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Inclusion or transformation?
Gender and the politics of citizenship

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Abstract

Citizenship has tended to be an ambiguous concept for feminist activists and academics. This paper[1] explores two different engagements with the politics of citizenship. The first centres on the politics of inclusion: struggles by feminist activists to secure equality of rights and benefits of citizenship. Here I focus on the problems associated with the predominant topic of citizenship as inscribed in the nation state, the problems associated with state citizenship projects, and the limitations of the bourgeois public sphere. The second set of engagements addresses transformative projects that seek to overcome such problems and limitations. These include challenges to the public/private divide; the turn to notions of recognition and respect; and grassroots struggles that mobilise practical

[1] This paper draws loosely on material developed in other publications by the author: Newman, J., *Working the Spaces of Power: Activism, Neoliberalism and Gendered Labour* (Bloomsbury, 2012) and Newman, J. ''But we didn't mean that: Feminist Projects, Governmental Appropriations and Spaces of Power'', in S. Roseneil, (a cura di) *Beyond Citizenship: Feminism and the Transformation of Belonging*, Palgrave, forthcoming.

conceptions of citizenship irrespective of, and well as in conflict with, legal and political definitions. I argue that these struggles for inclusion and transformation, while conceptually separate, are politically entangled. The paper concludes by suggesting ways in which the analysis might speak to the present political conjuncture.

Key words: Citizenship; Feminism; Social Movements; Inclusion; Transformation; Austerity.

1. Introduction

As I write this paper struggles are emerging across the globe that demonstrate the importance of citizenship as a continued axis of political, social, cultural and economic struggle. In the Arab nations we have seen the power of citizenship – its very embodied presence in public space – to topple dictators and bring about regime change. Many nations have witnessed the power of the Occupy movement, a power based not only on its visible presence but also on its rejection of traditional ways of engaging in politics (elections, voting, representation). This and other movements also suggest new transnational dynamics of citizenship, enabled by new technologies but also inspired by the global scale of struggles for justice. But at the same time the scale and frequency of disasters (wars, tsunamis, famines), combined with economic recessions, is putting extreme pressure on some nation states to continue to provide for the basic needs and rights of citizens, and encouraging them to tighten their borders against migrants and those displaced from their home territories by disaster.

Citizenship, then, is both expanding and contracting in its meanings and practices, and is the focus of continued struggle and contestation. However it has long been an ambiguous concept for feminist activists and academics. As recent research in some European nations shows, women's movement activists tend not to use the term (unless it helps secure funding), despite its central importance in feminist theory (Predelli et al.,

forthcoming). Citizenship offers a strategic concept around which claims for rights, justice and equality can be made. But in making such claims, it is necessary to confront the extremely 'thin' understandings of citizenship embedded in the law, democratic institutions and welfare states. These ambiguities arise across the academic/activist boundary. For feminist activists, demands for social and political inclusion are often made in the name of citizenship; yet the traditions of citizenship in many nations seem not to provide a hospitable climate for feminist ways of engaging in politics and culture. Academic critiques suggest some of the reasons why this may be so. They point to how citizenship in most western nations is associated with a liberal bourgeois public sphere privileging a particular class and gender. Women were both formally excluded (being awarded the right to vote and to participate in political institutions much later than men) and their interests and concerns underrepresented in public life. Feminist academics have also drawn attention to flaws in Marshall's (1950) pivotal work depicting a 'long march' of liberal democratic citizenship through civic, political and social rights. This offers an evolutionary framing which masks the social struggles that led to the expansion of citizenship claims in some nations (Turner 1990). It also offers a Eurocentric model against which 'other nations' (and those who inhabited them) tended to be judged as deficient. The Marshallian model has also been roundly critiqued by feminists within the West for its conception of citizenship as an abstract legal status, and for its assumptions about the impartiality and impersonal basis of justice (Squires 2000).

Such critiques open up a series of questions for both academics and activists. Should the emphasis be on women's inclusion in the liberal/bourgeois public sphere on the same basis as the men who defined its (classed and racialised) cultures and practices? Or should more emphasis be placed on women's extensive contribution through informal practices of participation in community and civil society? Should citizenship be viewed as a status (one to which women and other excluded groups should aspire) or as a set of processes and practices of participation? Does citizenship properly belong to the public sphere or can it be extended to take account of struggles against inequality and violence within in families, communities and households? Is citizenship a

predominantly individual property, or should it address issues of interdependence, care and welfare? Is it a concept and set of rights delimited by the boundaries of the nation state, or do notions of rights and responsibilities encompass transnational relationships and the movements of peoples? Does citizenship imply a focus on universal rights and benefits (with the nation state) or can it effectively address questions of difference?

Such questions are fully debated in other literatures (see especially Lister 1997, 2003) and I cannot engage fully with them in this short paper. But I do want to develop work first presented in Newman and Clarke (2009), which suggests that citizenship struggles can be understood as expansive or transformational. This, I think, offers a helpful framework for understanding contemporary movements and struggles. I address expansive and transformational struggles in the next two sections, then I return to how the analysis might speak to the present political conjuncture

2. Expanding citizenship: struggles for inclusion

Expansive struggles focus on questions of access and inclusion to a (more or less) public realm of citizenship rights and entitlements. While in European welfare states earlier social movements successfully addressed claims for inclusion on the part of working class populations, women, ethic minorities, gays and lesbians, a succession of new movements now focus on struggles on the part of mental health service users, prisoners, migrants and asylum seekers, sans-papiers and others all seek access to the 'public' realm of rights, justice and political recognition. All seek, in short, the array of political, economic and social rights and duties associated with the 18th and 19th century public domain of liberal citizenship. However, such rights and duties offer a limited conception of the meanings and practices of citizenship. To understand the impact of these limitations for feminist understandings of citizenship, I want to trace the contours of three pillars of citizenship: those of nation, state and public sphere (see also Newman 2008; Newman and Clarke 2009).

Citizenship speaks to issues of *nation and nationhood* that are unsustainable in a

globalising world. It assumes a common people, territory, culture and polity – all of which have become unravelled, requiring new analytical framings for citizenship itself and indeed new models of politics. Three issues are of particular importance: first, the marginal and conditional citizenship status of migrant women, asylum seekers, sex workers, prisoners and other groups within the nation; second, new flows and movements of peoples, jobs and resources across and within borders; and third, the questions of belonging and identity (Bosniak 2010; Castles and Davidson 2000; Hansen and Stepputat 2005; Sassen 2005; Soysal 1994). Most attention has focused on the global migration of people, capital and production which have generated new kinds of citizenship claim on the part of ethnic minorities, legal and undocumented migrants, and post-colonial subjects, and new and emergent spaces of politics. This challenges the predominant focus on access to bourgeois civic and political conceptions of citizenship, placing more emphasis on access to basic social and material benefits and on cultural framings of belonging.

Other scholars highlight the global flows of people and ideas and the emergence of transnational or global understandings of citizenship. For example Baubock (1994) links transnational conceptions of citizenship to a human rights framework requiring a transnational polity to ground membership and enforce rights. Soysal (1994) shows how global discourses of human rights are shaping new forms of belonging and access to rights on the part of migrant citizens and guest workers within European nations. The contributions of Sassen (2007) trace different axes of transnational identifications, relationships and forms of activism. Bosniak (2009) opens up a series of debates that revolve around questions of cosmopolitan or world citizenship understood as ethical identification and solidarity, including anti-capitalist activists promoting cross-border, anti-corporate and class based solidarity. She notes how environmental and social justice claims are now often made in the name of transnational citizenship and transnational conceptions of human rights. But Bosniak also cites commentators who insist that citizenship must remain founded on national membership and solidarity, not least since the nation state remains the prime locus of (re) distributional justice (Miller 1995) and communitarian forms of belonging (Taylor, 2004).

This takes me to a discussion of the paradoxes of feminist engagements with the *state*. In much of Europe the state was formed around the interests of a bourgeois liberal elite whose interests and power – gendered, raced and classed – were inscribed in political, legal and executive institutions (see for example Brown 1995, on *Finding the Man in the State*). Early feminist citizenship claims centred on so called 'liberal' agendas: claims for political inclusion (the right to vote, to serve as politicians); economic inclusion (the right to hold property, the right for equality in the workplace) and social rights (to welfare services and benefits). However the evolution of welfare states tended to reflect and reproduce the priority of male citizens. Although provision differed among European welfare states (Siim 2000; Lister et al. 2011), women's citizenship claims in many countries – including the UK - tended to be limited by a 'maternalist' ethos that privileged their role as wives and mothers and continued their subordination to the 'male breadwinners' in whose name claims for welfare benefits had to be made. 'Second wave' feminism later came to challenge the maternalist ethos, putting forward claims for the legal and financial independence for women, claims that were realised – in part - through equality legislation in some European states.

The nature of the struggles for inclusion moved on as women came to challenge the paternalistic and patriarchal assumptions often inscribed in welfare services. Attention shifted from challenging the 'male breadwinner' model to helping shape 'family friendly' policies, addressing issues of poverty and care, working on issues of domestic violence, campaigning for parental leave. This is a long way from the legal and financial independence campaigns of the 1970s, and expands the meanings of inclusion from a liberal concept of formal rights in the polity and economy to an expanded agenda of social rights. However formal citizenship rights were never completely won: maternalist policies, in which women's citizenship rights and social benefits were derived from their status as mothers, continued to dominate in some nations, including Italy and others linked to a 'southern model' of state welfare (Farrara 1996). And across Europe migrant women, barred from formal citizenship status, continued to experience marginalisation and exclusion, while other groups afforded formal citizenship status, were often barred from enjoying its cultural, social and political benefits because of

physical or mental disability, or as a result of racialised, class based or sexual prejudice.

For many women inclusion came with a price, heralding a new individualism that linked citizenship claims to worker and consumer power rather than political and social rights. The Third Way 'social investment state' in the UK, Canada and elsewhere (Giddens 1998; Lister 2004, Simon-Kumar 2011) is viewed as a hybrid welfare regime that combines neoliberal emphasis on women as workers (an 'adult' rather than dependent citizenship model) with an emphasis on state investment in children as the citizen workers of the future. The social investment state, argues Lister, was both a normative ideal for Third way governments, with children embodying the ideal of a future prosperous and inclusive society, and a pragmatic and instrumental response to the economic and social challenges facing mature welfare states (Lister 2001, 2002, 2004). It is associated with women's recognition as independent adult citizens by their inclusion in the workforce. The worker citizen was integral to notions of social investment and economic development; work was viewed as both the route out of poverty and dependence for those previously reliant on an unsustainable combination of male breadwinner and benevolent welfare state. As such, it offered an apparent response to feminist claims for equal status and opportunity in the public domain of citizenship. However citizenship was recast not as a complex and transformative project but as a form of recognition to be won through entry into full time paid employment. This brought benefits, but the cost for women was the assumption that equality was to be won through paid work; an assumption that overlooked workplace inequality, differential pay rates and gendered divisions of labour within the home. The citizen was fundamentally a worker citizen, and this has ambiguous consequences for women seeking independence, equality and inclusion.

I will return to questions of nation and state later in the paper, but first want to turn to the third pillar of citizenship: the *public sphere*. The association of citizenship with a public sphere of democratic decision-making is viewed as denying the importance of domestic patterns of inequality, and of personal experience and vocabularies of action. The 'public-private' divide through which citizenship is constituted, argues Lister, is «pivotal to women's long standing exclusion from full citizenship in both theory and

practice» (1997, 9), not least because of its consequences for the sexual division of labour and the bracketing of issues of care, sexuality, reproduction and domestic violence from the public sphere of citizenship and state action. Furthermore the public-private divide is a classed and raced distinction: in the US women of colour and working class have always been subject to state intervention in their domestic lives (Mohanty 2003, 51). However the divide has been a cornerstone of feminist critiques that have pointed to the association of citizenship with a public realm that subordinates personal and private life (Lister 1997, 2003). Struggles around gender, sexuality, disability and bio politics have attempted to transform the concept itself in order to assert identities and forms of politics excluded from its historically determined liberal and reformist strangleholds (e.g. Caldwell et al. 2009, Roseneil 2000).

Such transformations have been fundamental both to claims for recognition (in social and public policy) and voice (in the public domain). One consequence has been the partial and conditional expansion of the meaning of citizenship to encompass issues of sexuality, disability, care and other claims based on identity and experience. Citizenship, it seems, is no longer confined to the public domain of formal politics and institutional practice: it is traversed by claims based on personal experience. And shifts in popular cultural and the turn to more populist styles of politics, have opened up a more receptive climate to claims made in the discursive repertoires of personal narrative, affect, emotion and embodiment. However these are not easily accommodated in the sometimes rather sterile repertoires of the western traditions of citizenship studies.

3. Transformational agendas

It might be thought that the paradoxes and questions raised in the previous section render citizenship a less than fruitful basis for feminist politics. However it seems that citizenship continues to form a mobilising concept in struggles for social justice and belonging on the part of excluded groups. And the language of citizenship has been

mobilized to support claims for political, social and economic inclusion on the part of disabled people, young people, carers, prisoners, migrants, lesbian, gay, bi- and transgender identified people and many other groups. Such struggles work across claims for inclusion (to the public sphere of rights and recognition) and for transformation (of the meanings and practices of citizenship). The latter serves to expand the terrain on which equality claims can be made, shifting the focus from equal legal and political status to address inequalities within the domestic sphere and to raise questions about the social organisation of care work, reproduction and sexuality, bringing debates about body rights into the public domain:

> As with subsequent struggles around sexual citizenship, the focus shifted to social and cultural transformation. Such claims for citizenship are not merely demands for access to the juridical status of citizen (legal personhood) but imply reforming the social body itself. They seek to transform both who is/can be a member of the society and what relations between members must exist to form the 'good society (Newman and Clark 2009, 157).

Many social movements have had a significant role in transforming the meanings and practices of citizenship, changing the public domain itself rather than simply demanding access to it and voice within it, and in the process changing the boundaries between what are deemed to be public, private and personal matters. Feminist politics and scholarship in particular has challenged the separation of a public world of citizenship and justice from the personal world of relationships and care, noting how such a separation has bracketed care and other contributions to social well being from wider public recognition (Daly and Lewis 2000, McKinnon 1989; Uberoi 2003). Responses to this challenge include the attempt to expand a 'feminist ethic of care' from the private to the public domain (Tronto 1993; Sevenhuijsen 1998), or to link issues of care to dimensions of social justice (Lister et al. 2006, Barnes 2006).

Feminist work has also sought to transform state practice around notions of 'recognition and 'respect' as well as rights and duties. While the development of welfare states had largely been founded on class based claims for redistribution, in the second half of the 20th century and beyond they became the focus of extensive – and sometimes competing – claims for recognition. These claims for recognition varied

considerably, reflecting the history of oppression of and struggle by particular groups. They direct attention to how far particular groups have access to cultural and symbolic resources, how far their voices and contributions are recognised and the extent to which disadvantaged groups are afforded dignity and respect (Fraser 1995; Fraser and Honneth 2003; Young 1990). We can also see the emergence of claims for greater recognition for the skills and capacities citizens brought to their encounters with welfare institutions, challenging the 'knowledge-power knot' of professional power (Clarke et al 2007, Kremer and Tonkens 2006). The expertise and voice of 'ordinary' citizens now claims a legitimate space in both welfare interactions and the wider polity (Clarke 2010).

However the focus on recognition, and the more cultural framings of citizenship it implies, can detract attention away from the more material inequalities experienced by working class women, single mothers, carers and other groups, and from women's central role in citizenship struggles. Indeed the distinction between recognition and redistribution has been challenged (Lister 2003, Phillips 2003), and Fraser herself adds a third dimension, variously designated as participation and representation (Fraser 2008).

Struggles for inclusion continue alongside – and entangled with – transformative projects. The two are often deeply entangled in grassroot struggles, not only in Europe but in South Africa, India, Brazil, China, Latin America and across the nations of the global south (Caldwell et al 2009; Ong 2007; Sharma 2008; Kabeer 2005). In analysing such movements some have attempted to develop concepts of social citizenship, with a focus on relationships, acts and practices (e.g. Isin and Nielsen 2008), and cultural citizenship, in which meaning making and belonging are foregrounded (Coll 2010; Caldwell et al. 2009; Dagnino 2005). I want to focus here particularly on the work of Kathleen Coll in the US. Coll (2010) argues that contemporary struggles may engage with citizenship in ways that transcend its state centric legal and constitutional boundaries. Her study of women Latina migrants in the US is rooted in a cultural conception of citizenship that seeks to elicit people's own experiences and interpretations: citizenship here is a process defined not only by the culturally and historically constituted legal institutions of the state nor even by what has traditionally

recognised a political participation and civic engagement (Asen 2004). This more dynamic notion of citizenship «emphasises that questions of subjectivity and affects in the daily struggles, collective analyses, and diverse expressions of resistance […] are necessary for a robust understanding of citizenship institutions and practices» (2010, 8).

Most of the migrant women she studied did not have formal citizenship status. They recognised the power of the state's monopoly over citizenship as a legal status, but represented themselves as legitimate claimants to the rights, privileges and obligations of citizenship in the US. While excluded from full citizenship rights, the members of this grassroots organisation were very active in their adopted local and national communities. They engaged, trough the grassroots organisation Mujeres Unidas y Activas, in collective processes of claims making and in taking responsibility for themselves, their families and the community of Latin American migrants and their US born or raised children, as well as for the wider San Francisco community in which they lived. Coll's ethnographic study shows forms of activism that both incorporated and moved beyond the constraints of liberal democratic citizenship; it encompassed intimate and subjective realms of experience and foreground issues of gender, race, class and culture as political as well as questions of identity. These understandings were forged through collective grassroots organising and through their experience of motherhood. Coll argues that the focus on needs, rights and self esteem countered the individualism of rights talk and as such shows how «the struggle for cultural recognition need not eclipse political activism for economic justice and class solidarity» (2010, 169). The alternative discourses on rights and responsibilities in the home and community generated by women, immigrants and other groups «reinforce the importance of the collective, of social relatedness and show how individual and social fulfilment are intimately linked» (2010, 170). This, Coll argues, resonates with the reconfiguration of rights and responsibilities into more transnational and multilayered 'geographies of responsibility' advocated by Massey (2004) – a point to which I return later.

Across these transformative projects the question arises about how far the focus on claims for citizenship status and rights may become detached from notions of citizenship as a locus of belonging and identity, or how far these can be understood as

mutually constitutive. Coll argues that an emphasis on cultural practice among migrant women shows how citizenship is 'made up', but made up with reference to the national hegemonic framing of citizenship rights and responsibilities from which the women were largely excluded. Formal rights and cultural belonging are not counterposed within the paradoxical binary traced earlier, but are complexly entangled. The Coll study also shows how motherhood, care and relationships – traditionally viewed as one side of this binary – were integral to the cultural framings of citizenship that emerged within the group. But these were not distinct from public claims for recognition and rights; the group attempted to hold local elected officials to account, and mobilised their cultural traditions and identities to support struggles for social justice and political recognition (in ways, incidentally, that resonate with the approaches of London Citizens in the UK: www.citizensuk.org/). In a rather different way Sharma's study of women's projects in India points to the significance of moral and ethical meanings and talk: she points to how «marginalised actors are using inequality and morality talk to resolve the apparent contradictions of citizenship and to increase its scope by articulating inclusive, expansive, ethically inscribed and social definitions of the term» (2008, 147). But at the same time such actors «use their experience of subordination and exclusion from development to demand de facto inclusion into the supposedly universal citizenship status» (*ibidem*). Such work transcends the distinction between the binary categories of personal and political, rights and recognition, public and private, inclusion and transformation by focusing on citizenship as both a cultural and political project.

Such studies offer one route into acknowledging – and responding to - problems of identity and belonging. Recent studies have show how migrant and minorities women's organisations may mobilise around different conceptions of needs, identities and interests than did majority feminist movements (Kennedy-Macfoy, forthcoming; see also the wider research project on gendered citizenship in multicultural Europe (www.femcit.org and Halsaa et al. 2012). Such studies show how politics of belonging is a contested space, one traversed by multiple social and political movements that trouble homogenous assumptions about both feminism and citizenship. This opens up a question of how citizenship can remain a mobilising rhetoric for the recognition of very

diverse claims at the same point as the notions of solidarity and identity on which it is founded become fractured and troubled. But rather than erasing the basis of citizenship, post structuralism and post colonial theory, in pointing to the fluidity and multiplicity of identity, open up important questions about how actors work across categories – including those of citizenship/non citizenship, recognition and rights, public and personal - rather than being fixed in particularity. An intersectional approach offers a fuller and richer framing, and directs attention to the study of everyday understandings of citizenship, citizen experiences and citizenship-making (Coll 2010; Yuval-Davis 2004, Yuval-Davis and Werbner 1999). Such an approach shows how identities constituted through the formal, legal-juridical aspects of citizenship intersect with those derived from different axes of inequality, and how citizenship can be «remade from the margins» (Kennedy-Macfoy, forthcoming). It also suggests how intersections are lived and experienced in everyday practices of meaning making and cultural practice. That is, how the politics of inclusion organised around traditional (liberal, bourgeois) can be coexist with a politics of transformation that offers more fluid and mobile concepts of belonging.

4. Conclusion

How might this review of feminist engagements with citizenship speak to the contemporary citizenship struggles with which I began this paper?

First, struggles for inclusion are likely to intensify as pressures on economic and political migrants become exacerbated. However the citizenship agenda within many European nation states is moving away from earlier concepts of social and political inclusion to a focus on security and the tightening of borders, coupled with more coercive requirements that would-be citizens comply with dominant national cultural norms. This seemingly offers less political space for transformational agendas, and indeed those social policies that might be viewed as resulting from transformational struggles – policies on social inclusion, the recognition of minority cultures, policies on

care and well being – tend to be early victims of cuts to public services and welfare provision. Yet transformational struggles continue, and the influence of feminist struggles on contemporary social and political movements remains clearly visible.

Second, however, the era of cuts and austerity politics is tending to unravel many of the gains which earlier feminist movements secured for women. The recognition of women in the professions and the workplace has mostly taken place in the public sector and state welfare organisations, precisely those subject to the harshest cuts. And cuts to the care, welfare and health services that are integral to social citizenship have a disproportionate impact on women as the users, as well as the providers, of such services. While the social basis citizenship is being squeezed, the economic basis is amplified. Despite high unemployment, the discourse of work as a route to citizenship is intensifying. This rests on particular, highly gendered, conceptions of work in which unpaid labour (for example care work) is not recognised. It is also silent on the processes through which paid work for some – especially part time, poorly paid work – may be a route to greater hardship. Finally the idea of work as a route to independence is highly raced and classed, paying little regard to the new patterns of intergenerational, interclass and international care chains on which it depends.

Third, we are witnessing an increased emphasis on the responsibilities, rather than the rights, of citizenship (Lister 2011). This is not a 'new' concern – older conceptions of liberal citizenship acknowledged the importance of responsibilities as well as rights (Isin 2008) – but is becoming intensified and amplified in the rhetoric and practice of modernising governments seeking to shift responsibility from state to citizen. In Newman and Tonkens (2011) we looked across the seven country-based studies to identify multiple projects of responsibilisation, noting how the emphasis shifted depending on the political cultures of each nation, region or municipality. The projects included a new emphasis on economic responsibility (demanding that citizens become prudent savers and investors, as well as contributing more extensively to the financial costs of care, welfare, health and education services); democratic responsibilities (citizens being asked to take on more responsibility for good governance, and in local involvement and cohesion initiatives); development responsibilties (citizens being asked

to take on responsibility for their own self development); care responsibilities (both the management of their own present and future care and for the care of others); consumer responsibilities (finding and using information and exercising responsible choice); and in the wider projects of creating more responsible societies, including the responsibilities inherent in the Big Society in the UK and its echoes in the policies of other European nations. These notions of responsibility draw on and re-inflect some of the transformative projects traced above, including the moral and ethical vocabularies of citizenship made visible in the Coll and other studies. We can also see a wider process of displacement and substitution of a feminist politics that views citizenship as a moral and ethical domain rather than simply a matter of social and political rights. But in that process of substitution the space for claiming social and political rights, including the rights to welfare benefits and state provided services, becomes attenuated.

Finally I want to point to some concerns about the future basis of citizenship as a form of belonging and identification, and its foundations in issues of interdependence and trust. While, as I signalled earlier, we are seeing a new flowering of activism, among much of the population the climate is one of disaffection, detachment and cynicism – what some commentators have termed 'disaffected consent' (Gilbert 2010; Hall 2011). This serves to hollow out citizenship, stripping it of its social and cultural richness. It is also highly individualising. Whether it will be possible to foster new cultures of civic and social responsibility to take the place of welfare services is unclear. Attempts to foster such a culture in the UK, under the policy mantra of the Big Society, were met by cynicism amongst citizens and civil servants alike. My fear is that 'responsibility' will remain a highly gendered concept and that women's citizenship will refocus on sustaining community and civil society in the face of increased poverty, disadvantage and social fragmentation. Yet women are not just the passive victims of state policies and economic retrenchment. My own recent research (on women taking activist commitments into their working lives: Newman 2012) women have played – and are continuing to play – a vital role in configuring possible futures. Their work over the last 40 years has generated experiments and fostered new cultural and political resources. It has opened up 'prefigurative pathways' to alterative policy agendas, and has

reconfigured boundaries between public and private, state and civil society, in productive ways. The research illustrates the very diverse spaces of power from which women have sought to influence social and political change, and something of the range of skills and political orientations they brought to that work. It suggests the breadth of the agendas being pursued, and shows the multiple feminisms at stake and the complex entanglements between them. The hope is that emerging forms of activism – including new feminist struggles – will bring new voices to the public domain while enabling those of earlier generations to speak to the present conjuncture.

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