

[115] Joan Sangster, "Creating Popular Histories: Re-Interpreting 'Second Wave' Canadian Feminism," *Dialectical Anthropology* 39, no. 4 (2015): 381. https://www.jstor.org/stable/43895166.

time – what the feminist writer and cultural history teacher Margaret Beetham calls "a recognizable position in successive numbers"[116] – to maintain a loyal readership; on the other hand, a periodical also needs to be fluid and responsive to change in order to stay relevant. Beetham characterises this dynamic as "self-referring […], open-ended and resistant to closure."[117] And so, the periodical format was particularly well suited for facilitating difficult feminist political negotiations within a woman-controlled, serialised infrastructure of communication. Indeed, it is because the feminist periodical is a discursive, open and self-referential form that such records constitute a substantial challenge to hegemonic narratives about the Women's Liberation Movement.

Due to their often extensive print runs and varied content, periodicals can be read and analysed in a variety of ways. For example, in the 2018 anthology *Women and the Periodical Press in China's Long Twentieth Century: A Space of Their Own?*, the editors Michel Hockx, Joan Judge and Barbara Mittler propose four different modes of reading Chinese women's periodicals: horizontal, vertical, integrated and situated. A *horizontal* reading refers to "a close examination of all materials (texts, images, advertisements) included in one issue of a particular journal,"[118] a *vertical* reading "traces a particular genre or theme over time in one journal,"[119] while an *integrated* reading examines "women's journals as part of a wider print culture, holding them up against contemporary periodicals and other publications."[120] Lastly, a *situated* reading "extends the study of a particular journal to other source materials that informed its broader context."[121] My own approach most resembles a *situated* reading in the sense that I am not interested in feminist periodicals in isolation, but rather how they function as communication channels that connect the wider network of the Women's Liberation Movement. As such, I adopt a holistic methodological framework for reading periodicals which resembles the sociology professor Penny Tinkler's strategy in her 2016 essay "Fragmentation and Inclusivity: Methods for Working with Girls' and Women's Magazines." Tinkler proposes three main features for a holistic reading of, in this case, magazines specifically: "tracing the threads in themes; reflecting on the impression created by magazine

[116] Margaret Beetham, "Open and Closed: The Periodical as a Publishing Genre," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 22, no. 3 (1989): 99.
[117] Ibid. 97.
[118] Michel Hockx, Joan Judge and Barbara Mittler, "Introduction: Women's Journals as Multigeneric Artefacts," in *Women and the Periodical Press in China's Long Twentieth Century*, ed. Michel Hockx, Joan Judge and Barbara Mittler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). 9.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid.

content; attending to the different 'voices' that emerge."[122] Additionally, she argues for an "inclusive" rather than a "fragmentary" methodological approach to reading magazines, the latter of which isolates individual titles "from the larger field of periodicals within which it has been shaped."[123]

While Tinkler argues that an inclusive and holistic methodology should take text, image *and* design features into account, my own approach *does* engage in what she terms the fragmentary practice of "'cherry picking' to illustrate a point" in the sense that I exclusively focus on communication – particularly controversial and difficult correspondences, explained further below – in second wave feminist periodicals.[124] However, I maintain that this still constitutes a holistic approach, as my intention is to identify common mediating functions of feminist periodicals in relation to the political project of the women's movement. In this sense, I work *against* the isolation of individual titles from the political context in which they functioned and instead, I consider each individual correspondence and communication as part of the broader feminist periodical network. Accordingly, my methodological strategy for systematically analysing the mediating function of second wave feminist periodicals is *situated*, *holistic* and also *selective* in that I identify and trace overarching conflicts in letter-to-the-editor pages as my central line of investigation.

Encompassing these three methods of reading periodicals is my material-first approach. During the initial discovery stage of familiarising myself with vast amounts of material, I instinctually prioritised a spontaneous and serendipitous method for looking at the archival documents by allowing each document (and each letter) to direct me to the next one, as this approach enabled me to be more present in the relationship I was cultivating with the women featured in the material. Just like any oral conversation, the serialised nature of the feminist periodical form meant that ongoing conversations and discussions in the letter-to-the-editor pages were responsive, flexible and unstable. A top-down, overly systematised method for this initial stage of research would not have been able to register unexpected or irregular patterns in how particular conversations travelled through the feminist periodical network. As already mentioned briefly above in relation to feminist archival methodologies, women's

[122] Penny Tinkler, "Fragmentation and Inclusivity: Methods for Working with Girls' and Women's Magazines," in *Women in Magazines: Research, Representation, Production and Consumption*, ed. Rachel Ritchie et al. (Milton Park: Routledge, 2016). 32.
[123] Ibid. 26.
[124] Ibid. 37.

archives are potential sites of intergenerational learning and political continuity. It was therefore important for my own positionality as a woman to follow the material in order to become a contemporary of the participating readership. This material-first approach involved cultivating a kind of receptiveness and openness towards the periodicals themselves so as to fully trust that the material would pull me into the conversation as it moved along individual issues of the same title or even jumped across to entirely different publications.

Following the Letters

The process of collecting and compiling primary source material for this research was concentrated on correspondence and letter pages in feminist periodicals. As literary scholars Carey Snyder and Leif Sorensen illustrate in their 2018 article "Letters to the Editor as a Serial Form," letter pages "offer one of the only democratic platforms in magazines, an opportunity to make one's voice heard in a public forum."[125] It did not take long for me to identify how letter pages in second wave feminist periodicals functioned as such a space for women to negotiate contested ideas, often resulting in debates which were drawn out over several issues and in some cases, several years. This echoes Snyder and Sorensen's characterisation of letters as "participating in the serial temporality of the periodical form" and as such generate anticipation among the periodical's readership, similar to serialised fiction, for how the discussion may continue into future issues.[126] I chose to focus on conflict and disagreement because of the simple fact that such correspondences most starkly challenge one-dimensional caricatures of the Women's Liberation Movement by highlighting that indeed negotiations about heterosexuality, class and race were widely circulated and debated. In order to trace these correspondences, I conceived of them as a serialised narrative with a beginning, but not necessarily with an end. This is because I do not consider these debates as resolvable, having an obvious "winner" and "loser," but rather as being essential discursive mediations for activating the women's movement. Additionally, by recirculating these communications in this research, I am introducing these debates back into the contemporary field of feminist negotiation with the hope of bridging intergenerational ruptures that came with the collapse of the Women in Print Movement in the 1990s.

[125] Carey Snyder and Leif Sorensen, "Letters to the Editor as a Serial Form," *The Journal of Modern Periodical Studies* 9, no. 1 (2018): 125. https://doi.org/10.5325/jmodeperistud.9.1.0123.
[126] Ibid.

I understand the letters discussed in this research as belonging to a unified, but broad, genre of correspondence which is principally characterised by its publication within the material infrastructure of the second wave feminist periodical communications network. Within this overarching genre there exist a variety of forms of letter-writing, such as open letters, epistolary articles, letters written by groups, personal disclosures and information-sharing letters. This research does not attempt to create or utilise a taxonomy of epistolary correspondence, rather, the focus throughout remains on how the periodical *form* facilitated serialised correspondence about contentious topics regardless of which sub-genre of correspondence the letter assumed. Moreover, I do not make distinctions between letter-writers who may have been more cognisant of the particular nuances of theoretical and contentious feminist debates and those who may have just joined into the discussion or were principally sharing personal experiences. While is it noteworthy at this stage to point out that second wave feminist periodicals did enable women to articulate their views regardless of previous involvement with or knowledge of the Women's Liberation Movement, a systematic grouping of each letter-writer's background is not within the scope of this thesis. Instead, this research concentrates on how the networked web of the second wave feminist periodical infrastructure enabled polyvocal and simultaneous expressions of feminism through a particular kind of considered rhetoric which, as is specified when relevant, sometimes included personal disclosures of the letter-writer's background.

Thus, the selection of periodicals for this research was predicated on a gradual identification of overarching disagreements and difficult correspondences, some of which transcend one particular periodical and re-emerge in other titles. In this sense, I envisioned my source material as a *networked* and *networking* infrastructure of communication, made up out of individual periodicals and energised by discursive engagement. In the end, I identified the following periodicals and their corresponding overarching themes of political disagreement and negotiation:

Periodical	**Theme**
• *off our backs* • *Shrew: The London Women's Liberation Workshop Newsletter*	Political Lesbianism Heterosexuality

• *Women's Information Referral and Enquiry Service* (*WIRES*)	
• *Red Rag: A Magazine of Women's Liberation* • *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement*	The Communist Party Problems in Feminist Collective Working Reconciling Socialism and Feminism Feminism in Northern Ireland and Europe Reproduction
• *Outwrite: Women's Newspaper* • *Spare Rib: A Women's Liberation Magazine* • *Trouble & Strife: A Radical Feminist Magazine* • *Revolutionary & Radical Feminist Newsletter* (*Rev/Rad*)	Anti-Semitism and Anti-Zionism Racism Editorial Responsibility Readership Constituency and Censorship

I organised the material chronologically, beginning in 1970 and ending in 1989, though this decision was made primarily for the purpose of clarity and not because there are any chronological time frames in which these debates fit into neatly. Additionally, I should note that the scope of this research resulted in much debate being omitted given the enormity of material produced as part of the second wave feminist periodical network.

Visualising a Feminist Communication Network

Amalgamating and compiling my source material involved scanning, transcribing and visually mapping the correspondences. I learned through trial and error that it was important to scan *all* of the pages of a particular issue, and not just the letter pages, as often subsequent communication would reference previous articles or editorials. Before the scanning process began, I conducted a superficial reading of each periodical's letter pages to identify a vague line of serialised disagreement. Once I had a scan of each relevant issue, I then conducted a deep reading of the letter pages and simultaneously started the process of manually transcribing each relevant letter. This served two purposes: one, it would allow for easy searchability of keywords which became particularly useful when the transcriptions became

extensive in length and number. Two, having transcriptions of each letter allowed me to number them for the purpose of creating a visual map. I initially drew these maps by hand (Figure 2) in order to get a sense of how each letter related to the overarching debate, in addition to identifying which letters, articles and/or editorials provoked the most response.

I subsequently used the software Gephi to digitally visualise these communications (Figure 3 and 4) by inputting the relevant data as "nodes" (in this case the letters, articles or editorials) and "edges" (the relationship between the nodes) into an excel sheet. This closely approaches a Social Network Analysis (SNA) methodology, which has its roots in the field of sociology and constitutes a broad approach for investigating social structures while prioritising patterns of relationality that connect individual actors. Feminist historian Michelle Moravec examines the potential limits of SNA for analysing feminist artists in her 2017 article "Network Analysis and Feminist Artists." Her research takes on two distinct projects, one of analysing the artist Carolee Schneeman's female correspondence network, and the other tracing the circulation of American feminist art manifestos. Moravec cites a lack of feminist artists' archives and limited amount of metadata as major reasons why her approach diverted from the initial SNA method. Going beyond the SNA model, Moravec "relied on alternative methods, abandoning anything that could be termed a rigorous use of network analysis."[127]

In the same way, I discovered that the application of SNA for mapping correspondences in second wave feminist periodicals was insufficient insofar as it did not capture the nature of the relationality between individual communications. In other words, my research goes beyond demonstrating that a network of correspondence existed, and instead attempts to draw out the particular rhetorical characteristics of disagreements which *periodicals* as a form facilitated and mediated. And so, although I abandoned any formal use of SNA, it nevertheless proved a useful method for organising and making sense of my source material informally. Additionally, such graphs confirmed my speculation that communication, through the printed circulation of the periodical, enabled a webbed network of debate.

[127] Michelle Moravec, "Network Analysis and Feminist Artists," *Artl@s Bulletin* 6, no. 3 (2017): 67.

Figure 1: "Mapping Makara" poster and magazine installation at the Vancouver Women's Library (Left) and scan of the "Mapping Makara" poster (Right), 2017

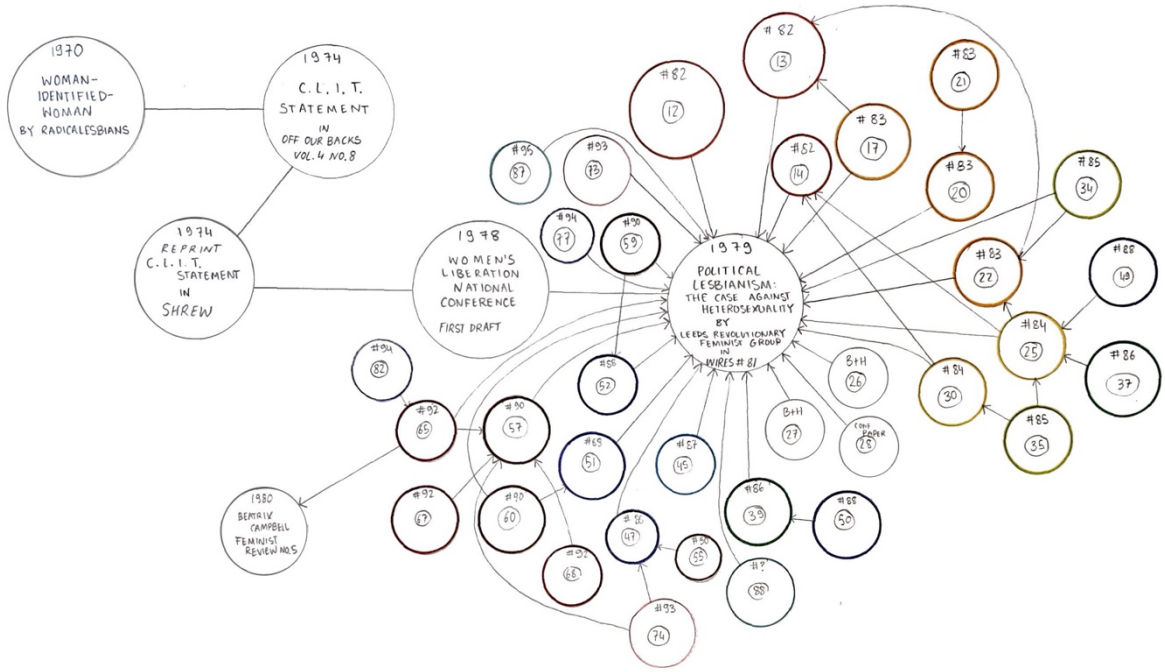

Figure 2: Hand-drawn visualisation of the unfolding debate on political lesbianism in Off Our Backs, Shrew and WIRES.

Figure 3: Visualisation made with Gephi showing the debate on Anti-Semitism and Anti-Zionism in Outwrite, Spare Rib, Revolutionary & Radical Feminist Newsletter, Trouble & Strife.

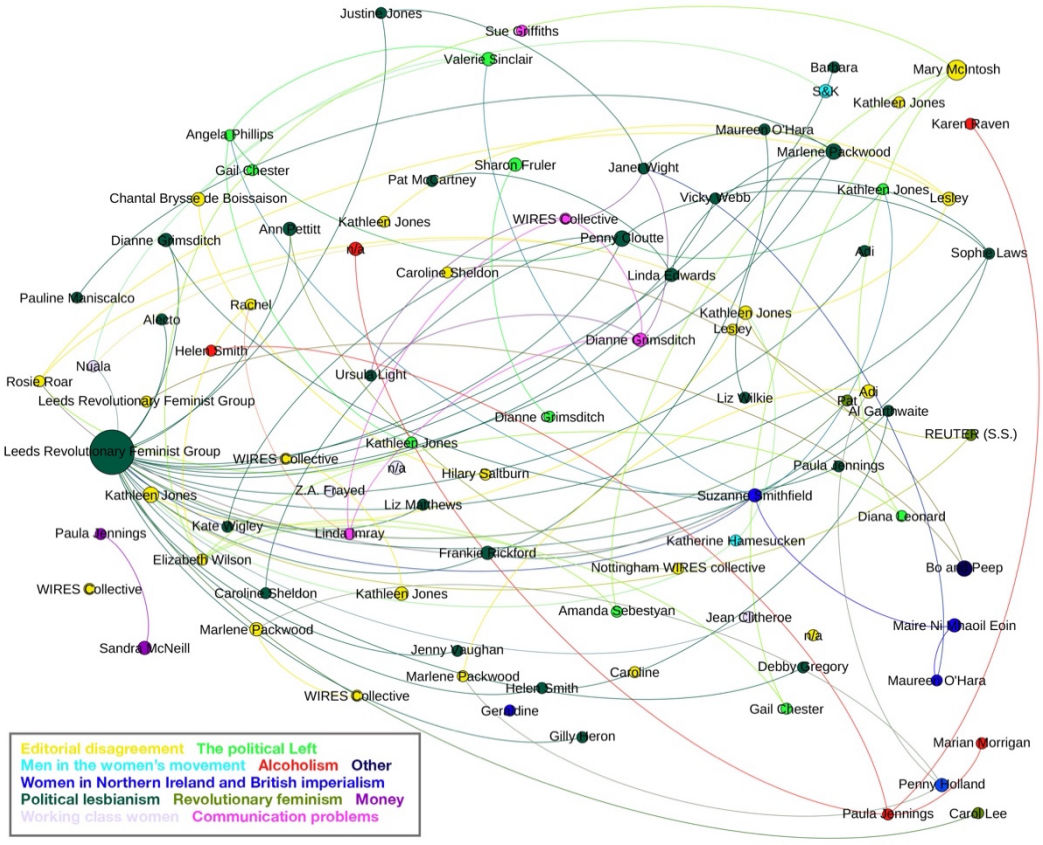

Figure 4: Visualisation made with Gephi showing a variety of simultaneous debates in WIRES.

Chapter 1: Political Lesbianism

1.1 Introduction

In 1979, the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group (LRFG) presented a paper titled "Political Lesbianism: The Case Against Heterosexuality" at the Revolutionary and Radical Feminist conference in Leeds. The paper was subsequently published in the periodical *Women's Information and Referral Enquiry Service* (*WIRES*) that same year, setting off a prolonged debate about heterosexuality and political lesbianism in its letter-to-the-editor pages. The central proposal in "Political Lesbianism" is that heterosexuality constitutes *the* fundamental subjugation of women by men (both personally and institutionally), and that lesbianism is a conscious choice women can make to avoid "collaborat[ing] with the enemy."[128] As documented in this chapter, the LRFG's proposal elicited responses from both heterosexual and lesbian women who regarded the paper as a personal attack as well as decidedly un-feminist.

Additionally, the paper emerged as part of the emergence of "revolutionary feminism" which was a distinctly British formulation of lesbian separatist ideas that had previously been circulating in the US. A culture of hostility towards lesbianism within the women's movement added to the factionalism between socialist, radical and revolutionary feminists that characterised much of the late 1970s. In their 1982 book *Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women's Liberation,* authors Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell both describe the "Political Lesbianism" paper as having "confounded an already depressed movement."[129] However, by focusing on the ensuing debate in *WIRES*' letter-to-the-editor pages, this chapter evidences how the feminist periodical form facilitated a discursive space in which women were able to participate in what was clearly a necessary debate that preceded the "Political Lesbianism" paper itself. Moreover, the correspondences covered here demonstrate how letter-to-the-editor pages enabled oppositional and heated negotiations about political lesbianism to be expressed through a rhetoric of mutual concern. These records add

[128] *Love Your Enemy? The Debate Between Heterosexual Feminism and Political Lesbianism* (London: Onlywomen Press, 1981). 7.
[129] Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell, *Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women's Liberation* (London: Picador, 1982). 225.

documentation of expansive and self-reflexive communication to the timeline of the debate surrounding political lesbianism.

1.1.1 Scope

This chapter chronicles the development of lesbian feminist ideas during the Women's Liberation Movement, with particular emphasis on the late 1970s and early 1980s during which the debate about political lesbianism was particularly contentious in the UK. I also provide historical context from 1968 onwards and chronicle how the American feminist periodicals *The Furies, NO MORE FUN AND GAMES* and *off our backs* (*oob*) enabled political lesbian theory to travel from the US to the UK, subsequently taking on a distinctly British formulation. Central to my investigation is the British periodical *Women's Information and Referral Inquiry Service* (*WIRES*), of which the letter-to-the-editor pages in issues 81-94 are examined in detail. Notably, these sources are also examined in historian Jeska Rees' 2009 article "'Taking Your Politics Seriously': Lesbian History and The Women's Liberation Movement in England."[130] While Rees' objective is to place these debates within the framework of lesbian history, the focus of this chapter instead remains on the rhetorical characteristics of the correspondences. In other words, though this chapter offers an overview of the development of political lesbianism, my principal aim is to assess the role of the feminist periodical *form* – with emphasis on letter-to-the-editor pages – in facilitating and circulating the debate.

1.1.2 Historical Context

During the 1970s and early 1980s, the Women's Liberation Movement generated an enormous amount of discursive material and feminist analysis about sexuality and lesbianism. These decades were characterised by such ground-breaking texts as Anne Koedt's 1968 pamphlet *The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm,* Jill Johnston's 1973 collection of essays *Lesbian Nation*, Shere Hite's 1976 report *The Hite Report: A Nationwide Study of Female Sexuality* and Adrienne Rich's 1980 essay *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian*

[130] Jeska Rees, "'Taking Your Politics Seriously': Lesbian History and the Women's Liberation Movement," in *Sapphists and Sexologists: Histories of Sexualities: Volume 2*, ed. Sonja Tiernan and Mary McAuliffe (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009).

Existence, among many others. The interconnected development of the Women's Liberation Movement alongside gay liberation struggles produced an often two-pronged hostile environment for lesbians, who on the one hand left mixed-sex organisations such as the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) after experiencing gay male culture as being "congruent with and a logical extension of straight male-supremacist culture,"[131] and on the other lesbians were met with hostility and suspicion in newly-formed Women's Liberation Movement organisations such as the National Organisation for Women (NOW) who considered lesbianism to be a distraction from the struggle for women's rights.[132]

In response to the suspicion levelled against lesbians by their fellow feminists, lesbian feminists began to develop and circulate a particular political position within the Women's Liberation Movement. Beginning in the US, lesbian feminists formed collectives and began distributing printed manifestos and essays in feminist circles, such as "The Woman Identified Woman" (1970) by Radicalesbians, numerous essays in the lesbian feminist periodical *The Furies* and the "C.L.I.T. Statement" (1974) published in the feminist periodical *off our backs* (*oob*). The overarching message found in this writing is a call for feminists to renounce "the prick in [their] head" and move towards prioritising women in all facets of life.[133] Anger and frustration were expressed towards "the straight press" which was argued to influence feminist ideas and encourage straight women to remain antagonistic towards lesbians as well as to allow male heterosexuality, suggested to be a central component in upholding male dominance, to go unchallenged.[134] The periodical format allowed for feminists to publish and express these ideas outside of the mainstream, or "straight" press, eventually making their way to the UK by means of *Shrew: The London Women's Liberation Workshop Newsletter*, which re-published the first instalment of the "C.L.I.T. Statement" shortly after it was first distributed in the US.

While many lesbians in the UK experienced a similar exodus from the British GLF, the trajectory of how lesbian feminist ideas spread in feminist circles in the UK took on significantly distinct iterations than it did in the American women's movement. By the mid-

[131] Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (New York: The Crossing Press, 1983). 144.
[132] Sheila Jeffreys, *The Lesbian Revolution: Lesbian Feminism in the UK 1970-1990* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2018). 22.
[133] "Editorials: Challenges," *Off Our Backs* 4, no. 8 (1974): 1.
[134] C.L.I.T., "Collective Lesbian International Terrors," *Off Our Backs* 4, no. 6 (1974): 16.

1970s many feminists in the UK were already familiar with and influenced by "The Woman Identified Woman" manifesto, resulting in "several sisters […] feeling the necessity to establish a separate Gay-Women's Group (along the lines of Radicalesbians, New York)."[135] In 1977 Sheila Jeffreys presented a paper titled "The Need for Revolutionary Feminism" at the National Women's Liberation Movement conference in London which was then re-printed the same year in the feminist periodical *Scarlet Women*. This marked the first recorded assertion for the need of "revolutionary feminism" which differentiated itself from radical or socialist feminism. Jeffreys argues in the paper that there has been a "liberal takeover of the women's liberation movement [*sic*]" by focusing solely on transforming sex-roles without transforming power imbalance.[136]

In other words, she asserts that men taking on their share of parenting work or domestic labour would not result in a transformative and liberated society for women, partly because this strategy is overly concentrated on "life-stylism" and personal choices rather than an upheaval of patriarchal power structures. The term "radical feminism," according to Jeffreys, had at that point been used to describe a broad range of positions and was therefore not useful to convey a particular set of ideas. The prefix "revolutionary," on the other hand, referred specifically to the concept of power being unequally distributed between men and women and was needed in order to "not just lump together the spectrum of apparently feminist demands […] as equally desirable."[137] She also makes the distinction between revolutionary and socialist feminism, arguing that the latter overemphasises the economic class system and ignores the sex class system:

> To be a socialist feminist, I would have to accept a unity of interests between myself and a group of men and to accept that my fear and humiliation come from capitalism and not men, and that I cannot do.[138]

Revolutionary feminism, on the other hand, put at the centre of its analysis an understanding of how male ownership of female reproduction is the basis of the exploitation of women and

[135] Al Garthwaite, "Interview" (2013) in Jeffreys, *The Lesbian Revolution: Lesbian Feminism in the UK 1970-1990*. 23.
[136] Sheila Jeffreys, "The Need for Revolutionary Feminism," *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement*, no. 5 (1977).
[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid.

that therefore no amount of "toilet cleaning men are constrained to" would prevent male desire to control female reproductive power.[139] Jeffery's paper inspired many women to call themselves revolutionary feminists, resulting in the founding of the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group (LRFG) as well as the first synchronised Reclaim the Night march in November 1977, organised by Al Garthwaite, a founding member of LRFG.[140]
Though revolutionary, radical and socialist feminism all share many axes of analysis in common, revolutionary feminism is particularly relevant in the context of this chapter as it combined both a *separatist* philosophy, that is "women working together without men" in order to "affirm their political accord not connected to any male," as well as an emphasis on *practical* actions to organise against male violence against women.[141] Revolutionary feminists were particularly unafraid of exposing men as the enemy and have been described as "vehement separatists who declared war on men."[142]

The combination of separatism and the understanding of men as the principle oppressive sex-class, influenced by earlier American writing on lesbian feminism, shaped the conditions in which the LRFG wrote the highly debated 1979 paper "Political Lesbianism: The Case Against Heterosexuality." Echoing much of what the American feminists had previously addressed, coupled with an urgent call for practical action in response to male violence against women, the paper argued that all feminists (and indeed women) should become *political lesbians* by refusing to associate with men – whether that be sexually or politically. It argued that cutting off male sexual access to and control over women's bodies would be fundamental challenge to the primary site of female oppression and would additionally free up women to allocate their time more efficiently for the political feminist cause. Most controversially, the paper characterised heterosexual women as "collaborators" with the patriarchy because of the perceived privileges that come with male association, though the LRFG later clarified that the word collaborator was "the wrong word to describe women who sleep with men, since this implies a conscious act of betrayal."[143] The paper was intended as a workshop paper for the 1979 Revolutionary and Radical Feminist conference in Leeds, following the 1978 National Women's Liberation Movement conference in Birmingham

[139] Ibid.
[140] Finn MacKay, "Reclaiming Revolutionary Feminism," *Feminist Review*, no. 106 (2014): 97. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24571941.
[141] Susan Hawthorne, *In Defence of Separatism* (North Geelong: Spinifex Press, 2019). 68.
[142] Eve Setch, "The Face of Metropolitan Feminism: The London Women's Liberation Workshop, 1969-79," *Twentieth Century British History* 13, no. 2 (2002): 187. https://doi.org/10.1093/tcbh/13.2.171.
[143] *Love Your Enemy? The Debate Between Heterosexual Feminism and Political Lesbianism*. 66.

during which tensions between revolutionary and socialist feminists arose that have been subsequently characterised as having "fragmented" the women's movement.[144]

It would be tempting for feminist historians to characterise tensions between heterosexual (predominantly socialist-leaning) and lesbian (predominantly revolutionist-leaning) feminists during these decades as being unbreachable and having had a negative impact on the Women's Liberation Movement, and indeed this has been covered in some depth already (Rees 2010; Campbell, 1980). While such research is necessary and important, particularly in highlighting the significant anguish experienced by many feminists in attempting to reach a consensus, it would be wrong to conclude that this is evidence of failure. It is only by examining the letter pages in feminist periodicals, where much political negotiation about lesbians in the movement were taking place, that a fuller and more nuanced picture emerges. Tracing these disagreements within feminist periodicals demonstrates that a primary function of these publications was to provide a necessary discursive forum through which to express and articulate differences between women. Evident in these letters are calls for more discussion and a general rejection of "final word" arguments. Even in Jeffrey's first 1977 articulation of revolutionary feminism, she makes clear that her "ideas are a fraction of the debate around the idea of sex-class and are meant to promote discussion. If I have trodden on any toes, it is in the hope of provoking a response."[145] The LRFG "Political Lesbianism" paper was published in 1979 in issue 81 of the *Women's Information Referral and Enquiry Service* (*WIRES*) newsletter which resulted in a drawn-out, complex and detailed discussion of political lesbianism in the letter pages of the newsletter.

1.2 American Export: tracing the origins of political lesbianism from the US to the UK

1.2.1 Radicalesbians and "The Woman Identified Woman"

Against the backdrop of the countercultural 1960s in the US, gay rights and gay liberation movements grew alongside the emergence of the New Left, civil rights and anti-war causes. Largely male-dominated, these movements posed a particular dilemma for lesbians, or what

[144] Angela Weir and Elizabeth Wilson, "The British Women's Movement," *New Left Review* 1, no. 148 (1984): 78.
[145] Jeffreys, "The Need for Revolutionary Feminism."

Shane Phelan calls the "conceptual annexation" from the articulation of problems faced uniquely by lesbians.[146] Being limited to taking on appendage roles within the gay rights movement, comprising largely of secretarial duties, meant that many lesbians sought alliance in the rising women's movement. However, the demand for a lesbian feminist political position within foundational feminist groups such as the National Organization for Women (NOW) was met with resistance from the beginning. In her now infamous book *The Feminine Mystique,* the NOW co-founder Betty Friedan described the surge of lesbian feminism as "the lavender menace" and that it "was threatening to warp the image of women's rights."[147] Lesbians were either completely left out of official feminist organisations such as NOW, which in its foundations was primarily concerned with the heterosexual dynamic, or they were treated as prospective sexual partners by women who were curious to sexually experiment. Neither treatment took seriously the political implications of lesbian feminism. This led to some prominent lesbians, like the author of *Rubyfruit Jungle* Rita Mae Brown, to resign from NOW and storm the stage of the 1970 Second Congress to Unite Women with T-shirts emblazoned with "Lavender Menace,"[148] claiming that the Executive Committee saw lesbianism as a divisive and unimportant issue which would negatively impact the public image of the organisation.[149]

During Brown's resignation and protest in 1970, a manifesto was distributed among the conference attendees which was written by a New York group called Radicalesbians. The manifesto titled "The Woman Identified Woman" came as a challenge to Friedan's and NOW's suspicion towards lesbians. It is one of the first attempts within the Women's Liberation Movement to express a lesbian-feminist political position that is also open to heterosexual women and argues that lesbianism (like male homosexuality) is only possible because of how rigid sex roles work to uphold male supremacy. In other words, "in a society in which men do not oppress women, and sexual expression is allowed to follow feelings, the categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality would disappear."[150] Such an articulation offers an understanding of the political significance of how lesbian sexuality is positioned in

[146] Shane Phelan, *Identity Politics: Lesbian Feminism and the Limits of Community* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989). 37.
[147] Toby Marotta, *The Politics of Homosexuality* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1981), quoted in Phelan, *Identity Politics*. 40.
[148] Rees, "'Taking Your Politics Seriously': Lesbian History and the Women's Liberation Movement," 94.
[149] Phelan, *Identity Politics: Lesbian Feminism and the Limits of Community*. 38.
[150] Radicalesbians, "The Woman Identified Woman," (1970): 1. Duke University Libraries' Women's Liberation Movement Print Culture Archive, accessed 29 September, 2021, https://repository.duke.edu/dc/wlmpc/wlmms01011.

relation to oppressive patriarchal structures, or the "master caste of men."[151] Further, the paper highlights how the word "lesbian" or "dyke" is often used as a slur towards women who do not conform to traditional feminine roles because such a woman could not possibly be a "real woman," as the essence of being a woman is, cynically suggested by the Radicalesbians manifesto, "to get fucked by men."[152] Taking this analysis further, then, the group argues that women fear being sexualised by lesbians to the same extent in which they are dehumanised by men, but without any of the benefits of male-identified compensations such as his status or protection from other men. This acceptance of male cultural conditioning is observed as having made its way into the women's movement and shows the internal difficulty of moving beyond a male system of classification, a problem which would later be expressed by Audre Lorde when she asks "what does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy?"[153] The Radicalesbian manifesto describes how many feminists go to great lengths to avoid any discussion of lesbianism and attempt to subsume it under broader issues, similar to when feminist author Susan Brownmiller characterised lesbian concerns as a "lavender herring."[154] In response, the authors call for an urgent reconceptualization:

> Until women see in each other the possibility of a primal commitment which includes sexual love, they will be denying themselves the love and value they readily accord to men, thus affirming their second-class status. […] In the privacy of our own psyches, we must cut those cords to the core. For irrespective of where our love and sexual energies flow, if we are male-identified in our heads, we cannot realize our autonomy as human beings.[155]

Central to "The Woman Identified Woman" is the positioning of lesbian feminism as a method for women to resist male-definition and reclaim personhood. The alternative, for the Radicalesbian group, is a continuation of understanding oneself as an "empty vessel," filled only through male-identification, leading to further alienation and self-hatred:

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[151] Ibid. 1.
[152] Ibid. 2.
[153] Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," (1984) in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Freedom: The Crossing Press, 2007). 110-11.
[154] Marotta, *The Politics of Homosexuality*. 236n, quoted in Phelan, *Identity Politics*. 40.
[155] Radicalesbians, "The Woman Identified Woman," 2-3.

> As long as women's liberation tries to free women without facing the basic heterosexual structure that binds us in one-to-one relationship with our oppressors, tremendous energies will continue to flow into trying to straighten up each particular relationship with a man, into finding how to get better sex, how to turn his head around – into trying to make the "new man" out of him, in the delusion that this will allow us to be the "new woman."[156]

Radicalesbians call for a new woman-identified consciousness in order to develop female autonomy and resist coercive identification with men. Crucially, the manifesto argues that heterosexuality is the primary site of male control over women and should be rejected if women are to achieve personhood. The paper is one of the earliest articulations in the Women's Liberation Movement of centring a lesbian feminist political position as being the condition for women's liberation and, ultimately, lays the groundwork for subsequent expressions of political lesbianism to develop.

1.2.2 *The Furies* and *NO MORE FUN AND GAMES*

In 1971, a year after the Radicalesbian paper was circulated, a collective of twelve lesbians established the lesbian separatist group *The Furies* in a communal house in Washington, D.C.. An identically named periodical was launched by the group in 1972 which became an essential medium through which to engage in dialogue with other lesbian feminist groups and spread the early ideas of political lesbianism. Rita Mae Brown, the same woman who resigned from NOW two years earlier due to a lack of engagement with lesbian concerns, expressed her analysis in an essay in the first issue of *The Furies*, titled "Roxanne Dunbar: How a Female Heterosexual Serves the Interests of Male Supremacy." It was a response to the activist and historian Roxanne Dunbar's 1972 essay "The Movement and the Working Class" in the Massachusetts-based women's liberation journal *NO MORE FUN AND GAMES.* Brown's main criticism of the article is that Dunbar "puts us all in the same pot" by subsuming the lesbian movement under the New Left while also claiming that lesbians represent a bourgeoise ideology.[157] Dunbar's exact words were that:

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[156] Ibid. 4.
[157] Rita Mae Brown, "Roxanne Dunbar: How a Female Heterosexual Serves the Interests of Male Supremacy," *The Furies*, January (1972): 5.

> Nothing could be further removed from the consciousness of a working woman with children than the 'freedom' to be a Lesbian.[158]

Brown is clearly hesitant to make a criticism in the first place, suspecting that "there are women and men who will lick their lips at the prospect of one woman raised in the working class criticizing another."[159] Nevertheless, Brown continues her criticism by pointing out that the lesbian movement has earlier beginnings than the New Left, quoting the political rights group Daughters of Bilitis, formed in 1955, as one of the first iterations of a lesbian civil and political rights organisations in the US. Brown counters the claim that the lesbian movement is removed from class politics by pointing out that many working class women in her circles have doubled their work output since coming out as lesbian: "they are free from having their energies drained by struggles with individual men or with men in groups. Now they pool their energies with other women and have that much more time for political work."[160] In addition, Brown takes issue with Dunbar's view that lesbianism is simply a "bedroom issue" and her refusal to consider it a political ideology, which, in Brown's view, is evident of "classic heterosexual blindness."[161] Here Brown articulates what would later be repeated in many British iterations of political lesbianism, namely that:

> Lesbianism is the greatest threat to male supremacy that exists. […] If all women were Lesbians male supremacy would have the impossible task of maintaining itself in a vacuum.[162]

Brown argues that the white, rich, male ruling class preserves its power by encouraging working class men to participate in a system of division and fear that motivates them to maintain control over women, and in particular lesbians, preventing any meaningful unity against "The Big Man." She goes on to draw attention to the way in which Dunbar's assertions about lesbians keep working class men from realising the ways in which sexism most benefits the ruling class male: "the only people who effectively challenge those oppressive actions are Lesbians, and Roxanne, a woman, legitimizes male power by writing

[158] Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, "The Movement and the Working Class," *NO MORE FUN AND GAMES* (1972) quoted in Brown, "Roxanne Dunbar: How a Female Heterosexual Serves the Interests of Male Supremacy," 5.
[159] Brown, "Roxanne Dunbar: How a Female Heterosexual Serves the Interests of Male Supremacy," 5.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid.

off Lesbians."[163] In Brown's view, the encouragement to work alongside working class men, or men in general, delegitimises women's liberation struggle because it poses no threat to the ways in which men rely on the servitude of women to construct their sense of self. The tension between lesbians and heterosexual women is evident when she says that "this same process holds for straight women. As long as they do male supremacy's dirty work and keep Lesbians down, Lesbians must leave the straight women to wallow in a cesspool of their own making."[164] This relates back to the criticism of the assertion that sexuality is merely a personal choice rather than a political one, as Brown argues that this framing allows straight women to continue supporting collective male supremacy by "holding onto male values and privileges" and in turn subverting the efficacy of the women's movement.[165]

Working class lesbians, therefore, are more willing ideologically and politically to work in a mixed class women's movement instead of alongside the male-dominated working class struggle. Brown asks, "why work with someone who derides your oppression or who actively surpresses [*sic*] you with another brand of Marxist intellectualism?"[166] Nevertheless, Brown insists that the lesbian movement is necessarily socialist, but that a socialist movement does not always work against the specific oppression of women, and that therein lies the tension between herself and Dunbar. She ends her criticism by pointing out that there is a crucial difference between lesbians and *political lesbians*, i.e. those who have committed themselves beyond the female sexual relationship and are instead advocating for the political liberation of all women. Brown's articulation of these ideas demonstrates a significant shift from understanding lesbian sexuality as a merely personal choice, located outside of the dominant women's movement. Instead, she continues the work of the Radicalesbian paper by placing lesbianism at the centre of the women's liberation struggle and demonstrates how *The Furies* collective and periodical provided a theoretical foundation upon which later British iterations of political lesbianism were formulated.

[163] Ibid.
[164] Ibid. 6.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Ibid.

1.2.3 The "C.L.I.T. Statement" in *off our backs*

Remaining in the US, in 1974 the women's liberation periodical *off our backs* (*oob*), also based in Washington, D.C., took on the issue of political lesbianism. In 1973, *oob* printed a short essay by Charlotte Bunch who was a collective member and writer of *The Furies*. In it, she uses the concept of "woman identified woman" as laid out by the Radicalesbians paper to make sense of sexuality and male supremacy, thereby demonstrating a direct line of thought as having continued on from 1970. Bunch goes on to elaborate on her own interpretation of the woman identified woman, deviating slightly from the original paper by writing that "I don't mean to say that lesbianism itself is the answer to the women's liberation movement," but that the strength of political lesbianism lies in reframing consciousness for a female community as political, not just personal.[167] She highlights that it is not merely lesbian sexuality which is important to discuss, but instead the power lies in questioning women's passive positioning in institutions such as the family or the job market, foreshadowing what Adrienne Rich would later say in her 1980 articulation of compulsory heterosexuality and its institutional capture (Rich, 1980). Similar ideas had also been introduced in Jill Johnston's 1973 book *Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution*, in which she argues that the logical solution to liberating women from patriarchal subjugation is *lesbian separatism*, and that "if you're not part of the solution you're part of the problem."[168] Notably, certain passages in *The Lesbian Nation* were originally published in the American alternative newsweekly *The Village Voice,* which Johnston describes as a "vehicle for [her] stylistic outrages and journeys into consciousness."[169] While this speaks to the way in which the generic periodical *form* provided a generative outlet for Johnston's formulation of lesbian separatism, other lesbian feminists regarded male-owned publications such as *The Village Voice* as detrimental to the women's movement, discussed further below.

The *oob* coverage of political lesbianism continued in May 1974 with a series of essays by a New York lesbian-separatist group called the Collective Lesbian International Terrors (C.L.I.T.). This series, titled "C.L.I.T. Statement," outlined and expanded arguments for political lesbianism similar to those made by Rita Mae Brown two years earlier. It began with just a one-page feature in the May 1974 issue of *oob* and was described by the C.L.I.T.

[167] Charlotte Bunch, "Lesbian Feminist Politics," *Off Our Backs* 3, no. 7 (1973): 17.
[168] Jill Johnston, *Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973). 181.
[169] Ibid. 7.

collective as a "counterattack" to "recent media insults against Lesbians."[170] The emphasis of the article was for lesbian feminists to become active thinkers and producers of ideas, rather than remaining passive consumers: "this is a beginning step in demolishing the 'creative artist' or 'writer' mystique that separates and inhibits us, giving some the role of active 'star' while the rest remain the passive audience."[171] The goal was also to fill a void in what is described as a literary and political scene lacking the lesbian perspective, and to discourage lesbian feminists from publishing in the "straight press" in order to prevent having their ideas co-opted by the liberal umbrella. The authors call for a "divorce" from the "mind-fucking and co-optation" of the Male News Front and to instead "create a network and atmosphere that Lesbians would not even consider writing in the straight press."[172]

The "C.L.I.T. Statement" continued in *oob* in July 1974, this time spanning over 11 pages. It was introduced in the editorial as having generated "individual and collective internal anguish" within the periodical's collective, noting that one member at the time of publication still maintained that the statement implies that straight women are potential men and wrongly frames them as the enemy.[173] Still, the *oob* collective decided to publish the statement as they recognised "the importance of dykes communicating with dykes and the fact that such communication is possible neither through the straight media nor most of the alternative papers."[174] The editorial goes on to describe how the *oob* collective feared dissolution in coming to terms with the "C.L.I.T. Statement" and that individual defensiveness and intimidation distorted both the interpretation of the statement and made mutual understanding difficult. Still, they asserted that through these discussions emerged new insights and sense of self for individual members, and that the "C.L.I.T. Statement" is a "tool for analysing, understanding and exorcising the patriarchy in our souls, our heads, and our lives."[175] The editorial concludes that whether the statement offends or ignites its readers, in both cases it provides the potential for moving closer towards becoming "woman-defined" and "woman-loving."[176] This framing alludes to the notion that *debate*, not unified agreement, is what produces the transformative conditions for both personal and political growth. By inviting active input from its readers, feminist periodicals like *oob* facilitated what literary scholar

[170] C.L.I.T., "Collective Lesbian International Terrors," 16.
[171] Ibid.
[172] Ibid.
[173] "Editorials: Challenges," 1.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Ibid. 10.
[176] Ibid.

Kathryn Thoms Flannery calls a process of reshaping "what would constitute legitimate and politically effective knowledge."[177] In other words, although the "C.L.I.T. Statement" clearly provoked difficult discussion between *oob*'s editorial collective members, it is precisely this *discursiveness* which was considered generative and which the periodical form could stimulate by encouraging correspondences from readers.

The full statement consists of an introduction and seven individually written essays, covering topics which range from criticising straight women, to the medicalisation of women, class divisions, economic co-optation, sado-masochism and the film industry, to personal painful reflections and finally a pleading call for women to prioritise other women. While the themes and issues addressed are far-reaching, there are two commonalities and key messages identifiable throughout. The first overarching feature of the statement is an uncompromising criticism of the "Media State," contending that the media foresaw the threat posed by the existence of radical movements and in turn appropriated the language of feminism to describe stereotyped feminine behaviour, thereby attempting to portray the Women's Liberation Movement as a road to "sexual liberation."[178] The introductory pages define the "Media State" as an extension of patriarchal ideology which attempts to control communication and language:

> Since men have been taking women's language apart for millennia and rendering it utterly meaningless slop, it comes as no surprise that the Media State has gunned down feminist language by misuse, overuse, diffusion and defusion. [*sic*] The Media State has taken the language of the Women's Movement and distorted it so terribly that women in the movement even misuse it.[179]

The statement, accordingly, makes a deliberate attempt to stray away from what is termed "male language."[180] One strategy to achieve this is the use of pseudonyms throughout the individual essays such as "electra shocka cocke" and "oedipussy tuddé." The authors say that they do not want to make a name for themselves or to have their thoughts bought off by magazines like *Bitch*: "they aren't going to ask Oedipussy Tuddé to write for them, are

[177] Kathryn Thoms Flannery, "Going Public with Pandora's Box: Feminist Periodicals," in *Feminist Literacies 1968-75* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2005). 25.
[178] C.L.I.T., "C.L.I.T. STATEMENT #2," *Off Our Backs* 4, no. 8 (1974): 11.
[179] Ibid. 12.
[180] Ibid.

they?"[181] In addition, they state that the ownership of thinking of ideas as commodities in the marketplace which can be owned and stolen is a male attitude, therefore using pseudonyms can instead encourage ideas "floating from one woman to the next without money signs, a male concept, attached."[182] The introduction also specifies *lesbians* as being the audience, and that consequently tedious "male fashion" ways of explaining straight-forward ideas can be avoided because women can intuitively grasp what is being communicated.[183]

In one of the individual essays, titled "Fashion Politics and the Fashion in Politics," attributed to "oedipussy tuddé," the concept of political co-optation is taken further and labelled "Ec(cop)tation," or economic co-optation. The author suggests that even if a woman has an original idea or insight, the Media State "moves in quickly to redefine the insight into patriarchal, controllable language, i.e., to distort the original perception to the public."[184] This then neutralises the original message while also making the thinker feel that she has successfully communicated her argument. As an example, the author describes how women resisted criticising other women publicly in order to quell negative media stories about the women's movement. She claims that, meanwhile, women writers were commissioned to write anti-woman "prick papers" in publications like the *New York Times* and *Village Voice.*[185] Because many women vowed not to criticise other women, then, the word "feminist" was quickly diluted: "See what I mean about Media pricks taking any insight, realization, perception we learn about our oppression and turning it around thus make a more sophisticated mindfuck for us to be confused over?"[186]

Another central component to the statement is the criticism of heterosexual women. One of the more contentious essays is "Straight Women" attributed to the pseudonym "snake." The main argument being made in this essay is that straight women are actually men in disguise, in the sense that they are subject to false consciousness: "straight women are in the strategic position, being disguised as women, to carry out such tasks as information gathering and tactical diversion."[187] One can see here why the statement was so contested within the *oob* collective, however, the editorial makes clear that the "straight woman" is interpreted by

[181] Ibid.
[182] Ibid.
[183] Ibid. 13.
[184] Ibid. 17.
[185] Ibid.
[186] C.L.I.T., "C.L.I.T. STATEMENT #2," 18.
[187] Ibid. 13.

them as being "directly proportional to the extent of the prick in her head," thereby acting more as a metaphor than a literal accusation.[188]

Addressing similar concerns of internalised male-identification is another essay by "oedipussy tuddé" titled "The Agent Within." The author contends with the effects of male socialisation which she describes as learning "male values, attitudes, and rules of behaviour that function to maintain the patriarchy."[189] She terms this process "MALe-FUNCKTALIZATION," referring to the "MAL-Function of the Ovarian Intellect," (original emphasis) and argues that this renders policing by the state unnecessary because MALe-FUNCKTALIZED women have a cop inside their heads that creates an existential tension between the self and a punishing male conscience.[190] This process begins with the free labour of housewives and mothers who, in their own state of male-identification, pass the same ideas onto their daughters and then self-destruct after they have raised their children. The author dubs this the function of the "straight woman who has been living inside her for years," the internal agent "who will cook for her killers and dig her own grave out of politeness."[191] Here the metaphorical use of the "straight woman as an agent" is perhaps clearer as the author specifies that the patriarchy works both from the outside in, sabotaging the women's movement through overt actions, as well as from the inside out, socialising women into being agents against themselves. In making this claim, the author attempts to emphasise how the Media State convinces women that her tastes are personal and original, rather than a consequence of, for example, where she falls on the social ladder. Implied is that sexuality is often considered a personal choice and invites the "straight woman agent" to manifest inside women's heads. Therefore, through the deliberate embodiment of political lesbianism, women can resist alienation from themselves by prioritising "the woman inside us and the women around us."[192]

The "C.L.I.T. Statement" demonstrates that the early articulations of political lesbianism in the US constituted an attempt, out of necessity, to carve out a language and theory for lesbian feminists. Neither the male-dominated Left (within which many lesbian feminists were active), nor the Women's Liberation Movement (where lesbian feminists sought alliance),

[188] "Editorials: Challenges." 1.
[189] C.L.I.T., "C.L.I.T. STATEMENT #2," 15.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Ibid. 15.
[192] Ibid. 16.

were accommodating to the particular problems faced by lesbians. As such, political lesbianism incorporated both an analysis of male supremacy and class politics, in addition to criticisms of how women themselves upheld the principles of patriarchal dominance. The "C.L.I.T. Statement" is an example of how – through the process of formulating a political lesbian position – lesbian feminists recognised that, without sufficient knowledge of class or sexual politics, the Women's Liberation Movement was in danger of creating a new consumer class: the liberated woman. The authors make no concessions in their use of language and show the seriousness with which the issue was approached. The statement ends with an impassioned plea for women to drop their alliance to the male Left and loyalty to heterosexual relationships, promising further collections of essays, and asking "serious dykes" to begin communicating with them in the hope of creating "the inevitable free-wheeling and bad-assed Witchy Woman World."[193] Responses to the statement in subsequent letter-to-the-editor pages were overall positive and grateful. Interestingly, in the October 1974 issue of *oob*, "some London Separatists" wrote a letter to "express the support, felt by many women here, for the article by the CLIT women."[194] One can only speculate if these were indeed the same women who then brought the statement into the pages of UK feminist periodicals and began the discussion of political lesbianism in the British context.

1.2.4 Existing Tensions and New Ideas in the UK

The tension between heterosexual and lesbian feminists was already present in the UK in the early 1970s. The second national conference of the Women's Liberation Movement in Skegness in 1971 saw the issue emerge when a group of Maoist women classified lesbianism as a "bourgeois deviation,"[195] after which several women walked out in protest, in some ways repeating the events of the Second Congress to Unite Women in the US the year before.[196] One of the founders of the National Women's Aid Federation, Jalna Hanmer, highlighted in an interview that during this time anti-lesbian sentiment was levelled against feminist organisations in an effort to discredit them: "we couldn't let be known that there many [*sic*] lesbians in Women's Aid. […] I think everyone felt that people would say, 'oh if you go

[193] Ibid. 22.
[194] C.L.I.T. "C.L.I.T. Response: Dear Sisters," *Off Our Backs* 4, no. 10 (1974): 27.
[195] Beatrix Campbell, "A Feminist Sexual Politics: Now You See It, Now You Don't," *Feminist Review*, no. 5 (1980): 14. https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.1980.9.
[196] Janet Dixon, "Separatism: A Look Back at Anger," in *Radical Records (Routledge Revivals): Thirty Years of Lesbian and Gay History, 1957-1987*, ed. Bob Cant and Susan Hemmings (Milton Park: Routledge, 2010). 44.

there, those lesbians will get you', that sort of thing."[197] Women faced the dilemma of renouncing lesbianism or to go further and challenge the stigma against lesbians at the potential cost of negative publicity. In 1974 the issue of lesbianism was at its height when the first National Lesbian conference was organised in Canterbury and around 300 women attended. Sheila Shulman recalled that the conference "was meant to be a recognition of our presence and the necessity for women to confront their own sexuality – for heterosexual women to confront their own sexuality."[198] She also noted that the "Woman Identified Woman" paper by Radicalesbian "was the credo at that point" for reflecting the lesbian experience.[199] One of the central outcomes of the lesbian conference was the formulation of a resolution to send to the fourth National Women's Liberation conference to be held in Edinburgh later that same year. The resolution stated that lesbianism is "the largest undiscussed issue in the women's movement" and petitioned the upcoming conference to devote an afternoon of small workshops to force women to deal with the subject.[200] Out of the Edinburgh conference came the passing of the movement's sixth demand: "An end to all discrimination against lesbians and a woman's right to define her own sexuality."[201] Underlying this demand, for some lesbians, was the assumption that if feminists confronted their own sexuality, they would naturally become lesbians, though the "should" didn't arrive until the introduction of the "C.L.I.T. Statement" later that year to the pages of one of the major UK feminist periodicals, touched on further below.[202]

In her re-telling of the emergence of lesbian separatism in the Women's Liberation Movement in the UK, Janet Dixon describes how many lesbians, herself included, felt exhaustion and frustration from working with men and consequently began leaving the Gay Liberation Front in 1972 in favour of women-only organising.[203] She credits the "C.L.I.T. Statement" as providing a language and analysis for UK feminists to articulate this position: "it wasn't until we read the American CLIT papers […] that we knew we had a name other

[197] Jalna Hanmer, "Interview Transcript," (2004): 8, quoted in Rees, "'Taking Your Politics Seriously': Lesbian History and the Women's Liberation Movement," 96.
[198] Sheila Shulman and Lynn Alderson, "Writing Our Own History 1: When Lesbians Came out in the Movement," *Trouble and Strife*, no. 1 (1983): 53.
[199] Ibid.
[200] Ibid. 52.
[201] Linda Bellos, "The Seven Demands of the Women's Liberation Movement 1971-1978," 2017, accessed 23 September, 2021, https://www.lindabellos.co.uk/single-post/2017/11/03/the-seven-demands-of-the-womens-liberation-movement-1971-1978.
[202] Shulman and Alderson, "Writing Our Own History 1: When Lesbians Came out in the Movement."
[203] Dixon, "Separatism: A Look Back at Anger." 46.

than men-haters."[204] This confirms Thoms Flannery's assertion that the production process of the feminist periodical involved both writers (in this case the authors of the "C.L.I.T. Statement") teaching themselves a new political language and, by making their formulations visible, other readers "could in turn teach themselves."[205] Dixon's account not only speaks to the practical function of the feminist periodical in moving political negotiations from the US to the UK, it also evidences how the feminist periodical could be experienced as a location of identification with evolving political languages and analytical frameworks.

After many conversations with other feminists on the topic of separatism, Dixon decided that the most effective way to communicate the lesbian position was to circulate the "C.L.I.T. Statement" in *Shrew: The London Women's Liberation Workshop Newsletter*: "we thought that if women wanted to know about separatism they could read this, and then leave us in peace."[206] However, after *Shrew* re-printed the "C.L.I.T. Statement" in November 1974, it "engendered such a hostile response" from its readers that the periodical "chose not to print the remaining chapters after only the third instalment."[207] Readers took particular issue with the claim that straight women were in fact men in disguise, and in 1980 the writer Beatrix Campbell described it in *Feminist Review* as a "toxic diatribe" that became a "destructive force" which split the women's movement.[208] While the *oob* collective had concluded that the "straight woman" was intended more as metaphor than direct attack, the readers of *Shrew* seemed less willing to agree with that interpretation.

1.2.5 Confrontations at the Seventh National Women's Liberation Conference in Birmingham, 1978

The seventh National Women's Liberation conference, held in Birmingham in 1978, is often characterised as marking an irretrievable split between socialist and the newer revolutionary feminists, in which the latter advocated for a political lesbian position.[209] Eight national Women's Liberation Movement conferences were held in the UK between 1970 and 1978,

[204] Ibid. 48.
[205] Thoms Flannery, "Going Public with Pandora's Box: Feminist Periodicals." 25.
[206] Dixon, "Separatism: A Look Back at Anger." 49.
[207] Finn Mackay, *Radical Feminism: Feminist Activism in Movement* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). 66.
[208] Campbell, "A Feminist Sexual Politics: Now You See It, Now You Don't," 14.
[209] See Rees 2010 for more detailed accounts from the 1978 National Women's Liberation conference that highlight feelings of alienation, guilt, and claims that the splits during the conference prompted a decline in participation in the women's movement.

during which a list of demands were discussed and passed. Reflecting on the purpose of these demands, Zoë Fairbairns says that the "advantage of having a list of clear demands was that it provided an answer to the frequently asked question, 'What do feminists want?'"[210] The first five demands were expressed as:

1. Equal Pay.
2. Equal educational and job opportunities.
3. Free contraception and abortion on demand.
4. Free 24-hour nurseries.
5. Legal and financial independence for all women.[211]

However, the Birmingham conference began with a petition by the revolutionary feminists to abolish the demands altogether "as it is ridiculous for us to demand anything from a patriarchal state – from men – who are the enemy."[212] It was decided that any decision relating to the abolition of the demands would be deferred to the next year's conference and the attention focused on the addition of the seventh demand which went through several iterations before landing on the following:

7. Male violence against women is an expression of male supremacy and political control of women. Freedom from intimidation by threat or use of violence or sexual coercion, regardless of marital status and an end to all laws, assumptions and institutions which perpetuate male dominance and men's aggression towards women.[213]

While the addition of this demand passed by a majority vote, it was immediately amended to exclude the first sentence about male supremacy, as this was considered to locate the problem of violence against women solely in men and not in a class divided society. This was met with outrage and protest from revolutionary feminists who wished to incorporate the term

[210] Zoë Fairbairns, "Saying What We Want: Women's Demands in the Feminist Seventies and Now," in *The Feminist Seventies*, ed. Helen Graham et al. (York: Raw Nerve Books, 2002). 10.
[211] Sisterhood and After Research Team, "Women's Liberation: A National Movement," 2013. The British Library, accessed 23 September, 2021, https://www.bl.uk/sisterhood/articles/womens-liberation-a-national-movement.
[212] Lesley, "Report from Plenary," *Women's Information and Referral Enquiry Service*, 48 (1978), quoted in Rees, "A Look Back at Anger: The Women's Liberation Movement in 1978," 347.
[213] Jeska Rees, "A Look Back at Anger: The Women's Liberation Movement in 1978." Women's History Review 19, no. 3 (2010). https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2010.489343.

"male supremacy" and clearly position men as responsible, though the amendment was nevertheless passed. The agenda of the conference passed several other resolutions pertaining to working-class women and women on the island of Ireland, leaving discussion of the sixth demand until the end of the conference which led to some lesbian women heckling and pulling away the speakers' microphones. The sixth demand, passed in 1974, was argued to be confusing:

> 6. An end to all discrimination against lesbians and a woman's right to define her own sexuality.[214]

The second half (the right to a self-defined sexuality for all women) supposedly obscured the first half (an end to discrimination against lesbians). Proposals to split the demand were passed, despite abstentions due to a confusion about the implications of the vote, and it was decided that the second half would *precede* all of the demands. It remained unclear how this new non-demand related to the rest of the list, but by that time the plenary's time had expired and the conference ended, leaving women feeling distressed and split.[215] As Jeska Rees writes in her 2010 investigation of the conference "A Look Back in Anger," most recollections of the conference have been written by socialist feminists who are quick to blame revolutionary feminists for the introduction of disunity and lack of good will. However, in tracing the way in which the articulation of political lesbianism moved from the US to the UK, and then took on its own formulation, it becomes clear that these divisions cannot be argued to solely have arisen during the revolutionary feminists' protest at the 1978 conference, but rather remained lingering and unaddressed for some time in various circles of the women's movement. Instead of isolating this ideological split to the conference proceedings, the *Women's Information and Referral Enquiry Service* (*WIRES*) periodical allowed for the discussion to continue in the years following.

[214] Bellos, "The Seven Demands of the Women's Liberation Movement 1971-1978."
[215] Ibid. 349.

1.3 "Political Lesbianism: The Case Against Heterosexuality," 1979

1.3.1 *Love Your Enemy?*: A Collection of Letters

The story of how political lesbianism came to be discussed in the US, and then subsequently in the UK, is also a story about the function of the feminist periodical. As detailed above, the format and serialisation of the periodical allowed *The Furies* collective to articulate early lesbian feminist ideas, and the *oob* periodical then made these emerging ideas available to a wider feminist audience. Though the seeds of political lesbianism were already present in the UK, it wasn't until *Shrew* attempted to print the "C.L.I.T. Statement" that the potential for further discussion within UK periodicals was seriously considered. However, by deciding not to publish the full statement because of negative reactions, a conversation in *Shrew* about the tensions between lesbians and heterosexual women was cut short.

In 1981, the UK feminist publisher Onlywomen Press published a booklet concerning the debate between heterosexual feminism and political lesbianism titled *Love Your Enemy? The Debate Between Heterosexual Feminism and Political Lesbianism.* The tension hinged around the central question of whether feminists should abandon heterosexual relationships and instead consider political lesbianism as a way to more authentically embody feminist principles. The discussion began to unfold in a 1979 conference paper by the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group titled "Political Lesbianism: The Case Against Heterosexuality," but it didn't gain traction until it was published in issue 81 of the Women's Liberation Movement newsletter *Women's Information and Referral Enquiry Service* (*WIRES*) that same year. Over the next fourteen issues of *WIRES*, an extensive dialogue unfolded in the letter-to-the-editor pages that considered the various arguments around political lesbianism which the original conference paper first put forth. The fact that Onlywomen Press sought it to be important to publish a collection of these letters highlights the discursive relevance of feminist periodicals in mediating a discussion internal to the movement. In their opening statement, Onlywomen Press states that "we are publishing this pamphlet because we think the discussion among feminists about political lesbianism is important" and that the debate "generated so much interest and feeling that we wanted to make the arguments available in a more permanent form."[216] This not only indicates that

[216] *Love Your Enemy? The Debate Between Heterosexual Feminism and Political Lesbianism*. 3.

feminist who were contemporaries to the discussion understood letter-to-the-editor pages as a discursive space, but also that it would be significant to collect and sequence various oppositional arguments in a medium that was perhaps less ephemeral and scattered than newsletters.

A public statement from the Onlywomen Press collective, made up out of all lesbian members, is included towards the end of the booklet, after which each collective member summarises her own account of the tensions between heterosexual and lesbian feminists. They clarify that:

> In publishing this pamphlet we were especially concerned to publish what women actually wrote, to promote genuine dialogue, in the hope of avoiding the growth of a mythology where twisted versions of other women's words become more current than the original.[217]

What is notable here is that letters to the editor are considered to be contributions which face little to no editorial intervention and can therefore counter any temptations to make generalisations about various feminist positions. This reflects cultural studies professor Margaretta Jolly's understanding of feminist letter-writing, which she argues can effectively demonstrate "the puzzle of how to create genuine coalition and community across political gulfs of race or class or sheer differences of temperament."[218] The collective statement goes on to describe the struggle as on the one hand acknowledging that lesbianism is not a blanket solution to patriarchal oppression, but that on the other lesbian voices have been previously ignored by heterosexual women on this issue. Therefore, while there may be valid criticisms of political lesbianism, the unfolding of oppositional arguments is nevertheless understood to be crucial. The collective sums up their position as follows:

> This is to talk of a re-orientation much more profound than the relatively simple process of sleeping with different people: an internal shift from male-identification to woman-identification.[219]

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[217] Ibid. 55.
[218] Jolly, *In Love and Struggle: Letters in Contemporary Feminism*. 4.
[219] *Love Your Enemy? The Debate Between Heterosexual Feminism and Political Lesbianism*. 57.

1.3.2 The Four Tenets of Heterosexuality

The original paper by the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group first sparked the ensuing debate, identifying four aspects of heterosexuality which are argued to be inherently oppressive to women. Their definition of a political lesbian is a "woman-identified woman who does not fuck men. It does not mean compulsory sexual activity with women."[220] The first argument in favour of why all feminists should be political lesbians contends that the mechanism by which patriarchal power is upheld is reliant on controlling female sexuality. The assertion here is that patriarchy is the only system in which the oppressor "invade[s] and colonise[s] the interior of the body of the oppressed."[221] In other words, it is through heterosexuality, which is argued to involve an inherent dynamic of domination and submission, that the fundamental subjugation of women is upheld.

The second argument addresses the political structure of the heterosexual couple. The heterosexual relationship is described as a power structure that upholds inequality between men and women. Because individual women are subservient to individual men, it is argued be a much more efficient way of controlling a group as opposed to geographical separation:

> It is more efficient by far than keeping women in ghettoes, [*sic*] camps or even sheds at the bottom of the garden. In the couple, love and sex are used to obscure the realities of oppression, to prevent women identifying with each other in order to revolt, and from identifying 'their' man as part of the enemy.[222]

This formulation is similar to Adrienne Rich's 1980 concept of "compulsory heterosexuality," notably published around the same time. Rich's analysis focuses on heterosexuality as an institution,

> organized and maintained through the female wage scale, the enforcement of middleclass women's 'leisure,' the glamorization of so-called sexual liberation, the

[220] Ibid.
[221] Ibid.
[222] Ibid. 6.

> withholding of education from women, the imagery of 'high art' and popular culture, the mystification of the 'personal' sphere, and much else.[223]

She argues that the question of whether to condemn *all* heterosexual relationships is the wrong one as it creates a false dichotomy between "good" and "bad" individual choices and leaves the institutions of power without criticism. Her solution is to challenge the economic and political institutions that maintain the traditional "family" model as an idealised economic relation in order to protect unequal sexual divisions of labour. The Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group paper, while also arguing that the political structures of male supremacy are maintained through heterosexuality, goes further by attempting to outline an ontological criticism of heterosexuality as a whole.

This brings us to the third and fourth arguments which deal with the act of penetration by the penis. The central argument here is that penetration is not necessary for female (or male) sexual pleasure. This position, however, did not arise in a vacuum but rather emerged from a burgeoning development of new feminist understandings of female sexuality. In 1976, sex researcher Shere Hite published the now infamous *The Hite Report: A Nationwide Study of Female Sexuality* in which 3500 women filled in questionnaires about their experiences of sex and pleasure. The report attempted to debunk Freudian ideas of the "vaginal orgasm" and showed that only 30% of the women reported having regular orgasms from intercourse.[224] *The Hite Report* was one of the first major studies based on individual women's experiences to challenge the notion that women require being penetrated by a penis to experience orgasm. The research made enough of an impact for *Playboy* to condemn and label it as "The Hate Report."[225] Hite confirmed what radical feminist Anne Koedt had alluded to in her essay *The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm* several years earlier in 1968.[226] Koedt challenged one of the foundational tenets of heterosexuality, namely that the female orgasm is exclusively attained through vaginal penetration. She instead embraced clitoral stimulation as the site of female pleasure and, without linking it to heterosexual or lesbian relations, argued that it presented

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[223] Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs*, vol. 5 (1980): 659.
[224] Letitia Anne Peplau, "The Hite Report: A Nationwide Study on Female Sexuality," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (September 21, 1977): 87. https://doi.org/10.1177/036168437800200103.
[225] Julie Bindel, "Shere Hite Obituary," *The Guardian*, September 15, 2020.
[226] *The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm* was first written as a four-paragraph essay in *Notes from The First Year,* published by the group Redstockings in 1968. A revised and more extensive version then appeared in *Notes from the Second Year*, published by the group New York Radical Women in 1970. Finally, *The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm* was published on its own in 1970 by New England Free Press.

the possibility for a new understanding of female sexuality. Several other feminists, including Ti-Grace Atkinson, Germaine Greer and Rita Mae Brown, wrote about the meaning of sexual pleasure for women during this time.[227] It is in this context, then, that the critique of penetration as an ontological dilemma emerges in the "Political Lesbianism" essay.

The third argument addresses the medical advances of contraception, noted as often tedious or dangerous, and the ways in which these have enabled a renewed focus on vaginal penetration. This is argued to coerce women to have penetrative sex more often, maintained through the involvement of doctors and marriage guidance counsellors. The essay contends that this is a predictable backlash to the newly achieved advances for women:

> As more women are able to earn a little more money and the pressures of reproduction are relieved, so the hold of individual men and men as a class over women is being strengthened through sexual control.[228]

What follows is perhaps the most characteristic assertion of the essay, the fourth argument, which outlines the ways in which penetration is a symbolic act of punishment and control through which the oppressor enters the body of the oppressed. The sexual revolution of the 1960s is criticised as having disguised the fact that penetration benefits men primarily. The essay goes further than just considering rape an act of control and violence, but instead contends that:

> We have all heard men say about an uppity woman, 'What she needs is a good fuck.' This is no idle remark. Every man knows that a fucked woman is a woman under the control of men, whose body is open to men, a woman who is tamed and broken in.[229]

In other words, every act of penetration is argued to embolden the oppressive power dynamic and to reinforce the class power of men. As will become apparent during the ensuing debate, this quickly became the most contested argument of the original essay. Following this last point, the next section includes "Questions and Comments" in which the authors anticipate

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[227] Jane Gerhard, "Revisiting 'the Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm': The Female Orgasm in American Sexual Thought and Second Wave Feminism," *Feminist Studies* 26, no. 2 (2000): 449. https://doi.org/10.2307/3178545.
[228] *Love Your Enemy? The Debate Between Heterosexual Feminism and Political Lesbianism*. 6.
[229] Ibid.

rebuttals and attempt to answer them. One of the tensions they expect will arise is that readers will interpret the essay as an attempt to frame heterosexual women as the enemy, to which they answer that while *men* are the enemy, heterosexual women are collaborators:

> Every woman who lives with or fucks a man helps to maintain the oppression of her sisters and hinders our struggle.[230]

Additionally, the authors clarify that even non-penetrative sexual relationships with men reinforce class power and should be boycotted. The refusal of heterosexuality is compared to the act of boycotting certain products or luxuries from a socialist feminist perspective in order to better support the cause of class liberation and anti-capitalism. This echoes the now famous statement by Ti-Grace Atkinson "feminism is the theory and lesbianism is the practice," insinuating that political lesbianism is an act of protest.[231] Anticipating the criticism that boycotting involves a certain level of security and privilege to begin with, the authors strongly refute that choosing to live outside of heterosexual relationships is a privilege:

> Living without heterosexual privilege is difficult and dangerous. Try going into pubs with groups of women or living in a women's house where youths in the street lay siege with stones and catcalls.[232]

The authors concede that lesbian relationships are not without their difficulties, but importantly distinguish that the struggles between women are not impeded by superior sex-class positioning. Nevertheless, they draw attention to the fact that the issue of political lesbianism in the UK cannot be directly appropriated from its most visible origins in the US:

> The lesbian dream of woman-loving, bare-breasted, guitar-playing softballers, gambolling on sun-soaked hillsides is more suited to California, supposing it bears any resemblance to reality, than to Hackney.[233]

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[230] Ibid. 7.
[231] The first written record of this statement is in Abbott and Love 1972, in which the authors describe Atkinson addressing the lesbian group Daughter of Bilitis in a speech in 1970, saying "feminism is a theory; but lesbianism is a practice." The statement as quoted above is attributed to Atkinson in Koedt 1973. See Taylor and Rupp 1993 for further documentation.
[232] *Love Your Enemy? The Debate Between Heterosexual Feminism and Political Lesbianism*. 8.
[233] Ibid. 8-9.

Still, the principles of political lesbianism are argued to be fundamental to cultivating honest and direct communication between women, since the imagination of heterosexual women may be "blocked by concern for her man and his brothers."[234] Expecting that some readers may describe this as guilt-tripping, the authors argue that:

> Guilt-tripping is used to prevent women from telling the truth as they see it and from talking about hard political realities. It is you, heterosexual sisters, who are guilt-tripping us.[235]

Already, the emotive tensions have become visible through a direct address to the reader: "you, heterosexual sisters." This publication encapsulates a culmination of the previous years' discussion on political lesbianism in the UK, and therefore existing disagreements already influenced these anticipated counterarguments. The essay concludes by pointing out that not all lesbians are indeed *political* lesbians, as many of them work closely with men on the left and are therefore "not woman-identified and gain privileges through associating with men and putting forward ideas which are only mildly unacceptable to male left ideology."[236] At its core, political lesbianism is posited as a direct challenge to the organisation of patriarchal power, most visible in heterosexual relationships. To reverse the Ti-Grace Atkinson statement: if patriarchy is the theory, then heterosexuality is the practice.

"Political Lesbianism" identifies four main tenets of how heterosexuality allows for the stronghold of patriarchal principles: female sexuality as the primary site of control, the heterosexual couple as an institutional method to embed male supremacy into the foundations of society, the remnants of the sexual revolution and the increasing pressure for women to have more penetrative sex, and the ontological problematisation of penetration as inherently oppressive and symbolic of patriarchal control. While the ideas were not novel to the essay, and indeed were written to a backdrop of increasing discussions around female sexuality and lesbianism, it is the periodical format in which it was published that enabled a surge of diverging opinions to be considered. In the afterword of the pamphlet, the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group explains that they "were asked to put the paper in *WIRES* because it had sparked off discussion, and women at the conference wanted other women to

[234] Ibid. 9.
[235] Ibid.
[236] Ibid.

join in with the original paper available to them."[237] The following section traces the various letters that were sent in as reactions to the above arguments in order to demonstrate the function of the feminist periodical not only as a mediator of disagreement, but as a forum through which feminist ideas could be openly discussed and developed.

1.4 The Replies

While the *Love Your Enemy?* pamphlet includes the majority of letters that were sent as responses to the essay "Political Lesbianism," a few letters were excluded because the Onylwomen Press collective could not make contact with the author to ask for her permission. In addition, several of the letters were marked with a star to indicate that they had been edited for length. Nevertheless, most of the letters span several pages and could be considered analytical essays in their own right. Most of the responses were published in the periodical *Women's Information and Referral Enquiry Service* (*WIRES*), however there are some inclusions from other sources such as the *Brighton & Hove Women's Liberation Newsletter*, a paper given at the Leeds conference on Sexual Violence Against Women, the *Birmingham Women's Liberation Newsletter*, as well as direct letters to the Onlywomen Press collective. In the third issue of *WIRES*, published in 1975 (several years before the "Political Lesbianism" essay would appear), it issued a plea to women that "THIS IS YOUR Newsletter. USE IT !!" (original emphasis), signalling that from its inception the periodical was geared towards communication and information contributed by readers.[238]

Furthermore, although this chapter deals exclusively with letters relating to political lesbianism, other simultaneous discussions were unfolding in *WIRES* that addressed topics including sending money to feminist groups such as Women Against Imperialism to pay for fines faces by Armagh women in Northern Ireland instead of spending it on National Women's Liberation conference fees, the role of the male Left in the movement, issues of alcoholism and incest, debates about whether the terms "working-class" and "middle-class" undermine a sex-class analysis, and the distinction between radical and revolutionary feminism (as unpacked in the introduction of this chapter). This is best evidenced by the social network mapping of these letters (Figure 4), which demonstrates visually how

[237] Ibid. 66.
[238] Statement in *Women's Information and Referral Enquiry Service, no.3 (1975): 11.*

disagreements about political lesbianism were embedded within a webbed network of communication and debate. The thematic variety of these simultaneous debates within *WIRES'* letter-to-the-editor pages illustrates how the periodical format can act as a "mediating object," as first noted by Victoria Bazin and Melanie Waters, and can thereby problematise singular stories of feminist history.[239] For this section the focus will remain with letters that responded specifically to the "Political Lesbianism" essay in order to reveal how the forum offered by the *WIRES* periodical allowed for complex debates to unfold.

1.4.1 Longing for Communication

The first letters responding to the "Political Lesbianism" paper appear in issue 82 of *WIRES*, published in 1979. A letter signed by Carol Lee begins by expanding on one of her previous letters in which she criticised the behaviour of revolutionary feminists at conference proceedings, though she also reflects that the language of her previous letters had potentially been "too harsh" and perhaps she was wrong about her stance.[240] Nevertheless, she explains that she "wrote to WIRES in an attempt to enter into a political discussion as [she] did not know of another suitable venue" and that "we will always have disagreements and must preserve the space to air them," demonstrating that writing letters to *WIRES* was considered essential for expressing differences internal to the movement.[241] She ends her letter by asking the revolutionary feminists in Leeds to respond with "what they feel we can do, if anything to restore the trust between us as sisters and allies in our struggle to be free," which signals an eagerness to use the pages of *WIRES* to continue the discussion and potentially reach some sort of consensus.[242]

Another letter featured in issue 82 of *WIRES* is written by a woman named Frankie Rickford. She begins her letter by stating that the essay offended and angered her, and yet feels "glad they wrote it and Wires [*sic*] printed it because those ideas have been hanging around for years but have never been stated so baldly before."[243] While she clearly disagrees with the content of the essay, there is a recognition that the publication of it is useful for the purposes

[239] Bazin and Waters, "Mediated and Mediating Feminisms: Periodical Culture from Suffrage to the Second Wave," 347.
[240] Carol Lee, "Dear Sisters," *Women's Information and Referral Enquiry Service*, no. 82 (1979).
[241] Ibid.
[242] Ibid.
[243] Frankie Rickford, "Dear Wires," *Women's Information and Referral Enquiry Service*, no. 82 (1979).

of unpacking and discussing the arguments. Frankie states that while she is a lesbian, she also trusts that heterosexual women can develop close relationships with other women. Although she agrees that penetrative sex is an "unquestioned pinnacle," "oppressive to women and tailored to men's interests," all possibilities for heterosexual women to explore other alternatives is "killed stone dead" by the assertions that any sexual activity outside a lesbian framework justifies excluding women from the movement.[244] Frankie's interpretation of the essay is that it reinforces the divisions between heterosexual and lesbian women with "abstract theory instead of communicating with each other - confronting [the divisions] in a way that MEANS something to our own conscious experience of our different lives, and builds on those experiences."[245] In the afterword by the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group, however, it is stated that:

> "Political Lesbianism" was written very quickly in a high energy brainstorming session one evening, for discussion at a Revolutionary and Radical Feminist Conference. It reflected some discussions our group had had, but in a very condensed form. This was because we knew that we would be able to expand and unpack these ideas in workshops at the conference.[246]

In other words, the essay functioned as a position paper, originally drafted for presentation at a conference, and was intended for further discussion. Arguably it *did* originate out of mutual communication between lesbians who did not feel otherwise able to express their ideas. This mirrors what the Onlywomen collective implies in their collective statement by outlining that "the heterosexual response to lesbian feminist utterances has been sometimes so defensive as to prevent hearing what we say."[247] Frankie's letter, as well as the publication of the original essay, is in many ways evidence of previously unsaid differences beginning to unfold and thereby fulfilling her wish for more communication.

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[244] Ibid.
[245] Ibid.
[246] *Love Your Enemy? The Debate Between Heterosexual Feminism and Political Lesbianism*. 66.
[247] Ibid. 55.

1.4.2 Expanding Criticisms

The letters that follow in issue 83 of *WIRES*, published in 1980, take several different positions on the topic of political lesbianism and mark the beginning of an extensive back-and-forth between readers.[248] A letter signed by Maureen O'Hara specifically responds to Rickford's letter, as detailed above, and claims that Rickford misrepresented the aims of the "Political Lesbianism" essay. In O'Hara's view, the essay's primary impetus was to construct an analysis about why men are the political enemy of women, not to make requirements for ostracising heterosexual women. In contrast to Rickford, she understands the essay "as a contribution to that discussion, and not as an attack on heterosexual women" and qualifies this by pointing out that she herself was sceptical when she first encountered political lesbianism.[249] She ends her letter by thanking other women for challenging her views on heterosexuality and that at no point did she interpret this as a personal attack.

Such statements highlight the capacity of feminist periodicals to encourage what the author of the 1976 handbook *Constructive Criticism* Gracie Lyons calls the ability of criticism to "consciously transform ourselves."[250] Lyons emphasises that well-expressed criticisms "help clarify differences" instead of obscuring them "in a fog of personalizing and defensiveness."[251] O'Hara's letter demonstrates how negotiations in feminist periodicals resulted in a *development* and *expansion* of ideas relating to sexual politics. However, a letter by Ann Pettitt in the same issue shows that this view was not held unanimously. Pettitt claims that the "Political Lesbianism" essay directly contravenes the (by then annexed) sixth demand for women to have the right to a self-defined sexuality and calls it a "patronising, arrogant piece of rubbish," demanding an explanation from *WIRES.*[252] In response, the *WIRES* collective of Nottingham, which had published the periodical in previous years, directly responded to Pettitt by asking her to "expand on her objections" and defended the decision by the acting *WIRES* collective to publish she essay, without fully agreeing with its content.[253]

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[248] All subsequent issues of *WIRES* discussed in this chapter were also published in 1980.
[249] Maureen O'Hara, "Dear WIRES," *Women's Information and Referral Enquiry Service*, no. 83 (1980).
[250] Lyons, *Constructive Criticism: A Handbook*. 15.
[251] Ibid. 34.
[252] Ann Pettitt, "Dear Wires," *Women's Information and Referral Enquiry Service*, no. 83 (1980).
[253] Nottingham *WIRES* Collective, "We Support," *Women's Information and Referral Enquiry Service*, no. 83 (1980).

Another letter of the same issue, written by Sophie Laws, agrees with Rickford's criticism of the "Political Lesbianism" essay and states as her main objection the lack of personal openness by its authors: "I think that a little openness about their own feelings about their own lives would be far more interesting than all these pronouncements about everyone elses' [*sic*]."[254] She asks for clarity about why no names were put to the original essay and argues that more personal reflection would make for a more compelling analysis. These exchanges demonstrate that while women were not hesitant in criticising each other's interpretations, such criticisms were often accompanied by requests to expand or continue the discussion. This reflects what Bazin and Waters see as the potential for feminist periodicals to refuse to "plug historical gaps" by problematising the notion that the second wave of feminism had a unified, singular position.[255] Instead, these letters show how women came to challenge what Jolly calls the "illusions that women's unification will be magical or easy."[256] It is particularly the call for more responses, answers and clarifications that indicate how letter-writing within *WIRES* confronted any perceived ideological dogma.

In response to O'Hara's letter, a woman named Penny Cloutte writes to issue 84 of *WIRES* and contends that one of the central flaws of the "Political Lesbianism" essay is, in her view, the lack of explicit reasoning for why heterosexual sex results in male supremacy. Cloutte also states that she is in agreement with Laws and intends to expand on her argument by making an observation that there seems to be an emphasis on religious loyalties *to* the movement, rather than understanding it as a useful framework for liberation. She states that she was afraid of getting her head "bitten off" for expressing her views, but that previous criticisms had encouraged her to do the same.[257] Instead of simply expressing her disagreements, she also attempts to articulate her hopes for moving forward: "I want to understand better how we as women can support each other, but also of how we as women oppress each other," thereby deliberately leaving room for subsequent letters to broaden her comprehension of the issue, despite her initial hesitation.[258] Another letter in issue 84, written by a woman named Suzanne Smithfield, expresses enthusiasm about the discussion surrounding political lesbianism and suggests that "it's a good thing that we are starting to

[254] Sophie Laws, "Another Criticism of the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Paper - 'Political Lesbianism,'" *Women's Information and Referral Enquiry Service*, no. 83 (1980).
[255] Bazin and Waters, "Mediated and Mediating Feminisms: Periodical Culture from Suffrage to the Second Wave." 347.
[256] Jolly, *In Love and Struggle: Letters in Contemporary Feminism*. 70.
[257] Penny Cloutte, "Dear Sisters," *Women's Information and Referral Enquiry Service*, no. 84 (1980).
[258] Ibid.

question the ways in which we can take away the servicing we provide to men."[259] This mirrors O'Hara's interpretation that the "Political Lesbianism" essay is principally concerned with constructing an understanding of how the oppression of women is maintained. Smithfield also conveys her appreciation for the *WIRES* collective for allowing contentious discussions to unfold, despite having "received quite a lot of shit in the process."[260]

Other letters that demonstrate the value of the periodical as a networked infrastructure of communication can be seen in parallel writing in the *Brighton & Hove Women's Liberation Newsletter*, a much smaller localised periodical, in which a letter signed by Adi argues that the "Political Lesbianism" essay is only *one* iteration of the issue. She contends that "confusion is necessary" and that instead of taking certain statements as "the 'last word' on a subject," patience should be adopted in order to allow women to formulate their thoughts without compromising their ideas in fear of "alienating other women."[261] The periodical, then, is instilled with the ultimate responsibility of enabling the emergence of new political articulations to evolve through letter-writing between women. Advocating for a similar *opening*, rather than *closing,* of the discussion is a woman named Vicky Webb in issue 85 of *WIRES.* She says that she "would like the debate around heterosexuality – the way it has been and can be used to divide women and to mask their common oppression as women – to continue."[262] In addition, she argues that the criticisms of political lesbianism have mostly focused on the *tone* of the original essay, and that it is a discussion about its *contents* on which she would like to see further communication.

Several other letters in *WIRES* express a desire for broadening and advancing the exchanges about political lesbianism. In issue 88, a woman named Jenny Vaughan wrote a decidedly critical letter regarding revolutionary feminists and what she described as "psychological and emotional violence" being inflicted on heterosexual women by other feminists in the Women's Liberation Movement.[263] Even so, Vaughan insists that her position is not the only valid one: "I'm writing in the hop [*sic*] that other women will take up the discussion where I leave off."[264] Al Garthwaite, one of the co-authors of the original "Political Lesbianism"

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[259] Suzanne Smithfield, "Dear W.I.R.E.S.," *Women's Information and Referral Enquiry Service*, no. 84 (1980).
[260] Ibid.
[261] *Love Your Enemy? The Debate Between Heterosexual Feminism and Political Lesbianism*. 18.
[262] Vicky Webb, "Dear Wires," *Women's Information and Referral Enquiry Service*, no. 85 (1980).
[263] Jenny Vaughan, "Dear WIRES," *Women's Information and Referral Enquiry Service*, no. 88 (1980).
[264] Ibid.

essay, wrote a response to Vaughan in issue 90 of *WIRES* to clarify her position that the essay does not advocate for the pressuring of heterosexual women into lesbian relationships. Similarly to Vaughan, Garthwaite ends her letter by leaving room for opening up the conversation: "This is not my final, worked out theory but hopefully, part of a continuing discussion."[265] In issue 92 of *WIRES*, a woman named Liz Wilkie wrote a letter that exemplifies how women were working out their position in the process of letter-writing: "My ideas are very wooly and unsure cos [*sic*] I've never written them down before."[266] She goes on to question whether her relationships with men are in and of themselves an unintended criticism of lesbian separatism, but that she also never felt alienated by lesbians in attempting to work out her analysis. Wilkie credits a previous letter by Marlene Packwood for sparking her reflections and ends by expressing some uneasiness about sending them in for publication: "If I dont [*sic*] post this today, I'll chicken out. I've been glad of a chance to write this. Thanks Marlene for making me do it. I hope more of us will improve on it."[267] While the issue being discussed was clearly charged and provoked nervous feelings, the medium of *WIRES* and its enabling of letter-writing between women supported the articulation of these feelings as well as the formulation of ideas that, in their often opposing stances, acted as catalysts for further responses.

1.4.3 Confessions and Vulnerabilities

WIRES also allowed for the expression of very personal confessions between women that were engendered by the "Political Lesbianism" essay. In issues 86 and 88 of *WIRES* an exchange between a woman named Dianne Grimsditch and a woman named Paula Jennings exemplifies a heightened sense of self-reflexivity and sensitivity in which political disagreement can be approached through the letter-writing process. Grimsditch wrote in to communicate her feelings of pain and anguish after reading the essay, prompted by her judgment that the discussion around political lesbianism has nothing to do with her and made her feel increasingly excluded from the movement. She also reflects on her observations about how many heterosexual women behave insensitively towards lesbians and often keep quiet about lesbianism in order to remain popular among their male peers. Nevertheless, she is resistant to what she considers pressure to come out as a lesbian and defends her right for

[265] Al Garthwaite, "Dear WIRES," *Women's Information and Referral Enquiry Service*, no. 90 (1980).
[266] Liz Wilkie, "Dear WIRES," *Women's Information and Referral Enquiry Service*, no. 92 (1980).
[267] Ibid.

self-affirmation, though in the process of doing so asks for generosity of spirit from other women: "I hope all the women who read this splurgle [*sic*] will do and not just categorise me and dismiss me as a repressed lesbian or whatever."[268] In response, Jennings, who describes herself as a lesbian separatist, re-read Grimditch's letter several times before responding in order to properly understand what she was saying. Jennings also acknowledges Grimsditch's feelings of anguish by commending her courage to write a letter to *WIRES* despite believing she would be rejected. The letter by Jennings opens with a personal account of how she felt enraged by cold responses from lesbians when she was in a heterosexual relationship, but that this painful challenge helped her grow and begin "loving in ways that [she] could not have foreseen."[269] She also differentiates between supportive and disrespectful criticism, arguing that the former is only possible if sincerity and commitment is present and that many lesbians cannot forgive "their own previously heterosexual selves" which then carries on through the often harsh criticism of other women.[270] Jennings draws on Grimsditch's claim that political lesbianism has nothing to do with her and pleads with her to "please say more" (original emphasis).[271] She ends with a call for more heterosexual women to respond to the "Political Lesbianism" essay and reassures Grimsditch that she is just as much part of the movement as any other woman. This exchange demonstrates that the medium of the feminist periodical can support disagreement which Bazin and Waters describe as "affectively charged" but "by no means fatal."[272]

Such personal exchanges, however, do not come without risk. While *WIRES* was intended solely for reading among women, this by no means guaranteed that it did not reach men as well. In Grimsditch's initial letter, she specified that it was written "for women and for women only and if I ever discover any man has read this piece of my soul, I'll invoke all the curses I can" and that "men are irrelevant."[273] In issue 88 of *WIRES*, Grimsditch wrote in to recollect that shortly after the letter was published, she received an intimidating phone call from what she describes as a woman's voice, threatening the following: "We're going to have the privilege of sorting you out. We're going to show you how feminists treat women like

[268] Dianne Grimsditch, "Maybe This Will All Seem," *Women's Information and Referral Enquiry Service*, no. 86 (1980).
[269] Paula Jennings, "Dear Diane (Grimsditch)," *Women's Information and Referral Enquiry Service*, no. 88 (1980).
[270] Ibid.
[271] Ibid.
[272] Bazin and Waters, "Mediated and Mediating Feminisms: Periodical Culture from Suffrage to the Second Wave," 351.
[273] Grimsditch, "Maybe This Will All Seem."

you."[274] Whether the caller was indeed another feminist, or a male orchestrator, or simply a woman in disagreement with the movement's aims, remains unclear. However, considering the possibility of another feminist levelling threats against Grimsditch, several women wrote in demanding that "some reactions would be welcome – preferably in open letters, not with a knuckle-duster"[275] and asking "the women who threatened Dianne Grimsditch [to] explain why in an open letter to WIRES."[276] These calls for more letters exemplify how highly the readers of *WIRES* considered the function of the letter pages and that personal attacks outside the forum, if indeed coming from mutual feminists, were thought to be off-limits. This incidence also exhibits how it is difficult for such a periodical to enact boundaries around the fragile ecosystem of a feminist readership without limiting diverging expressions, and that therefore it can easily be compromised.

A perceived breaching of the boundaries around a women-only readership is evident in issue 92 of *WIRES*, when a woman named Linda Edwards wrote in to convey her anger at an article by Beatrix Campbell in *Feminist Review*. Campbell had written a critical exposé of political lesbianism to an audience which was considered open to male readers by other feminists: "[The article] completely slags off radical feminist politics in a journal which is freely available to men."[277] Feminist periodicals such as *WIRES*, in contrast, were typically made up out of subscribers from National Women's Liberation Conferences and made no attempts to build alliances with other political movements. Edwards took particular issue with Campbell's claim that political lesbianism is "undemocratic" and that radical feminists had appropriated lesbianism, but it was the positioning of this article within a more mainstream journal that sparked off Edward's feelings of anger. However, this interpretation of Campbell's article was not unanimous.

In issue 94 of *WIRES* Pat McCartney wrote that while she "may not be able to put [her] case as coherently as Linda Edwards," Campbell's article expressed concerns shared by other feminists which had previously not yet been stated.[278] In McCartney's view, there existed a "closed shop feeling"[279] around the topic of political lesbianism and that the prevailing

[274] Dianne Grimsditch, "Dear Wires," *Women's Information and Referral Enquiry Service*, no. 88 (1980).
[275] Ursula Light, "Dear Sisters," *Women's Information and Referral Enquiry Service*, no. 90 (1980).
[276] Janet Wight, "Dear Sisters," *Women's Information and Referral Enquiry Service*, no. 93 (1980).
[277] Linda Edwards, "I Was Very Angry," *Women's Information and Referral Enquiry Service*, no. 92 (1980).
[278] Pat McCartney, "Dear Wires," *Women's Information and Referral Enquiry Service*, no. 94 (1980).
[279] Ibid.

attitude among feminists was that "one cannot be a real feminist without being a lesbian" (original emphasis).[280] While some *WIRES* readers were outraged that the subject was exposed to a male-inclusive audience, others clearly thought that such a forum allowed for a more critical reflection which was not possible in internal movement periodicals. However, in reflecting on the many letters in *WIRES* responding to the "Political Lesbianism" paper, the range of positions that encompass both critical as well as supportive stances seems to be equally distributed. Both stances claimed variations of feeling alienated and unaccepted in the women's movement, indicating just how complex a task *WIRES* faced in acting as a mediating object.

1.5 Conclusion

In reflecting on the aftermath of the "Political Lesbianism" paper, its authors state that the immediate outrage that flared up after its original publication led some women to initially believe there was no room to discuss sexual politics within the movement, but that the ensuing conversations within the letter pages within *WIRES* proved them otherwise. The climaxing of disagreements about political lesbianism as laid out above shows the ability for feminist periodicals to avoid what Gracie Lyons calls "a clash of one personal interest against another" and instead to encourage a "cooperative effort to discover the revolution that will advance the whole."[281] This collective attempt to add to and better define the feminist position hinges upon a belief in a feminist future, one which Agatha Beins argues periodicals could provide because of their serialisation and ability to facilitate a time and space for feminism to take place.[282]

Women's Liberation Movement conferences clearly had a significant role in locating an imagined futurity for feminism, as the clashes over the seven demands convey how differing factions of feminists were resolute in voicing their opposition if there was a feeling of being left out of this future planning. Periodicals such as *WIRES* not only offer a glimpse into the conference proceedings through regular reports, but they also crucially provided a discursive space for tensions to be expressed between physical meetings. The process of a reader receiving her issue of *WIRES* in the mail, taking the time to read its contents which were

[280] Ibid.
[281] Lyons, *Constructive Criticism: A Handbook*. 28.
[282] Beins, *Liberation in Print: Feminist Periodicals and Social Movement Identity*. 58.

often international in scope, then formulating her thoughts in relation to the issue as a whole, and finally expressing them through writing and mailing them in, allowed for the possibility of serious political negotiation with the benefit of time and reflection which resulted in a particular kind of considered rhetoric. This is not to argue that oppositional letter-writing between women was a pleasant undertaking, indeed often very charged language dominated the pages, such as when Pettitt signed her letter in issue 83 of *WIRES* with "yours in no sisterhood whatsoever"[283] or when a woman from Northern Ireland expressed her anger about the criticism levelled against Women Against Imperialism in issue 86 of *WIRES*: "you make me sick – but more than that you make me angry."[284] The majority of letters were signed off with phrases such as "in sisterhood," "with sisterlove" or "power to your struggles," but as Jolly observes, rather than signalling purely amicable intentions, such rhetorical assertions of sisterhood often cloak the polemic underneath.[285]

The Furies collective was early in pointing out that fraught exchanges between women were readily interpreted by opponents of feminism to be evidence of the fact that "women hate each other and can't work together."[286] It may very well be the case that the probability of any meaningful resolution between revolutionary and socialist feminists was low, but the purpose in uncovering these conflicts is *not* to prove that supposedly unbreachable divisions are evidence of the futility among second wave feminists.

Instead, the negotiation of political lesbianism in *WIRES* through letter-writing confirms two things: firstly, it demonstrates how second wave feminists were able to avoid the mistake of what Lyons describes as "emphasizing unity at all costs."[287] This mistake can lead to upholding an idealised fantasy of a frictionless political movement, and in the case of feminism, creates unrealistic expectations of "sisterhood" that cannot take into account very real differences between women. Because women are unwilling, then, to foresee conflict between each other, this can result in what Mary Daly calls "a crisis of feminist faith" when challenges arise between women and the "'illusion' becomes feminism itself."[288] Radical feminist Joanna Russ observes that this idealised unity is characterised by what she dubs the

[283] Pettitt, "Dear Wires,."
[284] Máire Ní Mhaoil Eoin, "You Make Me Sick," *Women's Information and Referral Enquiry Service*, no. 86 (1980).
[285] Jolly, *In Love and Struggle: Letters in Contemporary Feminism*. 71.
[286] Rita Mae Brown, "Leadership vs Stardom," *The Furies*, no. 2 (1972): 20.
[287] Lyons, *Constructive Criticism: A Handbook*. 22.
[288] Daly, *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy*. 112.

"Feminine Imperative" which requires women to make each other feel good all the time and can easily culminate in the disintegration of groups as honesty is set aside and differences remain unexpressed.[289] Clearly, the exchanges in *WIRES* illustrate the ability of second wave feminists to negotiate oppositional political stances despite of, or sometimes even resulting in, intensely painful feelings. This is not evidence that "women can't agree," but it more readily reveals actively engaged, networked and serious political debate that in and of itself *is the movement*. It also confirms Lyon's observation that in order "to achieve success, we need to bring our actions into correspondence with the objective world," and in this case the physical pages of the *WIRES* periodical provided a location within the world for such correspondences to unfold.[290]

This leads on to the second confirmation, which is that the mediation of divisions between lesbian and heterosexual women is reliant on the existence of a discursive space in order to avoid an ideological deadlock. The *WIRES* periodical enabled lesbian feminists to express a vision for a feminist future which would exclude men in all facets of life, a stance that had for years previously been ignored in the women's movement, and it also enabled heterosexual feminists for the first time to consider how sexuality and male-identification played an essential role in reifying male dominance. The regular circulation of communication between women allowed for the articulation of personal confessions, political differences and the formulation of political theory, as well as the creation of a feminist *subaltern counterpublic*, made up out of both readers and writers.[291]

More importantly, *WIRES* created a woman-controlled, serialised and textual location for political tensions to be expressed. As an archival record, the communication within *WIRES* undermines the portrayal of second wave feminists as having a "binary logic, tying it to either/or thinking" and instead highlights the ongoing, complex and multi-level political negotiation with which feminists were contending.[292] As Gerda Lerner notes, intellectual development "depends on response, encouragement, the ability to improve one's work by criticism and the testing out of ideas in social interaction,"[293] which has been continuously

[289] Joanna Russ, "Power and Helplessness in the Women's Movement," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 10, no. 1 (1982): 8. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40003113.
[290] Lyons, *Constructive Criticism: A Handbook*. 29.
[291] Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text* 26, no. 25 (1990). https://doi.org/10.2307/466240.
[292] Beins, *Liberation in Print: Feminist Periodicals and Social Movement Identity*. 146.
[293] Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy*. 223.

denied to women and instead "generation after generation of women [had to repeat] what others had done before them."[294] *WIRES* was one such avenue for women to have access to a forum in which the development of ideas and practices was encouraged as a result of the serialised exchange of letters.

For contemporary feminist historians and activists, letter-writing in second wave feminist periodicals such as *WIRES* offers a bridge to mend intergenerational ruptures between waves of feminism. Reading these often difficult communications between women makes room for identifying with the struggles of second wave feminists and can enable the creation of "coalitions with 'old' feminisms" which are often "described as one-dimensional foils for a narrative of present-day progressive feminist politics."[295] *WIRES* functioned both as a tool for the mediation and construction of oppositional feminist frameworks, unified through the promise of a feminist future, as well as a motor of sorts that kept communication going and avoided a standstill. As a case study of woman-controlled correspondence and conflict, it doubles up as a crucial archival starting point for linking contemporary negotiations in a temporal continuum which can avoid the repetitive jump-starting of feminist generations.

[294] Ibid. 249.
[295] McDaneld, "Activating Archives in Women's Studies 101: New Stories About Old Feminism and the Future," 65.

Chapter 2: Socialist Feminism

2.1 Introduction

The late 1970s and early 1980s marked a significant shift in British politics, epitomised by the 1979 Conservative Party general election win under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher. What followed was a period of political unrest, anti-trade union legislation, as well as a visible increase in police brutality, unemployment and inflation rates. Faced with the impacts of conservative policies and a foreseeable recession, a renewed sense of urgency ran through the Women's Liberation Movement, communicated effectively by the subtitle of Jean Gardiner's 1981 article "Women, Recession and the Tories" in *Marxism Today*:

> The Seventies are over. A fierce assault on women's rights is now under way.[296]

However, the defeat of the Labour Party was not the only development which defined this period. The Women's Liberation Movement had, by the end of the 1970s, split into increasingly ideologically divided factions on the topic of the political Left. This chapter documents how two different feminist periodicals, *Red Rag: A Magazine of Women's Liberation* (1972-1980) and *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement* (1976-1982), attempted to reconcile these divisions by formulating a recognisable socialist (and Marxist) feminist political position. The divisions principally centred around the question of whether working with the male-dominated Left would be advantageous for women's liberation. Indeed, many feminists withdrew from the organised labour movement, such as the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, after "[finding] themselves treated with contempt by their male comrades."[297] Other women insisted, particularly as Thatcherite ideas gained widespread support towards the end of the 1970s, that feminists should ally themselves "with the traditional institutions of the labour movement."[298]

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[296] Jean Gardiner, "Women, Recession and the Tories," *Marxism Today*, (1981).
[297] Sue Bruley, "'It Didn't Just Come out of Nowhere Did It?': The Origins of the Women's Liberation Movement in 1960s Britain," *Oral History* 45, no. 1 (2017): 67. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26382544.
[298] Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal, and Hilary Wainwright, *Beyond the Fragments: Feminist and the Making of Socialism* (London: Merlin Press, 1979). 201, quoted in Kathryn Harris, "New Alliances: Socialist-Feminism in the Eighties," *Feminist Review*, no. 31 (1989): 39. https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.1989.5.

Published over roughly the same period, both *Red Rag* and *Scarlet Women* feature disagreements in the form of editorials, articles and letters that demonstrate the existential workings-out of what the mission of each periodical should be and how it could most strategically act as a bridge between socialism, Marxism and feminism. Both published a total of 15 issues covering a wide array of topics: from more theoretical analyses about the relationship between women's liberation and class struggle, to reports of regional, national and international campaigns and conferences, as well as unsettling and troublesome reflections about collective working and the political positions of the periodicals themselves.

Red Rag was more closely aligned with the traditional Marxist Left and largely based in London, while *Scarlet Women* had closer ties with the Women's Liberation Movement and was put together by regional contacts across the UK. Investigating the ways in which these two periodicals endeavoured to construct a socialist feminist position and fuse certain aspects of socialism and feminism together reveals two distinct approaches: while *Red Rag* was envisaged as a framework through which feminist members of the Communist Party (CP) – from which a majority of the magazine's collective members came – could explore new ways of thinking independent of the CP; *Scarlet Women* positioned itself as a communication network for socialist feminists specifically to debate the contradictions they faced within the Women's Liberation Movement. As such, both periodicals expose distinct problems resulting from their publishing ethos, though both reflect overarching dilemmas and conflicts that enveloped the Women's Liberation Movement.

2.1.1 Scope

This chapter examines the way in which the feminist periodical *form* was utilised in the process of shaping a socialist feminist political position during the Women's Liberation Movement. I begin by providing a brief historical overview of how many women came to abandon male-dominated organisations of the political Left in favour of an autonomous women's movement throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s. Moreover, I summarise the ideological divisions internal to the women's movement that encompass conflicting theories about the origins and effects of male power, as well as diverging attitudes about the problem of working with men (the context of which runs parallel to the events unpacked in chapter 1 in relation to the development of political lesbianism). At the core of this chapter lies a

comparative analysis of the correspondences facilitated by two socialist feminist periodicals: *Red Rag* and *Scarlet Women*, covering the period between 1972-1982. By focusing on the editorials, reports and letters published in both periodicals, I reveal how divergent editorial strategies produced an array of theoretical and practical problems for socialist feminists. As sociologist and feminist historian Benita Roth argues, "looking at grassroots journals and underground publications is essential for understanding how feminists viewed things on the ground."[299] And so, while this chapter does not attempt to give a general history of socialist feminism, the comparison of *Red Rag* and *Scarlet Women* uncovers the nuances of socialist feminist negotiations and adds to the way in which feminist magazines and newsletters provided the necessary space to enable those discussions in the first place.

2.1.2 Historical Context

Socialist feminist ideas long pre-date the Women's Liberation Movement. Particularly around the turn of the 20th Century, women played a central role in international socialist anti-war movements, such as the Polish Marxist Rosa Luxemburg and the South African author Olive Schreiner. During this time women also rose in the ranks of socialist governments, such as the Russian Marxist feminist and diplomat Alexandra Kollontai (who became the first woman member of a governing cabinet as part of the Bolshevik party), as well as Finland's first female minister and key figure in the Finnish worker's movement Miina Sillanpää.

Other prominent figures who laid some of the groundwork for socialist feminism include Clara Zetkin, the German Marxist theorist and advocate for women's suffrage; Grace Campbell, the first female African-American member of the Socialist Party and the Communist Party of America; Emma Goldman, the Russian American anarchist and political activist; Charlotte Perkins Gilman, the American novelist and advocator for social reform; Eleanor Marx, the youngest daughter of Karl Marx and a socialist activist; and Simone Weil, the French philosopher and trade union activist, among numerous other figures. Early socialist analyses about women's status in the home also feature in texts written by men, such as Friedrich Engel's 1884 *The Origin of the Family* and August Bebel's 1904 *Women and*

[299] Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). 18.

Socialism. However, despite these contributions, it was not until the resurgence of the women's movement in the 1960s that the relationship between the largely male-dominated socialist Left and the newly emerging feminist groups became notably uneasy.

Although the Women's Liberation Movement had a "ready-made affinity for socialism," the often dismissive and sexist treatment of women within male-dominated socialist organisations led feminists to the realisation that the status of women could not be improved without an autonomous, all-female political movement.[300] An event which encapsulates this tension especially well happened in Washington, D.C. during the New Left's counter-inaugural demonstration against the election of Richard Nixon in 1968. Several women's liberation organisations gathered in order to inform the men in attendance that they were "sick of participating in other people's revolutions" and were beginning to work for themselves.[301] The anti-war leader Dave Dellinger, acting as the master of ceremonies for the various speeches, announced that "the women have asked all the men to leave the stage," an assertion that has been contested by Susan Faludi but that nevertheless served to give a negative impression of the women taking to the stage.[302] A local feminist, Marilyn Webb, was primed to speak first and she was only "three sentences into the mildest speech you can imagine"[303] when the socialist men in the audience booed her and began to shout remarks like "take her off the stage and fuck her!" and "fuck her down a dark alley!"[304] Shulamith Firestone attempted to speak next but was "drowned out by a howl of sexual epithets" and, as Ellen Willis reports, Dellinger responded by ushering the women off the stage without reprimanding any of the hecklers.[305]

The problem of male socialist hostility towards women's liberation activists also presented itself in the European context around the same time. In 1970, the French Women's Liberation Movement had its first public event at the University of Paris VIII in Vincennes, attended by over 600 women. Several British feminists attended, many of whom had been active in militant leftist groups and developed an analysis of women's oppression which was rooted in

[300] David Bouchier, *The Feminist Challenge: The Movement for Women's Liberation in Britain and the United States* (London: Macmillan, 1983). 67.
[301] Ellen Willis, "Women and the Left," in *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Barbara A. Crow (New York: New York University Press, 2000). 513.
[302] Susan Faludi, "Death of a Revolutionary," The New Yorker, 2013, accessed 23 September, 2021, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/04/15/death-of-a-revolutionary.
[303] Ibid.
[304] Willis, "Women and the Left." 514.
[305] Faludi, "Death of a Revolutionary."

Marxism. They decided to march the halls of the University to hand out flyers to female students while carrying banners and placards, chanting slogans such as "down with masculine terrorism."[306] As the women recall in a report published in *Black Dwarf*, they were followed by a hostile crowd of around a hundred men who shouted insults at the group, including "lesbians," "strip" and "what you need is a good fuck."[307]

The principal meeting was saw a heated debate unfold about why the men, who constituted approximately half of the 500 people in attendance, should leave. The women's liberation activists argued that the men were attending primarily with the intention of disrupting the proceedings. Refusing to concede, the socialist men in attendance exclaimed that "there's no woman problem," "a woman's catharsis can only come from a man," "if we don't support you, your movement is bound to fail" and "if you want your equality, let's screw."[308] In reflecting on the meeting afterwards, the British feminists explain that:

> It became clear to us when we discussed the meeting later, that the initial presence of men was instructive as it pointed up for the women present (and for the more conscious men) the pervasiveness of sexist ideology even among the so-called liberated men – among their very own comrades.[309]

Even though many feminists in the UK came from caucuses and separate groups within traditional left organisations such as the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, confrontations akin to the ones described above "provoked the establishment of radical feminism"[310] as well as the separate formulation of women's oppression (and the conditions for women's liberation) which traditional socialism had sequestered in favour of "the larger good of the movement."[311]

While some British feminists splintered off from the organised labour movement – advocating for a separate, women-only and autonomous women's movement – other women still retained their allegiances to the political Left due to their conviction that the oppression

[306] "Paris - the First Public Meeting," *Black Dwarf* 14, no. 37 (1970): 15.
[307] Ibid.
[308] Eli Thorkelson, "Sexist Anti-Feminism in the French Left, 1970," Decasia, 2019, accessed 23 September, 2021, https://decasia.org/academic_culture/2019/07/23/sexist-anti-feminism-in-the-french-left-1970/.
[309] "Paris - the First Public Meeting," 15.
[310] Juliet Mitchell, *Woman's Estate*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2015). 84.
[311] Willis, "Women and the Left," 514.

of women is rooted in capitalism, and that therefore the struggle for women's liberation should be situated within the struggle for socialism. Their central position was that Marxist socialism was already successfully analysing the conditions for revolution and could therefore be supplemented to include an understanding of women's oppression.

Tensions came to a head during the 1971 National Women's Liberation Movement conference in Skegness when socialist feminists, who were largely members of the Maoist group Union of Women for Liberation, defeated a proposal to exclude the men in attendance.[312] However, when a male Maoist speaker refused to cede the microphone, the majority of attendees voted "almost unanimously to have him leave" while the "Union women really [fought] to keep him in."[313] This event left many women in attendance with lingering feelings of hostility towards socialist organisations as well as a "deep distrust of structures and methods of organising which were associated with the male left."[314] Women in mixed-sex socialist groups broadly held the belief that socialist men could be allies once they accept their role in the subjugation of women, while the more radical and separatist feminists (who argued that all men benefit from patriarchy) believed it was unlikely that men would support feminist demands. However, not all women fell neatly into these divisions:

> Those who were in left groups were getting hammered for being "bourgeois feminists"; those who were not in left groups but were active in the Women's Liberation Movement were getting hammered for being "male dominated socialists."[315]

On the one hand, socialist feminists felt disillusioned by the male-dominated Left, and on the other questioned whether the radical feminist stance was equipped to address class divisions. A series of Women's Liberation and Socialism conferences took place between 1973-1975 during which the issue of developing a socialist feminist theory and practice in the Women's Liberation Movement was discussed. However, most interestingly for the purposes of this research, several socialist feminist periodicals emerged over this period in similar attempts to

[312] Nicholas Owen, "Men and the 1970s British Women's Liberation Movement," *The Historical Journal* 56, no. 3 (2013): 809. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X12000611.
[313] Sue O'Sullivan, "Passionate Beginnings: Ideological Politics, 1969-72," *Feminist Review*, no. 11 (1982): 79. https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.1982.17.
[314] "A Short History of the Socialist Current Within the British Women's Liberation Movement," *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement*, no. 4 (1977).
[315] Ibid.

negotiate the political differences of socialism and feminism, focusing on the overarching premise that "there will be no women's liberation without revolution, [and] there will be no revolution without women's liberation."[316] By examining two such publications, *Red Rag* and *Scarlet Women*, this chapter reveals how the periodical *form* and the contrasting constitutive editorial principles produced distinct – yet not entirely dissimilar – strategies for merging Marxism, socialism and feminism.

2.2 *Red Rag: A Magazine of Women's Liberation* (1972-1980)

2.2.1 Breaking up with the Communist Party

The first issue of *Red Rag* was published in 1972. The opening editorial functions as its declaration of intent, describing the publication as "a magazine of liberation and in particular of women's liberation."[317] The founding members of *Red Rag* were also members of the Communist Party (CP) and intended to create a publication independent of the CP.
The declaration states that the founders understand themselves simultaneously as Marxist feminists and equally as part of the Women's Liberation Movement, signalling that the position of the magazine is a special-interest cell within the larger organism of the feminist movement. This duality of concern is also noticeable in its central aim to "help build an alliance between women liberators and the working class movement," based on the recognition that significant divisions existed between the organised labour movement and the Women's Liberation Movement.[318]

The declaration observes that social progress can only be achieved through the political move towards socialism by means of trade unions, co-ops and leftist political parties and therefore, in order for the women's movement to succeed, it is essential that women organise themselves within unions. And yet, the declaration also acknowledges that there is a prevailing silence within the working class and trade union movement about the discrimination against women, as well as a general notion within the organised labour movement that there need not be a separate political women's movement in the first place.

[316] International Marxist Group, "There Will Be No Women's Liberation Without Revolution," Poster (c.1980).
[317] "Editorial," *Red Rag: A Magazine of Women's Liberation*, no. 1 (1972).
[318] Ibid.

The purpose of *Red Rag*, it seems, is to act as a discursive bridge between the two movements based on the belief that the struggle for women's liberation and for socialism are interdependent.

In common with the periodical *WIRES* discussed in chapter 1, the declaration clearly calls for open participation by its readers, asking them to send in letters and articles in order to help expand on *Red Rag*'s main objective of offering a "Marxist explanation of why women are oppressed and how that oppression can be fought and overcome."[319] The intended readership is specified as "all working women – inside and outside the liberation movement – to Marxists and non-Marxists, to the political and non-political."[320] However, as discussed further below, men in the organised labour movement were also welcomed as readers. It is not immediately clear from this initial declaration whether the magazine was intended for the development of a Marxist feminist analysis within the Women's Liberation Movement, or whether it was attempting to give more traction to the feminist cause within the organised labour movement, or perhaps whether it was attempting to do both.

This confusion of political positionality runs through the entire print-run of *Red Rag* and illustrates what many socialist and Marxist feminists regarded as a double-bind. In issue 2 of *Red Rag*, also published in 1972, Ann Pettitt wrote a letter to express this very concern: "I'm not quite sure who you're aiming at. Are you trying to solidify the 'political' wing of Women's Lib?"[321] Interestingly, Pettitt also participated in discussions about political lesbianism in the letter pages of *WIRES* as detailed in chapter 1, demonstrating the way in which periodicals facilitated a networked communication infrastructure that transcended singular publications. According to Pettitt, there is a "massive contradiction" in the magazine in that it promises to cover the status of working-class women while also stripping subjectivity and eccentricities from its writing-style which, she argues, makes the magazine incomprehensible to the very women it is intended to reach.[322]

This is also echoed in a second letter of the same issue, written by Sheila Taylor, who thought the first issue was excellent but "the overall effect was a bit academic" and asked whether

[319] Ibid.
[320] Ibid.
[321] Ann Pettitt, "Dear Red Rag," *Red Rag: A Magazine of Women's Liberation*, no. 2 (1972).
[322] Ibid.

more humour could be included in the form of cartoons.[323] Both letters demonstrate the self-reflexive ways in which socialist feminists were trying to work out their own positionality through printed communication. Pettitt admits that while her response is an "unconstructive criticism," she cannot think of anything constructive to say because the alternatives which she wishes to see are not "in the world yet."[324] Additionally, Pettitt signals a vested interest in the importance for a magazine like *Red Rag* to exist by urging the collective to stray away from replicating the "self-indulgent drivel that fills the pages of SHREW," the official newsletter of the London Women's Liberation Workshop which was later criticised for a lack of leadership in issue 8 of *Red Rag.*[325]

A significant characteristic which sets *Red Rag* apart from other feminist periodicals of the time is that men, specifically men who were part of the organised labour movement, were welcomed as readers. This is in stark contrast to the other periodical discussed in this chapter, *Scarlet Women*, which made the question of general circulation a matter for its readers to discuss. Several men from the Men Against Sexism Group wrote a letter in issue 2 of *Red Rag* expressing that the magazine led them to recognise the "prevalence of sexism in the labour movement" as well as in themselves, and that the first issue provided them a thought-provoking basis for discussing Marxist feminism.[326] Another man, Julian Doyle, simply wrote a letter saying, "I'm Sorry."[327] However, support from socialist and Marxist men was generally an exception. The production of *Red Rag* was initially kept confidential from the CP in order to maintain its editorial independence, but once the CP had been alerted about the magazine's existence, the party leadership "insisted that *Red Rag* must be shut down."[328]

Well-known male leaders of the organised labour movement in Britain, such as Tony Cliff, also influenced the tone of engagement with the Women's Liberation Movement. Cliff was a founding member of the Socialist Review Group, later named the International Socialists which finally became the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). In 1984, Cliff authored the book *Class Struggle & Women's Liberation: 1640 to the present day*, which attempts to provide a history of women's liberation and argues that such liberation is only possible through

[323] Sheila Taylor, "Dear Red Rag," *Red Rag: A Magazine of Women's Liberation*, no. 2 (1972).
[324] Pettitt, "Dear Red Rag,."
[325] Ibid.
[326] Men Against Sexism Group, "Dear Red Rag," *Red Rag: A Magazine of Women's Liberation*, no. 2 (1972).
[327] Julian Doyle, "Dear Red Rag," *Red Rag: A Magazine of Women's Liberation*, no. 2 (1972).
[328] Rosalind Delmar, "Introducing Red Rag," Barry Amiel & Norman Melburn Trust, 2020, http://banmarchive.org.uk/collections/redrag/index_frame.htm. 6.

organised class struggle. The introduction, however, establishes a cynicism towards feminists that runs throughout the whole book:

> Feminism sees the basic division in the world as that between men and women. […] For Marxism, however, the fundamental antagonism in society is that between classes, not sexes. […] Women's oppression can only be understood in the context of the wider relations of class exploitation. There can be no compromise between these two views, even though some "socialist feminists" have in recent years tried to bridge the gap between them.[329]

Cliff blames feminists for (in his view) wrongly focusing on divisions between men and women, identifying the key areas of rape, domestic violence and unequal wages as areas where they are at odds. His central argument is that supporters of women's liberation should focus on areas of mutual concern instead, such as union rights and anti-cuts campaigns. Cliff's main analysis hinges on women's oppression as *workers* and not as *women*, something which "he had voluntarily left to 'the feminists' leaving them permanently outside the possibility of creative Marxist analysis."[330] Although *Red Rag* had already ceased publication by the time Cliff's book was published, his suspicion towards socialist feminists pursuing a Marxist analysis of women's oppression precisely characterises the hostile atmosphere which *Red Rag* experienced during its lifespan. It was this kind of hostility present in the wider organised labour movement that motivated socialist feminists to claim their space within a Marxist analysis, and *Red Rag* was one such central effort.

Over issues 4 to 8, between July 1973 and February 1975, several of the editorials exemplify a concerted effort by the *Red Rag* collective to clarify the relationship between Marxist feminism and the Women's Liberation Movement, as well as the role of the magazine and its internal working structures. In issue 4, published in 1973, the editorial begins by stating that since the magazine was launched, "confusion has arisen as to who the collective is."[331] It clarifies that while there have been assumptions that *Red Rag* is aligned to the CP, in fact its primary commitment is to the Women's Liberation Movement and that since the publication

[329] Tony Cliff, *Class Struggle & Women's Liberation: 1640 to the Present Day* (London: Bookmarks, 1984). 7.
[330] Dave Renton, "Women's Liberation: What Cliff Got Right and Where He Went Wrong," Lives; Running, 2013, accessed 23 September, 2021, https://livesrunning.wordpress.com/2013/09/21/womens-liberation-where-cliff-went-wrong/.
[331] "Editorial," *Red Rag: A Magazine of Women's Liberation*, no. 4 (1973).

of the first issue, several feminists from the women's movement had joined the editorial collective. This grouping is further specified as a "Marxist feminist collective" and the remainder of the editorial attempts to unpack what this positionality means.[332]

The theoretical basis for Marxist feminism is argued to be the understanding that women's oppression must be considered within the context of a classist and racist society, and that previous feminist efforts of analysing it merely through the subjective lens of experience was not enough. Marxism, the editorial states, provides a theoretical instrument for scrutinising the origins of women's oppression as part of the larger project of advanced capitalism and that such a guide is needed in the women's movement. Additionally, the editorial recognises that traditional Marxism has been dogmatised by the (predominantly male) Left and that *Red Rag* is an attempt to "break their monopoly" by critically exploring the connections between radical feminism and Marxist feminism in order "to encourage ongoing discussion about the theory and practice of women's liberation."[333]

Here, the editorial clearly functions as a formative device for Marxist feminists to carve out their own positionality, having been made aware of confusion arising from their readership, in relation to both the women's movement and the political Left. It is specifically mentioned that this was the editorial collective's "first attempt to defined in broad terms [their] political perspective," an articulation which, when drafted through the format of an editorial, becomes conversational and responsive to the magazine's readership.[334] Moreover, there are clear attempts to signal the collective's interest in discursive participation by its readers in the development of Marxist feminism, which is also apparent in the editorial of issue 5 in which the *Red Rag* collective stresses that it would "particularly like to hear readers' responses."[335]

2.2.2 Problems in Feminist Collective Working

The difficulties of occupying a space in between two apparently divergent movements is apparent in issue 6, published in 1974, in which the editorial describes the complications of feminist collective working. It begins by openly stating that alongside the positive aspects of

[332] Ibid.
[333] Ibid.
[334] Ibid.
[335] "Editorial," *Red Rag: A Magazine of Women's Liberation*, no. 5 (1974).

working together, the collective was acutely aware of the obstacles in developing a collective practice from having experienced "a number of upheavals, ongoing disagreements and problems."[336] Feminist collective organising is generally characterised by non-hierarchical working practices since much of feminist theory "begins from the world as it ought to be" – hierarchy of power being a fundamental obstacle to such an idealised world – and therefore it "assumes the possibility for fundamental social change" by enacting that very change through the means in which it is organised.[337]

One of the most influential ideas that affected feminist organising structures during the Women's Liberation Movement was the notion of "small group" working, first coined by Pamela Allen, founder of New York Radical Women, in her 1970 pamphlet *Free Space: A Perspective on the Small Group in Women's Liberation*. In it, Allen articulates the fundamental components of the "small group experience" in relation to her involvement with the San Francisco-based women's liberation group Sudsofloppen. The organisation was in essence a consciousness-raising group that operated based on the principles of "the small group process" which Allen describes as taking place in four stages: opening up, sharing, analysing and abstracting. The intention of this process was to generate political knowledge and theory about the subordinate status of women based on each individual member's personal experience. She states that the best way to achieve this is in small groups of women as it allows for a dynamic which is "especially suited to freeing women to affirm their view of reality and to learn to think independently of male supremacist values."[338] Anticipating the problem of ideological dogmatism, Allen emphasises that within a small group, differences of opinion and experience should be explored and alternative perspectives encouraged. However, the goal of autonomous, non-hierarchical and non-sectarian discussion was not always easily enacted despite its promising potential. The complexity of attempting to work as a principled feminist collective, while also negotiating the development of a political feminist ideology, are particularly well documented in the pages of *Red Rag.*

One of the central problems described by the collective arose out of the conceptualisation of the political significance of *Red Rag*, how that conceptualisation related to the women's

[336] "Editorial," *Red Rag: A Magazine of Women's Liberation*, no. 6 (1974).
[337] Kathleen P. Iannello, *Decisions Without Hierarchy: Feminist Interventions in Organization Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 1992). xi.
[338] Pamela Allen, *Free Space: A Perspective on the Small Group in Women's Liberation* (New York: Times Change Press, 1970). 8.

movement in general and the effects this had on the physical production of the magazine. Out of these tensions emerged a confused dynamic within the editorial collective, whose individual members are characterised as being hidden away behind the front of *Red Rag*, and its larger constituency of women readers. The editorial of issue 6 suggests that, in order to remain open and active within the women's movement, *Red Rag* is aiming to "establish and maintain better channels of communication with women, who read the magazine and want to write and criticise it."[339] Such calls for inviting criticism were widespread in other feminist periodicals of the time, revealing that the allowance of difficult communication, potentially even critical of the periodical itself, was recognised not just as politically important but as an essential cue to generate and encourage communication.

Using *Spare Rib* as an example, Melanie Waters demonstrates that "bad feelings" in published correspondence can serve as an "'affective magnet' around which the politics of feminism can be negotiated and critiqued."[340] Such goals of transparent and open communication, however, were not easy to achieve given that the "refusal to have a hierarchy of responsibility or leadership" made it difficult for the *Red Rag* collective to reach consensus about which articles to publish.[341] Clearly the expectations of agreement were challenging for the editorial collective, partially because they were "in the process of working out [their] common politics" and that their "political relationship as a group is still not entirely worked out."[342] The dilemma here is one of causality and effect in which the *means* of publishing and communicating through the magazine is hoped to result in the *end* of developing a more succinct Marxist feminist position, and yet it is *because* the question of political identity is not fully worked out that the principles of collective working remain unresolved. Certain practical matters were regularly rotated within the collective, such as the designation of financial responsibility and distribution, although the editorial describes that this often resulted in overloading one person in isolation.

The problem of leaderless and collective organising echoes the content of a letter in the same issue written by Marian Sedley. In it, she describes her experience at the Women's Liberation and Socialism conference that took place in London in 1973. Sedley prefaces her letter by

[339] "Editorial," (1974).
[340] Waters, "'Yours in Struggle': Bad Feelings and Revolutionary Politics in *Spare Rib*," 447.
[341] "Editorial," (1974).
[342] Ibid.

stating that she "felt a bit wary of making criticism" because she had for the most part been an outsider of the women's movement and admits that she may not realise "half of what's gone into organising conferences in the past."[343] Her main criticism lies in the unfolding of the last open session of the conference, which she describes as a "tyranny of structurelessness," a term which is adopted from the American feminist Jo Freeman who, in 1970, gave a speech at the Southern Female Rights Union in Mississippi where she first coined the phrase. The transcription of her talk was later published in the feminist journal *The Second Wave* in 1972, after having been rejected for publication by *Notes from the Third Year* the year prior. The term "tyranny of structurelessness" refers to the problem of leaderless organising in the women's movement, a dilemma which first emerged after women had "exhausted the virtues of consciousness-raising groups and decided they wanted to do something more specific."[344]

The central issue posited by Freeman is that aspirations of non-hierarchy – that is, the principled disavowal of *formalised* working structures – does not prevent the formation of *informal* structures which become "a way of masking power" and decision-making is "curtailed to those who know the rules, as long as the structure of the group is informal."[345] Sedley recollects that this dynamic was present at the Women's Liberation and Socialism conference during which there seemed to be an implicit (rather than explicit) structure that allowed "those most familiar with the movement to affect disproportionately the political outcome of the conference."[346] She ends her letter by arguing for the necessity of an explicit political decision-making process in order to avoid exclusivism and elitism. Given the problems of collective working which *Red Rag* was already facing, such a report from a socialist feminist conference presumably reinforced the urgency with which working structures for the collective would be of vital importance to figure out.

The collective admits that while it does not "pretend to have solved these problems," it was aiming to work towards mutual accountability and that it is "through a dialogue between Red Rag and the movement and through our experience of producing the magazine that our

[343] Marian Sedley, "Dear Red Rag," *Red Rag: A Magazine of Women's Liberation*, no. 6 (1974).
[344] Jo Freeman, "The Tyranny of Structurelessness," *The Second Wave: A Magazine of the New Feminism* 2, no. 1 (1972): 20.
[345] Ibid. 21.
[346] Sedley, "Dear Red Rag,."

practice can be refined and corrected."[347] In other words, ongoing communication facilitated by the format of the magazine was seen as essential in order to clarify not only the Marxist feminist political position, but also the working tasks and functions which make such a dialogue possible in the first place.

In her 2015 book *Magazine Movements: Women's Culture, Feminisms and Media Form*, Laurel Forster notes how second wave feminist magazines would "exude a sense that contributions were welcome from all comers" in order to convey "their democratic and inclusive impulse."[348] Forster observes how the format of the magazine in particular allows readers to "express an exchange of ideas, not a static pronouncement."[349] The editorial of issue 6 of *Red Rag* signals a desire for more open exchange by calling for more support and communication from other women, as well as with a statement of hope that other magazines in the women's movement will emerge and cover similar issues: "the more the better."[350] Unlike commercial magazines, feminist periodicals depended on a networked "feminist mediascape."[351] By explicitly communicating a hope for more Marxist and socialist feminist magazines to emerge, *Red Rag* evidences what Cait McKinney terms the underlying "feminist mode of network thinking" that encouraged the free flow of information throughout and between feminist periodicals.[352]

2.2.3 Caught Between Socialism and Feminism

Halfway into its publishing lifespan, *Red Rag* continued to face two frontiers: women's roles within the organised labour movement were being analysed critically in articles and reviews, while the political factions of women's liberation groups meant that *Red Rag* itself had to negotiate internal deviations and scepticism about the magazine. Although by issue 8 in 1975 *Red Rag* had only been in existence for three years, the editorial reflects a general sense that the boundaries of the women's movement had significantly changed since the magazine first launched. This reflection can be mapped onto the larger landscape of political concern for women's equality. The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women had declared

[347] "Editorial," (1974).
[348] Forster, *Magazine Movements: Women's Culture, Feminisms and Media Form*. 215.
[349] Ibid. 5.
[350] "Editorial," (1974).
[351] Beins, *Liberation in Print: Feminist Periodicals and Social Movement Identity*. 122.
[352] McKinney, "Newsletter Networks in the Feminist History and Archives Movement," 311.

1975 as the "International Women's Year" which prompted many international organisations to hold conferences and events concerning women's rights. In the UK, 1975 saw passing of equalities legislation such as the Sex Discrimination Act and the Employment Protection Act, while the Trades Union Congress (TUC) called for large demonstrations and protests advocating for equal pay for women in the workplace.

The writing in *Red Rag* demonstrates a critical awareness that because the renewed surge of feminist advocacy was beginning to effect the organised labour movements, there was a danger that the "bourgeois interpretation" of the early ideas of the Women's Liberation Movement would result in a containment of their "revolutionary potential."[353] The editorial of issue 8 therefore suggests that, as the boundaries of the women's movement expand in light of International Woman's Year, *Red Rag*'s responsibility is to "continually assess and analyse the campaigns and activities which will undoubtedly be generated over the coming year."[354] The continuous assessment of tensions between the political Left and the Women's Liberation Movement reflect Forster's assertion that "magazines are perhaps the ultimate zeitgeist media form" in that the magazine facilitated a discursive space through which women were able to evaluate the broader political landscape in relation to feminist aims.[355]

Additionally, the editorial of issue 8 indicates that internal problems of collective working were also reflective of "the contradictions inherent in the politics of the woman's movement" and that more reader responses to articles would help "find ways of expressing these differences in the magazine."[356] One of the articles in issue 8, "Sisterhood Under Stress" by Sally Alexander and Sue O'Sullivan, considers an "escalating 'feeling' of unease and unhappiness about the state of the Workshop" that the authors attribute to a lack of overall structure as well as divisive ideological tendencies.[357] The London Women's Liberation Workshop, or "Workshop" for short, acted as an umbrella organisation for small groups and friendship networks between 1969 and 1979. At its height, the Workshop included around 70 small groups such as women's centres, study campaigns, action groups and other collectives. It also became a significant centre for communication and information, providing a directory

[353] "Editorial," *Red Rag: A Magazine of Women's Liberation*, no. 8 (1975).
[354] Ibid.
[355] Forster, *Magazine Movements: Women's Culture, Feminisms and Media Form*. 1.
[356] "Editorial," (1975).
[357] Sue O'Sullivan and Sally Alexander, "Sisterhood Under Stress," *Red Rag: A Magazine of Women's Liberation*, no. 8 (1975).

of lists of feminist speakers and tradeswomen, as well as housing a substantial archive of historical material about the Women's Liberation Movement. The Workshop also published a monthly periodical called *Shrew: The London Women's Liberation Workshop Newsletter* (discussed in chapter 1), rotating the production of each issue between its member organisations.

A meeting was held in November 1974 in an attempt to resolve difficult feelings and resentments that had led to an internal breakdown of trust in the Workshop. Alexander and O'Sullivan argue that one of the main contradictions responsible for leading to this breakdown was a "failure to create a political practice which is at the same time, coherent, democratic and supportive."[358] Furthermore, they attribute these difficulties to the larger political disagreements within the women's movement which had at that point began to challenge the notion of sisterhood and prompted them to ask the question "can we or should we all co-exist?"[359] Given that both of the authors were also members of the *Red Rag* collective, it is perhaps no coincidence that questions about collective working and the frustrations regarding the Workshop are also echoed throughout *Red Rag*'s editorials and its own working practices. The editorials, articles and letters in *Red Rag* in this case not only illustrate the growing obstacles facing different factions of the Women's Liberation Movement who all claimed similar goals of wanting to work together, they also provided a fundamental outlet for women to attempt to make sense of the existential problem of encountering divisions and resentment between women.

The Workshop is characterised as having been built on a "persuasive, if unwritten, blueprint for 'correct' practice in the women's movement"[360] and once again, as in Marian Sedley's letter in issue 6 of *Red Rag*, such practices are described in relation to "the tyranny of structurelessness." Alexander and O'Sullivan attribute many strengths of the Workshop (and the women's movement in general) to its decentralised, collective and dispersed structure. However, they also state that "decentralisation has often meant that tasks are abandoned, while the office workers are left to struggle in a vacuum alone, or with diminishing support," leading to an overall atmosphere of resentment and mistrust.[361] The dynamics of shifting

[358] Ibid.
[359] Ibid.
[360] Ibid.
[361] Ibid.

from small group working to a more diffused structure is described as a considerable factor in preventing warmth and intimacy between women. As a result of a lack in leadership to facilitate tensions between individual and collective working practices, ideological unity seemed no longer possible. The divisive polarisation between socialist and separatist feminists is highlighted by Alexander and O'Sullivan, a split which echoed throughout the Women's Liberation Movement as discussed in chapter 1. The authors argue that separatism is uncompromising and inward-looking, which they attribute to some socialist women withdrawing and dissociating from the Workshop.

This is challenged by Rosie, who wrote a letter responding to Alexander and O'Sullivan in issue 9 of *Red Rag*, also published in 1975. While Rosie admits that her opinions keep shifting and that she had been reluctant to write the letter, she insists that the authors oversimplified and lumped together differing concerns as a uniform "political tendency" under the term "separatism," something which she argues "exists only to its opponents."[362] However, Beatrix Campbell, who was also involved in the Workshop and a collective member of *Red Rag*, mirrored Alexander and O'Sullivan's interpretation that there existed warring "tendencies" between socialist and separatist feminists which ultimately had the effect of "dismember[ing] the Workshop as a centre for the whole movement in London."[363] Although *Red Rag* never covered the issue of separatism in depth, the article "Sisterhood Under Stress" contextualises not just the authors, but the overall political positionality of *Red Rag* within a women's movement that was struggling to hold itself together internally. The article acts as a record in which strikingly similar dilemmas faced by both the Workshop and *Red Rag* can be found. Political positionality, ideological unity and the obstacles of feminist collective working seem to be predicaments that were experienced by all factions of the women's movement, regardless of which "tendencies" were at play.

2.2.4 Resignations and Fallouts

In the case of *Red Rag*, these obstacles came to a head in issue 11 in 1976 when two letters by Sue O'Sullivan were published, announcing and explaining her resignation from the magazine collective. She states that after having worked on the magazine for four years, it

[362] Rosie, "Dear Red Rag," *Red Rag: A Magazine of Women's Liberation*, no. 9 (1975).
[363] Campbell, "A Feminist Sexual Politics: Now You See It, Now You Don't." 14.

became clear that the possibility of working collectively was no longer a reality. In part, this was due to O'Sullivan being criticised for dominating meetings, which in turn led her to "become passive and drift along."[364] However, central to her withdrawal from the collective was an adverse working relationship with members of the CP in *Red Rag.* She points out that although the internal problems of *Red Rag* could not solely be attributed to the CP members, as there existed a "general weakness of unaligned Marxist feminists in the women's movement," the politics of the CP had overwhelmingly coloured discussions and practices of the magazine.[365] In her view, the CP women became involved in the women's movement out of principle and saw it as a separate broad movement with which to align themselves.

O'Sullivan suggests that more discussion within *Red Rag* about the kind of leadership CP may have been able to offer the women's movement would have better positioned the magazine as functioning *for* the movement. In particular, she describes how the CP's adverse role in class and sexual politics has been purposefully avoided in editorials and articles which consequentially resulted in the "dullness, compromise and liberalism" of *Red Rag.*[366] One such example is the omission of a potentially controversial article by Roberta Henderson about the National Abortion Campaign (NAC) which was supposed to be published in issue 10. O'Sullivan says that the reasoning behind not printing it was to avoid rocking the boat:

> Instead of struggling on every single level of women's liberation we were supposed to 'do it correctly' – i.e. hold our tongues because we might hurt NAC if we criticised it at that point.[367]

She also describes how Jenny Fortune's article in issue 10 "Portugal: Women and the Struggle for Popular Power" was cut and had references about the CP removed. Furthermore, she notes how discussions about Ireland (presumably regarding the ongoing troubles and violence in Northern Ireland) never took place after one member of *Red Rag* and the CP said that "the women's movement wasn't the place to find out about Ireland."[368] O'Sullivan's interpretation of this was that members of the CP did not want *Red Rag* to be a space in which to define political agreements and disagreements nor to develop politically through

[364] Sue O'Sullivan, "Dear Sisters," *Red Rag: A Magazine of Women's Liberation*, no. 11 (1976).
[365] Ibid.
[366] Ibid.
[367] Sue O'Sullivan, "Dear Red Rag," *Red Rag: A Magazine of Women's Liberation*, no. 11 (1976).
[368] Ibid.

open discussion, recalling that during a collective meeting "it was admitted that it would be awkward to have articles in *Red Rag* criticising the CP."[369] This lack of transparency resulted in *Red Rag* being perceived as exclusive and overly prestigious which was fortified, according to O'Sullivan, by a general unwillingness by the collective to analyse and investigate the women's movement. She compares this to the early creative tensions of the beginning of the magazine when there in fact *was* enthusiasm to work out the dialectics between Marxism and feminism.

In both of her resignation letters, O'Sullivan discloses the details of the predicaments faced by the *Red Rag* collective that had so far only been vaguely alluded to in editorials. Because the format of a personal letter can bypass the lengthy process of collective consensus, it is an indispensable record for tracing the development of feminist thought and practice. O'Sullivan's letters also serve as examples of Margaretta Jolly's characterisation of letters as velvet boxing gloves in that they deliver a critical "punch" inside a rhetoric of concern and obligation.[370] Such rhetoric is evident in the way in which O'Sullivan ends her second letter with a self-reflexive acceptance that she may have made mistakes in her criticism:

> And I may be all wrong. I may be making a mistake. I do it because I hope that within women's liberation politics there can be criticism and the correction of mistakes. […] I've written these letters not to prove points or knock things for the sake of it but because I feel it is necessary politically.[371]

O'Sullivan's unease about the purpose of *Red Rag* is also reflected in a letter by Sarah Benton, published in the same issue, in which she scrutinises the absence of "*Red Rag*'s role in and relationship to the women's movement generally, and, more narrowly, to the women from whose ranks *Red Rag*-ers spring."[372] She suggests that *Red Rag* has been perceived by many women in the movement as an elitist clique because of how political tensions have been ignored. The potential of *Red Rag*, in Benton's view, lies in allowing for political conflicts in the women's movement to be argued out and that its capacity as a political magazine is undermined by preventing "women to see that those conflicts and areas of

[369] Ibid.
[370] Jolly, *In Love and Struggle: Letters in Contemporary Feminism*. 67.
[371] O'Sullivan, "Dear Red Rag,."
[372] Sarah Benton, "Dear Red Rag," *Red Rag: A Magazine of Women's Liberation*, no. 11 (1976).

confusion exist."[373] As Agatha Beins has documented, the format of the periodical provides a location in which readers can form a relationship with the women's movement, and since such sites are curated through an editorial lens, certain conflicts can be "effectively erased from the public record of the women's liberation movement."[374] Conversely, the letter pages offer the most potential for such conflicts to be inserted back into the record – if indeed the magazine decides to publish them – as they are often direct responses to calls for criticism and opinion.

According to O'Sullivan, there existed additional letters of criticism by women who had left the *Red Rag* collective which were never published, the content of which is described by O'Sullivan as echoing several of her criticisms. The absence of these letters being published indicates that while there were a considerable number of editorial calls for responses and letters, it remains unclear what decision-making process was in place (if any) to publish critical letters about the magazine itself. The decision to publish O'Sullivan's letter in issue 11 marked a turning point for the magazine in attempting to open up debate that resounded throughout the subsequent final four issues. At this point, nearly all of the women who came directly from the women's movement had left the collective and the remaining members were left to finally pursue resolutions to the problems that had been present since the beginning.

The editorial of issue 12 in 1977 chronicled "much heart-searching" and "reviewing" of the relevance of the magazine after the collective was reduced significantly in size, stating that they had often "felt a loss of direction, political tension and a stumbling and groping" which was indicative not only of their own internal difficulties, but the contradictions present in the larger women's movement itself. [375] The editorial describes a renewed urgency for the necessity of bridging communication gaps between women in order to prevent a hierarchy of personal or political struggle as well as to avoid the further alienation of women. It is also notable that from issue 12 onwards, the term "Marxist feminism" was largely replaced by "socialist feminism," perhaps in an attempt to move away from the dogmatism associated with the CP and invite a broader range of women to join the discussion.

[373] Ibid.
[374] Beins, *Liberation in Print: Feminist Periodicals and Social Movement Identity*. 54.
[375] "Editorial," *Red Rag: A Magazine of Women's Liberation*, no. 12 (1977).

Issue 12 also published two letters in response to O'Sullivan's resignation letters and in particular her criticism of the CP. Of notable interest is a letter written by Valerie Charlton, Adah Kay and Beatrix Campbell, who were all still members of the *Red Rag* collective as well as members of the CP. They refute the insinuation that conflicts internal to the magazine were acted out solely on the basis of CP membership and argue that this portrayal scapegoats the CP for broader areas of political difference:

> The point about the conflict and falterings [*sic*] on *Red Rag* was as much to do with the tension that exists for many non-aligned socialist feminists about both their individual connection to socialism and to class, and also about something which is a problem for us all: the movement's connection to socialist politics in Britain.[376]

This exchange confirms that five years after issue 1 of *Red Rag* was published with the aim of developing an alliance between the women's movement and the organised labour movement, the original problem of how to enact this still remained. While the magazine did *not* manage to secure such an alliance, it *did* manage to uncover both theoretical and practical tensions with which socialist feminists had to contend. The anxiety of how to deal with these tensions continues into the editorial of issue 13, also published in 1977, noting that "sectarianism within the movement is unnecessary and destructive."[377] An article in the same issue by Betty Crewe reports on the political splits discussed at the North West Feminist Socialist conference in Manchester that largely centred around the socialist feminist current in relation to the Women's Liberation Movement. Crewe recognises the necessity for understanding differences between feminists through communication, yet finds it perplexing that "women should need to re-define themselves into various sub or supra (?) categories within feminism."[378]

Beatrix Campbell reflects on these divisions in another article of the same issue, contending that "perhaps it would be truer to say that the apparent polarisation masked a necessary discourse. It wasn't so much a question of the movement fragmenting into factions, but living

[376] Beatrix Campbell, Adah Kay, and Valerie Charlton, "Reply to Sue O'Sullivan," *Red Rag: A Magazine of Women's Liberation*, no. 12 (1977).
[377] "Editorial," *Red Rag: A Magazine of Women's Liberation*, no. 13 (1978).
[378] Biddy Crewe, "FeministsocialistfeministsocialistfeministsocialistFEMINIST," *Red Rag: A Magazine of Women's Liberation*, no. 13 (1978).

out a debate with itself."[379] One could speculate that if such debates were published as letters earlier on, and that if the conversation was pursued openly from the inception of the magazine, accusations of elitism and exclusivity would not have been so easily levelled against the collective. Moreover, had there been a preceding exchange of letters that laid bare the predicaments of socialist feminism, perhaps the transmission of communication between socialist feminists and radical or revolutionary feminists would have been more engaged.

What can be said for certain, however, is that the utilisation of the letter pages in *Red Rag* to discuss difficult and conflicting tensions came too late to generate a stable socialist feminist position through dialogue. In her summary of *Red Rag* for the Barry Amiel & Normal Melburn Trust archive, the former collective member Rosalind Delmar describes that "by the time *Red Rag* 15 was produced, in 1980, 'the Conservative takeover of government' had taken place and Britain had become 'a political desert.'"[380] The editorial of issue 15, which would ultimately become the last issue of *Red Rag*, exhibits both a sense of apprehension and determination. The Labour movement is described as having habitually expressed women's subordination as a political given, the result being that "socialism has not only failed to confront patriarchy, but socialism in Britain has just about killed off socialism."[381] In other words, the Left is characterised by socialist feminists as having functioned through mythology and militancy that counteracted its revolutionary aims.

Alternatively, the editorial proclaims that because of this failing of the Left, there was a renewed wave of anger within the women's movement which had become "confident, because it has had ten years of activism, theory and personal struggle with men and heterosexuality to call upon."[382] The editorial ends on a note of defiance in declaring that *Red Rag* has "no alternative but to safeguard and expand the frontiers and effectiveness of our autonomous political movement."[383] However, as Delmar argues, at that point the autonomous women's movement was already in decline. She explains that the Women's Liberation Movement had shifted from what was "a movement with some semblance of a centre to a diverse set of feminisms with no organised movement."[384] Although issue 15

[379] Beatrix Campbell, "Sweets From A Stranger," *Red Rag: A Magazine of Women's Liberation*, no. 13 (1978).
[380] Delmar, "Introducing Red Rag."
[381] "Editorial," *Red Rag: A Magazine of Women's Liberation*, no. 15 (1979).
[382] Ibid.
[383] Ibid.
[384] Delmar, "Introducing Red Rag."

represents an admirable endeavour to advance the socialist feminist cause in response to the "crushing defeat of the Left," *Red Rag* was invariably a casualty of that same defeat.[385]

2.2.5 Reflections on *Red Rag*

What stands out about *Red Rag* is its function as a formative device for developing both a political theory of Marxist feminism as well as internal feminist collective working practices through communication in editorials, articles and letters. It acted as a discursive bridge between the organised labour movement and the Women's Liberation Movement which the magazine considered two interdependent political spheres. While attempting to define the Marxist feminist political position, a lack of transparency about the *Red Rag* collective members and their individual political alliances emerged which resulted in a double bind for the magazine. The collective was simultaneously navigating the development of its own political positionality using the magazine as a means for articulating new ideas, in addition to traversing the complexities of feminist collective working.

The dilemma of working towards the advancement of a Marxist feminist theory without having resolved principles of collectivity demonstrates that "the simultaneous development of women's heads and hands" cannot always "prevent a divisive split between radical theory and practice."[386] In the case of *Red Rag*, this confusion of political identity resulted in the omission of potentially controversial articles and overall editorial compromises. Nevertheless, the editorials are characterised by continuous calls for open participation and responses, including frequent self-reflexive assessments that the difficulties of the magazine are reflective of the larger contradictions present in the Women's Liberation Movement. The responding letters signal a vested interest by the magazine's readers that conflicts be evidenced and discussed. However, the use of the letter pages to generate dialogue between *Red Rag* and the movement on contentious topics came too late, as by that point the political Left in the UK – and its alliances with the Women's Liberation Movement – was already in decline.

[385] "Editorial," (1979).
[386] Travis, "The Women in Print Movement: History and Implications," 280.

It is in this way that *Red Rag* also reflects the larger political context in which it lived, from demonstrating the transatlantic transmission of US-born feminist concepts such "the tyranny of structurelessness," to the problems which grassroots feminist groups faced during International Women's Year in 1975, as well as the tensions surrounding separatism that defined many of the internal splits within the women's movement during the 1970s. As historical source material, *Red Rag* reveals how feminists utilised printed communication for the purposes of bridging factional political positions and developing collective working practices within a women's movement that was at the same time struggling to remain united.

2.3 *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement* (1976-1982)

2.3.1 A Socialist Feminist Network

The first issue of *Scarlet Women* was published in 1976, positioning itself as a newsletter of the socialist current in the Women's Liberation Movement. The newsletter was produced by a collective of women who were members of the consciousness-raising group Tyneside Coast Women (TCW), largely based in North Tyneside.[387] One of the collective members, Penny Remfry, recalls how they felt frustrated that men in organisations on the Left ignored the discrimination against women: "Wait til after the revolution, we were told, then we'll sort out the Woman Question, as it was called."[388] At the 1976 National Women's Liberation conference in Newcastle, TCW organised a workshop in order to address the issue of "wearing two hats," that is, the hats of socialism and feminism.[389] Out of this workshop came the agreement to set up a newsletter which would develop the understanding of women's oppression under capitalism by facilitating the articulation of thoughts and sharing of information about campaigns and activities. It was co-ordinated by TCW who also set up regional contacts and an editorial group in order to share and circulate the newsletter across the UK.

Issue 1 of *Scarlet Women* includes a report of the conference proceedings and the workshop that led to the emergence of the newsletter. The report details that a decline in socialist

[387] Tyneside Coast Women was also known as Coast Women's Group.
[388] Penny Remfry, "About Scarlet Women," Scarlet Women, 2019, accessed 23 September, 2021, https://scarletwomen.home.blog/about/.
[389] Ibid.

feminist conferences could be attributed to the sense that "factional attitudes were hardening within the socialist current" and an integrated theory of women's oppression would help resolve the "contradictions felt by being a 'feminist' working in the socialist movement and a 'socialist' active in the women's movement."[390] This bridging of concerns echoes the positionality *Red Rag* was trying to occupy in its attempts to build an alliance between the working-class movement and the Women's Liberation Movement.

A striking contrast, however, is that *Scarlet Women* candidly drew attention to the tensions between socialist and radical feminists from its inception, something which only appears in the later issues of *Red Rag* after the collective experienced difficulties in reaching editorial consensus. It should be noted, however, that *Scarlet Women*'s first issue appeared the same year as issue 11 of *Red Rag* in which Sue O'Sullivan's resignation letters were published. This is conceivably an indication that during and around 1976, feminists were becoming more aware of the factions internal to the women's movement with the benefit of having had at that point witnessed various interests unfold at eight out of what would end up being ten National Women's Liberation Movement conferences. Perhaps bearing in mind that transparency about the intentions of the newsletter would be a key method to generate trust with its readership, something which *Red Rag* received criticism about not doing sufficiently, TCW included a two-page summary about their members and activities in issue 1 of *Scarlet Women*.

Notably, TCW describes five major problems that had arisen within group discussions which were intended to act as catalysts to generate further communication in the newsletter.[391] These problems encompassed the following: how to conceive of the overall role of a socialist feminist group, how to incorporate feminism into socialist activities, how consciousness-raising can be integrated into women's groups, how the women's movement can offer new ways of dealing with relationships, marriage and childcare, and whether the Women's Liberation Movement should develop into a mass movement with the possibility of involving men (and women) who do not understand themselves as feminists.[392] The editorial of issue 2,

[390] Tyneside Coast Women, "What Has Happened to the Women's Liberation and Socialism Conferences?," *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement*, no. 1 (1976).
[391] Tyneside Coast Women, "Tyneside Coast Women - Who We Are and What We Do," *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement*, no. 1 (1976).
[392] Directly after mentioning marriage and childcare, the TCW exclaims "no, not separatism!," thereby assuring their readers that they intend to distinguish themselves from the revolutionary feminist stance, which is discussed in more detail in chapter 1.

also published in 1976, describes how a lot of letters were received in response to issue 1 saying that these problems "were also experienced by other sisters involved in feminist and socialist activities and campaigns."[393] The editorial goes on to recognise the comforting effect these letters had in contextualising such problems as having some objective basis in the women's movement rather than simply being "the result of personal ineptitude and lack of organisation."[394] Such responses exemplify the role of letters not just in contributing opinions to a conversation, but also as a confirmation for the newsletter that there existed an interested and invested readership.

TCW took the approach that differences between women "can be healthy given the right framework and approach" and concluded that "the only real solution to this problem lay in the setting up of a socialist feminist network" in order to continue discussions beyond the official conference proceedings.[395] Given that TCW had a history of utilising consciousness-raising, it is no surprise that the newsletter was seen as the most efficient means for socialist feminists to network with each other. Network thinking was integral in facilitating the communication of personal experiences and information between women, leading to "their discovering commonality of social treatment and status."[396] *Scarlet Women* was conceived of as the vehicle for manifesting a communication network in order to link together socialist feminists throughout the country, to raise and discuss problems as well as to develop ongoing theoretical issues and to prevent factionalism. Specifically, the newsletter would "provide a forum for discussion"[397] and share information about activities and campaigns across the UK. In issue 3, published in February 1977, it states that:

> The newsletter will not lay down the 'correct' line – it will rather pin-point and isolate problem areas in the development of our perspective. In publishing contributions and regional reports, it will raise issues that could be taken up for further discussion at regional meetings.[398]

[393] "Editorial," *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement*, no. 2 (1976).
[394] Ibid.
[395] Tyneside Coast Women, "What Has Happened to the Women's Liberation and Socialism Conferences?"
[396] Cheris Kramarae and Dale Spender, "Networking," in *Routledge International Encyclopedia of Women: Global Issues and Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 2000). 1446.
[397] "Editorial," (1976).
[398] "Editorial," *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement*, no. 3 (1977).

This commitment towards not laying down the "correct" line is important because it simultaneously enabled the newsletter to be responsive to wide areas of political concern while also signalling to the reader that a variety of opinions would be welcomed. *Scarlet Women* also published their list of regional co-ordinators in each issue including contacts in Scotland, the North and North West, Yorkshire, the East, the Midlands, the South West and South East, London and Wales. These co-ordinators were responsible for contacting socialist feminists in their regions in order to arrange meetings and bring up topics to be considered important for the newsletter to publicise and discuss. Each issue of *Scarlet Women* included a "News from the Regions" section in which the co-ordinators would summarise major events, conferences, actions and campaigns pertaining to women in their regional areas.

2.3.2 Feminism in Northern Ireland

Throughout its publishing lifespan, *Scarlet Women* prioritised the development of a communication network through regional and international contacts, allowing for extensive coverage on the situation facing women in Northern Ireland. In 1976, two Irish women, Betty Williams and Mairead Corrigan, formed an organisation called Women for Peace, later renamed Community of Peace People (CPP) out of a fear it would be associated with the Women's Liberation Movement. The women were motivated to start CPP by an incident during which Corrigan's young nieces and nephews were killed by a Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) driver who was fleeing from and shot by British soldiers. They organised several marches, the largest of which was held in the Protestant area of Belfast in 1976 attracting around 50,000 people. The CPP's main aim was to end the violence in Northern Ireland, and it formed part of a larger effort by people across the island of Ireland, generally referred to as the "Peace Process" or "Peace Movement," to oppose sectarianism. While the CPP was the most visible women-led peace organisation, women had been at the heart of cross-community work for decades prior.[399] This involved better housing and education advocacy, lobbying for maternity and abortion rights, and calling for peace.

Issue 3 of *Scarlet Women* contained two articles about women in Northern Ireland, asserting that "the Peace Movement was able temporarily to attract women because many of them

[399] It should be noted that while women were central in opposing sectarianism and calling for peace across the island of Ireland, women were *also* involved in the struggle for establishing an independent Irish Republic, such as Constance Markievicz, and in the parliamentary representation for civil rights, such as Bernadette Devlin.

were alienated from what must often seem a purely military fight having little to do with the daily struggle to survive."[400] The articles describe how there also seemed to be a sense among Irish women that church leaders were not supporting women's role in the struggles and that, while Irish women generally were not in a position to make specific demands regarding women's oppression, it would be vital for feminists across the UK to support Irish women in the Peace Movement in order to build better lines of communication and solidarity. These articles were followed by the Northern Ireland Socialist Women's Group (SWG) manifesto which, similarly to the aims of *Scarlet Women* and *Red Rag*, makes sense of the "economic and sexual oppression of women" through "a class-based viewpoint."[401] However, in the combined issue 6/7 of *Scarlet Women* published in 1978, a founding member of the SWG (Margaret Ward) sent in a letter to announce that just two months after the newsletter had printed the manifesto, the group dissolved.

The problem of groups disintegrating features heavily in both *Scarlet Women* and *Red Rag* which reveals a discernible strain felt by socialist feminists about how to integrate competing political concerns. For instance, Ward attributes the dissolution of SWG to underlying disagreements in the group that saw one half argue that a specifically *socialist* group would alienate women while the other half argued that the SWG was too far removed from the anti-imperialist struggle. Ward writes that after the dissolution of the SWG, she helped start the Belfast Women's Collective (BWC) which was "open to all women who want to work on women's issues" and positioned itself as an explicitly feminist organisation.[402] In her letter, she calls for support from *Scarlet Women* and its readers, asking whether socialist feminists should organise separately from the Women's Liberation Movement and the organised labour movement, and how to build coalitions with anti-racist committees.

The newsletter in this case acted as a foundational networking mechanism for British and Irish socialist feminists to share information and discuss strategies for building political bridges. The SWG manifesto, the announcement of the group's dissolution, and the attempt to rebuild another organisation with a renewed approach are all clear indicators that socialist

[400] Anonymous, "The Peace Movement," *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement*, no. 3 (1977).
[401] Socialist Women's Group Northern Ireland, "Manifesto," *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement*, no. 3 (1977).
[402] Margaret Ward, "News from the Regions: Belfast," *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement*, no. 6/7 (1978).

feminists in Northern Ireland were up against similar obstacles as socialist feminists in the rest of the UK, namely, that they found themselves positioned between two competing priorities while also maintaining that the integration of socialism and feminism is the only way in which to achieve meaningful progress. Nevertheless, the situation was also distinct in that the intersections of nationalism and the Catholic church produced contentions for the women's liberation struggle that were not present in the rest of the UK to the same extent, causing frustration about how these nuances were reported outside the island of Ireland.

In issue 4 of *Scarlet Women*, published in 1977, a letter from the Women and Ireland Group (WIG) contested the two articles on the Peace Movement in the previous issue. The group writes that it was "necessary to criticise the ways Soc/Fems are analysing the Irish struggle" because the socialist feminist debate about women in Northern Ireland had been influenced by the way in which the "British press" had reported on the Peace Movement.[403] The WIG argues that Irish women had been actively involved in organising various political campaigns since long before the Troubles, and that the Peace Movement was not a given feminist manifestation simply because it was seen to be led by predominantly women. The letter highlights that the demands made by the Peace Movement are for an "unspecified peace" and that despite the prevalence of women, "no demands for women's rights emerged."[404] The WIG argues that the Peace Movement is in fact primarily a political manoeuvre to support the reform of Northern Ireland by means of support by the British Army. Given this view, the WIG stresses that:

> For Soc/Fems to support the [Peace Movement] despite its political objectives and despite the forces in Britain who support them – the Government, the Army, the Press and the Church – on the basis that it is women organising together, assumes that it is merely the process of women "getting together" that produces ideological change.[405]

This echoes Margaret Ward's letter about the dissolution of the SWG, as she describes that a central factor to that dissolution was the realisation that "an organisation which is simply made up of working class women has no built-in guarantee of expressing a socialist answer to

[403] Women and Ireland Group, "Reply to Scarlet Women Collective," *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement*, no. 4 (1977).
[404] Ibid.
[405] Ibid.

women's oppression," and in the case of SWG and the Peace Movement, is "more likely to express reformism."[406] In other words, these letters suggest that it would be a mistake for socialist feminist to conclude that a feminist politic is an inevitable outcome from women organising together and that the proposed socialist feminist support for women in the Peace Movement should be approached with caution.

Given these political divisions between women in Northern Ireland, it would have been a delicate exercise for feminists in the rest of the UK to assess behind which organisation their support is best placed. Indeed, feminists often proclaimed that "Ireland is too difficult"[407] for them to work out, as is mentioned in the example of *Red Rag* whose Communist Party collective members felt that the Women's Liberation Movement was not "the place to find out about Ireland."[408] Conversely, the letters in *Scarlet Women* provided a location in which both British and Irish feminists could find out about, and contribute to, the varying factions of feminist organising taking place in Northern Ireland. The coverage of and engagement in this topic affirms the effectiveness of *Scarlet Women*'s primary goal to act as a communication network which would be responsive to regional and international issues concerning socialist feminists.

Several years later, in 1980, issue 11 of *Scarlet Women* was put together by the BWC as a special issue on women in Northern Ireland. The intention was to produce a cross-section of opinion which meant that at times the "typists and layout artists actively disagreed with things" and "objected strongly to certain analysis [*sic*]" but that it was still considered important to produce a collection which would stimulate debate.[409] By this time the CPP had collapsed due to internal disagreements about money and leadership, and the debate between feminists in Northern Ireland became about whether to support the anti-imperialist (and male-dominated) Republican movement, or whether to focus more specifically on the women's liberation struggle. The BWC took this opportunity to write a brief article about how the dissolution of the SWG led them to stop giving prominence to the anti-imperialist stance and that they instead began campaigning specifically for a women's movement.

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[406] Ward, "News from the Regions: Belfast."
[407] South London Women Against Imperialism, "Dear Sisters," *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement*, no. 12 (1980).
[408] O'Sullivan, "Dear Red Rag,."
[409] Marie, Marie-Thérèse, and Marilyn, "Dear Sisters," *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement*, no. 11 (1980).

In first criticising the Peace Movement in issue 6/7 of *Scarlet Women*, and subsequently the Republican movement and its position on women in issue 11, the BWC found itself increasingly isolated by political sectarianism and were deemed "a bourgeois women's group" by Women Against Imperialism (WAI).[410] The article illustrates increasing feelings of frustration and exhaustion developed within the BWC, stating that "we always felt the need to justify our anomalous position, to 'prove' ourselves as feminists and as socialists."[411] This hostility levelled against BWC meant that there was increased pressure for the group to remain united, leading to a reluctance to voice the "divergences of opinion within the group."[412] Eventually the collective met the same fate as the SWG and dissolved, days before issue 11 of *Scarlet Women* was published, though they note that upon reflection it had less to do with internal group dynamics and more to do with how "politically, there [was] precious little common ground on which feminists and socialists can meet" and so the BWC fell victim to the attempts of developing an "ideological critique of nationalism that was imbued with feminism."[413]

Such existential difficulties can be felt throughout issue 11 as the articles are saturated with opposing arguments and accusations, mainly centring around the question of whether women across the island of Ireland should put their weight behind male-dominated anti-imperialist organisations. The letters, editorials and articles in both *Scarlet Women* and *Red Rag* demonstrate how the negotiations of a socialist feminist position would often lead to the dissolution of a group, not only because of internal group dynamics, but because it represented a wider contradiction in the women's movement itself which for the large part remained unsolved.

Issue 12 of *Scarlet Women* was a special issue on women and imperialism which included articles about institutional racism in Britain, criticisms about prisons, a report on tourism and prostitution, feminist perspectives from India, Iran, Eritrea, El Salvador and Chile, as well as an article by Nawal el Saadawi about the Arab women's struggle in Egypt. Notably, the last four pages are dedicated to largely critical letters responding to the previous special issue on women in Northern Ireland. Marie Mulholland, a member of Belfast WAI, contends that the

[410] Belfast Women's Collective, "Article from Belfast Women's Collective," *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement*, no. 11 (1980).
[411] Ibid.
[412] Ibid.
[413] Ibid.

articles in issue 11 evidence a prevailing feminist attitude that characterises the Republican movement as a "Svengali" organisation. She says that this attitude assumes wrongly that any movement not initiated by women is de facto a "male plot" and it insinuates that women who support the Republican movement do not have an independent mind of their own. The women's movement in the rest of the UK, she contends, does not have a coherent stance on anything related to women in Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland and therefore "Irishwomen […] have not got the time or the tolerance to wait around for British feminists to search every nook and cranny looking for Svengali before they decide to participate in the saving of our lives."[414]

The South London WAI also wrote in a letter responding to issue 11, describing how their first response to reading it was anger. Similarly to Mulholland, they argue that the British Women's Liberation Movement often describes Irish Republican women as victims who are manipulated by the Republican movement which overlooks women's autonomous anti-imperialist organising in Northern Ireland and elsewhere. The letter additionally suggests that issue 11 was heavily skewed against women who supported the Republican movement and that it read like a "Feminist Handbook to Northern Ireland" which did nothing to make women "examine [their] own collusions and/or struggle against the British state."[415] Mulholland also responds to accusations that WAI alienates protestant women through its anti-imperialist stance, insisting that such criticism was never accompanied by any suggestions for constructive solutions. She is particularly taken aback by Gerry's article "Notes on Feminism and Northern Ireland" in which she uses the terms "so-called feminists" and "Trotskyist feminists" to describe WAI.

Mulholland's rebuttal insists that such language is unhelpful and cynically asks whether Gerry could send WAI an application form "in the British style of feminism" to assess whether they pass the feminist test.[416] Such rhetorical questions evidence that accusations of exhibiting "British feminism" were used by anti-imperialist feminists to discredit – or at least to call into question the credibility of – Irish women who criticised the Republican movement. The letter by the South London WAI also takes issue with Gerry's article, arguing

[414] Marie Mulholland, "I Am Sick to Death," *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement*, no. 12 (1980).
[415] South London Women Against Imperialism, "Dear Sisters,."
[416] Mulholland, "I Am Sick to Death,."

that her coverage is indistinguishable from that "presented by the Mirror or Guardian" and that it raises doubts about her anti-imperialist stance.[417] Gerry was a member of the BWC and also involved in the co-ordination of issue 11 – and given that her article was one of the principal criticisms about WAI lacking feminist analysis – it is understandable that WAI saw issue 11 as having editorial bias. Despite this potential bias, *Scarlet Women* provided a location in which conflict between women in Northern Ireland could unfold within the larger context of socialist feminists attempting to create a presence in the political Left and the Women's Liberation Movement. Just as socialist feminists in the rest of the UK were striving to avoid a polarising position, so too did WAI attempt to give equal priority to the anti-imperialist struggle as well as to "destroying the Irish Patriarchal rule."[418]

Two further letters were published in response to issue 11 that took slightly different views, one by Manchester Women and Ireland Group (WIG) and the other by Derry Women's Aid (DWA). The Manchester WIG is cognisant that there seem to be two opposing positions surrounding this issue: one being an unwavering acceptance and support of the Republican movement and the other being a disavowal of any Republican causes in favour of waging women's autonomous struggle against patriarchal oppression. The Manchester WIG says that neither of these positions represent their ideas and that the constant interference and criticism from the outside about how women in Northern Ireland should best organise themselves "is in itself imperialist."[419] While the WIG intends to improve childcare facilities, abortion and contraception rights to advance the lives of women across the island of Ireland, they also recognise that such aims are difficult to achieve given that the British Army invades "all areas of women's lives."[420] Therefore, they suggest it is imperative to cultivate more space for debating the issues raised in issue 11 of *Scarlet Women* in order to "come to a better understanding of imperialism" as well as to develop strategies for linking anti-imperialist campaigns with feminism.[421] This links back to the overall goal of the *Scarlet Women* newsletter of developing "an understanding of the real relationship between male supremacy and class society."[422] Though many of the letters are charged with forceful political

[417] Imperialism, "Dear Sisters,."
[418] Mulholland, "I Am Sick to Death,."
[419] Manchester Women and Ireland Group, "The Discussion around Ireland," *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement*, no. 12 (1980).
[420] Ibid.
[421] Ibid.
[422] "Editorial," *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement*, no. 6/7 (1978).

arguments, there is a pronounced recognition by contributors that the socialist feminist analysis needs to be further developed through more discussion which, without newsletters like *Scarlet Women*, would not have been possible.

The other letter, by DWA, brings attention to how women in Northern Ireland have been intentionally pit against each other by pledging allegiances to male-dominated political groups. The letter describes how both Unionist and Republican organisations have used "women members and supporters to condemn the demands of women's groups" which has, in extreme cases, led to women committing violence and hurling sexual abuse at other women under the directions of men.[423] Particularly, DWA questions why women have been predominantly "used as fundraisers and providers of accommodation"[424] by the Republican movement and further claims that the only demands these women articulate "have been those decided on by men."[425] The letter ends with the assertion that "only by forming their own organisations and challenging the ideologies of existing political and religious groupings, plus the attitudes of society in general, will women's liberation be achieved."[426] The coverage of the divergences in Northern Ireland reveals that the obstacles in developing a unified socialist feminist movement were not limited to one group or tendency or region, but rather that such dynamics were an inevitable characteristic of the articulation of socialist feminism. Because *Scarlet Women* had regional co-ordinators across the UK, it was able to be responsive to conflicts affecting socialist feminists in a variety of contexts and engage on regional issues through its discursive framework.

2.3.3 European Socialist Feminist Conferences

The wide-ranging concerns covered in *Scarlet Women* are particularly evident in its attempt to build international lines of communication. As the questions around Northern Ireland began emerging in issue 3, the *Scarlet Women* collective simultaneously took part in a planning meeting in preparation for the European Socialist Feminist conference that was to be held in Paris in November 1976. Issue 3 included a report from this meeting which was held in London and attended by socialist feminists from the Netherlands, Germany, Spain,

[423] Derry Women's Aid, "Some Years Ago," *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement*, no. 12 (1980).
[424] Ibid.
[425] Ibid.
[426] Ibid.

France and the UK. The report demonstrates that issues around the relationship between women's struggle and the class struggle were of overarching and international concern. While the French feminists appealed for the conference to focus on one simple theme, "Women and Work," the Dutch and the British feminists argued that "the WLM [Women's Liberation Movement] had gone beyond 'the left' in its analysis" and the sole focus on *work* would be an unnecessarily retrograde step in feminist analysis.[427] Particularly the Dutch feminists, from the group Feminist Socialist Platform (FSP), were insistent on facilitating a much broader exchange to allow for discussions that would not be formulated through the narrow lens of waged work.

Directly after the report, *Scarlet Women* published a letter from FSP which announced that they were withdrawing from organising the Paris conference, and instead planning their own socialist feminist conference in Amsterdam. In the letter, the Dutch feminists explain that even if the Paris conference would broaden its scope to go beyond the theme of "Women and Work," they felt that the planning meetings had been "too heavily dominated by specific groups of socialist women to get the kind of exchange [they] want."[428] By the time issue 4 of *Scarlet Women* was published in July 1977, several British feminists had attended both conferences and a report by Penny Remfry asks the question "was the split necessary?"[429] Over 4000 women attended the Paris conference while 250 women attended the Amsterdam conference, largely due to a smaller venue restricting attendance numbers. Remfry recalls that while the sheer number of women present at the Paris conference reflected "a large and energetic new area of political development and activity among women throughout Europe" which made the conference exciting in and of itself, the enormity of it also made it difficult to develop any of the discussions in a meaningful way.[430] In contrast, the Amsterdam conference facilitated a more intimate atmosphere in which women were able to get to know each other on a personal level. Both conferences were reported to have language barriers: in the case of Paris the plenary sessions were translated into three languages which meant that at least one language group was consistently excluded, while in Amsterdam the entire conference was English-only which put the British women in an advantageous position.

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[427] Barbara Yates, "What Happened to the European Socialist-Feminist Conference?," *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement*, no. 3 (1977).
[428] Feminist Socialist Platform, "Dear Sisters," *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement*, no. 3 (1977).
[429] Penny Remfry, "Paris - Amsterdam: Was the Split Necessary?," *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement*, no. 4 (1977).
[430] Ibid.

Remfry describes how "the Paris conference reflected a greater orientation towards the straight revolutionary left, and the Amsterdam conference tended towards the more libertarian and feminist positions," however even in Paris the topics of rape, violence, and control over female bodies were emphasised by participants as urgent areas of concern for socialist feminists.[431] This shows that, even with the narrower parameters of "women and work," socialist feminists in Paris inevitably ended up grappling with the need to go beyond traditional economic class analysis. In addition, it became clear during both conferences that women in Southern Europe and women in Northern Europe had distinct experiences of the feminist struggle. Whereas in Northern Europe the feminist movement had partly developed outside of the organised labour movement, in Southern Europe men's attitudes towards women were "thrashed out within the context of a much higher level of political consciousness."[432] In other words, Remfry is suggesting that the feminist cause was far more embedded in the socialist movements of Southern Europe.

Out of the two conferences came limited concrete actions, and in fact Remfry notes that the Paris conference "collapsed in confusion"[433] due to a general disappointment that there had not been enough opportunities to talk to women from other countries. Although the Amsterdam conference was significantly smaller, the reflections in *Scarlet Women* indicate that women were left with a sense that a European socialist feminist network was possible. Notably, it was decided that *ISIS International Bulletin*, an international feminist newsletter and communication forum, was to be used for the circulation of information about socialist feminist activities in Europe. This is important in making sense of why the Amsterdam conference left women feeling more hopeful. As Agatha Beins identifies in *Liberation in Print*, feminist periodicals weave a "temporal and spatial fabric" within which feminism finds a presence,[434] and such endurance allows for its readers to "anticipate a future" for feminism.[435] In agreeing that the conference work would continue through the *ISIS* newsletter, participants may have felt more optimistic that the conversations and relationships would persist into the future.

[431] Ibid.
[432] Ibid.
[433] Ibid.
[434] Beins, *Liberation in Print: Feminist Periodicals and Social Movement Identity*. 55.
[435] Ibid. 58.

Anna Briggs wrote a summary of the Amsterdam conference, also for issue 4 of *Scarlet Women*, which recalls how it felt exciting to discover that "a similar development of the theoretical approach had been taking place in different countries at the same time."[436] She describes how the tensions between radical feminism and socialist feminism had been taken up by feminists throughout Europe and how this realisation extended the participants' understanding that such concerns were not limited to regional differences. These reports confirm that the difficulties faced by socialist feminists in working out their political practices and ideas were felt throughout various European feminist currents and it is the format of the *Scarlet Women* newsletter which gave these debates an enduring presence.

2.3.4 Reproduction and the Origins of Women's Oppression

Another controversy which featured in *Scarlet Women* was that of the origins of women's oppression and reproduction. Socialist feminists were well aware of the necessity for theorising reproduction, particularly well evidenced in *Scarlet Women*'s reports on the European Socialist Feminist Conferences in Paris and Amsterdam during which it was inadvertently identified that there was a need to address how the female body, and in turn reproduction, is a site of patriarchal control. Issue 5, most likely published in 1977, reprinted several papers that had been presented at the Revolutionary/Radical Feminist conference in Edinburgh the year prior, as well as several socialist feminist rebuttals to those papers. Included in issue 5 was Sheila Jeffreys' paper "The Need for Revolutionary Feminism," which is mentioned in chapter 1 in the context of generating discussions and disagreements between radical and revolutionary feminists within the *WIRES* newsletter about political lesbianism and sexuality.

Interestingly, in the final issue of *Red Rag*, published in 1980, the editorial acknowledges that "sexuality and personal life seemed to have been taken up only by radical and revolutionary feminism" and that the collective did not intend to vacate the "personal political" to revolutionary feminists.[437] Perhaps thinking along the same lines, *Scarlet Women* eventually published a double issue (issue 13.1 and 13.2 in 1981) specifically about compulsory

[436] Anna Briggs, "Amsterdam - Another View," *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement*, no. 4 (1977).
[437] "Editorial," (1979).

heterosexuality and political lesbianism, but initially there was more urgency in the newsletter for making sense of reproduction and biological determinism.

The editorial of issue 5 recognises that there is a gap in socialist feminist theory in this regard and proposes that Jeffreys' paper could stimulate discussion and the development of ideas around reproduction. Jeffreys' paper suggests that economic class analysis is insufficient to make sense of women's lives and that therefore feminists should theorise based on the sex class system wherein "men have power over women because they control the means of production which are women's bodies."[438] One of her central arguments is that because socialist feminist theory is a loose adaptation of Marxism, it fails to take seriously *personal experience* of male violence and male sexuality as a basis from which to theorise oppression.

Two articles were included in issue 5 of *Scarlet Women* which objected to sex class analyses. One was simply titled "Socialist Feminists Respond" written by "a group of socialist feminist women in London."[439] The group takes particular issue with Jeffreys' use of the term "materialist" to describe the way in which women's oppression is located in the male sexual control over women's bodies. They argue that "her attempt to explain women's oppression by reference to a single root cause leads her to a biologistic explanation" and that "a biologistic explanation is not a materialist one."[440] Instead, the group suggests that in the case of Marxism, "materialism" does not relate to actual physical machinery, but instead to the social relations which determine the organisation of production.

And so, when superimposed onto a feminist analysis, "materialism" from a Marxist perspective would refer to the social roles assigned to men and women. In other words, a "husband/father is not oppressive because he is a <u>man</u>, but rather men are oppressive because they are husbands and fathers" (original emphasis).[441] The group argues that in conceiving of male control over reproduction as the basis of all aspects of women's oppression – the fundamental premise for devising a sex class analysis – Jeffreys is downgrading any struggle that does not directly relate to concrete physical objects. In this sense, the group suggests that

[438] Sheila Jeffreys, "The Need for Revolutionary Feminism," *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement*, no. 5 (1977).
[439] "Socialist Feminists Respond: Against 'Sex-Class' Theories," *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement*, no. 5 (1977).
[440] Ibid.
[441] Ibid.

Jeffreys' approach is similar to pure economic Marxism which ignores women's struggle against sexual oppression, and in doing so Jeffreys "prolongs the split between Marxism and Feminism which socialist feminists are attempting to overcome."[442]

However, even though the group is in disagreement about the validity of a sex class analysis, they recognise that for socialist feminists "there is no ready-made alternative and that it was important to begin to try and thrash one out."[443] Additionally, the article demonstrates the self-reflexive nature of writing in *Scarlet Women* by acknowledging that there remains "a great deal of confusion both about the relationship of the socialist feminist network to the wider Women's Liberation Movement and its relationship to the organised Left."[444] The role of the newsletter in making sense of this confusion is made particularly clear as the authors write that it was only in developing their response for *Scarlet Women* that they "were all forced to take positions."[445] In this case, the newsletter itself became the impetus for negotiating the socialist feminist position.

The topic of reproduction is the central theme of issue 6/7 of *Scarlet Women*, published in 1978, which became a double issue because of the amount of material that had been sent in, which in itself is evidence of the pertinence of the subject matter. The principal topic covered in this issue is the role which the alienation of reproductive power plays in upholding patriarchal control over women. In her article "Women, Reproduction and Alienation," Anna Briggs argues that male control over female reproduction – through paediatrics, obstetrics, and the general medical institution – has purposefully removed women from their key power as a sex class. She warns that this is a serious concern for socialist feminists because "there is no guarantee that in a 'socialist' male state, there would be any change in this."[446]

In issue 8 of *Scarlet Women* published that same year, two critical letters suggest that the content in the previous issue was veering towards biological determinism. One of the letters written by Cherrill Hicks, a member of East London Socialist Feminists, challenged the

[442] Ibid.
[443] Ibid.
[444] Ibid.
[445] Ibid.
[446] Anna Briggs, "Women, Reproduction and Alienation," *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement*, no. 6/7 (1978).

"intangible and mysterious concept of reproductive power."[447] She is sceptical that biological differences alone account for male power over women, and indeed argues that such a view "smack[s] of biological determinism" as it assumes that sexed power relations are innate and therefore male dominance would "always exist."[448] The other letter is written by Manny, a member of South London Socialist Feminist Monday Group, which similarly interpreted the writing in issue 6/7 as insinuating that women can defeat patriarchy by utilising their reproductive power. This, she says, wrongly pits women against men which goes "against the principle of socialism."[449]

The *Scarlet Women* editorial collective included a reply underneath Hicks' and Manny's letters, clarifying that the term "reproductive power" refers to the measurable (not mystical) ability to carry and bear children. The collective points out that because this is a distinctly *female* capacity, which is required by patriarchal class society to propagate inequality, it can also become a site of resistance if women "establish control over the conditions of motherhood."[450] Manny also appeals to *Scarlet Women* directly in proposing that it cover "broader issues which are the concern of the majority, written in a simple language accessible to everybody," an indication that perhaps she saw the topic of reproduction as a "specialised issue at the disposal of a few."[451] Nevertheless, such critical letters in themselves – as well as the fact that *Scarlet Women* had to produce a double issue on this theme given the volume of material submitted – demonstrate that discussions about reproduction and the origins of women's oppression were in fact central to the concerns socialist feminists had to confront whilst developing a theory distinct from traditional Marxism. Interestingly, while Jeffreys' contributions to the *WIRES* newsletter generated debates and disagreements about political lesbianism and heterosexuality, in the case of *Scarlet Women* the readers were more concerned with her arguments about reproduction and sex class analysis. This difference in reaction demonstrates the "two hats" context of socialism and feminism within which *Scarlet Women* and its readers were situated.

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[447] Cherrill Hicks, "Dear Scarlet Women," *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement*, no. 8 (1978).
[448] Ibid.
[449] Manny, "Dear Scarlet Women," *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement*, no. 8 (1978).
[450] "Editorial Reply to Letters," *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement*, no. 8 (1978).
[451] Manny, "Dear Scarlet Women,."

2.3.5 Reflections on *Scarlet Women*

Scarlet Women's first five issues are experimental, covering a wide array of topics from conference reports, to regional activities and tentative pursuits in working out the socialist feminist position. From issue 6/7 onwards, the issues became thematically defined.[452] Issue 15, *Scarlet Women*'s final issue, was put together by one of the collective members Ann Torode in 1983 on the theme of the nuclear threat and the Greenham Peace Camp. Interestingly, it was never actually published until 2019 when Holly Argent from the Women Artists of the North East Library, in collaboration with Penny Remfry, printed the issue on the occasion of Sandra Lahire's screening of her Anti-Nuclear trilogy of films.[453] This resurfacing of *Scarlet Women* is a clear indicator of the ongoing relevancy and unsolved problems that the newsletter covered during its publication lifespan.

Remfry recalls that issue 15 was not published "because by the time it was ready for printing in 1983 the other members of the collective had melted away, involved in other activities and concerns."[454] As already mentioned in the context of *Red Rag*, in 1979 the political Left in the UK had been defeated by the largest electoral swing since 1945, making way for what would become a decade of Conservative leadership under Margaret Thatcher. The last issues of *Scarlet Women* also reflect a sense of impending doom, as the collective states in 1980 that "*Scarlet Women* is fighting a losing battle against inflation. […] We need women to send donations […] OR WE MAY NEVER BE ABLE TO PRINT ANOTHER ISSUE" (original emphasis).[455] Given this hostile political and economic environment, it makes sense that the *Scarlet Women* collective members had started pooling their energies into other activities. That being said, the function of the newsletter in developing not just a socialist feminist network, but a basis of socialist feminist theory and analysis, was significant.

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[452] Issue 6/7 (1978) revolves around reproduction; issue 8 (1978) covers income, housework and waged work; issue 9 (1979) considers the roots of fascism and feminist anti-fascist activity; issue 10 (1979) discusses violence against women and pornography; issue 11 (1980) is about feminism in Northern Ireland; issue 12 (1980) deals with British imperialism and racism from international perspectives; issues 13.1 and 13.2 (1981) take up political lesbianism and sexuality; issue 14 (1982) is produced by the West Yorkshire Women and New Technology group and tackles computing from a feminist perspective; and finally issue 15 (1983) covers the nuclear threat and Greenham Peace Camp.

[453] A new issue of *Scarlet Women* was also published in 2019 as part of The Tyne and Wear Archives Museum's "Women of Tyneside" project, under the theme "What's changed for women since 1982?" The issue was put together by members of North Tyneside Women's Voices and designed by Sail Creative.

[454] Penny Remfry, "Foreword," *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement*, no. 15 (2019).

[455] "Subscription," *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement*, no. 12 (1980).

Making use of the newsletter format in order to facilitate a networked forum of debate exposed the readers and contributors of *Scarlet Women* to international socialist feminist negotiations, as well as internal conflicts and disagreements. Such debates resulted in the carving out of a distinct socialist feminist position, using the principles of consciousness-raising for developing theory from female experience as a point of differentiation from the traditional male socialist analysis. These considerations are particularly well evidenced in the coverage of feminism in Northern Ireland and international anti-imperialist struggles, the European Socialist Feminist conferences as well as the deliberations around the origins of women's oppression and reproduction. Reading the letters, editorials and articles in *Scarlet Women* uncovers how printed communication networks allowed for socialist feminists to express conflicting opinions about how to most strategically bring about a socialist feminist momentum and doing so, perhaps most importantly, within an international context.

2.4 Conclusion

During the 1970s and early 1980s in the UK, socialist feminists found themselves positioned in between the political Left and the Women's Liberation Movement, asking themselves if it is possible to "separate the Marxist and feminist criteria for change, recombine them, and finally, in the new juxtaposition, discover a more satisfying solution?"[456] The breakaway of women from socialist organisations led to significant divisions within the Women's Liberation Movement between radical feminists who rejected theories associated with the male Left and socialist feminists who regarded the foundations of Marxism as essential for any kind of revolutionary change. Varying degrees of allegiances to the political Left within the emerging socialist feminist current resulted in distinct strategies for facilitating the development of a socialist feminist position.

These shifting strategies can be effectively ascertained from analysing the communication and disagreements in the Marxist and socialist feminist periodicals *Red Rag* and *Scarlet Women.* While sharing many commonalities, both periodicals had a divergent publishing ethos that produced communication frameworks which reveal different problems socialist feminists were contending with. For instance, *Red Rag* was conceived of by feminists in the

[456] Batya Weinbaum, *The Curious Courtship of Women's Liberation and Socialism* (Boston: South End Press, 1978). 12.

Communist Party who envisaged an independent, Marxist feminist publication in order to make links with the Women's Liberation Movement. From this set-up followed an editorial tendency of excluding any criticisms of the Communist Party itself. Towards the end of its publishing lifespan, *Red Rag* published several letters from collective members who describe how this editorial bias not only led to a lack of transparency for its readership, but also to difficulties in collective working practices. Developing principles for collective working is a constant point of discussion throughout *Red Rag*'s editorials which made the simultaneous goal of developing a coherent Marxist feminist position a challenging task. In contrast, *Scarlet Women* was founded by members of the Tyneside Coast Women's Group which had already facilitated conversations about the difficulties of being feminists within the Left through consciousness-raising and workshops at conferences before the newsletter began circulating. *Scarlet Women* was intended as a communication forum for a newly established socialist feminist network and it was co-ordinated by regional contacts. The newsletter was largely able to avoid accusations of opacity as the articles, editorials and letters brought attention to the internal splits of the women's movement from the beginning of its print run.

Both *Red Rag* and *Scarlet Women* are compelling sources for analysing the role of periodicals in making space for internal feminist divisions to unravel. The articles, editorials and letters contributed to an active forum for negotiating the socialist feminist position. Additionally, it is clear that such communications were taking place within the broader context of a women's movement which was grappling with ideological disunity. In the case of *Red Rag*, its relatively insular editorial group and lack of connection to a broader network meant that when internal problems of collective working began to emerge – coupled with an overall decline of the Left – the continuation of the magazine became unattainable. Conversely, even though *Scarlet Women* was more able to absorb the impacts of feminist disagreements due to its networked and regional structure, the Conservative election victories and increasing inflation rates made it impossible to sustain the newsletter. Nevertheless, the negotiations involved in carving out the Marxist and socialist feminist position demonstrate in both cases particularly well how second wave feminists were concerned with linking together women with different priorities for the purpose of women's liberation. *Red Rag* and *Scarlet Women* are both examples of disagreement and contradictions being mediated through printed communication and, in turn, how these debates activated the Women's Liberation Movement itself.

Chapter 3: Racism, Anti-Zionism, Anti-Semitism

3.1 Introduction

In 1982, the well-known feminist magazine *Spare Rib* received a "flood of letters"[457] from Jewish feminists who claimed that their coverage on anti-Zionism had demonstrated underlying attitudes of anti-Semitism within the magazine.[458] *Spare Rib* having, for the first time, an equal number of Black women and white women members on its collective, decided against publishing these letters, reasoning that they were overtly Zionist and damaging to the liberation struggle in Palestine. The controversy soon dominated the magazine's letter pages and remained unresolved for the entirety of its publication lifespan. This chapter focuses exclusively on the way in which the *form* of the feminist periodical enabled such points of tensions to surface and, through the discursive nature of the letter-to-the-editor pages, allowed women to participate in the process of attempting to create anti-racist publications *for all women*. The political debate itself and the rationale behind the various arguments presented have been analysed in several studies already (Thomlinson, 2016; Malpocher, 2009; Hausman, 1991).

In tracing the correspondences here, several things become clear: letter-to-the-editor pages provided a discursive space in which seemingly competing – but what were in fact *interlinked* – identities and concerns could intersect. As such, these correspondences are an important source for tracing the development of an intersectional feminist analytical framework, most famously articulated by Kimberle Chrenshaw in 1989.[459] The letters examined here also evidence a shift away from the assumption that there exists a common experience between women, and towards a concentration on categories of difference, resulting in both Jewish and Black women experiencing these disagreements as a power struggle. Nevertheless, the letter-to-the-editor pages facilitated a necessary negotiation of these supposedly competing categories of identity. Additionally, the publication of these

[457] Sheila Shulman et al., "About Anti-Semitism," *Spare Rib*, no. 123 (1982). All subsequent mentions of the term "flood of letters" can be referred back to this citation unless otherwise specified.
[458] Here and throughout this thesis, I use the Oxford English Dictionary spelling and capitalisation of "anti-Semitism," defined as the "prejudice, hostility, or discrimination towards Jewish people on religious, cultural, or ethnic grounds."
[459] Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, no. 1 (1989). https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8.

correspondences brought the problems of racism, anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism to the attention of many white women readers for the first time. As historical source material, the debates featured in this chapter challenge the depiction of the Women's Liberation Movement as being ignorant of race by functioning as useful longitudinal entries into feminist debates about racism, anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism.[460]

3.1.1 Scope

This chapter examines the coverage of and correspondence about racism, anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism in four second wave periodicals: *Outwrite: Women's Newspaper, Revolutionary & Radical Feminist Newsletter (Rev/Rad), Spare Rib: A Women's Liberation Magazine* and *Trouble & Strife: A Radical Feminist Magazine.* The discussion is followed chronologically, from the first reporting of the Palestinian liberation struggle in *Outwrite*, to the subsequent editorial power struggles between Black women and white women in *Spare Rib*, as well as reactions to the controversy in *Trouble & Strife* and *Rev/Rad.* Particular attention is given to the letter pages and editorials in *Spare Rib* between 1982-1984 where most of the debate unravelled, however for the sake of scope, this chapter does not address in depth the long-lasting effects this dispute had on the women's movement. Rather, the focus remains on how both the format of the magazine, and consequently the function of the letter pages, allowed for contentious political ideas to be negotiated within the limits of a woman-controlled communication infrastructure. In their 2018 article "Letters to the Editor as Serial Form," Carey Snyder and Leif Sorensen argue that each letter in circulated periodicals "has the potential to exist not only as a discrete entity but also as a node in a larger network of responses."[461] Thus, in order to better assess the functionality of published correspondence in mediating feminist conflict, this chapter emphasises the networked mechanisms through which such communication was enabled. For an in-depth history of conflict in *Spare Rib*, as well as the history of racism and anti-Semitism in the Women's Liberation Movement, see respectively Corinne Malpocher's 2009 doctoral thesis *Sexuality, Race and Zionism: Conflict and Debates in Spare Rib, 1972-1993* and Natalie Thomlinson's 2016 book *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement in England, 1968-1993*. Both sources are used extensively in

[460] See Becky Thompson's 2002 journal article "Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism" for a detailed construction of a multiracial feminist movement timeline, including mentions of contrasting one-dimensional narratives of the second wave of feminism.
[461] Snyder and Sorensen, "Letters to the Editor as a Serial Form," 133.

this chapter to give context to the circumstances in which the correspondences took place. Moreover, it should be noted that the controversy in *Spare Rib* was also discussed in other feminist periodicals' letter pages such as in *Shrew: The London Women's Liberation Workshop Newsletter* and the *Women's Information Referral and Enquiry Service* (*WIRES).* However, these periodicals have already been considered as sources in chapters 1 and 2, therefore in order to expand on the breadth of the feminist periodical network, the emphasis here is turned towards other examples (see Figure 3 for an overview of the networked spread of the communication discussed in this chapter).

Subsequently, by narrowing the scope of this chapter to the most controversial years of 1982-1984, discussion about earlier coverage of Black and Jewish feminism in feminist periodicals is omitted for the sake of clarity. According to Malpocher's research, the early commentary on race and racism in *Spare Rib* focused on Asian women, for instance Rosie Boycott and Christine Aziz's article "Lottery of the Lowest: Asian Families in Southall" in issue 17, published in November 1973. As the decade went on, the attention remained on "the challenges faced by Asian immigrant workers in Britain in the early 1970s and the daily discrimination they experienced."[462] Additionally, Malpocher highlights how early coverage addressing the Arab/Israeli conflict in *Spare Rib* did not signal any editorial slant in terms of how a feminist positionality should respond to anti-Zionism or anti-Semitism. She gives the example of the articles "Daily Life in Palestinian Camps" by Rosemary Sayigh, published in issue 66 of *Spare Rib* in 1978; and "Being Jewish: Anti-Semitism and Jewish Women" by Rozika Parker, published in issue 79 of *Spare Rib* in 1979. Malpocher writes that these two articles functioned "as separate set pieces rather than as imbricated," and it is only after 1982 that "the conflation between feminism and anti-Zionism is made" against which some Jewish women took the position that such an equivocation has the potential of being a facade for anti-Semitism.[463] In order to make sense of this editorial position, including the shift from concentrating on Asian women to predominantly Black women and Black feminism in the early 1980s women's movement, a brief historical summary of the broader socio-political conditions in the UK follows below.

[462] Corinne Malpocher, "Sexuality, Race and Zionism: Conflict and Debates in Spare Rib, 1972-1993" (PhD diss., University of York, 2009), 92.
[463] Ibid. 158.

3.1.2 Historical Context

As Natalie Thomlinson highlights in *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement in England, 1968-1993*, the end of the 1970s is often remembered by second wave feminists as constituting the chronological end of the women's movement.[464] However, by focusing explicitly on Black women's activism, Thomlinson demonstrates that the "early 1980s was, in fact, as equally a vibrant period of feminism as the early 1970s."[465] Throughout the 1980s, the Women's Liberation Movement continued to be responsive to the broader British political landscape of the time. The election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979 initiated the steep decline in trade union membership across the UK and saw the closure of many manual trades in an effort to curb rising inflation rates during what was a global recession. Mass rates of unemployment and a rising number of people living in poverty culminated in a period of political unrest which, according to Malpocher, saw "explosions of racial tension" that "brought forth an increase in government intervention in the form of police presence."[466]

Additionally, in 1981, the Thatcher government passed the British Nationality Act which reclassified and removed "the entitlements to citizenship from British nationals in the Commonwealth," discussed in depth in Imogen Tyler's 2010 article "Designed to Fail: A Biopolitics of British Citizenship."[467] According to the Runnymede Trust, this effectively left nearly 21,000 people of Indian ancestry "stateless as British Overseas citizens" as they had no direct line of descent to anyone born in the UK.[468] Race and ethnicity are not explicitly mentioned in the 1981 Act, however as Tyler points out, the repercussions of the Act "designed citizenship so as to exclude black and Asian populations in the Commonwealth."[469] Together, the decline of trade unions, rising inflation, mass unemployment, racist policing and discriminatory citizenship laws produced the conditions

[464] See Rosalind Delmar, "Introducing Red Rag" (Barry Amiel & Norman Melburn Trust, 2020) p.6 and Lynne Segal, *Why Feminism? Gender, Psychology, Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999) p.9 for accounts of how the decline of the autonomous Women's Liberation Movement is remembered to coincide with the end of the 1970s.
[465] Natalie Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement in England, 1968-1993* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). 10.
[466] Malpocher, "Sexuality, Race and Zionism: Conflict and Debates in Spare Rib, 1972-1993," 11.
[467] Imogen Tyler, "Designed to Fail: A Biopolitics of British Citizenship," *Citizenship Studies* 14, no. 1 (2010): 62. https://doi.org/10.1080/13621020903466357.
[468] Runnymede Trust, "British Nationality Act 1981," The Struggle for Race Equality: An Oral History of the Runnymede Trust, 1968-1988, accessed June 14, 2021, www.runnymedetrust.org/histories/race-equality/61/british-nationality-act-1981.html.
[469] Tyler, "Designed to Fail: A Biopolitics of British Citizenship," 63.

for a series of race riots to break out across England in 1981. The most famous example being the Brixton riots in April 1981, during which "large scale confrontations between black British youth and white British police" resulted in a weekend of violence and arson.[470] Throughout this period, as Thomlinson observes, "a distinctly *British* Black identity become increasingly visible" and Black women progressively challenged the idea of a "'universal' (in practice, white) feminist subject" (original emphasis).[471] Part of this challenge stemmed from the fact that the Black women's movement, according to Thomlinson's 2016 article "'Second-Wave' Black Feminist Periodicals in Britain," emphasised "the place of women within black radical struggles, rather than on examining and theorising women's subjective experiences of male domination."[472] As more Black women became involved with the Women's Liberation Movement in the early 1980s, the problem of racism in the UK received wider attention in feminist periodicals and even led to the formation of explicitly anti-racist periodicals such as *Outwrite* and *We Are Here*, as well as Black women's book publishers including Sheba Feminist Publishers and Black Woman Talk, though earlier examples of Black feminist newsletters and magazines certainly pre-empted this shift.[473]

The early 1980s also saw a "turning point in histories of the British political Left's relationship to Israel" in the UK and introduced a lasting split between anti-Zionists and supporters of Israel, as chronicled in detail in Imogen Resnick's 2019 article "Irreconcilable Difference? The 1982 Lebanon War, British Jews, and the Political Left."[474] The tensions can largely be traced to the Lebanon war when, on 6 June 1982, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) invaded southern Lebanon. IDF's overarching mission was to target the Syrian production of surface-to-air missiles as well as reacting to the bombing of northern Israel by the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) one year earlier. However, as some scholars have pointed out, the underlying cause for the war was really a geo-strategic plan conceived of by Israel's then Defence Minister – and later Prime Minister – Ariel Sharon. One such scholar is Kirsten E. Schulze who, in her 1998 article "Israeli Crisis Decision-Making in the Lebanon War: Group

[470] Felix Brenton, "Brixton Riots (April 10-12, 1981)," Black Past, 2019, accessed 3 October, 2021, www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/brixton-riots-april-10-12-1981/.
[471] Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement in England, 1968-1993*. 22.
[472] Thomlinson, "'Second-Wave' Black Feminist Periodicals in Britain," 435.
[473] Earlier examples of Black women's newsletters and magazines during the 1970s include the Brixton Black Women's Group's newsletter *Speak Out* and the Organisation for Women of Asian and African Descent's newsletter *FOWAAD* as detailed in Natalie Thomlinson's 2016 article "'Second-Wave' Black Feminist Periodicals in Britain," referenced above.
[474] Imogen Resnick, "Irreconcilable Difference? The 1982 Lebanon War, British Jews, and the Political Left," *Oxford Middle East Review* 3, no. 1 (2019): 72-3.

Madness or Individual Ambition?" argues that Sharon's reasoning for invading Lebanon included the elimination of "all Palestinian presence and influence" and the destruction of "Palestinian nationalism in the West Bank and Gaza Strip."[475] Before the war in Lebanon, as Resnick details, "Israel was of negligible importance" for the majority of the Labour Party.[476] However, the effects of the war led to an uptake of grassroots anti-Zionist conviction among the political left, such as when 46 emergency resolutions condemning Israel's invasion of Lebanon were proposed at the 1982 annual Labour Party conference. Similarly, the Lebanon war prompted feminists to consider the incompatibility of Zionism with liberation politics. In the process of negotiating an anti-Zionist position in feminist periodicals, as discussed in more detail below, many Jewish feminists regarded the coverage as anti-Semitic and discriminatory. Over this period of feminist conflict and negotiation, Jewish feminists attempted to come to terms with their Jewish identity and what Jewish feminism itself entailed. Thomlinson suggests that, since these disagreements had "generated little in the way of positive emotion for white women," some Jewish feminists "(re)turned to their Jewish heritage" instead.[477] Moreover, she observes that there was no obvious "uniting purpose" between Jewish feminists outside of the debates consuming feminist periodicals of the time, and so their grouping was "short lived and fragmented" as it was inherently tied to the continuity of the controversy.[478]

3.1.3 Identity Politics

The socio-political unrest in 1980s Britain reflects the expansive – and often fractured – nature of correspondence in feminist periodicals of the time. While one of the main negotiations during the 1970s women's movement concerned the proposed unification of lesbian and heterosexual women under "woman-identification," the 1980s saw widespread confrontations on the issues of racism, ethnicity and imperialism.[479] As Malpocher observes, "Asian and black women […] felt little or no sympathy with the issues of marriage, sexuality and abortion rights *as articulated by white feminists*" (my emphasis) during a time when

[475] Kirsten E. Schulze, "Israeli Crisis Decision-Making in the Lebanon War: Group Madness or Individual Ambition?," *Israel Studies* 3, no. 2 (1998): 219. https://www.jstor.org/stable/30245719.
[476] Resnick, "Irreconcilable Difference? The 1982 Lebanon War, British Jews, and the Political Left," 76.
[477] Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement in England, 1968-1993*. 115.
[478] Ibid. 131.
[479] Alyssa A. Samek, "Pivoting Between Identity Politics and Coalitional Relationships: Lesbian-Feminist Resistance to the Woman-Identified Woman," *Women's Studies in Communication* 38, no. 4 (2015): 394. https://doi.org/10.1080/07491409.2015.1085938.

racist policing and hostile immigration laws challenged the notion of a "universal" female experience.[480] Although Black women's autonomous organising in the UK took hold during the early 1970s, it was the merging of the predominantly white Women's Liberation Movement with the Black women's movement in the early 1980s that resulted in tense identity-based conflicts.[481] This period is characterised by a shift away from "experience-based" politics, according to Malpocher, and towards a "relativist constructionist view of identity."[482] In other words, whereas the predominant determinant of knowledge in the Women's Liberation Movement had previously been *personal experience* (the assumption being that there existed a common experience between women), the critical evaluation of "white feminism" prompted the concentration on *categories of difference*.

And so, as more white middle-class feminist started to make a "conscious effort" to include Black women, the *Spare Rib* collective changed the constituency of its collective in October 1982: for the first time, the collective was comprised of an equal number of Black women and white women.[483] This had a significant effect on the ensuing controversy of censoring Jewish women's correspondence on the topic of anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism. As Bernice Hausman details in her 1991 article "Anti-Semitism in Feminism: Rethinking Identity Politics," both Jewish women and Black women experienced the conflict "as a threat to their identities," that is: "the Jewish women claimed anti-semitism within the Women's Movement, and the women of colour claimed white racism."[484] This hostility partly stemmed from, according to Thomlinson, Black women's assessment that the identity of "Jewish women as 'white' was far more salient that their identity as a fellow ethnic minority."[485] Additionally, the assumption that these difference categories were *by definition* in competition with each other was complicated by the fact that *Spare Rib*'s first Black collective member Linda Bellos – who was also Jewish – resigned due to the censure of the "flood of letters," during a time when the magazine attempted to establish itself as anti-racist. *Spare Rib* became the central forum in which communication about these conflicting categories unravelled, not only because of its large readership and circulation rates, but also

[480] Malpocher, "Sexuality, Race and Zionism: Conflict and Debates in Spare Rib, 1972-1993," 16.
[481] For a detailed chronology on the origins of the Black women's movement in the UK, see Natalie Thomlinson's 2016 book *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement in England, 1968-1993,* referenced above.
[482] Malpocher, "Sexuality, Race and Zionism: Conflict and Debates in Spare Rib, 1972-1993," 21.
[483] Ibid. 21.
[484] Bernice Hausman, "Anti-Semitism in Feminism: Rethinking Identity Politics," *Iowa Journal of Literary Studies* 11, no. 1 (1991): 93. https://doi.org/10.17077/0743-2747.1361.
[485] Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement in England, 1968-1993*. 125.

because the magazine had always declared that it was to be a publication for "all women."[486] And so, as the controversy advanced, the question of what an open forum for "all women" really meant in *practice*, given the emphasis on difference categories, consumed the magazine.

3.1.4 Terminology

The primary sources in this chapter feature a variety of different terms in referring to Black women. As identified by Malpocher, the term "Black" was used to refer to both women of Afro-Caribbean and African, as well as Asian women. This reflects the particular British context out of which this material emerged, as Thomlinson indicates:

> 'Black' as a political formation including all those who were the colonised rather than colonisers, is a particularly British phenomenon, contingent on the supposedly shared experiences of Afro-Caribbean, African, and Asian immigrants to Britain in the post-Windrush era.[487]

However, some scholars have argued that such conflations function to essentially erase the Asian presence while also conveying a false sense of homogeneity among different ethnic minority groups in the UK.[488] In issue 130 of *Spare Rib*, published in May 1983, the term "Black" had been replaced in the editorial by the American phrase "women of colour" which the magazine collective used as the primary descriptor until the "special Black women's issue," published in October 1983. Subsequently, the term "Black" was often accompanied by "third world" to indicate a growing international connection between Black women in the UK and women in colonised countries. For the purposes of this chapter, and to avoid the risk of revisionism, I use the term "Black" in the same way as my primary source material, that is "politically Black." I employ the capitalised version of "Black" in order to convey that this designation "is not a natural category but a social one – a collective identity – with a particular history," as during the case study in question, Asian women (specifically Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women) were by and large considered as part of that collective

[486] Waters, "'Yours in Struggle': Bad Feelings and Revolutionary Politics in *Spare Rib*," 447.
[487] Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement in England, 1968-1993*. 14.
[488] Julia Sudbury, *Other Kinds of Dreams: Black Women's Organisations and the Politics of Transformation* (London: Routledge, 1998). 110, quoted in Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement in England, 1968-1993*. 15.

identity.[489] I also use the phrases "women of colour" and "third world women" sporadically when it is warranted for the sake of clarity in referring to the material being discussed.

3.2 *Outwrite, Spare Rib, Revolutionary & Radical Feminist Newsletter, Trouble & Strife*

3.2.1 Beginnings in *Outwrite*

The coverage of the 1982 Lebanon war and its framing as an impetus for feminists to adopt an anti-Zionist position begins in the periodical *Outwrite: Women's Newspaper. Outwrite* was a monthly broadsheet-style feminist newspaper published between 1982-1988 by a mixed-race collective based in London. The editorial policy specified from the beginning that half of the collective would always be comprised of Black women.[490] This is in contrast to *Spare Rib* which, as discussed later in this chapter, did not have a constitutive policy in regards to its editorial collective membership. The newspaper had a strong internationalist, anti-imperialist and anti-racist editorial stance and was largely journalistic in style. From issue 2 onwards, published in April 1982, *Outwrite* began to cover the news of tensions between Israel and Palestine with some regularity.[491] In July 1982, a month after the Lebanon war officially began, issue 4 of *Outwrite* features a centre spread of articles "written and compiled by Palestinian, Lebanese and Israeli Anti-Zionist women."[492] One of the articles, "Women Will Not Be Silenced," is made up out of excerpts from the article "Prisoners for Palestine: A List of Women Political Prisoners" by Soraya Antonius, originally published in the *Journal of Palestine Studies* in 1980.[493] The excerpts focus on the way in which the Israeli occupation of Palestine had resulted in a long history of sexist abuse, as well as the mistreatment of Palestinian women in Israeli prisons. Included is Rasmiya Odeh's recollection of why her mother used to cry after being exiled from her homeland:

[489] Kwame Anthony Appiah, "The Case for Capitalizing the 'B' in Black," The Atlantic, 2021, accessed 3 October, 2021, www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/06/time-to-capitalize-blackand-white/613159/.
[490] "Editorial Policy," *Outwrite*, no. 1 (1982): 2.
[491] See for example "Occupied Palestine Resists," *Outwrite*, no. 2 (1982).
[492] "Palestine - Stolen Land," *Outwrite*, no. 4 (1982): 8.
[493] Soraya Antonius, "Prisoners for Palestine: A List of Women Political Prisoners – Journal of Palestine Studies," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 9, no. 3 (1980). https://doi.org/10.2307/2536550.

> I used to ask 'Why are you crying?' and [my mother] would say 'I cry because the Jews came from every corner of the earth and took everything we had, and now we have nothing to live on'…[494]

It is notable that Odeh's mother equivocates "Jews" with the Zionist and imperialist actions of Israel. This equivocation would become a recurring point of contention within the women's movement as well as one of the primary reasons for Jewish feminists to increasingly feel subject to anti-Semitism. Perhaps in anticipation of these concerns, the article is followed by a historical summary of the roots of political Zionism which begins by clarifying that it is essential "to draw a very clear distinction between anti-zionism and anti-semitism."[495] However, as Thomlinson claims, "*Outwrite* regularly printed allegations against Israel that were inflammatory and unfounded"[496] which calls into question the newspaper's commitment to "fight anti-semitism, racism and fascism with the same strength and determination."[497]

The pages following the centre spread in issue 4 also feature two collectively written letters by Jewish feminists with slightly opposing positions. The first letter – written by "a group of Jewish Lesbians" – begins by denouncing "the oppression of the Palestinians," but also points out that "the role of North America, Britain [and] the Arab nations" in occupying Palestine had been ignored and distorted, serving only to strengthen anti-Semitic attitudes by solely singling out Israel as the aggressor.[498] The authors describe how the Israeli occupation of Palestine is often described as "a prime example of Jewish intervention in the world" – a description which stems from the longstanding anti-Semitic belief in a global Jewish conspiracy.[499] The second letter – written by a group of "Jewish Feminists" – strongly condemns Israel's involvement in the invasion of Lebanon as well as the "continual repression of the Palestinians in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza."[500] The authors also emphasise that the women's movement and the political left have been guilty of maintaining "that Judaism and Zionism are synonymous."[501] And so, although both letters express a

[494] "Women Will Not Be Silenced," *Outwrite*, no. 4 (1982): 8.
[495] "Zionism and Anti-Semitism," *Outwrite*, no. 4 (1982): 9.
[496] Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement in England, 1968-1993*. 126.
[497] "Zionism and Anti-Semitism," 9.
[498] Bev Gold et al., "Dear Outwrite," *Outwrite*, no. 4 (1982): 10.
[499] Ibid.
[500] Adi Cooper et al., "Dear Sisters," *Outwrite*, no. 4 (1982): 10.
[501] Ibid.

forceful opposition to being subsumed under the belief that all Jewish people support Israel's actions in the Middle East, the letters also communicate some apprehension over anti-Semitic attitudes being embedded within the critique of Zionism.

Outwrite included a statement in issue 5, published in August 1982, detailing how the collective had been "likened to Nazis," received threats of physical violence and even bomb threats in response to its centre spread on Zionism in issue 4.[502] The critical responses are described as being largely comprised of accusations that *Outwrite* is guilty of "plain old Jew hatred."[503] Answering these claims, the statement contends that "guilt-creating" allegations of anti-Semitism have been used against the newspaper to suppress denouncements of Zionism.[504] As a means of clarification, *Outwrite* expands on its earlier editorial statements and announced that:

> OUTWRITE is not a liberal paper. It is consciously biased towards women, Black, 'Third World' and working class women. […] Therefore, in as much as we will never publish any letter that tries to defend apartheid or suggest that it has an 'acceptable' face, we have decided not to publish any Zionist or pro-Zionist letters.[505]

The definition of what would constitute a "Zionist letter," however, is not explained. Interestingly, although *Outwrite* was mostly a journalistic newspaper that gave only limited space to its reader responses, the complexities which arise in issue 4 and 5 over addressing anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism foreshadow precisely the themes that later overwhelmed the pages of *Spare Rib*. While *Outwrite* was, from its inception, produced by a mixed-race collective that had a pronounced anti-imperialist editorial position, *Spare Rib* had already been in circulation for a decade when its collective became mixed-race, resulting in a power struggle over the magazine's editorial policy that chronologically coincided with the effects of the Lebanon war. Taking this into account, as well as the greater priority *Spare Rib* placed on reader responses, it comes as no surprise that the discussions about anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism in *Spare Rib* were far more extensive and fraught than in *Outwrite*. Nevertheless, the early coverage of these negotiations in *Outwrite* evidences how difficult

[502] "Statement from Outwrite," *Outwrite*, no. 5 (1982): 2.
[503] Ibid.
[504] Ibid.
[505] Ibid.

communication in the women's movement could move from one periodical to another and, as will be discussed later in this chapter, even resulted in the emergence of new publications. These examples further illuminate the way in which the existence of a feminist periodical network could withstand the rapid developments of feminist activism and theory by providing multiple, parallel outlets for circulating political negotiations.

3.2.2 Opening the Flood Gates in *Spare Rib*

Issue 121 of *Spare Rib*, published in August 1982, features an interview by Roisín Boyd – the first Irish woman who joined the magazine collective – titled "Women Speak Out Against Zionism." This article would ultimately become the impetus for months of fraught negotiations between *Spare Rib* and its readership and, as a result, within the magazine collective itself. In the article Boyd interviews a Lebanese woman, a Palestinian woman and an Israeli woman who discuss the war in Lebanon and the problems of anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism. The Lebanese woman, Nidal, raises the issue of women feeling guilty about coming out as anti-Zionist, "because this will be taken as being anti-Jewish."[506] She draws a parallel between these feelings of guilt and the way in which white women rely on Black women to explain to them how to be anti-racist. The Palestinian woman, Randa, also addresses the issue of racism in her observation that "Palestinians suffer racism all around the world" because they are seen as a threat to the Gulf states.[507] The mention of racism in the context of Palestinian oppression is notable here as anti-Zionism eventually became an editorial mandate for transforming *Spare Rib* into an anti-racist magazine, discussed further on in this chapter.

The Israeli woman, Aliza Khan, emphasises that "to be anti-Zionist is to be anti-imperialist," the former pertaining directly to the forced exile of Palestinians from the state of Israel.[508] Khan further describes how the occupied area of Israel had become a male-dominated agricultural economy in which women were relegated to kitchen jobs. Additionally, she highlights how Israel's involvement in the Lebanon war has resulted in indiscriminate killings of women and girls and therefore Khan pronounces that "women must come out

[506] Roisín Boyd, "Women Speak Out Against Zionism," *Spare Rib*, no. 121 (1982): 22.
[507] Ibid.
[508] Ibid.

against [Zionism] because our sisters are being murdered"[509] and that "if a woman calls herself feminist she should consciously call herself anti-Zionist."[510] The interview ends with a quote from a letter written by women in Israel who denounce the male invasion into Lebanon and criticise how women were expected to "wait with open arms for the turn of the fighters."[511] Instead, they write that they will "not shut up" and "not agree to be 'purged' of the Palestinian people."[512] This article marked the beginning within *Spare Rib* of ongoing discussions about anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, and in particular how those issues should be understood within the context of the women's movement, which would become a recurring negotiation throughout the rest of the magazine's lifespan.

Two months later, in October 1982, issue 123 featured an article titled "About Anti-Semitism" which was made up out of eight individual testimonials about anti-Semitism in the women's movement, each testimonial written by a member of the London Jewish Lesbian Feminist Group (the same group that wrote a letter in issue 4 of *Outwrite*.)[513] The article is preceded by a foreword from *Spare Rib*, explaining that the "Women Speak Out Against Zionism" interview generated a flood of responding letters and that therefore the topic clearly merited further discussion. As Claire Sedgwick illustrates in her 2020 book *Feminist Media: From the Second Wave to the Digital Age*, letters in feminist periodicals had the potential of influencing the publication's content by providing insight into shifting attitudes and opinions among the readership.[514] However, there was no evidence of the "flood of letters" in issue 123, and it is perhaps notable that the author of the contentious interview, Roisín Boyd, is credited as having selected the letters for issue 123. This also relates to Sedgwick's observation that while *Spare Rib* often *did* publish letters that were critical of the publication itself, "the number of letters that were sent to the magazine was greater than the number that could be published."[515] And so, since the *Spare Rib* collective had "editorial power over the reader," letters are not just indicative of reader responses, but also of the editorial judgments of the magazine collective. Nevertheless, as a result of the decision not to publish the "flood

[509] Ibid. 23.
[510] Ibid. 22.
[511] Ibid.
[512] Ibid. 23.
[513] The members of the London Jewish Lesbian Feminist Group who wrote testimonials for the article "About Anti-Semitism" were Sheila Shulman, Elizabeth Sarah, Lilian Mohin, Bev Gold, Hannah Aziz, Lin Davidson, Linda Bellos and Jenny Lovell.
[514] Claire Sedgwick, *Feminist Media: From the Second Wave to the Digital Age* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020). 37.
[515] Ibid. 38.

of letters" which I touch on later in this chapter, readers would often take notice if their letters had not been published and subsequently write in to accuse *Spare Rib* of editorial bias. Therefore, even though editorial gatekeeping means that the letter pages evidence only an incomplete picture, letters were simultaneously used as a means to demand accountability from the magazine.

The first testimonial in "About Anti-Semitism" begins by criticising Aliza Khan's assertion that "unless we're 'anti-Zionist' we're not feminist" and contends that "as Jewish feminists the focus on 'Zionism' seems to us in itself anti-Semitic and hardly feminist."[516] Throughout the article, there is a prevailing message that, within the women's movement, Jewish women felt it was impossible to speak about anti-Semitism because the recent upsurge in anti-Zionism had aggravated anti-Semitic behaviour from other feminists. One author contends that it is the mixture of her Persian and Jewish background which has resulted in a "schizophrenic experience" in the women's movement.[517] She describes that in previous attempts to speak about this intersection, she had been met with confusion from other feminists: "I just become invisible – women just can't make 'sense' of me so they have to ignore one or the other part – usually the Jewishness."[518] According to several of the testimonials, this sense of being made invisible is achieved through accusations of being "too middle-class," "too intellectual," "oppressive," "difficult" and "dismissible."[519] One of the authors recognises these characterisations as "falling well within the range of typical Jewish stereotypes" and that their primary function is to force Jewish women to assimilate and disguise their otherness within the women's movement.[520] This constitutes an early example of how *Spare Rib* was being confronted with the complex task of accommodating multiple intersections of identities and oppressions which were at times, as will become clear throughout this chapter, interpreted as mutually exclusive rather than interlinked interests.

The editorial in issue 126 of *Spare Rib*, published in January 1983, is entirely dedicated to addressing the growing tensions between women about the seemingly adversarial priorities of anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism. Notably, the editorial briefly touches on the purported "flood of letters" from Jewish women as hinted at in issue 123, explaining that the collective

[516] Sheila Shulman et al., "About Anti-Semitism."
[517] Ibid. 21.
[518] Ibid.
[519] Ibid.
[520] Ibid.

had decided to "keep the letters" and instead commissioned the London Jewish Lesbian Feminist Group as well as Women for Palestine to write separate articles on the subject in issue 123 and 124.[521] By commissioning two select groups to write articles for *Spare Rib* instead of publishing the letters, the collective clearly attempted to reclaim some amount of control over the way in which the discussion was to unfold. This decision also speaks to the potential risk that letters pose in challenging editorial stances, thereby being a significant method for feminists to express disagreements. The editorial further describes how the collective had been accused both of "anti-Semitism and ignorance of Jewish history" as well as "publishing criticism of national liberation struggles and asking what is in them for women."[522] Significantly, within this situation of heightened disagreement and conflict, the *Spare Rib* collective understood itself and the magazine as having "a responsibility to decide how to present struggles and differences *between women*" (original emphasis).[523] Several years earlier, in July 1980, the editorial of issue 96 evidences that questions about the role of the magazine in facilitating disagreements was a key area of concern for *Spare Rib*:

> The *Spare Rib* Collective itself contains a variety of feminist opinion. Do we tend to suppress our differences to keep the peace, and so arrive at a safe but boring 'common denominator?' How much should *Spare Rib* be an open forum, and how much should we develop our own 'line'? We have certainly had bitter disagreements over some articles – do they stimulate debate within and about the movement? Is it necessary to publish such material in order to open issues out and move us all forward? Or are the views expressed so offensive to some collective members that we shouldn't print them? Could they be harmful to certain groups of women – lesbians, separatists or black women, for instance? Where does 'responsibility' become censorship?[524]

Such statements highlight a sense of responsibility held by the magazine collective in sustaining an open forum of correspondence. As Snyder and Sorensen observe in "Letters to the Editor as Serial Form," the significance of letters and correspondence pages lies in

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[521] The articles which *Spare Rib* commissioned instead of publishing the "flood of letters" from Jewish women were "About Anti-Semitism" by the London Jewish Lesbian Feminist Group in issue 123, and "Women Against Zionism" by Women for Palestine in issue 124. The latter article, not discussed in this chapter, was largely a historical account of Zionism that echoes many of the themes discussed in Roisín Boyd's interview "Women Speak Out Against Zionism" in issue 121.
[522] "Editorial," *Spare Rib*, no. 126 (1983): 4.
[523] Ibid.
[524] "Editorial," *Spare Rib*, no. 96 (1980): 3.

offering "one of the only democratic platforms in magazines, an opportunity to make one's voice heard in a public forum."[525] This democratic conception of correspondence, coupled with Melanie Waters' observation that the impetus to "reach out to *all* women" was a "mainstay of *Spare Rib*'s editorial discourse throughout its 21-year run," make the letter pages a particularly contentious – but essential – space in which the magazine had to mediate disagreement.[526]

And so, in order to mediate such differences, the editorial proposes several questions for moving the discussion forward, such as "how do we deal with extreme differences which exist between feminists?" and "can women be anti-Zionist and fight anti-Semitism?"[527] Crucially, however, the editorial ends with a speculation about whether it is even possible for the magazine to be an "arena of debate" in the first place, given that political negotiations can easily become interpersonal accusations. This was a conundrum faced by many feminist periodicals of the time, as Laurel Forster details in her 2015 book *Magazine Movements: Women's Culture, Feminism and Media Form*. While *Spare Rib* was on the one hand committed to "offering a forum for debate, even dissention," for very practical purposes it also had to "produce a publication that functions to make the movement unified" in order to keep its readership sufficiently hopeful that the magazine acted "for both individuals and the broader movement."[528] Malpocher chronicles in her research on *Spare Rib* that by the late 1980s the magazine had "developed a reputation for its conflicts"[529] and readers felt increasingly frustrated by the collective's lack of editorial accountability.[530] Nevertheless, Waters highlights that the letter pages (along with the reviews section) were the only regular feature to survive the entire print run of *Spare Rib* which speaks to the importance placed on open and ongoing communication throughout the magazine's lifespan.

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[525] Snyder and Sorensen, "Letters to the Editor as a Serial Form," 125.
[526] Waters, "'Yours in Struggle': Bad Feelings and Revolutionary Politics in *Spare Rib*," 447.
[527] The full list of questions asked in the editorial of issue 126 are as follows: 1. How do we deal with extreme differences which exist between feminists? How do we criticise but not discount or despise each other? 2. How does the fact that many of the questions we are asking which are tied up with patriarchal power, as well as imperialism and racism, affect our involvement as women? 3. What does Zionism mean, both historically and today? 4. Can women be anti-Zionist and fight anti-Semitism? 5. How can we best combat anti-Semitism? 6. How can we find a way of criticising Israel's actions in Lebanon without being anti-Semitic or fuelling anti-Semitism? 7. What is a critical feminist support of Israel? 8.What is a critical feminist support of PLO [Palestine Liberation Organisation]? 9. How should European feminists support Third World, national liberation struggles? 10. How do we define imperialism? 11. Can any of these questions be discussed usefully without referring to the power and influence of the USA, Soviet Union, western European countries, and to the Arab states?
[528] Forster, *Magazine Movements: Women's Culture, Feminisms and Media Form*. 209.
[529] Malpocher, "Sexuality, Race and Zionism: Conflict and Debates in Spare Rib, 1972-1993," 194.
[530] Ibid. 187.

Despite proposing these leading questions for the continuation of the discussion on Israel and Palestine, the subsequent issues 127-129 of *Spare Rib* feature no responding letters or articles. Just as the *presence* of letters can indicate activated disagreement and discussion, so too can the unexpected *absence* of letters suggest potentially difficult editorial discussions taking place behind the scenes. It is not until issue 130 of *Spare Rib*, published in May 1983, that the controversy is once again addressed in its editorial. This time, however, the problems surrounding the unpublished "flood of letters," which *Spare Rib* received from Jewish women in response to Roisín Boyd's interview "Women Speak Out Against Zionism" in issue 121, is addressed head on. As Snyder and Sorenson argue, letters in periodicals can evoke a similar kind of suspense present in serial fiction through their regular and anticipated publication, implying that "the discussion could continue indefinitely, with each new letter adding a new provocation for further discussion."[531] Accordingly, when this seriality is broken – in this case, as many Jewish feminist argued, because of anti-Semitic bias – readers demanded accountability by means of an editorial explanation or further response. The editorial describes how, for several months, the magazine collective had been having "numerous exhausting discussions" about possible options for publishing the letters.[532] Clearly these negotiations took a toll on the collective itself:

> Our differences on how to react to and deal with letters which questioned our support of the Palestinian cause divided us then and divide us now, even though membership of the collective has changed by more than half during that time.[533]

Some collective members adamantly rejected publishing those letters which exhibited "extreme Zionism," while other collective members wanted to publish a wide array of opinion, including Zionist perspectives. Although the editorial positions *Spare Rib* as "non-sectarian and anti-imperialist," the collective admits that their attempts of covering the distinct (yet often interlinked) oppression of Jewish and Palestinian women resulted in the magazine getting "attacked from both sides."[534] The editorial ends with a declaration that, although "the collective remains divided," *Spare Rib* still aims "to be open to a continuous dialogue between Jewish women and Palestinian and Arab women."[535] Similarly to the

[531] Snyder and Sorensen, "Letters to the Editor as a Serial Form," 125.
[532] "Editorial," *Spare Rib*, no. 130 (1983): 4.
[533] Ibid.
[534] Ibid.
[535] Ibid.

Marxist feminist magazine *Red Rag*, as discussed in chapter 2, the difficult communication present in the publication's letter pages and its shifting editorial strategies were often representative of internal obstacles in collective working. Consequently, as Agatha Beins argues in her 2017 book *Liberation in Print*, ideals of collective working were manifested through the publishing of letters in "efforts to maintain radical egalitarian structures," though perhaps not always as frictionless as hoped.[536]

3.2.3 Open Letter in the *Revolutionary & Radical Feminist Newsletter*

While *Spare Rib* continued to struggle with the predicaments of facilitating an open forum for discussion, reactions to this dispute emerged in other feminist periodicals. One such example is an open letter, authored by Judy Keiner and signed by 33 further women, about anti-Semitism in the women's movement. It was first published in *Shrew: The London Women's Liberation Workshop Newsletter* in May 1983, and later reprinted that autumn in issue 13 of the *Revolutionary & Radical Feminist Newsletter* (*Rev/Rad*).[537] The open letter references *Spare Rib*'s refusal to publish the "flood of letters" by Jewish feminists as evidence of a growing anti-Semitic attitude within the women's movement. Several members of the London Jewish Feminist Group agreed that "regardless of their personal position on Zionism, the refusal to publish any of the letters received, many of which were from Jewish feminists, was antisemitic."[538] Keiner chronicles how a meeting was held in April 1983 in London for Jewish and non-Jewish women to "discuss the most effective means of taking action to counter *Spare Rib.*"[539] This meeting was picketed by the Women for Palestine group and characterised as a "pro-Zionist right-wing terrorist group meeting."[540] In Keiner's view, this protest directly contravened the principle that women should be able to define their oppression and organise against it. She applies the same judgment to the original "Women Speak Out Against Zionism" article, which according to Keiner, allowed anti-Semitism "to be defined by people other than the members of the oppressed group."[541] She questions the

[536] Beins, *Liberation in Print: Feminist Periodicals and Social Movement Identity*. 87.
[537] As I have been unable to locate a copy of the original May 1983 open letter in *Shrew: The London Women's Liberation Workshop Newsletter*, I cite here from the autumn 1983 reprint in *Revolutionary & Radical Feminist Newsletter.* The reprint of this open letter in another newsletter is interesting in and of itself as it is characteristic of the idiosyncratic and networked mediascape of the Women's Liberation Movement.
[538] Judy Keiner, "Open Letter," *Revolutionary & Radical Feminist Newsletter*, no. 13 (1983): 12.
[539] Ibid. 11.
[540] Ibid.
[541] Ibid. 12.

way in which Zionism had been presented in the article as "a single monolithic evil" which has the consequence of holding Jewish women accountable for the actions of a patriarchal government.[542] Additionally, Keiner takes issue with the equivocation of Zionism with Nazism – a comparison which is based on the assertion that both ideologies aim to "wipe out whole nations" – which (in her view) ignores that the emergence of Israel was a result of the total extermination of Jewish people during World War II.[543] She suggests that it would be more accurate to compare the Israeli invasion of Lebanon to Britain's role in Northern Ireland, but that this would complicate the idea of Zionism "as a single unified evil ideology" on which to place the blame for imperialism in the Middle East.[544] Keiner also mentions the earlier articles published in *Outwrite* and criticizes what she claims is the interchangeable use of the terms "Jew" and "Zionist" throughout *Outwrite* and *Spare Rib.*[545] The open letter ends with a request by the London Jewish Feminist Group that women who write articles for *Spare Rib* to demand that it "include a statement saying the author/artist protests against or does not condone *Spare Rib*'s silencing of Jewish women."[546]

3.2.4 Censorship, Transparency and Accountability in *Spare Rib*

Perhaps in an attempt to encourage transparency and trust with its readers, issue 131 of *Spare Rib*, published in June 1983, features an article about the inner workings of the magazine collective and the responsibilities attributed to each member. One of the collective members, Sue O'Sullivan – who had resigned from the *Reg Rag* magazine collective in 1976 as discussed in chapter 2 – describes *Spare Rib* as operating both "inside" and "outside" of the women's movement as an alternative newsstand magazine.[547] This intention of utilising the magazine as a conduit for reaching women outside of the movement in many ways reflects the similar way in which *Red Rag* endeavoured to create a discursive bridge between the Women's Liberation Movement and the organised labour movement. However, also similarly to *Red Rag*, such aspirations were complicated by the practicalities and difficulties of feminist collective working. Another *Spare Rib* collective member, Manny, recounts how "ideal feminist principles don't necessarily create feminist practice in this capitalist

[542] Ibid.
[543] Ibid. 14.
[544] Ibid.
[545] Ibid. 16.
[546] Ibid. 17.
[547] "Spare Rib: See How We Run," *Spare Rib*, no. 131 (1983): 6.

imperialist country" and that the practical work of putting the magazine together can take away the pleasure of political idealism.[548] This statement reveals how the idealism of transcending differences between women can be shattered when the practice of enacting such principles becomes a source of inequality.

Fellow collective member, Susan Ardill, echoes Manny's sentiment as she describes having lost some of the enjoyment of reading *Spare Rib* because of noticing technical errors and political positions with which she did not agree. Paradoxically, one of the main strengths of the magazine, as argued by O'Sullivan, was the ability to stimulate writing about "differences between women, not for the sake of it, but to make possible more realistic connections between women."[549] It was an entirely different question, however, whether such differences could be mediated between the collective members themselves. Sona Osman recalls how much of the collective's time was spent trying to reach a happy medium on editorial concerns, a process which was "bloody hard when we all are different and have completely different political ideas as to what we should do."[550] Such internal political differences were also clearly affected by the opinions of *Spare Rib*'s readers. As one collective member, Arati, admits: "I am vulnerable to readers' response. I fear it because I need it."[551] Here she is speaking about her desire to reach "the heart of another woman"[552] and that readers' letters can most directly indicate whether women have indeed been impacted positively by the magazine.

Conversely, the only Irish collective member Roisín Boyd writes that she is consistently aware of the fact that *Spare Rib* is an English feminist magazine, and that if a particular issue is dominated by news that is not specific to the English women's movement, "readers are quick to remind us of this or to tell us what we *should* really be discussing" (original emphasis).[553] This illustrates Snyder and Sorenson's observation that letters not only contribute to a "democratic exchange of ideas," but also are utilised by the readership to "potentially influence the direction of the paper."[554] As such, readers' letters not only reflect the political divisions and differing opinions within the women's movement, but also have

[548] Ibid. 30.
[549] Ibid. 6.
[550] Ibid. 31.
[551] Ibid. 6.
[552] Ibid.
[553] "Spare Rib: See How We Run," 8.
[554] Snyder and Sorensen, "Letters to the Editor as a Serial Form," 135.

the potential of shaping the internal working dynamics of the magazine collective. This dynamic is arguably fundamental in enabling what Forster describes as the potential for magazines to "engage and sustain the major debates of the moment" by providing active lines of communication between the publication and its readers.[555]

Issue 131 also marked a strategic moment for the way in which *Spare Rib* covered the debate about Israel and Palestine. By June 1983, it had officially been a year since the war in Lebanon began and exactly 10 issues had been published since the controversial "Women Speak Out Against Zionism" interview appeared. As described in the editorial of issue 126, the collective had consciously decided not to publish the responding "flood of letters" from Jewish women in favour of commissioning articles, however the tension surrounding this deliberate omission had not subsided. And so, for the first time, issue 131 included several critical letters from Jewish women who addressed this dispute. One of the letters is collectively written by a group of Jewish feminists who argue that *Spare Rib*'s editorial decisions had stunted any meaningful debate about anti-Semitism:

> The fact that NO LETTERS WHATSOEVER were printed is experienced by us as silencing. […] By refusing to publish these letters we have not had the opportunity to answer these statements. Despite your avowed commitments to fighting anti-Semitism in editorials and articles, we experience this silencing as anti-Semitic. (original emphasis)[556]

The letter continues by emphasising that the readership of *Spare Rib* "has a right to know" about why the "flood of letters" was never published.[557] Such demands for accountability – made with an implicit concern for the magazine's readership – reflect Snyder and Sorensen's characterisation of letter pages as being "a version of the public sphere" that allow the magazine's readers "to make public statements to members of a community who share their concerns."[558] In response, *Spare Rib* published a brief explanation directly following the critical letter, arguing that the collective decided not to publish Zionist letters because of the implications such opinions had for Palestinians, and that they did not consider this

[555] Forster, *Magazine Movements: Women's Culture, Feminisms and Media Form*. 208.
[556] Adi Cooper et al., "Silencing," *Spare Rib*, no. 131 (1983): 26.
[557] Ibid.
[558] Snyder and Sorensen, "Letters to the Editor as a Serial Form," 128.

"silencing."[559] Significantly, *Spare Rib*'s response includes a disclaimer that this decision was not unanimously held by the collective. Waters notes how such candid insights into the collective's challenging working practices – which had at this point become somewhat of a regular feature in *Spare Rib* – reveal "the frequency and force with which the personal, the professional and the political converge."[560] However, as Malpocher summarises, this "combination of ideological concerns and practical issues" foreshadowed reoccurring patterns of disunity that would ultimately remain unresolved.[561]

Another letter, written by Lynda S. Pearl, takes up the offer to respond to some of the questions posited in the editorial of issue 126. Pearl describes herself as an anti-Zionist Jewish woman who, perhaps in an effort to draw out some commonalities between women, argues that anti-Semites and Zionists *both* see Jewish people as a separate race of people and that therefore opposing anti-Semitism inadvertently makes use of the same analysis as anti-Zionism.[562] Conversely, another letter written by Kate Askew, suggests that *Spare Rib* has not gone far enough in challenging Zionism: "If you as a collective would rather be racist than confront Zionist women within the movement, then at least have the courage to say so."[563] Such contrasting responses evidence the way in which letters can allow for conflicting voices to be heard, and in turn also confirm Forsters' assertion that "a single magazine can be a kaleidoscopic representation of feminism"[564] by acting as a "storehouse for these important, and necessary, conflicts."[565]

Issue 132 of *Spare Rib*, published in July 1983, sees the debate continue with intensity in its letter pages. One reader, Heather Dale, writes in to say that she was sickened and saddened by the editorial of issue 130, arguing that it demonstrated how *Spare Rib* was "doing to Jewish women exactly the same thing that men have been doing to feminists for the past decades,"[566] namely, silencing them. She further describes how *Spare Rib*'s promised commitment to cover anti-Semitism with more seriousness is "a sop to appease" Jewish women who may be offended by the editorial.[567] Another woman, Madge Dresser, responded

[559] "Spare Rib Replies," *Spare Rib*, no. 131 (1983): 26.
[560] Waters, "'Yours in Struggle': Bad Feelings and Revolutionary Politics in *Spare Rib*," 453.
[561] Malpocher, "Sexuality, Race and Zionism: Conflict and Debates in Spare Rib, 1972-1993," 212.
[562] Lynda S. Pearl, "Tolerance, But Also Awareness," *Spare Rib*, no. 131 (1983): 26.
[563] Kate Askew, "'I Am An Arabic Jew,'" *Spare Rib*, no. 131 (1983): 26.
[564] Forster, *Magazine Movements: Women's Culture, Feminisms and Media Form*. 208.
[565] Ibid. 109.
[566] Heather Dale, "I'm Still Proud of Being Jewish," *Spare Rib*, no. 132 (1983): 4.
[567] Ibid. 4.

with a letter in which she identified herself as "one of the Jewish women whose letters [*Spare Rib*] refused to publish."[568] She also criticised the editorial of issue 130, questioning how the magazine could claim to be open to a dialogue between Jewish and Palestinians when the collective initially decided not to publish the letters of their Jewish readership. This sentiment was not shared by Shelagh, a self-described Irish nationalist, who also responded with a letter criticising *Spare Rib* for tolerating "the reactionary crap that some Jewish 'feminists' have been coming out with."[569] In her view, the Republican movement in Ireland had the same objectives as the liberation struggle in Palestine, and therefore anything but the full support for Palestinians is "a wet liberal cop-out and a *betrayal* of liberation"[570] (original emphasis).

3.2.5 Is Sisterhood… Plain Sailing?[571]

Significantly, issue 132 also features an article titled "Sisterhood… is plain sailing" which outlines the differing views held by the collective members themselves. The article is divided into two sections: one in which the white women collective members respond – all of whom signed their name to their individual statements – and another, distinctly smaller section, in which the Black women collective members respond anonymously.[572] In several statements, the disagreements are described as having resulted in a "deadlock" internal to the collective. Clearly, the members' differences of opinion were "too great on this issue to try and maintain consensus" which made a joint statement of sorts impossible. Given this deadlock, it is noteworthy that the individual statements within the article take on a similar rhetorical form as letters to the editor. According to Malpocher, this approach seems to "demonstrate an awareness of the need to negotiate several conflicting viewpoints" through an "externalised articulation" of the collective's internal conflicts which temporarily deflects editorial accountability.[573] Not only does this choice of composition highlight the divisions within the collective, but it also demonstrates that letter-writing – in this case the collective addressing its readership – offers a means of communication amidst an otherwise hostile political debate.

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[568] Madge Dresser, "Growing Unease," *Spare Rib*, no. 132 (1983): 5.
[569] Shelagh, "Betrayal of Liberation," *Spare Rib*, no. 132 (1983): 5.
[570] Ibid.
[571] Unless otherwise specified, all quotations in this section are from "Sisterhood... Is Plain Sailing," *Spare Rib*, no. 132 (1983): 24-27.
[572] The table of contents in each issue *Spare Rib* cites the full-time and part-time collective members. Through process of elimination, the Black women collective members who produced issue 132 are Arati, Farzaneh, Petal Felix, Manny and Sona Osman.
[573] Malpocher, "Sexuality, Race and Zionism: Conflict and Debates in Spare Rib, 1972-1993," 184.

Roisín Boyd describes receiving the responding letters during the aftermath of her interview "Women Speak Out Against Zionism" as a "time warp" during which no agreement was reached and therefore no letters on the subject were published until issue 131. As discussed above, that issue featured a critical letter by a group of Jewish feminists to which *Spare Rib* offered a brief defence. Susan Ardill disagreed with that defence but recalls that it felt "too difficult" for her to write a different response than the one that ended up being published. Although, as Forster illustrates, the format of the magazine can lend itself to "accommodating the expression of diverse opinion and disparate voices," internal conflicts were more challenging to express given the expectation of having to uphold somewhat of a united front for cultivating trust among the magazine readership.[574] Notably, Boyd recognises that because *Spare Rib* did not have an editorial policy on which letters to publish, the collective "came unstuck because of this." As Beins suggests in *Liberation in Print*, one way for a periodical to signal its feminist values is through an editorial practice that includes "decisions about whom to publish, how to present contributors' voices, and how to give credit to writers."[575]

However, given that the constitution of *Spare Rib*'s collective had undergone a major shift, the magazine's feminist values were also beginning to change, making decisions about unified editorial policies a contentious point of disagreement. Louise Williamson recollects that the decision not to publish the original "flood of letters" by Jewish women was "not taken lightly" and was reached only after "months of continual meetings" and "huge arguments." In the end, the reasoning given was that the letters were pro-Zionist and racist, however this interpretation was not shared by all collective members. Sue O'Sullivan, for instance, states that she was in *favour* of publishing "a selection of Jewish feminist letters" even though she did not agree with all of them, and she also considered it important to include responses which would challenge those letters. With the exception of Boyd, all of the white women collective members explain that they had always argued strongly *for* the publication of a select few letters. Jan Parker recalls that the airing of readers' "mixed feelings" in the letter pages about the 1979 anti-abortion Corrie Bill several years prior had "strengthened both the debate and the campaign" which ended up defeating the bill. Ardill also makes a case for allowing readers to engage in debate through the publication of letters,

[574] Forster, *Magazine Movements: Women's Culture, Feminisms and Media Form*. 209.
[575] Beins, *Liberation in Print: Feminist Periodicals and Social Movement Identity*. 86.

stating that *Spare Rib* should "open up areas which are not cut and dried." On the other hand, as O'Sullivan suggests, the Black women members considered that publishing those letters would be "tantamount to buckling under to 'white-mail.'"

For context, Parker explains that the Black women members had joined the *Spare Rib* collective just as the controversy over Zionism began to take hold in October 1982. Several months later, in March 1983, the Black women decided to work separately for a month because they felt that *Spare Rib's* "assumptions and practices" were "changing too slowly." According to Ardill, this period of time was fraught with racist behaviour from white women in the collective which significantly impacted internal working relationships. What followed was the decision by the Black women *not* to publish any of the letters by Jewish women. Boyd attributes this decision partially to tensions between Black women and white women on the collective about editorial control and power, which had become "veiled behind the 'main' issue" of the debate surrounding Israel and Palestine. Additionally, she mentions a meeting which was held in order to address potential changes in the magazine's direction that resulted from having, for the first time, an equal number of Black women and white women in the collective.[576] During this meeting, according to Boyd, "no attempt was made to grapple with different politics" and instead the Black women members were criticised when mentioning imperialism in connection with attempts to define Zionism.

One of the statements written by a Black woman member also recalls this meeting, criticising how some feminists were quick to dismiss the use of the terms "imperialism" and colonialism" to define Zionism on the grounds that these are "male concepts." She goes on to ask "since when has Zionism become a feminist concept?" Williamson notes that accusations of appeasing to "lefty male politics" had often been used to assimilate differences of working practices, presumably because it would be considered a political compromise. The dilemma of compromising certain ideals also features in several other accounts written by Black women, characterising their role in working with white women as having "compromised [their] position" as Black women and, more forcefully, being "disgusted" that compromises had been theirs alone to make. Clearly, the sudden shift from *Spare Rib*'s collective being

[576] At this point, the only Jewish collective member, Linda Bellos, had resigned from the collective (discussed further below in section 3.2.6.)

predominantly white to a mixed-race collective highlighted underlying and unresolved divisions which shaped the way in which the debate around Zionism unfolded.

Despite these "non-productive" and "sectarian" divisions, the collective *did* agree that a common goal was to "construct an anti-racist magazine," but – as O'Sullivan reveals – in the process of doing so, contradictory definitions of what constitutes *racism* resulted in divisions between women. As one of the accounts by a Black woman member indicates, "it is significant that the division between white women and the Black women on the collective at *Spare Rib* had to come to a head over a white women's issue." Ardill, on the other hand, does not consider anti-Semitism a "white issue" and, as O'Sullivan specifies, "many Jewish women are black." In her analysis of this disagreement, Williamson points out that "the politics of experience" had always been central in working out arguments, but that problems arose when equally valid – but opposing – personal experiences were being considered in order to resolve disputes. In her view, there existed an underlying "inability within the women's movement to accept that there are differences" between feminists which, in the case of the Zionism controversy, resulted in a deadlock.

Parker emphasises the need to air "mixed feelings" in order to shift this deadlock and to better acknowledge "the creative function of differences." In fact, she considers the education and recognition of differences between women as essential to both the survival of the magazine as well as the movement. While evaluating the sequence of events which took place, Ardill admits that in retrospect, the collective "should have come out more strongly with our differences" from the beginning of the debate. She goes on to say that cultivating more openness about the collective's differences should have been considered a "pre-requisite for making any effective/constructive responses." Similarly, O'Sullivan recognises that these differences also have the potential of making possible "common interest," helping fight "common enemies" and giving "glimpses of a totally different future." Although she states that she "may be wrong," O'Sullivan advocates for the importance of using *Spare Rib*'s letter pages as a space for open debate:

> The letters' page in *SR* are the only 'open' ones in the mag where disagreements and differences of opinion surface regularly. We often print letters we disagree with. Given that there is disagreement between groups of feminists outside the collective

> over the present conflict, […] it is vital that *SR* carry this struggle between feminists on its pages.

This statement illustrates Beins' observation that letters in feminist periodicals can both reflect the "editors' commitments to presenting a range of different women's voices" as well as the "readers' willingness to take the position of writer, even if informally."[577] Echoing this sentiment, Ardill expresses her conviction that "*Spare Rib* is the sort of magazine that can allow for those sorts of contradictions." Most significantly, O'Sullivan demonstrates her understanding of conflict – and in turn the space in which that conflict can be aired – as "a way of politically engaging women in an honest recognition of the painful differences between us." Possibly shaped by her experience on the *Red Rag* collective, during which a lack of debate resulted in her resignation as discussed in chapter 2, O'Sullivan ends her contribution with a warning that political differences between women "will resurface again and again" unless feminists are willing to work through confusion and conflict.

Such willingness, however, is not expressed in the accounts written by the Black women members. One statement details how the controversy over Zionism had been discussed since she started working at *Spare Rib* and that she did not "wish to respond to the influx of letters any more." Another Black woman proclaims that she refuses to give this debate any more time, explaining that there are "more important issues" to discuss such as "Paki-bashing, gay-bashing, Irish-bashing and deportations of Black women." A third Black woman ends her account with a capitalised pronouncement that "WHITE WOMEN CONTINUE TO REMAIN THE OPPRESORS OF WOMEN OF COLOUR." These statements exemplify the raw emotion and anger often present in the magazine's correspondences, the expression of which Waters argues "is an important function of *Spare Rib.*"[578] In other words, Waters contends that in providing a space for difficult feelings to be "aired, acknowledged and responded to," *Spare Rib* demonstrated that "the struggle for liberation was not only one against the status quo, but also one that brought women into conflict with their peers, their families and themselves."[579] In a final suggestion by Parker, to be able to understand how racist ideology operates without merely superficially "including women of colour," a debate about all forms of racism would necessitate readers' responses for a "bumper letters page"

[577] Beins, *Liberation in Print: Feminist Periodicals and Social Movement Identity*. 87.
[578] Waters, "'Yours in Struggle': Bad Feelings and Revolutionary Politics in *Spare Rib*," 455.
[579] Ibid. 462.

the following month. This proposition further serves as an example of Waters' assertion that despite the letter pages often being "a volatile brew of conflicting sentiments about the magazine and its politics," they were considered essential for negotiating the feelings and political positions associated with the women's movement.[580]

And so, while several previous issues of *Spare Rib* were lacking significant discussion in its letter pages, the debate had clearly occupied much of the collective's time behind the scenes. It is worth mentioning that in several of the accounts written by white women, there appear self-reflexive acknowledgements of their own positionalities:

> My position as a white woman has to take into account levels of privilege, control and ongoing struggles with my own racism within a group trying day by day to forge a practice as a mixed race feminist collective. – Sue O'Sullivan

> I understand that my 'freedom' to be 'confused' or to take an individual stance over race and class issues is owed, in part, to my privileges as a white, middle class socialist feminist. – Sue O'Sullivan

> As a white woman on the SR collective I am not proud to confess that I have been painfully learning about this in my daily experience. – Jan Parker

> I would be kidding myself and everyone else if I didn't acknowledge that my ideas and behaviour stem from my position as a white woman, and I'm not bringing that out as a platitude. – Susan Ardill

Nevertheless, as one of the Black women indicates, despite these reflections there has been no evidence of white women collective members putting their "neat analysis into practice" and instead the internal conversations had been dominated by white women "lecturing Black and Third World women" on definitions of racism. Given that some members clearly had the impression that the controversy about anti-Semitism and Zionism was in fact originating from power relations between white women and Black women, the underlying problem may really have been about editorial control. Such a dynamic can be appreciated further using

[580] Ibid. 456.

civil rights activist Florynce Kennedy's articulation of "horizontal hostility" which refers to women's exertion of power over other women; and, in this case, editorial power over the direction of the magazine.[581] While the white women collective members largely hoped for a continued discussion in the magazine's letter pages, the Black women had clearly been advocating for "Black women [to] enter, learn to control, and act in a WHITE, FEMINIST MAGAZINE" (original emphasis). What perhaps had not been taken into account, however, was *Spare Rib*'s Jewish feminist readership, including Black and Arab Jewish women, who attributed the editorial censoring of letters to historic anti-Semitic attitudes. Consequently, Boyd identifies the question which must be asked as: "Is *Spare Rib* really a platform for *all* women?" (original emphasis) Such calls for input were characteristic of how, according to Beins, feminist periodicals "imagined readers as collaborators" and depended on reader responses for assessing the purpose of the publication.[582] Over the next three issues, there is a noticeable shift from discussing anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism to focusing more on Black women and racism, though both areas of discussion remained prominent subjects throughout *Spare Rib*'s entire print run.

3.2.6 Readership Response and Identity in *Spare Rib*

The editorial of issue 134 of *Spare Rib*, published in September 1983, chronicles how the magazine had recently been on the receiving end of a bomb threat from men who were "fed up with having women attack porn and sex shops."[583] Moreover, the Black women collective members had been subjected to racist attacks from callers and, in response, "most white women" dismissed such attacks as pranks, though it is not specified whether the white women in question were collective members.[584] In one instance, as described in the editorial, a journalist writing an article for the *Jewish Chronicle* refused to engage with the Black women and demanded to speak only with "white British born women working at *Spare Rib*."[585] However, several months earlier in May 1983, the *Jewish Chronicle* published an interview with Linda Bellos – the first Black woman who joined the *Spare Rib* collective – who was also Jewish. The interview, titled "Dig in the Rib for Israel," discloses that Bellos resigned from the *Spare Rib* collective over the Zionism controversy in September 1982

[581] Kennedy, "Institutionalized Oppression vs. The Female."
[582] Beins, *Liberation in Print: Feminist Periodicals and Social Movement Identity*. 108.
[583] "Editorial," *Spare Rib*, no. 134 (1983): 4.
[584] Ibid.
[585] Ibid.

because she felt that the collective "was not being strong enough in its determination to fight antisemitism" and that it was "inconsistent in the way it treats racism."[586] Bellos was asked to share the editing of the "flood of letters" from Jewish feminists with two non-Jewish collective members which became the defining moment of her decision to leave the magazine. "If a similar group of letters had alleged racism against black people in the magazine," the interview paraphrases, "she as a black member of the collective would have been allowed to edit them alone."[587] It is significant, in this case, that the first Black woman collective member of *Spare Rib* disclosed this information in a non-feminist journal and not in *Spare Rib* itself. Additionally, this incident highlights the complexities of handling competing priorities of experience as discussed in Williamson's account above. There is a certain irony in the fact that, as a consequence of *Spare Rib's* attempts to establish itself as an anti-racist magazine, the first Black woman collective member felt compelled to resign. So, as the debate continued in *Spare Rib*'s letter pages, the collective was not only confronted with its own political divisions and disputes about editorial power, but it also simultaneously had to contend with outside antagonism and real threats of violence, especially against its Black women members. However, as Waters points out, because *Spare Rib* was largely united under the aim of being a magazine "for *all* women," ideas about how to more effectively include *all* women regularly changed.[588] Thus, "the discomfiting effects of change on readers, editors and contributors" were justified on the basis that such changes would "contribute positively to the collective good, even if, for certain individuals, they feel bad."[589]

The letter pages of issue 134 are filled with emotive language in response to the "Sisterhood… is plain sailing" article. While most responses express what Waters dubs "bad feelings" – such as confusion, sadness, worry, anger, hurt and nervousness – there is also a general appreciation of the changing editorial direction of the magazine. Penny Pattenden, for instance, writes that she commends *Spare Rib*'s shift in becoming "angrier […] with a 'wider' approach, rather than narrow and inward-looking."[590] Similarly, Helen reveals that she thinks the magazine has improved and hopes that "it will continue to expand the space available to women of colour."[591] According to Lesley Saunders, the "Sisterhood… is plain

[586] Jan Shure, "Dig in the Rib for Israel," *Jewish Chronicle*, May 20 (1983): 21.
[587] Ibid.
[588] Waters, "'Yours in Struggle': Bad Feelings and Revolutionary Politics in *Spare Rib*," 447.
[589] Ibid. 447.
[590] Penny Pattenden, "Women of Colour Should Decide," *Spare Rib*, no. 134 (1983): 45.
[591] Helen, "…But You're Going in the Right Direction," *Spare Rib*, no. 134 (1983): 44.

sailing" article demonstrated courageousness and openness in revealing "not just the theoretical differences, but the pain and confusions."[592] Another woman, Stella Williams, expresses her gratitude for the "frightening – but good – possibilities" which the article made possible.[593] Several readers also reveal that, as a result of the debate, they began to feel more positive about *Spare Rib*. For example, Fran Wheat describes that she had been "feeling apathetic" because of a lack of information and it was issue 132 which "jolted [her] into action."[594] Pattenden admits that she "used to be so ignorant about imperialism/racism" and that *Spare Rib*'s coverage on the Zionism controversy educated her.[595] This is also picked up on in Saunders' letter, in which she contends that *Spare Rib* had "brought the issues into our own homes for women who have perhaps only skirted round the edges of racism before."[596]

Notably, Saunders also attributes the *form* of the debate – that is, as expressed through individual reflections by the collective members and the magazine's readers – as being essential for her in making racism an urgent issue to confront. This relates to how Beins describes readers of feminist periodicals as "sources of knowledge" and "experts in their own right" rather than just mere consumers of the magazine.[597] In other words, whereas previously Saunders had only considered the debate as an intellectual exercise, the nature of letter-writing enabled the articulation of systemic problems as personal experience. In doing so, according to Waters, letters can operate "along the lines of an open confessional,"[598] resembling the process of feminist consciousness-raising which functioned to generate political theory from the articulation of personal experience. Williams, too, reflects on the importance of letter-writing for expressing criticisms:

> At least with letters, all who have something to say, whether generally agreed with or not by the collective and readers – can air their views and be heard, unlike in a public meeting where some women have louder voices, or are more articulate than others.[599]

[592] Lesley Saunders, "Making Racism an Urgent Issue," *Spare Rib*, no. 134 (1983): 44.
[593] Stella Williams, "In Order to Change Everything Must Be Opened Up," *Spare Rib*, no. 134 (1983): 45.
[594] Fran Wheat, "Not So Much a Women's Liberation Magazine," *Spare Rib*, no. 134 (1983): 44.
[595] Pattenden, "Women of Colour Should Decide," 45.
[596] Saunders, "Making Racism an Urgent Issue," 44.
[597] Beins, *Liberation in Print: Feminist Periodicals and Social Movement Identity*. 86.
[598] Waters, "'Yours in Struggle': Bad Feelings and Revolutionary Politics in *Spare Rib*," 456.
[599] Williams, "In Order to Change Everything Must Be Opened Up," 45.

Given this potential, she argues that the strength of letters lies in allowing opposing, and perhaps even oppressive, viewpoints to be made public and discussed among *Spare Rib*'s readership. The alternative, in her assessment, is that such oppressive views are "bound to fester and grow in anger" and their assumptions remain unchallenged.[600]

However, not all readers are in agreement. Pattenden insists that giving the "flood of letters" from Jewish women a platform would minimise the efforts by Black women to provide *Spare Rib* with an anti-imperialist position. She also emphasises that, in her view, the widening of the scope of the magazine had clearly been due to the Black women collective members and questions whether the white women at *Spare Rib* were capable of compromise. In contrast, a letter by the Faversham Women's Group (FWG) argues that the "Sisterhood… is plain sailing" article was unhelpful: "The women of colour made cryptic assertions which we found hurtful. […] We want to have these debates but we can't if the women of colour won't say how they came to their hate-filled positions."[601] In their view, the debate about Zionism compromised *Spare Rib*'s ability to appeal to a wider readership and "to act as a route to the women's movement for women otherwise uninvolved in it."[602] In her 1989 article "Open and Closed: The Periodical as a Publishing Genre," Margaret Beetham highlights how in order to maintain a regular readership, periodicals must offer readers "a recognizable position in successive numbers."[603] Taking into account, then, that *Spare Rib* was going through a process of editorial and collective changes, the FWG was perhaps more taken aback by increasing inconsistencies in the scope of the magazine than by the debate itself.

The following month, in October 1983, issue 135 of *Spare Rib* features a letter written by Ali, who argues that the allegation that *Spare Rib* would "lose its appeal to a 'wider readership'" by confronting racism and imperialism is based on a predication that Black women "don't exist at all."[604] In issue 137 of *Spare Rib*, published in December 1983, a letter by Celia Cornwell suggests that the FWG letter demonstrated their inability to reflect on racism and that "black women must *once more* put time and energy into white women to educate them in their racism."[605] That same issue, the FWG followed up their original letter by clarifying that

[600] Ibid. 45.
[601] Faversham Women's Group, ..."...Or Are You?," *Spare Rib*, no. 134 (1983): 44.
[602] Ibid.
[603] Beetham, "Open and Closed: The Periodical as a Publishing Genre," 99.
[604] Ali, "Black Is Beautiful and Very, Very Angry," *Spare Rib*, no. 135 (1983): 5.
[605] Celia Cornwell, "Not Black Women, but Racism Divides WLM," *Spare Rib*, no. 137 (1983): 34.

they had come to a better understanding of the issues discussed and requested a meeting with *Spare Rib* to "look at racism in the Women's Movement much more closely."[606] This response was published alongside several other letters by white women who stressed that *Spare Rib*'s increased coverage of racism in the women's movement constituted a necessary shift for "listen[ing] seriously to the experience of black women."[607] As stated by Natalie Thomlinson in *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement in England, 1968-1993*, the "rapid turnover of periodicals" can demonstrate "just how quickly feminist theory developed during this era."[608] In the case of the FWG in particular, the shift from characterising Black women as being "hate-filled" to then admitting that they had underestimated the problem of racism after reading *Spare Rib*'s correspondence pages, is indicative of the way in which letters served an essential purpose in changing women's minds.

Nevertheless, the issue of whether *Spare Rib* really was a magazine "for *all* women," as originally asked by Roisín Boyd, remained a contentious topic. Present among the responses in issue 134 to the "Sisterhood… is plain sailing" article is a scepticism about whether the magazine could meaningfully include opposing points of view. Wheat discloses her nervousness in writing a letter to *Spare Rib* out of a fear that the collective would "dismiss [her] views as reactionary and irrelevant."[609] Similarly, Jane Bryce suggests that *Spare Rib*'s ability to provide an open forum "is perhaps at times more notional than actual."[610] She goes on to specify that her interest in reading the magazine hinges on the ability to access a wide variety of opinion, stating: "When I read a feminist magazine I don't want a line, I don't want to be told what to think."[611] In her view, the collective would benefit from feeling less responsibility for solving the contradictions within the women's movement. Alternatively, Pattenden insists that there should be no place for Zionist women to express their views in the magazine, and if they were to withdraw their support, then "so be it."[612] Even though these correspondences question the effectiveness of *Spare Rib*'s commitment to an open forum, their very publication is evidence of Forster's assessment that letters do, in fact, give readers "a personal forum for airing individual opinion and experience."[613] Such letters clearly

[606] Faversham Women's Group, "We Would Like A Meeting," *Spare Rib*, no. 137 (1983): 34.
[607] Chris Wilson, "White Women Must Listen to Black Women," *Spare Rib*, no. 137 (1983): 34.
[608] Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement in England, 1968-1993*. 27.
[609] Wheat, "Not So Much a Women's Liberation Magazine," 44.
[610] Jane Bryce, "Your Problems Are Our Problems Too," *Spare Rib*, no. 134 (1983): 46.
[611] Ibid. 46.
[612] Pattenden, "Women of Colour Should Decide," 45.
[613] Forster, *Magazine Movements: Women's Culture, Feminisms and Media Form*. 208-9.

enabled *Spare Rib*'s readers to feedback and discuss competing visions of the magazine's identity and role in mediating contentious topics.

3.2.7 Negotiations in *Trouble & Strife*

The effects of the "Sisterhood… is plain sailing" article transcended *Spare Rib* itself and went on to saturate the first four issues of the newly established feminist magazine *Trouble & Strife.* The magazine was produced by a collective of feminists who had been inspired by the French radical feminist journal *Nouvelles Questions Feministes*. *Trouble & Strife* was intended as a "widely available, easily readable" radical feminist magazine that would contribute to not only intellectual activity but crucially also inspire practical campaigns within the Women's Liberation Movement.[614] In order to achieve this, one of the magazine's primary intentions was to create an "open forum for debate" which would go beyond the opinions of the collective itself.[615] Indeed, some of the more complex political negotiations in the Women's Liberation Movement are covered in its first issue, published in the autumn of 1983. For example, these include an article by Ruth Wallsgrove considering whether the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp was siphoning energy from the women's movement,[616] and an interview with Sheila Shulman that chronicles the unfolding of the debate around political lesbianism.[617] Perhaps with regard to generating the desired "open forum," *Trouble & Strife* deliberately launched its first issue with some of the more controversial debates internal to the women's movement in the hope of inspiring reader responses.

Notably, issue 1 also featured an open letter by Dena Attar responding to *Spare Rib*'s coverage of Zionism, and in particular to the "Sisterhood… is plain sailing" article. Originally, Attar has wanted to respond to what she considered anti-Semitic tropes in Roisín Boyd's interview "Women Speak Out Against Zionism" in issue 121. However, she describes feeling concerned – like many other Jewish feminists – about any criticism giving "even the slightest grounds for anyone to think that they supported Begin's war in

[614] "Editorial," *Trouble & Strife*, no. 1 (1983).
[615] Ibid. 2-3.
[616] Ruth Wallsgrove, "Greenham Common – So Why Am I Still Ambivalent?," *Trouble & Strife*, no. 1 (1983): 4–6.
[617] Sheila Shulman, "Writing Our Own History 1: When Lesbians Came Out in the Movement," *Trouble & Strife*, no. 1 (1983): 51–66.

Lebanon."[618] In her experience, Jewish women with Zionist beliefs were not representative of the majority of Jewish feminists who were critical of Israel's role in the Middle East. Using the terms "Zionist" and "Jewish" interchangeably, argues Attar, is akin to "the practice of neo-Nazi groups like the National Front."[619] She goes on to question on what grounds the Black women collective members judged the "flood of letters" by Jewish women to be predominantly racist and that such criteria were not elaborated on. According to Attar, *Spare Rib*'s endeavour to generate a feminist position on the war in Lebanon had been formulaic in "assuming that Jews are white and Palestinians are not."[620] She suggests that "glib over-simplifications" and "mindless automatic responses" minimise and distort the ways in which Zionism and anti-Semitism affect women differently.[621] While Attar expresses her support for the Black women collective members, she also insists that "it cannot be unconditional support" and that, by refusing to publish the "flood of letters," *Spare Rib* had jeopardised the possibility for its readers to better understand the nuances of racism and imperialism.[622]

However, as became clear approximately a year later, *Trouble & Strife* itself was not exempt from criticism. In issue 3 of *Trouble & Strife*, published in the summer of 1984, a letter by Lilian Mohin criticises an article by Claire Duchen from the previous issue, titled "What's the French for Political Lesbian?" In said article, Duchen covers a split in the French Women's Liberation Movement (Mouvement de Liberation des Femmes) in 1980 over the issue of political lesbianism. As already discussed in depth in chapter 1, one of the most contentious characterisations throughout this debate in the UK was the labelling of heterosexual women by political lesbians as "collaborators" with the patriarchy. Duchen describes that the same "collaborator" label was levelled against heterosexual women in France, noting that this term had much more grave associations in the French context due to the collaboration of the state of Vichy with Nazi Germany.[623] Mohin's response to Duchen is sceptical of this interpretation, stating that "collaboration is not unique to France" and that, in her view, the avoidance of the term "collaborator" trivialises lesbian politics under the guise of anti-Semitic correctness.[624] Instead, Mohin states that "as a Jew I want it said, understood – not

[618] Dena Attar, "An Open Letter on Anti-Semitism," *Trouble & Strife*, no. 1 (1983): 13.
[619] Ibid. 14.
[620] Ibid.
[621] Ibid. 16.
[622] Ibid.
[623] Clare Duchen, "What's the French for Political Lesbian?," *Trouble & Strife*, no. 2 (1984): 26.
[624] Lilian Mohin, "Lesbian Radical Feminism: The Only Radical Feminism?," *Trouble & Strife*, no. 3 (1984): 7.

avoided."[625] She goes on to compare the way in which Jewish and lesbian women are "tolerated" in the women's movement so long as they "don't go on about it."[626] Similarly to exchanges in *Spare Rib*, this negotiation demonstrates how considerations of anti-Semitism overlapped with other overarching political dynamics – in this case the dynamic between heterosexual feminists and political lesbians. What these letters evidence convincingly is the embedded nature of how conflict during the Women's Liberation Movement was not always necessarily about the obvious point in question, but rather part of broader political considerations.

The debate continues in issue 4, published in 1984, which contains a letter from two women, Romi Bowen and Bernadette Manning, who had attended a *Trouble & Strife* readers' meeting earlier that year. The letter criticises the collective for not taking seriously the issue of anti-Semitism during said meeting. Bowen describes how, during the meeting, a collective member displayed ingrained anti-Semitic attitudes that "revealed the superficiality" of the magazine's commitment to opposing anti-Semitism.[627] She suggests that *Trouble & Strife* pitted a Black woman and a Jewish woman against one another by implying that the black woman (unnamed) had withdrawn her interest in contributing to the magazine after reading Lilian Mohin's letter: "You pitched the loud, aggressive Jew against the black woman, and so damaged all black and Jewish women."[628] Manning describes being "disturbed, upset and angry" about the collective's behaviour, though in her case it pertained to patronising assumptions about her intellectual capacity as an Irish woman.[629] In addressing the collective directly, she clarifies: "Your very different responses to us – as a Jew and as an Irish woman – were revealing in their predictability; one dealt with brusquely, the other patronised, both dismissed."[630]

A lengthy reply from the *Trouble & Strife* collective is published directly following the critical letter, which is largely apologetic, stating: "With the wisdom of hindsight, we regret having held a meeting where discussion was inevitably superficial, […] and where important

[625] Ibid.
[626] Ibid.
[627] Romi Bowen and Bernadette Manning, "Trouble & Strife: Anti-Semitism and Racism," *Trouble & Strife*, no. 4 (1984): 2.
[628] Ibid.
[629] Ibid.
[630] Ibid. 3.

topics were hurried over because of nervousness on our part."[631] Here, the correspondence by its very nature becomes a process of repair to redress the hurried superficiality of the meeting. With regard to the temporal quality of letters, Beins identifies the way in which such published correspondence "gives the reader a chance to negotiate the terms of the address in a way that differs from a response to a singular oral call."[632] In other words, because the reader can return to the letter over time, her immediate reaction may change by the time she has re-experienced the "direct address" several times.[633] Concerning the meeting in question, the collective contends that it did not intentionally pit women against each other, however it also admits that its members should have been more cognisant of the implications of contributing toward the stereotyping of Jewish and Black women, "especially given the history of *Spare Rib* and *Outwrite* in the past two years."[634] By mentioning "the history" of the debate in other periodicals, *Trouble & Strife* positioned itself within what Beins calls the "idiosyncratic lines of connection" that sustained printed feminist communication networks.[635] This correspondence and criticism, therefore, did not exist in isolation, but rather belonged to a self-referential connected network of periodicals and letters. *Trouble & Strife*'s response ends with a commitment by the collective to prioritise more discussions, self-education and self-criticism about racism as well as to transform the all-white membership of the collective itself. As with *Spare Rib*, instead of being mere carriers of information, these letters acted as conduits to the broader women's movement which, in the 1980s, saw the increase in awareness of racism.

3.2.8 Moving from Anti-Zionism and Anti-Semitism to Racism and Internationalism

The coverage of anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism in *Spare Rib* dwindled from 1984 onwards, though it never fully disappeared, which Nathalie Thomlinson argues is evidence that the issue was never truly resolved.[636] Even as late as issue 235 of *Spare Rib*, published in June 1992, a letter by Inbar Tamari is deeply critical of *Spare Rib*'s refusal to publicise a new club

[631] Ruth Wallsgrove et al., "The Collective Replies," *Trouble & Strife*, no. 4 (1984): 3.
[632] Beins, *Liberation in Print: Feminist Periodicals and Social Movement Identity*. 112.
[633] Ibid.
[634] Wallsgrove et al., "The Collective Replies," 4.
[635] Beins, *Liberation in Print: Feminist Periodicals and Social Movement Identity*. 122.
[636] Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement in England, 1968-1993*. 130.

for Jewish women "unless the women organising it explain their position regarding Israel."[637] Directly following the letter, *Spare Rib* confirmed that "it is encumbant [*sic*] on all Jewish people to denounce Zionism and the state of Israel."[638] In what would become *Spare Rib*'s last publication, issue 239 in December/January 1993, this editorial strategy was criticised in a letter signed by a group of feminists who questioned why the responsibility of denouncing Zionism only fell onto Jewish women.[639] Again, in direct response, *Spare Rib* defended their decision and optimistically called for more "responses on the debate, and in particular on the issue of Zionism," although any possibility for a prolonged discussion ended with the publication of the magazine.[640]

It is notable that, as the debate over Zionism in *Spare Rib* became more diffused after 1984, a new Jewish feminist periodical *Shifra* emerged. It was published by a collective of ten Jewish feminists who felt it necessary to "provide Jewish women with a forum to understand our experiences in all their diversity."[641] The editorial of the first issue includes a statement on the problem of Israel, indicative of the fact that the collective anticipated having to clarify their position given the previous two years of debate in *Spare Rib*. The appearance of *Shifra* speaks to the way in which the periodical format was applied to help, in this case, Jewish feminists come to an understanding of what "Jewish feminism" really entailed. As Forster argues, this search for existential *belonging* is one of the primary motivations for "building a network of unknown women through a journal or magazine."[642] The statement affirms that while the *Shifra* collective defends the right of Jewish people to have a homeland, they do not believe such a right should be at the expense of Palestinians. Additionally, the first issue includes an article by Linda Bellos titled "Black Jew?" in which she unpacks the limitations of identity politics in the women's movement. Bellos argues that a hierarchy of oppression has dominated difficult discussions between feminists and, as a consequence, women have been made to compete with one another. The solution, in her view, must include a refusal to assimilate differences between women under "sweeping generalisations."[643] *Shifra* was short-lived, only lasting for four issues between 1984-86, which in and of itself is indicative of the

[637] Inbar Tamari, "Dear Spare Rib," *Spare Rib*, no. 235 (1992): 5.
[638] "Spare Rib Replies," *Spare Rib*, no. 235 (1992): 5.
[639] Suzanne Elwick et al., "Evading the Issue," *Spare Rib*, no. 239 (1993): 4.
[640] "Spare Rib Replies," *Spare Rib*, no. 239 (1993): 4.
[641] "Editorial," *Shifra*, no. 1 (1984): 2.
[642] Forster, *Magazine Movements: Women's Culture, Feminisms and Media Form*. 208.
[643] Linda Bellos, "Black Jew?," *Shifra*, no. 1 (1984): 23.

difficulties Jewish feminists faced in identifying a common cause to organise around.[644] Nevertheless, the establishment of *Shifra* during a time in which *Spare Rib* was not being transparent about its anti-Zionist editorial policies demonstrates how difficult conversations motivated the emergence of new periodicals and in turn, how such shifts in the means of communication can also denote shifts in feminist thinking.

From 1983 onwards, the letters and general editorial tone in *Spare Rib* illustrate how debates about anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism grew into more deliberate conversations about race, racism, and Black (or "Third World") feminism. Issue 135, published in October 1983, was a "special Black women's issue" which marked a significant turning point for the magazine in directly addressing the problems of racism and imperialism that had emerged as a result of the debate about Zionism. The editorial states that since Black women were invited to join the *Spare Rib* collective the year previous, in October 1982, changes in editorial power had been "painful."[645] This shift in power is communicated by the announcement that "the Black/Third World Women on the collective […] had editorial control" over issue 135.[646] Interestingly, the editorial also notes that there had been divisions between the Black women collective members about how to define "black feminist politics," the specifics of which are not mentioned. This is the first disclosure in *Spare Rib* that the political tensions in the magazine collective were not *just* "split on colour lines."[647] Having claimed the space of an entire issue to cover "Black/Internationalist politics" in more depth, the Black women collective members also had to grapple with ways to introduce multiple points of view:

> We understand that it is dangerous to emphasize [*US spelling*] splits and divisions. But, if we do not realise those differences and how we can accommodate them, what will we do with the splits?[648]

The editorial ends with trepidatious calls for comments and responses from *Spare Rib*'s readers in order to further "the cause of Black/International feminist politics." In the following four issues, the reader responses varied from interpreting the special Black

[644] The origins of "Jewish feminism" and its existential problems are covered in more depth in Natalie Thomlinson's 2016 study *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement in England, 1968-1993.*
[645] "Editorial," *Spare Rib*, no. 135 (1983): 3.
[646] Ibid.
[647] Faversham Women's Group, "...Or Are You?" 44.
[648] "Editorial," (1983).

women's issue as being indicative of a positive editorial change to regarding it as a tokenistic gesture. One reader, Angela Jackman, describes in a letter how she feels "encouraged for the potential of the Black women's media" after reading issue 135 and that she hopes for a "permanent Black version of *SR*."[649] In contrast, a letter by Cathy questions why *Spare Rib* would "suddenly concentrate on Black women" unless the magazine felt they had been "neglecting them before."[650] Another letter by Samantha Anderson argues that issue 135 was not sufficiently focused on Black women for it to warrant the description of a "Black women's issue" and that, in general, she thinks singling out Black women is patronising and tokenistic.[651]

Clearly, the gradual shift away from discussing Zionism and towards addressing Black feminism allowed for the expression of distinct and opposing views in *Spare Rib*'s letter pages between Black women. In issue 136 of *Spare Rib*, published in November 1983, such divisions are articulated for the first time in Arati's article "Black to Black." The main division which Arati touches upon is the definition of "Black," a definition which she thinks women have been "unduly coy" about discussing.[652] In her view, the "Black" identity is comprised of a mixture of pigmentation – i.e. "the 'blacker' a woman is the more oppressed she is" – and a "lack of cultural reference" as a result of colonisation and displacement.[653] Arati notes how the hierarchy of oppression between people of colour is maintained through differences of skin pigmentation as well as class, motivated by internalised white supremacy. She goes on to suggest that the knowledge of these differences between Black women has enabled white women to control and sabotage their demands for justice. Therefore, she argues, "only when differences [between Black women] are dealt with can Real Solidarity begin"[654] (original capitalisation).

The editorial of issue 138, published in January 1984, also highlights an urgent need for the discussion of differences between Black women. The editorial appeals for "other Black women to help arrange a readers' meeting" with the *Spare Rib* collective in order to come to a better definition of "Black Feminism."[655] Possible areas of contradiction (or difference) are

[649] Angela Jackman, "Appreciation of SR," *Spare Rib*, no. 137 (1983): 4.
[650] Cathy, "Black Neglect," *Spare Rib*, no. 136 (1983): 5.
[651] Samantha Anderson, "Special Black Issue - Tokenism," *Spare Rib*, no. 138 (1984): 5.
[652] Arati, "Black to Black," *Spare Rib*, no. 136 (1983): 17.
[653] Ibid.
[654] Ibid.
[655] "Editorial," *Spare Rib*, no. 138 (1984): 4.

listed as "skin colour, disability, sexuality, age, religion and class."[656] The editorial further calls for support from *Spare Rib*'s Black readers as well as a commitment to the anti-racist struggle from its white readers, asking apprehensively: "white women please consider also what degree of gratitude and collusion to white racism you are demanding from Black women."[657] The obstacle for the collective, clearly, was in trying to create a space for its Black women readers to discuss their differences – seen as a prerequisite for improved feminist solidarity – while also anticipating criticism from their white women readership which may compromise how the collective envisioned the discussion should evolve. As Malpocher observes, the collective could only control the content of the *articles* in the magazine, and so controversial letters continued to pose a potential threat to the editorial unity of the collective.[658]

However, several Black women readers were not in agreement with *Spare Rib*'s methods of initiating such discussions of difference. In issue 141, published in April 1984, a collectively authored letter is deeply critical of Arati's article "Black to Black" and describes it as being "full of historical, factual and cultural inaccuracies" that only serve to perpetuate racist stereotypes.[659] The authors take issue with Arati's emphasis on skin pigmentation as being a central factor for the hierarchy of oppression, which they argue only reiterates "divisions and hierarchies among Black women."[660] Embedded in the authors' criticism of Arati's letter is a general sense of resentment directed at *Spare Rib* for giving the impression that it is facilitating such a dialogue between Black women for the first time. The authors are quick to point out that "a debate had been and is ongoing amongst grassroots Black women's groups for over 5 years" within the Organisation of Women of African and Asian Descent (OWAAD) and that "just because these discussions have not been publicised in the pages of *Spare Rib*, historically a white feminist magazine, does not mean that these discussions have not taken place."[661] It should be considered, however, that at that point *Spare Rib* was just beginning to emerge out of an entrenched debate about Zionism which had for several months taken priority.

[656] Ibid.
[657] Ibid.
[658] Malpocher, "Sexuality, Race and Zionism: Conflict and Debates in Spare Rib, 1972-1993," 202.
[659] Shaheen Haq et al., "A Response to 'Black to Black' from Black Women," *Spare Rib*, no. 141 (1984): 29.
[660] Ibid.
[661] Ibid.

Moreover, these debates – though not necessarily new or novel – were being brought to the attention of many white feminists for the first time through *Spare Rib*. As one white woman reader, Manda Kirkus, declared: "Now I realise the importance and the realness of what you were sharing with us. […] I know I need access to the sort of discussion *Spare Rib* takes on."[662] Kirkus had previously cancelled her subscription due to what she felt was an over-concentration on racism in the magazine, but changed her mind during a visit to Greenham Common where she observed the exclusion of Black women and remembered the analysis and discussion of such events in *Spare Rib*. Still, some Black women readers felt that *Spare Rib* was held hostage by its white readership, as Pauline Isabel describes in a letter:

> […] There is, ultimately, only one thing which matters and that is *the reader*. And guess who the reader of SR is – a non-black, non-working class woman. This delicate, liberal creature must not be shocked out of her woman-hatred or made to change. In fact she must not be offended in any way because this is said to affect circulation figures![663]

Such statements demonstrate an awareness in *Spare Rib*'s readers of how the magazine maintained what Beetham calls "a dominant position from which to read" in order to retain its middle-class readership.[664] However, the inclusion of letters such as the above example also attest to the flexibility which correspondence pages provided for offering readers "scope to construct their own version of the text by selective reading."[665] The controversy over not publishing the "flood of letters" from Jewish feminists led to the realisation that *Spare Rib* could not simply ignore the wide array of opinions coming from its readership. As Malpocher states: "Past attempts to avoid 'controversial topics' only called attention to the magazine's fear of 'shocking' or alienating readers."[666] The racial conflict within the women's movement continued to be a central theme throughout the rest of *Spare Rib*'s print run, most starkly represented on the cover of issue 168, published in July 1986. The cover image is of a white woman and a Black woman, standing back-to-back, framed by the question "Black & White Women: Can We Work Together?" The identically named feature article of that issue sees the *Spare Rib* collective ask different women's organisations about how they "found ways of

[662] Manda Kirkus, "Fence Between Us," *Spare Rib*, no. 139 (1984): 30.
[663] Pauline Isabel, "Response to Editorial of SR 138," *Spare Rib*, no. 140 (1984): 4.
[664] Beetham, "Open and Closed: The Periodical as a Publishing Genre," 99.
[665] Ibid.
[666] Malpocher, "Sexuality, Race and Zionism: Conflict and Debates in Spare Rib, 1972-1993," 140.

co-operating."[667] This, argues Malpocher, could be indicative of *Spare Rib* feeling "too vulnerable to personally engage with the issue" and so instead they diverted attention away from their own positionality by interviewing other women's groups.[668]

Ultimately, as will be explored further in the conclusion of this chapter, the issue of race "became the undoing of the magazine."[669] Nevertheless, it is notable that *Spare Rib* managed to survive for over a decade after the Zionism controversy erupted and it unquestionably brought discussions and negotiations of Black feminism, as well as anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, to the attention of a wide readership. In contrast, the *Merseyside Women's Paper*, for instance, had ceased publication in 1986 after the collective became fragmented over tensions between white and Black collective members.[670] Perhaps the most important difference between the two publications was that *Spare Rib*, due to its much wider circulation, had a considerably larger readership that made its investment into the magazine known through constant engagement by means of letter-writing. In this sense, magazines like *Spare Rib* relied on letters to both broaden and develop controversial discussions, as well as to act as the magazine's pulse that kept the publication tethered to the women's movement.

3.3 Conclusion: 21st century reflections

Although these debates remained unresolved, I contend that the measure of success for analysing these correspondences is not whether a consensus was reached. Rather, the topics, ideas and political negotiations that are revealed by examining letter-to-the-editor pages demonstrate how second wave feminist periodicals provided an indispensable location for the development of an intersectional analysis. Moreover, these communications anchor the resurgence of these debates longitudinally.

However, not all the women who were involved in the controversy remember it in generative terms. In 2006, documentary filmmaker Vanessa Engle produced a 3-part series titled "Lefties" about the political Left in Britain during the 1970s and 1980s. The second instalment, titled "Angry Wimmin," chronicles the development of revolutionary feminism

[667] "Can Black and White Women Work Together?," *Spare Rib*, no. 168 (1986): 18.
[668] Malpocher, "Sexuality, Race and Zionism: Conflict and Debates in Spare Rib, 1972-1993," 148.
[669] Ibid. 150.
[670] Ibid. 144.

and political lesbianism (examined in chapter 1). In one of the film's interviews, the *Spare Rib* editorial collective member Sue O'Sullivan recalls the 1982 editorial shift in the magazine when, for the first time, the magazine collective was comprised of an equally distributed mixed-race membership. She says: "When the first Black women came on to *Spare Rib*, I think they were in a very difficult position. […] But we did, I think, think simply by having them on the collective, it would make things better. And I don't think that anybody predicted that it would make things a hell of a lot worse."[671] What she is most likely referring to in this quote are the very deliberations covered in this chapter about the editorial obstacles which arose during the process of attempting to transform *Spare Rib* into an anti-racist magazine. Though the negotiations clearly took an emotional toll on all those involved, I still maintain that such records of discord are extremely valuable for the development of an intergenerational and polyvocal feminist history, particularly in relation to approaches for recognising the cyclical re-emergence of similar disagreements.

In common with O'Sullivan, but from a different perspective, Linda Bellos reflects critically on her time spent as the first Black and only Jewish editorial collective member of *Spare Rib* for the British Library digitisation project. Bellos comments on what she termed a "problematic" trend of understanding identity "as part of a hierarchy of oppression" within the Women's Liberation Movement as well as during her tenure at *Spare Rib*.[672] She details how, as women competed to tick the most "boxes of oppression," this did not in fact guarantee that they were listened to.[673] In a corresponding criticism about the rise of competitive identity politics during the early 1980s, one of the co-authors of the "Political Lesbianism: The Case Against Heterosexuality" essay (discussed in chapter 1) Al Garthwaite reflects that "identity politics were used by some people as a way to shut others up. Or for them to gain power. […] And it was not, in the end, positive. I can't think of anything good to say."[674]

In contrast, print culture historian Julie R. Enszer concludes, based on her research on the American multiracial and lesbian-focused second wave feminist periodical *Conditions*, that such periodicals can dissuade narratives which "suggest a failure of feminism during the

[671] Vanessa Engle, dir., *Lefties: Angry Wimmin* (United Kingdom: BBC, 2006).
[672] Linda Bellos, "The Limitations of Identity Politics," British Library, n.d., accessed 23 September, 2021, https://www.bl.uk/spare-rib/articles/the-limitations-of-identity-politics.
[673] Ibid.
[674] Engle, *Lefties: Angry Wimmin*.

1980s, supposedly for becoming inward looking and overly concerned with identity politics."[675] In agreement with Enszer, I position the source material examined in this chapter as evidence of attempts to "transform power relations between white women and women of color, [*US spelling*] institutionally and interpersonally" through "the production of print culture."[676] Nevertheless, I do not mean to undermine the painful memories of the women who were involved in such confrontations. By means of the systematic analysis of the recorded correspondences and letters, however, it is possible to glean a full appreciation of how such discursive channels provided a necessary location for the expression of conflicting feminist visions.

The first Irish editorial collective member at *Spare Rib*, Roisín Boyd, also remembers difficult and painful discussions about "what was a feminist issue and who should speak [to] those issues."[677] Notably, she describes how re-reading *Spare Rib* several decades later revealed to her "the depth of feeling, the honesty, the passion and the diversity" in addition to, in her words, the unusual airing of the magazine's "dirty laundry."[678] The act of revisiting the difficult correspondences, in this case, clearly allows for a retrospective reading which is not constrained by the practical pressures of having to produce the magazine. As such, the feminist periodicals discussed here contain the dual function of being discursive mediums for debate, as well as being crucial archival records for making sense of the *means* and *form* of discussion in relation to the present-day reappearances of similar concerns.

One contribution to *Spare Rib* which is not discussed in this chapter is interdisciplinary scholar Nira Yuval-Davis' 1984 article "Zionism, Antisemitism and the Struggle Against Racism: Some Reflections on a Current Painful Debate Among Feminists." It was written, in issue 146 of *Spare Rib*, as "an intervention" into the controversy after Yuval-Davis found herself "more and more unable to identify with any of the major sides involved."[679] She suggests that the struggles against Zionism, anti-Semitism and racism should be conceived of as complementary rather than competitive. Moreover, she argues that one of the reasons the

[675] Julie R. Enszer, "'Fighting to Create and Maintain Our Own Black Women's Culture': Conditions Magazine, 1977-1990," *American Periodicals: A Journal of History, Criticism, and Bibliography* 25, no. 2 (2015): 162. https://doi.org/10.1353/amp.2015.0025.
[676] Ibid.
[677] Roisín Boyd, "Race, Place and Class: Who's Speaking for Who?," British Library, n.d., accessed 23 September, 2021, https://www.bl.uk/spare-rib/articles/race-place-and-class-whos-speaking-for-who.
[678] Ibid.
[679] Nira Yuval-Davis, "Zionism, Antisemitism and the Struggle Against Racism: Some Reflections on a Painful Current Debate among Feminists," *Spare Rib*, no. 146 (1984).

debate felt hostile in *Spare Rib* was that a prevailing notion of an automatic "sisterhood" contributed to the expectation that "all women have, or would have (if they did not have false consciousness) the same political interests."[680] What makes this article worth mentioning in particular – besides its role within the broader debate – is that *Feminist Review* published an introduction by Yuval-Davis in 2020 in which she reflects on her original arguments in the 1984 article. Notably, by revisiting the text, she observes that the article was an "embryonic form" of the analytical tools she developed over her subsequent career, including her formulations of situated intersectionality (Yuval-Davis, 2015; Yuval-Davis, 2011) and dialogical epistemology (Yuval-Davis, 2012).[681]

This reflection additionally confirms my argument that the letter-to-the-editor pages discussed here provoked the generation of early articulations of intersectionality. Although Yuval-Davis notes that it took "a whole year to convince the members of the *Spare Rib* collective" to publish her original article, it was written as a response to the ongoing correspondences in the magazine.[682] In other words, while in some cases the disagreements clearly remain as painful (even detrimental) memories for the editorial collective members, the magazine *form* served an essential purpose for surfacing the conflict and influencing subsequent responses to the intersections of anti-Zionism, anti-Semitism and racism. And so, when "second wave feminism is (erroneously) associated purely with the essentialized [*US spelling*] figure of 'middle-class, white woman,'" these records provide a more complex and intimate representation of how the second wave feminist periodical network produced the material means for debating the intersections of identities and oppressions.[683]

[680] Ibid.
[681] Nira Yuval-Davis, "Introduction to 'Antisemitism, Anti-Racism and Zionism: Old Debates, Contemporary Contestations': Reflecting Back on My Article 'Zionism, Antisemitism and the Struggle Against Racism: Some Reflections on a Current Painful Debate Among Feminists,' *Spare Rib*, September 1984," *Feminist Review* 126, no. 1 (2020): 176. https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/10.1177/0141778920941311.
[682] Ibid.
[683] Fernandes, "Unsettling 'Third Wave Feminism': Feminist Waves, Intersectionality, and Identity Politics in Retrospect." 101.

Conclusion

A Network of Communication

The aim of this thesis was to conduct the first systematic analysis of second wave feminist periodicals in the UK between 1970-1990. Specifically, this research asked what such an analysis can reveal about the role of print-based networks in facilitating the development of feminist ideas. During my early visits to women's archives across the UK, it quickly became recognisable that the significance of feminist periodicals cannot wholly be assessed by focusing on any one individual title or print-run. Instead, the influence which the periodical form had in shaping and connecting the political women's movement resulted from a networked, kaleidoscopic landscape of woman-controlled feminist media. Therefore, in line with previous feminist periodical research (Beins, 2017; Thomlinson, 2016; Forster, 2015), I identified several predominant titles on which to base my research: *WIRES, Red Rag, Scarlet Women, Outwrite, Spare Rib* and *Trouble & Strife.* By selecting a broad range of periodicals, I was informed by Martha Allen's and Agatha Beins' analysis of second wave feminist periodicals in the US and, through this methodological framework, I have contributed significant additions to the field of women's publishing history in the UK.

Not only was information distributed freely between individual feminist periodicals as part of their political ethos, but the periodicals themselves constituted a networked constellation which offered women a multitude of entry-points for participating in the creation of a feminist presence. For instance, when Carol Lee wrote a letter to *WIRES* to criticise revolutionary feminists, she did so by qualifying that she "did not know of another suitable venue" to do so and that such outlets were vital for stimulating political discussion.[684] This dynamic also had the effect of allowing women to locate themselves *relationally* within the women's movement and, as Beins reminds us, the physical manifestation of feminist periodicals created an enduring, material location in which to practice and discover feminism. Just as Allen's survey of second wave feminist periodicals in the US illustrates their *linking* and *expansive* qualities, so too has this research highlighted how the periodical network in the UK resisted stagnation by encouraging readers to become collaborators and contributors.

[684] Lee, "Dear Sisters,."

The selection of multiple titles also revealed how seemingly distinct political negotiations during the Women's Liberation Movement overlapped, informed and influenced the development of second wave feminist theorising. As such, this research echoed Cait McKinney's approach of understanding individual periodicals as *networks*, situated within the larger constellation of feminist periodicals.

In other words, there exists a duality of network-thinking that underpinned the feminist periodical infrastructure: the individual issues themselves acted as connecting agents and multi-textual distributors of information, while also being embedded within a decentralised network of feminist media that ensured the emergence of new titles where others discontinued or ceased being relevant to their readership. For example, the *Red Rag* magazine collective stated that they hoped for the emergence of *more* socialist feminist periodicals during a time when internal collective working practices presented the collective with ideological obstacles. Similarly, the Jewish feminist periodical *Shifra* was established as a consequence of Jewish feminists feeling that *Spare Rib* was adopting anti-Semitic editorial policies. As I have discussed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, this demonstrates the way in which individual feminist periodical titles relied on the broader periodical network to share the responsibility of serving the women's movement.

Subsequently, this research has confirmed Margaret Beetham's observation that the periodical form is "resistant to closure" by reading feminist periodicals not in isolation, but as flexible and malleable forms that networked the Women's Liberation Movement.[685] Such findings are valuable to researchers interested in the constellation of second wave feminist theory and can dissuade any temptations to consider these histories as separate from the material communication network within which they were generated. While I have used seven overarching titles on which to base my research, David Doughan and Denise Sanchez's bibliographical work on feminist periodicals identified approximately 450 second wave feminist titles which circulated in the UK, leaving ample room for further study on the nature and implications of the networked feminist periodical infrastructure.[686]

[685] Beetham, "Open and Closed: The Periodical as a Publishing Genre," 97.
[686] See Appendix 1 for a summary and analysis of British second wave feminist periodicals in David Doughan, and Denise Sanchez. *Feminist Periodicals 1855-1984: An Annotated Critical Bibliography of British, Irish, Commonwealth and International Titles*. New York: New York University Press, 1987.

Form(s) and Function(s)

Conflict and Correspondence in Movement

Another fundamental question of this research asked what can be deduced about the principal *function(s)* of the feminist periodical *form* in relation to shaping the development of feminist ideas. Though feminist periodicals are physical objects, they are not static or stationary. On the contrary, their form necessitates *movement*: both in their physical journey from the editorial collective to the reader (in some cases also making separate stops at printer and distributor locations), as well as movement within their content. This research has applied existing analysis about the genre and form of periodicals (Snyder and Sorensen, 2018; Bazin and Waters, 2017; Beetham, 1989) to discern the way in which the feminist periodical medium produced a flexible and discursive space that was particularly conducive to the negotiation of a feminist politic.

Informed by Victoria Bazin and Melanie Waters' assertion that periodicals give voice to dissent and conflict within feminism, I focused on evidencing how the discursive function of feminist periodicals facilitated ideological disagreements between women. This emphasis on disagreement was *not* introduced to cast a dim light on the effectiveness of the feminist periodical. Rather, by contextualising these disagreements using feminist conflict theory (Schulman, 2016; Thompson, 1993; Daly, 1984; Lyons, 1976; Kennedy, 1970), I have argued that such disagreements were indivisible from the process of feminist theorising. And so, having considered both Gracie Lyons' proposition that criticism is necessary to "see the difference between right ideas and wrong ideas,"[687] as well as Sarah Schulman's observation that "conflict, after all, is rooted in difference and people are and always will be different," this research demonstrated how feminist periodicals provided both the discursive space for these conflicts to unfold and, in turn, the *generative* conditions under which new feminist ideas could be formed.[688] Accordingly, my approach adds to the field of feminist conflict theory, as well as communication theory in general, by highlighting the urgency with which disagreements were addressed in letter-to-the-editor pages.

[687] Lyons, *Constructive Criticism: A Handbook*. 15.
[688] Schulman, *Conflict Is Not Abuse: Overstating Harm, Community Responsibility, and the Duty of Repair*. 20.

Turning my attention, then, to what specific conditions were provided by second wave feminist periodicals to encourage discursiveness and avoid ideological deadlock, I illustrated how letter-to-the-editor pages functioned as the central mechanism through which disagreements and conflicts were expressed. The overarching conflicts identified by this research were broadly categorised as belonging to the topics of political lesbianism, socialist feminism, feminist collective practices, feminism in Northern Ireland, reproduction, racism, anti-Zionism, anti-Semitism, censorship, transparency and accountability. It is important to note that this research did *not* attempt to analyse the competing viewpoints in order to conclude which side presented the most compelling argument. Instead, my fundamental aim was to evidence how feminist disagreements in the form of letter-writing effectively facilitated what Margaretta Jolly describes as "the struggle to realise the ideals of sisterhood from within."[689]

Therefore, for the sake of concentrating on the *rhetorical* attributes of contentious communication through letter-writing, I applied Carey Snyder and Leif Sorensen's understanding that letters to the editor share similar characteristics with serialised fiction wherein there exist major plot points, twists, turns and developments. This approach allowed for an analysis that concentrated on the discursive and epistolary form of how these conflicts were deliberated. Having documented and chronicled these rhetorical features that accompanied the unfolding of feminist negotiations in letter-to-the-editor pages, this research offers historians, as well as media and communication scholars, with a substantial amount of under-researched primary source data on which to base further inquiries. Additionally, for the purposes of scope and clarity I selectively excluded several other ideological disagreements – such as negotiations about the women's peace movement, classism, pornography and sadomasochism – which all constitute significant records to be unpacked in future studies.

"Please Say More" / "I May Be All Wrong"

What stood out as a distinctive quality of the disagreements examined in this research is that critical letters were accompanied by calls for *expansion* and *clarification*. For example, when Paula Jennings replies to Dianne Grimsditch's letter in *WIRES* in which she insists that political lesbianism has no relevant application in her own life, Jennings asks Grimsditch to

[689] Jolly, *In Love and Struggle: Letters in Contemporary Feminism*. 4.

"please say more" (original emphasis), despite disagreeing with her interpretation after re-reading her letter several times.[690] Similarly, when Sue O'Sullivan writes a critical letter in *Red Rag* explaining her reasons for resigning from the editorial collective, she admits that she "may be all wrong"[691] but that her letter is written in the spirit of expressing criticism for the political necessity of advancing a feminist practice, with the expectation that there would be a continued dialogue. It is precisely this expectation among the periodical readership that discussions would *continue* into future letter-to-the-editor pages which contributed to the prevalence of such appeals for women to *say more* or clarify their original argument.

Furthermore, the examples of conflict presented here confirm Beins' reflection that correspondence in the form of published letters allows the reader to "revisit the text"[692] over time before responding, given that the production cycle for the next periodical issue was, on average, between four to eight weeks. In comparison to instantaneous digital communication, the turn-over of call and response in feminist periodicals was slow, considered and gradual. One reader, Adi, recognises this in a letter published in the *Brighton & Hove Women's Liberation Newsletter,* stating that confusion and patience are both necessary for allowing women to come to their own conclusions on the topic of political lesbianism instead of rushing to "last word" statements.[693] Clearly, the material conditions of the feminist periodical publication cycle gave shape to discursive gaps in between issues during which readers took seriously the task of formulating their own opinions in response to previous letters.

And yet, appeals for the *opening* and *broadening* of disagreements in letter-to-the-editor pages did not just appear as a consequence of the temporal features of publication. Throughout this research, I have revealed how – embedded into the founding principles of the periodicals examined – there existed an ethos of facilitating open communication *for the sake of* improving upon feminist theory and activism. For example, *Scarlet Women* was established specifically as a "forum for discussion"[694] in order to produce "the right framework and approach" for mediating political differences between women.[695] Similarly,

[690] Jennings, "Dear Diane (Grimsditch),."
[691] O'Sullivan, "Dear Red Rag,."
[692] Beins, *Liberation in Print: Feminist Periodicals and Social Movement Identity*. 112.
[693] Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group, "Political Lesbianism: The Case Against Heterosexuality," *Women's Information and Referral Enquiry Service*, no. 81 (1979): 18.
[694] "Editorial," (1976).
[695] Tyneside Coast Women, "What Has Happened to the Women's Liberation and Socialism Conferences?"

Trouble & Strife specified as one of its founding principles that the magazine would act as an "open forum for debate" and encourage discussion that would transcend any predisposed opinions of the editorial collective.[696] This is also echoed in *Spare Rib*'s editorial ethos which, throughout the charged correspondences about anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism, continued to affirm the magazine's goal to facilitate dialogue between Jewish, Palestinian and Arab women. The *Spare Rib* editorial collective consciously recognised the significance of letter-to-the-editor pages for surfacing painful differences between feminists, not for the sake of exposing disunity, but for making possible the articulation of "common interest" through open debate.[697] Having taken into consideration the material form of feminist periodicals, this research also placed particular emphasis on their founding principles of open communication which meant that letter-to-the-editor pages became indispensable to fulfilling the goals of the publication. As such, this research presents historians and philosophers alike with an invitation to consider how certain ideological positions and political theories are indivisible from the material means by which they are communicated and formulated.

Interestingly, the readers of the feminist periodicals I analysed also recognised that letter-to-the-editor pages were a democratic tool for shaping feminist consciousness. For instance, Stella Williams wrote a letter to *Spare Rib* in which she observes that, in contrast to in-person public meetings during which louder voices may dominate, the letter-to-the-editor pages allow "all who have something to say" to "air their views and be heard."[698] Moreover, an unspecified group of socialist feminist wrote a collective response to Sheila Jeffrey's paper "The Need for Revolutionary Feminism" in *Scarlet Women*, detailing that it was only by formulating their criticisms for publication in the periodical that they "were all forced to take positions."[699] Another reader, Lesley Saunders, wrote a letter to *Spare Rib* to support the way in which the editorial collective had published their individual reflections on the problem of racism internal to the collective, stating that "the *form* in which you have chosen to publish these ideas and feelings has made it suddenly very urgent for me to confront them too."[700] Although the collective's ruminations did not constitute "letters to the editor" *per se*, they were modelled on the epistolary form in style and first-person perspective. As I have argued, this confirms the way in which women employed the formal style of letter-writing for the

[696] "Editorial," (1983).
[697] "Sisterhood... Is Plain Sailing," *Spare Rib*, no. 132 (1983).
[698] Williams, "In Order to Change Everything Must Be Opened Up."
[699] "Socialist Feminists Respond: Against 'Sex-Class' Theories."
[700] Saunders, "Making Racism an Urgent Issue."

purpose of making sense of broad political problems through the lens of personal experience. Furthermore, I have applied Waters' observation that letters to the editor can operate "along the lines of an open confessional" in pursuance of negotiating difference and disagreement.[701] Thus, the archival data collected in this research is advantageous to any researcher interested in studying how the principles of consciousness-raising can be enacted, not just in traditional in-person settings, but through the *discursive* space of correspondence in feminist periodicals.

More than just illustrating the conditions for open communication which letters in feminist periodicals engendered, I have also chronicled the resulting shifts in perspective and opinion among both the editorial collectives and their readerships. The evidence presented expands on the work of Jessica Megarry who, in her research on social media, argues that "digital feminism" does not provide the same material continuity as second wave feminist periodicals did and therefore is unable to facilitate reflective theory-building. This research has offered multiple examples of how, by exposing readers to the same information over time, the feminist periodical produced a common knowledge of theoretical problems for the movement and was thereby able to generate discursive *momentum* instead of necessitating repetition and re-iteration. One such example of momentum is a letter in *WIRES*, written by Maureen O'Hara, who offers a supportive analysis of political lesbianism and qualifies this by indicating that she was sceptical of the theory at first, but that she shifted her opinion as a result of other women challenging her assumptions.

Correspondingly, Penny Pattenden wrote a letter to *Spare Rib* admitting that she had been "ignorant about imperialism/racism" before the debate about anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism educated her.[702] Another reader, Manda Kirkus, details how she came to fully appreciate "the importance and the realness" of the debates in *Spare Rib* after witnessing racist behaviour at Greenham Common, instilling in her a renewed sense that the unfurling discussions in the magazine helped her make sense of racism in the women's movement.[703] Additionally, I have compiled testimonies from white women on the *Spare Rib* collective itself who, through the process of struggling to develop an anti-racist collective practice together with the Black collective members – particularly surrounding censorship and transparency in letter-to-the-editor pages – describe learning about their privileges and prejudices. Through these various

[701] Waters, "'Yours in Struggle': Bad Feelings and Revolutionary Politics in *Spare Rib*," 456.
[702] Pattenden, "Women of Colour Should Decide."
[703] Kirkus, "Fence Between Us."

examples of self-reflection and shifting opinions, this research provides further evidence to Natalie Thomlinson's observation that the "rapid turnover of periodicals" produced a material record of "just how quickly feminist theory developed during this era."[704] Simultaneously, this research constitutes a methodological angle for approaching feminist histories as moving, flexible and sometimes contradictory threads of correspondence and debate that are principally tied to their material expressions.

Painful Schisms

This research also contended with the fact that as a result of these conflicts, painful splits and polarisations occurred which, at face value, would be difficult to categorise as "generative," particularly from the perspective of the women who were embroiled in the debate. If I were to begin this research anew, I would dedicate more time and resources to establishing an oral history component within my methodology for the purpose of gauging the long-term emotional and psychological effects these conflicts had on those involved. Nevertheless, I have argued – in agreement with Beatrix Campbell – that "the apparent polarisation masked a *necessary discourse*" and that the Women's Liberation Movement was "living out a debate with itself" (my emphasis).[705]

In the case of the feminist periodicals examined here, the most distressing confrontations seemed to have taken place between the various editorial collective members themselves. Within the periodical publishing genre, the role of the editor is a complicated one. The qualities that distinguish "author" from "editor" are vague and malleable, partly due to the philosophical principles of the Women in Print Movement which attempted to place less importance on individual authors and instead focus on the collective labour required to produce published texts (as discussed in the introduction). The effects of this focus, and the participatory nature of the feminist periodical genre, meant that the editorial collectives often contributed to letter-to-the-editor pages as authors and writers themselves. In *Rolling Our Own: Women as Printers, Publishers and Distributors*, the London-based literary agent Anna McDermid suggests that conventional editing roles in male-dominated publishing houses are often occupied by women because they require imposed "feminine" qualities of nurturing and

[704] Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement in England, 1968-1993*. 27.
[705] Campbell, "Sweets From A Stranger."

caring for the author's work.[706] The periodicals discussed in this research are examples of feminists rejecting hierarchical publishing structures (as highlighted in Chapter 2), and so it makes sense that editorial collective members would also push against the role of "nurturer" and instead become active participants in openly challenging their readerships as well as their fellow editors.

At first glance, such editorial polarisations suggest that the tension originated from ideological disagreement. As I have documented throughout this research, though, the internal divisions principally centred around clashes of editorial power that were shaped by broader political shifts in the UK. This is particularly evident in Chapter 3, in which I have chronicled how the debate on anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism in *Spare Rib* was entangled with the way in which editorial power was being negotiated between the editorial collective members. For the first time, in 1982, the collective was comprised of an equal number of Black women and white women. This coincided with the rise of anti-Zionist conviction among the political Left, an increasingly visible Black British identity as well as a heightened emphasis on anti-racist practice in the Women's Liberation Movement.

In the process of trying to establish *Spare Rib* as an anti-racist magazine, the collective decided *not* to publish a "flood of letters" sent in by Jewish women in response to the magazine's coverage on the Lebanon war. This sparked off the simultaneous debate on what an anti-racist and feminist stance on Israel and imperialism should involve, in addition to what responsibilities the magazine held for accommodating the voices of "*all* women."[707] Interestingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, the collective members utilised the linguistic form of letter-writing within the pages of the periodical to make their individual concerns and opinions known to each other and the broader readership after "numerous exhausting discussions" did not result in any agreements.[708] By analysing these testimonials, I have shown that what was really at stake (particularly for Black women) was an editorial power struggle between white and Black women collective members, eventually resulting in a "special Black women's issue" and an increase in coverage on racism, internationalism and anti-imperialism in *Spare Rib*. This research has called attention to how these negotiations evidence the high regard in which the importance of letters and open communication were

[706] Cadman, Chester, and Pivot, *Rolling Our Own: Women as Printers, Publishers and Distributors*. 19-20.
[707] Waters, "'Yours in Struggle': Bad Feelings and Revolutionary Politics in *Spare Rib*," 447.
[708] "Editorial," (1983).

held: both in being the catalyst of the original conflict surrounding the censoring of letters from Jewish women, as well as constituting the means through which the editorial collective attempted to reach a reconciliation after in-person meetings did not work. Consequently, this research builds upon existing studies of this particular case study (Thomlinson, 2016; Malpocher, 2009) by focusing on the effects which the periodical form – and the highly politicised space of the letter-to-the-editor pages – had in shaping the nature of the conflict.

Furthermore, I have offered another example of painful editorial splits in Chapter 2, detailing the *Red Rag* editorial collective's efforts in creating a magazine independent of the Communist Party (CP) and the subsequent obstacles in feminist collective working which emerged within the magazine. *Red Rag* was conceived of as a discursive tool for building an alliance between the Women's Liberation Movement and the organised labour movement, and in particular, it promised to "break [the] monopoly" of the predominantly male Left by using the magazine to carve out a space where Marxism and radical feminism could converge.[709] However, gaining the trust of a Women's Liberation Movement readership did not prove to be a straightforward venture as there existed a suspicion among feminists that *Red Rag* was in some way officially aligned with the CP. I have described how, during this period of the early 1970s, many women felt disillusioned with the sexist behaviour in the organised labour movement and therefore expressed distrust towards any associated methods or structures of organising. When the *Red Rag* editorial collective was challenged by its readers for being opaque about its alliances, it stated in an editorial that it is "through a dialogue between Red Rag and the movement and through our experience of producing the magazine that our practice can be refined and corrected."[710] This research has discussed several other similar statements running through the editorials of *Red Rag* which confirm my argument that the periodical form was understood as essential for facilitating theoretical developments *as well as* for the development of a feminist collective practice.

And yet, the *Red Rag* editorial collective was faced with the dilemma of trying to establish such practices *through* the magazine without any existing principles that would sustain the magazine to begin with. Accordingly – as has been a typical feature of the many examples presented here – letter-writing was utilised by the collective member Sue O'Sullivan to

[709] "Editorial," (1974).
[710] "Editorial," (1974).

announce and explain her resignation from the magazine after, in her view, internal collective working became untenable because the CP politics dominated the magazine's discussions and practices. In response, several remaining collective members also published a joint letter in the magazine and argued that the internal problems of collective working had more to do with broader areas of political difference about socialist practice which replicated themselves within the production of the magazine. I have unpacked these difficulties using existing literature on non-hierarchical feminist collective organising and small group theory (Iannello, 1992; Allen, 1970), constituting a valuable base of information for any researcher looking for examples of the practicalities and obstacles of a feminist collective practice. Ultimately, my emphasis remained on how feminists engaged in a process of attempting to bridge painful political and personal divides *through* the medium of a feminist periodical.

And so, while I have collected and analysed examples of a traceable progression and advancement of feminist theory through letter-writing in feminist periodicals, there have also been plenty of examples which demonstrate that the same medium has facilitated fall-outs, resignations and painful splits. However, my underlying argument throughout this research has been that progress and conflict are not at opposite ends of a spectrum for measuring political "success" or "efficacy." On the contrary, the feminist periodicals examined here all exhibit an awareness that the expression of disagreement, albeit painful, is a necessary condition for the pursuit of political solidarity between women. Additionally, in order to avoid reducing the Women's Liberation Movement to what Bazin and Waters call a homogenised "signal image," I have demonstrated how feminist periodicals document kaleidoscopic conflicts and disagreements which had a *generative* function in propelling feminist theory-building forward and, as such, this research is an example of why researchers should be mindful of attributing over-generalised tropes to the Women's Liberation Movement.[711] The deception that this era of feminism could be neatly defined by any particular political positionality has been further challenged here by emphasising how feminist periodicals did not exist in a vacuum of women's liberation, rather, they were responsive to broader political developments in the UK. In other words, I have shown how the disagreements and conflicts which occupied letter-to-the-editor pages were reflective of overarching concerns present in 1970s and 1980s British politics – such as the decline of the

[711] Bazin and Waters, "Mediated and Mediating Feminisms: Periodical Culture from Suffrage to the Second Wave," 349.

organised labour movement and trade unions, the rise of the Conservative Party, unemployment, inflation, police brutality and race riots – and it was the medium of a feminist periodical which provided women with a discursive outlet to relate said matters to the project of the Women's Liberation Movement.

Intergenerational Reconciliation

As a result of my investigative framework, I have identified that a central function of second wave feminist periodicals was the mediation and circulation of disagreements between feminists that contributed to the generation of feminist theory *through* – not in spite of – ideological conflict. Subsequently, this research was able to undermine claims that the second wave of feminism was concerned with a homogenous selection of ideas and, instead, I have narrated the discursive development during the Women's Liberation Movement using a plurality of voices. Moreover, I have shown how allegations that second wave feminists neglected the full range of women's experience rely on "narrative foil[s]" that exclude the very women such claims intend to support.[712]

What became overwhelmingly clear over the course of my research was that the correspondences in second wave feminist periodicals are remarkably similar to the political disagreements present in contemporary feminist discussions. For instance, a return to the political lesbian and lesbian separatist analysis is being made by feminist authors and activists (Hawthorne, 2019, Wild, 2019) in response to the definition of "sex" becoming a matter of controversy in law and public policy.[713] Angela Wild, a feminist activist and member of the grassroots lesbian group Get The L Out, refers to "the lesbian walk-out of the gay movement" during the Women's Liberation Movement as making a contemporary reappearance in response to "the male-centred LGBT movement supporting the rights of males who identify as lesbians at the expense of lesbians' rights to sexual boundaries and

[712] McDaneld, "Activating Archives in Women's Studies 101: New Stories About Old Feminism and the Future," 56.
[713] See the 2020 report "The Political Erasure of Sex" by researchers Jane Clare Jones and Lisa Mackenzie, funded by the University of Oxford, charting the way in which the Office for National Statistics and National Records of Scotland have privileged "the demands of groups which claim to represent the interests of the trans community […] to the detriment of women" during the planning for the 2021 UK census, as well as a brief history of sex denialism and its role in influencing policy on women's services while bypassing the consultation of women.

women-loving."[714] Wild also references several second wave feminist authors, such as Sheila Jeffreys, Adrienne Rich and Marilyn Frye, in order to highlight the political potential of lesbian and women-only spaces. Similarly, the publisher and author Susan Hawthorne writes that the topic of lesbian separatism is increasingly "under discussion with events being held to discuss the issue of women's separate spaces"[715] and that it is "just as relevant today"[716] as it was during its early 1970s theoretical formation. Furthermore, I have personally witnessed in grassroots feminist meetings and social gatherings that the principles of political lesbianism still provoke nearly *identical* arguments and discussions as in the examples of second wave feminist periodicals unpacked in this research.

Additionally, the question of whether the organised Left is serving women's interests is being revisited in the UK. Several feminist organisations – such as the Labour Women's Declaration, Woman's Place UK (WPUK) and Lesbian Labour – have been established by female members of the Labour Party and trade unionists to challenge the ways in which the Labour Party has ignored sex-based exemptions set forth in the 2010 Equality Act.[717] The hashtag #LabourLosingWomen has trended with some regularity on social media, particularly after feminist campaigner and founder of Counting Dead Women, Karen Ingala Smith, was barred from Labour Party membership for un-evidenced claims that she demonstrated "hostility based on gender identity"[718] and trade union activist Kiri Trunks was "'un-invited' from speaking on challenging sexism by a UK Labour ward" after she spoke at a rally in support of WPUK and the LGB Alliance.[719] Moreover, discussions about anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism have resurfaced in contemporary British politics, specifically in reaction to when the Equality and Human Rights Commission found the Labour Party to have broken equality law through "an inadequate process of handling anti-Semitism complaints"

[714] Angela C. Wild, *Lesbians at Ground Zero: How Transgenderism Is Conquering the Lesbian Body* (Get The L Out, 2019). 9.
[715] Hawthorne, *In Defence of Separatism*. 3-4.
[716] Ibid. 12.
[717] See both Woman's Place UK, "Dear Keir...," Woman's Place UK, April 5, 2020, accessed 23 September, 2021, https://womansplaceuk.org/2020/04/05/dear-keir/ and Labour Women's Declaration, "Petition: LABOUR WOMEN'S DECLARATION," ipetitions, November 11, 2019, accessed 23 September, 2021, https://www.ipetitions.com/petition/labour-womens-declaration.
[718] James Kirkup, "Labour's Bizarre Decision to Bar the Founder of Counting Dead Women," The Spectator, March 27, 2020, accessed 23 September, 2021, https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/labour-s-bizarre-decision-to-bar-the-founder-of-counting-dead-women.
[719] Woman's Place UK, "We Stand with Kiri: Labour and Women's Voices," Woman's Place UK, February 20, 2021, accessed 23 September, 2021, https://womansplaceuk.org/2021/02/20/we-stand-with-kiri-labour-and-womens-voices/.

and the subsequent suspension of the then Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn.[720] Conversely, the Labour Party under the leadership of Keir Starmer has been accused of "ignoring" its Palestinian members,[721] in additions to the Party "losing Black members over allegations of anti-Black racism."[722]

Much more research could be done on the political similarities of the late 1970s/early 1980s and the late 2010s/early 2020s in the UK and the ways in which such parallels evoke a revival of topics discussed during the Women's Liberation Movement. My objective in briefly illustrating such comparisons, however, is to offer a reminder of how the feminist periodicals discussed in this research constitute a material lens through which to understand the present modes of feminist theory and practice *longitudinally*. Not only have I demonstrated that such records convey a multiplicity of voices over time as opposed to, say, feminist books which – even in the form of anthologies – do not convey the painful, kaleidoscopic correspondences that resulted in a particular theoretical or practical outcome. I have also established, by applying Jennifer McDaneld's pedagogical work with women's archives, that reading second wave feminist periodicals can encourage a longitudinal identification with the women who are featured in the material itself. Such readings activate women's historical records and, in doing so, can dissuade feminists embroiled in present-day political conflict to succumb to "a crisis of feminist faith" by de-personalising whatever is at stake in the recognition that such negotiations are evidence of an *activated* women's movement.[723] I have argued that the ethos of the Women in Print Movement produced a networked, woman-controlled and feminist communication infrastructure in the form of periodicals which enabled the expression of disagreements to *energise* and *stimulate* the women's movement. In other words, the *material* infrastructure through which conflicts are mediated is an essential factor for assessing whether such mediations are possible in the first place. Most significantly, I have offered women today a channel through which to become contemporaries of the feminist past and regenerate an intergenerational passage of knowledge.

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[720] "A Guide to Labour Party Anti-Semitism Claims," BBC News, November 18, 2020, accessed 23 September, 2021, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-45030552.
[721] Nadine White, "Labour Palestinian Members Say Party Is 'Ignoring Them,'" Independent, May 11, 2021, accessed 23 September, 2021, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/labour-palestine-israel-racism-b1842438.html.
[722] Nadine White, "Exclusive: Labour Is Losing Black Members Over Allegations Of Anti-Black Racism," Huffpost, June 2, 2020, accessed 23 September, 2021, https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/leaked-labour-report-sees-black-voters-quit-party-over-final-straw_uk_5ea70e55c5b6a30004e62cc0.
[723] Daly, *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy*. 112.

When the American suffragist Matilda Joslyn Gage produced several comprehensive accounts of women's historical achievements – including what many consider the first historical account of matriarchal societies[724] – she proclaimed, in 1893, that "now that women had laid to rest the myth that they were without a past, there would be no need to face that particular demoralising problem again."[725] And yet, in the 21st century, young women have so little knowledge of the achievements of the previous generation of women that they wonder – as covered in this research – "why they had never heard that 'old' feminism was this diverse" when exposed to feminist archival material.[726] While I have added significant findings to the field of periodical research by evidencing how a principal function of the second wave feminist periodical was to mediate political conflict and in turn provide a discursive location for the women's movement, I have also continued the work of feminist activists like Gage by activating women's records for the purpose of restoring to women a cultural memory that is not reliant on oversimplified tropes or stereotypes. Significantly, I have highlighted the complicated, painful and sometimes contradictory correspondences of second wave feminists, serving as a reminder that women are complex and multi-faceted and therefore produced complicated and multi-textual records, only a small fraction of which have been examined here. Far from being a feminist utopia, feminist periodicals show how the strength of the Women's Liberation Movement was derived from the recognition of differences between women. After all, the realisation that as women, our differences are not fatal, produces a kind of solidarity capable of revealing the difficult sisterhood necessary for cultivating our commonality.

[724] Matilda Joslyn Gage, *Woman, Church and State: A Historical Account of the Status of Woman Through the Christian Ages: With Reminiscences of Matriarchate* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1893).
[725] Dale Spender, *There's Always Been A Women's Movement This Century* (London: Pandora Press, 1983). 4.
[726] McDaneld, "Activating Archives in Women's Studies 101: New Stories About Old Feminism and the Future," 63.

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

BWC – Belfast Women's Collective

CP – Communist Party

CPP – Community of Peace People

DWA – Derry Women's Aid

FSP – Feminist Socialist Platform

FWG - Faversham Women's Group

IRA – Irish Republican Army

NAC – National Abortion Campaign

Rev/Rad - Revolutionary & Radical Feminist Newsletter

SR – Spare Rib

SWG – Socialist Women's Group

SWP – Socialist Workers Party

TCW – Tyneside Coast Women

The Workshop – The London Women's Liberation Workshop

TUC – Trades Union Congress

WAI – Women Against Imperialism

WIG – Women and Ireland Group

WIRES – Women's Information and Referral Enquiry Service

WLM – Women's Liberation Movement

Appendices

Appendix 1: A summary and analysis of second wave feminist periodicals in *Feminist Periodicals 1855-1984: An Annotated Critical Bibliography of British, Irish, Commonwealth and International Titles*

In 1987 New York University Press published *Feminist Periodicals 1855-1984: An Annotated Critical Bibliography of British, Irish, Commonwealth and International Titles*. Written and researched by David Doughan and Denise Sanchez, this annotated bibliography is made up out of 920 entries of periodical titles in total. The book is intended as a guide for researchers in the field of feminist history, with annotations and archival access information included when possible. The authors argue that in general, periodicals have been under-estimated as a source for tracing the development of political movements. In particular, relating to the feminist movement, periodicals show "women writing for women in a variety of ways for some fairly diverse political ends, for a period well over a century."[727] I examined the annotated entries in detail in order to get a sense of the range of feminist periodicals during the Women's Liberation Movement in the UK. A downside to this particular source is that it was published in 1987 and therefore does not include the cessation dates of those entries which were still in print at the time of publication, indicated by "C" in the date ranges. Additionally, the archival access information is significantly out of date and no longer accurate.

The entries in *Feminist Periodicals* begin in 1855, however I am mostly concerned with the second wave of feminism and therefore decided to begin my summary of findings with entry 237, *Arena Three* (1964-73), one of the first periodicals in Europe to have been "written by and for homosexual women."[728] My decision to start with this particular journal was due to its date of publication, which immediately predates the period most commonly associated with the Women's Liberation Movement in terms of its start date, but continues for long enough into the first decade of the Women's Liberation Movement to give a clear sense of the movement in its formative years.

[727] David Doughan and Denise Sanchez, *Feminist Periodicals 1855-1984: An Annotated Critical Bibliography of British, Irish, Commonwealth and International Titles* (New York: New York University Press, 1987). xii.
[728] Ibid. 65.

Out of the remaining 684 entries, 450 are listed as being from the UK, which is where I focused my analysis. There is a significant spread of feminist periodicals being published across the UK, though there is an identifiable gap around the Scottish borders, northern Scotland and northern Wales. The periodicals which specified their audience as "women-only," operating primarily on a subscription-basis or sold through feminist bookstores, were concentrated between London and Lancaster. Out of the 450 total UK feminist periodicals, 58 were expressly positioned as "women-only" (12.8%).

Perhaps one of the most striking observations is the array and variation of topics and form of second wave feminist periodicals. I identified ten overarching categories which could be loosely applied to the feminist periodicals in question, however it should be noted that several periodicals could be argued to belong to an array of different genres, such as *WIRES* and *Outwrite.* However, for the purposes of generating an overview, the following categories give a sense of the direction and popularity of various editorial and publishing strategies:

1. Academic Newsletters – 0.89%

While some periodicals were published in Student Union buildings, or affiliated to university women's groups, this category includes only those titles which were either explicitly published through official academic bodies or aimed at an academic audience. Examples include *British Sociological Association: Women's Caucus Newsletter* (1978-C), a women-only newsletter published out of York University and later the University of Bradford, covering issues of interest to women in sociology. Another being *Studies on Women Abstracts* (1983-C), edited by Rosemary Dean of The Open University in Milton Keynes, each issue containing between 150 and 200 abstracts with focus on "education, employment, women in the family and community, medicine and health, female sex and gender role socialisation, social policy, the social psychology and women, female culture, media treatment of women, and historical studies."[729]

2. Campaign Newsletters – 8.71%

I define campaign newsletters as being related to a single-issue cause that is primarily concerned with mobilising readers to take some sort of political action. Overarching issues of concern included childcare, reproductive health for women, trade unions and equal pay and

[729] Ibid. 246.

employment initiatives. Several periodicals were concerned with reform for access to abortion, such as *Women's Abortion and Contraception Campaign Newsletter* (1972-75), *Abortion Law Reform Action Group: Newsletter* (1974-76), *National Abortion Campaign (NAC) Newsletter* (1975-C) and *Bristol Women's Abortion and Contraception Campaign Newsletter* (1972-74). Notably, these were also met with anti-abortion newsletters from other women's groups, such as *Women for Life Newsletter* (1975-77), *Concerned Citizens for Choice on Abortion Newsletter* (1981-C), and the overtly anti-feminist newsletter *Vive La Difference: The Voice of the Campaign for the Feminine Woman* (*C.F.W.*) (1979-C), the latter of which had a male editor.

Other campaigns took on childcare, reproductive labour and housework. For example *Mothers in Action* (1972-74), *London Homeworking Campaign Bulletin* (1977-78), *Wages for Housework: Campaign Bulletin* (1977-C), *Labrish: Black Women for Wages for Housework (UK)* (1979), and *Wages for Housework: International Campaign Bulletin* (1972-C). Often the collectives behind the campaign would contribute articles or information to other periodicals, including the groups Black Women for Wages for Housework, the English Collective of Prostitutes, the US Prostitutes Collective, Wages Due Lesbians UK and USA, British Women Against Rape groups, Boston Rape Action Project and Housewives in Dialogue.[730] This is indicative of a reading audience developing across several periodical titles, bound together by the shared political goal of demanding wages for housework.

3. Discursive Feminist Magazines – 5.8%

Arguably all the periodicals listed generated some form of discussion between women and could be considered discursive in their own right. However, for this category I specifically identified periodicals that took on a magazine format (as opposed to a stapled and more ephemeral newsletter), and that also had broad editorial approaches to a variety of topics. One of the common themes in this category seems to be upholding the importance of generating discussion and communication. Examples include *Shrew* (1968-1978), *Rhiannon: A Paper for Women in Wales* (1978-C), *Catcall: A feminist Discussion Paper* (1976-C), *M/F: A Feminist Journal* (1978-C), *Spare Rib* (1972-C), *Revolutionary & Radical Feminist Newsletter* (1978-C), *Trouble and Strife: A Radical Feminist Magazine* (1983-C) and *Mukti: Asian Women's Magazine* (1983-C).

[730] Ibid. 144.

4. Government Newsletters – 2.68%

This category emerged when it was clear that several periodicals were funded, published, or initiated by government bodies or commissions. Typically, the content of these periodicals was made up out of reports, statistics and information that is generally useful to policy advisors or political campaigners. An example from Ireland is *CSW Newsletter: Official Publication of the Council for the Status of Women* (1981-C) which aimed "to provide liaison between Government Departments and Women's Organisations."[731] Another example is *Equal Opportunities Commission Annual Report* (1976-C) published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

5. Men's Newsletters – 2.68%

Interestingly, there were quite a few newsletters set up by men to support the demands of the Women's Liberation Movement and to generate healthy discussion between men on the topics of sexism. Examples include *Anti-Sexist Men's Newsletter* (1983-C) in Wales, *Anti-Sexism, Anti-Patriarchy News Sheet* (1982-C) in London, *Brothers* (1973-74) in Birmingham, *Manchester Men's News* (1975-77) in Manchester and *Liverpool Creches Against Sexism Newsletter* (1981-C) in Liverpool. The most widespread of these newsletters is noted to be *Achilles Heel: A Magazine of Men's Politics* (1978-82), which was produced by a group of men who supported "the aims, perspectives and demands of the Women's Liberation Movement."[732] Issues discussed included men's consciousness-raising groups, sexuality, family, patriarchy, masculinity and violence.

6. Organisation Newsletters – 20.76%

This category refers to periodicals which were affiliated to, and acted as mouthpieces for, a particular organisation. A significant number of organisations that produced feminist periodicals were branches of various Women's Aid or women's refuge organisations across the UK, for example *Welsh Women's Aid Newsletter* (1981-C), *Broken Rib: Edinburgh Women's Aid Newsletter* (1977-?), *Scottish Women's Aid Newsletter* (1982-C), *Dundee Women's Aid* (1983-C), *Nemesis: The Monthly Newsletter of Women's Aid* (1974-?) and *National Women's Aid Federation Newsletter* (1977-C). Typically, these newsletters would

[731] Ibid. 210.
[732] Ibid. 164

feature news from their branch and other Women's Aid groups, news of general events, conferences and campaigns concerning women and sometimes book reviews.

Other organisations with publishing arms included various women's centres across the UK, such as *South London Women's Centre Newsletter* (1976-?), *Haringey Women's Centre Newsletter* (1980-C), *Camden Women's Centre Newsletter* (1977-?), *Women's Righting: North Paddington Women's Centre Newsletter* (1981), *Southall Black Women's Centre Newsletter* (1983-C), *Lancaster Women's Centre Newsletter* (1977-78) and *Swansea Women's Centre Newsletter* (1985-C). These newsletters usually aimed to facilitate communication and information sharing between women who were involved in the centre, as well as provide calendars of events, reports on conferences, and information about groups that may be useful.

Further examples of organisation-affiliated periodicals include *Irish Countrywomen's Association Newsletter* (1981-C), *FOWAAD: Newsletter of the Organization of Women of Asian and African Descent (OWAAD)* (1979-1980), *Anti-Apartheid Movement Women's Committee Newsletter* (1981-C), *The Lesbian Archive Newsletter* (1984-C), *Battersea Black Women's Group* (1984-C), *Association of Radical Midwives Newsletter* (1978-C), *Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp News-sheet* (1982-C) and many more.

7. Tabloid News – 0.45%

There are only two periodicals which neatly fit into this category, as they are explicitly referred to as news tabloids. The first being *Women's Newspaper* (1971), which was produced by a women's collective and covered national and international news, articles about lesbianism, black women and reviews.[733] The second is *News from Women's Liberation* (1973-77), which was also produced by a collective and focused more on international news than national. It folded due to lack of woman power and money.[734] Other periodicals, such as *Outwrite*, while having the tabloid newspaper format, I instead consider part of the "Women's Liberation Newsletter" category because of the explicit political positioning and use of language (see Category 10).

[733] Ibid. 75.
[734] Ibid. 95.

8. Topic-Specific Newsletters – 38.84%

This is by far the largest category because of the variation of issues covered. While other categories are either bound by their organisation, or campaign, this category explicitly encompasses periodicals which were thematically oriented. The most common topics covered were **socialism** (*Socialist International Women Bulletin* (1977-C), *Red Rag* (1972-80), *Woman's Voice* (1972-76), *Cambridge Scarlet Women* (1977-?)), **medicine/reproductive health** (*WHIM: Women in Medicine Newsletter* (1981-C), *Lesbian Nurses Newsletter* (1983-C), *Libido* (1975-?), *Sheffield Childbirth Group Newsletter* (1975)), **mothers/childcare/reproductive labour** (*Matriarchy Research and Reclaim Network Newsletter* (1981-C), *MATCH: Mothers Apart from Their Children Newsletter* (1981-C), *It's Not All Nappies ... A Lesbian and Feminist Newsletter On Children and Childcare* (1982-C), *Black Working Party Newsletter* (1982-C)), **law/employment** (*Woman's Financial Letter* (1978-1980), *Redstocking: Cambridge Anti-Discrimination Against Women Group* (1974-?), *Women in Manual Trades Newsletter* (1978-C)), **lesbianism** (*Red Herring* (1975), *Sappho* (1972-81), *Older Lesbian Network Newsletter* (1984-C)) and the **arts** (*Drastic Measures - Rock Against Sexism Bulletin* (1979-80), *Sourcream* (1981-82), *Boom* (1981-C), *Broxa* (1982-C), *Mama: Women Artists Together* (1977-79)).

Other popular topics included **race/racism/ethnicity** (*Voice of Women: Kadinlarin Sesi* (1984-C), *Black Women's Co-operative Newsletter* (1984-C), *Birmingham Black Sisters Newsletter* (1984-C)), **international** (*Mayur* (1973-?), *Africa Woman* (1976-?), *Chilean Women* (1976), *Women in Eastern Europe Newsletter* (1977-C), *Oppression of South Asian Women* (1977-?)), **youth** (*This Magazine Is For, About and By Young Wimmin* (1979), *Danger: Young Women at Work* (1980-?), *Girls Talk* (1980), *Shocking Pink: The Alternative Young Women's Magazine* (1980-82)) and **education** (*Gen: An Anti-Sexist Educational Journal* (1983-C), *Women and Education Newsletter* (1973-C)).

9. Women's Information Newsletters – 9.15%

Periodicals belonging to this category fall into two camps. The first is an information-based sharing newsletter which is not positioning itself as explicitly feminist, but rather relevant to all women. For example, *Outdoor Women* (1983-C), *Women on Wheels* (1980-C), *Women in Durham* (1980-83) and *Women Now* (1971-75). The latter said of its editorial policy that "we want our journal to survive because we try to make it speak to all women, not just to women in the movement. The majority of women misunderstand our aims, which are so often

misrepresented."[735] The other camp is for those periodicals that are explicitly feminist, as well as primarily publishing information, lists or contact numbers and addresses. Examples of these include *Norwich Women's Movement Newsletter* (1974-77), *Women Together: A Community Paper For Everyone Who's A Woman* (1975-76), *Manchester Women's Paper* (1975-84), *WIRES* (1975-C) and *Preston Women's Info Sheet* (1980).

10. Women's Liberation Newsletters – 10.04%

The overarching characteristic for periodicals in this category is a definitive alliance to the Women's Liberation Movement as well as the explicit mentioning of feminist politics. This category consists mostly of newsletters that have "liberation newsletter" in the title, however some do not and are still included because they exhibit a similar publishing ethos in connection to the larger movement. In Scotland, for example, there were various iterations including *Scottish Women's Liberation Newsletter* (1973-74), *Aberdeen Women's Liberation Newsletter* (1974-77), *Scottish Women's Liberation Workshop Newsletter* (1975-?), *Edinburgh Women's Liberation Newsletter* (1972-C) and *Glasgow Women's Liberation Newsletter* (1976-C).

Other examples across the UK include *Outwrite* (1982-C), *Pent Up* (1972), *Manchester Women's Liberation Group Newsletter* (1973-75), *Women's Liberation Newsletter - Leeds* (1973-C), *Bristol Women's Liberation Newsletter* (1974-C), *Black, Brown Women's Liberation Newsletter* (1979-C) and *Irregular Periods: Bradford Women's Newsletter* (1982-C).

[735] Ibid. 76.

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