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The Socio-Cultural Milieux of the Left in Post-War Britain

Celia Penelope Hughes

Thesis Presented for the Degree of PhD

University of Warwick

September 2011

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University, and to thank the AHRC for funding my project. Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my family whose love and enduring faith have helped to see me safely over the bumpy times when self-doubt threatened to unseat me.

## Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between activist subjectivities and the shaping of Britain's late sixties extra-parliamentary left cultures. Based on the oral narratives of ninety men and women, it traces the activist trajectory from child to adulthood to understand the social, psychological, and cultural processes informing the political and personal transformation of young adults within the new left cultures that emerged in the wake of Britain's anti-war movement, the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign (VSC). To this end the study charts the development of the political and cultural shifts on the left over the decade from the early 1960s to the early 1970s. It shows how throughout this period dialogue between inner and outer activist life occurred against a background of ongoing realignment on the left from a fluid, eclectic cultural network around the VSC to a demarcated post-VSC left after 1969, that saw increasing divergence between a non-aligned libertarian New Left on the one hand and a Trotskyist far left milieu on the other.

The study seeks to claim a valid space for Britain's left activist landscape within the political, social and cultural framework of '1968' and British post-war historiography. Privileging individual and collective subjectivities, the thesis examines ways of belonging inside Trotskyist and non-aligned left milieux by situating the respondents, their radical histories and activist cultures within the changing post-war fabric. It shows that investigating individual and collective memories provides deeper understanding of the 'cognitive maps' that young men and women created, as they attempted to situate themselves as radical, global beings as well as local, gendered social citizens.

As micro-studies the individual stories reveal how the experience of social, emotional and political maturation from child to adult intersected with a specific social and political moment – the formation of a new and distinctive left culture that came to full fruition only in the aftermath of 1968 with the arrival of Women's Liberation and the new personal politics. Exploring the social and psychological impact of post-war childhood and youth, the study engages with the political and emotional impact of Women's Liberation on the men and women within the cultural context of the

different left milieux.

Overall, the thesis questions how, from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, the variant cultures of the milieux penetrated public and private spaces, and shaped early life experiences of work, political activity, family, and political and personal relations in order to understand how activism shaped social patterns and psychic being.

## **Abbreviations**

<b>AEC</b>	Associated Electrical Company
<b>AEU</b>	Amalgamated Engineering Union
<b>BCPV</b>	British Council for Peace in Vietnam
<b>BRPF</b>	Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation
<b>ATA</b>	Private Archive of Andrew Tolson
<b>CAST</b>	Cartoon Archetypal Slogan Theatre
<b>DRA</b>	David Robinson Archive
<b>GCA</b>	Geoffrey Crossick Archive
<b>CCC</b>	Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies
<b>CCW</b>	Camden Community Workshop
<b>CMPP</b>	Camden Movement for People's Power
<b>CND</b>	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
<b>GRA</b>	Geoff Richman Archive
<b>CVSC</b>	Camden Vietnam Solidarity Campaign branch
<b>DPA</b>	Di Parkin Archive
<b>DWP</b>	Dodi Wepler Archive
<b>GLF</b>	Gay Liberation Front
<b>HUA</b>	Hull University Archives
<b>IMG</b>	International Marxist Group
<b>ILP</b>	Independent Labour Party
<b>IS</b>	International Socialists
<b>JHA</b>	John Hoyland Archive
<b>JOIN</b>	Jobs or Income Now
<b>LPYS</b>	Labour Party Young Socialists
<b>LSE</b>	London School of Economics

<b>LWLW</b>	London Women's Liberation Workshop
<b>MNA</b>	Mica Nava Archive
<b>MRC</b>	Modern Records Centre, Warwick University
<b>NALSO</b>	National Association of Labour Students
<b>NLF</b>	National Liberation Front
<b>NLR</b>	New Left Review
<b>NUR</b>	National Union of Railwaymen
<b>PCA</b>	Prue Chamberlayne Archive
<b>RSG</b>	Regional Seat of Government
<b>RSSF</b>	Revolutionary Socialist Student Federation
<b>SCM</b>	Student Christian Movement
<b>SDS</b>	Sozialistische Deutsche Studentbund
<b>SDS</b>	Students for a Democratic Society
<b>SMA</b>	Socialist Medical Association
<b>SLL</b>	Socialist Labour League
<b>STOP-IT</b>	Americans in Britain for U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam
<b>SW</b>	Socialist Woman
<b>VSC</b>	Vietnam Solidarity Campaign
<b>VSO</b>	Voluntary Service Overseas
<b>WACC</b>	Women's Action Co-ordinating Committee
<b>WL</b>	Women's Liberation
<b>WLM</b>	Women's Liberation Movement
<b>WSL</b>	Workers' Socialist League
<b>YCL</b>	Young Communist League
<b>YCND</b>	Youth Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
<b>YS</b>	Young Socialists

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*[Source: Shrew, Vol. 3, No. 4, May, 1971, p. 7]* 281

## Introduction

This thesis is a study of left subjectivities in post-war Britain. The intention is to offer an enriched socio-psychological and socio-cultural understanding of the intimate left landscape in which young men and women, from childhood through to early adult years, were politicised, socialised, and shaped a selfhood. The study builds upon earlier work on the politics, culture and inter-personal network informing Britain's radical anti-war group, the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign (VSC). Initiated in June 1966 by individuals around the Bertrand Russell Foundation and the International Marxist Group (IMG), from 1967 until 1969 the VSC operated as the main prism for the burgeoning activist scene, fuelled by the student movement and the expanding membership of the two main Trotskyist organisations, the International Socialists and the IMG.<sup>1</sup> Within this radical landscape permeable political, social, and cultural boundaries enabled young activists to move fluidly from leftist groupings inside the universities and local neighbourhoods through to the counter-cultural scene and the long-standing quarters of the labour movement inside the docks, factories and tenants movements.

The questions underlying this project have personal origins that take me back to my own early adult self, inspired by my reading of Sheila Rowbotham's memoir *Promise of a Dream: remembering the sixties*. On an undergraduate course examining 'The Heavenly Decade: The Sixties' I stumbled upon one of the few texts concerned with the British experience of sixties radicalism. I was captivated by the left world Rowbotham described in rich narrative detail; how well she managed to 'evoke what it felt like at the time', to 'situate her responses' and 'relate' her 'subjective take on events to a wider social picture'.<sup>2</sup> In so doing she provided me with a highly moving, witty,

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<sup>1</sup> The significance of the radical cohort of men and women considered in this study outweighed their numbers: activists were only ever a very small proportion of the mainly middle-class cohort of men and women attending university in the 1960s. The Robbins Report on Higher Education, published in 1963, showed that the number of students in full-time higher education was 216,000 in 1962-3, or 5.6 per cent of men and 2.5 per cent of women. *Higher Education, Report of the Committee appointed by the Prime Minister under the Chairmanship of Lord Robbins 1961-1963*, Cmnd. 2154, Parliamentary Papers xi-xiv, 1962-63, pp. 15-16.

<sup>2</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream: Remembering the Sixties* (London, 2000), p. xi.

and astute portrayal of what it felt like to be a young woman situated on the edge of profound social, cultural, and political shifts, part of a close-knit, masculine and intellectual new left. She also introduced me as a historian to the exciting world of Marxist historiography and all its connecting currents: history from below, oral history, and, not least, feminist history. Discovering these traditions, and intrigued by some of the contradictions Rowbotham described feeling as a woman, I encountered the post-war left at a moment of decisive individual and political change; against the background of the New Labour left, the socialist aspirations she and her contemporaries held seemed to be products of the past as a foreign country. The encounter confirmed me in my desire to conceive of myself as a historian, and, above all, eager to seek out further accounts of personal and political life within the grass-roots, left circles she described. Searching in vain, I was continuously disappointed by the few turgid, theoretical or overtly political accounts that existed.<sup>3</sup> I sought windows into activist selves over and above the minutiae of the political campaigns that dominated and shaped these left circles. Instead, I wanted to know how activist milieux shaped daily life. What sort of meaning did men's and women's socialism provide their young selves and in what ways could this be found rooted in their early upbringings in post-war British society? Above all, what was the individual *felt* experience of being active within these new left circles? I was also eager to discover what happened to activist men and women after 1969 with the demise of the national VSC and the arrival of Women's Liberation as a new left politics. These questions lie centrally to this oral history study that examines the narrative memories of men and women who as individual and collective social and political actors, in turn, developed and mediated between the new left cultural formations. Following the example of recent cultural histories that adopt a compromised understanding of agency as both a discursive, structurally-informed power and an

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, John Callaghan, *The Far Left in British Politics* (Oxford, 1987), John Callaghan, *British Trotskyism: Theory and Practice* (Oxford, 1984), and Peter Shipley, *Revolutionaries in Modern Britain* (London, 1976). Even official histories written by former activists tend to focus on the political trajectory of movements and organisations to the exclusion of the inner activist. See, for example, Ian Birchall, 'Building "The Smallest Mass Party in the World": Socialist Workers Party 1951-1979', [consulted at <http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/revhist.otherdox/smp/smp2.html>] (11th March 2008)], Martin Shaw, 'The Making of a Party? The International Socialists 1965-76', in Ralph Miliband and John Saville (eds.), *The Socialist Register* (London, 1978), pp. 100-145.

entirely human-directed affair, I am concerned with the individual stories not merely as a collective social and cultural conduit, but taken on their own terms of expression.<sup>4</sup> What forms of selfhood did new left circles provide? What was the relationship between political and emotional life, and how did the political and the private intersect in the Trotskyist and 'non-aligned' left?

The timing of this study seems eminently appropriate. The recent biographical and subjective turns in social and cultural history allow valuable space to add the voices of dissenting individuals to the historical record of post-war experience. Concerns with typicality and an individual's capacity to speak for the masses has thankfully given way to an acceptance of the value an individual life may offer the social historian as a lens through which to understand the complex ways in which the self and the social interact in any given moment of time. If, as James Hinton argues, selfhoods are constructed as much from the outside in, and the rapid pace of change in modern life required individuals to continually re-work the self, it follows that in the context of post-war Britain narratives of political selfhood offer the social historian a valuable entry-point from whence to permeate the layers of political and social continuity and change. Defending his decision to write nine separate biographical essays on wartime Mass-Observation diarists, Hinton argues that 'historical processes can be illuminated from the contemplation of individual life histories because it is, in the end, the choices made by individuals which drive those processes forward'.<sup>5</sup> This study does not always support Hinton's faith in the human-directed shape of historical change; the narratives informing this account suggest that, on occasions, men and women were, in fact, at pains to override the cultural power of gendered social discourses operating in mainstream and radical arenas. Nevertheless, the biographical framework Hinton adopts provides an influential model for interrogating the dialectical relationship between post-war activist cultures and the individual subjects inside them. This study seeks to understand the integrated role men and women played in shaping the rich, eclectic cultures of the extra-parliamentary left as well as to discern the

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Frank Mort, *Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society* (London, 2010), pp. 10-11; Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Later-Victorian London* (London, 1994), p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> James Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives. Mass-Observation and the Making of a Modern Self* (Oxford, 2010), p. 18.

contribution of those cultures in shaping activists' sense of self. Privileging individual and collective subjectivities, it is informed not only by the micro-subjective turn that seeks to explore the 'complex relationship between the self and the social', but also the emotional and the political.<sup>6</sup> The individual stories afford ways of seeing how the experience of social and political maturation intersected with a specific social and political moment – the formation of a new left culture that came to full fruition only in the aftermath of 1968 with the arrival of Women's Liberation and the new personal politics.

Through the prism of individual histories this study will show how from the late fifties and early sixties young men's and women's encounters with the post-war left, including the world of Communism, New Left, the Labour Left and Trotskyist groupings, coincided with early structures of feeling and seeing. Pursuing the cultural evolution of new left cultures, from individuals' sub-cultural encounters with Angry Young Men literature, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), and the Young Socialists (YS) through to new left groups around the VSC, this account takes an ego-centric focus that seeks to understand the ways in which young political actors drew upon the political cultures around them to make sense of themselves in relation to the local and international world. Attention will be given to the eclectic local and global cultural shape of the left milieux that grew up around and out of the VSC. Based on an intimate network of inter-personal ties, the porous boundaries of the early left landscape transformed young men and women into highly mobile beings; geographically and psychologically, they crossed continents through personal-political exchanges with foreign students and new left actors, whilst simultaneously incorporating older left traditions reaching back to the inter-war realm of their parents. Amidst this fluid landscape mobility

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<sup>6</sup> Catherine Feely, 'From Dialectics to Dancing: Reading, Writing and the Experience of Everyday Life in the Diaries of Frank P. Forster', *History Workshop Journal*, 69, Spring, 2010, p. 92. For other recent studies of the relationship between selfhood and society, see Katie Barclay, 'Composing the Self: Gender, Subjectivity and Scottish Balladry', *Cultural and Social History*, 7:3, September, 2010, pp. 337-353; James Hinton, 'Middle-Class Socialism, Selfhood, Democracy and Distinction in Wartime County Durham', *History Workshop Journal*, 62, Autumn, 2006, pp. 116-141; James Hinton, 'The "Class" Complex': Mass-Observation and Cultural Distinction in Pre-War Britain', *Past and Present*, 99, May, 2008, pp. 207-236. As part of its aim to illuminate new aspects of the movement, 'Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project' seeks to raise questions about the relationship between women's political and emotional lives. See <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/clhlwr/1-7-11-3.html>.

became a psychic condition allowing young women to transcend dominant post-war discourses of gender and sexuality, as they took on the behavioural mantle of the intellectual and activist man. However, journeys through the shifting cultures of the late sixties left were highly complex, turbulent affairs that often created contradictions between social, political, and psychic life. As men and women contemplated the expanding external political and cultural structures of the world around them, inner life could present a much smaller, constricted affair. This study presents an account of activist selfhood as a story of realignment; caught between conservative mainstream post-war social and sexual discourses, men and women confronted a dual internal and external transition as they struggled to align the social and political patterns of the radical milieu with the psychic imprint of outer society.

I am aware of the sensitive undertaking beneath project. One respondent asked simply, why try and produce such a study when Rowbotham's memoir so aptly captured the new left world? My response is that, notwithstanding the authoritative cultural and political account that the memoir provides, the subjective, mediated memories within it are ultimately those of one woman<sup>7</sup>; there are other stories to be told that might more fully inform a new historical understanding of Britain's late sixties new left landscape. As a historian, I believe Rowbotham would be the first to agree that this is the case. Writing about the early beginnings of Women's Liberation she questioned why people sought one another in new ways. Even as an early member herself she felt at loss to answer.<sup>8</sup> But could I, a historian two generations removed, fare any better? How does one 'pattern the particular'?<sup>9</sup> What significance to attach to the shifting patterns and directions an individual life takes and how much more fraught with anxiety this becomes when considering collective life patterns. Simone de Beauvoir might have been writing for the oral historian when she lamented the shifting contradictions in which a life can move, 'at one moment translucent, at another utterly

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<sup>7</sup> For reflections on the feminist memoir and the mediated memories it contains, see Lynne Segal, 'Who Do You Think You Are: Feminist Memoir Writing', *New Formations*, 67, 2009, pp. 121-123.

<sup>8</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, 'Introduction' in Sheila Rowbotham, *Dreams and Dilemma: Collected Writings* (London, 1983), p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

opaque', a formula which can breed 'many misunderstandings'.<sup>10</sup> The dilemma points to the gulf between the social and the psychic that Frank Mort has identified in his reflections on preserving post-war narratives. The 'complex tissue' of emotional and affective life that comprises subjectivity calls for a carefully interwoven balance between individual histories and social story-telling.<sup>11</sup> I hope that this account falls somewhere suitably between the two.

In considering the cultural texture of the left milieu shaping the socio-psychological life of the activist, the shifting political background of the late sixties played a pre-eminent role. The dialogue between inner and outer life, radical and mainstream social discourses took place against a wider picture of political realignment on the left that began in earnest after the demise of the anti-war movement removed the unifying force on the activist scene. Throughout this study the term 'new left' will be employed in a collective sense, to refer to the left cultures that up to 1969 cohered in a fluid inter-personal network around the VSC. Chapter three will illustrate how this sinuous landscape coincided with a developmental moment in adult life when men and women's openness to new ideas encouraged freedom of movement across the multiplicity of Trotskyist and new left groups. After the Campaign's demise, however, the term new left acquired an altered meaning, as 'non-aligned' left activists embraced a new prefigurative politics that imposed a cultural gulf between them and the industrial labour focus of the Trotskyist organisations, IS and IMG. The result of this political and cultural shift was to solidify the boundaries between the Trotskyist and 'non-aligned' milieu as part of a transition that saw the network taking on an increasingly demarcated shape. Between 1969 and 1971 this process of political realignment was given added impetus by the emergence of the new politics of Women's Liberation that in terms of politics and personnel shared many connections with the 'non-aligned' left. Chapters four and five will examine the political, cultural, and social points of continuity and departure between the post-VSC prefigurative politics and Women's Liberation that contributed to a new libertarian, socialist feminist left.

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<sup>10</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *Force of Circumstance* (translated by Richard Howard, London, 1965), p. 276, cited in Lynne Segal, *Making Trouble: Life and Politics* (London, 2007), p. 253.

<sup>11</sup> Frank Mort, 'Social and Symbolic Fathers and Sons in Postwar Britain', *Journal of British Studies*, 38: 3, 1999, p. 382.

## Britain and 1968 Historiography

Amidst the contested cultural terrain of 1968 recent widespread efforts to historicise the global political and social upheavals that accompanied this period have seen a curious and unsettling silence about the place Britain's radical left landscape played either in global or national terms.<sup>12</sup> If historians of post-1945 British society are now beginning to resurrect interpretations of the sixties and seventies from negative readings of Conservative and New Labour politicians, journalists and social scientists<sup>13</sup>, they remain as yet reluctant to approach Britain's own left activist enclaves with the same innovative historical methods applied in revised studies of North American and European activism.<sup>14</sup> One reason why this dearth seems particularly unanticipated is because recent interest in 1968 as a site of contested memory involves attempts, in the words of one such study, 'to reclaim the voices and the vitality of individuals as well as groups', allowing valuable cultural space for the

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<sup>12</sup> In this study the term '1968' is understood as a short-hand symbol, denoting events associated with the emancipatory grass-roots social protest movements that roughly spanned the years, c. 1956-1977. For discussion of the meanings of '1968' as a long-term historical moment, variously associated with global youth revolt and transnational political and social relations, see Gurinder K. Bhambra and Ipek Demir, 'Introduction: 1968 in Retrospect' in Gurinder K. Bhambra and Ipek Demir (eds.), *1968 in Retrospect: History, Theory, Alterity* (Basingstoke, 2009), pp. xi-xiv; Carole Fink, Philip Gassert, and Detlef Junker, 'Introduction' in Carole Fink, Philip Gassert, and Detlef Junker (eds.), *1968. The World Transformed* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 1-3; Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of '68. Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956-76* (Oxford, 2007); Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth, '1968 in Europe. An Introduction' in Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth (ed.), *1968 in Europe. A History of Protest and Activism, 1956-77* (Basingstoke, 2008), pp. 1-7; Sarah Waters, 'Introduction: 1968 in Memory and Place' in Ingo Cornils and Sarah Waters (eds.), *Memories of 1968: International Perspectives* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 1-4; 190-220; Richard F. Wetzel, 'Introduction' in Richard F. Wetzel (ed.), *1968: Memories and Legacies of a Global Revolt* (Washington, D.C., 2009), pp. 5-14.

<sup>13</sup> For select examples of recent studies that acknowledge political and social movement activism as defining tenets of these decades, see Andy Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out: What Really Happened to Britain in the Seventies* (London, 2009), pp. 209-233; Sarah F. Browne, 'The Women's Liberation Movement in Scotland, c. 1968-1979' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Dundee, September, 2009); Sarah F. Browne, 'A Veritable Hotbed of Feminism?': Women's Liberation in St Andrews, Fife, c. 1968-c. 1979', *Twentieth Century British History*, forthcoming, 2011; Mark Donnelly, *Sixties Britain* (London, 2005); Eve Setch, 'The Face of Metropolitan Feminism: The London Women's Liberation Workshop, 1969-79' *Twentieth Century British History* 13 (2), 2002, pp. 171-190; Jeska Rees, 'Are you a Lesbian?': Challenges in Recording and Analysing the Women's Liberation Movement in England', *History Workshop Journal*, 69, Spring 2010, pp. 177-187; Jeska Rees, 'A Look Back at Anger: the Women's Liberation Movement in 1978', *Women's History Review*, 19: 3, 2010, pp. 337-356; Lucy Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left in Post-War Britain: How the Personal Got Political* (Manchester, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> For recent examples, see Bhambra and Demir (eds.), *1968 in Retrospect*; Ingo Cornils and Sarah Waters (eds.), *Memories of 1968*; Lessie Jo Frazier and Deborah Cohen (eds.), *Gender and Sexuality in 1968: Transformative Politics in the Cultural Imagination* (New York, 2009); Belinda Davis, Wilfred Mausbach, Martin Klimke, and Carla MacDougall, 'Introduction' in (eds.), *Changing the World, Changing Oneself: Political Protest and Collective Identities in West Germany and the U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s* (Oxford, 2010).

subjectivities of radical social actors to speak and to be heard.<sup>15</sup> Commitment to preserving the memories of former movement participants, concern with their every-day experiences, lifestyles, and textured cultural patterns rests in the best traditions of history from below that stands as one of the cultural legacies of the '68 social movements.<sup>16</sup> It seems a rather sad irony that the young historians who helped to pioneer this rich historical field should now find their own radical histories sidelined by the very generations who have continued to expand the boundaries of history from below.

Secondary studies of political and social protest in sixties Britain, though still few in number, do, of course, exist, but the historiographical landscape in which they have been written has minimised the space for former participants to reveal their stories. The predilection for examining the transnational dimensions of the era has given rise to increasing numbers of comparative studies few of which consider Britain's activism worthy of mention. In her assessment of British student protest during the Vietnam War Sylvia Ellis offers a possible explanation for the dearth of studies on the British experience of 1968: 'The British student movement during the 1960s was undoubtedly less violent, less radical and more easily controlled than those in continental Europe and the United States of America. There were no barricades, no petrol bombs, no fire hoses, no tear gas, no heavy rioting, no national university strikes or general strikes, no mass destruction of property and no shootings.'<sup>17</sup> Understood in these terms, it is all too tempting for internationally-framed studies to disparage the actions and rhetoric of British activists as insignificant in relation to the national power struggles played out elsewhere across the globe.<sup>18</sup> However, assessing protest movements merely in

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<sup>15</sup> Davis, Mausbach, Klimke, and MacDougall, 'Introduction' in (eds.), *Changing the World, Changing Oneself*, p. xi.

<sup>16</sup> See Henry Abelove, Betsy Blackmar, Peter Dimcock, and Jonathan Schneer (eds.), *Visions of History* (Manchester, 1983); Anna Davin, 'The Only Problem Was Time', *History Workshop Journal*, 50, Autumn, 2000, pp. 239-244; Sheila Rowbotham, 'Introduction' in *Threads Through Time: Writings on History and Autobiography* (London, 1999), pp. 2-4.

<sup>17</sup> Sylvia Ellis, "'A Demonstration of British Good Sense?'" British Student Protest during the Vietnam War', in Gerard J. DeGroot (ed.), *Student Protest: The Sixties and After* (Essex, 1998), p. 54.

<sup>18</sup> Gerard DeGroot, *The 60s Unplugged: A Kaleidoscopic History of a Disorderly Decade* (London, 2008), pp. 356-363, and Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties. Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c. 1958-1974* (Oxford, 1998), p. 634.

terms of their impact made upon the national body politic and society overlooks the more subtle questions transnational scholars are increasingly asking about the dynamics at work within the international activist networks.<sup>19</sup> Any attempt to understand the social and technological modes of political and cultural transfer operating across porous national boundaries calls for attention to the individuals who were both recipients and transmitters<sup>20</sup> – to reposition the voices behind the movements and to acknowledge the legitimacy of their experiences.

Pejorative or narrow assessments of British left activism also derive from the search for authenticity that surrounds studies of the post-1945 decades.<sup>21</sup> Disagreements about interpretations of the sixties and seventies, the desire to achieve an authentic narrative for these decades, has seen historians emphasise the moderate, conservative, and apolitical characteristics defining the ordinary British masses.<sup>22</sup> Accounts that echo sociologists' representations of young citizens' overriding political apathy and social conformity necessarily stifle the minority of dissenting voices that from an early age sought to contest the dominant post-war political and social order.<sup>23</sup> Such depictions also reinforce the 'consensus' historiography of post-war British society where accounts of welfare reform, expanding educational opportunities, economic growth, affluence, increasingly standardized patterns of social class, and resultant social stability and political consensus have until recently dominated.<sup>24</sup> In the light of recent research challenging this

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<sup>19</sup> Davis, Mausback, Klimke, *Changing the World, Changing Oneself*; Fink, Gassert, and Junker, *1968*; Horn, *The Spirit of '68*; Richard Ivan Jobs, 'Youth Movements: Travel, Protest and Europe in 1968', *American Historical Review*, 114:2, 2009, pp. 376-404; 'The Sixties in National and Transnational Perspective: Communications and Protest Movements, 1956-1973', Workshop, Centre for Transnational History, 16-17 September, 2010.

<sup>20</sup> Davis, Mausbach, Klimke, 'Introduction', p. xi.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Nick Thomas, 'Will the Real 1950s Please Stand Up?: Views of a Contradictory Decade', *Cultural and Social History*, 2, June, 2008, pp. 227-236; DeGroot, *The 60s Unplugged*, pp. 1-5.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Ellis, 'A Demonstration of British Good Sense?', pp. 54-69; Nick Thomas, 'Challenging Myths of the 1960s: The Case of Student Protest in Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, 13:3, 2002, pp. 277-297; DeGroot, *The 1960s Unplugged*, pp. 355-363; Dominic Sandbrook, *White Heat: A History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties* (London, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> For sociological studies see Philip Abrams and Alan Little, 'The Young Voter in British Politics', *British Journal of Sociology*, 16: 2, June, 1965, pp. 95-110, and Ferdynand Zweig, *The Student in the Age of Anxiety: A Survey of Oxford and Manchester Students* (London, 1963), pp. 42-45.

<sup>24</sup> For a useful summary of the 'optimistic' historiography of post-war consensus, see Catherine Ellis, 'The Younger Generation: The Labour Party and the 1959 Youth Commission', *Journal of British Studies*, 41, April, 2002, pp. 199-200. See also Becky Conekin, Frank Mort, and Chris Waters, eds., 'Introduction', *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain, 1945-1964* (London, 1999), pp. 4-5.

homogenous picture, re-examining political as well as social expressions of discontent amongst early sixties' youth offers to further refine understandings of British society in the late 1950s and 1960s as a complex multilayered landscape where prevailing identities of class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and nationality began to be challenged and re-composed.<sup>25</sup>

### **Oral History and Left Subjectivities**

The initial reason for turning to oral history as the principal methodology in this study derives from the paucity of available archival material that would allow access to the personal insights, thoughts, reflections and feelings – the affective dimension of young lives on the left I sought to examine. Personal sources such as diaries and correspondence, that might elicit the individual behind the campaign discourse, are almost entirely absent. The often frenetic pace of activist life left little time for self-reflection. *Black Dwarf* and *7-Days* journalist John Hoyland commented that throughout his life he had kept a diary with the exception from between roughly 1967 and 1972; the pages for these years lie blank because he and his comrades remained firmly focused on external life; the intense pace of activities, of national and global change allowed little time for self-reflection as revolution awaited around the corner. In 1968 IS member Ian Birchall considered himself one of the more sober people on the activist scene, but even he recalled taking out a mortgage, and reassuring his wife that they need not worry about the repayment schedule because revolution was surely going to come.<sup>26</sup> Where private correspondence and diaries do exist individuals are, understandably, as yet reluctant to release them to the scrutinising eyes of the researcher. In a couple of cases respondents read extracts from diaries aloud to me, complete with their own reflections on the younger selves writing about activism and adolescent angst. However, the snapshots they provided

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<sup>25</sup> For selected examples of this revisionist historiography, see Lawrence Black, Michael Dawswell, Zoë Doye, Julia Drake, Andrew Homer, John Jenkins, Mark Minion, Glyn Powell and Louise Tracey (eds.), *Consensus or Coercion? The State, the People and Social Cohesion in Post-War Britain* (Winchcombe, 2001); Stephen Brooke, 'Gender and Working Class Identity in Britain during the 1950s', *Journal of Social History*, 34:4, Summer, 2001, pp. 773-795; Stephen Brooke, 'The Conservative Party, Immigration and National Identity, 1948-1968', in Martin Francis and Ina Zweiniger-Bargieslowska (eds.), *The Conservatives and British Society, 1880-1990* (Cardiff, 1990), pp. 147-70, and Louise Ryan and Wendy Webster (eds.), *Gendering Migration: Masculinity, Femininity and Ethnicity in Post-War Britain* (Aldershot, 2008).

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Ian Birchall, London, 4<sup>th</sup> November, 2008.

had been carefully selected for public exposure before the interview, and it was impossible to know the context in which the extracts had been written beyond the brief commentary respondents supplied, and if, and how they had been edited. Confronted with this reality, oral sources offered an entirely appropriate solution as sources for activist selfhood.

However, this does not discount the value to be gained from the printed primary material that has been used in conjunction with the interviews. This includes a wealth of internal bulletins, leaflets, campaign pamphlets, posters, and ephemera as well as newspapers and monthly newsheets printed by the Trotskyist and 'non-aligned' left milieux. In many cases interviews with respondents led me to personal archives that individuals allowed me generous access to, and in some rare and valuable cases these contained the sort of private reflections and correspondence I had hoped to find. Although the Modern Records Centre at the University of Warwick, Coventry, contains a substantial collection of political literature from the IS and IMG organisations, for the most part the archive of Britain's left activist milieux remains incomplete, scattered across the country in individuals' attics and cupboards. I am convinced that the material I viewed is likely to be the tip of the iceberg in terms of internal group literature. Many individuals remain as yet reluctant to part with material that holds immense sentimental value as relics of a lost political world and a tangible symbol of youth. It is likely to be several decades before such material starts to make its way into public archives, although even then the challenge becomes how to prevent the scattered composition of this, as yet, privately held material from being translated into multiple, fragmentary holdings across the country or even overseas.

Overall, I conducted ninety oral history interviews with men and women between 2009 and 2010. However, the final study presented here is based on a much smaller sample of fifty one interviews, and of these approximately twenty stories are focused on in depth over the course of the account. I chose these twenty stories for their strong connecting currents to each other and for the their illustrative value as case studies of lives closely interwoven with the radical network that grew up around and out of the metropolitan-based VSC. The interviews were conducted mainly in London

and southern regions, Wareham, Sussex, and Totnes, though not also discounting northern areas of the country, including Leeds, Middlesbrough and Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The metropolitan focus of my research was not deliberately chosen, and whilst I am sensitive to criticisms from former Women's Liberation members that histories of provincial and regional activism invariably lose out to the capital<sup>27</sup>, the metropolitan bias in this study derived largely from the inter-personal network of contacts upon which I was dependent for respondents. The historian and socialist-feminist Sheila Rowbotham has throughout my project been immensely helpful in offering suggested names and contact details of people to interview; her Hackney home during her own period of activism necessarily made hers a metropolitan-centric world, though as a prominent face of Women's Liberation she and friends also travelled extensively - to demonstrations across the country, hitch-hiking across Europe, and throughout the 1970s responding to the constant invitations she received to speak to local and international audiences far and wide.<sup>28</sup> From Sheila's address book the 'snowball' effect took place<sup>29</sup>, leading me to other contacts, and so my base of respondents grew to encompass men and women who had during the late 1960s and 1970s either been active members of IS and IMG, or involved in 'non-aligned' libertarian milieux that grew out of the VSC and the early days of Women's Liberation – artistic and theatrical groups, such as Agitprop, the Cartoon Archetypal Slogan Theatre (CAST), Red Ladder, and grass-roots community groups, including the Camden Movement for People's Power (CMPP) and the Tufnell Park Women's Liberation group. The metropolitan focus of the interview respondents was also partly designed to be in keeping with the study's concentration on the largely metropolitan-based network that grew up around and out of the national VSC movement.

Whilst many IS members had joined the organisation in 1967-68, as students participating in university protests and VSC demonstrations, a smaller number had been recruited into the

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<sup>27</sup> Browne, 'The Women's Liberation Movement in Scotland', p. 19.

<sup>28</sup> For details of the sheer volume of speaking engagements Sheila Rowbotham carried out from the late 1960s and beyond, in association with left campaigns and Women's Liberation, see the Correspondence of Sheila Rowbotham in the Papers of Sheila Rowbotham, 7SHR/1/A, The Women's Library, London Metropolitan University.

<sup>29</sup> Jeska Rees, "'Are you a Lesbian?'" , p. 183.

organisation at the beginning of the decade. These members came mainly from working-class – manual, though occasionally white-collar – homes, and through activity, often firstly in CND, followed a political pathway through the YS into the IS and IMG. In selecting respondents to interview I have been mindful of the dangers already apparent in previous British and international studies of 1968; of historians returning repeatedly to narratives of individuals who at the time and since have become publically associated with the campaigns and movements.<sup>30</sup> In the case of Britain Ronald Fraser’s 1988 international oral history study of student activism has, to-date, remained the authoritative account upon which historians have drawn upon for first-hand testimonies.<sup>31</sup> However, when placed alongside the few memoirs written by individuals who were publically at the forefront of campaigns, the result has been to shape a dominant narrative of Britain’s ’68 activism as an entirely student affair.<sup>32</sup> The sensitivity surrounding the issue of historical representation and typicality are not only concerns of historians themselves, but also exist amongst former movement participants<sup>33</sup>, as witnessed at the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary event at Oxford’s Ruskin College, held to commemorate the first Women’s Liberation conference there in 1970.<sup>34</sup> Women who were active grass-roots members of the movement, in localities and regions away from the London Women’s Liberation Workshop (LWLW), expressed their hurt and even anger that memories of their own activities were being silenced by the misguided actions of researchers who returned time-and-again to the voices of prominent participants.<sup>35</sup>

In a desire that this study should not be simply another oral history of student activism, I have sought to include the voices of men and women whose stories of activism took place within the

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<sup>30</sup> In the context of the Women’s Liberation Movement, Barbara Caine has argued that feminist histories must turn their attention away from the exclusive focus of prominent activists or what she calls ‘women worthies’. See Barbara Caine, ‘Feminist Biography and Feminist History’, *Women’s History Review*, 3: 2, 1994, p. 258.

<sup>31</sup> Ronald Fraser (eds.), *1968: A Student Generation in Revolt: An International Oral History* (New York, 1988).

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Tariq Ali, *Street Fighting Years: An Autobiography of the Sixties* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn., London, 2005); Sheila Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream: Remembering the Sixties* (London, 2000).

<sup>33</sup> Ian Birchall, ‘Working-Class Power: What is really worth remembering about May ’68 – a talk by Ian Birchall’, ‘1968 and All That conference’, Conway Hall, London, 10 May, 2008.

<sup>34</sup> ‘Women’s Liberation Movement @ 40 Conference: Continuities and Change’, 12-13 March, 2010, Ruskin College, Oxford.

<sup>35</sup> ‘Collecting Liberation Histories Workshop’, ‘Women’s Liberation Movement @ 40 Conference’.

milieux inside this network, but outside the exclusive context of university left circles, whether as apprentices, in factories, docks, or mining towns, or as professionals and parents inside local north London communities. In many cases such respondents expressed surprise, delight, yet also doubts that their voices merited inclusion; the words, 'I was just...' denoted self-perceptions of marginality in the historical memories of campaigns and milieux to which they belonged for several years. Such sentiments, however, testified not only to the narrow respondent-base upon which accounts of sixties activism already rest, but oftentimes told personal stories of subjective belonging or otherness inside the milieux themselves.

As an inter-subjective practice, oral history has a vital role to play as a psycho-therapeutic methodology.<sup>36</sup> Since its early beginnings as an offshoot from history from below, the method has long been credited with allowing stories of experience to emerge that would otherwise remain condemned to the cultural wasteland, outside 'history land', because no other appropriate interpretative devices exist with which to access them.<sup>37</sup> Since the multiple turns the practice of history has taken in the last few decades - incorporating psychoanalysis, anthropology, cultural studies, literary analysis, and, more recently, memory studies and the subjective turn - one might assume that the value of oral history as an inherently dialogic form, nullifies the need for defensive methodological reflections. Early pioneers of the field, Alessandro Portelli and Luisa Passerini, performed valuable work in expounding the distinctive value of oral history practice to interrogate the workings of memory and the crafting of subjectivities.<sup>38</sup> Yet, as sources for selfhood oral

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<sup>36</sup> For discussion on the potential therapeutic benefits of a patient-centred oral narrative intervention, see Erin McCarthy, "'Is Oral History Good for You?'" Taking Oral History beyond Documentation and into a Clinical Setting: First Steps', *Oral History Review*, 37:2, 2010, pp. 159-169.

<sup>37</sup> Sarah Hodges used the term 'history land' to discuss the practice of writing historically about the present moment; a practice rendered possible by the nature of 'history land' as a place 'full of ungovernable spaces which allow for various transgressions'. Sarah Hodges, 'Of Biotrash and Techno-Bling: Medical Garbage in India', 'Half-Past: Writing Recent History', Early Career Workshop at the University of Warwick, 11<sup>th</sup> June, 2009. The idea of oral history practice as a malleable device with which to carve out individual stories also draws parallels with the relational methodology Carolyn Steedman devised in *Landscape for a Good Woman* to appropriate the stories of two working-class lives, her mother's and her own, from the dominant, subsuming culture that failed to allow for their particular working-class experiences. Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (London, 1986), pp. 6-24.

<sup>38</sup> Alessandro Portelli, 'The Peculiarities of Oral History', *History Workshop Journal*, 12, Autumn, 1981; pp. 96-107; Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (New

narratives retain their sceptics. Only recently Hinton reiterated the problematic nature of oral history as a source for the construction of identity, precisely because the process of “remembering” how we became who we are now’ involves a narrative construction in which what might at the time have been significant experiences are forgotten or reinterpreted in the light of more recent ones.<sup>39</sup> I have been continually reminded of this warning throughout my work by established academics as well as by respondents themselves some of whom expressed caution or reserve about the subjective nature of the account I would be producing.

There is no escaping the depth in which oral history is embedded within the complex sphere of memory, conceptualised by Mark Freeman as ‘a process of self-understanding that involves gathering together the various dimensions of selfhood that have heretofore gone unarticulated, or been scattered, dispersed or lost’.<sup>40</sup> All forms of memory, even apparently spontaneous everyday spoken or unspoken memories are, in turn, constructions, mediated ‘by complex psychological and mental processes’.<sup>41</sup> In addition the inter-subjectivity inherent within the oral history interview makes cautious methodological reflection not only necessary, but also a crucial part of how one reads respondents’ narratives. As Lynn Abrams has argued, ‘The historian cannot play such an active and creative role in the production of a primary source and then conveniently ignore his or her own presence in the process at the analysis stage.’<sup>42</sup> Although I acknowledge concerns about the authentic shape of the selves the oral narratives in this study allowed access to, as a counter-charge I can only show how I have embraced and incorporated the collaborate, creative process of the

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York, 1991), p. vii; Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (Wisconsin, 1997); Luisa Passerini, ‘Work, Ideology and Consensus under Italian Fascism’, *History Workshop Journal*, 8, 1979, pp. 82-108; Luisa Passerini, *Autobiography of a Generation*, Italy 1968 (translated by Lisa Erdberg, Hanover, 1996).

<sup>39</sup> James Hinton, ‘Middle-Class Socialism: Selfhood, Democracy and Distinction in Wartime County Durham’, *History Workshop Journal*, 62, 1996, p. 116. For reflections on some of the challenges presented by the lingering suspicion of the oral history practice, see David Palmer, “‘Every Morning before You Open the Door You Have to Watch for that Brown Envelope’: Complexities and Challenges of Undertaking Oral History with Ethiopian Forced Migrants in London, UK’, *The Oral History Review*, 37, Winter/Spring, 2010, p. 37.

<sup>40</sup> Mark Freeman, *Rewriting the Self: History, Memory, Narrative* (London, 1993), p. 29.

<sup>41</sup> Susannah Radstone, ‘Reconceiving Binaries: the Limits of Memory’, *History Workshop*, 59, Spring, 2005, p. 135.

<sup>42</sup> Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (Abingdon, 2010), p. 56. See also Joan Sangster, ‘Telling Our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral history’, in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (London, 1998), p. 92.

interview into the end narrative construction.<sup>43</sup> Throughout the study I have sought to attend to the specific temporal, spatial and social, political and cultural contexts in which respondents have articulated their memories of activist life. Following Karl Figlio I believe that there is little that could, nor should have been done to offset the retrospective, consciously and unconsciously reworked selves respondents crafted through the course of narration.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, for a few individuals the oral history interview seemed to actively function as a form of ‘auto-therapy’, helping them to make sense of their present selves.<sup>45</sup> Like the reader and writer within an autobiography or memoir, I as the oral historian and they as respondents were inextricably linked, as we both in turn sought an affirmation of self within the narrative. For my own part I have often questioned the extent to which I may have been hearing my own inner musings echoed in respondents’ voices. Throughout the course of interviewing, transcribing, and analysing, I kept stumbling on crevices and fissures between the internal and the external. Perhaps I retreated too far inwardly, and listened too much to my own internal voice. I was aware of the dislocation I felt at this time between how I felt inwardly and the outer existence of my life. I was trying to reconcile the tension between the two arenas, and it was making it hard to isolate the men’s and women’s voices from my own.

Juliet Mitchell’s writing on femininity, narrative, and psychoanalysis alerted me to the psychoanalytic and oftentimes gendered dynamic inherent within the oral history interview. Psychoanalysts, she wrote, are at one level, hearing and retelling histories: ‘The patient comes with a story of his or her own life. The analyst listens, through an association something intrudes, disrupts, offers the “anarchic carnival” back into that history, the story won’t quite do, and so the process starts again. You go back and you make a new history.’<sup>46</sup> Light dawned; the respondents’ search for the men and women they had once been had become a process of reflecting on who they now were in a political and social landscape transformed inexorably beyond Thatcher, Blair and Women’s

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 58.

<sup>44</sup> Karl Figlio, ‘Oral History and the Unconscious’, *History Workshop Journal*, 26, Autumn, 1988, p. 130.

<sup>45</sup> Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester, 2009), p. 21. For details of the practice of oral history and the construction of selfhood, see Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, pp. 50-53.

<sup>46</sup> Juliet Mitchell, ‘Femininity, Narrative and Psychoanalysis’, in Juliet Mitchell, *The Longest Revolution: Essays in Feminism, Literature, and Psychoanalysis* (London, 1984), p. 288.

Liberation. Throughout the interview they sought a sense of validation. As for myself, had I then become the analyst? Mitchell offered further insights into my role. With this psychoanalytic process, she argued, 'the analyst, in analysing his or her own counter-transference, performs the same process on himself or herself; listening to a history, they ask "Why am I hearing it as that?" Something from the analyst's own associations disrupts and penetrates into the narrative'.<sup>47</sup> If this was the case, as oral historian and analyst, the interviews involved a double search. As I observed men and women attempting to construct new histories and new identities, I came to realise how I, in turn, was searching for a sense of myself within them; their voices offered private possibilities for resolving my own inner and outer struggle.

Throughout the two years of interviewing I was undergoing a regular course of psychotherapeutic counselling. Looking back retrospectively, I now wonder whether the intensely internal, often private direction of the interviews may have resulted from my own intuitive responses and questions to emotional signals that might have nudged respondents to reflect on themselves in this way. I was, however, always mindful of respondents' reluctance to pursue certain private subject areas, and in all such cases I respected their wish to retain their privacy for ethical reasons. Rather than excuse my own compromised subjective position, I hope to show throughout the study how, tentatively employing tools of psychoanalysis, I have been able to gain a deeper understanding of the fluid, active and ongoing processes involved in the construction and reworking of activist selfhood. Nancy K. Miller wrote that one reads oneself 'across the body or under the skin of other selves' as a way of creating 'identifications'.<sup>48</sup> Whilst Chlöe Taylor may have regarded such an act voyeuristic, even narcissistic, displaying, as it does, a sustained interest in ourselves, my own defence legitimating the act, derives from the richer interviews that often resulted where I was able to establish an emotional connection to respondents.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Nancy K. Miller, 'Reading Spaces', *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 13:2, 2000, p. 422, cited in Chlöe Taylor, *The Culture of Confession from Augustine to Foucault: a Genealogy of the 'Confessing Animal'* (London, 2009), p. 168.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p. 169.

Psychoanalysis is a tool concerned with the ambiguities about the past based on the premise that a literal or “objective” knowledge of everything that took place is neither possible nor necessary for understanding the subject’s position. Roger Kennedy has described psychoanalytic history as ‘a history of layers, full of shifting strata ... a mutilated yet still living past.’<sup>50</sup> In the context of oral history the process of the respondent telling and the historian listening to stories is an interactive process of mutually peeling back the layers, of searching for hidden meanings contained within each emotional register.<sup>51</sup> Bill Schwarz reminds us that historians ‘needn’t be frightened of phantoms’, of understanding the ‘symbolic, psychic means by which the past is *represented* in the present’.<sup>52</sup> Paying careful attention to recurring tropes, and reading the emotive impulses within the oral narratives, I will show how the role of the present past in the composition of the activist self has been central to the process of understanding the complex individual and collective selves respondents located and, in turn, invested within the left activist circles of late sixties British society.

The interviews, conducted mainly in respondents’ homes, but notwithstanding locations including, on one occasion, a hospital, took on a fluid form, employing the life-history method that was based around a basic set of questions about the respondents’ childhood, adolescence, and adult years. In two cases interviews with respondents living overseas were conducted using the Skype facility, and in several more cases correspondence with individuals has also supplemented the oral narratives used. A number of respondents had been interviewed previously for projects on student activism, Women’s Liberation and libertarian collective living. In all these cases, aware of the extent to which respondents can elicit a ready-made script that they re-employ in different interview contexts, I made sure to study previous transcripts and to assess them against the later interview for similarities, patterns, and discrepancies. However, as I show in chapter three, I also took care to scrutinise pre-prepared or re-elicited stories in the understanding that respondents re-tell particular

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<sup>50</sup> Roger Kennedy, ‘Memory and the Unconscious’ in Radstone and Schwarz (eds.), *Memory*, p. 181.

<sup>51</sup> See Sally Alexander, ‘Memory-Talk: London Childhood’ in Radstone and Schwarz (eds.), *Memory*, p. 237.

<sup>52</sup> Bill Schwarz, ‘Not Even Past Yet’, *History Workshop Journal*, 57, Spring, 2004, p. 103.

accounts for important reasons; in so doing they are performing a meaningful self-identity through which they hope to convey certain impressions to the interviewer.<sup>53</sup>

### **Thesis Overview**

Overall, the thesis adopts a chronological approach that follows stories of activist selfhood from childhood through to early adult years; simultaneously, it charts the political and cultural evolution of the post-war left landscape up to and immediately beyond the VSC. Chapter one begins the account by situating the respondents, their radical histories and activist cultures within the changing post-war fabric in which they were raised as children and adolescents. It investigates the roots of oppositional or left consciousness; through attention to early structures of feeling or underlying feeling, it examines how encounters and experiences in the home, school, local community, and wider national and international world led young men and women into a disputatious relationship with the post-war society. Pursuing the complex category of 'experience', chapter two continues to explore the theme of left identity through involvement in a milieu. From the early-to-mid-1960s young men and women journeyed into dissenting and early left youth subcultures, absorbing themselves in Angry Young Men literature, CND, the YS, and early IS/IMG milieux. Chapter two will explore how these sub-cultural encounters interacted with early experiences in the home and community, examining the individual and collective meanings adolescents and young adults found within these radical circles that would lead them on to further activist involvement. Chapter three addresses the specific experiences of student activism in left milieux men and women found at universities across the country from the mid-to-the late 1960s. It examines how through interpersonal and technological modes of communication the individual and local student world melded with exposure to the wider international political and cultural ferment around 1968. Attention to the fluid cultural and social shape of the left milieux around the VSC will show that at the high point of the national network mobility within these circles became a psychic condition as

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<sup>53</sup> Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, p. 151.

much as an outer expression of political, social and even sexual conduct. After the last major demonstration on 27 October 1968, the demise of the Campaign saw a transitional political moment on the activist scene before Women's Liberation burst forth and began to reshape the political landscape with a new language of personal politics. Chapters four and five examine the 1969 moment that inaugurated increasing demarcation between the Trotskyist organisations, IS and IMG, on the one hand, and the 'non-aligned' libertarian enclaves that encompassed Women's Liberation on the other. In chapter four a micro-level examination of a local north London 'non-aligned' group, the Camden Movement for People's Power (CMPP), shows the political and socio-psychological origins of the new politics within a grass-roots community group that spanned the transition, as a former north London VSC branch. The group's connections to one of the early Women's Liberation groups, the Tufnell Park group, illustrate how the arrival of Women's Liberation coincided with political, social, and psychic shifts elsewhere on the metropolitan activist scene that saw men and women beginning to embrace a new prefigurative left politics. This political moment occurred alongside social and psychological changes in activists' private lives; now young adults, the arrival of the new politics created demands for men and women, as activists, citizens, wives and husbands, mothers, and fathers to straddle competing social and sexual discourses between their left milieux and mainstream, early 1970s society. At a time when the boundaries between Trotskyist and 'non-aligned' milieux were growing increasingly static, and less permeable, chapter five explores the impact of the new politics of Women's Liberation on the divergent milieux. It considers how within these left cultures politics penetrated public political and private spaces, and shaped socio-psychological life for activists inside them.

## Chapter One

### Signposts of Activist *Mentalités*: Childhood and Adolescence in Post-War Britain

The external social landscape for the narratives of young left activists coming of age was a reconstructed post-war Britain. Simon J. Charlesworth explained the importance of understanding a place as ‘a natural starting-point for understanding being.’<sup>1</sup> Situating the individuals and their histories within the changing post-war fabric is crucial for understanding how and why young lives on the left began. Examining ways of belonging on the left, understanding and preserving the richly textured patterns of new post-war left cultures necessitates understanding the nature of young activists’ opposition to the dominant, ‘established’ society in which they came of age. I cannot ignore the relation between the ‘myriad moments of individual experience and the outer shifts’ of wider societal change.<sup>2</sup> Listening to the narratives I began to hear the dialectic between the psychic impulses that individuals expressed between their childhood and later activist landscapes. In seeking to preserve the individual subjectivities on the left and to register their existence within collective spaces and alongside collective subjectivities, the historian must pay careful attention to particular ‘structures of feeling’ on the left. The term, which Raymond Williams used to denote ‘the preliminary level of awareness that is still feeling’, is useful for thinking about how later radical actors and thinkers came to register and interact with the shifting social, economic, political, and cultural *habitus* of their post-war childhood.<sup>3</sup>

In *The Aesthetics of Class in Post-War Britain* Paul Long argues convincingly of the validity with which it is conceivable to talk about a post-war *mentalité*.<sup>4</sup> Women growing up in fifties Britain have spoken of the material nutrients of the welfare state accompanying expanding educational

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<sup>1</sup> Simon J. Charlesworth, *A Phenomenology of Working-Class Experience* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Rowbotham, ‘Introduction’, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Filmer, ‘Structures of Feeling and Socio-cultural Formations: the Significance of Literature and Experience to Raymond Williams’ *Sociology of Culture*, *British Journal of Sociology* 54:2, 2003, p. 202. See also Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters, Interviews with New Left Review* (London, 1979), pp. 158-74.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Long, ‘The Aesthetics of Class in Post-War Britain’, (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Warwick, September 2001), p. 7. See also Paul Long, *Only in the Common People: the Aesthetics of Class in Post-War Britain* (Newcastle, 2008).

opportunities and inculcating their young working-class selves with a surety of their right to existence.<sup>5</sup> The resounding sentiment underlying this *mentalité* was a psychological security deriving from the stable social and economic conditions of the post-war boom, a feeling that eluded their parents' lives and was a key component in the generation gap that contemporary social commentators began to pay attention to following the student protests of the late 1960s.<sup>6</sup> It is the relation of class to this post-war *mentalité* that lies at the heart of Long's work, and occupies a crucial component of this account.<sup>7</sup> Awareness of one's own existence in relation to a hierarchically ordered social world outside the immediacy of the family was often the starting-point for young activists in fostering a sometimes antagonistic relationship with the outer world. As a frequent demarcation point for childhood experience and memory the defining role of class supports the recent attempts to resituate class as a category of analysis, especially in post-war social and cultural histories, although the personal histories also point to other registers of identity: gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and nationality.<sup>8</sup> Without exception, a collective register of left identity that

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<sup>5</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (London, 1986), p. 121; Angela Carter, 'Truly It Felt Like Year One', in Sara Maitland (ed.), *Very Heaven: Looking Back at the 1960s* (London, 1988), pp. 209-216; Liz Heron (ed.), *Truth, Dare or Promise: Girls Growing Up in the Fifties* (London, 1985), and Mary Ingham, *Now We Are Thirty: Women of the Breakthrough Generation* (London, 1981), p. 12. See also Paul Foot and Nigel Fountain's accounts of the post-war generation of left-wing activists in David Widgery (ed.), *The Left in Britain 1956-68* (London, 1976), pp. 225-7 and 421-3.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Donald G. Macrae, 'The Culture of a Generation: Students and Others', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 2:3, 1967, pp. 1-11; Margaret Mead, *Culture and Commitment: A Study of the Generation Gap* (New York, 1970), George I. M. Robertson, 'The Generation Gap and the Defence of Britain', *Contemporary Review* 240, 1983, pp. 71-77. The existence of a 'generation gap' was not exclusive to British society. In 1977 Ronald Inglehart discussed changing values in relation to Western post-war societies. Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Changing Political Styles Among Western Publics* (Princeton, 1977).

<sup>7</sup> Long's study focuses specially on how during the post-war era the working-classes were imagined as idealised, objects of desire in cultural studies and a range of cultural theories. Long, 'The Aesthetics of Post-War Britain', p. 26.

<sup>8</sup> For recent works that have argued for the need to retain class in the wake of the challenges of post-structuralism, see, for example, Geoff Eley and Keith Nield, *The Future of Class in History: What's Left of the Social?* (Ann Arbor, 2007); Geoff Eley and Keith Nield, 'Scholarly Controversy: Farewell to the Working Class?', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 57, Spring, 2000, pp.1-30; Talvinder Gill, 'The Indian Workers Association Coventry: 1938-1990: Political and Social Action and its Impact on the Politics, Culture, and Community Identity Formation of Indian Migrants' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Warwick, September 2010); Matthew Hilton, 'Politics is Ordinary: Non-governmental Organizations and Political Participation in Contemporary Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, 22:2, 2011, pp. 230-268; Neville Kirk, 'Editor's Introduction' in Neville Kirk (ed.), *Social Class and Marxism* (London, 1996), p. 1-10. David Cannadine points to the importance of the lived reality of class, 'consciousness of class as social description and social identity' as the basis for understanding one of the central themes of British life and history. The predominance

activists from all milieux shared was their belonging to a 'continent-wide transnational social group' in solidarity with other '68 protesters.<sup>9</sup> This chapter will endeavour to show the particular structures of feeling underlying the left sensibilities young activists developed. The 'shifting reciprocal relationship' between 'psychic life' and specific social, political and economic histories provides the key to understanding why it was that those identities came to guide activists towards particular left spaces and to carve out new channels within those spaces.<sup>10</sup>

### **All In The Family: Working-Class Family Socialization and Early Left Instincts**

The signposts for locating a critical consciousness lie in the domestic arena of the family. This finding accords entirely with contemporary as well as more recent sociological studies that identify the principal influences shaping young activists who participated in the civil rights, student, and anti-war protest movements of the 1960s.<sup>11</sup> Such surveys highlight the role of family socialisation into politics

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of class in the self-understanding respondents displayed in the narratives would seem to support his argument. David Cannandine, *Class in Britain* (London, 2000), p. 23.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Ivan Jobs, 'Youth Movements: Travel, Protest, and Europe in 1968', *American Historical Review*, 114:2, 2009, p. 376. Recent scholarship on '1968' emphasises the transnational, global dynamic inherent within the political, social, and cultural events of this year, and underlines the prevalence of an international identity, which encouraged solidarity with political activists overriding national boundaries. For select examples, see Gurminder K. Bhambra and Ipek Demir (eds.), *1968 in Retrospect: History, Theory, Alterity* (Basingstoke, 2009); Belinda Davis, Wilfred Mausbach, and Martin Klimke (eds.), *Changing the World, Changing Oneself: Political Protest and Collective Identities in West Germany and the US in the 1960s and 1970s (Protest, Culture and Society)* (New York, 2009); Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert, and Detlef Junker (eds.), *1968 The World Transformed* (Cambridge, 1998); Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956-1976* (Oxford, 2007), and Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth, *1968 in Europe: A History of Protest and Activism, 1957-1977* (New York, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> Cora Kaplan, *Sea Changes: Culture and Feminism* (London, 1986), pp. 4-5.

<sup>11</sup> For details of contemporary British sociological surveys that fall within this purview, see, for example, Philip Abrams and Alan Little, 'The Young Activist in British Politics', *British Journal of Sociology* XVI, June, 1965, pp. 315-333. Frank Parkin's sociological study of CND found that the great majority of young CND supporters had at least one family member who was sympathetic to the Campaign, and came from families where there was some level of commitment to left-wing politics on the part of both parents. Frank Parkin, *Middle Class Radicalism: The Social Bases of the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament* (Manchester, 1968), pp. 146-47. For sociological studies of the origins of New Social Movements, see, for example, Mario Dianie, 'Background and Early Developments of Network Approaches', in David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (Oxford, 2007), p. 344; Darren E. Sherkat and T. Jean Blocker, 'The Political Development of Sixties' Activists: Identifying the Influence of Class, Gender, and Socialization on Protest Participation', *Social Forces*, 72:3, March, 1994, pp. 821-842. In her study of recruitment to Italian left-wing terrorist groups, Donatella della Porta found that involvement often came through strong interpersonal linkages, often to family as well as close friends. Donatella della Porta, 'Recruitment Processes in Clandestine Political Organizations: Italian Left-Wing Terrorism' in Bert Klendermans, Hanspeter Kriesi, and Sidney Tarrow (eds.), *International Social Movement Research: From*

and the important role parents played in transmitting shared political and social values to their children, but they did so at the expense of the psychic and emotional realm of childhood subjectivity. The life-story practice of oral history privileges interiority whilst inviting an intergenerational dynamic within the narrative. Interviewees engage generational memory, often invoking family stories to offer an account of their family origins prior to living memory.<sup>12</sup> Seeking to explain an engagement with class before they could articulate a conscious, sociological rendering of the term, respondents mediated themselves through their parents. Children of working-class parents eagerly identified themselves in relation to their parents' socio-economic roots, suggesting the central location of class consciousness within their left identities.<sup>13</sup> The prevalence of the intergenerational narratives raises the useful spectre of family systems theory to illuminate the narratives underlying this account. Paul Thompson first applied the 'family systems' approach to the practice of oral history to explain how individual life stories invoke intergenerational transmission. Through select case studies, he showed how family story and generational memory indicate the breadth and scope of the social and cultural lineage of the family, including 'social values and aspirations, fears, world views, domestic skills, and taken-for-granted ways of behaving'.<sup>14</sup> Transmitting 'family myths, models, and denials', they provide the context in which crucial life

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*Structure to Action – Comparing Social Movement Research Across Cultures Volume. 1* (Greenwich, 1988), pp. 155-72.

<sup>12</sup> A life story may be understood to replicate the essential tenets of a life history, but is told to elicit a particular sense of self, often revised in relation to recent events that impact on self-consciousness. For discussion of the theoretical differences between the two terms, see Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (Abingdon, 2010), pp.40-43; Marie-Françoise. Chanfrault-Duchet, 'Textualisation of the Self and Gender Identity in the Life Story', in Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury and Penny Summerfield (eds.), *Feminism and Autobiography* (London, 2000), pp. 61-75; Alessandro Portelli, 'The Best Garbage Man in Town: Life and Times of Valtèro Peppoloni Worker', in *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (New York, 1991), pp. 117-37; Charlotte Linde, *Life Stories: The Creation of Coherence* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 21-25.

<sup>13</sup> In his oral history study of Tyneside Young Socialist and CND politics, John Charlton introduced respondents' stories by setting them in the socio-economic context of their parents' post-war histories. The prevalence of class as a dominant framework within these accounts is notable. John Charlton, *Don't You Hear the H-Bomb's Thunder? Youth and Politics on Tyneside in the Late 'Fifties and Early 'Sixties* (Pontypool, 2009), pp. 22-38.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Bertaux and Paul Thompson, 'Introduction', in Daniel Bertaux and Paul Thompson (eds.), *International Yearbook of Oral History and Life Stories: Between Generations: Family Models, Myths and Memories*, Vol. 2, (Oxford, 1993), p. 1.

decisions may be partly made.<sup>15</sup> In this chapter childhood stories, mediated through the trope of the father and mother, reveal the emotional signals and unfulfilled, even unconscious dreams youngsters picked up from parents and other relations, all of which helped to foster an early relationship to the wider social world. Sally Alexander has shown the meaning that oral histories of London childhoods bring to Marc Bloch's concept of 'underlying feeling', illuminating the 'child's (remembered) self-awareness in relation to the outside world and to the child's place within it'.<sup>16</sup> Her reflections on family stories suggest the possibility which generational memory and Thompson's method have of restoring agency to the individuals within this account, privileging the 'aggregate of small private decisions', and challenging the reductive and abstract 'categories of social theory' to 'preserve the (selected) past in the present'.<sup>17</sup>

At one level the narratives underlying this account are familiar stories of post-war childhood and adolescence. What distinguishes them is that the stories told are life narratives of young individuals who in the sixties went on to find a specific sense of self within new left spaces. Like all children born into British society after 1945 their childhood experiences played out against a national climate of reconstruction where family dominated social discourses of renewal, and the Welfare State initiated unprecedented intervention into the domestic realm.<sup>18</sup> This chapter offers the useful opportunity to situate the narratives against existing studies of post-war family life in an

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<sup>15</sup> Paul Thompson, 'Family Myth, Models, and Denials in the Shaping of Individual Life Paths', in Daniel Bertaux and Paul Thompson (eds.), *International Yearbook of Oral History and Life Stories: Between Generations: Family Models, Myths and Memories*, Vol. 2, (Oxford, 1993), pp. 14-37.

<sup>16</sup> Sally Alexander, 'Memory-Talk: London Childhoods' in Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (eds.), *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates* (New York, 2010), p. 236.

<sup>17</sup> Sally Alexander, "'Do Grandmas have Husbands?'" Generational Memory and Twentieth-Century Women's Lives', *The Oral History Review*, 36: 2, 2009, p. 162.

<sup>18</sup> Social studies on the post-war family reflected deeper questions occupying post-war officials about national renewal. The proliferation of commissions, reports as well as unofficial social commentaries featured questions all related to this theme, including changing patterns of marriage, the decline of the working-class extended family, and the role of working women. For discussion of the post-war family in social commentaries, see Stephen Brooke, 'Gender and Working Class Identity in Britain during the 1950s', *Journal of Social History*, 34:4, 2001, pp. 773-95, Angela Davis, 'A Critical Perspective on British Social Surveys and their Accounts of Married Life, c. 1945-1970', *Cultural and Social History*, 6, March, 2009, pp. 47-64, Janet Finch and Penny Summerfield, 'Social Reconstruction and the Emergence of Companionate Marriage, 1945-59' in Graham Allen (ed.), *The Sociology of the Family: A Reader* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 12-34; Pat Thane, 'Population Politics in Post-War British Culture', *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain 1945-1964* (eds.), Becky Conekin, Frank Mort, and Chris Waters (London, 1999), pp. 114-133, and Jeffery Weeks, *Sex Politics and Society. The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800* (London, 1981), pp. 232-239.

effort to understand how they fit into prevalent patterns of social continuity and change, and to consider how individual experiences in the family informed engagement with society and the wider world, shaping the tenets of an early new left self.

Thinking about how children come to form relationships with the social world around them is fundamental to thinking about how structures of feeling came to be shaped into critical and even political thought. Raymond Williams and Carolyn Steedman offer insight into this process of childhood cognition and its connection to the social world. Williams wrote of the 'real ... physical and material relational processes' which take place as part of an 'activation of specific relations' when poems are read, stories told, plays enacted and watched.<sup>19</sup> Although he was discussing a specific interaction with cultural forms, Williams' reflections might also usefully be applied to children's interactions with parents' social and political behaviour as well as the emotional signals emitted to their offspring. Writing on the literary figure of the child and human interiority, Steedman reflected how Williams' descriptive process of 'movements of relationship, between people and things' were individual, collective 'means of cognition, ways of thought' which then move into social worlds.<sup>20</sup> The reflexive, active process at work in the shaping of human consciousness was the central feature of Williams' writings on the dynamic between inherited culture and individual subjectivity.<sup>21</sup> In relation to working-class memories of Fascism Luisa Passerini echoed Williams' thesis on the dialectic between inherited socialisation and the 'capacity for self-reflection' and critical thought.<sup>22</sup> These reflections may be applied to the ways of relating socially and psychically that respondents remembered from childhood.

Children of working-class parents derived early understandings of social status from impressionistic, emotional responses to their parents' lives and social interactions. Sheila

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<sup>19</sup> Raymond Williams, cited in Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1790-1930* (London, 1995), p. 19.

<sup>20</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations*, p. 19.

<sup>21</sup> Raymond Williams, 'Culture is Ordinary', reprinted in A. Gray and J. McGuigan (eds.), *Studying Culture: An Introductory Reader* (London, 1993), pp. 5-6.

<sup>22</sup> Luisa Passerini, 'Work Ideology and Consensus under Italian Fascism: Work in Progress', *History Workshop Journal*, 8, Spring, 1979, p. 104.

Hemingway grew up in North Leeds, one of four children living in a two-up one down, back-to-back house. Her father worked in the laundry at the local St James hospital while her mother was a Hoffman presser in a nearby tailoring factory.<sup>23</sup> Her father presented his own rigid mode of conduct, 'living according to the rule'.<sup>24</sup> He reasoned: 'You know your place. Your place is here. It's them at the top who know how to rule ... We were born to work.'<sup>25</sup> But at the age of eleven during a strike at the tailoring factory Hemingway became aware that her mother was not so compliant about her own sense of place in this social hierarchy. She recalled the conversation between mother and daughter: "Why aren't you at work?" "I'm not at work today 'cos I'm on strike." "What does that mean?" "Well, I'm not going to work today." And it was set off like that.<sup>26</sup> Although it was not until she met her husband at the age of seventeen that Hemingway began to understand Labour politics, the moment represented an early fragment of consciousness about a wider social body: 'My Dad would say, "Well that's another day's wages you've lost" ... You pick those things up and they tend to stay with you, you know.'<sup>27</sup> Her testimony indicates that before children were able to articulate coherent ideas about the social order and their place within it, material conditions of domestic life, daily patterns, and a child's sensitivity to parental feeling shaped an early relationship with the world.

Alan Woodward illustrated how first-hand physiological and psychological experiences of material deprivation fostered his early antagonism to society. He grew up initially in Camden Town, London, and later in Broadstairs, Kent. The Woodward family's severe poverty marked his earliest childhood memories: he held four separate jobs before and after school in an attempt to support the meagre wages of his parents.<sup>28</sup> The uncomfortable memory of free school meals signalled the social shame of material deprivation, but it was the injustice attached to his mother's suffering that fuelled his anger at the hypocrisy of the Christian authority governing his schoolboy life. He

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with Sheila Hemingway, Leeds, 7<sup>th</sup> June, 2009.

<sup>24</sup> Mort, 'Social and Symbolic Fathers and Sons', p. 364.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Sheila Hemingway.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Alan Woodward, London, 2<sup>nd</sup> January, 2009.

questioned: 'If there is a God why does this God allow so much pain, anguish, poverty to exist? ... What is the coherence behind it even though my Mum had been in the Salvation Army in her youth many years before that?'<sup>29</sup>

The place of family stories in working-class families shows the role transgenerational family culture played in inculcating a sense of class amongst post-war children.<sup>30</sup> John Charlton recalled stories passed down from previous generations that became part of family legend. One particularly vivid story came from his maternal uncle who told of his father's mistreatment during the economic crash of 1931: 'His employer took him aside with the words "We all have to make sacrifices."' <sup>31</sup> For Charlton's grandfather the sacrifice was a pay cut from twenty-one to nineteen shillings a week. Before he came to formulate tangible political ideas as an older teenager, stories like this one became embedded in Charlton's mind. Understanding that the 'we' excluded his grandfather's employer, the blatant injustice he perceived provoked an antagonism with society which became sharpened upon his entry to Heaton Grammar school, in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, in 1949.<sup>32</sup> Other processes that saw Charlton starting to engage critically with society related to his observations of the social nuances surrounding class and the uncomfortable feelings they could engender. His father was a chauffeur in private service and when his employment took the family into the owner-occupied suburb of Kenton, as tenants, Charlton found himself surrounded by predominantly lower-middle-class families.<sup>33</sup> In terms of what this meant for his teenage social world, he noted how 'summer holidays delineated social difference'.<sup>34</sup> His family operated an open house, but calling on friends, at two houses at least, he would be kept waiting on the doorstep. Alive to his social unacceptability as a working-class boy, the shame of being made to feel an outsider stung sharply.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> For discussion about the role of family myths in shaping social change, and the valuable insights they provide into the fusion of 'the personal with the familial, the material with the symbolic', see Thompson, 'Family Myth, Models, and Denials', pp. 15-36.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with John Charlton, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 2009.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> John Charlton, *Don't You Hear the H-Bomb's Thunder?*, p. 51.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with John Charlton.

The process of gravitating to a friendship group of predominantly working-or lower middle-class boys with socialist outlooks, unconsciously at school and more consciously, at teacher training college, related to the inadequacy Charlton felt amidst the company of his middle-class peers. He reflected on his desire to enter this 'petty bourgeois community': I think I envied the facility I saw some middle class lads have that I didn't feel I had. I felt that they were more articulate than me. I thought life seemed a lot easier for them.<sup>36</sup>

### **The Relationship between the Working-Class and the Post-War Labour Party**

Charlton's social connection to the left milieu he found at school points to the subtle suffusion of class with a longstanding cultural attachment to Labour politics that was critical in shaping the emotional contours of working-class children's left consciousness. Like class awareness itself, the political and cultural implications of class were often learned in the family arena. Men and women spoke of a process of becoming almost intuitively left as a logical extension of their working-class lineage. Family stories again played a role in transmitting cultural attachment to the Labour left. Judith Milner recounted her father's tales about her maternal grandfather, Earnest Gibson, who had been very active in the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) during the war.<sup>37</sup> Working in the same industry, her father knew of Gibson's formidable reputation of confronting opposition to unionise the men around him. Milner's early respect for her grandfather's political ideas was nurtured by stories she heard about the police escort that accompanied him to work each day.<sup>38</sup> Claire Muldoon highlighted her father's political legacy from the Independent Labour Party (ILP) when he joined the International Brigades.<sup>39</sup> Roger Cox's father was a lorry driver for the Cartage Department of the Eastern region of British Rail at London's Liverpool Street. As a child Cox heard repeated stories of his father's battles defending members in the Bishopgate branch of the National

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Judith Milner, London, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2008.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Claire Muldoon, London 10<sup>th</sup> December, 2009. For discussion on the response of the British left to the Spanish Civil War, see Tom Buchanan, *The Spanish Civil War and the British Labour Movement* (Cambridge, 1991); Lewis H. Mates, *The Spanish Civil War and the British Left: Political Activism and the Popular Front* (London, 2007).

Union of Railwaymen (NUR).<sup>40</sup> He made an emotional connection with these stories to form a vague feeling that ‘something was not quite right with the world’, an unarticulated sensation that there had to be an explanation for the numerous contradictions in his life. Cox’s was one of many accounts to show that before children became truly conscious of class and its cultural and political meanings, affinity to Labour derived first and foremost from emotional familial ties. It was not until Cox met influential figures around the early International Socialist group (IS) that he began to make the necessary political connections with his early childhood instincts.<sup>41</sup>

Other working-class parents transmitted to their children a more considered historic and social body of working-class values, and cultural and political patterns. Laurie Flynn grew up in fifties Edinburgh alive to his parents’ Glaswegian socialist roots. His father, a book-binder by trade, raised his son to revere education and the possibilities it offered for exploring the world. Through his parents Flynn also acquired an understanding of the humanistic tenets embedded within their socialism: he made a direct psychic connection between the principles of the early twentieth-century Socialist Sunday School and the warm loving kindness his parents exuded as individuals.<sup>42</sup> As a six-year old he accompanied his father back to his childhood home near to the Irish market at Shipbank Lane. In one of the poorest sectors of Glasgow Flynn learned that poverty meant second-hand shoes and spectacles. He caught a glimpse not only of the harsh texture of his father’s childhood, but saw in practice his values of co-operatism, community and charity.<sup>43</sup> In subsequent years memories of this Glaswegian working-class world enabled him to relate more intimately to the free-thinking values of socialism, co-operatism, democracy, and social equality with which his parents had inculcated him. For Flynn these values carried an implicit sense of working-class identity: ‘We are talking about this free thinking, non-commercial place. Looking back I came from a

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<sup>40</sup> Interview with Roger Cox, London, 24<sup>th</sup> March, 2009.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> For details of the social principles and cultural practices of the Socialist Sunday School movement, see David Fisher, *A Band of Little Comrades: the Story of Socialist Sunday Schools in Edinburgh, 1905-1945* (Edinburgh, 2001); the National Council of British Socialist Sunday Schools, ‘Constitution: as adopted by the Annual Conference’, Easter, 1948, and George Whitehead, *The Socialist Sunday School Movement* (1929).

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Laurie Flynn, London, 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2008.

very generous-hearted socialist one-class ... Both my parents were very active in their unions. My Dad was a trade union official and so May Day events were common for us in Edinburgh in the mining community with bands.<sup>44</sup> His experience at 'Paddy's market' seems to have signalled the start of a conscious rendering of the world, of applying his childhood values to his surrounding community along a trajectory that took him from his family's new council house to the London School of Economics (LSE): 'Its radical tradition attracted me ... Coming to LSE from my parents' background and their love of education, we knew the world needed to be changed.'<sup>45</sup>

Other respondents confirmed how cultural and emotional attachment to the Labour left occurred through dual interactions with the family and local community. Bob Light's account of his East End London childhood highlighted the enduring special relationship between the Labour Party and the working-class in post-war Britain:

I would have been in junior or infant school and certainly we were aware that we were Labour. I don't mean just me, but everybody in the class was aware of that because it was a period when there was, in so many ways, a sense of... not community, but a kind of mono-cultural bond between people. You shared the same bond in the form of the same conditions and experiences, and you identified with Labour.<sup>46</sup>

In Light's evocation one can hear the faint echo of Richard Hoggart's working-class Leeds.<sup>47</sup> The 'mental horizons' of class which shaped the working-class connection to the Labour Party and the labour movement seem to have altered little since Hoggart noted the prevailing social division between 'us' and 'them'.<sup>48</sup> Similarly resonant in Light's reflections are the political formations in post-war British society, which Raphael Samuel characterised as 'exclusive in the loyalties they

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Bob Light, London, 28<sup>th</sup> March, 2009.

<sup>47</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (Harmondsworth, 1961), pp. 72-73. The East End of Bob Light's childhood also contained a perceptible trace of the 'respectable' poor working class, who occupied the first half of twentieth-century Britain, and whose demise Jeremy Seabrook lamented in his highly class-conscious oral history. Jeremy Seabrook, *Working-Class Childhood: An Oral History* (London, 1982), pp. 66-73.

<sup>48</sup> Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, pp. 72-73.

demanded' and 'unquestioned in moral authority and organisational imperatives'.<sup>49</sup> The result of growing up amidst this 'tribal class' was that from a young age Light assumed a passive acceptance that people like himself, his family, and his neighbours identified with the Labour Party and the politics of the left. His first memory of a general election came from the age of six; in 1955, still only in infant school, he and his class mates were all aware of themselves as 'being Labour'.<sup>50</sup> The memory signals the way in which cultural suffusion via a web of socialization patterns transmitted to the child their family's attachment to the left. Amidst cultural patterns parental character exercised a specific guiding hand. Light described the barely perceptible terms with which the social patterns of his household became imprinted on 'an ordinary working-class kid' otherwise preoccupied by sport.<sup>51</sup> Intense political discussions between his father and socialist uncles formed a familiar picture in the busy household where his father's brothers gathered most Sundays throughout the year. Although he was too young to engage with their 'verbally violent' political arguments, the debates were important because they formed part of the 'verbal furniture' of Light's boyhood. Taking place alongside discussions of football, in an atmosphere of fraternal respect and compassion, they set an example of the need for 'engaged political debate'.<sup>52</sup>

The influence of family support for Labour was not confined exclusively to working-class families. Martin Shaw spoke about the impact his own family's Labour ties made despite his middle-class origins. His mother was the daughter of a greyhound stadium manager who, along with her siblings, had broken from family tradition to become a resolute Labour supporter. Shaw's father had working-class roots that had seen him working in a butcher's shop until a grammar school education had taken him into a teaching career in adult education.<sup>53</sup> In the late fifties he joined the Adult

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<sup>49</sup> Raphael Samuel, 'The Lost World of British Communism', Part 1, *New Left Review*, 154, 1985, p. 4. At the opposite end of the social scale, Elizabeth Wilson noted the subtle cultural ways in which class mediated politics during her time at Oxford University, so that she came to associate 'Tories' with the 'sub debs' and their escorts she met who hung out at Earls Court and Kensington. Elizabeth Wilson, *Mirror Writing* (London, 1982), p. 29-31.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Bob Light.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Martin Shaw, Brighton, 15<sup>th</sup> January, 2009.

Education department at Leeds University alongside notable New Left figures; historian Edward Thompson and sociologist John Rex.<sup>54</sup> Although Communism always remained ‘at a distance’, he and Shaw’s mother both adhered to a liberal Catholicism that identified them as Labour voters. Left politics featured, as it had for Light, in everyday family life so that news of the 1956 Suez crisis and Hungarian uprising deeply affected the nine-year old Shaw. He explained: ‘We didn’t have a television so it must have been in the newspapers, and I organised a jumble sale outside the gate of our house which I think raised about £2.00 in old money so that was a formative influence.’<sup>55</sup> His father’s pacifist sentiments informed another dimension of his teenage political and moral conscience. After he was invalided out of the Second World War his father had joined the Peace Pledge Union and become a conscientious objector.<sup>56</sup> He had also spent some time convalescing in the Birmingham Quaker hospital, which had added a non-conformist edge to his views. Although his father was never active within the anti-nuclear movement, Shaw remembered that he would argue against nuclear weapons from a Christian pacifist point of view and knew people who were active in the Campaign.<sup>57</sup> Although the movement was starting to fade by the time Shaw was old enough to go on the marches, his father’s sympathies encouraged his own loyalty to the cause.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> For insight into the intellectual and social ethos that prevailed in the Extra-Mural Department at Leeds University during Thompson’s tenure, see Peter Searby, John Rule, and Robert Malcolmson, ‘Edward Thompson as a Teacher: Yorkshire and Warwick’, in John Rule and Robert Malcolmson, (eds.), *Protest and Survival: The Historical Experience* (London, 1993), pp. 1-23.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Martin Shaw.

<sup>56</sup> The Peace Pledge Union, founded in May 1936 by an Anglican clergyman, the Reverend Dick Sheppard, was the largest of all pacifist organisations in Britain during the thirties. At the outbreak of war in September 1939 membership stood at 130, 000. For details, see David C. Lukowitz, ‘British Pacifists and Appeasement: The Peace Pledge Union’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 9:1, 1974, pp. 115-127.

<sup>57</sup> Of the adult CND respondents Frank Parkin surveyed, 52 per cent were Non-conformists: Quakers, Methodists, Presbyterians or Baptists, likely due to their churches’ radical antecedents that made them responsive to appeals to social dissent. Frank Parkin, *Middle-Class Radicalism*, pp. 63-77. For further details of the relationship between Christians and CND, see also Jodi Burkett, ‘Redefining British Morality: “Britishness” and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament 1958-68’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 21:2, 2010, pp. 196-97 and Richard Taylor, *Against the Bomb: The British Peace Movement, 1958-1965* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 37-41.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Martin Shaw.

## Red Diaper Babies Come of Age: Growing Up Within a Communist Party Network

If family socialization patterns fostered emotional and cultural ties to the Labour left, this process was most overt in Communist Party homes. The Communist Party heritage of activists is striking, not least because of the way in which the rupture from this tradition marked their adult politics. Although the Young Communist League (YCL) was active around the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign (VSC), the Communist Party never occupied the place that other left organisations like the Trotskyists established in the left network.<sup>59</sup> The overriding impact of Communist Party upbringing served less to perpetuate Communist affiliation than to engender a general emotional and cultural attachment to an unspecified left. As will be shown, activists' awareness of the political and emotional significance of 1956 varied depending on their age and political trajectory.

Communist politics suffused day-to-day domestic life and conversation in all-encompassing, often subtle ways, transferring to children attitudes and beliefs pertaining to the left almost without question. Tales of Communist Party childhood echo Raphael Samuel's evocative description of the lost British Communist world as a 'complete society' that was accompanied by 'a complete social identity' transcending 'the limits of class, gender and nationality'.<sup>60</sup> Michael Rosen spoke about his fifties Communist Party upbringing in shaping the terms of his engagement with his wider childhood social circle to the extent that culture, Party, and politics functioned as one. His parents' friends were drawn exclusively from within the Party, creating a culture of 'Communist Party kids' who went on holiday together, played together, and who would then talk about the Party and Russia.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> The reason for the Communist Party's hostility to the VSC derived from its opposition to the Campaign's solidarity position, and to the political challenge it represented to the British Council for Peace in Vietnam (BCPV), the moderate broad left movement that sought to secure peace in Vietnam on the basis of the Geneva Agreements of 1954. The Party formed the largest political voice in the Council, but from October 1967 the VSC overtook it as the main anti-war movement on the left. See Celia Hughes, 'The History of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign: The Substructure of Far Left Activism in Britain, 1966-1969', (Unpublished MA dissertation, University of Warwick, 2008), pp. 13-14.

<sup>60</sup> 'Samuel, 'The Lost World of British Communism', p. 5.

<sup>61</sup> Michael Rosen, 'All in the Family', in Phil Cohen (ed.), *Children of the Revolution: Communist Childhood in Cold War Britain* (London, 1997), pp. 52-54. Peter Waterman also wrote of his 1950s Communist childhood in similar terms wherein 'the Party and "the movement" became my family, my club, my church, my country, my universe'. Peter Waterman, 'Hopeful Traveller: The Itinerary of an Internationalist', *History Workshop Journal*, Spring, 35, 1993, p. 171.

Children followed the example set by their parents; they grew up to consider political activism and discourse as normal behaviours. As long as one remained enclosed within this Communist milieu intense political discussion became part and parcel of the retinue of early childhood life. Sarah Cox's parents were both Party members; at the age of four they separated and she remained in London surrounded by her mother's intellectual Communist friends.<sup>62</sup> Only when she stepped outside into a world beyond the Party did she become aware of the McCarthyism beginning to be felt in British public life, the trade unions and the Labour Party.<sup>63</sup>

Raised to be critical thinkers, children from Communist Party homes often became critically conscious of the prevailing established authority through direct early encounters with its manifest unjustness. Through situations involving family members they came to see themselves as social 'outsiders' or 'other'. In 1949 thirteen-year old Sarah Cox became entranced by the tales of fellow school pupils who had recently returned from a large youth rally in Eastern Europe. She was eager to join in with their Communist activities, but was dissuaded by her father who had left the Communist Party in 1940 when he joined the civil service.<sup>64</sup> He urged her: "'Please don't", because it would have put his job at risk. He got investigated by a really quite nasty guy ... he got put through the mill and it nearly drove him to a nervous breakdown, but he would still go on and talk about Marxism.'<sup>65</sup> Although Britain escaped the worst excesses of America's McCarthyism, anti-Communist investigations conducted amidst the paranoia of the Cold War remained manifestly cruel in the personal devastation they wrought upon their victims and families. For Steve Jefferys the sense of being defined as a dissident collective and an object of attack began with a furore in 1962 after the British secret service made an application to his school's headmaster to find out about

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<sup>62</sup> Interview with Sarah Cox, London 24<sup>th</sup> March, 2009.

<sup>63</sup> Waterman, 'Hopeful Traveller', p. 171; Peter Hennessy and Gail Brownfeld, 'Britain's Cold War Security Purge: The Origins of Positive Vetting', *Historical Journal*, 25:4, 1982, pp. 965-74; Matthew Grant, *After the Bomb: Civil Defence and the Nuclear War* (Basingstoke, 2010), pp. 3-4.

<sup>64</sup> In the inter-war years fear of internal subversion by British Communists directed by Moscow was already a preoccupation of the British Security Service, MI5. Thereafter, in the wake of the Gouzenko scandal reviews of Whitehall's defences against Soviet infiltration led to a new 'purge procedure', to keep communists and fascists out of sensitive civil service posts. See Hennessy and Brownfeld, 'Britain's Cold War Security Purge', pp. 966-67.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Sarah Cox.

Communist Party members working on the staff.<sup>66</sup> He would soon feel the harsh anti-Communist arm of the state touch his family; his uncle would be blacklisted and thrown out of his job as an officer for the civil service union in the wake of the Vassall spy case.<sup>67</sup> After questions were raised in the House of Commons about why the headmaster should be exposing the political affiliation of his school children, Jefferys felt a sense of the 'who' and 'we' being defined.<sup>68</sup>

Communist ideas shaped youngsters' moral and social parameters by encouraging them to question the opinions and actions of dominant authority where they ran counter to their own moral framework. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, in October 1962, Jeffery's brother, the head boy, was indefinitely suspended after he dared to use the school assembly to call a meeting to discuss the crisis. Although the suspension was eventually lifted after their mother visited the headmaster, the experience was one of 'being defined as a collective, as a network, in part by the dominant authorities.' He explained: 'this was a period in which you were not expected to question authority. You were expected just to sit down and do what you were told, and here largely because of the political ideas we had, which were running counter to the system, we were most likely to be saying well what about this, what about that?'<sup>69</sup>

John Cowley confirmed how international Cold War politics coincided with the local and family-centred world of the Communist Party child to leave a particular political-psychological

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<sup>66</sup> Interview with Steve Jefferys, London, 13<sup>th</sup> November, 2008.

<sup>67</sup> In September 1962 thirty-eight year old William Vassall, Admiralty clerk to junior Conservative minister, Sir Thomas Galbraith, was charged and subsequently imprisoned for spying for the Soviet Union. See *The Times*, 8 November, 1962, p. 12; Home Office, *Report of the Tribunal to Inquire into the Vassall Case and Related Matters*, Command Paper (London, 1963); William Vassall, *Vassall: The Autobiography of a Spy* (London, 1975). The revelations concerning Vassall's homosexual entrapment by the KGB formed part of a series of Cold War political scandals in the 1950s and early 1960s, including the defection of diplomats Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean, the imprisonment of ex-diplomat George Blake, and the Profumo scandal. The role of sexual deviancy and national subversion underlying the scandals informed an anxious moral debate fuelled by political and social commentators, whose concerns about the moral decay of Britain's upper-class leadership contributed to the wider debate about Britain's post-war decline. See Arthur Koestler (ed.), *Suicide of a Nation? An Enquiry into the State of Britain Today* (London, 1963); Frank Mort, *Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society* (London, 2010), pp. 343-347, Frank Mort, 'Scandalous Events: Metropolitan Culture and Moral Change in Post-Second World War London', *Representations*, 93:1, 2006, pp. 106-137; Michael Shanks, *The Stagnant Society: A Warning* (Harmondsworth, 1961), Gilliam Swanson, 'Good-Time Girls, Men of Truth and a Thoroughly Filthy Fellow: Sexual Pathology and National Character in the Profumo Affair', *New Formations*, 24, 1994, pp. 122-154.

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Steve Jefferys.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

imprint. Prior to attending his London grammar school a painful family rift had already alerted him to the bitter feelings Communist membership could arouse. Cowley's mother came from avowedly Labour supporting parents, and when her younger brother joined the Communist Party their father cast him out of the family. Cowley's step-father was also a Party member and though Cowley himself was never encouraged to join the YCL or the YS, his school aroused in him a critical sensitivity to politics by censoring all Communist associations. He explained:

In civic lessons when they talked about Parliament, and asked people to name which political party and what newspaper they read, when I said I read the *Daily Worker* they wouldn't write it on the blackboard. That Cold War period in the fifties ... it was an inhibiting environment and as a young person, to a child who wasn't political, it created a frustration with the way politics was seen.<sup>70</sup>

Cowley also recounted how as a teenager he 'suddenly found' himself on the demonstrations over the Suez crisis in 1956. Increasingly, he began to emphasise his Communist Party connection at school, as though to self-consciously identify himself as an outsider within a world he perceived as upside down.<sup>71</sup>

Cowley's memories testify to the complex political and emotional relationships shaping the left *mentalités* of the late sixties milieu. Continuities as well as ruptures abounded between the pre-and post-war political generations. On the one hand the grass-roots community activism or 'do it yourself politics' Cowley discovered at New York's School for Social Research in 1965 represented a decisive break from the Cold War bloc politics of the Communist Party he rejected as a child.<sup>72</sup> The Jobs or Income Now (JOIN) project aided by his friend Richard Rothstein, an activist in the New Left organisation, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), presented a model of the humanistic, libertarian Marxism he had embraced as a doctoral student, replete in the English socialist tradition

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<sup>70</sup> Interview with John Cowley, London, 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 2009.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, 'Introduction' in Helene Curtis and Mimi Sanderson (eds.), *The Unsung Sixties: Memoirs of Social Innovation* (London, 2004), p. x.

of Ernest Banks, William Morris and Bernard Shaw.<sup>73</sup> On the other hand his new left experiences rested upon enduring familial ties: his emotional response to his parents' social values and their experiences of class shaped the libertarian tenets of his Marxism.<sup>74</sup>

### **Family Values and Structures of Feeling on the Left**

The central role of the family in the 'new politics' of the 1970s calls for the need to resituate activists within their families in order to discern structures of feeling beyond issues of class alone. Social relations between the sexes were to take unprecedented focus on the left with the emergence of the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM). As left women began to speak out against the 'blatantly phallic' culture of the revolutionary left, the clarion call for comrades, husbands, and lovers to discover 'a new manner of being men' imbued deeper questions of masculinity, femininity and their relationship to the post-war family as well as to wider patterns of socialisation.<sup>75</sup> In the early Women's Liberation groups women employed consciousness-raising as a new political tool to explore the roots of their own oppression. Socialist feminists encouraged men to do the same, and by the mid-1970s some men in 'non-aligned' left circles took up the challenge as they sought to discover new forms of masculine identity that would transform relations between the sexes. Childhood experiences featured heavily in both women and men's discussions in the early consciousness-raising groups, as individuals sought to understand the wider social questions behind specific experiences taking place in left enclaves. Questions surrounding the roots of early feminist consciousness have traditionally focused historians' attention on the childhood and adolescent experience of girls in post-war society as well as women's experiences in the left and underground

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid. The Jobs or Income Now project was part of the SDS Economic Research and Action Project (ERAP) that initially began in Chicago in September 1963 as an extension of their civil rights activism. The project was intended to organise 'an interracial movement of the poor' to confront poverty as one of the central features of African Americans' oppression. Set up in Baltimore and Chicago, in 1964 the JOIN projects focused on working with poor whites around the unemployment compensation centres before re-organising around the formation of community unions from February 1964. For details, see Richard Rothstein, 'A Short History of ERAP', [consulted at [http://content.cdlib.org/view?docId=kt4k4003k7&brand=calisphere&doc.view=entire\\_text](http://content.cdlib.org/view?docId=kt4k4003k7&brand=calisphere&doc.view=entire_text) (2 June 2010)].

<sup>74</sup> Interview with John Cowley.

<sup>75</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, *Woman's Consciousness Man's World* (Harmondsworth, 1973), pp. 25-43.

subcultures of the 1960s.<sup>76</sup> Yet little attention is devoted to answering the more nuanced questions Sheila Rowbotham initially raised in *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World* about what exactly was going on in the heads of her male peers.<sup>77</sup> Her insights raise valuable questions about the early adolescent experiences of the post-war 'scholarship boy' whose sense of left self was accompanied by his own specific experiences of social and sexual relations. In this study I have followed Carolyn Steedman's anachronistic practice of using the terms 'scholarship boys' and 'girls' out of periodic context in the 1950s when, following the introduction of compulsory, free secondary education, the only remaining scholarship pupils were those who won local authority scholarships to attend public day schools or the previously endowed fee-paying grammar schools.<sup>78</sup> I have adopted the terms in a rather loose sense to denote the intellectual pathway of a particular cohort of activist men and women that started in the grammar or public day school, and followed through into the radical sub-cultural enclaves of the mid-1960s, and thereafter into the left circles they encountered in the universities in the late 1960s.

### Fathers and Sons

The scholarship boys who populated the left milieux uneasily negotiated the shifting social and political climate of the 1950s. Difficult journeys towards modern selfhood were often symbolised by uneasy relations with fathers. Just as the narratives of fifties scholarship girls feature the post-war mother, those of young left men are punctuated with the leitmotif of the father whose social values had been indelibly shaped by an interwar realm of experience. As generational narratives the stories form a familiar picture of divisions between parents and children that testified to the ever-expanding

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<sup>76</sup> Birmingham Feminist History Group, 'Feminism as Femininity in the Nineteen-Fifties', *Feminist Review* 3, 1979, pp. 48-65; Sarah F. Browne, 'The Women's Liberation Movement in Scotland, c. 1968-1979' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Dundee, September, 2009), pp. 41-77; Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell, *Sweet Freedom* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 3-5, Heron (ed.), *Truth, Dare or Promise: Girls Growing Up in the Fifties* (London, 1985); Jean McCrindle and Sheila Rowbotham, *Dutiful Daughters: Women Talk About Their Lives* (Middlesex, 1983); Michelene Wandor, *Once a Feminist: Stories of a Generation* (London, 1990).

<sup>77</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World* (London, 1973), pp. 21-23, p. 43.

<sup>78</sup> Carolyn Steedman, 'Writing the Self: The End of the Scholarship Girl' in Jim McGuigan (ed.), *Cultural Methodologies* (London, 1997), p. 109.

forms of modern selfhood available to the post-war child and adolescent.<sup>79</sup> Frank Mort has argued that it may be more 'productive' to view these stories of mid-twentieth-century separation as a 'conflict between competing versions of the self rather than as a confrontation between political ideologies and a clash of cultures'.<sup>80</sup> However, within this study stories of self are inextricably interwoven with both political ideology and conservative and radical cultures. In order to understand the ways in which the young post-war adults came to inhabit new political subjectivities it is necessary to consider how encounters with the socially prescribed rules of their parents led them to seek refuge in the new radical cultures of the 1960s.

In her writing on the formation and processes of memory and female subjectivity Sally Alexander draws upon the mother 'as a metaphor for those intergenerational lineages of mostly oral and feminine identification'. She highlights how Virginia Woolf's concept of thinking through the mother allows for a deeper understanding of twentieth-century female subjectivity by interrogating individual life stories for 'the metonymic signs of femininity particular to a generation'.<sup>81</sup> To the extent that the masculine subject may also be understood as a partial, ongoing construction, Alexander's ideas offer useful transference to the masculine realm of experience and identity, in this case by interrogating the metaphor of the father and its relation to generational memory and masculine subjectivity.<sup>82</sup> Conflict between fathers and sons provides insight into the social and emotional disjuncture of the scholarship boy trying to find a place amidst the conflicting social messages fed to him by the patterns of his class and education. Ruptures with the father speak of a larger chasm within the masculine post-war realm in which the reconfiguration of middle-class

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<sup>79</sup> Mort, 'Social and Symbolic Fathers and Sons', p. 364. For discussion on the relationship between modernity and selfhood, see Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge, 1992); Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Cambridge, 1992); Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self* (London, 1990), and Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, 1989).

<sup>80</sup> Mort, 'Social and Symbolic Fathers and Sons', pp. 369-370.

<sup>81</sup> Sally Alexander, 'Memory, Generation and History: Two women's Lives in the Interwar Years', in *Becoming a Woman and Other Essays in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Feminist History* (London, 1994), p. 234.

<sup>82</sup> In her understanding of subjectivity and its construction Alexander draws upon the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's emphasis on the role played by language – the symbolic order – in the production of meaning and unconscious fantasy. See Sally Alexander, 'Women, Class and Sexual in the 1930s and '40s: Some Reflections on the Writing of a Feminist History', in *Becoming a Woman*, pp. 106-110.

masculinity, ongoing since the First World War, took on new political and social expression amongst men in this study.<sup>83</sup> Intellectually and emotionally, they stood at odds with the established middle-class conservatism of the interwar era that harked back to an older Victorian age of class-bound institutions, colonialism, imperialism, and Christian moral fibre, as embodied in the public schools. As the adolescent male strove to assemble more egalitarian, just social scripts, the turbulent experience of reconfiguring new masculine codes of selfhood came to be deeply felt at the level of father-son relations.<sup>84</sup>

The emotional distance between fathers and sons often began by physical separation with stories of boyhood marked by fathers' absence in the armed forces. The return of demobilised fathers from 1945 was often a disorienting process for children and fathers alike. Alan Allport has shown that for children too young to have conscious memories of their fathers before they departed for war 'the concept of "Daddy" had by 1945 often reached the levels of the purest abstraction'.<sup>85</sup> In 1941 Mike McGrath's father left for war and returned home in 1949, a virtual stranger to his eight year old son.<sup>86</sup> The freedom that defined McGrath's early childhood in Bishops Stortford came to an abrupt end when his father's arrival marked the family's move away from the Hertfordshire fields to a series of remote RAF stations starting with Frisacaley in Liverpool. Overriding memories of his father's remoteness were compounded by the visual imagery McGrath evoked of the barbed wire and armed guards separating him from the world outside the camps. The images seemed to provide a deeper connection to the structures of feeling underlying the childhood landscape he sought to recreate, especially as he juxtaposed the stark metallic barriers of the RAF camps with his visual

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<sup>83</sup> In his study on the male war generation, Michael Roper makes a convincing case for viewing the emergence of a modern, reflexive male self as a more long-term process than is often supposed. Michael Roper, 'Between Manliness and Masculinity: The "War Generation" and the Psychology of Fear in Britain, 1914-1950', *Journal of British Studies*, 44: 2, 2005, pp. 343-362.

<sup>84</sup> John Brewer drew upon his father's suit and homburg hat to symbolise the old conservative values that as a member of the post-war generation he challenged and rejected. John Brewer, 'New Ways in History, or, Talking About My Generation', *Historien: European Ego-histoires: Historiography and the Self*, 1970-2000, pp. 29-31.

<sup>85</sup> Alan Allport, *Demobbed: Coming Home After the Second World War* (London, 2009), pp. 68-74.

<sup>86</sup> Interview with Mike McGrath, Leeds, 3<sup>rd</sup> June, 2009.

memories of playing freely in the surrounding fields.<sup>87</sup>

Luisa Passerini offers valuable insights into what greater depths of interpretation the oral historian can achieve by thinking about memory as a collection of unconscious impressions whereby what is remembered is a way of selectively organising experience to produce and explain one's self. In *Autobiography of a Generation* she used her own psychoanalysis to help her identify specific patterns from the accounts of students who participated in the unrest in Turin, in 1968.<sup>88</sup> Her method informs more recent historiography that highlights the importance of considering the overall experience of remembering, of analysing impressionistic, unconscious articulations including dreams and visions.<sup>89</sup> Psychoanalysis, when combined with social and cultural methods, offers deeper understanding of the relationship between childhood memories and early structures of feeling in the left enclaves activists inhabited from the mid-1960s. For McGrath the metallic harshness of the images of war, the contrast with the almost pastoral idyll he conjured of the boy playing in the open fields, signalled an inner rupture and the turning-point that his father's return represented in his masculine self.

The separation took on an additional layer of meaning when at the age of eleven he won an international scholarship to Dulwich College, an all-male boarding school in south-east London. He was one of a number of male respondents for whom the disjuncture between father and son blurred and carried on into relations with authorities governing the all-male boarding schools they attended. Childhood resentment over premature removal from the family laid the basis for what often developed into a deeper emotional gulf from the conservative values that prevailed within the elite male educational institutions. In the 1950s Dulwich College stood at the top of the scholarship

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Luisa Passerini, *Autobiography of a Generation. Italy, 1968* (London, 1996), p. 23.

<sup>89</sup> Sally Alexander, 'Feminist History and Psychoanalysis', in *Becoming A Woman*, pp. 225-230; Sally Alexander, 'Memory-Talk: London Childhoods', in Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (eds.), *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates* (New York, 2010), pp. 235-245; Timothy G. Ashplant, *Fractured Loyalties: Masculinity, Class and Politics in Britain, 1900-30* (London, 2007); Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1994); Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester, 2009); Michael Roper, 'Slipping Out of View: Subjectivity and Emotion in Gender History', *History Workshop Journal*, 59, Spring, 2005, pp. 57-72.

leader board, along with Manchester Grammar School, sending pupils to Oxbridge, and McGrath was overtly conscious of being trained for leadership.<sup>90</sup> Post-war British society remained dominated by elites educated at public schools so that even by 1961 thirty-six per cent of the entries in *Who's Who* had attended schools represented in the Head Master's Conference.<sup>91</sup> McGrath recalled his explicit adolescent distaste for the elite culture for which he was being moulded. His school years were marked by a personal struggle for a sense of identity and place; absorbed in his inner world, wider politics, including the events of 1956, passed him by. He reflected:

I didn't feel I wanted to be part of that culture they were training us for, so that combined with being an outsider, brought up in RAF camps, where you are absolutely an outsider not just in a psychological sense... You are behind barbed wire and separated from the local population in some places, not all, but that, combined with being petit-bourgeois in the fairly strict sense, from [a family of] shop keepers, [going] into a boarding school with lots of posh people in it reinforced that outsider bit.<sup>92</sup>

McGrath defined his rejection of the institutional values of his school in the same context as he spoke of his disjuncture from his father's firmly right-wing views. Although it was not until his twenties that political arguments with his father took an explicit focus on race, memories of division between father and son highlighted the strength of feeling underlying this issue.<sup>93</sup> Disputes with fathers over race symbolised the way in which young men's gulf of social experience from the inter-war man became internalised and found expression in early political and moral values. It was no coincidence that anti-racism formed an early core tenet within the political identity of activists like McGrath. The chasm vis-à-vis the father propelled their vision for a humane and free society, leading to deeply felt outrage against the inhumanity of apartheid in South Africa, the segregation of American blacks, and against the American offensive in Vietnam. After joining the Cartoon

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<sup>90</sup> Along with notable public day schools like St Pauls and Merchant Taylors', Dulwich was amongst the country's most academically distinguished schools upon which direct-grant schools like Manchester Grammar School were modelled.

<sup>91</sup> Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Oxford, 2000), p. 237.

<sup>92</sup> Interview with Mike McGrath.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

Archetypal Slogan Theatre (CAST), an agitprop theatrical company, in 1965, McGrath's first active engagement with politics came over the issue of Rhodesia following Ian Smith's Universal Declaration of Independence on 11 November.<sup>94</sup> Uneasy relations between David Lyddon and his father took a similar focus on race. Initial antagonism at the age of fourteen expressed his 'incarceration' in Christchurch Hospital School, in Horsham, West Sussex, separated from his local peer group. At the age of seventeen Lyddon's hostility to wider social authority gave his early antagonism more explicit political flavour:

I start[ed] becoming disaffected without quite knowing why. If you have ever seen the film *If*, you would understand [that] there is a kind of general alienation that builds up. You are not quite sure what you are against, but you are against a lot of things. My father was a Labour supporter ... but was also quite racist. That was the aspect of his politics I didn't like. There was an ingrained racism against blacks in a more general sense so I suppose, really, if I was anything, I was anti-racist.<sup>95</sup>

For a number of men the interweaving Rowbotham described between the immediacy of childhood experience; the towering figure of the father and the interconnecting patterns of the economy, family, class, and paternal politics conjured the distaste which their fathers' mild prejudice aroused.<sup>96</sup> They renewed this distaste in the course of retelling, suggesting the place perception of prejudice held in the early formation of adult identity, and the point at which the father lost some of his power and became a figure within a wider social world of class and politics. In Chris Rawlence's account images of the Royal Air Force hero fighter are disturbed by impressionistic memories of his father's anti-Semitic quips and ditties.<sup>97</sup> The anti-Semitism signifies a wider chasm between father and son: even as an adult Rawlence could not reconcile his father's anti-fascist stand against Sir Oswald Moseley on 1930s Cable Street with 'the Jew-hating rhyme' that 'had the city slickers

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Interview with David Lyddon, University of Keele, 15<sup>th</sup> July, 2009.

<sup>96</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, 'Revolt in Roundhay', in Liz Heron (ed.), *Truth, Dare or Promise*, p. 192.

<sup>97</sup> Chris Rawlence, 'Stokowski's Socks', in John Hoyland (ed.), *Fathers and Sons* (London, 1992), pp. 77-79.

guffawing in their youth'.<sup>98</sup> Ian Birchall remembered his father's jocular but pejorative references to Labour Party supporters. These he recalled in the same context as the mild anti-Semitism common amongst his parents' lower middle-class circles.<sup>99</sup> When his mother mentioned in passing one day her Jewish dentist, her friend exclaimed, 'I don't think I could have a Jew inside my mouth'. Her quip formed part of a plethora of diffuse racist ideas and subtle prejudices that could extend to anti-Irish as well as to anti-Catholic sentiments.<sup>100</sup> Birchall's inability to relate to his parents' middle-class world of trivialities and hypocrisies echoed the disjuncture proclaimed by McGrath, Lyddon and Rawlence. However, the distance between Birchall and his father was not a complete estrangement: 'My father, for someone who had left school at 15, was a very well read man. So I would occasionally discuss books with my father. He read Thomas Mann, for example. I suspect not many people in his situation had, so it wasn't a complete intellectual gulf.'<sup>101</sup> His recollections reflected the way in which distance from middle-class conservative values, material symbols, and associated patterns of behaviour could be simultaneously tempered by instances of emotional affection and a son's respect for a father's actions that impressed themselves into the consciences of perceptive, socially-aware young men.

Passerini noted of her '68 generation how the paternal figure nullified any notion of simple rupture between the Italian generations. Tension between continuity and discontinuity was borne out in the ambivalent quality of the father whose values were the source of conflict as well as the source of liberal renewal in their children, nourishing ideas of liberty, justice and possible rebellion.<sup>102</sup> She concluded that 'a patrimony of struggle', including 'models of deference,

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid, p. 79.

<sup>99</sup> Interview with Ian Birchall, London, 4<sup>th</sup> November, 2008.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. Rowbotham also talked about the 'passionate prejudice' which the lower middle-class families in the business world of Leeds reserved for Jews, though her parents' own 'steadfast refusal to countenance the anti-Semitism common among many of the people they knew' was her first lesson as a young child 'against accepting hearsay rather than the evidence of your own experience'. Sheila Rowbotham, 'Revolt in Roundhay', p. 192.

<sup>101</sup> Interview with Ian Birchall.

<sup>102</sup> Passerini, *Autobiography of a Generation*, p. 26.

acquiescence, imitation, and concealment' posited 'an internal conflict'.<sup>103</sup> In this study similar tensions underlined paternal relations. David Widgery identified the contradiction between his father's non-conformist politics and his authoritarian sense of discipline, that as an adolescent he found hard to reconcile with the surrounding social climate of leniency and indulgence. He admired his father's deep social conscience: his concern for attractive London County Council housing and the provision of art exhibitions for ordinary people. He always took an interest in his son's politics and the young medical student felt free to discuss his political feelings.<sup>104</sup>

Memories of sporadic affection or closeness between fathers and sons reflected wider shifts in patterns of parenting discernible during the 1940s and 1950s. By the second half of the twentieth-century popular newspapers were presenting 'a clear normative standard of fatherhood', encouraging men to be emotionally involved parents, even potential 'friends' or 'pals' to their children.<sup>105</sup> Social surveys focusing on fatherhood and the family confirmed that changes in the perceived norms of fatherhood were being reproduced in social patterns. Michael Young and Peter Willmott's study of Bethnal Green and Debden suggested that working-class fathers were more involved in the lives of their children than previous generations.<sup>106</sup> John and Elizabeth Newson's *Patterns of Infant Care* examined over 700 families in Nottingham and confirmed that increasing paternal investment in the family was evident in all social classes.<sup>107</sup> Conflict between father and son occurred because the middle- and lower middle-class father stood at a juncture in modern 'normative standards' of masculinity, half-way between the Victorian 'puritan and moralistic' values, and the reflexive selfhood embodied by the post-war son.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid, p. 27.

<sup>104</sup> Ronald Fraser interview with respondent C896/18, April 1984, 9<sup>th</sup> October, 1984, pp. 9-10, Ronald Fraser Interviews: 1968 – A Student Generation in Revolt, British Library Sound Archive.

<sup>105</sup> Laura King, 'Fathers' Emotional Relationships: Fatherhood in Britain, 1918-1960', Paper presented to the Social History Conference, University of Glasgow, 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2010, p. 4.

<sup>106</sup> Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (London, 1957), pp. 28-29. See also Stephen Brooke, 'Gender and Working Class Identity', pp. 773-95, and King, 'Fathers' Emotional Relationships', p. 4.

<sup>107</sup> John and Elizabeth Newson, *Patterns of Infant Care in an Urban Community* (Harmondsworth, 1965), pp. 133-134.

<sup>108</sup> Roper, 'Between Manliness and Masculinity', p. 360.

Occasionally a father left an imprint on his son through his absence. Martin Tompkinson spoke of the shadow that his father's death cast over his childhood world from the age of four:

Wrongly, but understandably, I got the notion [that] it was my fault he had died. It was never really explained to me, and it was almost as though my mother was ashamed of being a widow ... On the one hand I was a very active, sporty people pleaser. To all and intents and purposes I had a happy childhood, but that whole experience left me with a life view that the world isn't fair. It certainly made me an atheist. It also probably made me an overachiever in some senses and made me want to get on to terms with the world.<sup>109</sup>

When, from the age of nine, Tompkinson became aware of political events like the Suez crisis, he felt his father's influence through reading his Left Book Club specials still in the house.<sup>110</sup> Soon afterwards he became interested in Marx and subscribed to *Soviet Weekly*.<sup>111</sup> John Hoyland showed the powerful shaping presence his phantom father figure brought to him whilst growing up on the left. He had been killed in the war when Hoyland was three years old. Yet the legacy of his father's Quaker conscience and Communist Party activity impressed itself into his young head and heart. The heavy presence of his grandfather, Quaker, socialist and peace activist, provided the connection between politics and masculine authority, shaping his gravitation towards Youth CND: 'My grandfather, with his idealism and high mindedness, reinforced the powerful sense of duty – the duty to achieve great things, preferably for the sake of others – that my absent father had instilled in

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<sup>109</sup> Interview with Martin Tompkinson, London, 6 November, 2008.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. The Left Book Club was established in the spring of 1936 by the publisher Victor Gollancz under whose direction it developed into a leading left-wing political movement in 1930s Britain. Originally set up with the aim of 'equipping people to fight against war and Fascism', its educational orientation was reflected in the growth of discussion groups the Club generated as well as its sponsorship of mass rallies, political education classes, and summer schools. By the time it closed down in October 1948 the Left Book Club had issued 257 books together with additional pamphlets and leaflets. Members of the Club were mainly middle-class subscribers who ranged from the politically committed to the politically uncertain, and who encompassed Labourites, Communists, Liberals, unattached progressives, and even a few antifascist Conservatives. See Gordon Barrick Neavill, 'Gollancz and the Left Book Club', *The Library Quarterly*, July, 41:3, 1971, pp. 197-215. See also Paul Laity (ed.), *The Left Book Club Anthology* (London, 2001).

<sup>111</sup> Interview with Martin Tompkinson.

me.<sup>112</sup> Hoylands' oral and written accounts expressed conflicting feelings that his boy and adult selves struggled to reconcile over his father. As Quaker, Communist, anti-fascist activist and military hero, he represented figures to revere and emulate, but the man Hoyland strove to be presented a hard act to follow. Some of the anxieties he experienced during his years of activism in the 1970s echoed his boyhood insecurities about the need to live up to his father's legacy. He wrote, for example, how during the first two years of his time at Leighton Park, the same Quaker boarding school his father had attended in Reading, he 'sweated blood trying to live up to his expectations'.<sup>113</sup> In his oral account Hoyland spoke about this paternal presence in his adult life; as a revolutionary he felt quite often wanting: 'I felt in some ways that they [working-class men] were in touch with reality in a way that I wasn't.'<sup>114</sup> He questioned his level of intellectual understanding, and felt under pressure to invest this theory in a real connection with his image of the working-class man, to live up to his activist father.<sup>115</sup>

### Mothers and Daughters

The leitmotif of mother occupied a similar place in the narratives of women as the father held in men's accounts. The female image provided insight into the way in which common experiences of post-war femininity and girlhood, of contradictory images of what it meant to be a woman, crossed-over with specific experiences concerning class and politics, shaping the left consciousness of activist women. Stories of difficult relations with mothers told of young girls' social relationships to the wider post-war female realm and to the social values they encountered as young women. The place the mother held in respondents' girlhood landscapes resonated with other post-war female voices; those secondary, and often higher educated women, born in Britain between 1943 and 1951.<sup>116</sup>

During the 1970s the theme of mother-daughter relations began to be taken up for

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<sup>112</sup> Hoyland, 'The Man with the Bright Red Trousers', in Hoyland (ed.), *Fathers and Sons*, p. 150.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, p. 132.

<sup>114</sup> Interview with John Hoyland, London, 4<sup>th</sup> March, 2009.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> See, for example, Heron (ed.), *Truth or Dare*; Ingham, *Now We Are Thirty*, and Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*.

exploration by sociologists and psychologists alike. Key texts like Nancy Friday's *My Mother/My Self: The Daughter's Search for Identity* inspired feminist discussion of mothers and daughters within the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM).<sup>117</sup> The narratives collected in this study belong to the collective voice of young post-war women journeying to modern female selfhood. Their experiences informed a new model of female morality away from the conservative values embodied in their mothers.<sup>118</sup> What distinguished these left women's voices from those of the wider post-war female generation was alertness to and rejection of the contradictions and hypocrisies their mothers' lives seemed to represent. Attention to these women's interactions with their mothers reveals particular interpretations of the concepts of female social duty, femininity, and class, which they would carry into the left circles from the mid-1960s onwards. For women who formed identities within these circles the process of redefining moral values away from their mothers was not simply part of an unconscious cultural shift, expanding the boundaries of post-war female freedom. Rather the process entailed a more extensive shift in the way in which they came to inhabit their own class and left identities. Young left women came to establish an antagonistic relationship to wider social structures and became alert to political events which had at their heart acts of hypocrisy or injustice. At root of this new, specifically 'left' female morality stood the image of their mothers as the 'good woman', and the unhappiness she exuded. Mothers emitted powerful understandings of female 'goodness', which daughters came to see as bound up with the social patterns of class, and the meanings they took added to the body of contradictions inhabiting the wider social body of post-war femininity. As young girls many women were strongly attuned to the powerful subterranean channels of resentment running deep within their mothers; unspoken regrets for opportunities lost

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<sup>117</sup> Nancy Friday, *My Mother/My Self: The Daughter's Search for Identity* (3<sup>rd</sup> edn, London, 1994). In her study of the Women's Liberation Movement in Scotland Sarah Browne has highlighted the importance of the theme of mother-daughter relations in shaping an early feminist consciousness amongst the cohort of women she interviewed. The sharp contrast between their aspirations for their own lives and the stark reality of their mother's limited social horizons were formative in shaping their early female horizons in the 1960s. She also revealed the importance of this theme within the Scottish movement in the 1970s, as Scottish feminists reflected on the emerging sociological and psychological literature. Browne, 'The Women's Liberation Movement in Scotland', pp. 59-61.

<sup>118</sup> Lynn Abrams, 'Mothers and Daughters: Narrating a Path to the Individualised Self in Post-War Women's Lives', Paper presented to the Social History Society Conference, University of Glasgow, 30<sup>th</sup> March, 2010.

through their roles as wives and mothers. Class experience was integral to their mothers' frustrations because it was through submitting to dominant middle-class discourses of what marriage and motherhood entailed that they subordinated imagined identities and dreams of life outside the patterns of this class. Caroline Burn reflected on her mother's taste of freedom during the war when she had been evacuated to Kent as a physical education teacher. It marked an all too brief interlude disrupted by a 'good' middle-class marriage to Burn's father, whose technical profession in the film industry helped to bring the family a materially comfortable existence in Hampstead Heath.<sup>119</sup>

My mum was a very frustrated woman. She reckoned she should have married someone much more cultured than my Dad. He was a technical guy. He wasn't artistic ... We were both sent to grammar school and I was always cross with her because according to her beliefs we should have gone to a comprehensive school. We used to have rows all the time. "If you are a Communist why didn't you send us to a comprehensive school?" She wasn't really a Communist I don't think ... She was worthy, nice, dutiful, always helping other people and everything. My mum was always helping anyone in the street who needed help filling in forms or she was very active helping other households, so [there was] a huge sense of duty.<sup>120</sup>

The women's narratives suggest that daughters reacted against the contradictions of their mothers' lives to reinvest their social consciences away from the observances of class towards what they instead perceived to be genuine social causes. Burn reflected on her mother's imprint: 'We did very early stay at the grass roots, but it was very much an ought rather than a desire I felt. If we hadn't done all that stuff... It is a feeling I was driven by duty.'<sup>121</sup>

Prue Chamberlayne's conceptions of 'social duty' and 'goodness' were similarly formed within the dual framework of her rural middle-class upbringing and a Christianity she retained into

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<sup>119</sup> In her interviews with wartime women, Penny Summerfield characterised the 'ambivalence and restlessness' which featured in accounts of experiences of marriage and motherhood after the war. The change in 'the subject position' from the wartime 'independent young woman doing a vital job to serve her country' to the identity of 'young wife and mother' were difficult to reconcile. See Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives: Discourse and subjectivity in oral histories of the Second World War* (Manchester, 1998), p. 279.

<sup>120</sup> Interview with Caroline Burn and Gilda Peterson, Leeds, 5<sup>th</sup> June, 2009.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

her late teens. Her teenage diaries reveal an inward struggle as exposure to social injustice prompted a crisis of faith in her moral conservative values. On 20 September 1964 whilst teaching in Zimbabwe she reflected on the racial prejudice she observed daily in relation to her earlier European travels, wondering whether she would have had sufficient courage to denounce Nazi atrocities.<sup>122</sup> They illustrate how she, too, interpreted 'duty' within the class expectations of her gender. After having sexual relations with a boyfriend Chamberlayne became preoccupied with the question of how to adapt marriage to the building of a successful relationship, as she faced the social implications of pre-marital sex, the possibility she could be pregnant, and the inevitable disquiet the union would cause her parents.<sup>123</sup> She too expressed dislocation from her parents' class preoccupations and spoke of the antagonism her father's attitudes caused between the two of them; she took it for granted that she would vote Labour simply because the party represented the antithesis of his conservative values.<sup>124</sup> Yet, as long as she was immersed within that conservative middle-class environment she felt unable to escape its norms and expectations. She worried that her parents would discover that the boyfriend she had met in Bratislava was the son of a postman, and caught herself scrutinising his table manners.<sup>125</sup> Chamberlayne's adolescent diary, read together with her oral narrative, present a portrait of earnest social conscience intertwined with uncertain modern female selfhood. From one perspective her anxieties reflected the social and cultural transition teenage girls underwent from the early sixties in their attitudes towards religion and sexual morality: Chamberlayne stood at the edge of women's revolt against 'respectability' and the 'puritanism' that had marked the early-to-mid twentieth-century cultural climate determining sexual restraint.<sup>126</sup> Yet, her disquiet also betrayed the inner turmoil accompanying her emerging

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<sup>122</sup> The diary of Prue Chamberlayne, 20<sup>th</sup> September, 1964, p. 43, in the Private Archive of Prue Chamberlayne (hereafter known as PCA).

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, pp. 9-17.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, pp. 14-15.

<sup>126</sup> Callum G. Brown, 'Sex, Religion and the Single Woman, c. 1950-75: The Importance of a "Short" Sexual Revolution to the English Religious Crisis of the Sixties', *Twentieth-Century British History*, 22:2, 2011, pp. 189-215; Callum G. Brown, 'Women and Religion in Britain: The Autobiographical View of the Fifties and Sixties' in

socialist values, situated as she was in a family and community where her instincts stood at odds with prevailing conservative norms.

In contrast, other women spoke of the important role their mothers had played in presenting models of confident female social selfhood. The experience tempered the flavour of their early socialist consciences, investing them with a social surety which fed into an equally certain, yet critical engagement with the wider world. Judith Herren's mother was a doctor and a formative role model as a professional working mother. Herren's father had been killed in the war and she was raised in an all-female household where surgeries were held daily; she formed part of her mother's working life, learning early on to answer the telephone as a secretary. She explained how she grew up knowing what it meant to be a thinking woman: 'We were an all female household so I had an instinctive understanding of what it was to be a woman and to be independent, and to think for yourself, and manage money, and pay the mortgage and your income tax, and all that. It wasn't something that was foreign.'<sup>127</sup> The social assuredness Herren's mother imparted to her daughter fed into confident interactions with the male students she encountered within the New Left circle at Cambridge.<sup>128</sup>

Jane Storr explained how her mother's training as a Norland nanny<sup>129</sup> provided her daughter with a progressive upbringing, that in turn fostered an early independent spirit.<sup>130</sup> Storr's father was socialist in the values to which he adhered and encouraged the belief that she could be anything to which she set her mind. He accompanied such conviction with emphasis on education as a route to intellectual and social freedom, helping his daughter to develop a capacity for critical thinking that expressed itself in early awareness of a political world that imbued questions of social justice and

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Callum G. Brown, and Michael Snape (eds.), *Secularisation in the Christian World* (Farnham, 2010), pp. 159-73; McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p. 327.

<sup>127</sup> Interview with Judith Herren, London, 5<sup>th</sup> March, 2009.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> The Norland nanny was trained in and practised a system of child-centred care based on the premise that children should be raised in a loving and nurturing environment. Norland College was founded in 1892 by Emily Ward. See Penelope Stokes, *Norland: The Story of the First One Hundred Years* (The Norland College, 1992).

<sup>130</sup> Interview with Jane Storr, Leeds, 4<sup>th</sup> June, 2009.

equality. From the age of fourteen Storr began attending YS meetings in her home town of Hemel Hempstead, but it was CND, civil rights, and the Vietnam War which fired her social conscience and left her unable to ignore the moral atrocities the newspapers and television showed. Her mother clearly set the tone for Storr's self-assertion within this wider social and political world, but the social contradictions she embodied led to a tumultuous relationship between them. Although Storr's childhood was essentially happy, free to develop and explore, from around the age of eleven she began to see her mother through the critical eyes of early adolescence, and with an independence and curiosity that reflected her mother's interest in progressive childcare psychology.<sup>131</sup> To Storr her mother's devotion to her husband presented the very opposite image of womanhood to the ambitious, free-thinking model her father offered his daughter. She recalled:

My mum was totally enthralled by my father so deferred to him in terms of all intellectual opinions: how you ran the house, the money. They had on the surface a pretty idyllic marriage, never argued, but I think I was probably about eleven when I thought you know what? This I do not want... to have a marriage like this, and I had a very sort of tumultuous relationship with my mother through my adolescence based on the perception that she was trying to hold me back. I was trying to fly. I didn't know quite where I wanted to fly. She was a housewife and the smallness of her intellectual world was frightening to me. I wanted to challenge it.<sup>132</sup>

### **The Diasporic Imprint of the Family**

The structural place fathers and mothers held in men's and women's narratives of developing selfhood and socialist sensibilities reinforces the importance that transgenerational transmission played in the formation of critical, socialist consciousness. Children of immigrant or refugee parents

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<sup>131</sup> Storr mentioned that her mother was reading progressive child psychologists from the first half of the twentieth century, including Donald Winnicott, Bruno Bettelheim as well as the childrearing methods of Maria Montessori. The influence of these liberal educators on post-war children, who would later display radical sensibilities, is notable for the continuity they suggest about the imprint of pre-war radical tenets within the new left spaces of the 1960s and 1970s. Mica Nava's mother, Anna (Anike) Van der Voort, drew on the same broad group of child psychologists in the education of her own children. Nava recounted the profound impact of Theosophy on her mother in pre-war Holland, a movement which was connected to nineteenth-century socialism and Eastern spiritualism, and which had important links to the group of progressive childcare writers like Rudolf Steiner and Montessori. See Mica Nava, *Visceral Cosmopolitanism: Gender, Culture and the Normalisation of Difference* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 136-138.

<sup>132</sup> Interview with Jane Storr.

often inherited the emotional and psychological imprint of their elders' displacement. Repeated tales of children feeling marginalised, as 'others' or outsiders, portray difficult early relationships with the British cultures they encountered. Many individuals continued to identify themselves as children of refugees and told how their experiences had instilled in them an instinctive need to correct injustices they saw as young people.

Mica Nava's parents transmitted messages of social and cultural difference to their daughter throughout her cosmopolitan childhood. The imprint of their European radicalism expressed itself in her own instinctive gravitation to radical corners of post-war European cities from London to Paris. Nava's teenage identity of rebel and outsider seemed to be a specific response to her parents' half-hearted assimilation within the middle-class world of the Home Counties. She echoed their 'boldly expressed political views and emotions' that spoke of a 'need to protect others and correct injustice'.<sup>133</sup> Her mother, Anna (Ankie) Van der Voort, later Weisselberg, came from a bohemian family in Holland, her early years shaped by the Theosophical practices her parents had observed.<sup>134</sup> Nava's father, Marcel Weisselberg, had been part of a group of socialist Viennese 'non-Jewish Jews' who had been radicalised in interwar Vienna by the continental socialist and communist movements he observed, by Viennese municipal socialism, the rise of Austro-fascism and German Nazism as well as early experiences of displacement following his family's escape, in 1907, from anti-Semitic attacks in his birth province of Berlad, Bukovina, in the eastern provinces of the declining Austro-Hungarian Empire. In 1938 the couple had arrived in London with Nava's three year-old brother.<sup>135</sup> In the autobiographical chapter of *Visceral Cosmopolitanism: gender, culture and the normalisation of difference* Nava reflected on the ways in which the legacy of her parents' survival could be felt in the cultural observances of her post-war childhood. She thought that her parents' commitment to

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<sup>133</sup> Nava, *Visceral Cosmopolitanism*, pp. 138-139.

<sup>134</sup> From the latter decades of the nineteenth-century theosophists exercised considerable appeal to radical intellectual circles in the West influenced as much by its humanitarian, international sentiments as an alternative spiritual form to Christianity. See Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (Baltimore, 2001), Peter Washington, *Madame Blavatsky's Baboon: Theosophy and the Emergence of the Western Guru* (London, 1993).

<sup>135</sup> Nava, *Visceral Cosmopolitanism*, pp. 136-139.

maintaining an open house to aid and shelter those in difficulty was particularly symbolic of their identity as survivors<sup>136</sup>, an acknowledgement of their fortuitous escape.<sup>137</sup> She too felt the imprint of their displacement in the complex way in which their efforts to assimilate stood at odds with defiant displays of cosmopolitan political and educational principles. At one level Nava recalled serious attempts to learn to be 'English'. In the Home Counties, in a countryside area near to Newbury, assimilation entailed a particular kind of 'Englishness' and her mother successfully adopted the Home Counties' social nuances requisite to social acceptance. Anna Weisselberg was blonde, adept at languages and she dressed to fit in with the conservative fashions of the women in her circles.<sup>138</sup> She encouraged her children to fit in by taking up the country activities of pony clubs and gymkhanas, and expressed her aspiration for her daughter to read Politics, Philosophy and Economics at Oxford.<sup>139</sup> But in spite of her mother's best efforts, her parents' clung to their early radical roots and never wholly integrated. Neighbours stood amazed at the unconventional patterns of the Weisselberg house: over the years there proceeded a continuous flow of foreign visitors from Holland, Austria, and France, often non-Jewish Jews, whilst Nava's mother broke with the Counties' gender standards by standing for election as a Labour parish councillor.<sup>140</sup>

How many and what particular tenets of Nava's radical teenage sensibilities may be attributed to the social, cultural, and psychological dynamics of her parents' displacement remain at best speculative. At some unconscious level she may have taken up the mantle of the early bohemianism her mother had abandoned in her wish for social acceptance. Nava recalled: 'My aunt said [of Nava's mother] she was much more of a bohemian when she arrived in Vienna, and so she became more conservative, and I maybe took up the banner on her behalf.'<sup>141</sup> During the 1950s

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<sup>136</sup> For discussion of some of the complex social, cultural, and psychological ways in which the legacy of being a Holocaust survivor was observed by the second generation raised in post-war Britain, see Natasha Burchardt, 'Transgenerational Transmission in the Families of Holocaust Survivors in England', in Bertaux and Thompson (eds.), *International Yearbook of Oral History and Life Stories*, pp. 121-135.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*, p. 145.

<sup>138</sup> Interview with Mica Nava, London, 20<sup>th</sup> November, 2009.

<sup>139</sup> Interview with Mica Nava.

<sup>140</sup> Nava, *Visceral Cosmopolitanism*, pp. 143-149.

<sup>141</sup> Interview with Mica Nava.

Nava found herself drawn to France for its allure of the exotic, its cafes, wine, and not least its artistic and intellectual bohemians, notably Sartre, and Juliette Greco.<sup>142</sup> The young Nava seemed acutely conscious of the difference and ‘otherness’ that her parents’ progressive, free-thinking lifestyle signalled. Alongside the visual darkness of her European features, language was another marker of her Jewish heritage. Even during her years at the progressive school Bedales<sup>143</sup>, where she found a sense of belonging amidst a progressive middle-class English set; her linguistic talent became a hallmark of difference amongst her fellow class-mates.<sup>144</sup> Unsurprisingly, Nava felt more at ease amidst the artistic cosmopolitan enclaves she discovered as a fifties teenager in France and Britain. Already equipped with an instinctive empathy for those on the social margins, another signal of her later politics came when she discovered the injustices surrounding racial politics. She adopted a fiercely anti-colonial stance that saw her defend Algerian independence to her boyfriend, and she argued with her older soldier brother about the colonial war in Malaya. She even fantasized about joining the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, and, with surprising verve, when only sixteen or seventeen, took it upon herself to dismiss the decorator in her parents’ London flat after she heard him expressing derogatory views about the West Indian immigrants in the local Notting Hill area. Given the sense of belonging Nava had already discovered within marginal subcultures her travels to artistic quarters in New York and Mexico followed a logical pattern of progression.<sup>145</sup> Her childhood and adolescent background provided an appropriate setting for the home she found within the sixties underground and cosmopolitan enclaves when she returned to London with her Mexican husband José (Pepe) Nava.<sup>146</sup>

The role that Jewish identity played in activists’ early critical consciousness is a pertinent

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> In 1893 John Hadley Badley founded Bedales in Lindford, near Haywood Heath, on an alternative educational philosophy to the muscular Christianity prevailing in most nineteenth-century Victorian public schools. His belief was that ‘head, hand and heart’ formed the sound basis for growth and development. For details, see James Henderson, *Irregularly Bold: Study of Bedales School* (London, 1978) and Roy Wake and Pennie Denton, *Bedales School: The First Hundred Years* (London, 1993).

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, p. 146.

<sup>145</sup> Interview with Mica Nava.

<sup>146</sup> Nava, *Visceral Cosmopolitanism*, p. 149-151; Interview with Mica Nava.

question given the European origins of a number of respondents. Underlying the critiques their counterparts in the West German and North American student Left applied to the Vietnam War, the indelible imprint of the Holocaust signalled a refusal to countenance the past and present war crimes committed by their parents.<sup>147</sup> The spectre of Auschwitz haunted the young activists' moral frame of reference. Yet, for many British activists their Jewish identity remained an 'unarticulated and unsung' aspect of their young left selves until several decades later.<sup>148</sup> Victor Seidler has written of the enforced 'submission' of his Jewish origins he carried with shame as a boy: 'brutal' but unelaborated references from his family to Hitler's concentration camps were intended to silence a still precarious identity of 'other'.<sup>149</sup> This is not to argue that the Jewish heritage of the post-war child remained dormant in their relationships with the surrounding world. To be a Jew in post-war Britain was not an invitation to social acceptance. The anti-Jewish riots in a number of British cities in 1947 confirmed that the anti-Semitism, a strong feature of the anti-alien discourse of the first quarter of the century, had survived the war.<sup>150</sup> The 'passionate prejudice' that Birchall and

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<sup>147</sup> In 1966 a group of radicals graffitied the walls of Dachau with the slogan: 'Vietnam is the Auschwitz of America'. See Tony Judt, *PostWar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London, 2005), p. 419. For further details of the anti-Nazi legacy in the West German student movement, see Nick Thomas, *Protest Movements in 1960s West Germany: A Social History of Dissent and Democracy* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 69-72. See also Wolfgang Kraushaar, 'Hitler's Children? The German 1968 Movement in the Shadow of the Nazi Past', in Ingo Cornils and Sarah Waters, (eds.), *Memories of 1968: International Perspectives* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 79-102; Claus Leggewie, 'A Laboratory of Postindustrial Society: Reassessing the 1960s in Germany' in Fink et al., (eds.), *1968*, pp. 285-297; Wilfred Mausbach, 'America's Vietnam in Germany – Germany in America's Vietnam: On the Relocation of Spaces and the Appropriation of History', in Davis et al. (eds.), *Changing the World, Changing Oneself*, pp. 41-62; Wilfred Mausbach, "'Burn Warehouse, Burn!" Modernity, Counterculture, and the Vietnam War in West Germany', in Axel Schildt and Detlef Siegfried (eds.), *Between Marx and Coca-Cola: Youth Cultures in Changing European Societies, 1960-1980* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 175-202. For details of the Jewish legacy in the American SDS movement, see Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (London, 1993), p. 12.

<sup>148</sup> Jenny Bourne, 'Homelands of the Mind: Jewish Feminism and Identity Politics' in *Jewish Feminism and Identity Politics, Race & Class*, Vol. xxxix, 1987, p. 4, cited in Lynne Segal, *Making Trouble*, p. 213. Segal commented on the prominence of Jewish women in her libertarian, socialist and feminist circles, especially in the women's movement in the 1970s. She noted how 'mostly secular, often socialist, we were rarely vocal "as Jews"'. Segal is notable as one of many interviewees who are now active supporters of the Jews for Justice for Palestinians (JFJFP) campaign.

<sup>149</sup> Victor Seidler, *Rediscovering Masculinity: Reason, Language and Sexuality* (London, 1989), p. 29.

<sup>150</sup> Wendy Webster, 'Britain and the Refugees of Europe 1939-50', in Louise Ryan and Wendy Webster (ed.), *Gendering Migration: Masculinity, Femininity and Ethnicity in Post-War Britain* (Aldershot, 2008), p. 48. For further details of anti-Semitism and the position of Jews in post-war Britain, see Tony Kushner, 'Anti-semitism and Austerity: The August 1947 Riots in Britain', in Panikos Panayi (ed.), *Racial Violence in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London, 1996), pp. 149-168, and Tony Kushner, 'Remembering to Forget: Racism and Anti-racism in Postwar Britain', in Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus (eds.), *Modernity, Culture and 'the Jew'* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 226-242.

Rowbotham encountered in the lower middle-class, small business circles of Leeds and West Yorkshire testified to this.<sup>151</sup> Hence for children of Jewish refugees growing up in the 1950s the sense of living on the margins derived often from that same intuitive, instinctive empathy for their parents' struggles to assimilate.

Sabby Sagall was born in September 1937 to the parents of Russian Jewish refugees who had fled to Britain in the mid-1930s. As a child he recalled being distinctly conscious of what his 'Jewishness' represented in terms of his identity and place within British society.<sup>152</sup> Part of his insecurity derived from his father's unstable business, acting as an agent for British companies selling capital goods to African nations.<sup>153</sup> However, Sagall also explained that his childhood sense of the world as an unstable place derived from his parents' precarious escape prior to his birth:

When the Nazis took over Danzig ... my father's family went to Brussels, and my mother's family dispersed; she came to London, and my parents met in London in the mid-thirties. I think growing up I had a sense of an unstable world. I had a sense of being an outsider and I think this gave me the opportunity to adopt a more critical stance not just of British society, but of the world as a whole. My parents really were right-wing liberals and, though not religious Jews, they were conscious of their Jewishness, which expressed itself in Zionism.<sup>154</sup>

Zionism was the first political response of certain Jewish respondents to this part of their identity. John Rose was born into a middle-class Jewish family in Harrogate, West Yorkshire. Apart from the influence of his brother, who was active in CND, the first critical stance he remembered adopting derived from his Jewish heritage. A trip to Israel in 1966 further strengthened the Zionist convictions he derived from his father.<sup>155</sup> Richard Kuper was one of a number of Jewish South African students at the LSE who would go on to become prominent Socialist Society and IS activists. As a teenager in

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<sup>151</sup> Rowbotham, 'Revolt in Roundhay', p. 192.

<sup>152</sup> Interview with Sabby Sagall, London, 12<sup>th</sup> March, 2009.

<sup>153</sup> In her oral histories of the everyday experiences of migration and post-migration in post-war Leicester, Kathy Burrell discovered that economic insecurity and long working hours were especially important themes for Polish, Italian and Greek Cypriot families moving to Britain; the second generation, like Sagall, were often very aware of the hardship their parents had suffered, and continued to face. See Kathy Burrell, *Moving Lives: Narratives of Nation and Migration among Europeans in Post-War Britain* (Aldershot, 2006), pp. 56-58.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Interview with John Rose, London, 30<sup>th</sup> October, 2008.

South Africa Zionism provided him with an apparent answer to the problems of South Africa as well as his first taste of political activism in a Zionist and socialist youth movement.<sup>156</sup>

The legacy of persecution which first generation migrants transferred to their children sometimes shaped an early and stridently anti-Communist stance. Even before they became aware of the political implications of events surrounding 1956, and later the Prague Spring of 1968, the anti-Communist tenets within their early socialist identities derived from instinctive responses to stories of family experiences in the Soviet satellite states. Lee Comer's mother was a Czech Jew who had escaped to Britain as a sixteen year-old girl, leaving her sister in Prague to complete her education. Comer compared the restrictions the Cold War climate created for her family in Prague with the civil constraints she faced as a CND activist in London: 'We travelled there and she came over to see us but under such constant supervision; it was pretty horrible. She had constantly to report to the police, and when we went there we knew we were being followed, so there I was on the one hand being followed by the Czech secret police, and on the other side being followed by MI5, and I was no threat to anybody.'<sup>157</sup> Anna Paczuska recounted a similar revulsion for the brutal repression Communism wrought upon her Polish family. Her parents had fought with the Polish Free Forces during the war and prior to that her mother had been interned in the prisoner camps in Russia and Poland. Like many other Poles they fled to Britain to escape a Communist controlled Poland.<sup>158</sup> As a young girl Paczuska remembered:

My mum and Dad always talked about Britain as a land of opportunity, my mum in particular. They saw what was happening in Poland as vicious and nasty, which it was, and it kind of left an impact on me growing up that Communism was something very nasty, and this was reinforced by letters arriving from my grandparents with

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<sup>156</sup> Interview with Richard Kuper, London, 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2009.

<sup>157</sup> Interview with Lee Comer, Leeds, 3<sup>rd</sup> June, 2009.

<sup>158</sup> Polish migration to Britain peaked in 1951 at a figure of 162, 339, rising from 4462 in 1931. Military and civilian displacement after the Second World War transformed the Polish migrant population from a previously largely Jewish presence to a specifically Polish one. See Burrell, *Moving Lives*, p. 5.

bits censored and various bits cut out of them and squashed through ... There were stories of people who disappeared or were never heard of again, of poverty, well, of repression and oppression at every level.<sup>159</sup>

Indirect exposure to the Jewish heritage of 'other' was also influential in shaping the stridently anti-racist tenets of activists' early moral and political framework. Many Communist Party members had Jewish roots. Steve Jefferys recounted that at least half of his peer group in the Highgate area of London provided him with an important Jewish intellectual influence.<sup>160</sup> Anti-racist values were often transmitted through liberal minded parents. The 'anti-Fascist crucible' of Jimmy Light's politics impressed itself strongly upon his son, Bob Light. Fervently anti-racist, Light characterised his father as being in this respect quite unusual for an East End dock worker:<sup>161</sup> he had grown up in Bethnal Green in the 1930s when he and his wife had made an explicit decision to support the Left. Light distinctly recounted one notable incident in which his father had profoundly impressed upon him the need to counter racial prejudice:

My Dad and I used to go the Lane ... Petticote Lane is an open street market which runs on a Sunday and that was also the period of the 1950s when Mosley was trying to revive the British Union of Fascists ... I can remember one Sunday; we must have come on the fringes of one of the Fascist meetings, and we got there and the next thing I know my Dad is thumping people, and fighting, and rolling on the ground, and I didn't know what to do. I was trapped between being a child and a man, a couple of years later I would probably have joined in, but at that stage I was embarrassed and frightened.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Interview with Anna Paczuska, London, 4<sup>th</sup> January, 2010.

<sup>160</sup> Interview with Steve Jeffreys.

<sup>161</sup> According to Fred Lindop London dockers were 'probably more prejudiced than other dockers', situated, as they were, in an area of constant immigration and a higher than average percentage of unskilled work, which rendered them more sympathetic to racist views. See Fred Lindop, 'Unofficial Militancy in the Royal Group of Docks 1945-67', *Oral History Journal*, 11: 2, 1983, p. 30.

<sup>162</sup> Interview with Bob Light. In the 1930s London's East End, an area with a strong Jewish and East European immigrant population, had formed the core support base for Sir Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists. By the 1950s the East End had also absorbed the greatest concentration of immigrants coming into Britain from commonwealth nations such as the West Indies, making it the natural location for Mosley to attempt to revive anti-immigrant sentiment in the area. For further details, see Kushner, 'Remembering to Forget', pp. See also Dave Renton, *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Britain in the 1940s* (Basingstoke, 2000); Matthew Worley, *Oswald Mosley and the New Party* (London, 2010).

On the cusp of manhood, the moment stood out for Light because of the painful, embarrassed feelings it still evoked, signifying the chasm between childhood helplessness and adult responsibility. Yet, in relation to his political consciousness the memory was also significant because it resonated with the need to counter prejudice and hatred. These were powerful lessons that would later feed into Light's left identity when in 1967 he became involved with Young Socialist politics. He was one of a core of individuals who joined IS through prior activity in the Hackney YS, a branch suffused with the working-class Jewish culture of the area. Since anti-fascism still prevailed in the area, especially in the local labour movement, local left groups eagerly championed anti-racist causes when they arose.<sup>163</sup> Hackney also had a heavy West Indian population and so it was no coincidence that in the mid-1960s the branch threw itself into fighting 'Rachmanism' and the effects of the Crossman Housing Act.<sup>164</sup>

### **A Secular Youth? The Role of Religion and Left Sensibility**

When situated against wider historiographical debates about post-war continuity and change the respondents' narratives raise challenging questions about the influence of the established Anglican faith on this cohort of sixties youth. The accounts engage directly with ongoing debates about the pace of post-war British secularisation from the mid-1950s onwards.<sup>165</sup> More directly, the narratives offer unique insight into the particular imprint which cultural patterns of Anglicanism left on young

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<sup>163</sup> Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream*, p. 90.

<sup>164</sup> Interview with Fred Lindop, Wareham, 13<sup>th</sup> January, 2009. For details of Rachmanism, housing crisis and rent reform in the 1960s, see Keith Banting, *Poverty, Politics and Policy: Britain in the 1960s* (London, 1979), pp. 14-27. See also John Davis, 'Rents and Race in 1960s London: New Light on Rachmanism', *Twentieth Century British History*, 12:1, 2001, pp. 69-92.

<sup>165</sup> For details of this historiographical debate, which mirrored contemporary discussions of the status of Christianity in post-war British society, see Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000* (London, 2001), pp.170-187; Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-century Britain* (Harlow, 2006); Callum G. Brown, 'Secularisation, the Growth of Militancy and the Spiritual Revolution: Religious Change and Gender Power in Britain 1901-2000', *Historical Research*, 80, 2007, pp. 393-418; Brown, 'Sex, Religion, and the Single Woman, c. 1950-75', pp. 189-215; Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing Without Belonging* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 29-44; Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity 1920-1985* (London, 1986), pp. 491-504; Arthur Marwick, *British Society since 1945* (4<sup>th</sup> edn London, 2003), p. 72; McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, pp. 294-295; Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford, 2007); Dominic Sandbrook, *White Heat: A History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties* (London, 2006), pp. 458-467.

individuals who were often highly inquisitive, morally attuned, and, not least, highly perceptive to acts of apparent hypocrisy and injustice. At one level the stridency with which a number of individuals came to reject the middle-class Anglicanism of their parents and schools seems to support Callum G. Brown's conclusions that the post-war period witnessed a rejection of institutional expressions of Christianity along with the beginning of an accelerated decline in faith itself both as a means with which to interpret the world and to provide a moral compass for one's views.<sup>166</sup> But Christian faith amongst young people who went on to be highly politicised cannot so easily be categorised into social patterns of straightforward decline and retreat, complicated as it was by issues of class, politics, and social conscience. Rejecting the middle-class Anglicanism of their parents and schools was often the earliest way in which they came to position themselves against the prevailing orthodoxies of middle-class culture and social practice. The culture of Anglicanism continued to suffuse patterns of post-war middle-class life even if, by the early sixties, the practice of weekly church attendance was in decline.<sup>167</sup> Willmott and Young revealed that in the London suburb of Woodford, the local church was in some aspects 'a quintessential middle-class club, a way of meeting new neighbours and mixing with the right sort'.<sup>168</sup> For Sheila Rowbotham 'religion was the first vehicle for general thoughts about existence'.<sup>169</sup> Anglican ways seemed to her altogether at odds. Her school minister explained that you did not challenge God. Grace had to be received, goodness itself was not enough. To the inquisitive and questioning Rowbotham his explanation made no sense. When she decided that she wanted to be received as a Methodist this decision was too much for her Tory father whose quite violent response and 'sudden rush of Anglican devotion' at once frightened and puzzled her. He had never taken her to an Anglican church; neither did he read the Bible. The impact of middle-class observance on conscience suddenly became clearer after Rowbotham's mother explained that in her father's South Yorkshire village Methodists had been

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<sup>166</sup> Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, p. 188.

<sup>167</sup> Marwick, *British Society Since 1945*, p. 72

<sup>168</sup> Peter Willmott and Michael Young, *Family and Class in a London Suburb* (London, 1960), pp. 82-83, cited in Dominic Sandbrook, *White Heat: A History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties* (London, 2006), pp. 463-464.

<sup>169</sup> Rowbotham, 'Revolt in Roundhay', p. 199.

looked down upon.<sup>170</sup> Ian Birchall's own encounters with Yorkshire's middle-class hypocrisy in his home town of Shipley, in West Riding, confirm the way in which rejection of childhood faith was often an expression of disjuncture with the established social and cultural patterns of the middle-class home and school. He was raised with the dominant presence of his mother's Catholicism. Her father had been a Methodist preacher and whilst an undergraduate Birchall considered himself a Christian socialist. His decision to reject his faith came after various incidents and anecdotes that informed his increasing distaste for the meaningless, often hypocritical trappings of middle-class status:

I was still going to church for the first couple of years I was at Oxford, but I was more and more struck that actually so-called religious people didn't take seriously what they supposedly believed in. I mean a thing, for example, that sticks with me ... I had read the bible right through, but I had read things, for example, where Jesus says it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. I loved that. I thought let all the rich go to hell, let's watch them fry, and I started quoting this to people in my home town.<sup>171</sup>

Though it took time, the experience of meeting people in the Oxford Labour Club who seemed 'to be actually putting their money where their mouth was', doing vast amounts of political activity with no prospect of reward, confirmed to Birchall that his conscience fitted most comfortably with socialism without the moral taint of Christianity alongside it.<sup>172</sup>

Other interviewees found the cultural and spiritual underpinnings of middle-class upbringing harder to disaggregate from their moral framework of values and beliefs. As previously discussed, Prue Chamberlayne revealed a social conscience highly tempered by the lingering Christianity of her rural middle-class background. The letters of her early twenties suggest that the Christian moral compass of childhood and adolescence was not always so easily discarded. Opposition to her parents' insistence on "'good" standards', to a morality they equated with education and social

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid, p. 200.

<sup>171</sup> Interview with Ian Birchall.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

status, was complicated by the enduring Christianity which this middle-class upbringing had inculcated within her. By early adulthood she sought to resolve the two conflicting poles of her moral, intellectual and spiritual core: Christianity and Marxism. She consigned each body of thought to a separate sphere. In a letter to a friend in May 1970 she explained her understanding that Christianity taught one how to live on a personal level and Marxism on a social level. She saw the two spheres existing 'hand-in-hand'. Marxism, she felt, could complement Christianity in helping people to be 'good'. The 'poor', she perceived, were often morally better, able to attain standards of 'goodness' over and above the 'rich'.<sup>173</sup> Later chapters will show how the concepts of social duty imprinted within young men and women in home and school retained a powerful hold over activists' moral framework and social behaviour.

For some middle-class children political conscience became indelibly imprinted by the humanitarian values of a very middle-class culture whose hypocrisies and class-ridden anxieties they opposed. Sally Alexander revealed how moral sentiment could derive from a child's sensitivity to their parents' own childhood deprivation. Like Chamberlayne, Alexander constantly pushed the boundaries of obedience, questioning, in particular, her father's moral views on contemporary issues like the legalisation of homosexuality and the abolition of hanging.<sup>174</sup> Yet she also found herself struck by a need to atone for her material good fortune that her father's past suffering merited. At times the desire to be good expressed itself in an almost religious conviction, as she contemplated reading the New Testament.<sup>175</sup>

### **Post-War Secondary Education and the Scholarship Boy and Girl**

Childhood encounters with Anglicanism illuminate the enquiring, questioning mindset that shaped defiant relationships between activists and their social worlds. Christianity along with parental and school authority invariably stood within youngsters' most immediate frame of reference,

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<sup>173</sup> Letter from Prue Chamberlayne to Lynda, 12<sup>th</sup> May, 1970, in PCA.

<sup>174</sup> Interview with Sally Alexander, London, 17<sup>th</sup> November, 2010.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

determining a common code of ethics and defining standards of behaviour. The question of how established religion impacted on these school children raises wider questions about post-war patterns of social continuity and rupture in the context of activists' experiences in the left terrain. Respondents' accounts reveal contradictory experiences about the social, cultural and psychological imprint which the educational establishment made on their framework of values and social relationships. The images of the scholarship boy and girl haunted the activist landscape of the late 1960s and 1970s, offering various accounts of how intellectual identity tempered the activist experience, and the way in which the imprint of this 'psychic structure' could be felt within the various left milieux.<sup>176</sup> The identity of the intellectual activist raises crucial questions about men and women's engagement with political and social issues, post-war cultural life as well as political and social theories within a wider milieu beyond the home. Whilst for many interviewees, how and why they first came to connect to Marx occurred in early adulthood, often at university, secondary school provided the early groundwork, sowing the seeds of interest in politics, culture and society.

The secondary school stood out as a prominent site for the shaping of social conscience, fostering critical enquiry about contemporary social and political issues, and introducing interviewees into a milieu of children who shared radical sensibilities over class, culture and politics. For the post-war child positioning oneself against the Anglicanism of the school establishment served as a symbolic gesture to counter the prevailing middle-class social practices and hypocrisies embedded within it. It meant implicitly defining oneself as 'other' against the prevailing norms. Unsurprisingly, the atheism of many Communist Party children brought them into direct conflict with school authorities. James Hinton's father was an entomologist, academic and Communist; 'atheism was in the blood'. At Colston Boy's School, in Bristol, sixteen-year old Hinton 'took off' intellectually and 'began arguing with this vicar about God because I got hold of Bertrand Russell's *Western Philosophy*, and his book on power and atheism was crucial'.<sup>177</sup> For Mike McGrath refusal to kneel

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<sup>176</sup> Carolyn Steedman, 'Writing the Self: The End of the Scholarship Girl', in Jim McGuigan (ed.), *Cultural Methodologies* (London, 1997), p. 108.

<sup>177</sup> Interview with James Hinton, University of Warwick, Coventry, 20<sup>th</sup> November, 2008.

for Sunday prayers served as one possible every day act of resistance that occurred just beneath the surface, and spoke less of religious conscience than of the need to express an individual identity away from the established mould of the public school boy as a state servant.<sup>178</sup>

However, the narratives also showed the capacity of the Anglican grammar school to foster powerful concepts of social duty amongst their pupils. In this respect activists' expressed need to engage socially and politically at the grass-roots found powerful connection with wartime concepts of civic duty.<sup>179</sup> The role of mothers has already been identified in fostering enduring notions of goodness and duty amongst young women, but many female respondents also highlighted the powerful influence of their female teachers and school establishments in nurturing instincts of social conscience. In contrast to accounts which stressed strong reactions against school Anglicanism, others suggest the endurance of this Anglican spirit by the way in which messages of social justice became embedded within respondents' young minds. It is possible to view this prevailing spirit as part of a longer Christian tradition shaping concepts of female civic virtue and women's active presence in the public sphere that saw Victorian Christian women practising evangelical social philanthropy.<sup>180</sup> Gilda Peterson recalled the strong ethos of social duty that had prevailed throughout her Hartlepool grammar school where the importance of serving one's community was reinforced through the heroic Edwardian figures after whom each house was named; she belonged to Nurse Cavell House.<sup>181</sup> This message of service was reinforced through outside organisations that formed part of her daily childhood pattern and inculcated the tenets of the established faith. Church, Sunday school, and the Girl Guides, all carried the message of service, albeit to God and the

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<sup>178</sup> Interview with Mike McGrath.

<sup>179</sup> Matthew Grant's research on the 'atomic citizen' has shown that in post-war Britain the government continued to build upon wartime concepts of social citizenship to stress the importance of service, duty and self-sacrifice in an effort to raise support for Cold War voluntary defence services. See Matthew Grant, 'Defining the atomic citizen: activism, apathy and cold war voluntary service in Britain', Paper presented to the Social History Society Conference, University of Glasgow, 1 April, 2010; Matthew Grant, *After the Bomb: Civil Defence and Nuclear War* (Basingstoke, 2010).

<sup>180</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London, 1987); Eleanor Gordon and Gwyneth Nair, *Public Lives: Women, Family and Society in Victorian Britain* (New Haven, 2003); Claire Midgely, *Feminism and Empire: Women Activists in Imperial Britain, 1790-1865* (London, 2007).

<sup>181</sup> Interview with Gilda Peterson, Leeds, 4<sup>th</sup> June, 2009.

Queen, whilst stories of missionaries in Africa and China provided Gilda with a glimpse of a world beyond Hartlepool.<sup>182</sup> The importance of subordinating one's own individual sense of self to the needs of a wider community was a feature Mary Evans highlighted in her own account of a 1950s girls' grammar school.<sup>183</sup> The powerful sense of duty messages of self-sacrifice and service embedded within some young women may be explained by the dominant position the grammar school held within many towns and cities in British society in the twenty years after the war.<sup>184</sup> Joan Bakewell attended Stockport High School for Girls for seven years up to 1951, and confirmed the grammar school's capacity to set the moral as well as the intellectual standards of the community, not only, but especially among the middle-class:

I was overwhelmed by a body of women resolved to shape and instruct me in their shared world-view. They were a cohort of the army of self-improvement, steeped in the same entrenched, spinsterly values of learning, duty and obedience ... The school motto set the high-minded tone:

Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,

These three alone lead life to sovereign power.<sup>185</sup>

Despite the predominant Anglican spirit suffusing post-war education, Quakerism and Methodism imbued other respondents with a similarly deep social and moral conscience. 'Methodism', Edward Thompson once remarked to Rowbotham, 'gives you this terrible sense of responsibility'.<sup>186</sup> Hilary Wainwright attended Quaker Mount Girls School in York. Her Methodist father had worked in the Friends Ambulance Unit during the war and through them he had met many Quakers. Impressed by

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Mary Evans, *A Good School: Life at a Girl's Grammar School in the 1950s* (London, 1991), p. 56.

<sup>184</sup> David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain 1945-51* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn. London, 2008), p. 566.

<sup>185</sup> Joan Bakewell, *The Centre of the Bed: An Autobiography* (London 2003), p.62, cited in Kynaston, *Austerity Britain*, p. 566.

<sup>186</sup> Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream*, p. 139; Sheila Rowbotham, 'E. P. Thompson: A Life of Radical Dissent', *New Society*, 3 September, 1993, p. 15. In *The Making of the English Working Class* Thompson demonstrated the cultural contribution of Methodism to expressions of radical political dissent. He argued that 'the Methodist political rebel carried through into his radical or revolutionary activity a profound moral earnestness, a sense of righteousness and of "calling" ... a high degree of personal responsibility'. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (3<sup>rd</sup> edn, London, 1980), p. 433.

many of the Quaker values, he had also learned that traditionally they provided a good education he wished his daughter to attain. Wainwright recalled how the school's ethos of social service encouraged her and fellow pupils to take an interest in life outside of the school, attending, for example, the many student Christian meetings held in York against the Vietnam War.<sup>187</sup>

Radical dissent holds an important tradition in British society for challenging the established order, and for children attending Quaker and Methodist schools the 'tolerant and inquiring Christianity' communicated by these Churches came to be felt through the spirit of independent intellectual thought as well as through social conscience.<sup>188</sup> Individual teachers were often crucial in nurturing this spirit of enquiry. Rowbotham's history teacher, Olga Wilkinson, came from an East Yorkshire Methodist farming family. Her 'scepticism and humanistic tolerance' ingrained in the young Rowbotham 'the habit of inquiring where things had come from; why someone expressed a particular opinion; why people came to think the way they did', in sum total, the intellectual tools to facilitate active engagement on a social and political level.<sup>189</sup>

However, Methodism alone cannot account for the spirit of intellectual and social aspiration Wilkinson nurtured in her pupil. She was one of many female teachers respondents mentioned as being influential in developing their understanding of the educative dimension of female social duty. Within their grammar and independent secondary schools these later active and left thinking women were often taught by women who embedded in them the belief that education offered a route to female social advancement. Many of these female teachers had gone on to university in the 1920s and 1930s where they had learned to fight hard to gain intellectual acceptance in deeply patriarchal institutions. Since the British Home Civil Service had only abolished the marriage disqualification for women in 1948, and since the middle-class social assumption still governed grammar schools that marriage and teaching were not compatible, for many of the teachers the female educational community filled their lives with the meaning marriages and their own children

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<sup>187</sup> Interview with Hilary Wainwright, London, 26<sup>th</sup> November, 2009.

<sup>188</sup> Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream*, p. 139.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9.

might otherwise have done.<sup>190</sup> As a result they translated fierce aspirations to their surrogate female offspring, leaving them in no doubt that the price of post-war female privilege was duty, and that theirs was to invest themselves in their studies, and in due course to go out into the world and to achieve as women.

These concepts of social duty that teachers impressed upon female pupils may well have been partly conditioned by the legacy of women's wartime engagement. James Hinton views middle-class women's wartime voluntary social work as crucial for preserving middle-class values and authority against 'the potentially egalitarian and democratizing impact of the war'.<sup>191</sup> Such values he sees represented by confident middle-class women who believed that 'social leadership was the duty they owed to those less privileged than themselves.'<sup>192</sup> The enduring psychic imprint that messages of female social duty left on young activist women are notable because of the social and psychic challenges they would face in the late 1960s and 1970s when they began to reformulate longstanding concepts of female freedom in the public and private spheres of their left milieu. The moral and social crisis of conscience which the adolescent Chamberlayne displayed over a pre-marital sexual encounter prefigured some of the struggles left women would later face in their efforts to reconcile the social and cultural conditioning of their gender and class with their desire to experiment with new concepts of female social and political selfhood.

Despite the social and psychological ruptures that many women identified between their young selves and their mothers, the role of their female teachers suggests equally powerful, if subterranean points of continuity between the two generations of women. Both Caroline Burn and Gilda Peterson spoke with reverence of inspirational female teachers who helped them to foster visions of futures that would take them beyond the constrictions of their mothers' lives.<sup>193</sup> At Burn's

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<sup>190</sup> Evans, *A Good School*, p. 56.

<sup>191</sup> James Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives: Mass Observation and the Making of the Modern Self* (Oxford, 2010), p. 51.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid*, p. 52. See also James Hinton, *Women, Social Leadership and the Second World War: Continuities of Class* (Oxford, 2002).

<sup>193</sup> Interview with Caroline Burn and Gilda Peterson. In Ronald Fraser's 1968 study female respondents also frequently referred to the influential role female teachers played in encouraging their pupils to foster liberal

north London all-girls' grammar school, founder, Frances Buss had left a powerful legacy of female educational excellence to live up to.<sup>194</sup> She particularly remembered her English teacher, Carole Hanley, along with Margot Heinemann, who was active in the same Communist Party circles as Burn's parents. Both women had impressed upon the girls aspirations to 'go out and live boldly in the world'.<sup>195</sup> In spiritual and intellectual terms the impressive voices of women like Hanley and Heinemann penetrated the often defiant restlessness of fifties female adolescence. Some female teachers played an active role in encouraging young women to think critically not simply about political issues, but about influential Marxist traditions of thought. Val Graham vividly recalled her surprise when one of her female teachers surreptitiously handed her a copy of *Das Kapital*, perhaps sensing that her female pupil showed signs of being curious about politics and debating social issues. Graham remembered that 'they really impressed me, not as a kind of pitiful "half women". You know, because some people used to make fun of them because they weren't married. They didn't strike me like that. They struck me very differently, and one of the lesbian couple had very strongly anti-racist views, and she did talk to us about things like that, so I was genuinely influenced.'<sup>196</sup>

Alongside the threads of continuity, post-war female education betrayed glaring contradictions besetting female identity. Despite the sense of open possibilities informing female secondary education, young women were left in no doubt that social freedom carried a price. Ruptures with the inter-war generation informed the way in which young left women negotiated post-war social and political channels of authority, and occurred as female adolescents came into conflict with the perceived hypocrisies of their school establishments. Wainwright highlighted the tension between on the one hand the rhetoric of teachers who encouraged pupils to invest their

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inquiring minds. One respondent recalled her aspirations to emulate her history teacher, who, in her eyes embodied a traditional model of feminism that championed female professional life. See Ronald Fraser interview with respondent C896/03, 4<sup>th</sup> April, 1984, p. 24, Ronald Fraser Interviews: 1968 – A Student Generation in Revolt, British Library Sound Archive. See also Mary Ingham, *Now We Are Thirty* (London, 1981), p. 52.

<sup>194</sup> In 1850 Frances Buss became the first headmistress of the North London Collegiate School, based on the private school her mother had established in Kentish Town in 1845. See *The North London Collegiate School, 1850-1950: A Hundred Years of Girls Education* (Oxford, 1950).

<sup>195</sup> Interview with Caroline Burn and Gilda Peterson.

<sup>196</sup> Interview with Val Graham.

social consciences in worthwhile social and political causes outside the school, and on the other the social restrictions which hampered the girls' experience of participating in campaigns against the Vietnam War.<sup>197</sup> Restrictions on who they could talk to after meetings and the sort of young men they were permitted to share coffee with betrayed the contradictions between the apparent openness with which the school authorities encouraged them to fulfil their role as active citizens, and the petty restrictions that reminded them of their childlike status. However, Wainwright revealed that in a climate of burgeoning, energetic youth culture, messages of social citizenship that supported the increasing social presence and consumer power of British youth were hard to ignore in the face of illogical rules over coats and shoes. As a result the forms of resistance she employed against school authority ranged from passive acts of defiance to outright displays of support for friends threatened with expulsion after accompanying boys to coffee bars or over suspicions of drug-taking.<sup>198</sup>

For certain working-class children grammar schools played an important role in raising awareness of class or reinforcing early sensations concerning class status. Respondents' testimonies highlight the particular place post-war educational policies held in their early social and political experiences, as it was often the discovery of likeminded youngsters from similar social backgrounds that facilitated political engagement prior to university. By the time Harold Wilson became Labour Prime Minister in 1964 Rab Butler's system of grammar schools, secondary moderns and selection through the eleven-plus had long been subject to profound criticism. As early as 1951 Hilde Himmelweit's survey of the socio-economic reality of the 1944 Education Act revealed that in the four grammar schools she sampled in the Greater London area 'children from lower working-class homes, despite their numerical superiority in the population as a whole, continued to be seriously under-represented' – constituting 'only 15 per cent of the grammar as opposed to 42 per cent of the

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<sup>197</sup> Interview with Hilary Wainwright.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

secondary modern sample'.<sup>199</sup> Himmelweit also demonstrated how middle-class boys consistently outperformed the working-class boys academically.<sup>200</sup> Despite the social acclaim working-class children gained from passing the eleven-plus, the grammar schools could also be uncomfortable places, arousing awareness of social difference and even inferiority compared to the middle-class pupils and teachers populating the schools.<sup>201</sup> Respondents repeatedly recalled the social isolation that came from being separated from friends in their local communities.<sup>202</sup>

Sandy Irving had grown up with an early awareness of the surrounding social inequalities in his Huddersfield mining town where everyone on his council housing estate voted Labour without question.<sup>203</sup> As a child attending King James Grammar School in the early sixties, he was conscious of belonging to the generation of working-class children whose grammar school experiences had only a few years earlier been the focus of Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden's sociological survey *Education and the Working Class*: 'It was very striking when I went to grammar school how different it was, and how different the people were compared to the people on our council estate. In fact one lad with whom I became friends owned the factory where my father worked for a bit.'<sup>204</sup> During his teenage years Irving's Communist uncle lent him copies of the *Daily Worker* along with publications from the Left Book Club, and, as a result, he soon came to view his own experiences within a social framework rather than contingent circumstances. Paul Smith's understanding of the social order

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<sup>199</sup> Hilde T. Himmelweit, 'Social Status and Secondary Education since the 1944 Act', in Kynaston, *Austerity Britain*, p. 575.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> The findings of Jackson and Marsden supported the common sentiment expressed by respondents of working-class origin who attended grammar schools, that parents invariably encouraged education and were aware of the social significance of the grammar school for the wider social prospects it offered. The importance of working-class mothers as the 'centres of power' behind the working-class school days seem to confirm Pat Thane's findings in her study of how changing attitudes to fertility, family size and the role of women shaped concepts of female identity. Post-war social surveys revealed that all women, regardless of education, repeatedly mentioned the importance of giving children a good education, as they developed new conceptions of social selfhood on behalf of their children, and which they then passed down to them. See Pat Thane, 'Population Politics in Post-War British Culture', in Conekin, Mort and Waters (eds.), *Moments of Modernity*, pp. 130-131.

<sup>202</sup> See also Charlton, *Don't You Hear the H-Bomb's Thunder?*, p. 55.

<sup>203</sup> Interview with Sandy Irving, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 2009.

<sup>204</sup> The Jackson and Marsden study, 'about working-class children turning into middle-class citizens' contributed to the debate, ongoing in late fifties and early sixties, that the British working class was socially disadvantaged and the talent of most of its children destined to be wasted. Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden, *Education and the Working-Class* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Reading, 1966).

was also heavily informed by his boyhood observances of the local education system. He grew up in the village of Capenhurst, Cheshire, between 1955 and 1956, and noted how the organisation of the schools mirrored the three social components dividing the village: the children of the landowners and those from the modern executive estate either attended the independent King's school in Chester or, as second best, the boys and girls grammar schools in Ellesmere Port. However, the children from the council estate, who almost universally failed the eleven-plus, ended up at the secondary modern school, St John's Street. Smith was the only boy from his council estate to win a place at Ellesmere Port Grammar School.<sup>205</sup> The power of class to divide and isolate came as a painful lesson when the local village boys gave him little choice but to fight physically and rhetorically in order to reintegrate himself back into their social circle.<sup>206</sup>

It was not only the grammar school that had the capacity to arouse class consciousness and a sense of antagonism to the indelible unfairness of the social order. The place of the male boarding school also held a prominent place in the coming of age narratives of men from lower middle- or middle-class origins. The emotionally stilted ethos of the public school emerged as a common theme of hostility amongst sensitive, often critically thinking adolescent boys. Antagonism with middle-class fathers often fed into similar expressions of resistance and appropriation against the authoritarian middle-class masculinity of Victorian institutions, which for generations had supplied the military personnel and civil servants intended to run the British Empire. Against the post-war retreat of British colonialism, the shadow of colonial masculinity was not so easily displaced, inscribed as it remained within the values of the elite all-male institutions populated by the boys of upper and middle-classes, including the minority of lower middle-class boys who won scholarships to attend direct grant grammar and high schools.<sup>207</sup> McGrath's hostility to the muscular Christian values that prevailed throughout the halls of Dulwich College derived partly from his feelings of

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<sup>205</sup> Interview with Paul Smith, Coventry, 4<sup>th</sup> December, 2008.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> 'Direct-grant' schools were self-governing institutions which received partial state support in return for preserving 25 per cent of their places free to holders of local authority scholarships. For further details, see Roy Lowe, *Education in the Post-War Years: A Social History* (London, 1988), pp. 112-113; McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p. 237.

social inferiority in relation to the overwhelmingly middle-and upper-class status of most pupils.<sup>208</sup> During the 1950s and early 1960s Dulwich was one of the more prestigious direct grant schools for boys that sought to perform a socially conditioning role; in the light of the expansion of the social catchment of grammar and independent schools, fears of grammar school teachers that ‘parity of esteem’ would weaken ‘every part of national life’ led to efforts inside these institutions to strengthen traditionalism.<sup>209</sup> McGrath’s distaste for Dulwich’s elitist training reflected the fact that as one of the more prestigious direct grant schools, it offered social and cultural pursuits familiar to the major public schools, such as cadet initiatives and military training.<sup>210</sup> However, like others, he too connected his hostility to the unhappiness which the ‘public’ school’s repression of the ‘private’ created in him during adolescent years of uncertain male sexuality and selfhood. Max Farrar highlighted the perversity of teachers’ authoritarian attitudes when set against the backdrop of emotional and cultural deprivation he experienced at Liverpool College. The discovery of novels such as Ernest Hemingway’s *For Whom The Bell Tolls*, John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* and J.D. Salinger’s 1951 account of teenage angst and alienation, *The Catcher in the Rye*, opened up him to a world of charged emotionality.<sup>211</sup>

Amidst the public/private divide of the male boarding school the gender binaries of masculine/feminine were demarcated within those boundaries. Recalling his time at Sherborne School between 1947 and 1952, Peter M. Lewis explained how ‘systematically the feminine was outlawed’ from the boys’ make-up. The school constituted ‘a whole distorted landscape in which a patriarchal ideology’ assigned ‘arbitrary values to sexuality, emotion and friendship’, separating them out from each other and excluding all signs of womanhood; those delicate associations of care

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<sup>208</sup> Interview with Mike McGrath.

<sup>209</sup> Lowe, *Education in the Post-War Years*, p. 109.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid*, p. 113.

<sup>211</sup> Interview with Max Farrar, Leeds, 5<sup>th</sup> June, 2009. Peter M. Lewis also noted how his time as a boarder at Amesbury School from 1942-7 was one of ‘voracious reading’ which helped to distract him from thoughts of home. See Peter M. Lewis, ‘Mummy, Matron and the Maids: Feminine presence and absence in male institutions, 1934-63’, in Michael Roper and John Tosh (eds.), *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800* (London, 1991), pp. 176-77.

and nurture.<sup>212</sup> In the novels Farrar met characters who were striving to inhabit an emotionally deeper world; identifying with them he surreptitiously reclaimed 'the forbidden feminine' that the Victorian system sought to expunge.<sup>213</sup> Simultaneously, he embarked on adolescent friendships with boys who provided companionship and a collective outsider identity to offset the official authoritarian balance of power pervading the school. During whispered, prohibited conversations after lights out Farrar was shocked to learn of the negative attention his half-coloured friend Dave attracted when during the holidays he attended parties hosted by the middle-class medical circles of his half-Trinidadian father. Only half aware of Liverpool's black under-class population, tales of his friend's discomfort brought racism into Farrar's adolescent purview amidst a world dominated by unjust, perverse authorities. Together they took interest in the civil rights movement gathering pace in mid-1960s America, and began to read the novels of the civil rights activist James Baldwin.<sup>214</sup> Through another friend Farrar became drawn into the bohemian youth subculture that by the early sixties had evolved around a cohort of writers and intellectuals American commentators labelled 'Angry Young Men', and whose critical opposition to 'the Establishment' provided a collective voice for socially discontented youth.<sup>215</sup> This dissident youth subculture, which found a moral cause in the Bomb and political expression in CND, imbued what Kenneth Tynan termed 'instinctive Leftism': with its 'kitchen sink' drama, and provincial writers of working-class origin, it decried the class hierarchy of British society.<sup>216</sup> Criticism of 'the Establishment' focused on the informal power structure or 'old boy network' whose moral hypocrisy and political ineptitude were highlighted and pilloried over the Eden government's handling of the Suez crisis in 1956.<sup>217</sup> Other cultural components included jazz, folk song, American beatnik and French existentialist literature along with an affinity for New Wave films and American rhythm and blues. From jazz to Sartre, Kerouac, Camus, and Colin Wilson's

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Interview with Max Farrar; Peter M. Lewis, 'Mummy, Matron and the Maids', p. 182.

<sup>214</sup> Interview with Max Farrar.

<sup>215</sup> Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States* (Oxford, 1998), p. 56.

<sup>216</sup> Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Culture and Politics in Postwar Britain* (Oxford, 1989), p. 240; Alan Sinfield, 'Middle-class Dissidence', *Ideas and Production*, IX and X, 1989, pp. 11-29.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid, p. 233.

philosophical examination of *The Outsider* all seemed to speak for the first adult wave of working-class grammar school graduates coming through the Butler Education Act.<sup>218</sup> Farrar lapped up the sub-cultural currents that together informed his developing class dissidence as well as his willingness to resist unjust authorial acts. By the time he read Alan Sillitoe's *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* at the age of sixteen, he was ready to display his own great act of refusal by publicly rejecting the school's weekly officer training course.<sup>219</sup> For public school boys like Farrar, McGrath, and Lyddon, the dissident subculture offered opportunities to assume the modern reflexive selfhood that the Victorian 'Establishment' constrained; it offered individual temporary relief from uneasy class consciousness and emotional hunger that spoke of 'a still existent division between "athletes" and "aesthetes"' dating back to the 1870s in a minority disdain for the values of military and muscular Christianity.<sup>220</sup>

Gareth Stedman Jones offers a useful perspective for understanding the meaning that early youth subcultures provided for young activists. There was no inevitable, predetermined path linking the two left cultures. Individuals entered the later post-war enclaves having had minimal or no exposure to the radical youth subcultures of the early sixties. Conversely, adolescents who found strong affinity with these early youth subcultures did not necessarily follow this through into fully fledged activism. For Stedman Jones French culture offered 'a sort of self-distancing' from the 'repressive and conformist' English culture of his fifties childhood.<sup>221</sup> Like Farrar, he discovered 'one way of escaping the embrace of that culture was, as Richard Cobb once expressed it, to find a second identity'.<sup>222</sup> His reflections reinforce Alan Sinfield's argument that 'subcultures are not founded always, or even particularly, in opposition and resistance; more mundanely, they are *ways of coping*.

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<sup>218</sup> For further testimony of Colin Wilson's impact on the first-Butler generation of working-class grammar educated boys, see John Sutherland, *The Boy Who Loved Books: A Memoir* (Manchester, 2007), pp. 148-152.

<sup>219</sup> Interview with Max Farrar.

<sup>220</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones, 'History and Theory: An English Story', in *Historien: European Ego-histoires: Historiography and the Self, 1979-2000*, vol. 3, 2001, p. 108; Roper, 'Between Manliness and Masculinity', pp. 347-350.

<sup>221</sup> Stedman Jones, 'History and Theory', pp. 104-108.

<sup>222</sup> Sinfield, *Literature, Culture and Politics*, p. 108.

They afford to those who live them stories of their own identities and significance'.<sup>223</sup> For young individuals who in the sixth-form, at university, or shortly after began to gravitate towards new left spaces with their own defining set of cultural features, the dissident subcultures of the late fifties and early sixties marked signposts along their own leftward journeys. They provided *ways of coping* with the uncertainty of adolescence coupled with the social and political dislocations they encountered; whether at home, school, the local community or the wider world. The early subcultures provided alternative, subversive, yet psychologically safe spaces in which to discover an early sense of social and political self.

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid, p. 153.

## Chapter 2

### The Early Left Self and Initial Encounters with the Left Milieux

If political identity derives mainly from socially shared meaning, from involvement in a milieu, what space does this allow for considering the significance of individual background or political theory? For Lynne Segal it was her 'encounter with particular historical conjunctures that provided the pattern' for her journey into sixties radical movements; despite rather than because of her own individual and cultural particularities she became receptive to dissenting voices.<sup>1</sup> But where does that leave the social historian seeking a deeper understanding of the social and psychological processes within Segal's encounters? In the childhood, adolescent, and early adult world invariably one simply *is*. Di Parkin noted how 'as a child you live in the pod, this is the way the world is'.<sup>2</sup> Sheila Rowbotham explained how as a teenager in the early sixties she 'acquired an implicit way of thinking' which made it impossible for her to see her own situation in terms of social and historical change: 'Things just happened for and in themselves'.<sup>3</sup> Part of her later political emphasis upon direct experience and feeling derived intellectually from 'the strong doses of Camus, Colin Wilson, Nathaniel West, and Sartre's *Nausea*' this seventeen year-old read. The emotional dimension of her thinking, however, derived 'from rock music, the beat movement and a dislike of upper-class arty people who had opinions on everything'.<sup>4</sup> The impact of rock music she experienced in highly individual and isolated terms: it offered release from internal conflicts over her own sense of self as a person in relation to the confused images of womanhood she met in early sixties society and culture.<sup>5</sup> Segal and Rowbotham's reflections highlight the complex historical category of 'experience' when considered in relation to the journeys adolescents and young adults began to

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<sup>1</sup> Lynne Segal, *Making Trouble: Life and Politics* (London, 2007), p. 264.

<sup>2</sup> Di Parkin, 'Significant Crossroads as a Teenager or Young Adult', 13<sup>th</sup> August, 2005, p. 1, in the Private Archive of Di Parkin (hereafter DPA).

<sup>3</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, London, 1974), p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 12-15. Rowbotham's reflections bring another perspective to Simon Frith's argument about the capacity of rock music to facilitate modern female selfhood: 'Rock was experienced as a new sort of sexual articulation by women as well as men'. For details, see Simon Frith, *Youth, Leisure and the Politics of Rock* (London, 1983), p. 239.

make into the left milieu from the mid-1960s. If, as Segal posits, her movement into the libertarian left is to be explained by the power of the collective, where was the conscious I within that encounter, the self who brings with it a life continually evolving up until and beyond that moment? Perhaps Segal's emphasis on the pre-eminent role of the collective, the power with which it fostered political identity, is to be explained by the refuge she found within her libertarian feminist collective. But were the political meaning and affiliation she found not themselves individual psychological responses to the social and cultural patterns of the milieu? The risk of discounting the individual's social and psychic history from the collective moves radical men and women made towards the late sixties left network, and the collective allegiance they found therein, is to reduce the meaning of experience once more to a 'momentary thing, a reaction to and reflection on immediate circumstances'.<sup>6</sup> Examining the relationship between Marxist texts and Communist selfhood, Catherine Feely has shown how reading and writing, combined with daily experience, allowed an individual Communist activist 'to determine his place in the world'.<sup>7</sup> Her emphasis on the dynamics of the reading relationship situated 'in a particular social, temporal and spatial context' underlines the importance of understanding young activists' experiences in the early milieu in the context of earlier life experiences, childhood structures of feeling, and their engagement with early sixties radical subcultures.<sup>8</sup>

The making of the early left self and the 'experience' of sixties youth within early left spaces were active, dialectical, and reflexive processes, ultimately individual and unique, intertwined with their own subjectivities and biographies. Regardless of what historical conjunctures propelled individuals into their first forays on the left, their own individual psychologies, and social, political and cultural histories shaped their experiences within those and the left circles they moved into during the 1970s, just as in turn they shaped the narratives of those experiences whether or not this

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<sup>6</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Master and Servant: Love and Labour in the English Industrial Age* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 220-221.

<sup>7</sup> Catherine Feely, 'From Dialectics to Dancing: Reading, Writing and the Experience of Everyday Life in the Diaries of Frank P. Forster', *History Workshop Journal*, 69, Spring, 2010, p. 92.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 105.

occurred in tandem with public discourses. This second chapter seeks to explore how early sub-cultural encounters, engagement with particular Marxist texts, national and international politics and societies interacted with individual histories, structures of feeling, and ways of seeing and being that the first chapter began to consider. It will explore the meanings adolescents and young adults derived from these encounters and the place they formed in the making of new left cultures and selves during the early-to-mid 1960s.

### **'Angry Young Men' and Women: The Influence of Radical Literature and Drama**

Activists' initial steps of entry into the left social spaces that by 1967 coalesced around the VSC invariably began with the sixties sub-cultures that appeared at the end of the first chapter. The emphasis that Feely placed upon the 'accumulated experience of life' to 'change the meaning of books' may be usefully extended beyond literature and the act of reading and applied to a wider array of cultural mediums and experiences.<sup>9</sup> Exploring the dynamics of young individuals' interactions with alternative cultural modes offers to inform the role post-war culture played in mediating particular relationships between selfhood and society. If literary texts represent the attempts of literary intellectuals, 'in the changing conditions of their medium and society generally, to make persuasive sense of the world', the question must be posed as to how individuals starting to critically question the prevailing order, negotiated socially subversive, resisting cultural forms to make sense of themselves and the social spaces around them.<sup>10</sup> Claude Lichtenstein and Thomas Schregenberger offer a useful way of thinking about radical cognition in relation to the young activists and early sub-cultures. They use the term 'As Found' to denote the radical, anti-utopian attitude that prevailed among British artists, designers, and realism film-makers in the 1950s. 'As Found' was a 'perceptive recognition of reality, "a new seeing of the ordinary"', illuminating the

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<sup>9</sup> Feely, 'From Dialectics to Dancing', p. 105.

<sup>10</sup> Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Culture and Politics in Postwar Britain* (Oxford, 1989), p. 2.

properties of 'directness, immediacy, rawness and material presence'.<sup>11</sup> All these qualities are discernible within the structures of feeling underlying young activists' engagement with their childhood social landscapes. The term 'As Found' also captures the random encounters respondents made with the early radical sub-cultures along with the active perception they employed in relation to those cultures. Already as children and adolescents perceptions of social inequalities, hypocrisies, and parents' political certainties taught respondents a way of 'looking and being receptive to the fine nuances and meanings' embedded within social interactions, politics and cultures they stumbled upon.<sup>12</sup> In the late 1950s and early 1960s 'angry' literature and theatre, and the radical bomb culture surrounding the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) reinforced these attitudes, as they spoke to youngsters' concern with the tangible and the present that the unfairness and instability of their surrounding world provoked. Within the early subcultures youngsters heard, above all, calls for autonomous action.<sup>13</sup>

Many respondents first encountered literature from the 'Angry Young Men' and French existential movements during the sixth-form, an educational period which provided time and intellectual space for exploration and discovery. In the late 1950s and early 1960s the two-year bridge between adolescence and young adulthood marked a period of coming intellectually alive, of expanding social, political, and personal horizons as individuals became increasingly conscious of formative social and political events beyond their local childhood world. Growing up in Hartlepool, Gilda Peterson supposed she was 'really fairly ignorant' of contemporary social and political affairs until 'by the sixth-form I had some sense of Europe and who am I, because in the sixth-form I spent a lot of time at the public library, because we didn't have books at home'.<sup>14</sup> In this context the discovery of literature that addressed contemporary social and political issues seems to have informed her emerging left-thinking and feeling self. The sixth-form represented a time when

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<sup>11</sup> Claude Lichtenstein and Thomas Schregenberger, 'As Found' in (eds.), *As Found: The Discovery of the Ordinary* (Baden, 1993), p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Gilda Peterson, Leeds, 4<sup>th</sup> June, 2009.

connections began to be made between childhood structures of feeling and an intellectual framework of social and political ideas that would form the basis of a left identity to be developed at university. John Charlton noted the social demarcation characterising pre-and post-sixteen education; the class insecurity that often characterised working-class children's grammar school experiences dissolved; 'superior class attitudes from teaching staff to pupils miraculously disappeared' in the expectation that pupils would follow the same path of social mobility that higher education offered; teachers became more open in their political opinions, and new cultural experiences honed a collective sense of intellectual and social identity.<sup>15</sup> Val Graham was not alone in recalling her teacher introducing her to Marx. When Joan Smith left her Harrow girls grammar school in 1964 'the History teacher gave me a copy of *Das Kapital* on the grounds I might read it'.<sup>16</sup> Charlton characterised his own sixth-form days as a halcyon time of social and intellectual engagement that coincided with his enclosure within a milieu of working- and lower middle-class grammar school boys who shared his class conscious feelings: 'The sixth-form at grammar school was critically important to me. That was the narrowing down of people who thought, talked, talked about ideas ... We were interested in history and literature and current affairs. There was lots of argument, lots of discussion going on all the time.'<sup>17</sup> This group of grammar school boys, a number of whom would form a core component of the Newcastle young socialist group, The 59 Society, shared the collective cultural 'effervescence' around class, and latched on to 'Angry Young Men' literature such as Kingsley Amis' 1954 novel *Lucky Jim*.<sup>18</sup> Charlton felt himself 'floating'<sup>19</sup> in this cultural movement because the authors' revolt against the 'genteel, class-segregated staidness of fifties British society'<sup>20</sup> echoed his own embarrassed discomfort as a chauffeur's son denied entry to middle-class neighbouring households. Of *Lucky Jim* he reflected: 'We loved it, we absolutely loved

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<sup>15</sup> John Charlton, *Don't You Hear the H-Bomb's Thunder? Youth and Politics on Tyneside in the Late 'Fifties and Early 'Sixties* (Pontypool, 2007), p. 56.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Joan Smith, London, 20<sup>th</sup> March, 2009.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with John Charlton, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 2009.

<sup>18</sup> Charlton, *Don't You Hear the H-Bomb's Thunder?*, p. 66; interview with John Charlton.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ian MacDonald, *Revolution in the Head: The Beatles' Records and the Sixties* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, London 1995), p. 7.

it. In our sixth-form common room we might even read out chunks of it. It was a big giggle; *Lucky Jim* and another writer of the same genre, John Wain's *Hurry on Down...* It was the same sort of humour ... They were a bit older than us those angry young men ... but I guess they were sharing the same kind of assault, really, on the establishment.'<sup>21</sup> The boys also read avidly the reviews of John Osborne's 1956 seminal play *Look Back in Anger*, too far from London to see it on stage.<sup>22</sup> The play spoke to Charlton, as it did for a wider cohort of working- and lower middle-class scholarship boys, because he heard within it the 'lessons in feeling' that Osborne had intended to evoke as a means of breaking down class barriers.<sup>23</sup> Tynan noted that the 'salient thing about Jimmy Porter was that we – the under-thirty generation in Britain – recognised him on sight. We had met him; we had shared bed-sitting rooms with him'.<sup>24</sup> Whilst Charlton and his male cohort were in 1956-7 too young to have shared Porter's seminal experiences, as adolescents they spoke his and Jim Dixon's provincial class idiom; the anger the protagonists exuded towards the Victorian social system was rich in the same vital, critical engagement Charlton and his friends were beginning to make in relation to domestic Labour and international politics.

In 1958 Ian Birchall saw Osborne's play performed by a provincial repertory company.<sup>25</sup> He remembered that to his eighteen-year old self, hostile to Suez and now a firm 'Labour man', the play was 'absolutely electrifying'.<sup>26</sup> His commentary illuminates the wider life experiences in which novels and drama were being received by a cohort of scholarship boys whose class consciousness and identification with the working-class man was coupled with an intellectual persona that increasingly extended the scope of their reading to encompass French existentialist literature, Marxist histories as well as seminal Marxist publications. The 'Angry Young Men' movement seems

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with John Charlton.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> John Osborne, 'They Call It Cricket', in Tom Maschler (ed.), *Declaration* (London, 1957), p. 61.

<sup>24</sup> Kenneth Tynan, 'The Angry Young Movement', *Curtains: Selections from the Drama Criticism and Related Writings* (London, 1961), p. 193.

<sup>25</sup> In 1958 Tynan noted that *Look Back in Anger* had been performed by nearly every repertory company in Britain. Tynan, 'The Angry Young Movement', p. 196.

<sup>26</sup> Ian Birchall, 'Formative Reading', notes written in response to the author's request for interviewees to detail literature, read as children and adolescents, that they consider to have been formative in shaping a political consciousness, November, 2008, p. 2.

to have further shaped Birchall's affinity for a mythologized image of the working man; the romanticism had found its tenets in earlier literary encounters and reached a crescendo during his time as an Oxford undergraduate when he met influential left figures: the Oxford Union President and future dramatist, Dennis Potter<sup>27</sup> – 'I hero-worshipped him ... in particular the way he counter-posed the values of his working-class background to the dominant values of the university' - and *Clarion*<sup>28</sup> editor, Ken Coates, whose eight years of service in the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire coalmines shaped an imaginary picture of masculine labour.<sup>29</sup> Birchall's earliest introduction to an 'aggressively "working-class hero"' had come in the form of Alf Tupper, the central character in the boy's comic *Rover*; one of several he read between the ages of seven and fourteen.<sup>30</sup> Tupper was a welder and amateur athlete who trained in his spare time by running around the gasworks; his exclusive fish and chip diet identifiably working-class. In her study of post-war boys' and women's reading experiences, Hilary Young highlighted the role that Tupper played as a working-class anti-hero in contrast to 'the official discourse of middle-class respectability and ideal middle-class masculinity, which were exemplified in other boy's publications such as *Eagle* and *Boy's Own Paper*'.<sup>31</sup> She noted the particular character model Tupper provided for working-class boys to look up to; his adventures provided an affective reading experience because they felt able to identify with his poor living conditions.<sup>32</sup> Although removed from Tupper's harsh environment, Birchall gained a different sort of identification, but one which provided a similar imaginative experience to the working-class boys; in both middle-and working-class boyhood landscapes Tupper's triumph over adversity offered a means of escaping from the uncomfortable reality of everyday life.<sup>33</sup> Birchall

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<sup>27</sup> Humphrey Carpenter, *Dennis Potter: A Biography* (London, 1998).

<sup>28</sup> *Clarion* was the magazine of the National Association of Labour Students (NALS).

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Ian Birchall. In 1948, upon being called up for national service, Coates refused to be drafted into an army fighting communist and nationalist guerrillas in Malaya, opting instead to work as a miner. See John Palmer, 'Ken Coates Obituary', *Guardian*, 29<sup>th</sup> June [consulted at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2010/jun/29/ken-coates-obituary> (18 May, 2011)].

<sup>30</sup> Birchall, 'Formative Reading', p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Hilary Young, 'Representation and Reception: An Oral History of Gender in British Children's Story Papers, Comics and Magazines in the 1940s and 1950s' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Strathclyde, 2006), p. 169.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 168-169.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 169.

admired Tupper's repeated triumph, not over his material hardships, but the way in which he repeatedly beat 'the "toffs" to finish with a four minute mile'.<sup>34</sup> Other influences for Birchall came at secondary school when George Orwell's radicalism rubbed off far more than its intended anti-communist message – "'if there is any hope, it is with the proles'" - and Thomas Hardy's 'bitterly class conscious' novels *Tess of the Durbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*.<sup>35</sup>

Literature that resonated with respondents' felt dislocations from their social worlds helped to collectively frame their experiences and swathe their understandings of class with several layers of meaning. Robert Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* and its 1967 television adaptation enhanced seventeen-year old Sandy Irving's structural understanding of exploitation. The novel built upon earlier structures of feeling surrounding his family's class. He too encountered it during his sixth-form days when from 1967 an extra year of study gave him precious time in the public library. Debating politics with friends led him, perhaps half-consciously, to Marx, though like many young respondents he struggled to read beyond page two of *Das Kapital*. Some of Marx's shorter pamphlets made more sense in conjunction with contemporary left-wing publications such as *Tribune*, *Labour Worker* and all thirty-two back copies of *International Socialism*. Together these texts equipped Irving with a Marxist framework in which to make sense of formative political events around 1968, including the Prague Spring, the May events in Paris, and the televised images and reports of the Vietnam War.<sup>36</sup> He explained their role in providing him with the intellectual ammunition to resist his uncle's initially alluring communism:

I very much knew about Prague, and just looking at the Soviet Union, as you saw it on the television, it didn't look that much difference from America. You had a Party elite with a massive military power rather than anything different. I wasn't struck by a lot of what the *Daily Worker* said. Just somehow it didn't ring true to

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<sup>34</sup> Birchall, 'Formative Reading', p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, pp. 1-2.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Sandy Irving, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 2009.

me ... The point is, I suppose, I was already predisposed to organisations that might advance different ideas on the subject.<sup>37</sup>

Irving's account provides a glimpse of the complex wealth of political and cultural strands which collectively and individually, he and other respondents absorbed and processed during formative years of social and intellectual development. General studies lessons provided an early collective setting in which to discuss current affairs. In November 1965 the unanimous support Irving's class showed for sending British troops to Rhodesia derived from their black and white moral certainty that Ian Smith 'was a bad man'.<sup>38</sup> At friends' houses they cemented their distrust of the ruling powers listening to Bob Dylan's protest music whilst at home Irving privately honed his critical voice watching the popular satirical television programme *That Was The Week That Was* (TW3); occasionally he even managed to read copies of *Private Eye*.<sup>39</sup> Both satirical forms pilloried an elite Establishment run by out-of-touch, colonially-shaped leaders.<sup>40</sup> Although it is difficult to discern how deeply he heard the social criticism within Dylan's folk and 'electric' protest songs, the socially and politically conscious lyrics<sup>41</sup> likely operated alongside leftist concerns Irving heard elsewhere to confirm what he was 'thinking already':

I had come across the war poets in school and so that would reinforce your thinking; so these are all little streams that feed in I suppose, but there wasn't an alternative counter-cultural scene in Huddersfield. It was quite a drab place. In fact, I went to more classical music concerts because I was a volunteer at the door of the Huddersfield Choral Society at the town hall. Musically, I would have listened to more Wagner than Dylan.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Mark Donnelly, *Sixties Britain* (Harlow, 2005), p. 50.

<sup>41</sup> In reflecting on Bob Dylan as a personal and political voice for the sixties generation, Gerard DeGroot has drawn attention to the profound 'emotional challenge' he posed to his listeners, articulating their alienation and confusion. See Gerard DeGroot, *The 60s Unplugged* (London, 2008), pp. 229-236. For discussion of the political and social commentary contained in Dylan's song-writing, see David Boucher and Gary Browning (eds.), *The Political Art of Bob Dylan* (Chippenham, 2004).

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Sandy Irving.

Irving's testimony signals the gulf between the modernising impulses of sixties sub-cultures and the conservative local contexts in which they were sometimes received. The combined presence of old and new cultures in provincial settings shaped adolescent selfhood in differing directions.<sup>43</sup> In Huddersfield the long-established choral tradition alongside the brass band of the pit made classical music a feature of local mass culture. In this setting Irving's musical tastes were not a revolt against 'respectability and upper-class culture'; rather they affirmed an already discernible, locally-rooted working-class identity combined with a socially critical conscience.<sup>44</sup>

### **Women and the Early Radical Subcultures**

The discovery of Marxist politics and early left sub-cultures from CND, the YS, New Left, IS and The Week/IMG grouping occurred repeatedly within the context of adolescents and young adults searching for alternative social, cultural, and political spaces in which to retreat from or better understand the narrow microcosms of their habitations. In these contexts sixties sub-cultures provided private as well as collective public havens in which to fathom the uncertainty of the young adult self; radical culture opened up inner intellectual worlds where youngsters pondered themselves in relation to local and international societies and cultures. Like other female adolescents, as a girl Gilda Peterson was already attuned to her mother's social dislocation amidst the new owner-occupied, lower middle-class community that her husband's coach business had afforded her.<sup>45</sup> Once in the sixth-form her own unease with her Hartlepool home was fed by her

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<sup>43</sup> Frank Mort has argued that from the mid-1960s Harold Wilson's government played a formative role in repositioning the provinces following the domination of the metropolis in national culture from the early 1940s. For an adolescent boy becoming aware of his homosexual identity the greater visual presence of London's homosexual culture gave the metropolis a particular pull in shaping homosexual fantasies and transferring these imagined cultures to the adolescent provincial world. Frank Mort, 'Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society', Plenary lecture, the 35<sup>th</sup> Annual Social History Society Conference, University of Glasgow, 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2010. See also Peter Bailey, 'Jazz at the Spirella: Coming of Age in Coventry in the 1950s' in Becky Conekin, Frank Mort and Chris Waters (eds.), *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain 1945-1964* (London, 1999), pp. 22-40.

<sup>44</sup> Bailey, 'Jazz at the Spirella', p. 39.

<sup>45</sup> During the 1950s and 1960s social commentators revisited inter-war debates about the malaise of the new suburban housewife in response to the development of new working-class housing developments in suburban extensions to towns and in new towns. For discussion of working-class women's experiences, see Mark

increasing consciousness of a social and political landscape beyond northern England. News of Suez and the French Algerian crisis added to earlier missionary notions of far-off countries, culminating in questions of consciousness and her relationship to the outer world:

I enrolled on a philosophy course, which turned out to be on philosophers of the French Revolution, which again meant nothing to me until I went. Really, my main interest was what is the meaning of life? What is consciousness and what is it all about, and I suppose politics. We didn't see many plays in Hartlepool. The only thing you would see was *Annie Get Your Gun* or *The Wizard of Oz* or something like that. Our big excitement culturally would be to go to the local Chinese restaurant that had just opened, and to have something and chips followed by banana fritters.<sup>46</sup>

Unlike other questioning teenagers rejecting childhood Anglicanism, seventeen-year old Peterson reclaimed her previously abandoned faith as she sought 'some sort of theory' to make sense of existence. In 1964 the move to Birmingham University was another step in this inner and outer search:

I went there to do philosophy and psychology. I wanted to understand how we tick and I suppose I had a bit of political consciousness, and I fished about a bit, but the only political party I came into contact with was the Labour Party, and it was all about Clause Four and nationalisation, and, you know, getting this in and that in, and resolutions, and really dead ... it didn't have that big exciting world sort of feel.<sup>47</sup>

Birmingham's Student Christian Movement (SCM) presented the only place 'where people were asking the big questions about the meaning of life and what do you do'.<sup>48</sup> Discussions included Dr John Robinson's progressive arguments from *Honest to God* in which he conceptualised God as a participant in human society.<sup>49</sup> In his radicalising mission for modern Anglicanism to aid social

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Clapson, 'WorkingClass Women's Experiences of Moving to New Housing Estates in England since 1919', *Twentieth Century British History*, 10: 3, 1999, pp. 345-365.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Gilda Peterson.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> The debate addressed wider public discussions about modern post-war youth and the decline in churchgoing amongst this generation that related to the media's focus on the youthful contingent in CND. See John Robinson, *Honest to God* (London, 1963); David L. Edwards (ed.), *The Honest to God Debate* (London, 1963);

change, Peterson heard the possibility of a political and social philosophy to transcend the social and cultural narrowness of home and the Labour politics she first found at Birmingham: 'The Bishop of Woolwich wrote something about God not being up in the sky. It was about community and it was about changing the world.'<sup>50</sup> Through her involvement with the SCM Peterson put herself forward as a representative to the university anti-Vietnam committee, leading her into further political activity in Birmingham's student protest politics.<sup>51</sup>

Peterson's narrative of meaningful search for an external world beyond the social, political and cultural narrowness of teenage self highlights the relationship between female subjectivity and sixties sub-cultures. Interwoven with the external dimension of her adolescent quest, her uncertainty related specifically to her role as a woman on the edge of an ever-expanding, rapidly changing outer world. For most women in this study the task of locating and resurrecting their female selves in the years prior to the WLM was challenging, not least where their early individual sense of self did not quite fit with dominant public representations they had since encountered. Penny Summerfield has contributed to feminist discussions on complexities inherent in the public discourses that women often struggle to negotiate, as they seek to compose themselves as feminine subjects.<sup>52</sup> Building on Bronwen Davies' understanding of the 'multiple and contradictory' discourses 'through which the subject position "woman" is constituted', Summerfield has been one of several historians to show how the contradictory character of these discourses apply especially to

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Holger Nehring, "'The Long, Long Night is Over". The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, "Generation" and the Politics of Religion (1957-1964)' in Jane Garnett, Matthew Grimley, Ana Harris, William Whyte and Sarah Williams (eds.), *Redefining Christian Britain: Post 1945 Perspectives* (London, 2006), pp. 143-144.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Gilda Peterson.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* Peterson was one of few respondents whose political activism was preceded by student Christian activity, even though for many men and women the moral parameters of their identities had been shaped by the Anglican tenets of childhood culture, as detailed in chapter one. In the American context of sixties protest politics, Sara Evans has shown how young women's active involvement in the Student Christian Movement (SCM) was formative in shaping a moral critique of the world and providing them with empowering, transforming experiences that inspired them to pursue their convictions through struggle in the civil rights movement, the student movement, anti-Vietnam War movement, and subsequently, in the WLM. See Sara M. Evans (ed.), *Journeys that Opened Up the World: Women, Student Christian Movements, and Social Justice, 1955-1975* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, New Jersey, 2004).

<sup>52</sup> Penny Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews' *Cultural and Social History*, 1, January, 2004, pp. 70-71.

women's remembered experiences.<sup>53</sup> Her insights illuminate the challenges of understanding the gendered experiences within the early sixties sub-cultures. The endeavour to understand how and why young women invested themselves in these predominantly masculine sub-cultures was rendered problematic by the question of how or if they thought about themselves in gendered terms. Respondent Bronwyn Davies highlighted the potential threat her own memories faced when they failed to fit with existing feminist discourses of women's interactions with sixties culture.<sup>54</sup> Prior to our interview she had attended a workshop of women who in the 1970s had all been active in Cardiff in the WLM. She mentioned feminist discussions that may have taken place either at the workshop or elsewhere about women's passive, traditionally feminine role in the cultural mediums during her late 1950s and early 1960s childhood. However, she became quite frustrated with her difficulty in clearly articulating her own sense of self in relation to these discourses. Her words, 'I was just me' denoted the asexual terms in which she felt and experienced herself as a teenager in the early sixties:

I just saw myself as growing up. I didn't see myself as growing up as a young woman. I didn't identify myself as a woman at all. I was just me and you know. I am trying to think how to express this without. I was just me. I wasn't... You know when people talk about the impact of role models and media, cultural influences, and feminists talk about the fact when we were growing up you would have just the representation of women in books and on television, it was in those days in the fifties and sixties all the people doing anything interesting, action, were men and the women... and so that clearly wasn't going to be me, so I was going to be a man I suppose, except clearly I wasn't a man.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Bronwen Davies, 'Women's Subjectivity and Feminist Stories' in C. Ellis and M. G Flaherty (eds.), *Investigating Subjectivity: Research on Lived Experience* (London, 1992), p. 55, cited in Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure', p. 70. See also Joan Sangster, 'Telling our stories: feminist debates and the use of oral history', *Women's History Review*, 3, 1994, pp. 11-28.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Bronwyn Davis, Llanishen, 17<sup>th</sup> June, 2009. For discussion on the perils posed by pre-existing cultural discourses to individual narratives, see Anna Green, 'Individual Remembering and "Collective Memory": Theoretical and Presuppositions and Contemporary Debates', *Oral History*, Autumn, 2004, pp. 35-44, John Murphy, 'Memory, Identity and Public Narrative: Composing a Life-Story after Leaving Institutional Care, Victoria, 1945-83', *Cultural and Social History*, 7, September 2010, pp. 297-314, and Julie Stephens, 'Our Remembered Selves: Oral History and Feminist Memory', *Oral History*, 38:1, 2010, pp. 81-90.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

The accounts of Davies, Peterson and others suggest the way in which the masculine, radical cultural enclaves added to the wealth of contradictory discourses constituting 'woman' that visibly prevailed throughout the post-war terrain in which these women were shaping identities. As girls growing up in 1950s British society the fragile female dimension of their world presented them with a host of dualisms. They were exposed to contradictory images from their mothers, teachers, and from wider culture about what it meant to be a woman, and what constituted appropriate feminine behaviour.<sup>56</sup> Whilst expanding education seemed to be opening up opportunities for them to take a more prominent part in public life, few of their mothers worked in full-time paid employment, they equated female teachers, their most immediate images of professional women, with spinsterhood, and many of their mothers continued to voice hopes that university would provide opportunities to meet a 'good' husband.<sup>57</sup> It is unsurprising that the world these women aspired to inhabit was masculine. Peterson's unstable adolescent identity derived partly from the educational and social aspirations her grammar school teachers had heaped on her; at odds with the cautious female social model her mother presented:

The head mistress had been an Oxford classicist and I think I have always felt a bit unconfident with people from that very confident middle-class identity ... and my mother would be like that; a bit about not going above your place, and not having airs and graces, and so one was getting quite a strong message of we are a bit above our station and you have got to be careful, and then from school you were getting a message of *al arduo ad alto* - through work to the stars - was the school motto, trying to push us up. I was in a sort of gang ... of girls that went about, but I didn't do horse riding like some of them.

Her testimony suggests the uncomfortable female world that was intertwined with the class dislocations the female spheres of school and home exuded. Far less confusing was the masculine social realm she occupied as a girl – 'just wanted to be a boy, was in the guides and went camping,

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<sup>56</sup> For details of the contradictions which the post-war world presented to young women, see Elizabeth Wilson, *Only Half-Way to Paradise: Women in Postwar Britain, 1945-1968* (London, 1980), pp. 2-8. See also Birmingham Feminist History Group, 'Feminism as Femininity in the Nineteen-Fifties?', *Feminist Review* 80, 2005, pp. 6-23.

<sup>57</sup> Many of the higher-educated women within this study recalled hearing their mothers voicing hope that they would meet a future husband at university.

had two brothers, so didn't have much girly identity as a young child at all' - in the sixth-form and returned to at university, often the only woman hitchhiking and youth hostelling with her male peers.<sup>58</sup> At Birmingham University the SCM and the student movement offered a continuity of this social security in contrast to female circles where again she felt 'a slight sense of inferiority, which I probably did have more with the girls who were more smart and assured in a different kind of way'.<sup>59</sup>

Peterson's account resonated with other women's memories of the place early sub-cultures played in the gendered dimensions of uncertain young selfhood. During these teenage years of expanding geographical and mental horizons, immersing oneself in cultures on the social margins seemed for girls to be one avenue for locating a tangible identity when around them the dominant cultures presented contradictory images of womanhood.<sup>60</sup> Sheila Rowbotham confirmed that in 1961, when the 'idyllic working-class hero' was just arriving on the horizon, there was no equivalent romantic literary genre for women.<sup>61</sup> Female icons accorded powerfully to the fifties reassertion of traditional femininity in an atmosphere when female emancipation was taken as given.<sup>62</sup> Like Davies, Rowbotham reflected that 'When I saw myself able to live as I wanted I didn't have any specific idea of myself as a woman doing whatever I would be doing. I would simply be doing things'.<sup>63</sup> Amidst the youth sub-cultures the only rebellious role models she found were inherently masculine. There was no female equivalent of Marlon Brando. Rowbotham's 'rag-bag' of ideal women, Mary Wollstonecraft, Olive Schreiner, Simone de Beauvoir, and Doris Lessing were either

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<sup>58</sup> Interview with Gilda Peterson.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Hilary Young revealed a similar practice amongst the few female respondents who, in the 1950s, read boys' comics such as *Rover*, *Wizard* and the *Eagle* in place of magazines specifically intended for girls. The women emphasised distance and boundaries they felt they were overcoming or were being opened up to them by reading material that was meant for boys, alluding to boundaries of what was respectfully considered to be feminine behaviour as well as the spatial boundaries of the all-girls' boarding school or female household. Young, 'Representation and reception', pp. 222-223.

<sup>61</sup> Rowbotham, *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*, p. 44.

<sup>62</sup> For discussion on the role of women in 1950s cultural representations of class, see, Terry Lovell, 'Landscapes and Stories in 1960s British Realism', *Screen* 31, Winter, 1990, pp. 360-376, and Geoff Eley, 'The Family is a Dangerous Place: Memory, Gender, and the Image of the Working-Class', in Robert Rosenstone (ed.), *Revisioning History* (Princeton, 1993), pp. 15- 29.

<sup>63</sup> Rowbotham, *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*, p. 12.

ensconced firmly in the past, or else their lives seemed far removed from hers.<sup>64</sup>

Di Parkin told a similar story. In 1959 her entry into the West Surrey Federation Young Socialists (YS) occurred in the familiar context of teenage disaffection: 'I was fifteen and bored, and my mother was trying to think of activities I could do. My mother was in the Labour Party and one of her friends said "Oh, why doesn't she join the Labour Party Young Socialists?"' She framed the appeal of the 'Angry Young Men' in essentially masculine terms of class that resonated with those of male comrades mixing in the same LPYS and early IS circles. The 'angry' working-class protagonists were deeply influential in shaping her socialism, which, just as male respondents described, became central to her socially critical teenage identity: 'I knew I was a socialist at this time. I was about sixteen at this moment, but I became a revolutionary. That is it. You can't reform capitalism and class is the key variable.'<sup>65</sup> This 'angry' radical self was rooted in the same teenage friendships formed by socialist men: 'My friendship with [Jill Curry] was based on the fact that we were both socialists ... our identity was mainly in terms of being culturally alternative, and so we went to see *Look Back in Anger*.'<sup>66</sup> Parkin identified with this 'angry' culture because from childhood she, like other middle-class girls, was sensitive to 'my own privilege', unable to identify 'with my own class'.<sup>67</sup> As a result she conjured an idealised working-class image that was to all intents and purposes male, informed by the 'aggressive construction of active masculinity' that protagonists in the northern realist films embodied.<sup>68</sup> She absorbed their celebratory cultural and political messages because *Saturday Night And Sunday Morning*, *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, and *The L Shaped Room*, *A Kind of Loving*, and *A Taste of Honey* were 'all films about working-class life and I wished I had been working-class'.<sup>69</sup>

Belonging to the YS male culture on equal terms as men meant taking on masculine forms of

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Di Parkin, Totnes, 27<sup>th</sup> April, 2009.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Eley, 'Distant Lives, Still Lives', p. 20.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Di Parkin.

behaviour including the beer drinking culture that was a prominent feature of Trotskyist politics.<sup>70</sup>

The first occasion Parkin recalled being conscious of a contradiction between her female identity and the masculine worker ethos in which she felt at home occurred when:

I had a working-class boyfriend, a factory worker, and we went to the pub with other mates of his with their girlfriends, and the blokes were at the bar ordering drinks and they said "Well, you should be over there" [in the lounge]. I did go over there. These girlfriends of theirs were traditionally female ... They were talking about things that I was absolutely not interested in. They were talking about things like, oh I don't know, fashion or knitting. I was really arrogantly despising of where most women stood at this time.<sup>71</sup>

For Parkin these feminine young women adorned with bouffants were entirely removed from the working-class, masculine activist image with which she conceived herself; her place was at the bar with the men.<sup>72</sup> Yet, it is striking that she recalled asserting her teenage feminine sexuality through fashion, albeit along political lines. Girls in her left milieu stood out from the 'dolly bird' girlfriends of her male friends by virtue of their post-Beatnik style dress: the black opaque tights, black kohl pencil drawn around the eyes, white lipstick, and black hair worn loosely to the waist, a token testament to traditional feminine sexuality.<sup>73</sup> Parkin's experience of what it meant to be a woman within the masculine ethos of the YS/IS continued the earlier contradictions she and other young girls had encountered. Aware that women who visually accorded to traditional images of post-war femininity were not taken intellectually seriously, she 'kind of wanted to be a man'.<sup>74</sup> Yet 'because I was quite good looking - I had this kind of play girl figure with big breasts and long legs, and so I got lots of male attention ... so though I identified with men I was getting what I wanted from them because of my female looks.'<sup>75</sup>

In contrast, the teenage Rowbotham immersed herself into the early sixties rebellious

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<sup>70</sup> The longstanding association between the public house and the male worker meant that meetings frequently took place inside back rooms in pubs.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Di Parkin.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

subcultures, because she sought within them an individual 'sense of release' from the profound ambiguity she saw in all cultural representations of post-war womanhood.<sup>76</sup> In *Promise of a Dream* she drew upon Simone de Beauvoir's childhood term *dépayser* (to change scenery or disorientate) to describe her own adolescent reading experience.<sup>77</sup> As a girl de Beauvoir had read books much in the same fashion as Rowbotham and Peterson; to transport herself away from her teenage surroundings and to transform herself in the process. The sub-cultures promised 'extreme inner experiences'.<sup>78</sup> Carrying such hopes, Rowbotham shared something in common with the many young men she would meet around the VSC network, who had sought in the early radical cultures the same 'profound disorientation' from 'the petty customs' of home and school.<sup>79</sup> This radical reading experience offered an avenue for intellectual inner retreat and the freedom of fantasy that may well have reflected the intentions of progressive post-war educationalists who had sought to inculcate into Britain's children learned practices of self-expression.<sup>80</sup> However, scrutinising the meaning of life did not for young men entail the confusion surrounding sixties female social and sexual conduct. The 'mystical nihilism' of Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*, Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* or the Sartre and Brecht Rowbotham dipped into seem to have provided partial private release from the 'knotted' tensions she and other sixties young women encountered between freedom and restrictive morality.<sup>81</sup> What the sub-cultures failed to supply was the heightened sense of awareness that might have illuminated the muddled contradictions she tried 'exhaustingly' to straddle. When absorbing herself in her own 'little private sphere of "culture"', where Miller and Lawrence coexisted with Kerouac, Shaw, and Ibsen, she 'identified with the men because they were exciting and adventurous'.<sup>82</sup> Just like Parkin,

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<sup>76</sup> Rowbotham, *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>77</sup> Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream*, p. 8; Judith Okely, *Simone de Beauvoir: a re-reading* (London, 1986), p. 45.

<sup>78</sup> Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream*, p. 8.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Paul Long, 'The Aesthetics of Class in Post-War Britain' (Unpublished PhD thesis. University of Warwick, 2001), 200, p. 289; Carolyn Steedman, 'State-Sponsored Autobiography' in Conekin, Mort and Waters (eds.), *Moments of Modernity*, pp. 41-54; Mort, 'Fathers and Sons', pp. 380-381.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p. 7. For similar accounts of sixties confused female sexual morality, see Callum G. Brown, 'Women and Religion in Britain: The Autobiographical View of the Fifties and Sixties' in Callum G. Brown and Michael Snape (eds.), *Secularisation in the Christian World* (Farnham, 2010), pp. 159-73; Sara Maitland (ed.), *Very Heaven: Looking Back at the 1960s* (London, 1988); Nell Dun, *"Talking to Women"* (London, 1965).

<sup>82</sup> Rowbotham, *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*, pp. 13-15.

Rowbotham 'simply switched sex', unconscious of the 'rough ride' the girls got even though her own sense of herself as a thoughtful girl contradicted the living doll pop singers like Cliff Richard sang about.<sup>83</sup>

### **Don't You Hear the H-Bomb's Thunder? CND**

In the early to mid-sixties entry into left sub-cultures often began with CND. Identification with the movement against the Bomb entailed a combination of collective moral, political, and individual motivation, and for many respondents may be understood within De Beauvoir's concept *dépayser*. As the largest extra-parliamentary organisation in early post-war Britain, the Campaign became the first radical social, cultural and political space in which socially-aware youngsters could invest an uncertain teenage identity; at odds with the conservative customs of home, school, and official state institutions.<sup>84</sup> Drawing upon the anti-modern, socially engaged tone of the 'Angry Young Men', CND provided the first 'brave cause' through which to hone a critical voice against the moral bankruptcy of state power.<sup>85</sup> James Hinton identified the Bomb as the issue which 'started [me] off'.<sup>86</sup> His discovery of CND coincided with his intellectual awakening; the formation of moral certainties and intellectual ideas. At the age of sixteen the timing of CND coincided with formative psychological changes shaping his social relations and sense of self:

I was appointed a prefect, but I was de-prefected because the house master discovered in my locker a pile of leaflets I had had printed calling on the youth of Bristol to set up an YCND. This must have been '58-59 ... I cashed in my post office savings to get this leaflet printed. My mother came from the lower edges of landed gentry and was educated; my father colonial. I had this sense of belonging to an elite, an intellectual class, and

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid. For discussion on the ambiguous position of women in sixties popular music, see Andrew August, 'Gender and 1960s Youth Culture: The Rolling Stones and the New Woman', *Contemporary British History*, 23:3, 2009, pp. 79-100.

<sup>84</sup> For discussion of the role of CND as a space for a rebellious new youth culture, a forerunner to 1968, see James Hinton, *Protests and Visions: Peace Politics in Twentieth-Century Britain* (London, 1989); pp. 161-165, Kate Hudson, *CND: Now More Than Ever. The Story of a Peace Movement* (London, 2005), pp. 50-57; Meredith Veldman, *Fantasy, the Bomb, and the Greening of Britain: Romantic Protest 1945-1980* (Cambridge 1994), pp. 137-151; Richard Taylor and Colin Pritchard, *The Protest Makers: The British Nuclear Disarmament Movement of 1958-1965, Twenty Years On* (Oxford, 1980), pp. 109-111.

<sup>85</sup> John Osborne, *Look Back in Anger!* (London, 1957), pp. 84-85.

<sup>86</sup> Interview with James Hinton, Warwick University, Coventry, 20<sup>th</sup> November, 2008.

there was my family background, people who were intellectual achievers, and I had this coming intellectually alive after being disapproved of by my father for being stupid.<sup>87</sup>

The 'magnificent [moral] simplicity'<sup>88</sup> of the Bomb offered Hinton a straightforward way of demarcating himself from the archaic ruling powers, whilst the Campaign provided a safe social and political space in which to disorientate away from the uncomfortable feelings of childhood, and to negotiate an autonomous position in relation to his upper-middle-class family.<sup>89</sup> He had discovered a new identity: in late fifties and early sixties society CND was part of a subterranean litany to which one subscribed in order to be marked out as a dissident.<sup>90</sup> According to Jenny Diski, 'Our parents, and the papers they read, hated the marchers with their long hair, jeans, resistance songs and clashes with the police. What more could an angry fifteen-year old want?'<sup>91</sup>

Contrary to Arthur Marwick's argument that CND 'was not really a part of youth subculture', defined by dress and music, the testimony of many young participants suggests otherwise.<sup>92</sup> As a fourteen-year old Michael Rosen relished CND culture as much as anything about the movement: the annual Easter Aldermaston march represented jazz, folk music and blues, trips to London, and time spent 'hanging' around Soho's Partisan cafe, the 'social nucleus' of CND and the New Left.<sup>93</sup> Just as Communist Party upbringing early on marked out children as political outsiders so the CND

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> In a wider but similar vein, Veldman depicted CND as an avenue of psychological freedom', a means for protesters to escape mentally from Cold War culture and to articulate their disappointments and dreams. See Veldman, *Fantasy, the Bomb and the Greening of Britain*, p. 151.

<sup>90</sup> Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream*, p. 68. From its critics CND attracted the derogatory label 'youth', as they sought to discredit the movement by drawing upon sociological and governmental debates about the problems of post-war youth. For details, see Nehring, 'The long, long night is over', pp. 138-145; Jonathan Hogg, 'Representations of CND and British Nuclear Culture', 'Campaigning in Contemporary Societies: Histories and Policies', Voluntary Action History Society PhD and Early Career Workshop, University of Birmingham, 13<sup>th</sup> November, 2009.

<sup>91</sup> Jenny Diski, *The Sixties* (London, 2009), p. 28. Frank Parkin noted that nominal support for CND was 'a more or less commonly accepted feature of the youth culture'; the Campaign provided collective group support to diffuse adolescent rebellion against adult authority. Frank Parkin, *Middle Class Radicalism: The Social Bases of the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament* (Manchester, 1968), p. 158.

<sup>92</sup> Marwick, *The Sixties*, p. 66.

<sup>93</sup> Rosen, 'All in the Family', p. 59; the Partisan Coffee House was situated under the library and office of the New Left journal, *Universities and Left Review*, supplying radicals with a taste of the culture growing around the Campaign, combining 'good' food, coffee, folk sessions, trad jam sessions and political harangues. Jeff Nuttall, *Bomb Culture* (London, 1970), p. 44.

milieu provided a similar mantle; to wear desert boots and Levi jeans was 'to be CNDish'.<sup>94</sup> The cultural representations of CND were inextricably part of the anti-establishment youth subculture that supplied an oppositional teenage identity, often bound up with enthusiasm for the beatnik movement, jazz, folk music, French existentialist and British 'angry' literature and drama. Although contrary to press claims, teenagers formed only a small contingent of the marchers, the new youth culture injected into each march a festival spirit that would precede the agitprop new left protest around the VSC.<sup>95</sup> Marwick rightly conceded CND's historical status as 'a link between the New Left revival of the mid-1950s and the radical student movements of the middle and later sixties', highlighting the visible presence of the CND symbol, the upturned 'Y' and the badge many young protesters continued to wear for the rest of the decade, even if not directly associated with CND.<sup>96</sup> According to Jeff Nuttal, it was the 'wild public festival spirit that spread the CND symbol through all the jazz clubs and secondary schools in an incredibly short time', and granted to young marchers 'a new feeling of licence', enhanced by their 'obvious' humanitarianism.<sup>97</sup> David Widgery explained the forbidden appeal: 'It was terribly enticing. At school we were told to be aware of them, not to fraternize.'<sup>98</sup> Wearing a CND badge became 'a declaration of wild extremity'<sup>99</sup>; a symbol of social rebellion against parental, school, and state authority.<sup>100</sup> For many respondents the badge became a leitmotif for the social and psychic meaning they had found in the movement. Max Farrar distinctly recollected 'the joy I had when ... my little metallic CND badge arrived in the post in 1967 or 1966 ... pinning it on my blazer, and not really doing very much else apart from going to CND meetings'.<sup>101</sup> The moment coincided with a wider period of political awakening upon his arrival at Hemel Hempstead Grammar School, intertwined with new friendships, social freedom away from public

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<sup>94</sup> Rosen, 'All in the Family', p. 59.

<sup>95</sup> Nuttal, *Bomb Culture*, p. 47.

<sup>96</sup> Marwick, *The Sixties*, p. 66.

<sup>97</sup> Nuttal, *Bomb Culture*, p. 47

<sup>98</sup> Cited in Ronald Fraser (ed.), *1968 A Student Generation in Revolt: An International Oral History* (London, 1988), p. 35.

<sup>99</sup> Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream*, p.68.

<sup>100</sup> Kate Hudson, *CND*, p. 50.

<sup>101</sup> Interview with Max Farrar, Leeds, 5<sup>th</sup> June, 2009.

school, and the start of his relationship with his lifelong female partner.<sup>102</sup>

For Bronwyn Davies the CND badge represented ‘the start of me being fairly intolerant of interference by institutions and what I think is right’.<sup>103</sup> Initially the Campaign seemed to signify her father’s passionate moral example: she began her account with her first political memory in 1961, when aged eleven her father took her on the Aldermaston march. She quickly followed his lesson - ‘as a child you think in much more black and white terms so as a child my father went and campaigned about it, and so I did too’ - aged only thirteen she participated in the 1963 march, which coincided with the mass circulation of the Spies for Peace document disclosing the Regional Seat of Government 6 (RSG6) near Reading.<sup>104</sup> However, when she later came to speak about this period in greater detail, she by-passed the marches to explain the significance CND assumed in shaping moral and political beliefs that overrode all earlier connection to her father. Amidst a narrative of teenage isolation and resentment (after a year together in Nigeria her parents had sent her home alone to continue O-level studies), the CND badge conjured up powerful feelings of defiant outrage alongside the momentary belonging the Campaign brought her within a dissenting collective:

I became a member of CND and I don’t remember going to any meetings, but always wearing a CND badge on my coat, and selling them to other people at school for six pence each, and you got in trouble if you got caught wearing a CND badge. I was a bit subversive. There were quite a lot of other girls. The friend I went on the Aldermaston march with wasn’t at my school, but there were other girls who would have gone on the march and were happy to wear the badge. I thought it was very wrong that the school should think that it was meaningful and appropriate to fuss about whether you wore a badge on your uniform. I thought it was right to be in CND and to wear the badge because it was a way of spreading the message, and also what business was it of the school’s what you wore on your uniform? You weren’t even in school when you wore your coat, so, you know, mind your own business.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Interview with Bronwyn Davies.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. For details about the ‘Spies for Peace’ Affair, see Sam Carroll, ‘Danger! Official Secret: the Spies for Peace: Discretion and Disclosure in the Committee of 100’, *History Workshop Journal*, 69, Spring, 2010, pp. 158-176.

<sup>105</sup> Interview with Bronwyn Davies.

In Lee Comer's narrative the cultural symbolism of CND signified how the movement's collective social connotations assumed deeper emotional meaning explaining her involvement. In the late 1950s she lived close to one of the main nerve centres of the Campaign in Hampstead Heath just as the movement was getting underway. Although very active, working as secretary of the Hampstead branch, Comer discounted friendships or social contacts to explain how CND's cultural symbolism gave her an external visual identity befitting her discomfort with the middle-class Jewish milieu in which her mother and step-father sought to integrate her:

If you were at all a thinking person ... it [CND] was self-evident; it was just there and I was alone. I didn't have friends or family involved in it. I was just this lone sixteen-year old ploughing my way up to Hampstead Heath and doing my stuff there ... It was part of that social thing at the time. The only way you could be at all different, except you weren't, was by being a beatnik, you know, wearing long pullovers ... you ironed your hair and wore lots of black eye makeup, so you obviously were in CND as well, but it wasn't as though I had loads of friends in that world, and the kind of social milieu I was in was one I wasn't comfortable in because my mother and step-father were trying to turn me into a nice Jewish girl ... It wasn't me at all. I was deep into existentialism and Simone De Beauvoir and Ernest Hemingway.<sup>106</sup>

For Comer, as for Hinton, CND facilitated retreat into an inner intellectual world by supplying a radical cultural persona. Visceral revolt became part of the litany of Comer distinguishing herself amidst tense parental relations. Moral conscience remained, however, crucial to her commitment to the unilateralist cause: 'We were deep in the Cold War; it was self-evident.'<sup>107</sup> Comer's reflections echo John Charlton's certainty of the 'unifying potency of the issue of the bomb' which his experience and other Tyneside testimonies had confirmed to him.<sup>108</sup> What distinguished young CND activists from teenagers who wore the badge or drifted to marches simply to annoy adults was their concern for public as well as private issues; their 'propensity to identify themselves emotionally with

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<sup>106</sup> Interview with Lee Comer, Leeds, 3<sup>rd</sup> June, 2009.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Charlton, *Don't You Hear the H-Bomb's Thunder?*, p. 66.

certain remote events', which most of their peers were 'less keenly sensitized to'.<sup>109</sup> On a moral level the testimonies reveal how the shadow of the Bomb profoundly shaped the consciences of young activists.

Whether or not they participated in CND, few respondents escaped the full psychological impact of the Bomb in the moral and political values they formed. Chris Ratcliffe's narrative reveals how in 1958 a chance encounter with the Aldermaston March was sufficient to enable an astute, socially perceptive teenager to question received parental opinion on the movement:

I remember once being in the centre of London and we went into Lyons Corner House for lunch, and as we went in we saw a mass demonstration ... as far as the eye could see there were thousands and thousands. We had quite a long lunch and when we came out they were still coming past. Subsequently, we know this is how demonstrations work, but for a young boy I just thought they can't all be louts as my dad referred to them, and it was just kind of wow, what is going on? This is something I wanted to know about.<sup>110</sup>

Before institutional politics featured in childhood landscapes the eccentric appeal of the marches struck a chord with the diffuse anxieties with which individuals responded to media reports on the nuclear threat: 'I was a reasonably bright young lad and I did follow the news. It was quite worrying especially the Cuban missile crisis.'<sup>111</sup>

Respondents' memories of the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962 share an 'eve of destruction mood'; on a wider social level the narratives suggest something of the impact of the Bomb on the social psychology of post-war children and adolescents.<sup>112</sup> Depending on age and political understanding, the crisis inspired a myriad of sentiments that anticipated a critical relationship with the governing authorities and a desire for youngsters to engage themselves in

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<sup>109</sup> Parkin, *Middle Class Radicalism*, pp. 160-61.

<sup>110</sup> Interview with Chris Ratcliffe, Hebden Bridge, 5<sup>th</sup> June, 2009.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Current research on British nuclear culture seeks to understand how cultural representations of nuclear weapons, nuclear power and CND informed popular understandings of each one, and to understand how broader concepts of British identity contributed to cultural depictions of the Bomb. For example, Hogg, 'Representations of CND and British Nuclear Culture'. For discussion on the role of nuclear culture in informing the American early post-war nuclear consciousness, see Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (London, 1994); Gerard DeGroot, *The Bomb: A Life* (London, 2004).

assertive action for political change. Before respondents were able to articulate political outrage at the recklessness of international leaders, adolescent feelings were most often imbued with personal resentment at lost opportunities, especially sexual experiences never to be. At Chandos Boys School, the secondary modern Ratcliffe attended in Stanmore, north-west London, the end of human existence offered him and his seventeen-year old friends the possibility of social rebellion and sexual adventure: 'We were all talking about what we were going to do. At our school it was split down the middle; boys on one side and girls on the other, and we were all talking about how we were going to run over to the other side.'<sup>113</sup> For Di Parkin the 15 November 1962 appeared like any other except that, as she stood at the school bus stop, world war and annihilation seemed certain. Imminent war had sat on her shoulders from her earliest memories, informing childhood games - 'You have to lie still in the cooling bath water and count, or else the plane flying overhead will turn out to be a bomber and that will be that' – but as a sixteen-year old she was able to shape an opinionated response: "'I'm going to die a virgin!' I am deeply angry.'<sup>114</sup> Adolescents' instinctive understanding that 'the world was a mess' may have been emotionally charged and clumsily expressed – 'What are you going to do with your last four minutes? Will we all have sex?', but the cognition, discussions and activities that followed on from these feelings suggest a logical progression into eventual action.<sup>115</sup> Elaine Connell's memories of the three o'clock deadline suggest how the terror of the nine-year old child, facing imminent demise – 'I was scared, scared, scared', later coalesced into acute awareness of her vulnerable lack of agency: 'My childhood resumed but ... I never forgot how my little life was at the mercy of people I didn't know and couldn't control.'<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Interview with Chris Ratcliffe.

<sup>114</sup> Di Parkin, 'Significant Crossroads as a Teenager or Young Adult or How I became a Revolutionary', in DPA, p. 3.

<sup>115</sup> Interview with Gilda Peterson. Peterson's memories of teenage thinking about what to do with her last four minutes on earth echoed Mary Ingham's reflections about the sexual preoccupations of her and her teenage friends during the Cuban missile crisis. It may well have been the case that Peterson had woven Ingham's written memories into her own, but it is also likely that girls' shared sexual curiosity reflected the increasing liberal permissiveness of British culture which surrounded them, from pop music to daring early sixties films, such as *Term of Trial*, *A Taste of Honey*, *Only Two Can Play*, and *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. Mary Ingham, *Now We Are Thirty: Women of the Breakthrough Generation* (London, 1981), p. 67.

<sup>116</sup> Elaine Connell, 'The day I asked: Are we going to die at three o'clock Mum?', *News on Sunday*, 15 November, 1987, p. 1.

Her response signalled the capacity of CND to provide an early model for direct action as a means to assuage real life, overwhelming childhood terrors: 'I was going to become one of those people Dad called "beatniks" and "layabouts" who marched every year'.<sup>117</sup> Marching offered Connell security in the faith that CND activists 'seemed to be the only ones who cared about children like me', protection against the fear of 'being burnt alive'.<sup>118</sup> To adolescents already engaged in the international politics fuelling the crisis, CND's activism also seemed to be self-evident. Bernard Reagan explained the 'shaping of views' that developed in the course of 'going out and drinking and chatting' with friends interested in issues, including nuclear disarmament: 'It always struck me that, if this is what one thought, you should try and do something about it.'<sup>119</sup>

Following the influential role of the family in shaping childhood relations to class and political and emotional affinity for the Labour left, many respondents became active in CND because of their parents' own involvement in the movement.<sup>120</sup> Bronwyn Davies' father took her on the last day of the Aldermaston march when she was only eleven.<sup>121</sup> Wisty Hoyland's father was an Anglican vicar and Chairman of Cambridge CND: 'He would even stand up in the pulpit and express his views much to the annoyance of the Church of England.'<sup>122</sup> At her independent Cambridge school, The Perse, affiliation to CND provided Hoyland with a defiant response to teachers who publically voiced their disapproval of her father's radicalism, and she continued her activism at London University from 1959.<sup>123</sup> Activism in CND also commonly featured in families where there was a Communist Party connection. Steve Jeffery's activism in the Youth Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (YCND) and in the Committee of 100 followed a seamless pattern of progressive political activity that began as early as 1949: 'One of my first recollections is actually being pushed in a wheel chair in a

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Interview with Bernard Reagan, London, 20<sup>th</sup> August, 2009.

<sup>120</sup> This pattern accords to Frank Parkin's finding, in his study of the social bases of CND, that the great majority of young CND supporters (aged between 15 and 25) had at least one parent who was sympathetic to the Campaign, either in the sense of being an active supporter, or in approving its aims and methods. See Frank Parkin, *Middle Class Radicalism*, p. 146.

<sup>121</sup> Interview with Bronwyn Davies.

<sup>122</sup> Interview with Wisty Hoyland, London, 21<sup>st</sup> January, 2009.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

demonstration the Communist Party organised in Downing Street. We were charged by police horses. This was a demonstration against German rearmament so from that I was very active in YCND, then involved in the civil disobedience activities in the Committee of 100. Basically there was a whole mess of activities.<sup>124</sup> Although Caroline Burn never showed any interest in joining the YCL like the children of other family friends, CND marches were a family affair as well as a social occasion for school friends. The Aldermaston marches were situated 'quite near to us and my mum was very active in CND more than in the Communist Party. My mum was always very anti-war ... and she took me on the marches'.<sup>125</sup>

For respondents who were young adults, teenagers, or even children during the Campaign's heyday from 1958 until 1963, CND activism formed a veritable rite of passage and remained central to a critical framework that would lead them, from 1965 onwards, to condemn their government's support for American military action in Vietnam.<sup>126</sup> The social ethos of CND was fundamental to its appeal in fostering a new, dynamic form of grass-roots political activism. The recollections of many of the former CND activists who were active in youth politics in Tyneside provide rich collective testimony to the energy, social community, and fun which the marches fostered. YS member John Creaby remembered how the Aldermaston march of 1959 was like 'a huge carnival, political parties and local Councils, students, mixed with those from different religions, cultures, entertainers'.<sup>127</sup> Another marcher, Mike Down, summarised the collective experience of youth: 'The marches provided an intense social and political education for tens of thousands of (mainly) young people – a kind of Glastonbury and 4-day seminar every Easter'.<sup>128</sup> Phil Hearse remembered his first Aldermaston March, in April 1962, in similar terms: 'An amazing experience ... kids with long hair, duffle coats and guitars singing protest songs'.<sup>129</sup> The resounding sentiment, aside from the sense of

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<sup>124</sup> Interview with Steve Jefferys.

<sup>125</sup> Interview with Caroline Burn and Gilda Peterson, Leeds, 5<sup>th</sup> June, 2009.

<sup>126</sup> See Celia Hughes, 'The History of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign: the substructure of far left activism in Britain, 1966-1969', (Unpublished MA dissertation, University of Warwick, 2009), pp. 33-35.

<sup>127</sup> Cited in John Charlton, *Don't You Hear the H-Bomb's Thunder?*, p. 71.

<sup>128</sup> Cited in *ibid*, p. 72.

<sup>129</sup> Interview with Phil Hearse, London, 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 2008.

community the marches fostered, was that the strength of the movement's appeal to young activists owed much to its capacity to engender spontaneous action and individual initiative.<sup>130</sup> David Widgery characterised the Campaign's enticing appeal as deriving not only from its cause, but from the fact that activists 'were political in a different kind of way ... They were passionate, evangelical, calling upon you to do things now, to sit down, to stand up and be counted'.<sup>131</sup>

CND established the foundations for grass roots canvassing that would be fundamental to the do-it-yourself politics surrounding the VSC. The method had struck a chord early on among CND youths. In 1962 those who had participated in 'Flying Columns', groups of YCND members who intensively canvassed door-to-door, felt that the experience had enormously improved their effectiveness as campaigners. Peter Latache, YCND chairman, had propounded the merits of this method in the YCND newspaper, *Youth Against the Bomb*, advocating the simple idea of 'Let's talk to the people'.<sup>132</sup> He enthused about 'a kind of naive socialism' which the Easter marches provided: 'Everybody mucked in, everybody suffered the same discomforts, everybody shared, supported everybody else ... It was an emotional blast to be among so many like-minded people. This, I thought, was how a civilised society would behave towards its members.'<sup>133</sup> The political experience of direct action young activists tasted in the sit-downs, initiated by the Committee of 100, ruined many for 'committee meetings and points of order' for ever more.<sup>134</sup> After Sheila Rowbotham's march to the RSG6 in 1963 the 'appeal of adventure in the woods' meant thereafter 'it was to be networks and movements ... rather than "proper" politics'.<sup>135</sup> Thirteen-year old Bronwyn Davis and her friend also followed the diversion. The Committee's direct action politics, symbolised by the

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<sup>130</sup> See also Charlton, *Don't You Hear the H-Bomb's Thunder?*, p. 73.

<sup>131</sup> Cited in Ronald Fraser (ed.), 1968, p. 35.

<sup>132</sup> *Sanity*, September, 1962, p. 3.

<sup>133</sup> Cited in Fraser (ed.), 1968, p. 34.

<sup>134</sup> Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream*, p. 69. Young CND members criticised the leadership's orthodox political style of campaigning, an impatience which contributed to the split in CND and the foundation of the Committee of 100. For discussion about the radical nature of the Committee of 100, its beliefs, tactics, and clashes with the main CND movement, see Jodi Burkett, 'Direct Action and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, 1958-1962', in Nick Crowson, Matthew Hilton and James McKay (eds.), *NGOs in Contemporary Britain: Non-state Actors in Society and Politics since 1945* (Basingstoke, 2009), p. 21-37 and Frank E. Myers, 'Civil Disobedience and Organizational Change: The British Committee of 100', *Political Science Quarterly*, LXXXVI, March, 1971, pp. 92-112.

<sup>135</sup> Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream*, p. 69.

decision to divert the route and override the leaders of CND, fitted entirely with her belief that action should follow conviction.<sup>136</sup> Steve Jefferys indicated the 'key turning-point' the Committee's protests provided in his left libertarian inclination, already influenced by his parents' close relationship with the *New Reasoner* group. In September 1961 the Committee of 100 protested after the Russians exploded an atomic bomb in the atmosphere above central Asia.<sup>137</sup> From then on until 1963 he became open to anarchist ideas before a brief involvement with Highbury Labour Party ended in 1964 when Harold Wilson's government failed to honour their manifesto pledge to raise the Old Age Pension:

I went on the Committee of 100 core demonstration outside Knightsbridge, and found to my genuine shock and horror that the numbers were down by half or three quarters of what they normally were because the Communist Party and fellow travellers were not protesting against the Russian Embassy, so I suppose that was formative in shaping my political thinking ... I was in a rather peculiar environment because, when the Communist Party split, meetings of the *New Reasoner* group used to take place in our house in a flat in Highgate ... John Saville remained a very close family friend ... and he was a very strong influence. Now coming from that background, nonetheless, I was still quite surprised when the pro-Russian crew were not present. It was all very civilised sitting down in the street, and people would kind of lift you up and throw you quite brutally in police wagons, and try to intimidate you, and so I had experiences of dealing with the police and being arrested ... those sorts of experiences meant I was open for lots of different things.<sup>138</sup>

CND imprinted an enduring legacy in the intellectual and emotional left tenets young activists developed in the milieux they joined from the mid-1960s. The new post-war left politics, that in 1967-69 coalesced around the VSC, straddled and drew influence from various left traditions, encompassing Communism, the British New Left, the Labour Party, and the labour movement as well as international New Left protest movements. By mid-1960 respondents' encounters with the full range of these traditions had fostered an attachment to a new energetic form of grass-roots political

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<sup>136</sup> Interview with Bronwyn Davis.

<sup>137</sup> See *The Times*, 2 September, 1961, p.6.

<sup>138</sup> Interview with Steve Jefferys.

engagement. Jefferys, like many of his LSE cohort, eventually found affinity with the International Socialist politics of ‘Neither Washington nor Moscow’, rejecting the binary logic of the Cold War in favour of an internationalism that advocated an alliance with the workers of Europe, Asia, Africa and the rest of the world.<sup>139</sup> CND was a vital staging-post in preparing the cultural terrain for the left milieu of the late 1960s and together with the New Left in defining an international left framework that envisioned close connection with the Third World countries.<sup>140</sup> In the late 1960s the positive neutralism of CND and the New Left was to transmute into a Third World radicalism as young activists sought to align themselves with Third World national liberation struggles, most prominently in Vietnam.

### **Young Socialist/Early IS Culture**

In the early-to-mid 1960s CND remained part of a wider, though still small, fluid left scene, providing a cohort of young activists with a political education and a social circle to make intellectual sense of international and domestic politics, and social-psychological sense of their role within this framework. Men’s and women’s testimonies reveal how the permeable boundaries between left groups facilitated the transfer of ideas and political forms often through memorable meetings with older individuals whose own politics had been shaped within a pre-war left enclave. In the early 1960s the British left young activists entered was in a state of flux in the wake of the 1956 Communist Party split. By 1962 the New Left was in decline and many of its activists had begun to drift away into other milieux which offered the promise of greater success, notably CND and the Labour Party.<sup>141</sup> A cohort of activists who joined the two main Trotskyist groupings in the VSC; IS and IMG, first encountered speakers around these milieux through Labour Party and YS circles. In

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<sup>139</sup> See Ian H. Birchall, ‘History of the International Socialists – Part 1’, *International Socialism*, 76, March 1975, [consulted at <http://www.marxists.de/intsoctend/birchall/theoprac.htm> (22 May 2009)].

<sup>140</sup> For details on the New Left influence on CND politics in the area of foreign policy, see Hinton, *Protests and Visions*, p. 175. See also Michael Kenny, *The First New Left: British Intellectuals after Stalin* (London, 1995), pp. 172-175. For discussion of CND’s vision of a new international role for Britain, see Jodi Burkett, ‘Redefining British morality: “Britishness” and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament 1958-68’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 21:2, 2010, pp. 185-192.

<sup>141</sup> Kenny, *The First New Left*, p. 24.

February 1960 the decision of the Labour Party to launch a new national youth organisation, the Young Socialists, had prompted Trotskyist groups, notably the Socialist Review group (the name of the IS group prior to 1964), and the Socialist Labour League (SLL), to use the opportunity for recruitment.<sup>142</sup> Through CND, YS meetings, and the Socialist Review's youth paper, *Young Guard*, YS men, and a few women, were absorbed into a youthful revolutionary culture that combined beer-drinking and folk-singing with activity in the labour movement.<sup>143</sup> As the main youth organisation on the left the YS attracted a predominantly working-class base – from manual, though occasionally white-collar – homes and involved a specifically working-class political culture. As a result those working-class and few lower middle-class adolescents who gained their first activist experiences within this milieu already had a solid grounding in industrial labour politics that often came later for middle-class university students. Part of the initial appeal the YS and early Trotskyist milieu exercised derived from the cultural and emotional connection working-class youngsters made between membership, politics, and their own family background and personal experiences. Continuity between the childhood and activist landscape was mediated through a working-class identity grounded in a specific locality, cultural patterns, and memories which nurtured an emotional attachment between respondents and the labour left. In 1963 Joan Smith joined the Kenton IS branch after initial activity in the Harrow YS. Situated half-way between home and school, the branch was a familiar feature of her daily route, but she also 'felt very comfortable at their meetings because it was actually a very working-class group. It was very like my background; it was people who worked on the Park Royal industrial estate; there were engineers, a couple of post office

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<sup>142</sup> The SLL used its newspaper, *Keep Left*, as a source of agitation and propaganda in the YS, and by 1961 its supporters had become known as the most avowedly militant of the left groups operating, so that Labour Party officials took increasingly harsh steps to curtail their influence; expelling *Keep Left* supporters, proscribing its newspaper, and disbanding branches where SLL supporters were concentrated. By 1965 only the refusal of Transport House to recognise the YS in its present form resulted in forcing the *Keep Left* group out of the party. The YS reformed as the Labour Party Young Socialists in 1965, though other revolutionary groupings, the IS, the International group, or the IMG, and the Militant continued to dominate the membership. Peter Shipley, *Revolutionaries in Modern Britain* (London, 1976), pp. 92-95.

<sup>143</sup> Ian Birchall, 'Building "the Smallest Mass Revolutionary Party in the World": Socialist Workers Party 1951-1979' [consulted at <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/revhist/otherdox/smp/smp1.html> (13th May 2009)]; Shipley, *Revolutionaries in Modern Britain*, p. 131.

engineers, a secretary at one of the universities, a primary school teacher, another teacher, it was a mix of people that was just okay'.<sup>144</sup> In 1959, aged twenty-one, John Charlton was one of the first members of the unofficial young socialist group, the 59 Society, founded in Gateshead, Newcastle-upon Tyne.<sup>145</sup> At a time when ideas remained 'in a very fluid state' Charlton moved freely between the 59 Society, CND, and the Newcastle New Left: during the course of his abundant weekly meetings, demonstrations and social gatherings he absorbed ideas to hone an intellectual framework that would find a place in IS<sup>146</sup>. Whereas CND was during this time situating him to the left of the Labour Party, and satisfying his youthful desire for action, the New Left meetings grounded his hostility to Soviet Communism in reasoned argument:

What you got in new left meetings was a much harder political argument ... laid out by a speaker about different aspects of the world ... I knew I wasn't interested in the Communist Party ... I remember sitting with the radio glued to my ear during Hungary. I was very keen on football and in 1953 ... it was the first time the England team had been beaten on their own soil by the Hungarians ... I watched it on the newsreels at the cinema and there were some absolutely brilliant players, and when the Hungarian revolution broke out my main interest was to find out what had happened to them, yeah ... I was so keenly interested in the Hungarian revolution and absolutely appalled by the Russian tanks pouring in, so I was never going to go that way ... Of course being on the Labour Left I was also deeply anti-Yankee ... You were just as appalled by anti-Communism as you were by Communism, so if anybody came forward with a framework of ideas that embraced ... being anti-American and anti-Communism they were going to be appealing, and the New Left was like that. And of course that is also about the IS because when the IS enters the frame they do it even better than the New Left in my opinion.<sup>147</sup>

The political culture in which the 59 society operated mirrored the fluid left landscape shaping the intellectual tenets of Charlton's politics. Amongst the Society's lively social life, which encompassed YCL and CND activists, activities such as rambles and midnight hikes with speakers,

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<sup>144</sup> Interview with Joan Smith.

<sup>145</sup> Interview with John Charlton.

<sup>146</sup> Charlton, *Don't You Hear the H-Bomb's Thunder?*, p. 100; interview with John Charlton.

<sup>147</sup> Interview with John Charlton.

suggested a flavour of the inter-war Communist rambles and socialist youth expeditions.<sup>148</sup> However, the social continuities between the pre- and early sixties post-war milieux were limited, and whilst he valued the New Left speakers for expanding the international dimension of his politics, the activism and easy sociability of the 59 Society more readily accommodated his politics alongside cultural pursuits that encouraged fluid social and sexual mixing. The political solemnity of the New Left stood too closely to the Labour Party's bureaucratic formality whereas the 59 Society felt more like 'a society, a youth club, an opportunity for drinking in friendly company, arguing with and laughing with people'.<sup>149</sup>

For a small cohort of male apprentices the YS/IS milieu performed social, cultural, and psychological functions that connected to their earliest childhood efforts to make sense of themselves in relation to their families and local environment. On a sociological level these men's accounts may be read in conjunction with the post-war findings of the LSE-trained sociologists whose social surveys of working-class life suggested a complex, multilayered society where tensions between older patterns of class and modernizing aspects of post-war affluence and youth culture provided the external social structures.<sup>150</sup> Also pertinent in this context is the work of the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies (CCC), notably that of Phil Cohen, who interpreted post-war youth sub-cultures as specific, yet contradictory cultural responses to social disruptions which had affected the entire East End community. Cohen saw the styles of mods, teddy boys and skin heads as attempts to 'express and resolve, albeit magically, the contradictions which remain hidden or unresolved in the parent culture'.<sup>151</sup> Such findings may be seen as formative to understanding the cultural expression of working-class, Young Socialist men; their styles were part of wider responses

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<sup>148</sup> Interview with John Charlton; Matthew Worley, 'Left Turn: A Reassessment of the Communist Party of Great Britain in the Third Period, 1928-33', *Twentieth Century British History*, 11:4, 2000, p. 376.

<sup>149</sup> Interview with John Charlton.

<sup>150</sup> See Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (London, 1962), and Brian Abel-Smith and Peter Townsend, *The Poor and the Poorest: A New Analysis of the Ministry of Labour's Family Expenditure Surveys of 1953-54 and 1960* (London, 1966).

<sup>151</sup> Phil Cohen, 'Sub-cultural Conflict and Working Class Community', *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, 2, Spring, 1972, University of Birmingham, p. 22. See also Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (eds.), *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, London, 2006), and Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London, 1995).

on the part of working-class youth to growing up in local communities deeply embedded in class feeling, especially where they found themselves caught in the midst of real shifts in the social landscape.

The political cultures that developed within the YS/IS milieu reflected the very socio-cultural identity that had informed the young men's Marxism. In 1967 Bob Light encountered 'a group of young kids' from the YS; the appeal of the East End London branch rested firmly in the shared socio-economic and socio-cultural background he discovered between the members and himself. The branch, which by 1968 integrated Walthamstow, Leyton and Hackney, initially consisted of a dozen or so predominantly East End working-class young men as well as a few women. Like Light a number of them came from left-wing families, carried a natural interest in politics, and shared his enthusiasm for football, non-mainstream music including blues and folk, and held some very good parties. Reflecting the almost tribal working-class East End youth culture in which he had grown up, the group attracted him partly because it felt so familiar: 'My experience is almost self-defining. Walthamstow was very self-contained, people didn't travel and so it was very much kids from the local area ... The guys would be all working-class background, but somewhere with a dissident gene; so Roy, for example, Jimmy, people like that came like me from a political family and politics was a natural area of interest.'<sup>152</sup> The highly localized youth culture he described echoes portraits of teenage mod culture with its roots in localized communities such as Croyden, Tottenham and Hackney outside the centre of 'Swinging London'.<sup>153</sup> Despite the inherent internationalism of the socialism the branch espoused, central to its appeal was its ability to accommodate a local working-class youth culture that included a vibrant rhythm n' blues music scene based in pubs like the Britannia, the YS haunt next to the Hackney Empire.<sup>154</sup>

Fred Lindop proved an exception amongst the local membership; an LSE post-graduate, he was four years older than Light and his peers. His Oxford education, extensive collection of books

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> David Fowler, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain, c. 1920-c.1970*, (Basingstoke, 2008), p. 131.

<sup>154</sup> Interview with Bob Light.

and serious persona distinguished him in the branch. He was also married and as a university teacher his lifestyle and manner stood out against the laddish persona of Light and ‘the guys’ who shared a flat together, a ‘den of iniquity and excess’, near to Walthamstow Central.<sup>155</sup> Nevertheless, Lindop’s deprived Birkenhead background reinforced the inclusive working-class milieu defining the branch. The son of a wood-cutting machinist in the Camel Laird ship yard, at Birkenhead direct grant school his social separateness had arisen amidst a body of boys who came mainly from professional middle-class families; their fathers, company directors, solicitors or even MPs. Coming of age, he held a firm desire to retain a distance from this professional materialist culture, and like Charlton and Irving, in the sixth-form he had gravitated to a male friendship group of predominantly working- or lower middle-class boys whose shared socialist outlook related to the discomfort and antagonism they felt in relation to middle-class pupils.<sup>156</sup> Amidst a localized political culture where ‘accusations of petty bourgeois status abounded’ class identity, resting on shared childhood cultural patterns and emotions, provided a key constituent of belonging. As a result Lindop, with his Jewish Hackney wife, added his own social and psychic imprint to the overall working-class East End cultural ethos enveloping the membership.<sup>157</sup>

For Lindop the otherness of the Trotskyist identity, defined by tendency, rooted in a commitment to the professional calling of revolutionary, and embedded in the bitter experience of past political failure connected with his adolescent sense of social difference.<sup>158</sup> In his previous Hackney branch he had thrived off sectarian arguments with Militant members like Peter Taff and Brian Smith. His discomfort amidst his middle-class Oxford peers had finally found a home, and he had readily embraced the Afro-Caribbean music of the local West Indian community whilst campaigning in Ridley Road. Despite the beginnings of student unrest at the LSE from June 1965, he remained more at home in Hackney where he concentrated his efforts on building the East London IS.

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Interview with Fred Lindop, Wareham, 19<sup>th</sup> January, 2009.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Rowbotham, *Woman’s Consciousness, Man’s World*, p. 18.

If I am entirely honest I always felt much more comfortable with working-class people, and especially with working-class women than I did with middle-class people, although I had lots of friends who became television producers, writers, theatre directors, but some of those had working-class backgrounds, including publicans in working-class areas. I didn't really have much contact with them beyond '67. Most of my friends by then were political activists or the people I met through tenants' activities.<sup>159</sup>

As John Charlton testified, the suffusion of class and cultural attachment to Labour politics meant that for working-class young men initial attraction to the YS and early IS milieu was often social. Alan Watts was the son of a factory engineer. In Tottenham his early political awareness came from the small circle of male friends with whom, in 1958, he joined his local YS branch:

I knew I was socially aware and then Gordon, a mate of mine, was big into reading war stories, and I remember having an argument with him about this ... [it was] 1958 and I said "Why do we need nuclear weapons?" He said, "Well, we've got to protect ourselves." I said "Well if we got rid of them and so did they" ... but none of this went anywhere, and later on several of us who knocked around together, the guy we hung around with, Mel Norris, asked us to go to a YS meeting, and we went there and came across these people just pouring out these ideas and stuff I had never heard before, and it was absolutely brilliant.<sup>160</sup>

Roger Cox's entry into Tottenham IS occurred through similar friendship ties, beginning in 1953 when he joined the Shoreditch branch of the Labour Party:

When I was in secondary school my best friend was the son of a London County Councillor and therefore he was in the Labour Party, and so from the age of twelve or thirteen I was active in the Labour Party, and you had lots of different views, and in terms of friendships and ties you had got this ... I was in the YS ... but the other thing was that the old Trotskyist organisations began to grow around these circles, and we bumped into people from the SLL, and the other people who came round was the IS.<sup>161</sup>

Cox's testimony indicates how activism within YS circles brought bright, socially enquiring, and class conscious youngsters into contact with figures from the early IS organisation whose political ideas

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Interview with Alan Watts, London, 20<sup>th</sup> March, 2009.

<sup>161</sup> Interview with Roger Cox, London, 24<sup>th</sup> March, 2009.

and energetic style of delivery struck a chord with youngsters' social and political experiences. These IS figures would exercise a decisive influence on the development of their thinking as well as their social sense of self. By 1964 the Labour Party Young Socialists (LPYS) had begun to move progressively leftwards as discontent with Labour Party headquarters increased. They had also come under the increasing influence of Trotskyist groups – the SLL, IS, and the Revolutionary Socialist League – which lent activists a willingness to defy the party line.

Active around the YS and CND, the IS had emerged in the 1950s as the Socialist Review Group, following the orientation of their effective leader, Tony Cliff.<sup>162</sup> In 1960 the group had launched a theoretical magazine, *International Socialism*, whose title asserted the state-capitalist position which Cliff had embraced: 'Neither Washington nor Moscow, but International Socialism'. According to Martin Shaw the group provided an anti-Stalinist, freethinking alternative to the intimidating 'orthodoxy' of the SLL, and in the early sixties, began to attract 'refugees' from the latter, from the declining New Left as well as a few young workers and students from CND and the YS.<sup>163</sup>

For working-class activists like Watts and Cox the striking impact of IS ideas came in the way in which they seemed to resonate with their personal experiences of the local workaday world. Cliff emphasised, for example, the concept of 'substitutionism', substituting the revolutionary party for the working-class to advocate a party which discussed and decided openly in front of the workers.<sup>164</sup> Alan Watts remembered the electrifying nature of the ideas he heard on Tuesday evenings when IS speakers, Cliff and John Palmer, came and spoke to his YS group:

What was exciting about it to me was that it was the beginnings of an explanation of what was going on around me ... On the one hand I was working in this factory everyday with loads of working-class people, obviously, toolmakers, and so there was a union organisation because they were all craftsmen, and on Tuesday

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<sup>162</sup> John Callaghan, *British Trotskyism: Theory and Practice* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 99-101; Shipley, *Revolutionaries in Modern Britain*, p. 131; Birchall, 'From Theory to Practice', p. 2.

<sup>163</sup> Martin Shaw, "'The Making of a Party?'" *The International Socialists 1965-1976*, in Ralph Miliband and John Saville (eds.), *The Socialist Register* (London, 1978), p. 104.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

evenings going to these meetings, and I can distinctly remember going to work in the mornings and working my drill, and my head was just spinning with all these ideas. It was just fantastic. I didn't realise at the time. I just thought what about this, what about that?<sup>165</sup>

Watts' narrative indicates how for socially and politically conscious youngsters, in the early 1960s, the uncertainty and angst of the early adult self often became intertwined within a wider framework of national and international politics and social developments. He encountered the early IS milieu at a crucial moment of frustration with his work and family relations. Having gained an apprenticeship at Stockholm Metal Works in Enfield, he had recently been dismissed after he accused his foreman of responsibility for a serious accident in which an employee had had his fingers crushed in a ten tonne press. During this same time his hopes of travelling to Southern Rhodesia had also been dashed after his brother and not he was accepted for Voluntary Overseas Service (VSO)<sup>166</sup>:

The idea was that my brother and I were going to Southern Rhodesia. It was just somewhere to go other than where I was ... at the time he was working in the *Financial Times* as an office boy and they [the VSO programme] accepted him and not me and so he went. I must have been twenty-two or so. David went when he was 19 and my mother always thought he was the dog's bollocks and I was the son who was the Commie. It was all a bit of a nightmare really.<sup>167</sup>

For Watts the moral and political issue of the Bomb seemed to symbolise his absence of agency at work, in his family as well as in the wider political arena. Week by week, as he listened to the speakers, the ideas he heard equipped him with explanations that felt empowering because they enabled him to situate his own individual sense of injustice within the class framework Cliff and others presented to him. Why it was necessary to build the Bomb suddenly became clear to him through leading IS theoretician Michael Kidron's theory of the 'permanent arms economy', and he

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<sup>165</sup> Interview with Alan Watts.

<sup>166</sup> VSO was founded in 1958 by Alec Dickson, a former journalist who had observed the beneficial contribution Western students had made to refugee relief during the Hungarian uprising in 1956. The project began after the Bishop of Portsmouth, Launcelot Fleming, wrote a letter to *The Sunday Times*, suggesting school leavers volunteering overseas could be a way of bolstering Commonwealth ties. For details, see Dick Bird, *Never the Same Again*, (Cambridge, 1998).

<sup>167</sup> Interview with Alan Watts.

began to feel he had a grasp on the way the world worked.<sup>168</sup> As he relived the exciting revelations that Cliff's explanations of Russia and the Bomb had brought, Watts showed how the subjectivity of the frustrated young apprentice came to speak through the language of International Socialism:

What was being explained to me over quite a long period of time was really how we all fitted together. The Bomb, for instance, was a bit of an issue, it was ongoing ... The explanations that were being presented for why it was necessary to build the bomb was explained by the politics of IS at the time with the permanent war economy ... So that was quite exciting that suddenly I had a grasp on the Bomb and why they needed to have it ... when you explain Russia ... it was a black hole ... There was an iron curtain in our heads, and so when Tony Cliff and the IS group were explaining the class nature of Russia I began to get a grasp of the way the world worked.<sup>169</sup>

Light underlined how for these young men politics was from the outset inextricably personal, an extension of the self, because of the way in which their encounters with the YS/IS occurred at pivotal moments of personal and political transition as they struggled to make sense of turbulent emotions and their relationship to the local and international world. After a profoundly traumatic end to a relationship at the age of sixteen, he had abandoned his plans to be a professional footballer and flown to France where he and his friends worked in youth hostels and earned money picking fruit. The subsequent years of travelling through Europe and India, immersing himself in black music, absorbing a new understanding of race, and experimenting sexually can be seen both as an extension of his earlier involvement in the vibrant mod scene around East End pubs, the international style awakening his interest in a wider world, as well as a psychic response following his girlfriend's suicide. He reflected: 'If you hit this prism from my background where there is this

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<sup>168</sup> The theory of the 'permanent arms economy' used arms expenditure to explain the relative post-war stability of advanced western capitalist economies. The idea was first developed by writers of the American Trotskyist movement led by Max Shachtman, popularised by Cliff, and further developed by Michael Kidron, who argued that the system represented the final phase of capitalism and that, contrary to ideas prevailing in the Communist Party and amongst many Trotskyists, capitalist stability, as long as war expenditure continued, called for grass-roots struggles as the best way to secure reforms. For details, see Michael Kidron, *Western Capitalism since the War* (Harmondsworth, 1968); Birchall, 'From Theory to Practice', p. 1; Callaghan, *British Trotskyism*, pp. 94-96; Shaw, 'The Making of a Party?', pp. 3-4.

<sup>169</sup> Interview with Alan Watts.

deep rebelliousness and I have also had this appalling broken part of me ... then you tend to come out of it in a political way'.<sup>170</sup>

Cox confirmed how the captivating appeal of IS speakers occurred at a critical juncture of these men's relations with the left when they were seeking a new, dynamic political space which could accommodate their own contradictory experiences of post-war affluence and Cold War bloc politics. Apart from CND few radical options appealed to jocular East End youngsters who were likely to greet the brittle orthodoxy of SLL activists with cynicism and teasing. Whilst the Communist Party was politically irrelevant, as the party of Russia and the Bomb, its members tired and authoritarian, the Labour Party represented bingo sessions in Shoreditch.<sup>171</sup> Cox was instantly captivated by the first IS characters he met, Robyn Fiore and Michael Kidron, whose ability to relate ideas to him with humour and sincerity stood in stark contrast to the austere culture that prevailed elsewhere on the left:

Then arrived on the scene two contrasting characters and the impact they had was quite unimaginable really. One was Robyn Fiore and the other was Mike Kidron. These two toffs, gents, spoke very posh. They came and had these arguments with us, do you know this, and they were incredibly unpatronising and quite funny, and again they were from this different world, a world which was more sophisticated, and again there was this opportunity to actually have a better understanding of the world, and they used to go around various groups of youngsters talking to them to lure them into Tony Cliff's front room where he gave these lectures on Marxism.<sup>172</sup>

The captivating personality of Tony Cliff and his ability to nurture, respectfully engage, yet banter with and challenge the East London apprentices was central to the appeal the early IS milieu exuded. Once Fiore and Kidron had successfully 'lured' Cox into Cliff's front room, he was enraptured by this 'funny old man', his Marxism heavy with amusing idiosyncrasies. In stark contrast to the officialdom of the Communist Party and the labour movement, Cox explained how 'suddenly there is this

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<sup>170</sup> Interview with Bob Light.

<sup>171</sup> Interview with Roger Cox.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

Marxism and Cliff is going to do it, and it was in someone's front room so you didn't have the intimidation'.<sup>173</sup> The domesticity of the political setting in the Cliff's Stoke Newington home created a reassuring familiarity that helped to shape a sense of belonging.<sup>174</sup> Before long Cox and Light found themselves baby-sitting for Cliff and his South African wife, Chanie, at home in a familial circle that fluidly encompassed the small number of members in the organisation.<sup>175</sup> Chanie also played a nurturing role to the young workers who came into Cliff's circle. She was a teacher and Sarah Cox, Roger's wife, recalled her attentiveness, setting him tests on the political ideas the group had discussed.<sup>176</sup> In Light's case Cliff played a mediating role which helped him to make intellectual and emotional sense of the strained loyalties he felt, torn between his love for his father and his inability to relate to his steadfast Communist beliefs. Only marginally older than his father, and living around the corner, Cliff provided an integrated paternal and political role model that cemented Light's commitment to this Palestinian socialist's organic ideas and affectionate manner:

You cannot imagine the influence. He was in so many respects a parallel to my father ... My father was 10 years older or so, and my father was the product of a troubled home, and he came out of it as really fine people, he and my mum, and for all I didn't agree with my father, and he and I used to have really intense political arguments at this stage, especially about Russia because [of] the invasion of Czechoslovakia, but it was vicious at this time, but you meet Cliff, he was an intellectual in this sense.<sup>177</sup>

For Light, Cox and Watts the IS milieu provided a Marxist education that in other circumstances they might have gained from Oxford's Ruskin College or the Workers Educational Association (WEA).<sup>178</sup>

The IS circle around Cliff was small and intimate, but a hot-house of political and intellectual

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid

<sup>174</sup> Michèle Roberts provides a description of the chaotic, open family household of the Cliffs in Stoke Newington, north London, which she visited in 1971. Michèle Roberts, *Paper Houses* (London, 2007), p. 18.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Interview with Sarah Cox, London, 24<sup>th</sup> March, 2009.

<sup>177</sup> Interview with Roger Cox.

<sup>178</sup> Geoff Andrews, Hilda Keane and Jane Thompson, *Ruskin College: Contesting Knowledge, Dissenting Politics* (London, 1999); John Holford, 'Unions, Adult Education and Post-War Citizenship: The WEA and the Construction of Trade Union Education', in Stephen K. Roberts (ed.), *A Ministry of Education: Centenary Essays on the Workers' Educational Association* (London, 2003), pp. 153-175; Bernard Jennings, *Knowledge is Power: A Short History of the Workers' Educational Association 1903-1978* (Hull, 1979).

ferment. Cliff, Kidron, Paul Foot, John Palmer and others nurtured these youngsters, took a personal interest in their political development, and encouraged them to pursue their own ideas through reading challenging Marxist texts. Although the experience was sometimes difficult at first having left school at fifteen, they persevered because Cliff and others gave them confidence to believe in their intellectual abilities where school teachers had previously dismissed them. From the moment he joined the organisation in 1958 at the age of seventeen, Cox's receptiveness to reading and education resulted from the importance which the organisation placed on his role as a worker. Cliff devoted time to grilling him on the life of the factory, its politics, union practices as well as daily minutiae including the importance of the tea break.<sup>179</sup> In such areas workers like Cox were experts and Cliff made them feel so. As he expressed his indebtedness to the organisation for giving him access to ideas to illuminate his place in the world, he underlined how the self-determination he gained as a young worker was mediated through an empowering politics within what he often felt to be an alienating industrial world:

Right from the start I was told by the organisation, when I was doing my apprenticeship, you must work hard and pass your exams, and then you can get a good job and really begin to operate. Education is of the utmost importance. You had to read ... For a working-class boy like me the organisation was your university. It was where you learnt everything and where you were expected to teach yourself. If you talk to a kid of my generation I was probably exceptional in a way. You stood head and shoulders above people around you in terms of ideas, you know. You came to love ideas. The best conversations I had were with my mates when I was on the railways because some of these guys had travelled the world a bit and [had also left behind] the narrowness I didn't have any longer.<sup>180</sup>

Amidst the late sixties activist scene intellectual mobility, the transference of political, social and cultural ideas from western Europe and north America offered young men and women alternative

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<sup>179</sup> Interview with Roger Cox.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

‘ways of thinking’ and ‘versions of the world’.<sup>181</sup> Yet at a locally-rooted level early IS culture offered young men like Watts and Cox an international socialist politics that was simultaneously embedded in older and newly emerging cultural patterns of East End working-class life including work, family and leisure. Inside the tiny organisation, which by 1964 numbered no more than 200 members, they gained an intellectual apprenticeship and the opportunity to engage in this wider international process of intellectual mobility and political exchange.<sup>182</sup> Amidst this intimate and intellectually electric ethos these young men found a sense of self through belonging to the group. They came to identify themselves as being IS: a vital component of this identity involved the body of ideas they came steadily to absorb. As these activists came to feel themselves gaining greater access to new ways of viewing the world, the world itself seemed simultaneously to expand and shrink around them as possibilities for perception increased, and their own place within the local and international situation expanded.

### **Youth Culture and YS Masculine Sociability**

The intellectual stimulus of the YS/IS milieu became heavily embedded in a masculine-oriented sociability, part of the collective identity that bound young socialist men together. Social bonds were rooted in a shared identity of class, enthusiasm for newly discovered Marxist ideas, political debate, intensive activity, and cultural tastes. The process of being collectively active and learning how to be activists fostered and developed the bonds of comradeship. In the run-up to the general election of 1964 Watts recalled attending a meeting at Finsbury town hall when he and his friends clashed with far right supporters:

I thought whatever happens I’m going to go in. So we got into this meeting, but we kept thinking we knew which side we were on. We had had meetings on Russia and Germany, and all that sort of stuff, and the

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<sup>181</sup> Roughly parallel learning processes affected young female activists of this generation as much as men. Feminist Angela Carter highlighted how as a young sixties woman the abundance of intellectual ideas and cultural forms she encountered from Europe suggested an overwhelming sense of possibility for individual and social transformation. Angela Carter, ‘Truly, It Felt Like Year One’, in Sara Maitland, (ed.), *Very Heaven: Looking Back at the 1960s* (London, 1988), p.211.

<sup>182</sup> Callaghan, *British Trotskyism*, p. 101.

Spanish Civil War, and so we knew what the story was, and so we acted collectively to oppose people with like views over here so this drew us together as friends and comrades.<sup>183</sup>

This inherently active YS culture fostered a socially buoyant, yet intellectually rooted masculinity, which became easily subsumed into the street politics around the VSC in the late 1960s. Together with Light's familiarity with members' mod culture another factor drawing him further into the East End YS/IS branch was the group's involvement in the VSC just as it began to move its politics out of Transport House and on to the street. His participation and arrest in the anti-Vietnam war demonstration on 22 October 1967 especially cemented his attachment because the militant tone of protest signalled a discernible shift towards a militant, activist left politics that connected to a deeply rooted part of his working-class East End background<sup>184</sup>:

I began to form a loyalty and the first big demo was in October '67 ... and there was a part of me that really liked being able to smack the police right in the mouth, exerting all that resentment built up over the years being a working-class kid, and red riding is the thin version, but they were little Nazis, and it added up to a really nice day out to me, and you consolidate the sense of identification, and I think I got arrested at that one. I didn't mind, no great stigma, I got fined and then I went away.<sup>185</sup>

Alan Woodward, who joined Tottenham YS around 1962, indicated how the social bonds of comradeship exuded a collective self-assertion that derived from the energy the young men generated through political activities. Within the Tottenham group he and others supported the tenants' struggle, went on CND marches, were arrested in the Committee of 100 sit-downs, wrote and leafleted a factory, - 'A Blow Against the Bomb is a Blow Against the Boss'- attended countless

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<sup>183</sup> Interview with Alan Watts.

<sup>184</sup> For details of protesters' clashes with police at the American Embassy, see the *Morning Star*, 22 October, 1967, p. 1; the *Guardian*, 24 October, 1967, p. 4. For discussion of the protest's political and psychological departure from preceding CND protests, see Chris Harman, *The Fire Last Time: 1968 and After* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, London, 1998), p. 143.

<sup>185</sup> For details of the first mass march against the Vietnam War, orchestrated by the VSC, see *The Times*, 23 October, 1967, p. 1, and Tariq Ali, *Street Fighting Years: An Autobiography of the Sixties* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, London 2005), pp. 233-234.

meetings, sold the IS paper, *Labour Worker*, and later joined the anti-Vietnam war marches.<sup>186</sup> All this activity occurred alongside continual, heated discussions; 'people saying I have read this book. Have you read that book?'<sup>187</sup> Implicit within these earnest but friendly debates was the intellectual competition on which the social bonds between them rested. Throughout the early-to-mid 1960s, as they gained confidence in their effectiveness as a group of political actors, political ties in turn strengthened the social bonds to create a shared sense of comradeship that was rooted in a competitive male sphere. The masculine language and tropes within the narratives highlight how the dynamic of comradeship was inherently active in form: at its heart lay the element of competition that could be discerned in all social and political activities, and relations the young men shared. The tropes of movement in Woodward's account suggest the way in which activity became integral to his socialist selfhood: 'We would come back and say how many papers we had sold, how many arguments we had had ... it was this milieu of activity, of consciousness being perceived by activity. Out of activity came consciousness as opposed to many Marxists who believed it was the other way round.'<sup>188</sup>

The language of the milieu reinforced the fraternal and comradely ties. Before they were able to feel truly part of the group Young Socialist men faced the daunting task of learning the Trotskyist code in which the IS theorists had long been absorbed. Woodward found this a fairly rapid process because at the time he shared a house with an older IS activist from Notting Hill Gate: 'If you didn't know you would think the person was talking rubbish, but once you knew the code, the vanguard, the proletariat, etcetera, there was a cohesion behind it all.'<sup>189</sup> The intensity of life in the household - constant activity, meetings, discussion and interventions - cemented fraternal bonds alongside leisure activities. In 1966 Woodward accompanied his comrades on a wet camping trip to Aviemore: 'We were a little group who went around together ... who went on holiday together once to Scotland hitchhiking and sleeping in railway trains ... so there was this group who in a sense

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<sup>186</sup> Interview with Alan Woodward.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

carried out an intense rescheduling of my thinking into revolutionary socialist lines.<sup>190</sup>

The integrated social and political patterns through which Young Socialists developed their own vibrant youth culture illustrate how prior to the emergence of the student movement and Women's Liberation the personal had already become political as the boundaries between politics, work, home and social life blurred. This picture of a lively IS sub-culture complements the earlier portrait of CND as a 'culturefest' for the young, highlighting the role these milieux performed as cultural staging posts for the VSC activist scene.<sup>191</sup> Symbolic of the close interaction of youth sub-culture and activist politics was the flat, in 65 Bishop's Close, the fulcrum of the East End IS branch in which Light and his comrades shaped a vibrant social and cultural scene. By 1968 the household was drawing in an ever-growing number of working-class youths from the Walthamstow area. Attracted by the legendary parties the flat hosted, young party-goers were recruited, and throughout 1968 the flat became central to the political as well as to the social life of the branch. The social and political patterns around the milieu blurred into one; branch meetings, held in the Britannia Pub, became more frequent as social as well as political gatherings. Light and his comrades, heavily keen on blues and San Francisco music, started a band together in the flat and this too became part of the branch's social and cultural scene. His memory of life inside the household underscored the ease with which the libertarian socialist politics the young men found in IS fitted alongside their enthusiasm for the mod sub-culture shaping their musical tastes, style of dress and sexual conduct:

We were simultaneously young men, yeah, doing young men things. We were really into music and we had a band associated with the flat ... in many ways it was the DNA of our politics, the exploration of new kinds of music ... There was no party line on what music you liked ... The sense of sexual freedom was important because in an earlier generation you couldn't have done it, but in this generation we were unusual, and we were very committed. We would go and leaflet factory bulletins. The branch and the household were almost

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Willie Thompson and Marcus Collins, 'The Revolutionary Left and the Permissive Society' in Marcus Collins (ed.), *The Permissive Society and Its Enemies: Sixties British Culture* (London, 2007), p. 160.

inseparable to be honest. People would hang out there and there would always be someone sleeping on the floor.<sup>192</sup>

Dynamic, at times militant activity not only empowered Young Socialist men as political agents working for local and international change, but informed their willingness to push against social boundaries constraining their capacity for social and sexual mobility and pleasure. The men's narratives exuded a self-determination that testified to the self-assertion they acquired during these initial years of activism. It was in their work lives where IS politics came most immediately to affect their identities as workers. The higher spending power of working-class youth, which the Albermarle Committee had, in 1959-60, noted beneath the emerging youth culture, continued towards the end of the decade to facilitate the burgeoning activist youth scene.<sup>193</sup> Light was one of a cohort of young men who after 1945 benefited from the growing demand for young unskilled and semi-skilled workers in an economic trend that was accompanied by falling contributions made to parents.<sup>194</sup> In 1968 he worked casually as a painter and decorator; working at the weekend for double pay was sufficient to keep him afloat for the rest of the week, allowing him time and leisure to pursue music and politics: 'I didn't have a regular routine life and I didn't want one. My life was about politics, not in a messianic way because politics was about friendships and music.'<sup>195</sup>

Women's minimal place in the men's narratives underscored the masculine, fraternal foundation of early Trotskyist culture and identity. During this period of their accounts Woodward was amongst a small number of Tottenham YS/IS comrades to have married and yet neither his own wife nor the wives or girlfriends of his comrades featured in his narrative about the milieu. On one level the absence or background presence of women is unsurprising given the largely negative experiences a number of women in the early WLM documented in relation to the Trotskyist

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<sup>192</sup> Interview with Bob Light.

<sup>193</sup> Ministry of Education, *The Youth Service in England and Wales* (the Albermarle report) (1960).

<sup>194</sup> Bill Osgerby, *Youth in Britain since 1945* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 23-26.

<sup>195</sup> Interview with Bob Light.

groups.<sup>196</sup> To some extent this active masculine sociability may be seen as a logical extension of the fraternal bonds propounded by 'aggressively' working-class male protagonists many of the men had strongly identified with as adolescents. The crisis in culture the 'angry' literature addressed had focused its lament for traditional working-class culture on the female corrupted by modern consumerism.<sup>197</sup> It is difficult to conclude in what ways the men consciously or unconsciously may or may not have absorbed the gendered sub-texts of the 'angry' literature they read voraciously. However, the YS/IS milieu showed no signs of the 'sex-hostility' which the 'Angry Young Men' exuded, evident also in male gangs of the period such as the Teddy Boys.<sup>198</sup> The 59 Society, for example, contained a large number of young women of secondary-school and university age. Women like Mary Feinmann, Fiona Scott-Batey and Jane Owens were daughters of Tyneside Labour councillors whilst others were drawn in through participation in Tyneside CND.<sup>199</sup> The fluid integration of membership between CND and the YS meant that the social and sexual values prevailing within each forum could incline towards a mutual libertarianism. Given the critical social and political consciousness of young adults within these milieux, members unsurprisingly displayed evidence of the changing sexual behaviour and attitudes post-war sociologists had observed most prominently within the avant-garde youth sub-cultures, characterised by 'the form of greatest openness, frankness, and contempt for adult hypocrisy'.<sup>200</sup> In the early-to-mid-1960s young women as well as men around the left milieux displayed a growing sense of social and sexual agency that allowed individuals like seventeen-year old, beatnik dressed, Bronwyn Davies to head off alone to London for demonstrations.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> See Sheila Rowbotham, 'Women's Liberation and the New Politics', in Sheila Rowbotham, *Dreams and Dilemmas: Collected Writings*, London, 1983, p. 24-32, Amanda Sebestyen, in *Once a Feminist: Stories of a Generation: Interviews by Michelene Wandor*, London, 1990, pp. 138-139, and Anna Paczuska, in *Once a Feminist*, pp. 149-159.

<sup>197</sup> Geoff Eley, 'Distant Voices, Still Lives: The Family is a Dangerous Place: Memory, Gender, and the Image of the Working Class', in Robert Rosenstone, ed., *Revisioning History*, (Princeton, 1993), p. 20.

<sup>198</sup> Marcus Collins, *Modern Love: An Intimate History of Men and Women in Twentieth-Century Britain*, (London, 2003), p. 168.

<sup>199</sup> Charlton, *Don't You Hear the H-Bomb's Thunder?*, pp. 102-103.

<sup>200</sup> Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties*, p. 74. See also Charles Hamblett and Jane Deverson, *Generation X* (London, 1965); Michael Schofield, *The Sexual Behaviour of Young People* (London, 1965).

<sup>201</sup> Interview with Bronwyn Davies.

John Charlton's reflections on the opportunities the 59 Society provided for social and sexual freedom – 'an opportunity to meet girls. That was one of the things that was terribly important'<sup>202</sup> - were echoed equally by female members like Jane (Lu) Bell who felt stifled by the paternalistic rules governing her social life and sexual body within her Newcastle University hall of residence.<sup>203</sup> The extent to which such sentiments were shared by other young men and women active in the YS and CND signalled, above all, the way in which mutually companionable relations between the sexes could exist alongside the fraternal bonds of intellectual and political comradeship.<sup>204</sup> For Light a couple of casual relationships with women from Hackney, one an IS member, stimulated his entry into the milieu because alongside sex, politics provided a mutual, intimate area for personal and political exploration in a relationship where he had the sexual vocabulary and experience while she brought political experience and intellectual capital.<sup>205</sup> Di Parkin emphasised how friendships with male as well as female members rested equally on their shared identities as revolutionaries.<sup>206</sup> Such personal and political mutuality featured subsequently amidst male-female relations at the height of the VSC activist scene, though that is not to deny the innately contradictory gendered experiences women's testimonies have already highlighted.

In the YS young men's public displays of political identity and comradeship minimised space for the feminine. Alan Woodward's wife was a fellow activist: in 1962 he had met her in London's Chelsea YS which he chaired during his training at the local teaching college. He insisted that he did not intentionally describe women's role in the Tottenham YS in pejorative terms; he signalled his respect for the wife of another comrade - a 'fully fledged politico' - yet she stood out because all other female members were 'little women', passive members who 'tagged along behind this group of very active, very effective men'. He confirmed the psychic connection between activism, fraternal

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<sup>202</sup> Interview with John Charlton.

<sup>203</sup> Charlton, *Don't You Hear the H-Bomb's Thunder?*, p. 112.

<sup>204</sup> For details of women's experiences and relations vis-à-vis male CND members, see Sam Carrol, "'I Was Arrested at Greenham in 1962": Investigating the Oral Narratives of Women in the Committee of 100', *Oral History*, 32, Spring, 2004, pp. 12-19.

<sup>205</sup> Interview with Bob Light.

<sup>206</sup> Interview with Di Parkin.

ties and the men's collective Trotskyist identity: 'We were extremely effective in most of what we did. We were shit-hot basically'.<sup>207</sup> For Woodward the bonds of comradeship were explicitly masculine even despite his own wife's activism. This traditionally masculine working-class culture seems to have endured partly because it fed off the traditional gender division of labour inside the post-war family: the powerful discourse of motherhood and maternalism perpetuated women's childcare responsibilities.<sup>208</sup> Yet, Woodward did emphasise that he took his turn to look after the children to allow his wife to attend YS meetings.<sup>209</sup> Whether true or not, neither he nor the other respondents perceived young women as threats to their male solidarity even if for Woodward women assumed a subordinate status in the group. The fraternal political, intellectual, and social bonds the men shared simply denied space for an emotive, feminine dimension. These young working-class men belonged to a political culture where they were caught between shifting, often conflicting old and new models of class and gender identity.

On the one hand, sites of agitation such as the factory, docks and coal mines conjured up and brought them into contact with an older working-class identity, which rested on established ideas of masculinity and femininity. Such traditionally gendered notions of class fitted easily alongside the fictional representations many had read as adolescents as well as wider social messages of women's subordinate status where femininity continued to be defined through home and family. On the other hand, within their own and through contact with friends' families, and as a result of friendships and mutual romantic relationships with women in their social and political circles, these young working-class men had been exposed to increasingly complicated notions of

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<sup>207</sup> Interview with Alan Woodward.

<sup>208</sup> Stephen Brooke, 'Gender and Working Class Identity in Britain During the 1950s', *Journal of Social History*, 34:4, Summer, 2001, pp. 777-78; Angela Davis, 'A Critical Perspective on British Social Surveys and Community Studies and their Accounts of Married Life c. 1945-70', *Cultural and Social History*, 6, March, 2009, pp. 51-54; Janet Finch and Penny Summerfield, 'Social Reconstruction and the Emergence of Companionate Marriage, 1945-59', in Graham Allen (ed.), *The Sociology of the Family: A Reader* (Oxford, 1999), p. 33; Janet Fink, 'For Better or For Worse? The Dilemmas of Unmarried Motherhood in Mid-Twentieth-Century Popular British Film and Fiction', *Women's History Review*, 20:1, 2011, p. 148; Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800* (Essex, 1981), pp. 232-236; Elizabeth Wilson, *Only Halfway to Paradise: Women in Postwar Britain: 1945-1968* (London, 1980), pp. 97-98.

<sup>209</sup> Interview with Alan Woodward.

masculinity and femininity, including the companionability which increasingly had come to characterise post-war working-class as well as middle-class marriage, family, and social life.<sup>210</sup> Light described his father's role in his East End household in terms which echoed the model of the 'new' working-class man described by sociologists such as Michael Young, Peter Willmott and Ferdynand Zweig; one who was increasingly domesticated, even feminised in his softer approach to his wife and children. Although his father was a docker, and immersed in a traditionally gender segregated industry where heavy drinking culture underscored a dominant masculinity, Light remembered that his father's role in the household distinguished him from other men in the neighbourhood:

My father had a very different role in the household to the majority of men. There were things he wouldn't do. He would never iron but he did cook. He did wash up ... he took a much closer involvement in childcare. He had a role of working-class fatherhood which would be more typical of today, but this was in the 1950s. It was to do with his politics and to do with his early experiences. My Dad grew up in the really tough times in the East End and his mother was a ... I have never wholly understood this but his mother, I suspect it was some form of post-natal depression ... Dad was just in the point in the family where he was young enough to be ordered around, yet old enough to have the measure of responsibility. He actually effectively became a functioning family.<sup>211</sup>

The men's narratives revealed that gendered contradictions within the YS sub-culture rested on experiences of and exposure to social models of class and gender that by the mid-1960s were at a point of transition as much as the left scene where they sought to make sense of themselves in relation to the wider local, national and international arena.

This chapter has shown how for a particular cohort of working-class men their encounters with the Trotskyist milieu in the early-to-mid 1960s, prior to the emergence of an activist network, coincided with specific experiences of social class, family relations, and gender within the context of a changing post-war British society in which they were coming of age. In this respect the masculine

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<sup>210</sup> Stephen Brooke, 'Gender and Working-Class Identity', pp. 780-787.

<sup>211</sup> Interview with Bob Light.

narratives point to valuable signs with which it is possible to understand the mono-gendered ethos of the early activist milieu: the transformative ways in which for these young socialist men the culture they together fostered rested on shared mono-cultural bonds of class, familial relations and politics, shaping political identity, means of belonging, and forms of social behaviour during formative early adult years. Yet, for the scholarship boys and girls whose early left consciousness found active expression at university, exposure to long-standing labour politics occurred in greater dialogue with an international new left politics that invested political subjectivity with an internationalism that involved working-, lower-, and middle-class students in more overt ruptures from the familiar local environment of home. Young British activists saw at first-hand, or through the visual medium of television and photographs, the possibilities which the actions of foreign students and workers presented for external change in ways that would feed into and inform their own experiences of grass-roots activism in the anti-war movement, in student strikes, in the factories, docks, and in tenants' campaigns. The following chapter pursues the contradictory tensions between new and long-standing social patterns and gender roles that marked the activist experiences of male and female university students. In the late 1960s the activist network, which spawned from the capital, and expanded outwards to encompass social contacts with international activists acquired an internal, psychic shape as much as a tangible cultural form. For men and women it facilitated freedom of movement across cultures and away from traditional social norms. Yet, at university the left milieux often also appealed to students because they located within them reassuring echoes of home. Within the radical enclaves students entered at universities in London and throughout the provinces, connections to childhood structures of feeling around class offered tangible political roles and theoretical frameworks which young men and women began to relate to the rapidly unfolding pace of external politics.

## Chapter Three

### The University Left Milieu and the Formation of Left Selfhood

The university experience of young activists intensified the social and political search for self that occurred amidst three years of intellectual discovery and questioning; during the mid-to-late 1960s past and present strands of political, social and emotional education elided. Alongside official degree studies, lessons of political theory, Marxist and new left ideas, psychology and sociology intertwined with revelations concerning class relations, trade union and industrial labour politics, political leaders' moral hypocrisy, experiences of cultural ferment, and social and sexual experimentation. The expansion of students' inner and outer worlds created heightened sensations of being; they transformed inner selves in tandem with external political and social transformations. In the late sixties it was not simply that they were spectators to dramatic international and national political, social and cultural shifts, rather that students often came to feel and see themselves as social actors, contributing to a rapidly changing outer world. For many the university years marked the start of a genuinely rooted belief in imminent revolution and all the political and personal possibilities they imagined such transformations might entail.

Perhaps it was the concentrated time-frame of the experience, but more likely it was the way in which for many respondents the period coincided with events surrounding 1968, that gave the years of university activism and politics particular prominence in their narratives. The status many accorded to events around 1968 signified the extent to which cultural constructions of '68 had become woven into their own memories of early activism and the meaning they had found within the university left milieu. Memories of activism, intertwined with the formation of adult selves, were often infused with the dreams and sense of transformation that inform 'the social imaginary of

1968'.<sup>1</sup>

This third chapter will examine the particular socio-psychological, political, and cultural experiences men and women underwent within the left milieu at universities across Britain in the mid-to-late 1960s, exploring how as young adults they interacted with and internalised local and wider national and international changes. It will consider how against the background of an ever-changing world, the dialectic social, political, and emotional processes with which young adult subjects shaped the eclectic activist cultures around the VSC and simultaneously assembled political and social selves.

### **Collective Identity, Memory and the Radical Left Self**

The iconography of the calendar year '1968' – of barricades, bullets, tear-gas and tanks - was firmly embedded in respondents' narratives explaining past and present identities. Political, social, and cultural influences from across the international, national and local spectrum often seemed to coalesce into a seamless experience of discovery and awakening to produce remembered images of student selves who shared the political astuteness and social agency of their international counterparts. Individual memories had been interwoven within a collective framework where the keynote of experience was collective liberation. Whether respondents' early left activity occurred at university or elsewhere, the binding collective identity they shared as young activists was the sense of belonging to an international radical collective, aligned with left-wing social actors across the globe from Europe to North America, and to Third World countries struggling for national liberation; within this framework they saw their activism challenging prevailing political, cultural and social orthodoxies in ways many still identified with to the present day.

Margaret Renn situated the political excitement and personal development she had undergone throughout twenty years of IS activism within 1968 specifically: 'It [1968] was incredibly formative and very confidence building. I am not the person I would have been if I had not... the

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<sup>1</sup> Gurminder K. Bhambra and Ipek Demir, 'Introduction: 1968 in Retrospect', in Gurminder K. Bhambra and Ipek Demir (eds.), *1968 in Retrospect: History, Theory, Alterity* (Basingstoke, 2009), p. xi.

world became a much smaller place and your intellectual analysis of the world became a much finer thing.<sup>2</sup> The year stood out for her partly because it represented the starting point of her activism: she was an eighteen-year old student at Goldsmiths College when she joined IS. The overall validation she derived from her activism also made 1968 a symbolic marker for her memories because of its associations of political and personal liberation in the public memory of the left: 'I think in '68 it was all very easy ... the battle lines were very clear for us who were moving leftwards. You were for or against the Vietnam War. You were for or against the Tory government.'<sup>3</sup> The political and social freedom she had experienced throughout twenty-years of IS membership was interwoven with personal and public memories of '68. Reflecting on the place the organisation had held in her life, she recalled incredulously 'somebody who said 1968 wasn't all it was cracked up to be'. For Renn '68 was a time when 'you just opened the door and said yes'.<sup>4</sup> Her reflection applied equally to her memories of '68 specifically and to those of her activism as a collective experience: 'How can you, even if you no longer agree with it, how can you not see it as an incredibly positive thing?'<sup>5</sup>

Following the work of sociologist Maurice Halbwachs historians and practitioners of memory studies have increasingly focused attention on the way in which individuals engage with collective memories to shape a coherent self.<sup>6</sup> In the wake of pioneering oral historians Graham Dawson and Alistair Thomson, Penny Summerfield has shown how pre-existing cultural discourses bring to interviewees an all-important sense of 'composure', a form of psychic ease individuals achieve through composing a version of the self they can comfortably accept.<sup>7</sup> In line with this framework

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Margaret Renn and Anna Paczuska, London, 4<sup>th</sup> January, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (translated by Francis J. Ditter and Vida Yazdi Ditter, New York, 1980).

<sup>7</sup> See Penny Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews', *Cultural and Social History*, 1, January, 2004, pp. 65-93, and Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives* (Manchester, 1998). See also Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London, 1994), and Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (Melbourne, 1994). For further discussion of the role of social and cultural constructions in collective memory, see Anna Green, 'Individual Remembering and "Collective Memory": Theoretical

Robert Gildea has presented tentative conclusions about the way in which French activists from the '68 generation gave similar accounts to the narratives often found in literature about the trajectory of events around 1968. Where one course moved 'from dreams to bullets, hedonism to Leninism, cultural to political revolution', the other moved in the opposite direction from political to cultural and hedonistic revolt.<sup>8</sup> Gildea found that interviewees were more likely 'to elicit a ready-made discourse' where they did not have to negotiate a painful path through 1968, but where instead they had a clear conception of their self-identity.<sup>9</sup>

Disappointingly, he did not offer any deeper reflections on the role cultural constructions played in facilitating the composure/discomposure of these interviewees. His findings nevertheless offer useful comparative reflections for thinking about the way in which individuals who became involved in political activity around 1968 narrate and assign meaning to their experiences.<sup>10</sup> Transnational studies of sixties political and social actors have increasingly highlighted certain commonalities in the way in which signs of reconstructed experiences transcend national boundaries.<sup>11</sup> In this context it is important to consider the meaning of collective identity, as respondents understood it both at the time of their activism and since. Jan Hassmann offers a useful definition to bear in mind when reading respondents' narratives: 'Collective identity is a question of identification on the part of individuals involved. It does not exist "as such" but only as it is present in the mind and behaviour of group members and as it is able to animate their thoughts and

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Presuppositions and Contemporary Debates', *Oral History*, 32, Autumn, 2004, pp. 35-44, Michael Roper, 'Remembering the Soldier Hero: The Social and Psychic Construction of Memory in Personal Narratives of the Great War', *History Workshop Journal*, 50, Autumn, 2000, pp. 181-204; Julie Stephens, 'Our Remembered Selves: Oral History and Feminist Memory', *Oral History*, 38, Spring, 2010, pp. 81-90.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Gildea, 'The Long March of Oral History: Around 1968 in France', *Oral History*, 38, Spring 2010, p.71

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 77.

<sup>10</sup> See also, Luisa Passerini, *Autobiography of a Generation, Italy, 1968* (translated by Lisa Erdberg, Hanover, 1996).

<sup>11</sup> See Fraser, 1968, Belinda Davis, Wilfried Mausbach, Martin Klimke, and Carla MacDougall, 'Introduction', in Davis, Mausbach, Klimke, and MacDougall (eds.), *Changing the World, Changing Onself: Political Protest and Collective Identities in West Germany and the US. in the 1960s and 1970s* (Oxford, 2010), pp. xi-xviii, Wilfried Mausbach, 'America's Vietnam in Germany –Germany in America's Vietnam: On the Relocation of Spaces and the Appropriation of History', in Davis et al. (eds.), pp. 42-43, and "We Didn't Know How It Was Going to Turn Out": Contemporary Activists Discuss Their Experiences of the 1960s and 1970s', in Davis et al. (eds.), pp. 278-281.

actions.<sup>12</sup> Where such activism began during university, it may well be that respondents' nostalgia for youthful freedoms made them more likely to reproduce social and cultural myths surrounding 1968 to place undue emphasis on the university experience as a period redolent with key markers of activist selfhood.

Narrative signposts indicated how for some respondents collective memory became the tool with which to construct a collective identity shaped around the social imaginary of '68. The plural subject was the key agent behind the emancipatory impulse underlining most cultural representations of 1968 – students, workers, blacks, and women are amongst the social groups whose stories dominate the literature. Collective liberation was the hallmark or 'spirit' of the social protest movements whose members sought to overturn the authoritarian, elitist power hierarchies prevailing in the Western world and beyond.<sup>13</sup> In her 'collective autobiography' of Turin student activists, Passerini highlighted the way in which the '68 spirit had shaped an enduring collective subjectivity for her and her respondents. Its longevity, she implied, derived from the 'vein of '68 acknowledged as a worldwide phenomenon that changed and will change the course of lives'. The incomplete nature of this 'vein' had powerful repercussions for the lives and identities of the Turin radicals including the author herself. 'Reconstructing it' was 'a way of continuing it and of detecting the next steps'.<sup>14</sup> Passerini's reflections suggest the psychic need with which respondents in this study also drew upon cultural discourses of '68 to produce an account of themselves as student activists. The power of the plural self may be seen as having been fuelled not only by the validation they acquired from their rebellion at university, but also by the extent to which their subsequent activist trajectories had evolved from their initial involvement within their student milieux.

Respondents' self-conceptions of themselves belonging to a collective of student activists was shaped at least partially by external, contemporary cultural discourses: media depictions of

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<sup>12</sup> Cited in Mausbach, 'America's Vietnam', p. 42.

<sup>13</sup> Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956-1976* (Oxford, 2008) pp. 1-2.

<sup>14</sup> Passerini, *Autobiography of a Generation*, p. 60.

student protests labelled prominent personalities as dangerous radicals.<sup>15</sup> John Rose stated: 'It was the first sit-in in Britain and it caused a sensation. The press were down every day and made us all feel terribly important, and to some extent we were quite important.'<sup>16</sup> Subsequent sociological and historical interpretations built upon contemporary cultural portraits, preserving them for posterity and becoming internalised by respondents. The most notable examples, as Rose's testimony suggested, came from individuals who had participated in the student unrest at the LSE in 1966-68, and who subsequently had gone on to be politically active in left organisations and grass-roots community groups, sometimes up to the present day.<sup>17</sup> In such cases respondents' self-identities as members of the '68 student generation provided the formative context for their narratives. Laurie Flynn referred to the twenty to thirty books he had read on 1968, and he set his narrative against this wider cultural picture: 'People who had come to LSE had come to create a new space, they were new left radicals. People had come to LSE to ask why we live this way. Why is society like it is? Can we live in a different way?'<sup>18</sup> He interspersed his account with terms often found in sociological and historical '68 literature, including 'breakage', 'fracture', 'rupture', and 'new ideas'.<sup>19</sup> Drawing upon cultural representations of the decade in this way, Flynn signalled the extent to which his current self remained embedded within the international context of social and political upheaval and renewal just as his student activism had been informed by the same spirit: 'We lived in daily communion with Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement. These were the songs of our

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<sup>15</sup> For details of the derogatory press coverage of student protest, see Nicholas Thomas, 'The British Student Movement 1965-72' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Warwick, December 1996), pp. 114-119; Nick Thomas, 'Protests Against the Vietnam War in 1960s Britain: The Relationship Between Protesters and the Press', *Contemporary British History*, 22:3, 2007, pp. 335-354. See also, Margaret Anne Rooke, *Anarchy and Apathy: Student Unrest, 1968-1970* (London, 1971). For an account of the individual and collective impact of the media's personal attacks on Tariq Ali as 'student leader, see Tariq Ali, 'An Open Letter', *Black Dwarf*, Vol. 13, No. 2, p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with John Rose, 30<sup>th</sup> October, 2008.

<sup>17</sup> In April 2007 former participants in the 1967 LSE sit-in gathered together to celebrate the life of Basker Vashee, a former liberation fighter in Rhodesia and a key-player in the student unrest. The collective memories of former student activists and LSE Socialist Society members highlighted the resonance the LSE events continued to hold for their present lives and selves, especially for their prevailing belief that 'challenge can lead to change'. See Tricia Book and Laurie Flynn, 'Celebration of the Life of Basker Vashee and of the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the LSE student sit-in', April, 2007, pp.1-3 [consulted at <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/alumniRelations/reunionsAndEvents/2007/0420.htm> (11 May 2008)].

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Laurie Flynn, London, 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 2008.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

lives: Bob Dylan's "How many roads must a man walk through?".<sup>20</sup>

Even allowing for the blows dealt to the left in the 1980s, the surviving collective faith LSE respondents showed in human agency suggested that such sentiments could not be attributed to nostalgia alone, rather for the individuals concerned the concept of people's control, or direct democracy, a core component of the new left politics, retained a vibrant, dynamically enduring quality that shaped their current self-understanding. IS and LSE Socialist Society respondent, Martin Tompkinson, signalled the surviving faith he held in the agency of his student cohort by drawing upon language he and his comrades had used in pamphlets and leaflets written during the sit-in:

There was a guy married with two kids and always in the library, determined to get a first. He did and in '68, a few weeks later after graduation, I discovered from the other rugby guys that as a result of what had gone on he had decided he could no longer be an agent of the ruling class, and had jacked his job in with a wife and four kids to support. Because of what we were doing people changed, but they changed as a result of the impact of being involved in things when they could see that they themselves can change the world or a small bit of the world around them.<sup>21</sup>

Given that individuals taking prominent roles in student unrest have since become the focus for researchers pursuing generational studies of '68, it seems understandable that one result has been to reinforce respondents' self-conceptions as members of a '68 collective.<sup>22</sup> Before our interview Chris Ratcliffe had already participated in several collaborative projects documenting and bringing into the public arena accounts of the student activism at Essex University, the Poster Workshop

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Martin Tompkinson, London, 6<sup>th</sup> November, 2008. 'LSE: What It Is and How We Fought It', LSE Socialist Society pamphlet, MRC, MSS. 244 Box 6. For details of other Socialist Society literature written over the course of the sit-in and on other occasions during 1967-68, see The Papers of Steve Jefferys, MRC, MSS. 244/3/1.

<sup>22</sup> A number of my interviewees had previously contributed to Ronald Fraser's study, though it was not my intention to replicate his sample of student activists. See Ronald Fraser (ed.), *1968 A Student Generation In Revolt: An International Oral History* (New York, 1988). Prior to my interview with Martin Shaw he had been the focus of a sociological study of the British student movement. See Esmee Hanna, 'The English Student Movement: An Evaluation of the Literature', *Sociology Compass* 2:5, 2008, pp. 1539-1552. A number of my interviewees had also previously been or were (mostly subsequently) also interviewed by Dr. John Davis as part of the English dimension to the oral research project at the University of Oxford, 'Around 1968: Activism, Networks and Trajectories'.

project, and communal living projects; he was also in the process of digitising his personal archive.<sup>23</sup> His eagerness to provide an account of his activism, to compare his narrative with that of other respondents and for me to share with him an interpretation of his account – ‘what are you making of all this?’ - testified to the central place a collective radical memory had assumed in his present life.<sup>24</sup> The psychological power of this memory owed much to the positive psychic imprint his student activism had made at a time when he was shaping an adult self in relation to what he perceived to be a rapidly shifting society:

I was trying to develop myself as a person and what did I want out of life, and I remember thinking... there were speeches, people said we don't just have to go out and get a job in a big corporation and that is it; we could spend the rest of our life trying to work for a better world, and I think most of us did or continue to do.<sup>25</sup>

The power of the collective challenges the oral historian's ability to access and create space for individual voices of experience. Anna Green has criticised the way in which ‘the social, discursive and psychological structures of remembering’ have led oral and cultural historians to minimise the value of individual memory and experience.<sup>26</sup> Her comments suggest the need to pay close attention to the shape of respondents' narratives for what they may reveal about individuals' own sense of place within the university left milieu. Passerini echoes such sentiments when she reminds her readers of the need to privilege individual experience alongside cultural discourse: ‘The process [of searching for what '68 produced in cultural terms], in its complexity and at the point at which it

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with Chris Ratcliffe, Hebden Bridge, 6<sup>th</sup> June, 2009. Ratcliffe was responsible for creating an internet-based forum as a site dedicated to creating a collective memory of student activism at Essex University. See ‘Essex ‘68’ [consulted at <http://www.essex68.org.uk/> (12<sup>th</sup> May 2008)]. For details of the website commemorating the achievements of Poster Workshop, see <http://www.posterworkshop.co.uk/>. In July 2009 Channel 4 broadcast ‘Wild Things’, a programme directed by Adam Hopkins about a group of radical young adults in early 1970s North London who developed communal living practices, including raising children with a common surname of ‘Wild’. Chris Ratcliffe and his son were two of the interviewees filmed for the programme. For details, see <http://www.channel4.com/programmes/wild-things/episode-guide/series-1/episode-1>.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Chris Ratcliffe.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Anna Green, ‘Individual Remembering and ‘Collective Memory’, p. 42. Michael Roper has criticised the concept of ‘composure’, closely tied as it is to popular public memory, because its emphasis on the power of public languages minimises the place of the unconscious in shaping individual ways of remembering. Roper, ‘Re-remembering the Soldier Hero’, p. 184.

has arrived today, has also been pre-eminently one of shaping lives ... individuals are moulded who did not exist before.<sup>27</sup> Once at university the process of discovering left organisations and left circles was bound up in a search for selfhood to accommodate individuals' backgrounds and social experiences in relation to the wider social, political, and cultural developments ongoing around them. Only a small number of respondents spoke of arriving at university with a clearly self-defined left identity. Even then that identity rarely remained static, but underwent a profound process of re-working or consolidation over the course of meeting and engaging with new left forums, fellow students, influential left personnel, workers, trade union activists, as well as through exposure to the wealth of political, social and cultural ferment that increased throughout the late 1960s.

Studies of sixties protest that have sought to emphasise the moderate overall tone of Britain's student movement have minimised the available cultural space for individual radical subjectivities.<sup>28</sup> That far left organisations were a tiny minority in British universities is not in question. Even in 1968, the height of the VSC movement, international radicalism, and university protests, John Callaghan suggested that a doubling of membership for IS produced no more than 1000 members.<sup>29</sup> For the IMG, membership was even smaller – A. Z. Ehrlich suggested a growth from about 40 in 1968 to no more than 100 members by mid-1969.<sup>30</sup> Respondents confirmed the minority status of the early groups they joined from the mid-1960s. Ian Birchall recalled that when he joined IS as a student at Oxford University in 1962:

I was told we had got 106 members and I thought that this was in Oxford, but then it was explained to me that [this meant] 106 members in the whole country ... but it was never something apart; we were very much

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<sup>27</sup> Passerini, *Autobiography of a Generation*, pp. 148-149.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas, 'The British Student Movement 1965-72', pp. 114-119. See also Nick Thomas, 'Challenging Myths of the 1960s: The Case of Student Protest in Britain', *Twentieth Century British History Journal*, 13, 2002, pp. 279-280, and Sylvia Ellis, "'A Demonstration of British Good Sense?'" British Student Protest during the Vietnam War', in Gerard DeGroot (ed.), *Student Protest: The Sixties and After* (London, 1998), pp. 54-55.

<sup>29</sup> John Callaghan, *The Far Left in Britain* (Oxford, 1987), p. 95.

<sup>30</sup> Avishai Zvi Ehrlich, 'The Leninist Organisations in Britain and the Student Movement, 1966-1972' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1981), p. 52.

involved in the Labour Party, in CND, in anti-apartheid, in whatever was going on ... you didn't feel you were marginal ... We were a group in a broader movement.<sup>31</sup>

The accounts of Birchall and other respondents suggest the need to reframe the social and cultural contribution far left organisations made to student protest by considering the relational processes shaping student left milieux, the larger extra-parliamentary network, and activist selfhood. Prior to the emergence of the VSC, in June 1966, fluid boundaries between groups on the Labour left meant that IS and IMG student members were actively involved in the Labour Party, the YS, CND, anti-apartheid as well as other left campaigns making them feel part of a movement. Peter Gowan explained the origins of his IMG activism at Southampton University within the context of this fluid left scene. In the autumn term of 1966, as a member of the university Labour Club, he attended the NALSO Conference in North Yorkshire where he presented his club's paper to change the direction of Labour housing policy:

There was a fight between IS and the IMG and I discovered I was with the IS group ... Back in Southampton I was quickly put off by the IS group, in particular by [Chris] Harman. He came down and gave a lecture to the IS group about Cuba ... I was appalled by Harman because the entire tone of his speech was one of vitriolic hostility towards Fidel and the Cuban revolution and I couldn't understand that ... Then politically I discovered neither IS nor the Communists, but these Trotskyists doing entry work into the Labour Party, a group called the International Marxist Group, so I was in touch with them from about 1966. I got to know about them through our own meetings in Southampton and we, by this time, were very interested in the Vietnam thing.<sup>32</sup>

In 1966 the IMG retained its 'entryist' position inside Labour, its early activity centred round *The Week*, a magazine launched in January 1964 as a 'news analysis for socialists' by activists from Nottingham Labour Party, including Ken Coates and Pat Jordan.<sup>33</sup> Between 1966 and 1967 Gowan and his fellow Southampton Labour members were just one of many university labour clubs across the country drawn towards the IMG and IS through initial attraction to the VSC's solidarity position

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with Ian Birchall, London, 4<sup>th</sup> November, 2008.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Peter Gowan, London, 13<sup>th</sup> November, 2008.

<sup>33</sup> *The Week*, No. 1, January, 1964, p. 1.

with the Vietnamese National Liberation Front (NLF).<sup>34</sup>

Individuals' biographies illuminate abstract membership figures to showcase the subjective experiences underlying minority groups whose minimal role in student protests sees them all-too often relegated to the historical sidelines. Analysing the political propaganda subscribed to by far left students without also considering the individual context in which it was produced and received risks reducing the histories of Trotskyist groupings to meta-narratives of political success and failure. How and why university demonstrations and left milieux shaped students' affinity for social and political activism, to the extent that some carried it above and beyond their university years, is crucial for understanding the individual and collective meaning they simultaneously drew from and invested within the political activist cultures they helped to shape.

### **Radical Selfhood and the University Experience**

As avenues for physical and psychological retreat new left spaces took on particular relevance at university with students' removal from the familiar social and political environs of home. For several working- or lower middle-class students class dislocations they had felt at grammar or public schools became heightened within university institutions where they found themselves in a social minority and ill-at-ease with the social gulf they fell into. In 1966 Val Graham arrived at Birmingham University to read Russian studies; as a working-class girl amidst a predominantly middle-class, male student body she was soon alive to her social constraints and unacceptability:

I once actually looked up the statistics of how many girls from my social class went to university at that time and it was something like 1 in 70, 000, and I actually felt it. I felt I was not like one of them, and I remember once my Dad coming to visit me and people sort of making fun because he was a factory worker.<sup>35</sup>

The overriding perception of social and gendered difference defined Graham's early days at Birmingham to the extent that it shaped her initial encounter with student politics. The left carried

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<sup>34</sup> Celia Hughes, 'The History of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign: The Substructure of Far Left activism in Britain, 1966-1969' (Unpublished MA dissertation, University of Warwick, September, 2008), pp. 33-35.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Val Graham, Chesterfield, 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2009.

familiar associations of family and home, and offering possibilities for social belonging, provided a natural gravitation point:

I got involved with a young man in the Socialist Society ... Kevin and I came from very similar backgrounds ... His father got a job at the Rover factory in Birmingham and I ended up towards the end of my time actually playing hockey not for the university team but for the factory team, and that is really where I felt most at home.<sup>36</sup>

Affinity with her boyfriend's class also defined Graham's relationship with him, providing her with a sense of belonging within the Society itself – 'We were just interested in student politics'; - soon after meeting they immersed themselves as a partnership into the full-spectrum of student politics from involvement in the students' union and guild council to participating in the anti-Vietnam War demonstrations.<sup>37</sup>

From 1967 the social alienation David Lyddon had felt at his Christ Church Hospital School continued and was exacerbated at Oxford University:

During my first year I suppose ... really I was ideologically floundering around. What am I? What do I stand for? What do I believe in? What the hell am I doing here? Because, although I had been to this funny school and you are used to lots of isolation and intense work, and while there were some people who came from genteel posh backgrounds who had fallen on hard times, in the main there were loads of people from working-class backgrounds like me. Come to Oxford and suddenly there is all the posh... you know the toffs ... It felt really weird and I have to say I actually did feel suicidal on my first night.<sup>38</sup>

Lyddon's reflections on the class-ridden world of sixties Oxford and its capacity to hone a deviant, outside identity, echo in many personal accounts of working- and lower middle-class students. Elizabeth Wilson noted how 'we were all crazed with class'.<sup>39</sup> Her impoverished background had also inculcated a deep sense of unease, a 'sly, bitter cynicism' and refusal to succumb to 'fashionable

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Val Graham.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with David Lyddon, Keele, 15<sup>th</sup> July, 2009.

<sup>39</sup> Elizabeth Wilson, *Mirror Writing: An Autobiography* (London, 1982), p. 49.

enthusiasms'.<sup>40</sup> Lyddon's testimony signals that alongside narratives of radical international communion, journeys into left milieux also followed narrower, localised paths of inner self-questioning.<sup>41</sup> Not all sixties activists' were fully attuned to the Paris May '68 events. Lyddon's memories of the French upheaval formed a distant backdrop to his personal preoccupations: 'In my first year I did still feel very confused, you know, looking for something ... you had May '68 going on, which obviously you were reading about, but not watching it on the television or anything, so talking a bit but not really understanding what it was all about.'<sup>42</sup> This search for some tangible form of identity or alternative space reached a personal and political climax in the local context of Oxford's student politics:

Right towards the end of the term, in June, you became aware there had been a sit-down in the Cowley road outside this hairdresser's called Annette's, because they refused to do ... basically black women's hair, and there had been a sit-down of about forty people ... somehow [I] became aware of it, as did my mates, and [we] agreed we would do a follow up at the end of that first afternoon so a whole raft of us sat-down on the pavement, and the police started to move us away and [began] arresting us, and I am sitting there thinking this is the kind of moment of truth. What do I believe in? I believe[d] in this so I got myself arrested.<sup>43</sup>

This 'moment of truth' marked the start of Lyddon's increasing involvement in several student demonstrations throughout his second year: picketing All Souls College, joining the third VSC march on 27 October 1968, and becoming embroiled in the activities of the Oxford branch of the Revolutionary Socialist Student Federation (RSSF).<sup>44</sup> At the end of his first year he had changed

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p. 40. Sheila Rowbotham's position of 'uncompromising hostility as a defiant Northerner' at St Hilda's College had combined with her beatnik principles to make her 'disdain not only the upper-class public school boys in their sports jackets, but the "smoothies" and "arty types" who wore corduroy jackets'. However, she also noted how rigid class demarcations, prevailing elsewhere in sixties Britain, could be exceedingly permeable in Oxford, enabling young women like herself to move back and forth between sets. Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream*, p. 45.

<sup>41</sup> New studies of '68 are only just beginning to consider the relationship between the local, the individual, and the international and the collective in shaping experience. See, for example, Sofia Serenelli, 'In an Italian Province: Memory and the Everyday Life of a New Left Group in Macerata', in Ingo Cornils and Sarah Waters (eds.), *Memories of 1968* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 345-376.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with David Lyddon.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

course from Chemistry to Politics, Philosophy and Economics (PPE). Without the prospect of end of year preliminary examinations and with the opportunity to read about political subjects like the Russian Revolution, he had time to absorb the Marxist politics of the RSSF and to make sense of it in relation to the social antagonisms of his youth. Whilst his political awakening was a largely individual internal affair, a chance encounter with a like-minded student provided a route into the radical milieu: 'I eventually got friendly or latched on to a guy from a posher part of south London ... and he became a soul mate ... we were sort of discovering politics and an alternative scene': during the course of 1968-69 Lyddon located a tangible self in the growing radical student left. Whether his growing social self-confidence resulted directly from his intellectual and political awakening is uncertain, but the individual blossoming he underwent highlights the psychological connections he, at least, made between the external politics he found and the start of his activist life. From the moment of conception Marxism became an intrinsically personal, socially enabling aspect of self:

I describe myself probably in the years '68-69 as a kind of anarcho-Marxist. That is how I saw myself. I had a sort of Marxist view without believing in the need for a party, and I think, yeah, there were various things going on in my personal life as well where having been to single sex school and going then to a university with lots of female students, it is difficult to make the kind of relationships, but eventually I managed to cut and break through that and it was no holds barred after that.<sup>45</sup>

### **Radical Students and Marxist Literature**

As radical students stood poised on the brink of intensive political activity, the utopian tenets of Marx's writings opened up their eyes and minds to new possibilities of being. During the early-to-mid 1960s cheap translated editions of Marx's early writings became increasingly available and were read avidly by leftward students seeking a libertarian socialism free from the taint of Soviet Communism.<sup>46</sup> By 1962 in his final undergraduate year Ian Birchall had come to see

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Fraser (ed.), 1968, p. 82.

myself as a socialist. I had read bits of Marx. I had actually read quite a bit of Marx ... A friend of mine bought me ... for my 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday ... she wasn't political at all, but she knew I liked this sort of stuff; and she bought me the selected works of Marx and Engels in two volumes. Now, at that time you could get them fantastically cheaper, for about ten shillings and six pence for two volumes of about 600 pages each, and I remember in the summer, just after I had done my final exams, I was waiting for my degree results, and I just sat down and read my way right the way through these two volumes.<sup>47</sup>

Narratives about students' Marxist reading experiences show how texts aided their search for political and personal meaning on the left, adding to the idealistic hopes they nurtured for their future world. Lyddon's encounter with Marx occurred at a critical juncture at the start of his activist life when student politics had come to seem irrelevant and IS offered to accommodate his psychic and political search: 'IS seemed very open. It had an account of the Soviet Union which made sense to me and it ... fitted with what I was groping towards.'<sup>48</sup> As radical social and intellectual avenues opened up before him, Marx's writings, read together with other radical literature, felt profoundly revelatory: 'In my third year at university I read all three volumes of Marx's *Kapital*. It was just very, very profound. It is kind of opening you up to seeing the world in a very different way and this is at the same time as I am also discovering anti-psychiatry, R.D. Laing and all that, and so I am getting into a kind of blowing my mind [sic].'<sup>49</sup> For Birchall Marx too provided 'all sorts of illuminations' because he read them alongside IS writings; together they helped him to reconcile the intellectual and emotional tenets of his socialism with the revolutionary politics of IS:

I remember reading the thesis on Feuerbach and suddenly realising that ... the subjective and objective were interlinked, probably in a very philosophically naive way, but certainly all sorts of illuminations happened together with reading things like *International Socialism*, which was having debates on reform and revolution ... I read *Tribune* avidly and yet at the same time I had this sort of dilemma that really this stuff in *Tribune*, you know, emotionally I was with it. I knew what they were saying, but intellectually it was really a bit shallow. At

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<sup>47</sup> Interview with Ian Birchall, London, 4<sup>th</sup> November, 2008.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

the same time I was also reading *New Left Review* and a lot of that seemed to me to be rather pretentious and rather removed from what was really going on in the world, and it was [so] really when I heard some of the people from International Socialism.<sup>50</sup>

However much Marx's writings moved radical students towards left enclaves or facilitated collective political feelings and thoughts, the radical reading experience that often preceded these collective encounters was a highly individual affair; within the texts each student heard subtly different tenets to make sense of their own particular national, social and political backgrounds, and they carried these personal messages through into their milieux. Richard Kuper and James Hinton were close friends and Communist Party members together at Cambridge University during the early 1960s. Independently, they each located similar possibilities in Marx's writings to allow for their own romantic constructs about the working-class. For Hinton, as for Lyddon, Marx presented political solutions to ease his social and psychic discomfort, his writings offered a route through which to come to terms with his upper-middle-class background:

I wanted to find a way of finding the ordinary or the working-class, and that was all to do with hang-ups about this relatively posh privileged background ... Between school and university I hitchhiked to the South of France and I took with me Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and G. D. H. Cole's Everyman translation of *Das Kapital* [Vol. one] in two little volumes. I read these two books side by side and I became a Marxist.

Kuper's reading of Marx's early manuscripts confirms the popular appeal of the texts; their concept of socialist freedom suggested tangible ways in which students could marry the utopian tenets of Marx's writings with the particular political and social realities surrounding them. Marx presented to Kuper the possibility of another world or a new political language to amalgamate the socialist Zionism he had embraced in his native South Africa with the vibrant, alternative Cambridge life he discovered in the left quarters of the university Labour club:

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<sup>50</sup> Interview with Ian Birchall.

For all of us in South Africa England was the place you aspired to go to. It was the place where everybody was free, and everything was tolerant and open and non-racist and so on, and I came to the most class-bound society ... You were fined six and eight pence if you were found without a gown ... In my final year I was doing modern political thought as one of my options, and we studied the early manuscripts, and I found it seemed to speak very immediately to the kind of situation we were in, and so the transition [from South African Zionism] was actually fairly kind of easy.<sup>51</sup>

The manuscripts assumed further significance for Kuper because he read them in 1964 when for the first time he heard Tony Cliff speak to the Labour Club; the Soviet corruptions of Communism Kuper had first conceived in Marx's original vision of socialist freedoms became even more apparent upon hearing Cliff's reflections on post-war Russia.<sup>52</sup> Coming to Britain's class politics from the South African context, Kuper's utopian vision of socialism from below expressed an imaginative amalgamation of Marxist reading with early engagement in IS. The tiny libertarian Trotskyist group, with its young cohort of apprentices, allowed him to project his romantic reading of the working-class on to the group's politics:

I was very influenced by an article by Hal Draper, an American Marxist, called *The Two Souls of Socialism* where he contrasted socialism from above with socialism from below and stressed the idea in Marx that the liberation of the working-class will be the act of the working-class ... those kind of notions which were around on the more libertarian Marxist left and which were around in IS at the time ... there [was] the feeling that this group somehow or other was the embodiment of the possibilities of the new society ... in IS you met generally young trade unionists who were kind of thoughtful, self-educated in that period, almost overwhelmingly, but you kind of felt, yes, there was all this wasted talent and it was there, and together we could do something.<sup>53</sup>

Reverence for education and learning was palpable amongst young activists; exciting intellectual trends taking place in the 1960s came firmly within the purview of this generation of higher

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with Richard Kuper, London, 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2009.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. *The Two Souls of Socialism* was originally published in the American socialist student magazine, *Anvil* (Winter, 1960) and subsequently appeared in *New Politics*, No. 1, 1966, pp. 57-84, a pamphlet published by the International Socialists in Highland Park, Michigan.

educated young. Students' openness to new political, sociological and cultural ideas fed into social and political experience to inform new ways of looking at social relationships and movements developing around them.

### **Far Left Trotskyist Groups and Student Activism**

Chance meetings with older Labour left and Marxist intellectuals confirmed many a left student's move away from Labour, honed already developing tenets of Marxist thought and identity, and steered them in the path of Trotskyist groups: IS, *The Week* or (from 1968) the IMG. By the late 1960s these groups had begun increasingly to displace the Labour Party as the left organisations of choice for students growing frustrated by the moral and political betrayals of Harold Wilson's Labour government. The same figures who impressed apprentices in the YS circles made a lasting intellectual and emotive mark on university students, many of whom had since early adolescence been edging their way towards a fitting place on the left where they could make sense of Cold War politics and personal social and cultural experiences.

In 1961 Fred Lindop was active in the Oxford Labour Club when he had his first real encounter with Marxism. Previously a "Bevanite" in the old sense of being a leftist Labour bloke', his meeting with International Socialist speakers occurred at a moment of gradual transition away from this outmoded left position towards the youthful dynamism of CND<sup>54</sup>:

My first real encounter with Marxism, as opposed to, say, simply reading Christopher Hill's work, was listening to a number of then prominent members of the International Socialists or then the Socialist Review Group as it was called, in particular Alistair MacIntyre who was a fellow at Nuffield, and then of course people like Michael Kidron who were invited up ... MacIntyre was amusing and exciting, but Kidron had an all-embracing view of

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<sup>54</sup> The term 'Bevanite' denoted support for the rebellious political positions adopted by Labour MP, Nye Bevan, who in the mid-1950s incurred the wrath of the leadership and leading right-wing party members: in April 1954 he resigned from the shadow cabinet in protest at the party's decision to vote in favour of German rearmament. In March 1955 he further abstained from the vote that saw Labour accept the decision that Britain should manufacture the hydrogen bomb. For details, see Andrew Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party* (Basingstoke, 2008), pp. 127-28.

the world and an ability to connect things up, and I guess he was the most intellectual person developing me into a sort of Marxist.<sup>55</sup>

Ian Birchall was an Oxford Labour Club member alongside Lindop. Together with other Labour and Socialist Society members his decision to join IS represented the climax of a move through and out of the Labour left during his undergraduate years, from 1958 to 1961. Discussions about the relationship between capitalism and war with Oxford student and IS member, Paul Foot, during the 1961 Aldermaston march, supporting South Bank building workers in the 1958 strike led by SLL militant, Brian Bean, as well as Birchall's 'hero worship' of Dennis Potter and Ken Coates had by 1962 led him to become 'identifiably socialist'.<sup>56</sup> By the time he heard Kidron speak on the permanent arms economy during a Socialist Group meeting in the autumn term, his political stance had shifted on to a more discernibly radical plane<sup>57</sup>:

I did three years for my first degree between '58 and '61 and then I left and spent a year in France, which was very interesting because it was the very end of the Algerian War and, although I was in a small village, I was picking up a lot of things around this, and it was a completely different sort of politics because politics in England was voting. Politics in France was blowing people up.<sup>58</sup>

The language of International Socialism spoke powerfully to Birchall's exposure to a harsher international politics, offering him an intellectual framework and moral stance that sat more easily with his reading and live experiences of imperialist oppression. The group's militant, active street politics also provided his closest taste of the 'real' independence politics he had seen in France. Although the intellectual clarity of IS explained their appeal to Birchall, so too did his ability to feel

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<sup>55</sup> Interview with Fred Lindop, Devon, 13<sup>th</sup> January, 2009.

<sup>56</sup> In his first Oxford term, in 1958, Birchall attended a Labour Club meeting about the South Bank building workers' strike. Right-of-the-centre Labour members refused to support the strike because it was led by a 'Trotskyist'; their accusation led Birchall to the first volume of Isaac Deutscher's Trotsky biography where he discovered a 'bold and original thinker': interview with Ian Birchall. See also Ian Birchall, 'All Along the Watchtower', [consulted at <http://www.socialistreview.org.uk/article.php?articlenumber=8738> (11<sup>th</sup> July 2009)].

<sup>57</sup> The Socialist Group was a Marxist discussion group that was part of the Oxford University Labour Club, which met on Sunday evenings and had speakers ranging from Tribune MPs to various currents of the revolutionary left. Correspondence from Ian Birchall to the author, 9 September, 2010.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Ian Birchall.

part of the masculine street militancy that reproduced a more tangible image of the imaginary revolutionary man he conjured in Potter and Coates:

I had never heard anyone before who actually understood how the whole thing, how the whole world system fitted together. I mean the people involved around us were involved in, you know, we were out on the streets, and I was with people from the Oxford International Socialists in the week of the Cuba crisis, and we tried to stage a march, and it was the first time I actually got to a police cordon, pushing and shoving at the police, so it wasn't just an intellectual thing, and that, again, very much impressed me, you know, these were the same people who also had a very rigorous intellectual understanding, but they were also out there in the middle of a punch up.<sup>59</sup>

Speakers associated with the IMG were no less impressive. Phil Hearse founded an IMG group at York University in 1968. He remembered: 'Ernest Mandel came to our university. We had the main lecture theatre. We probably squeezed a thousand people into that. That was the kind of intellectual atmosphere of the time.'<sup>60</sup> David Carter illustrated the persuasive influence that glamorous national and international spokesmen and theoreticians could exercise over undergraduates struggling to choose between far left groups. His arrival at York in 1969 saw him grappling between whether to follow through his adolescent dabble in the Isle of Man's 'hippiedom' or to pursue his attraction to the serious politicians he met at York: 'I was quite enjoying mixing with both and I wasn't antagonistic to either, but I made a conscious decision that if I am going to achieve anything I have to become a revolutionary.'<sup>61</sup> Drawn to the internationalism of the Fourth International, the impressive intellectual showmanship of prominent student lefties like IMG member Phil Hearse, helped Carter to choose his revolutionary route; in December 1970 he finally joined the Spartacus League, the IMG's youth section<sup>62</sup>: 'I was impressed by members of the Fourth

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Since 1946 Ernest Mandel had been leader of the International Secretariat of the Fourth International, of which the IMG was the British section. Interview with Phil Hearse, London, 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 2008.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with David Carter, Middlesbrough, 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2009.

<sup>62</sup> The IMG set up the Spartacus League in 1970 out of recognition that the student movement was a site for political recruitment and expansion, linked to the working-class movement. For details, see the pamphlet published by the Kingston (Surrey) branch of the Spartacus League, c. 1971, MRC, MSS. 128/87.

International, Ernest Mandel and people like Tariq Ali. I remember hearing him speak and thought he was rather good. I was just more impressed by them I think.’<sup>63</sup>

The intimate left landscape students entered in the mid-to-late 1960s, with its dual ties to the labour movement and academia, exposed young activists to a diverse range of old and new left speakers. The LSE Socialist Society exemplified the fluid connections and the intellectual dynamic that came consequently to characterise many of the milieux in the VSC network. During 1964-5 the Society was founded by a small nucleus of IS and Solidarity (anarchist) students out of the smaller Marxist Society; a counter-part to the much larger Labour Club. It represented an intellectual and political powerhouse filled with impressive intellectual minds and dominant personalities.<sup>64</sup> The regular Society meetings and seminars, often led by IS speakers, including Cliff, Kidron, John Palmer and Nigel Harris, provided an attractive, lively forum for debating and learning about the new Marxist politics; a supplement to the conservative syllabi still prevailing in the School. Richard Kuper, for instance, found sociology ‘an intellectual backwater ... very untheoretical even at an apologetic level’. Even more ‘appalling’ was that ‘it had nothing to say about why there was a war in Vietnam or about class conflict’.<sup>65</sup> Nigel Coward disliked his economics course, devoted to free market economics, and lacking any ‘decent Marxists’ on the syllabus. However, around the refectory, in 1966, he ‘fell in’ with the Marxist Society: ‘They made more sense than the course ... There used to be passionate discussions over a lunch time cheese roll ... You had a bigger role in that than you did in one of the normal seminar groups.’<sup>66</sup>

The Society’s open political culture attracted a wide range of left faces from leading IS and IMG figures to trade unionists, dockers, building workers, and activists around the VSC. David Widgery was a medical student at the University of London who regularly turned up at the School. He liked the Society’s sardonic guide to lectures members had produced in a similar vein to the one

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> According to Joan Smith, the former secretary of the Marxist Society and the Socialist Society, in 1964, when the Socialist Society was initially set up, there were 150 members. In contrast, in 1965 the Labour Club had 300 members. For further details, see IS article on the IS and the LSE, MRC, MSS. 152, file 32.

<sup>65</sup> Cited in Ronald Fraser (ed.), 1968, p. 97.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Nigel Coward, London, 7<sup>th</sup> April, 2009.

Berkeley students had created during the Free Speech Movement.<sup>67</sup> Widgery was one of many Society members attending Ralph Miliband's popular public lectures (impressed by Miliband's ability to provide a good exposition of Lenin) and he frequently came to listen to talks hosted by the Society; on any day IS speakers Cliff and Paul Foot could be sharing the company of New Left activist and historian, Edward Thompson, along with striking building workers from the Barbican dispute.<sup>68</sup> In the late sixties Thompson's socialist humanism left a resounding impression on many students encountering his work through their degree studies and left circles. *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) offered a new way of understanding class as 'an active process' communicated through relationships and expressed in culture and social being besides political institutions.<sup>69</sup> His new approach to class came at a crucial time when left students were discovering the transforming political and social potential of human agency in their university protests and international movements for self-determination. John Rose explained: 'The *Making of the English Working Class* was a must read book and we all read it, and it played an important part in our formation because the book itself is a testimony to the power of the working class.'<sup>70</sup>

Part of Joan Smith's role as Socialist Society secretary involved organising an annual set of lectures with Marxist historians Edward Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, and Isaac Deutscher.<sup>71</sup> She belonged to the original intellectual core of members who had come to the Society through the preceding Marxist Society. This intellectual core brought with them a much more theoretical take on Marxism than the younger wave of students such as Martin Shaw, Laurie Flynn and Steve Jefferys whose activist politics was shaped by the sit-in.<sup>72</sup> The two elements coexisted together and the

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<sup>67</sup> Ronald Fraser interview with respondent C896/18, April 1984, interview 1 – side 2, p. 1, Ronald Fraser Interviews: '1968 A Student Generation in Revolt', British Library Sound Archive.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p. 1-2. In 1967 LSE Socialist Society students went down to the picket lines to lend their support to a strike of building workers at the Barbican development site in central London. Respondents testified to the political inspiration Communist Party convenor, Lou Lewis, provided, whilst interactions with younger building workers at the LSE bar proved an important experience of connecting with working-class militants. Interview with John Rose; interview with Steve Jefferys; interview with Martin Tompkinson; Martin Tompkinson, 'The Building Industry After the Barbican Affair', *Agitator*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 5<sup>th</sup> December, 1967, pp. 6-7.

<sup>69</sup> E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (11<sup>th</sup> edn, London, 1980), p. 8.

<sup>70</sup> Interview with John Rose.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Joan Smith.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Martin Shaw, University of Sussex, Brighton, 15<sup>th</sup> January, 2009.

Society's journal, *Agitator*, showed that during the key years of unrest, from 1966-68, daily meetings combined Marxist seminar and discussion groups on topics ranging from the Russian Revolution to Antonio Gramsci alongside meetings devoted to political campaigns and activism including the Barbican builders' strike, Rhodesia and apartheid, the Vietnam War, and student power.<sup>73</sup> The *Agitator* testified to the intellectual identity which the Socialist Society, IS and the literature circulating within these forums gave to the mainly young men who discovered within them a sense of themselves as dual Marxist intellectuals and activists. When the Society published an article on Marx's Theses of Feuerbach, in March 1966, they quickly sold out.<sup>74</sup> Simultaneously, the Society's open, democratic impulse provided an experimental political space for experienced activists like Steve Jefferys to hone his activist mentalité – 'I went in there as an agitator'<sup>75</sup> - as well as for less seasoned politicians like Martin Shaw to acquire the intellectual and activist education necessary for belonging:

I think we were aware we were making a political journey. One moment which stands out in my mind was when I wrote an article for the Socialist Society journal, the *Agitator*, called the 'Remaking of Socialist Politics' in a duplicated form. I remember him [Laurie Flynn] saying very sagely as he took it off the duplicator, "Perhaps more the remaking of Martin Shaw by socialist politics", which I thought was very good actually, so incidentally it was a sort of development of my identity, but for me it wasn't like a conversion; it didn't feel like a rupture.<sup>76</sup>

The clarity of Shaw's memory signalled the moment's significance as a staging-post in his political and intellectual life. He was in the process of a transition inside the Society; reframing his moral Christian values within a humanistic Marxism and re-evaluating the sort of political actions he thought appropriate to achieving change, rejecting his pacifism in favour of the militant activist

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<sup>73</sup> For a typical example, see the November 1967 listing of Socialist Society meetings in *Agitator*, Vol. 3, No. 2, October, 1967, p. 28.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Joan Smith. See, 'Marx Theses on Feuerbach', *Agitator*, No. 7, March 1966, pp. 1-5.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Steve Jefferys.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Martin Shaw; Martin Shaw, 'The Making of Socialist Politics', *Agitator*, Vol. 3, No. 2, October, 1967, pp. 8-10.

politics Jefferys and other Society members championed during the sit-in, the campaigns over Rhodesia and the Vietnam War.<sup>77</sup>

### **Students' Entrance into the Emerging Activist Scene**

In the mid-to-late 1960s the discovery of revolutionary university-based groups shaped intensely felt radicalising experiences, because the students immersed within the new cultural forms, intellectual ideas, and local, national, and international politics were now young adults looking to situate themselves politically, socially, and emotionally. Inside academic institutions amidst intellectual and cultural ferment, respondents made connections between their expanding internal worlds and their sense of place in relation to external social and political hierarchies, structures and certainties starting to be challenged and re-made. As they played sometimes central roles in protests against university authorities, radical students came to feel themselves actively pushing apart the old social and political boundaries constraining social and psychological freedoms. Respondents told accounts of the excitement characterising these years, thus creating a collective picture of students moving freely between groups against a fluid background of individual, subjective radical encounters set over an intense three-to-four year period.<sup>78</sup>

Gilda Peterson's account of activism at Birmingham University exemplified such fluidity. From a political perspective her narrative confirmed the open character of the activist network as it emerged around the VSC; its connection to the personnel, ideas and revolutionary organisations of the British student movement, and the developing structural interconnections between student protesters at different universities. In 1970 her decision to join IS came inadvertently out of the Warwick files affair of February of that year. The scandal, which was leaked to the media and to other Students' Unions, sparked off a pattern of imitations at universities throughout the country,

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid. For details of the activist politics the Socialist Society championed over these campaigns, see 'Rhodesian Action Committee, *Agitator*, November, 1966, p. 12; 'Editorial', *Agitator*, No. 2, 1966, p. 1; a member of the Rhodesian Action Committee, 'Why We Marched', *Agitator*, No. 2, 5; 'Student Power', *Agitator*, November, 1967, p. 14.

<sup>78</sup> Martin Shaw, 'Violence and Demonstrations', *Agitator*, Vol. 4, No. 1, October, 1968, p. 9.

including Birmingham.<sup>79</sup> Through information from the Warwick files two Birmingham sociology students discovered that their University had been funding the segregated medical school in Rhodesia's University College.<sup>80</sup> Peterson's previous involvement in Birmingham's 1968 sit-in led the two students to approach her with their findings and together they initiated a campaign, raising money to send a Rhodesian student from Birmingham back to his home country to report on conditions for black medical students. Birmingham students, active in the liberal left groups and in RSSF, also organised activities on campus to raise awareness of the scandal. After meeting one of the medical students from the campaign, a member of Birmingham's IS branch, Peterson also began to participate in these events and she eventually joined the IS group.<sup>81</sup>

Her testimony showed the individual subjective experience of coming to student activism within this expanding left network. For Peterson the very openness of the political and cultural landscape seemed to translate to her memories of living inside it; temporality itself assumed a fluid quality, as experiences over three years merged together, and she, in turn, evoked the freedom with which she moved in between radical circles and intellectual currents, unconstrained by organisational boundaries, hierarchies or dominant cliques:

We sort of flirted around with things. I wasn't conscious of there being a group. Actually, I think it started with Stuart [Hall]; he lectured us. We had the *NLR* about and, well, the whole CCC.<sup>82</sup> I suppose [I] was conscious of that, but it wasn't organised; it was all part, a bit like the reading of everything else ... There was

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<sup>79</sup> Thomas, 'The Student Movement in Britain', p. 77.

<sup>80</sup> Documents found during the Warwick sit-in revealed that the Inter-University Council for Higher Education Overseas, of which Warwick's Vice-Chancellor, Jack Butterworth, was Vice-Chairman, exerted pressure on Professor Miller, Principal of University College Rhodesia, to resign because he had proposed to increase the intake of Black students at a new medical school being supported by Birmingham University. The IUC did not wish to provoke conflict with the Smith government. For full details of the controversy, see *The Times*, 11 March, 1970, p. 10. See also, *Campus*, No. 64, 6 March, 1970, p. 1.

<sup>81</sup> Interview with Gilda Peterson.

<sup>82</sup> The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCC) was set up at Birmingham University, in 1964, by its first director, Richard Hoggart, and in 1968 New Left theorist, Stuart Hall, assumed the directorship.

all sorts of discussions going on in all sorts of areas, and all sorts of points of views, but there wasn't a driving organisation, it was just lots of excitement about.<sup>83</sup>

Shifts from topic to topic; of memories of involvement in the sit-in, of intellectual discoveries made in discussion groups, and initial perceptions of the left scene she met suggested the intoxicating, almost overwhelming impact her exposure to intellectual and political ferment brought. The plethora of left groups on campus enabled her to experiment politically without commitment; she was peripherally involved in the RSSF, aware of the 'red bases' group connected to the IMG, and friendly with a few Maoists, unaware of IS until 1969.<sup>84</sup> Memories of the Cultural Studies Centre (CCC) reinforced the overall intoxicating feel of Peterson's student years; ideas seemed to merge one into another to the extent that she found it difficult to make sense of their larger meaning either at the time or since. She flirted with ideas just as she dipped in and between left groups:

I thought intellectually it was incredibly sort of buzzy about trying to systematise, and maybe Chomsky was on to something, and we could find out how to systematise thinking in a way that wasn't just cause and effect, and we kind of drew more from literature and sociological notions as well. Anyway I can't remember why I said all that, so I did all that and then... I took off to France for a while and lived in a little bedsit. I just got off the boat in '68 and didn't get involved in the French events ... It was easy. I just got off the boat.<sup>85</sup>

On the one hand Peterson's fragmented shifting descriptions suggested the intense relationship between the intellectual and social excitement she experienced. Her expanding body of ideas seemed to feed her long-held desire to escape from the social constraints of her northern working-class home. On the other hand the ruptures also told of her uncertainty about the future; her search

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<sup>83</sup> Interview with Gilda Peterson. For details, see Dennis Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies* (London, 1997).

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. The 'red bases' concept formed the basis of the RSSF manifesto, a half-way house between Marxism-Leninism and the Marcusean New Left model of the West German SDS, whereby the federation conceived itself as an extra-parliamentary opposition, committed to the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and imperialism, and committed to the building of 'red bases' of revolutionary agitation and preparation in the universities through the socialist transformation of students' unions. See, 'The Revolutionary Socialist Student Federation', in Widgey (ed.), *The Left in Britain*, pp. 339-340. By 1970 the RSSF had been reduced to operating as a 'vaguely libertarian sect of its own' and the IMG set up Red Circle groups in several towns, aligned to their journal the *Red Mole*. For details, see *Red Mole*, Vol. 1, No. 5, 14 May, 1970, p. 12.

<sup>85</sup> Interview with Gilda Peterson.

for some overarching meaning of her own social place and feelings in relation to the new ideas she was discovering and individuals she was meeting. She was caught in a psychic struggle between the local, familiar world of home and the wider socially diverse landscape of university and beyond. The latter promised freedom in new experiences, but simultaneously its removal from the blue-collar world she knew in Hartlepool meant that as mediums for realising social change student peace and activist politics remained removed from everyday patterns of home. IS's class politics bridged this gulf:

I think I was sort of looking for something that was more rooted ... When I first went over to Birmingham I remember thinking in Hartlepool most people worked in the steel works or the docks ... I said to people, well, where are the works? ... I quite liked Longbridge<sup>86</sup> because here were a lot of people where people worked, and you could see it clearly and I think that was important, but also, intellectually, I think I was looking for something with a bit more sense of, well, how do you change the world? I knew all this philosophical stuff wasn't going to do it, and I knew the students weren't going to be the leaders in changing society, and so I think I was intellectually trying to look for something that could get to grips a bit more with Marxism.<sup>87</sup>

The themes of fluidity and mobility characterising the accounts of student activism represented subjective states of mind, suggesting the instability of newly formed or still emerging ideas, beliefs and values. As the accounts of Lyddon, Birchall, and Peterson highlighted, these young men and women sought new ways of seeing and being in the world in ways that would allow them to negotiate a new relationship to their immediate surroundings as well as to the wider national and international social and political arena.

Paul Smith's narrative underlined the way in which fluidly reported narratives reflected the overwhelming sensation of rapidly shifting parameters of political activity and ideas during an intensive period of political education. Memories of the self, the local and the international merged

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<sup>86</sup> In 1970 the Birmingham IS group was one of a number of left-wing groups active in and around the Birmingham car factory at Longbridge. The size of the plant attracted many activists distributing leaflets and selling papers in hopes of recruiting workers. For details see, Frank Henderson, *Life on the Track: Memoirs of a Socialist Worker* (London, 2009), pp. 69-77.

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Gilda Peterson.

into one seamless experience in ways that reflected the relentless, exhausting, yet thrilling world of activity and intellectual debate he entered at university. His activity began in 1966 shortly after his arrival at Warwick University to study politics. Seeking 'intellectual explanations' for events such as the Vietnam and Arab-Israeli Wars, he quickly became involved with the Socialist Society and the activities of the VSC.<sup>88</sup> But it was his decision to join IS in 1967, after Cliff spoke to the Society, that signified a period of unfolding political events and activities so intensive and rapid that he was unable to provide any accompanying reflection on their individual meaning; rather their meaning arose in the course of his efforts to keep up with and to make political sense out of every new development as well as to find a place for himself and his Warwick milieu in this overarching global framework:

I met the contact at Bromley South station, and he was carrying a copy of *Young Guard*, so then I began to go on Vietnam demos, meetings on Vietnam; and then, of course, by then the student movement came to us from the LSE over Rhodesia, disciplining and free speech. That was '67 wasn't it? ... so then you have got the Vietnam War, the awareness of struggles inside the trade union movement, incomes policy legislation, shop stewards defence committee of which James [Hinton] was a treasurer, the Arab-Israeli war, so you have an additional dimension, the student movement, then Ireland, France, Italy, women's movement, you know, just one dimension after another, [an] expanding field of political activity, which you always had to integrate.<sup>89</sup>

Smith's memories of this ever-expanding political scene to be absorbed and integrated extended to his experiences of ongoing political exchange between foreign and British Warwick students.<sup>90</sup> In the late 1960s Warwick's History department ran a student exchange program with three American

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<sup>88</sup> Interview with Paul Smith, Coventry, 4<sup>th</sup> December, 2008. In December 1967 the Warwick University Socialist Society marched from the Gibbet Hill campus to join a larger demonstration in Coventry. For further details, see *Campus*, No. 8, 1 December, 1967, p. 1. Another major cause of student protest at Warwick University, which the Socialist Society helped to orchestrate, was the invitation, issued by the Anglo-Rhodesian Society, to Major Patrick Wall, Conservative MP for Halton in Yorkshire, who supported the Smith regime. See *Campus*, No. 9, 8 December, 1967, p. 1, and *Campus*, No. 20, 9 May, 1968, p. 5.

<sup>89</sup> Interview with Paul Smith.

<sup>90</sup> Belinda Davis has similarly noted the importance of post-war teacher and pupil exchange programmes, active between West Germany and the US, in exposing West German students to new values of democracy in ways which opened up their minds to new ways of being political at a time of immense upheaval and mobility in West Germany. See, Belinda Davis, 'A Whole World Opening Up: Transcultural Contact, Difference, and the Politization of "New Left" Activists', in Davis et al. (ed.), *Changing the World Changing Oneself*, p. 260.

universities: Ann Arbor, Berkeley, and Wisconsin.<sup>91</sup> The latter two accepted six students from Warwick for one term and in return they sent two students to Warwick for one year.<sup>92</sup> Although their time in America allowed Warwick students to participate briefly in the anti-war movement that by 1967 had spread rapidly across university campuses, the influence from American students on Warwick's left scene was disproportionately greater because student activism in America had begun earlier, was more extensive than in Britain, and American students were present on campus for longer.<sup>93</sup> Smith recalled one notable debate between the two national cultures that made a lasting impression on his developing sense of political self. In his final year he felt compelled to debate with an American student who proclaimed himself a Zionist. After Smith's own intensive re-orientation over the Arab-Israeli war, when Cliff had denounced Zionism, he 'was staggered' that the American student had yet to 'fill in the gaps' and the implication was that Smith undertook this role.<sup>94</sup>

Not only did political and cultural exchange shape an eclectic protest culture, but for young activists immersed within the microcosm of the student left the experience of developing a sense of social and political being was heightened because of the increasingly dialogic relationship between political and personal life. Anna Davin showed how once internalised, student left politics could take on an innately porous quality, spilling over into everyday life and shaping how she conducted herself

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<sup>91</sup> A total of eleven American universities participated in the Warwick Exchange Programme, varying in location, type and size from the University of Chicago, to Swathmore, in a small town eleven miles south west of Philadelphia, and Amherst, the Ivy League men's college. For details, see *Campus*, No. 51, 24 October, 1969, p. 6.

<sup>92</sup> Ronald Fraser interview with respondent C890/06, Anna Davin, April 1984, p. 30, Ronald Fraser Interviews: '1968 A Student Generation in Revolt', British Library Sound Archive.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.* It is notable that two of the universities where Warwick history students were sent on exchange were amongst the two foremost sites of American student activism against the Vietnam War. Anti-war activity on US university campuses began initially at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, in March 1965, when a group of academics from the old left and pacifist campaigns organised a 'teach-in' at the university. The idea spread quickly across US campuses: students from the free speech movement at Berkeley organised the largest 'teach-in', and created the Vietnam Day Committee, where members linked up with students from Ann Arbor. See Marwick, *The Sixties*, pp. 541-542. See also Gerard J. DeGroot, "'Left, Left, Left!': The Vietnam Day Committee, 1965-66", in DeGroot (ed.), *Student Protest*, pp. 85-99.

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Paul Smith. For a similar account of Tony Cliff's impact on a Zionist LSE student activist over the Arab-Israeli War, see John Rose, 'Debate Sparked by Six Day War 1967 Transformed a Generation', *Socialist Worker*, 2054, 9 June, 2007 [consulted at <http://www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=11874> (14 October, 2008)]. Another instance of political debate and national exchange between British and American students occurred in October 1967 when a contingent of Warwick students picketed the new Benefactors' Hall of Residence during a visit by the American Ambassador, David Bruce, to unveil a plaque to officially open the building. For details, see *Campus*, No. 1, 6 October, 1967, p. 1.

as a young woman. She was a history undergraduate at Warwick during the same period as Smith, and like him her political activity began when she joined the Socialist Society.<sup>95</sup> The fluid parameters of the left politics she found included the nexus between the history department and the student left. Edward Thompson was the most prominent of several faculty members on the left, many of them young teachers such as James Hinton; and Davin remembered the Socialist Society heavily populated by history undergraduates along with several of Thompson's graduate students. The close political relations between staff and students were also exemplified by the fact that the *Kapital* reading group in the Society was run by a young philosophy lecturer, Peter Binns, who was a member of IS.<sup>96</sup> Davin was one of several independent members in the Society along with Solidarity students and others from a Communist Party background.<sup>97</sup>

Her own recollections about the influence of American students in the Society focused on the membership of notable American women who, back home, had been activists inside the New Left student movement, within SDS. Davin explained how these female students heightened the fluid nature of the left scene at Warwick by the way in which they introduced Socialist Society members to ideas they had learned from the US movement: internal participatory democracy, neighbourhood organising, and, crucially for Davin and other Warwick women, early Women's Liberation literature that by 1968 had started to circulate New Left circles in America.<sup>98</sup> Through their engagement with Warwick socialist students these SDS women played a vital role in expanding the permissible boundaries for ideas and forms of left activism within the Society. By the time Davin and other Society women began, in 1969, to meet as a women's group, initially with and then at the exclusion of men, the fluid boundaries between national left cultures and the provincial and metropolitan activist scene allowed for the dialectic movement of ideas and activities between these

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<sup>95</sup> Ronald Fraser interview with respondent, C890/0, Anna Davin, p. 28, Ronald Fraser Interviews: '1968 A Student Generation in Revolt', British Library.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, p. 32. In November 1969 Barbara Winslow, History Graduate from the University of Washington and SDS member, published an article in the university newspaper detailing the emergence of the Women's Liberation Movement in America. See, Barbara Winslow, 'Path to Freedom', *Campus*, No. 55, 28 November, 1969, pp. 4-5.

two arenas. The SDS idea of neighbourhood organising took root immediately outside the campus in Coventry when Socialist Society women began meeting with women from the local council estate, Hillfields.<sup>99</sup> Former SDS member, Barbara Winslow, was studying for her MA in Social History at Warwick when she joined IS:

What was really so interesting, especially for us middle-class women, is we wanted to meet in Hillfields, where the workers were. These working-class women, they wanted to meet at the University. They wanted to date college boys. We were all in our blue jeans; these women came dressed up. And it was a real lesson in terms of class and expectations and so forth. They thought why would we want to meet in this ugly industrial council estate when we could meet at the university and get away from it all?<sup>100</sup>

The cross-over of class cultures which comes out in this account highlights the way in which personal contacts facilitated social and cultural exchange between the two groups of women, adding to the sensations of social and political mobility for female students who found themselves temporarily transported out of their middle-class environment into another social world where class delineated social difference regardless of the commonality of gender.

The fluid essence of the left politics Davin encountered at Warwick was rooted above all in its capacity to defy internal and external parameters. Her choice of language pointed to the way in which her developing socialist selfhood coincided with important personal changes as a young woman, and how these in turn occurred at a turning-point in the history of the left when women were starting to articulate a 'new' language of left politics embedded in the emotional core. On the one hand, the construction of Davin's narrative, privileging the personal alongside the political, suggests the legacy of Women's Liberation as surviving within her language and the composition of her memories of self. Nikolas Rose argues that 'language makes only certain ways of being human

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<sup>99</sup> Kate Weigand interview with Barbara Winslow, Williamstown, Massachusetts, 3-4 May, 2004, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, 2004, [consulted at <http://www.smith.edu/libraries/libs/ssc/vof/transcripts/Winslow.pdf> (24th October, 2009)], p. 22.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, pp. 22-23.

describable, and in so doing makes only certain ways of being human possible'.<sup>101</sup> His reflections on the role of language as 'one of the keys to our assembly as psychological beings' are highly pertinent in the case of Women's Liberation, because, as will be shown in chapter four, the essential power and transforming potential of the new politics was rooted in changes to ways of communicating Marxism that would enable women to speak and to be heard.<sup>102</sup> It is possible to see how the language of the new politics of Women's Liberation enabled Davin to open up what Rose terms a 'psy-shaped space' in which to reconstruct her student activist self through the privileged language of inner feeling.<sup>103</sup>

Her account provides an unusually lucid consideration of the careful stages through which radical politics came to shape inner and outer female student life. As for many respondents her student politics seeped into the most intimate interior corners and seemed to suffuse every visible external quarter because of how wholeheartedly she threw herself into Warwick's socialist circles. When Davin first arrived at Warwick in 1965 she already possessed a level of intellectual confidence, but what she quickly came to relish was the freedom of having an intellectual life independent from her husband. As her political activity developed initially behind her intellectual life, she sought the same completeness of experience that she derived from her studies, and this led her to seek particular ways of formulating politics.<sup>104</sup> Intensive, constant discussions strengthened the social bonds between Davin and her socialist friends so that, before long, politics began to suffuse personal relationships and to shape private life. As they grew to conceive themselves as political beings, social bonds tightened to the extent that they sought to remove any boundaries inhibiting that closeness; casual sexual encounters became a way of cementing personal and political bonds.<sup>105</sup> In this sexual-political nexus, American students were again influential because they tended to be more independent, often further on in their studies, working to support themselves financially, and

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<sup>101</sup> Nikolas Rose, 'Assembling the Modern Self', in Roy Porter (ed.), *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present* (London, 1997), p. 238.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 234.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

<sup>104</sup> Ronald Fraser interview with respondent, C890/0, Anna Davin, p. 49.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

consequently more sexually liberated than British students, voicing greater expectations and exhibiting less cautious behaviour.<sup>106</sup>

Davin's account reveals how intimate social relations between student activists became an integral, if unconscious site of activism. The fluid, open shape of university left circles may be seen as one key explaining the intensity with which students came quickly to invest themselves into activity and attached themselves to the activist scene in which they began to work and socialise. Alongside the external political, social and cultural changes students witnessed in wider British and overseas' societies, agency derived from within the milieu itself; the libertarian culture fed into sexual as well as political and social relations, shaping men and women's internal sense of social and sexual mobility. Radical cultural codes permitted young women, already conditioned to expect lives of equality denied to their mothers, to push further against the social boundaries governing their freedom. This expansive social space stood in contrast to women's wider social situation. The shifts in traditional attitudes, discernible throughout the 1960s, and enacted in the 'permissive' legislative reforms, occurred only gradually.<sup>107</sup> Although the laws allowed for the possibility of expanding personal freedoms by encoding the primacy of individual 'consent', the liberalisation of behaviour was by no means directly proportional.<sup>108</sup>

Social surveys indicated the conservatism characterising the social attitudes and behaviour of sixties youth so that, in spite of the increasingly sexualised culture prevalent in the public sphere, private sexual practice remained cautious. Marriage as an institution retained its popularity amongst the young; the figures for first-time marriage peaked at 357,000 in 1971 (compared to 307,000 in 1931), and the age of first-time marriage fell significantly from 26.8 for men and 24.6 for women in 1951 to 24.6 for men and 22.6 for women in 1971.<sup>109</sup> Geoffrey Gorer's survey for *The Sunday Times* revealed that in 1969 a quarter of married men and nearly two-thirds of women

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Jeffery Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800* (Essex, 1989), p. 252.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Jane Lewis, *Women in Britain since 1945* (Oxford, 1992), p. 44.

remained virgins upon marriage.<sup>110</sup> Viewed against this cautious social landscape, the cultural codes and social practices of the activist scene offered young women and men much greater scope for social and sexual experimentation than was possible or permissible in mainstream society. Commitment to realising social agency outside the dominant patterns of capitalism encouraged the experimentation of political communication and self-expression.<sup>111</sup> Anna Paczuska confirmed the social possibilities the activist landscape permitted adventurous, bright young women like her: 'There was a way, if you were quite energetic and evidently a bit bright and up for life and challenge you could get away with it.'<sup>112</sup>

Female narratives of personal and political mobility assumed an integral part of a larger pattern of increasingly felt social independence on the part of young sixties women for whom steadily expanding economic and educational opportunities began to be discerned in the challenges to cultural norms that suggested 'emancipated thinking and living' in practice.<sup>113</sup> The post-war scholarship girl invariably entered higher education carrying the cultural assumption that she shared intellectual equality with scholarship boys. Her entry into the activist terrain was often taken on similar terms. Men's numerical dominance necessarily made mutuality a characteristic of social and political interaction, continuing the accelerated patterns of post-war mixing, which featured in education and youth leisure provision, as supported by official policy makers and post-war psychologists.<sup>114</sup> For independent-minded and intellectually assured students like Joan Smith the largely male composition of the LSE Marxist Society failed to raise any questions concerning her own role or status as a woman. Having already earned the respect of members for her intellectual prowess and on account of her prior IS involvement, the mainly male members were keen to

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<sup>110</sup> Geoffrey Gorer, *Sex and Marriage in England Today* (London, 1971), p. 30.

<sup>111</sup> In contrast sexual liberation in the underground also purported to relate to the mind-expanding culture of altered consciousness men and women sought to attain as 'part of the vital and present task of experiencing experience'. Jenny Diski, *The Sixties* (London, 2009), p. 60. See also Jonathan Green (ed.), *Days in the Life: Voices from the English Underground, 1961-1971* (London, 1998), pp. 421-425.

<sup>112</sup> Interview with Anna Paczuska, London, 4<sup>th</sup> January, 2010.

<sup>113</sup> Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, c. 1958-c. 1974* (Oxford, 1998), p. 398.

<sup>114</sup> Marcus Collins, *Modern Love: An Intimate History of Men and Women in Britain, 1900-2000* (London, 2003), pp. 79-82.

introduce her to graduate Marxist students whose reputations for theoretical brilliance offered her further stimulation and engagement inside the Society: 'I was fine. I was already in the IS, so I had come in already and in fact they kept saying to me, "You should be in contact with Chris Harman, Richard Kuper"', and I was going, mmm, not sure, not sure.'<sup>115</sup> Margaret Renn explained how naive adventurism informed her early social relations with male comrades: 'The first people who got me involved with politics were all young men because that is what you wanted...to be with young men, you know, in a way because I was sixteen or seventeen and on the lookout, and they were all very exciting ... I had absolutely no idea what I was doing, but made it up as I went along.'<sup>116</sup>

Yet gendered contradictions of female activists abounded. Just as Di Parkin revealed that in the YS it was possible to feel simultaneously intellectual and activist, essentially part-man, so it was still possible for a female student to remain in tune with her feminine sexuality, to be alongside men as both a beer-drinking comrade and potential sexual partner in accordance with her own desires. Notions of friendship or comradeship could be seemingly divested of gender, supplanted instead by intellectual and emotional connections concerning class, politics and shared cultural tastes. The activist politics of the left presented young women with clearly drawn-out social codes: Renn readily got up in the student's union and spoke in front of an overwhelmingly male audience, because 'that is what you did'.<sup>117</sup> She and other respondents revealed how flirtatious relations with male comrades added to the sense of fun and adventure to be enjoyed as a female student activist without necessarily undermining their sense of inclusion in the activities of the milieu. Sexual dalliances with male comrades, initiated on their own terms, could in fact consummate young women's sense of belonging. Gilda Peterson reflected on her sense of place in the Birmingham IS group: 'I didn't feel there was a big oppressive male scene. I felt reasonably equal and I had already had some relationships.' Instead, in the class politics and factory activism of IS she found a new identity and gained a set of political skills from chairing and organising meetings and demonstrations

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<sup>115</sup> Interview with Joan Smith, London, 20<sup>th</sup> March, 2009.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Interview with Margaret Renn and Anna Paczuska, London, 4<sup>th</sup> January, 2010.

to leafleting factory gates, and selling the weekly paper.<sup>118</sup> At a time when she was reaching out for new directions in her life, transitory sexual relations with IS comrades provided an avenue for drawing herself deeper into the culture of the milieu:<sup>119</sup> 'I suppose it was a way of getting fully involved in the scene and being more central, and sort of jumping for it all with two feet.'<sup>120</sup>

However, such accounts need to be read alongside female testimonies that accord psychic conflict and personal trauma, preceding Women's Liberation, as the price of radical social behaviour.<sup>121</sup> Ultimately, tensions arose within female students because the activist landscape around the VSC was predicated upon competitive masculine social and sexual codes women had to negotiate to gain recognition. Chapter two highlighted the way in which male socialist selfhood almost invariably rested on shared bonds of militant street politics and intellectual comradeship. In the late sixties the point of division between men and women in the activist realm often occurred in the discursive intellectual and political arena where men held a physical and psychological monopoly, thriving off the intellectual intensity, street militancy, and rhetorical competition of activist meetings. Repeated references from women suggested that even the most intellectually-assured and politically active scholarship girl could find it hard to make herself heard on the same terms as her male peers. In the LSE Socialist Society Wenda Clenaghan remembered that as a woman 'you did have to push your way in and sometimes you couldn't push your way in'.<sup>122</sup> Yet moving freely between open left circles alongside men, it was hard for female students to distinguish this mobility as set apart from authorial male voices, especially when they emanated

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<sup>118</sup> Narratives by female students who embraced the exhilarating freedom of the activist landscape confirmed the gendered accounts of New Left activism in North America and Western Europe. See, Wini Breines, *Community and Organization in the New Left, 1962-1968: The Great Refusal* (South Hadley, 1982), pp. 38-39. See also Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York, 1979), Doug McAdam, *Freedom Summer* (New York, 1988), Passerini, *Autobiography of a Generation*, and Barbara L. Tischler, 'The Refiner's Fire: Anti-War Activism and Emerging Feminism in the Late 1960s' in Gerard J. De Groot (ed.), *Student Protest*, pp. 186-200.

<sup>119</sup> Such conduct may be seen as an extension of the social patterns already discernible in the social spaces of the early sixties avant-garde where female sexual agency had begun to shape a new female social morality. See Nell Dunn, *Talking to Women* (London, 1965), p. 9.

<sup>120</sup> Interview with Gilda Peterson.

<sup>121</sup> Beatrix Campbell, 'A Feminist Sexual Politics: Now You See It, Now You Don't', *Feminist Review*, 5 (1980), pp. 1-18; Interview with Lee Comer, Leeds, 3<sup>rd</sup> June, 2009; Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream*, p. 45; interview with Wisty Hoyland, 21<sup>st</sup> January, 2009.

<sup>122</sup> Interview with Wenda Clengahen, London, 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 2009.

from respected and affectionately held friends. Wenda Clenaghan underlined the confusion that was attached to her experience in the LSE Socialist Society:

The guys were quite respectful; we were clever women, but quite often they had strings of girlfriends ... Some of the more famous ones, let's say, of course, it would be like having groupies around them, and of course some of them took advantage of that, but on the whole they were a pretty decent bunch.<sup>123</sup>

As an IS member at Durham University, Anna Paczuska's perception of social difference between men and women remained unresolved, submerged beneath layers of consciousness of herself as an immigrant who never quite fitted in: 'I think I thought student life ... wasn't about men, but women who were students and men who were students; they did things together, much more together, but I did sense that feeling that you didn't... that there was something quite unresolved there, but I must admit I found university quite socially uncomfortable.'<sup>124</sup> Her sense of difference and marginalisation showed that before activist women became truly conscious of themselves as gendered beings distinct from male comrades, other registers of selfhood defined activist experience. Paczuska's predominant recollection of the group focused on the leading IS men, but she accorded greater emphasis to its social and intellectual exclusivity, seeming never quite able to connect the two together: 'I saw it as rather an exclusive intellectual group, you know, it seemed to me as if they saw anybody likely [to be interested in their politics, then] they would ask them to join, but it was a laying on of hands, a privilege conferred.'<sup>125</sup>

### **The Metropolitan Activist Scene of the Late 1960s**

Respondents' emphasis on the permeable, subjective quality of the left politics they embraced at universities confirms the fluid shape of the growing activist scene. By the late 1960s increased far left activity responded to a host of national and international issues. The decline of the British economy provided the domestic background against which the left came to express bitter

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Interview with Anna Paczuska.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

disillusionment in a Labour government prepared to betray the party's socialist heritage<sup>126</sup>: public spending cuts, wages restraint forced by the Prices and Incomes Board, immigration and race, the Industrial Relations Bill of 1969, and the overseas difficulties of Rhodesia all occasioned the left's frustrations with Labour.<sup>127</sup> After the initial hopes of left students, in 1965, that the Wilson government might live up to its promises to reinvigorate British society through real social reforms, the betrayal was deeply-felt, especially by students whose politics had been informed by long-standing Labour families.<sup>128</sup> Clengahen remembered: 'The Socialist Society got bigger and bigger, but I still didn't want to leave the Labour Party at that point because I had put quite a lot into it ... but at the point at which Labour took away the passports of the African Asians I left the Labour Party and joined the International Socialists in 1968.'<sup>129</sup>

But it was activity against the Vietnam War, the 'left litmus paper', and the prominence the VSC came to acquire on the left that facilitated the dynamic relationship between activist groups in the provinces, focused around the universities, and the activist metropolitan centre.<sup>130</sup> From the mid-1960s onwards IS and IMG expanded steadily in alignment with the VSC; a symbiotic

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<sup>126</sup> For a flavour of the bitter betrayal found in left circles, see Ken Coates, *The Crisis of British Socialism: Essays on the Rise of Harold Wilson and the Fall of the Labour Party* (Nottingham, 1972). Coates expressed the sentiments echoed by other activists in *The Week* group, which soon began to be echoed more widely on the left.

<sup>127</sup> For details of the policies the Wilson Labour government adopted in relation to these issues, see Barbara Castle, *The Castle Diaries, 1964-1976* (London, 1990); Mark Donnelly, *Sixties Britain* (London, 2005), pp. 104-115, and, pp. 138-142; Peter Dorey, (ed.), *The Labour Governments, 1964-1970* (London, 2006); Michael Foot, *The Politics of Harold Wilson* (Harmondsworth, 1968), pp. 249-285; Keith Banting, *Poverty, Politics and Policy: Britain in the 1960s* (London, 1979); Nicholas Woodward, 'Labour's Economic Performance' in Richard Cooper, Steven Fielding and Nick Tiratsoo (eds.), *The Wilson Governments, 1964-1970* (London, 1993), pp. 72-99; Clive Ponting, *Breach of Promise: Labour in Power, 1964-1970* (London, 1990); Nick Tiratsoo, 'Labour and its Critics: The Case of the May Day Manifesto Group' in Cooper et al. (eds.), *The Wilson Governments, 1964-1970*, pp. 163-183; Andrew Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party* (Basingstoke, 2008), pp. 145-165; Keir Thorpe, 'The "Juggernaut Method": The 1966 State of Emergency and the Wilson Government's Response to the Seamen's Strike', *Twentieth Century British History*, 12: 4, 2001, pp. 461-485; David Walker, 'The First Wilson Governments, 1964-70' in Peter Hennessy and A. Seldon (eds.), *Ruling Performance: British Governments from Atlee to Thatcher* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 172-198; Carl Watts, 'Moments of Tension and Drama: The Rhodesian Problem at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meetings, 1965-65', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 8:1, 2007, pp. 1-28.

<sup>128</sup> See, for example, 'Editorial', *Agitator*, No. 5, January, 1966, p. 1, Andreas Nagliati and Basker Vashee, 'Devaluation', *Agitator*, No. 6, February, 1966, p. 4, John Lea, 'The Wage Freeze and the New Phase in British Politics', *Agitator*, Vol. 2, No. 2, November, 1967, pp. 1-2.

<sup>129</sup> Interview with Wenda Clengahen, London, 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 2009.

<sup>130</sup> David Walker, 'The First Wilson Governments, 1964-70', in Peter Hennessy and Anthony Seldon (eds.), *Ruling Performance: British Governments from Attlee to Thatcher* (Oxford, 1987), p. 201.

relationship evolved between them to the extent that from 1967 until 1969, the VSC operated as the main prism for the burgeoning activist scene.<sup>131</sup> Within this radical landscape the student movement supplied campaigns like the VSC with mobile bodies to publicise demonstrations and protest activities, to rouse student bodies on to the streets or to man picket lines as required.

The position of the LSE's Socialist Society; at the nexus of the metropolitan network illustrates the interwoven social and political dynamics around the activist heartland. Throughout 1967-1968 LSE's national reputation for political radicalism accentuated the body of social contacts between the Society and the growing penumbra of radical enclaves situated in north and east areas of London where property was inexpensive and shared housing a feature of young activist life. The Socialist Society's reputation as an open, libertarian political site quickly made it a haven of activist sociability; an open door policy guaranteed lively political discussion, parties, and foot soldiers for demonstrations. The fluid boundaries between the intensely political core in the Society, affiliated largely to IS, and the counter-cultural milieu where students were concerned essentially with life-style politics, provided for a wide array of political contacts, including the new radical theatre, art, and information groups: the Cartoon Archetypal Society (CAST)<sup>132</sup>, Agitprop Information, Agitprop Street Players, and Poster Workshop; members serviced campaigns with alternative, imaginative propaganda in a self-sustaining environment, drawing upon political and cultural traditions from Russian agitprop, the San Franciscan Mime Troup theatre and Rock n' Roll to the Parisian Atelier Populaire and surrealist ideas circulating in the art schools (see figure 3.1).<sup>133</sup> These cultural activists coexisted with Society members and a core of young apprentices Paul Foot had recruited from the YS during his time as a reporter for the Glasgow *Daily Record* – Frank Campbell, a building worker, and Ross Pritchard, a print worker who had represented young printers on the strike committee of

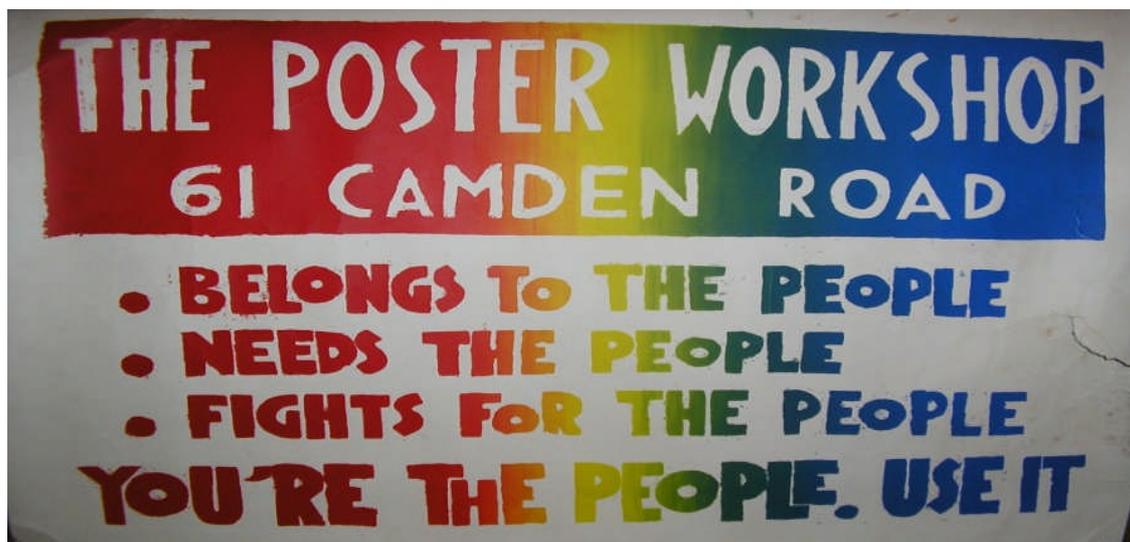
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<sup>131</sup> Celia Hughes, 'The History of the Vietnam Campaign: A Substructure of Far Left Activism in Britain, 1966-1969' (Unpublished MA dissertation, University of Warwick, 2008), pp.41-53.

<sup>132</sup> IS members around the Society; Nigel Harris, Laurie Flynn and Richard Kuper, ran Marxist seminars for CAST at the photographic studio Roland and Red Saunders had established in Windmill Street. Interview with Roland and Claire Muldoon, London, 10<sup>th</sup> December, 2009.

<sup>133</sup> For details of the co-operative relationship between these radical cultural groups, see Sarah Wilson, 'The Poster Workshop', [consulted at <http://www.posterworkshop.co.uk/aboutus.html> (3 November, 2010)].

Figure 3.1 Poster advertising the services of Poster Workshop, c. 1968.



Source: *Private Archive of John Hoyland (JHA.)*

the 1959 Glaswegian apprentices strike.<sup>134</sup> Shared social bonds between students and apprentices rested on the shared sociability of youth culture, on Friday night drinking sessions and intellectual exchange.<sup>135</sup> Steve Jefferys remembered: 'These were days when we would all be drinking down in the Three Tonnes and people used to come down to see us'.<sup>136</sup> The apprentices were attracted to the Society milieu by the ethos of resistance they encountered; promise of direct action, support for their dispute with Myton's construction company, and the presence of female students.<sup>137</sup> In turn socialist students were drawn to the enormous energy and intellectual capacity of the apprentices who were well read in Marx, economics as well as general politics, and whose presence went unnoticed amidst the cohort of mature trade union studies' students; Ted Parker, Mike McKenna and Morgan O'Brien - 'they were very important because what they gave was very much a sense of weight. They had had fifteen years of experience outside the movement'.<sup>138</sup>

The porous boundaries surrounding the Socialist Society facilitated the diachronic process of

<sup>134</sup> Interview with Steve Jefferys.

<sup>135</sup> In the October 1967 issue of *Agitator* a list of meetings included details of a meeting to organise the London Building Workers' dance on October 12<sup>th</sup>. *Agitator*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1967, p. 28.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

activist participation sociologists have emphasised in relation to new social movements; individuals became involved through their pre-existing links, but their very participation also forged 'new social bonds', hence 'the duality of the link between individuals – in particular their identity – and group memberships'.<sup>139</sup> Steve Jefferys provided his own reflections on this process:

The network forming is partly by definition by others, partly by self-definition and selection of areas of work; and simply the fact of working together, drinking together, sleeping together creates a bonding over probably what was by any accounting... what must have been an unusual example of student activity. The links were also there with the Committee of 100. In 1967 the Colonels in Greece staged a coup and seized military power, and at that time we were using anarchist printers who I had contact with through the Committee of 100. People were still around doing stuff, and these anarchist printers suggested to us that what we should do was to occupy the Greek Embassy. We called together a number of Greek students and about 25-30 of us went in this big furniture van and occupied the Greek Embassy.<sup>140</sup>

Jefferys's testimony shows how political and cultural influences from the British and overseas left were transferred to a new activist stage through 'inner modes of enmeshment'; refracted through individuals' political and personal lives to impinge upon and shape their identities and actions.<sup>141</sup> In this context the concept of 'interculturality' usefully alludes to the reflexive relationship operating between the formation of the new protest culture and activists' emotional – or psychic – life.<sup>142</sup> The fluid boundaries between the university left milieu and the activist network facilitated students' social and sexual freedom of movement paradoxically because it provided for many a 'self-sustaining womb-life' environment or habitus, allowing time and space for students to explore themselves in relation to their politics and the alternative social landscape around them uninterrupted by the

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<sup>139</sup> Mario Diani, 'Networks and Participation', in David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (Oxford, 2007), p. 339.

<sup>140</sup> Interview with Steve Jefferys. The anarchist printer he referred to was Committee of 100 member Terry Chandler. For details of the occupation, see *Black Dwarf*, 26<sup>th</sup> October-15<sup>th</sup> November, 1969, p. 15. See also *The Times*, 29 April, 1969, p. 1.

<sup>141</sup> Belinda Davis, Wilfred Mausbach, Martin Klimke, and Carla MacDougall, 'Introduction', in Davis et al. (eds.), *Changing the World, Changing Oneself*, p. xii.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

everyday demands of the outer world.<sup>143</sup> Martin Tompkinson explained: 'I was quite lost when I left LSE where there were a lot of people you knew who felt like you did. The outside world isn't like that; people outside switch off.'<sup>144</sup> Within the activist habitus the power of change individuals felt at work around them, in their social circles, internally and on a global level, contributed to respondents' sensual perceptions of social and physical movement. Their expressions form part of the collective emotional experience surrounding the global '68 movements, what Detlev Claussen terms the 'chiffre 68'<sup>145</sup>, an 'imagined synchronicity'<sup>146</sup> of socialist breakthrough that interpellated new subjectivities around a new politics.<sup>147</sup>

### **The International Subjectivity of Young Activists**

Subjective perceptions of movement offer valuable insight into the relationship between the cultural and social shape of student left circles and activists' subjective states within them. Many of the most politically active students, often members of far left groups, were present at the forefront of university protests.<sup>148</sup> As a result they established political and personal connections with student activists at other institutions across the country, and were often involved in efforts to orchestrate these connections into means for wielding student power. The RSSF was the most concerted attempt to set up a national revolutionary student organisation in June 1968, modelled on the West German SDS, and this also functioned as an umbrella for socialist students of various tendencies – IS, IMG, the *NLR* circle, Maoist, and libertarian students.<sup>149</sup> At the forefront of the underground media

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<sup>143</sup> Interview with Martin Tompkinson, 6<sup>th</sup> November, 2009.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Detlev Claussen, "Chiffre 68" in Dietrich Harth (ed.), *Revolution and Mythos* (Frankfurt, 1992), p. 219.

<sup>146</sup> Jakob Tanner, 'Motions and Emotions', in Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth (eds.), *1968 in Europe: A History of Protest and Activism, 1956-1977* (Basingstoke, 2008), p. 77.

<sup>147</sup> Deborah Cohen and Lessie Jo Frazier, 'Love-In, Love-Out: Gender, Sex, and Sexuality in '68' in Lessie Jo Frazier and Deborah Cohen (eds.), *Gender and Sexuality in 1968; Transformative Politics in the Cultural Imagination* (Basingstoke, 2009), p. 2.

<sup>148</sup> For discussion on the role far left groups played in student protests, see Nick Thomas, 'Challenging Myths of the 1960s', *Twentieth Century British History*, 13:3, 2002, pp. 283-84.

<sup>149</sup> Letter from Manchester Socialist Society to its members, 1968, MRC, MSS. 152, file 32. For further details of the RSSF, see A.Z. Ehrlich, *The Leninist Organisations in Britain and the Student Movement, 1965-1972'* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1981), p. 25. See also Fraser (ed.), *1968*, pp. 277-278, and David Widgery (ed.), *The Left in Britain, 1956-68* (London, 1976), p. 315.

servicing the network, the newspaper *Black Dwarf* kept its predominantly student readership abreast of the latest developments in the various student occupations. From the time of the first sit-in at the LSE, in March 1967 Clenaghan seemed to be ‘always on the move: ‘We used to travel the whole country agitating. Guess how we travelled around? Hitch-hiked, world-revolutionary hitch-hiking.’<sup>150</sup> Within these same circles Sarah Perrigo ‘was involved quite heavily in the student movement in the RSSF, and Richard [Kuper] and I went speaking at universities across Britain at one stage ... talking about sit-ins, and I certainly remember going to Birmingham and Leicester’.<sup>151</sup> At Birmingham Val Graham and her IMG comrades ‘were a bit like revolutionary tourists. We all used to look for the next sit-in at the next university and all hop into a car’.<sup>152</sup> Yet only a small proportion of students who participated in campus unrest were also involved in the small activist scene around the VSC. Contrary to media speculation that occurred in the wake of the Warwick protests of 1970, the reality of the network of militants journalists envisaged was much smaller and less politically challenging to state authority, incapable of co-ordinating a nationwide campaign of campus disruption.<sup>153</sup>

Despite the real travels of student activists, respondents’ perceptions of movement are perhaps even more revealing than actual instances of mobility. Wilfried Mausbach signals the way in which identity is grounded in time and space, and how “imagined communities” can endow people with a sense of belonging.<sup>154</sup> In order to understand the way in which student activists saw themselves inside their milieux, it is important to consider the way in which respondents reconstructed their experiences within particular frameworks of time and space. Students’ experiences of intellectual ferment, of establishing political and social connections, and internalising international political struggles together heightened the dynamic, mobile subjectivity embedded

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<sup>150</sup> Interview with Wenda Clenaghan.

<sup>151</sup> Interview with Sarah Perrigo, Leeds, 4<sup>th</sup> June, 2009.

<sup>152</sup> Interview with Val Graham.

<sup>153</sup> See *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 25 February, 1970; p. 1, *Daily Telegraph*, 27 February, 1970, p.2; *Daily Telegraph*, 2 March, 1970, p. 5.

<sup>154</sup> Wilfried Mausbach, ‘America’s Vietnam in Germany –Germany in America’s Vietnam: On the Relocation of Spaces and the Appropriation of History’, in Davis et al. (eds.), *Changing the World, Changing Oneself*, p. 43.

within their activism. Not only did physical movement through street-politics and grass-roots campaigning give an external, verbal meaning to activism in the sense of 'doing', but engagement in the activist milieu aroused powerful internal understandings of the political and social agency that resulted from activity. Within the VSC network 'activism' also assumed subjective meaning as a sensation of inner being. The sense of respondents being, from the earliest time of joining a left milieu, constantly active and always on the move was repeatedly emphasised, and this entailed a subjective state of mind as much as one of outer reality.

Various factors contributed to this subjective activist condition. As student protests became a familiar sight on university campuses across the country, and the VSC mobilisations attracted ever larger numbers, media sources from the activist left as much as expressions of alarm from official government and media spokesmen may well have helped to shape activists' self-perceptions of political and social agency. In June 1968 the headline for the first issue of *Black Dwarf* presented the activism of British students and all others on the left, as allied to the actions of Western European activists, resisting capitalist and imperialist oppression. The slogan 'We shall fight. We shall win. Paris, London, Rome, Berlin' was intended to act as a defiant message of opposition to ruling authorities as well as one of collective solidarity for activists themselves (see figure 3.2).<sup>155</sup> In so far as the testimony of respondents makes evident, the newspaper's editors and producers at least partially succeeded in their aim to 'act as a voice' for radicalised youth, because of the newspaper's concurrent impact in shaping activists' subjective concepts of political agency.<sup>156</sup> *Black Dwarf* facilitated the free, fluid exchange of ideas, radical culture and information about the various protests and political gatherings occurring throughout Britain as well as internationally. Although in terms of tangible numbers, the late sixties network remained a marginal left collective, the centrality of international liberation struggles to which activists committed themselves alongside national and local issues had the psychological effect of expanding individuals' mental horizons, and enlarging the psychic space available to them for manoeuvring within the activist scene.

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<sup>155</sup> *Black Dwarf*, 1 June, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1968, p. 1.

<sup>156</sup> Ali, *Street Fighting Years*, p. 200.

Figure 3.2 Poster advertising Black Dwarf, depicting the front cover of the journal's first edition in June 1968.



Source: JHA.

In thinking about the impact of ‘activist’ terminology, as deployed and read by individuals within the left milieu, focus needs to be given not only to considering how the meanings of such language may have shaped activist subjectivity, but also, as Rose argues, what that language did for those individuals, how it shaped behaviour, ‘what components of thinking and acting’ it connected up to, and what it enabled them ‘to dream into existence, to do to themselves and to others’.<sup>157</sup> A pertinent example concerns the spectre of internationalism which prevailed throughout the VSC network since its earliest beginnings in June 1966, and which had been embedded within activists from their earliest memories of political awakening. British activists shared the ‘internationalist sensibilities’ of their Western European and North American counterparts; they too internalised the mobilizing actions they witnessed in foreign countries to forge international identities.<sup>158</sup> Solidarities with international movements for civil rights, national liberation, and social and personal freedoms were as much internally felt by students and young activists as they were forms of inter-personal communication with foreign activists. Iconic revolutionary figures from international conflicts were not, for serious left-thinking students, mere cultural icons, whose potent portraits exerted an imaginary appeal beyond analysis, rather political icons and models of social justice whose appeal was rooted in a deeply humanitarian dimension.<sup>159</sup>

There is no doubt that the revolutionary ‘myth’ of “Che” and to a lesser extent the Vietnamese Communist leader, Ho Chi Minh, involved an idolisation that could at times blind radical young adults to the harsh realities of their methods. In March 1969 Sue Crockford accompanied Camden VSC members to London’s Abbey Road to meet Madame Nguyen Thi Binh, the Foreign Minister of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam (see figure 3.3).<sup>160</sup>

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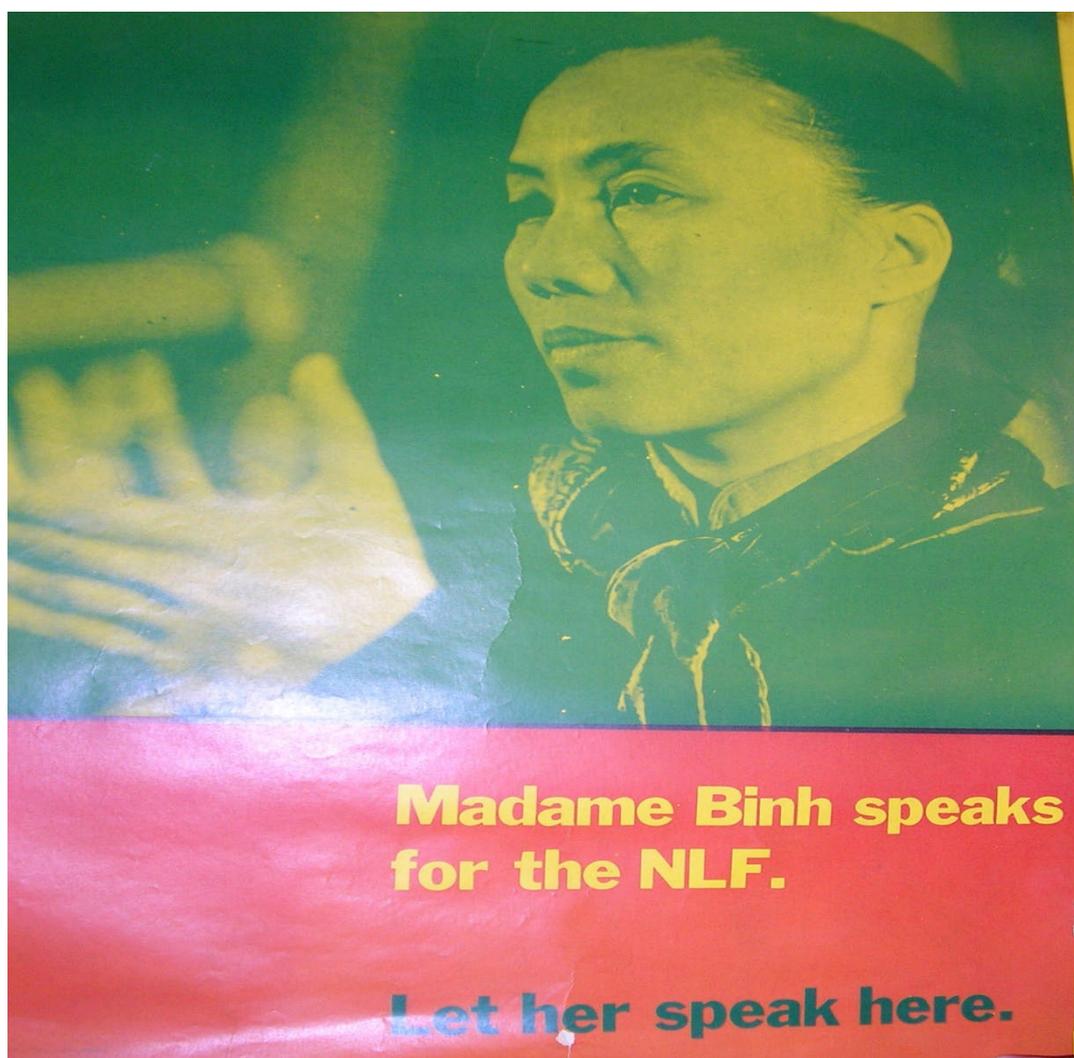
<sup>157</sup> Rose, ‘Assembling the Modern Self’, p. 239.

<sup>158</sup> Richard Ivan Jobs, ‘Youth Movements, Travel, Protest, and Europe in 1968’, *American Historical Review*, 114:2, April, 2009, p. 376.

<sup>159</sup> DeGroot, *The 60s Unplugged*, p. 124.

<sup>160</sup> Madame Binh was briefly present in Britain because during this period she was attending the Paris Peace talks, which began on 10 May 1968 but failed to proceed in earnest until five months later. Camden VSC

Figure 3.3 VSC poster depicting a serene-looking Madame Nguyen Thi Binh, the Foreign Minister of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam. The poster was part of a national VSC campaign, launched in November 1968, to persuade the British government to grant NLF and DRV representatives visas to speak to audiences in Britain.



Source: *Private Archive of Geoff Crossick (GCA)*.

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journals showed that the group followed the talks intently. Interview with Sue Crockford, London, 30<sup>th</sup> September, 2009. See also Geoff Crossick, 'Camden VSC in Black Pyjamas', *Red Camden*, Vol. 1, No. 5, 1969, p. 1. During the Paris peace talks, VSC established contact with NLF and DRV representatives, and Camden VSC championed the proposal of the VSC National Council in November 1968 to launch a national political campaign to focus on British complicity in the war through the example of the government's refusal to grant NLF and DRV representatives visas to enter Britain whilst recognising Saigon. See "'What Next'": a discussion document produced by some members of Camden VSC' in *VSC Bulletin*, 20, January 1969, p. 17, Hull University Archives (hereafter HUA), Papers of Lt Commander Edgar Philip Young and Amicia More Young, DYO/12/88. For an example of activists' communications with NLF and DRV representatives, see *Black Dwarf*, 28<sup>th</sup> March, Vol. 14, No. 14, 1969, p. 5.

She recalled activists' enthusiastic interest in the gritty nature of guerrilla struggles – 'someone not long before had said something like, "how did you get involved with the Vietcong? Do you know how many people Ho Chi Minh has killed?"'<sup>161</sup> VSC posters glorified Vietnamese guerrilla fighters who were taking on the technological supremacy of the United States and winning (see figure 3.3). The prevalence of masculine tropes within VSC ephemera may be seen partly as an expression of the mono-gendered, militant codes of political language and behaviour within the network that carried over from the YS/IS milieu. The respect, even reverence many young male and female students showed towards working-class militants, who taught them the rules and practices of the docks or shop floor, fed into the same militant male ethos that fuelled the international idolisation in these circles. Rowbotham mocked the 'naked genitals' of 'street-fighting man – the cult of Che, the paraphernalia of helmets, the militancy that could shout the loudest'.<sup>162</sup> The desire some men expressed to take up the guerrilla mantle of the NLF and to aid their cause as volunteers, may have drawn upon romantic notions of the 1930s International Brigades and, at some level, tapped into the street-fighting masculinity displayed in the militancy of the first two VSC marches.

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<sup>161</sup> Camden VSC member, Geoffrey Crossick, clearly defined what collective solidarity with the VSC entailed, and which he endorsed, when he asserted the need for Camden members to distinguish themselves from the moderate position of CND during the 1969 annual CND Easter march: 'The NLF fight, they use guns, they kill American soldiers, they seek victory.' See Geoff Crossick, 'Camden VSC in Black Pyjamas', p. 1.

<sup>162</sup> Rowbotham, *Women's Consciousness, Man's World*, p. 24.

Figure 3.4 RSSF poster glorifying the military skill of the NFL guerrilla fighters.



Source: JHA.

Mike Martin remembered: 'If somebody had said we will send an army of volunteers to Vietnam to help the Liberation Front I would have put my hand up.'<sup>163</sup> Yet reverence for these figures also spoke of an engagement and empathy with peasant struggles that gave the concept of 'internationalism' an implicitly felt dimension. There was no doubting the deep conviction motivating the sentiment to fight overseas; activists believed deeply in the righteousness of the NLF claim for self-determination. Stephen Merret recalled how 'I wept tears of joy the day the Americans withdrew from Vietnam in 1973'. During his years in Camden VSC dedication to the NLF cause ultimately cost him his job, when in 1969 the Ministry of Technology discovered that he had been publishing material exposing British complicity in the war.<sup>164</sup>

Nor was international solidarity confined exclusively to men.<sup>165</sup> Rowbotham described her and other VSC members' internationalism as 'implicit and simply taken for granted' to the extent that 'it did not occur to us to justify or explain why we were connected to [Martin Luther] King or [Rudi] Dutschke'.<sup>166</sup> The defiant heroism of the NLF was typically portrayed with images of male and female freedom fighters, symbols of people power pitted against anonymous technological might (see figure 3.5).<sup>167</sup> Crockford's memories of her encounter with Madame Binh told of her deep respect and reverence for the revolutionary Vietnamese woman, based largely on their shared identities as mothers:

She had this bun, one of these ageless faces ... I can remember talking to her and how it started; Barney was only three months, six months, just a babe in arms, and she was really sweet to him. I didn't know enough

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<sup>163</sup> Interview with Mike Martin. According to Tariq Ali some of those men in the investigating team for the War Crimes Tribunal, sponsored by the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, offered to form an international brigade, but were turned down by the Vietnamese Prime Minister, Pham van Dong. See Ali, *Street Fighting Years*, p. 176.

<sup>164</sup> Interview with Stephen Merret and Alicia Merrett, Wells, 16<sup>th</sup> December, 2009.

<sup>165</sup> A notable example of the emotional upheaval, which could result from young activists' emulation for revolutionary icons, occurred in September 1969 at the Ho Chi Minh Memorial meeting. Chris Harman caused consternation when he denounced Ho Chi Minh for destroying the Trotskyist movement in North and South Vietnam. See Unknown author, 'But unity is hard to get and harder to keep ...' in Widgery (ed.), *The Left in Britain*, p. 415.

<sup>166</sup> Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream*, p. 172.

<sup>167</sup> See VSC poster of NLF guerrilla fighters sold by Camden VSC, VSC poster of Ho Chi Minh sold by Camden VSC, and advertising a Vietnam demonstration supported by the VSC on 4<sup>th</sup> June 1972, in Private Archive of Geoff Richman (hereafter GRA).

about her, and I said, "Have you got kids?", and of course she did, but she didn't know where they were, and I just thought, oh, how could you do this? I mean you are so passionate and committed, and you have given up being with your kids, and you don't know where they are. I was just devastated.<sup>168</sup>

Activists' alertness to social and political protest overseas represented a logical continuation of growing up in the Cold War era where the perils of nuclear annihilation expanded the local immediacy of the childhood landscape to bring awareness of a world divided into two antagonistic blocs. Where youngsters had been engaged with CND, even at marginal levels, the possibilities for envisioning international frameworks of power and alignment with Third World nations increased. Given that participation in CND spoke of an inherently moral, emotionally felt outrage, this reaction to foreign power politics carried on into the way in which, as young adults, they responded to international struggles for self-determination against apartheid in South Africa and American military action in Vietnam as well as to the way in which they drew parallels with their local struggles for democracy within their universities. New mass visual mediums of communication, notably television and film, heightened the urgency of this moral impulse. During her sixth-form years, Jane Storr explained, 'the images on the television would be presenting you with a sense of injustice all over the world ... at the time you thought how can people not want to change this because we can't close our eyes to it? Nobody could pretend this stuff wasn't going on'.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Interview with Sue Crockford. On 30 October 1970, the meeting with Madam Binh at the Royal Lancaster Hotel, London, was advertised in the Women's Liberation Workshop (WLW) Newsheet, No. 6, 24 October, 1970, highlighting the interest in the NLF representative amongst female and male activists alike. In a special issue of *Shrew*, the WLW journal, in 1970, Anna Davin had written a report of a meeting between members of the Workshop and Ma-Thi-Chu, executive member of the NLF. The report devoted equal attention to Vietnamese women's guerrilla role in the armed forces as to their traditional role as care givers within Vietnam. See Anna Davin, 'Women in Vietnam', *Shrew*, Special double issue, 1970, pp. 5-8.

<sup>169</sup> Interview with Jane Storr, Leeds, 4<sup>th</sup> June 2009.

Figure 3.5 Camden VSC poster depicting the heroism of male and female NLF guerrilla fighters.



Source: GCA.

Storr's reflections were especially echoed by respondents in relation to the Vietnam War, which as the first televised war, received more extensive and intensive media coverage than any other hitherto.<sup>170</sup> The power of the visual image to evoke emotion and arouse empathy for the victims of American bombing helped to sharpen the divisions between left-thinking students and an outmoded, authoritarian government cloaked in the mantle of the left. Confronted with the horror of napalm, bombing, mass graves and executions, for young adults critically sensitised in CND their own government's policy of moral support for American military action seemed to confirm the

<sup>170</sup> David Cate, *Sixty-Eight: The Year of the Barricades* (London, 1988), p. 3.

urgent need to 'stand up and be counted'.<sup>171</sup> Sandy Irving remembered 'coming home from school and seeing pictures on the news at six o' clock about what had been happening in Vietnam, and it was just so terrible; I couldn't wait to get to university and go on the big anti-war demonstrations'.<sup>172</sup> As a symbol of wider political and generational discontent, Vietnam swelled the ranks of left-wing students seeking radical solutions.

Joan Smith was LSE's Socialist Society secretary when in 1967 she and her comrades threw their support behind the VSC, initially hosting the photographic exhibition to raise support for the International War Crimes Tribunal. The Society's responsiveness to VSC's solidarity message reflected the explosive impact of the War in compounding members' frustrations with Labour: 'America was the new colonialism and it was just so brutal and, of course, it was the first time television showed you what was going on, and so I suppose that was the biggest thing then. We didn't think Marxism was wrong because every day it was being confirmed that, yeah, this is how people behave, how the ruling class behaves when it's threatened'.<sup>173</sup> At a time when left students were sharpening the intellectual frameworks of their Marxism in relation to the Cold War and the post-colonial world, the occurrence nationally and internationally of parallel struggles against injustice confirmed to them their own place within a wider political and social structure. Drawing links between international, national and local struggles enabled them to situate their own fight against their universities in a larger political framework. At the LSE Laurie Flynn, explained, 'we just wanted a radical alternative, we didn't want Walter Adams (see below). We wanted radical socialism in the west in solidarity with the civil rights struggle and anti-colonial struggles'.<sup>174</sup> Inside these larger political struggles Socialist Society students came to see themselves in collective terms and to discover for themselves an understanding of collective strength they subsumed into the sense of themselves as political actors, as around them they witnessed the empowering effects of

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<sup>171</sup> Cited in Fraser, 1968, p. 35.

<sup>172</sup> Interview with Sandy Irving, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 2009.

<sup>173</sup> David Robinson, interview with the author, London, 15 June 2008. See also 'Vietnam War Exhibition', VSC flyer for the photographic exhibition and a talk on the International War Crimes Tribunal by David Robinson, 22 February-1 March, 1967, Private Papers of David Robinson (hereafter DRA).

<sup>174</sup> Interview with Laurie Flynn.

the sit-in on members of the wider student body.

Empathy with foreign liberation struggles derived not only from the new global mass media, but from real life social relationships students formed in their universities and travels abroad. Learning about radical left politics from the first-hand experiences of grass-roots activists like South African refugees and trade unionists injected a personal immediacy and emotionality into the moral frame of issues socialist students passionately took up. The LSE Socialist Society's report on Dr Walter Adams, previously principal of University College, Rhodesia, and their subsequent demonstration outside Rhodesia House<sup>175</sup> derived partly from the School's cosmopolitan student body whose collective international origins fed into the School's anti-colonial tradition.<sup>176</sup> Richard Kuper was one of a number of Jewish South African students including the President of the Students' Union, David Adelstein, who were alive to the injustices and oppression of the system of apartheid upheld by Ian Smith's all-white government.<sup>177</sup> Many such students were Socialist Society members including South African refugees David Lazaar and Basker Vashee. The latter was a Zimbabwean Asian economics student who had been imprisoned for a year before the Smith regime expelled him from his homeland, in 1966, for his efforts to uphold human rights at the University College of Salisbury, Rhodesia.<sup>178</sup> Together they informed Society comrades of the brutal realities surrounding the South African regime and the dangers posed to activists struggling to oppose it.<sup>179</sup> Steve Jefferys explained how the early personal dynamics within his radical politics had shaped his student activism

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<sup>175</sup> For details of the occupation, see *Black Dwarf*, 26<sup>th</sup> October-15<sup>th</sup> November, 1969, p. 15. See also *The Times*, 29 April, p. 1. For details of other instances of student protest against South African apartheid, see Sylvia Ellis, 'A Demonstration of British Good Sense?' British Student Protest during the Vietnam War, in Gerard DeGroot (ed.), *Student Protest*, pp. 57-58.

<sup>176</sup> The report was based on interviews with four of the main lecturers at the University College of Rhodesia who were arrested by the Smith regime in July 1966. The authors presented four main reasons why they did not consider Walter Adams a suitable candidate to become director of the large multi-racial college of the LSE. For details, see 'LSE's New Director: A Report on Walter Adams', MRC, Papers of Steve Jefferys, MSS. 244 Box 6.

<sup>177</sup> David Adelstein wrote a letter to *The Times* along with other representatives of the LSE Students' Union, which defended the students' right of democratic participation in university appointments by asserting their right to question Adams' suitability for the position of Director. The publication of the letter resulted in the LSE authorities taking disciplinary action against him. See *The Times*, 29 October, 1966, p. 9.

<sup>178</sup> Interview with Sabby Sagall, London, May, 2008. See Basker Vashee, 'The Meaning of UDI', *Agitator*, Vol. 2, No. 3, December, 1966, pp. 19-20. See also Book and Flynn, 'Celebration of the Life of Basker Vashee', pp. 1-3.

<sup>179</sup> Interview with Steve Jefferys. See also 'Rhodesia', *Agitator*, No. 2, 24 November 1965, pp.2-4.

even prior to the LSE. His first-hand introduction to the brutalities of South African apartheid had occurred during his school years when he came into contact with a network of South African refugees living near to him in the Highgate area of London, part of the Communist, largely Jewish community he grew up in:

Into the social network came South Africans who were refugees fleeing injustice, so there the issues of injustice and dealing with the reasons why their parents were fleeing were to do with their parents' support for the ANC and the links that they had. The kind of political agenda that became totally acceptable was hearing people supporting the limited initial campaign blowing up electric pylons and the very limited stuff the ANC started at that time, which involved responding with huge demonstrations.<sup>180</sup>

Stories of the ANC's radical agenda sensitized Jefferys to the brutal oppression black South Africans faced and enlarged the possibilities CND activism had already shown for challenging oppression over and above the Committee of 100's direct action – 'demonstrating, participating in sit-downs, supporting people who are taking military action against oppressive action ... all of this was being put into a kind of melting pot of political ideas and interests that seemed at the time quite typical'.<sup>181</sup>

Friendships with South African students informed British students' increasing political and emotional connection to a wider world. Individual ties served simultaneously to expand students' global awareness whilst also shrinking the physical and social gulf between them and the people at the heart of foreign struggles. Until the age of nineteen Ireland was the furthest Joan Smith had travelled outside of London, and even reading about foreign affairs in newspapers brought little comprehension of the far-off countries journalists depicted. Her friendship with Vashee and other LSE foreign nationals transcended the narrow political and social parameters of her upbringing:

There were people whose eyes were to be minister of this or that but there were others going "I am a freedom fighter", and, in a sense, there was this feeling that they had bigger struggles, and I certainly felt this, that their

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<sup>180</sup> Interview with Steve Jefferys.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

world knowledge was immense. I suppose I just felt I didn't know much about the rest of the world, you know, that obviously the IS was concentrated on the UK.<sup>182</sup>

CAST members, and a husband and wife team, Roland and Claire Muldoon, consolidated LSE students' personal connections to the anti-apartheid and anti-Vietnam War struggles by staging political performances at the School, becoming absorbed into the nexus between the Society and the VSC network.<sup>183</sup> Smith and Claire Muldoon became particular friends; the latter worked for the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) in their King's Cross Office, and Claire shared her understanding of the South African struggle with her friend.<sup>184</sup>

Before and after university overseas travelling and volunteering brought other young people first-hand experiences of foreign national liberation struggles. Personal ties to countries gave issues an immediate urgency, and formed part of the intricate web of experiences shaping political consciousness. The Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) programme provided another channel fostering an internationalist perspective, one rooted in life-changing experiences and relationships, and South Africa was a common destination. Clenaghan went to the LSE in 1965 just months after completing VSO in Nigeria where she 'got a very good idea about Nigeria and the dominance of the whites'.<sup>185</sup> Stories of personal transformation provide telling insight into the way in which first-hand exposure to apartheid radically sensitised young individuals to oppression; many returned home unable to settle back into their old lives, compelled to invest themselves into campaigns for social and political equality.<sup>186</sup> Love affairs as well as close friendships brought the South African struggle painfully home to students. Prue Chamberlayne's relationship with a South African medical student created a deeply emotional attachment to the country's politics. After two-years VSO in Zambia she

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<sup>182</sup> Interview with Joan Smith.

<sup>183</sup> In 1965 CAST established their own anti-apartheid campaign, Majority Rule in Rhodesia. On 3 December 1965 CAST held a concert, "'Psychedelphia vs. Ian Smith", Giant Freak Out', where they performed alongside Pink Floyd at the Round House, in London's Chalk Farm, to raise money for South African resistance fighters.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Interview with Wenda Clengahen.

<sup>186</sup> For comparable stories of the way in which voluntary missionary work in Africa fuelled subsequent civil rights activism in America, see Sarah Evans, *Journeys That Opened Up the World: Women, Student Christian Movements and Social Justice, 1955-1975* (New Brunswick, 2003).

returned home to rural Gloucestershire, in December 1967, quite unable to return to the narrow middle-class expectations of her parents. Translating her radicalised social conscience to the British political context proved challenging, even painful, because her fear that committing herself to social problems in Britain rather than South Africa would result in a 'narrow nationalistic world view' rested on her hopes that she would one day be able to translate her inter-racial relationship to East Africa: 'I was pretty much in an African frame ... One year after independence we thought the whole thing would blossom. My main ambition was to develop my relationship with B.'<sup>187</sup> Chamberlayne's testimony highlights how through personal relationships political and personal spheres became inextricably integrated so that young activists' international identity often imbued the anticipation, determination, hope and anger they felt on behalf of their close friends and lovers.

The political concept of solidarity, taken up by VSC founders to supersede moral protest alone, came also to assume powerful subjective meaning so that regardless of their minority political status or actual power to affect political change, activists' ability to empathise with and to internalise foreign as well as British struggles against oppression, enlivened the sense of themselves as political and social agents fighting alongside NLF guerrilla fighters as much as striking seamen.<sup>188</sup> The eclectic protest culture that emerged around VSC informed activists' belief in their powerful potential to shape political and social change near and far; the 'new left' politics functioned as much as a subjective, psychic condition as a theoretical science for activists to understand and engage with the world. Before women and anti-sexist men began to call for new ways of conceiving politics, to allow legitimate space for subjectivity for the oppressed 'to construct a total alternative kind of being', the loose libertarian protest culture around VSC had already begun to allow activists the psychic space to

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<sup>187</sup> The diary of Prue Chamberlayne, 29 April, 1968, p. 7, in the Private Papers of Prue Chamberlayne (hereafter PCA); interview with Prue Chamberlayne, London, 8<sup>th</sup> May, 2009.

<sup>188</sup> In June 1966 a strike led by the National Union of Seamen garnered the support of a number of young activists to become one of many grievances with Wilson's Labour government. Activists around *The Week* group liaised with a local group in Hull, *Humberside Voice*. Tony Topham was a prominent figure in the solidarity group, which included individuals from the strike as well as those from the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation. For details, see *The Week*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1966, p. 1.

envisage new forms of being in the world.<sup>189</sup> Rowbotham depicted the atmosphere around '68 as 'very much one in which culture and consciousness were emphasized at the expense of the objective circumstances in which we found ourselves'.<sup>190</sup>

Inside the open activist spaces around the VSC and the student movement emphasis on the subjective also drew upon the political language of West European protest movements such as the Situationists, whose political notion of the 'spectacle' referred to the all-encompassing vacuum within contemporary life into which capitalism had injected a consumer culture to pacify and stultify the senses of alienated individuals.<sup>191</sup> Whilst Situationism as a political culture never found explicit influence amongst Britain's activist circles<sup>192</sup>, the political language of alienation and everyday life penetrated university protest circles and, as will be shown in the next chapter, fed into the activist cognition of non-aligned left milieux such as Camden VSC.<sup>193</sup> Above all the Paris May '68 protests, privileging 'the subjective in struggle', suffused the activist culture around VSC because the sight of French students and striking workers fed into the global imaginary of '68 that activists absorbed either from witnessing at first-hand or receiving news of the events from media sources.<sup>194</sup>

In the midst of the Essex University protests Chris Ratcliffe watched the news from France in the students' television room when the need to be more than a long-distant observer prompted him into action: 'We said if we don't go we shall just regret it and so we hitchhiked; we had to go through Belgium and we helped to build the barricades, and breathed in the CS gas, and just took in the spectacle, and that as much as anything had an amazing effect on me.'<sup>195</sup> Again, sensory perception defined Ratcliffe's oral as well as his previously written account of his trip. Although his capacity for

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<sup>189</sup> Rowbotham, 'Women's Liberation and the New Politics', p. 9.

<sup>190</sup> Rowbotham, *Women's Consciousness, Man's World*, p. 23.

<sup>191</sup> Horn, *The Spirit of '68*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>192</sup> According to Dick Pountain, in the late sixties there were only two members of the British wing of the Situationists, Chris Day and Don Nicholson-Smith, based in Notting Hill. Along with John Gravelle, they came together to form a radical group called King Mob, which tended towards cultural anarchism, and was expelled from the Situationist International for being a sect. Jonathan Green, *Days in the Life: Voices from the English Underground 1961-1971* (London, 1998), pp. 249-250.

<sup>193</sup> Tanner, 'Motions and Emotions', p. 74.

<sup>194</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, *The Past is Before US: Feminism in Action since the 1960s* (London, 1989), p. 246.

<sup>195</sup> Interview with Chris Ratcliffe.

verbal communication with the French activists was to some extent limited, – ‘I didn’t speak much French’ - the power of the ‘spectacle’ generated a visual process of cognition that coloured his activist habitus with dreams of utopian socialist change.<sup>196</sup>

In a study of Barcelona’s 1936-37 social revolution, Gerd-Rainer Horn showed how, in place of spoken communication, symbols and debates performed an uneven subjective role shaping foreigners’ perceptions of revolution.<sup>197</sup> His analysis illuminates the way in which, also in the case of British radicals and Paris May ’68, impressionistic, visual symbols became duly translated into cognitive modes of thought and political understanding.<sup>198</sup> In Ratcliffe’s case the power of the visual – the barricades, the CS gas, the row after row of CRS paramilitary police, the red flags adorning the Odéon, the French national theatre, the book stalls of political literature occupying the length of the Boulevard St Germain, the action group meetings around him in the Faculty of Medicine, the graffiti, and the brandishing of identification papers at French students ‘worried about “fascists”’,<sup>199</sup> - became duly translated from the Latin Quarter into the socialist aspirations he had begun to develop through the Essex protests: ‘I had seen the possibilities. I had seen that it was just possible for a whole country to just take control and rise up and help each other, and the poetry of the streets and all the graffiti and everything, and, you know, in your wildest dreams you could not have imagined it.’<sup>200</sup>

Personal contacts with West European activists reinforced students’ conceptions of psychic unity to make foreign sites of struggle an implicit extension of their own because the shared politics of understanding between them and their foreign contacts were at times real and tangible. In May 1968 Steve Jefferys and Laurie Flynn travelled to Paris to experience at first-hand the unfolding

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Gerd-Rainer Horn, ‘The Language of Symbols and the Barriers of Language: Foreigners’ Perceptions of Social Revolution (Barcelona, 1936-1937), *History Workshop Journal*, 29, Spring, 1990, pp. 42-62.

<sup>198</sup> Interview with Chris Ratcliffe. See also Chris Ratcliffe, ‘May Days in Paris’, p. 1 [consulted at <http://www.essex68.org.uk/may68-p.html> (10th November 2010)].

<sup>199</sup> Ratcliffe’s reference to “fascists” denoted the threats French radicals perceived to their safety from gangs of right-wing students they considered to be ‘vicious’ and ‘highly trained’, and who had, in recent days, been beating up individuals before rapidly retreating. Chris Ratcliffe, ‘May Days in Paris’, p. 2 [consulted at <http://www.essex68.org.uk/may68-p.html> (10th November 2010)].

<sup>200</sup> Interview with Chris Ratcliffe.

revolution. Whilst there they met up with members of *Voix Ouvrière*, the French Trotskyist organisation supporting the French students' actions, and emphasising factory workplace activity.<sup>201</sup> They returned to the Socialist Society equipped with examples of French factory leaflets that duly informed the model for leaflets IS students began distributing outside the factory gates of the Royal London docks, written by dockers and IS members, Bob Light and Michael Fenn, and which Jefferys later modelled his factory bulletins on at the Glasgow Chrysler factory.<sup>202</sup>

For Jefferys his period in France represented another component of his developing activist selfhood, of learning how to be an agitator in a global-local nexus that allowed space for grass-roots agency:

I claimed the student power slogan first in the UK in one of the Agitators almost as a joke when we were calling for our own elections in '66 to elect your own director ... That had emerged out of the Black Power slogan in the United States, so we were very aware ... We were feeding from that, and it is interesting because later on the French students feed from us; so there is something happening around South Africa and Rhodesia in the UK and internally in the US around the civil rights struggle ... The context is one where we see the need for links with a workers' movement.<sup>203</sup>

Political and social contacts between young activists and individuals from the old left labour movement brought a local dimension to a political network being mapped out externally and internally on a global and local scale. For many respondents participating in sites of struggles in the world of the factory, the docks and local communities proved to be just as informative as international liberation struggles in expanding the shape of their inner and outer horizons. The discovery of poor working conditions, of political and social injustice and of poverty close to home helped to shape what was for many activists a more tangibly rooted relationship to surrounding social and political sites of struggles. After the political disappointments of May '68, and once the VSC began to diminish as a site of activity, by 1969 many activists began to turn their attention to

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<sup>201</sup> Ian Birchall, 'Lutte Ouvriere', IS Internal Bulletin, December, 1970, p. 2, MRC, MSS. 128/158.

<sup>202</sup> Interview with Steve Jefferys.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

subjective struggles closer to home through a new language of politics and a new form of social and political being that built upon experiences in the university milieu.

## Chapter Four

### The New Politics of the 'Non-Aligned' Left and Women's Liberation

The fluid shape of the activist scene around the VSC reached its nadir by the end of the decade. The fissures within the Campaign echoed in tensions and realignments elsewhere: in April 1969 the collapse of the National Left Convention ended hopes of unifying the left<sup>1</sup> whilst the fatal rupture in the *Black Dwarf's* editorial board signalled a process of stratification, crystallising the shape of the landscape for the forthcoming decade.<sup>2</sup> The Campaign's disintegration marked the continuing growth of the Trotskyist organisations, IS and IMG, one the one hand, and the loose collectives of 'non-aligned' left enclaves, on the other hand, composed initially of the radical cultural groups that had developed around the VSC. During the 1970s members within these increasingly divergent milieux committed themselves to realising different visions for grass-roots socialist agitation. Whereas Trotskyists concerned themselves with building revolutionary organisations oriented towards the industrial working-class, the 'non-aligned' left came to be characterised by loose radical communities of socialists, feminists, gay liberation activists, anarchists and squatters whose libertarian style do-it-yourself politics was already alive in the community politics which had

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<sup>1</sup> The National Left Convention, presided over by Raymond Williams, editor of the May Day Manifesto, was intended to act as a unifying conference of the left, bringing together some eighty left groups, ranging from Trotskyist organisations, Young Liberals, and the Communist Party to the Workers' Control Institute, Save Biafra Committee, and underground newspapers such as *Black Dwarf*, *Slant*, the radical cultural group, Agitprop, and community activist projects such as the Notting Hill Community Workshop. However, serious divisions and take-over efforts by IS and the Communist Party forestalled the aim of the conference. For details, see Raymond Williams, 'A Convention of the Left', *Black Dwarf*, Vol. 13, No. 10, 27 January, 1969, p. 8; Robby Gray (Edinburgh VSC), 'The "National Convention of the Left": Some Sour Comments', *Red Camden*, Vol. 1, No. 7, 1969, p. 11; Nigel Young, *An Infantile Disorder? The Crisis and Decline of the New Left* (London, 1977), p. 160.

<sup>2</sup> The dispute began after the waning VSC movement led to a division between editorial members led by Tariq Ali and others, who sought to orient the newspaper to the IMG, and those such as John Hoyland, Adrian Mitchell, Vinay Chand and Sheila Rowbotham who sought to preserve its independence. The final rupture occurred over a sorely disputed article discrediting the ANC, which Ali ran against the protestations of other board members, and in February 1970 he and other IMG members, including Robin Blackburn, Peter Gowan and John Weal, launched the underground newspaper, the *Red Mole*, directly affiliated to the IMG. See Tariq Ali, *Street Fighting Years: An Autobiography of the Sixties* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, London, 2005), pp. 329-30; interview with Vinay Chand, London, 14<sup>th</sup> May, 2008; interview with John Hoyland, London, 19<sup>th</sup> November, 2008; Sheila Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream: remembering the sixties* (London, 2000), pp. 249-250.

emerged in the first half of the sixties.<sup>3</sup>

Within the British scene, as with western political movements elsewhere, the period 1969-71 heralded the arrival of a political moment when the 'new politics' began to transform the political, cultural and social life of the extra-parliamentary left. The 'new politics' was the term Sheila Rowbotham used to distinguish the politics of Women's Liberation from the alienating revolutionary politics and culture she had encountered around the Trotskyist groupings in VSC.<sup>4</sup> The emotive tenets and psychological hallmarks of Rowbotham's new left politics echoed elsewhere in the activist left: in voices confined either to existential musings in activists' diaries, inside activists' heads, or occasionally in printed political writings. Visions of socialist revolution that demanded wholesale release from 'inner and outer bondages' asserted the need to transform internal perception and being just as much as external structural change.<sup>5</sup> Calls for attention to the ways in which capitalism penetrated the head as well as the social body represented an amalgamated expression of emotional experiences and intellectual impulses that derived not only from the North American New Left, but resonated with the socialist humanism of E. P. Thompson and the first New Left as well as older utopian impulses of nineteenth-century new life socialists.<sup>6</sup>

This chapter will examine the arrival of the 'new politics' of the 'non-aligned' left milieu, and Women's Liberation in turn. Although for the purposes of analysis the two milieux will be considered using the same political label that activists themselves used interchangeably, it is important to recognise that the two milieux emerged as separate political entities. Yet, as will be shown, in the early 1970s, prior to the development of a fully fledged libertarian socialist feminist left, through shared political-cultural tenets, and personnel, the 'non-aligned' left milieu and the

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<sup>3</sup> For details of this open non-aligned grass-roots socialist movement, see Lynne Segal, *Making Trouble: Life and Politics* (London, 2007), p. 93.

<sup>4</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, 'Women's Liberation and the New Politics', in *Dreams and Dilemmas: Collected Writings* (London, 1983), p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> For Sheila Rowbotham the direct connections to E. P. Thompson and the new life socialists were mutually encompassing, as in this case also personal contacts between the two exposed her to individuals and writings from the nineteenth-century socialist circle where she found continuity between them and the sixties new social movements in which she was active. See Sheila Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love* (London, 2008), pp. 3-4.

early Women's Liberation groups were also interrelated. This chapter will examine the 'new politics' in a political, social and psychological framework to show how the arrival of Women's Liberation coincided with political, cultural, social and psychic shifts elsewhere in the activist terrain: female and male activists alike, dissatisfied with the tactical politics of the Trotskyist groups, sought to embrace a 'new', prefigurative left politics that would politicise the everyday, and challenge the isolating, atomising effects of life under capitalist society by seeking to transform social relations within local, grass-roots public and private spheres. The realigning activist landscape in which the 'new politics' appeared coincided for many men and women with the point of early adult life, of leaving university, undertaking work in the external social world, formative relationships, or the start of family life, and in all such milestones commitment to grass-roots activism shaped these experiences. The chapter will focus on a London VSC branch, based in Camden Town, which in the autumn of 1969 re-formed away from VSC to become the Camden Movement for People's Power (CMPP). The political culture of the collective provides an early example of the 'new politics' in practice. In CMPP, members' personal problems and needs were seen as integral to the political life of the group. Activism in the local community was understood to derive from analysing one's own personal sense of oppression.

As will be seen, at the end of 1968 American women in CMPP took this discourse of personal politics into the Tufnell Park Women's Liberation group, which formed one of the first four groups to compose the London Women's Liberation Workshop (LWLW) when it began in mid-1969.<sup>7</sup> Prior to joining, almost all female members had been involved in non-aligned left activist circles, notably in CVSC, alongside male comrades, friends, lovers, and husbands. Many American members had also been active in New Left movements in the US. and the beginnings of the women's movement there.<sup>8</sup> For these women and men attraction and commitment to realising a 'new politics' was mutually shared and the socio-psychological impact mutually felt. The group provides a valuable case study

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<sup>7</sup> Mica Nava, 'The Beginning', Notes on the Beginnings of the Belsize Lane Women's Liberation Group, p. 1, in the Private Archive of Michaela Nava (hereafter MNA); *Shrew*, No. 6, 1969, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Mica Nava, 'The Beginning', p. 2, in MNA.

through which to further our understanding of how the 'globality' of '1968' 'functioned' not only in the British cultural context, but at the level of individual subjectivities inside the heart of Britain's network.

In his call to interrogate the interplay of global factors at the local level, Timothy Brown raises the spectre of the macro- and micro-'1968', whereby it is necessary to understand not only the communicative modes of political and cultural transmission between young activists, and the conditions governing their transmission, but the 'alternative cognitive maps' local actors created as the means with which to imagine themselves in communities transformed by a new type of grass-roots politics.<sup>9</sup> Drawing upon such a framework it is possible to examine the relationship between global and local processes of political and cultural transmission operating in the British scene<sup>10</sup>, and the gendered, psychic dynamics between individual men and women to understand how the political ideas British and American New Left activists introduced into CMPP came to be refracted through the political and socio-psychological experiences of members to create a new left culture to meet the social, psychic and political needs of the Camden collective.<sup>11</sup>

A micro-level study of CMPP also affords an in-depth social and psychological picture of activist life at a breaking political moment as the 'new politics' began to demand conscious efforts for men and women to realign personal and political spheres of life. The intention is to examine the origins and impact of the Tufnell Park Women's Liberation group against the new left culture of

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<sup>9</sup> Timothy S. Brown, "'1968' East and West: Divided Germany as a Case Study in Transnational History', *American Historical Review* 114: 1, 2009, p. 70. In the Italian context Sofia Serenelli-Messenger has also highlighted the value of researching the local dynamics of the '1968' movement in order to make 'more concrete assessments of its complexity and plurality as a phenomenon'. Sofia Serenelli-Messenger, '1968 in an Italian Province: Memory and the Everyday Life of a New Left Group in Macerata', in Ingo Cornils and Sarah Waters (eds.), *Memories of 1968: International Perspectives* (Oxford, 2010), p. 348.

<sup>10</sup> This process of global ideas being taken up at a local level is referred to by sociologists as 'glocalism', and is understood as a two-way communicative transaction. Often used to describe twenty-first century processes of globalization, sociologists and historians have also begun to apply the term to transnational studies of '68. Frank Bösch, 'Communicative Networks: Media and Global Formation of Social Movements', 'The Transnational Sixties? Movements and Media in Europe and the US, Postgraduate and Early Career Workshop', Centre for Transnational History, University of St Andrews, 16-17 September, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> This approach builds upon recent literature on 1968, gender and sexuality that posits the arguments that even where 1960s movements did not explicitly intertwine gender, sex and sexuality with political practices, all movements 'found their context in assumptions about gender and sexuality'. See Luisa Passerini, 'Foreword', in Lessie Jo Frazier and Deborah Cohen (eds.), *Gender and Sexuality in 1968: Transformative Politics in the Cultural Imagination* (Basingstoke, 2009), p. ix.

CMPP in order to gain a more nuanced understanding of the contribution gendered activist culture played in fostering the women's political revolt. In both the limited historiography on Britain's sixties activism and Women's Liberation, accounts of women's socio-psychological experiences and place within the revolutionary left rarely allow scope for a diverse assessment.<sup>12</sup> Overarching transnational and even national accounts of male misogyny and female discrimination risk caricaturing male revolutionaries and collectivising women's voices into one homogenous entity whilst the few secondary studies devoted to Britain's Women's Liberation Movement accord only cursory acknowledgement to the movement's left roots.<sup>13</sup> Portraits of women confined solely to the margins of radical movements, typing minutes, and supporting male partners do an injustice to the women and men whose stories do not fit the dominant public narrative by excluding them from the frame of the left landscape immediately prior to and after 1969.<sup>14</sup> They also overlook the complex category of gender which allows for a more in-depth understanding of women and men's roles on the left in relation to the outside post-war society in which they had been socially and culturally conditioned as social beings.<sup>15</sup> The story of CMPP and Tufnell Park offers a more harmonious

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<sup>12</sup> Ronald Fraser, *1968: A Student Generation in Revolt: An International Oral History* (London, 1988), pp. 342-44; Chris Harman, *The Fire Last Time 1968 and After* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, London, 1968), p. 342, Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c. 1958-1974* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 688-690.

<sup>13</sup> The most comprehensive and sensitive study of the WLM to date is Eve Setch's hopeful portrait that 'disputes a linear picture of rise and fall'. However, even she perpetuates previous accounts of British second-wave feminism which emphasise only negative patterns of female experience within left groups at the expense of a more nuanced interpretation of male-female relations and the female selves women fostered within left circles. Eve Setch, 'The Women's Liberation Movement in Britain, 1969-1979: Organisation, Creativity and Debate' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, Royal Holloway, July, 2000), p. 20. For similar interpretations, see David Bouchier, *The Feminist Challenge: The Movement for Women's Liberation in Britain and the United States* (London, 1993), p. 59, Paul Byrne, 'The Politics of the Women's Liberation Movement' in Joni Lovenduski and Pippa Norris (eds.), *Women in Politics* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 60-61, and Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell, *Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women's Liberation* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn., Oxford, 1987), p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Geoff Eley's argument exemplifies this interpretation, when he argues that in 1968 girlfriends and wives were present with their men, making the coffee and preparing the food, but 'decidedly not on the podium'. Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000* (Oxford, 2002), p.366. See also Marcus Collins, *Modern Love: An Intimate History of Men and Women in Twentieth-Century Britain* (London, 2003), pp. 176-179.

<sup>15</sup> In this vein, Deborah Cohen and Lessie Jo Frazier argue that during this period the markers of gender, sex, and sexuality assumed nuanced, specific expressions out of the particular contexts in which they were produced. Deborah Cohen and Lessie Jo Frazier, 'Love-In, Love-Out: Gender, Sex, and Sexuality in '68', in *Gender and Sexuality in 1968*, p. 3. For discussion on the possibilities gender analysis has lent to historical literature since the publication of Joan W. Scott's groundbreaking article "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis", in the December 1986 issue of the *American Historical Review*, see the AHR Forum,

interpretation of the emergence of Women's Liberation. This chapter seeks to examine the mutual gender culture of CMPP to uncover the political, social and psychic impact of the new politics including the oftentimes barely visible fractures between members as they struggled to realign their personal and political lives and selves.

In a period in which private, often subterranean fissures began rising to the surface, finding release in conversations women were starting to engage in as news of Women's Liberation filtered through from abroad, CMPP members responded to the wider political and emotional ruptures surrounding the activist scene.<sup>16</sup> The group articulated a new form of prefigurative left politics by amalgamating new left sentiments, resonating from the late 1950s onwards, with their own specific political and socio-psychological experiences. Members sought to build an organic socialist community in which 'each member felt equally at home, involved and responsible'.<sup>17</sup> The intention was to realise a truer version of 'new left' politics, where the VSC had been unable to extricate itself 'from the womb of the old left', displaying the hallmarks of America's new left in style alone.<sup>18</sup> Core CVSC members had felt alienated from the 'articulate and forceful' Trotskyist personalities who had dominated national VSC meetings and placed emphasis on developing effective, participatory methods of political communication.<sup>19</sup>

In place of a revolutionary politics that responded to 'objective circumstances', CMPP concerned itself with the subjective, seeking to provide for 'positive collective experiences' that would reproduce neither the political nor personal alienation of bourgeois society.<sup>20</sup> The group embodied socialist ideas of Women's Liberation that began to spread throughout 1969. Through analysing the personal roots of oppression individuals in a collective could learn to relate to each

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"Revisiting Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis", *American Historical Review*, 133: 5, December, 2008, pp. 1344-1429.

<sup>16</sup> See Sheila Rowbotham, 'The Beginnings of Women's Liberation in Britain', in *Dreams and Dilemmas*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>17</sup> Geoff Richman, 'Camden Movement for People's Power', Internal CMPP pamphlet, c. 1971, in the Private Archive of Geoff Richman (hereafter known as GRA).

<sup>18</sup> Geoff Richman, 'End of a Tactic?', Unpublished paper, November 1968, p. 10, in GRA.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Richman, 'Camden Movement for People's Power', p. 2, GRA.

other in new ways, discovering in each other a collective strength and consciousness in relation to capitalist society. The final point was for members to begin to use their new self-consciousness to make larger strategic demands, and to fight for socialism.<sup>21</sup>

As a group composed predominantly of couples, CMPP raises the question of how far a mutually conceived, subjective politics met the intellectual, social, and emotional needs of the men and women who lived out their early adult days in this non-aligned left milieu. If male as well as female members had already rejected the alienating discourse of the Trotskyist groupings, and committed themselves to realising more open, accessible communicative forms, why then, in 1969, did CMPP and other women around this milieu feel the need to set up a separate women's group apart from the men? What does this tell us about these left women's relations both with the left and with wider society; from what political and personal roots did they conceive and connect with Women's Liberation, and what was the impact on relations within CMPP?

### **The Origins of the Camden Movement For People's Power (CMPP)**

CMPP and its 'new politics' arose out of the fluid network around the VSC where the porous political and cultural spaces of the activist scene facilitated the international transfer of ideas through personal, informal interchange. A close examination of the group's beginnings reveals the important role individuals played in bringing together British and international old and new left traditions to envisage a new revolutionary model for political and social transformation. The CVSC core emerged out of the North West London ad-hoc committee, which had been formed to organise the anti-Vietnam War demonstration of 27<sup>th</sup> October, 1968.<sup>22</sup> However, the political origins reached back to the Communist Party in which core CMPP members had been shaped as political beings. Geoff Richman, the group's main theoretician, had joined the Hampstead Young Communist League (YCL)

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> Geoff Richman, 'On Strategy', p. 11, in GRA.

in 1953 as a socially critical and creative medical student, who wrote poetry and read Mayakovsky.<sup>23</sup> Upon entry he had found himself inwardly transformed as a revolutionary, and unable to 'rest content with any ordinary sort of existence', he embraced it as 'a complete life system' that shaped his thinking about humanity, marriage, family and occupation.<sup>24</sup> As a general practitioner in Kilburn he became frustrated with the National Health Service and convinced that most patients' illnesses were socially-induced.<sup>25</sup> Secretary of the Socialist Medical Alliance (SMA), Richman and his wife Marie built up an extensive network of social and political contacts ranging from local London Communists to East German SMA representatives who attended the large dinner parties the couple hosted at their Cricklewood home.<sup>26</sup> In 1966 the Richmans broke with the Communist Party and became involved with a Maoist opposition inside it; the party expelled them after they refused to recant Geoff Richman's written and circulated arguments that the Party was failing to address real issues in society. Out of their involvement with the Maoists, in 1967, the Richmans developed the Friday Group; here they met an American couple, Henry and Sheli Wortis, who provided the link to the VSC and the new left ideas the couples began to exchange and develop.<sup>27</sup>

Despite the different national contexts in which they had engaged in left politics, the Richman and Wortis couples found in each other kindred political spirits. Henry Wortis was a medical researcher at Mill Hill, the National Science Institute in London, whilst Sheli had trained as an experimental psychologist. Henry's work had brought the couple to London from San Francisco, California, in 1965, just as the British anti-war movement was starting to take shape.<sup>28</sup> Both were 'red-diaper babies' with shared family backgrounds of Communist Party and trade union activity, and

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<sup>23</sup> Interview between Geoff Richman and Margaret Dickinson in Margaret Dickinson (ed.), *Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain, 1945-90* (London, 1999), p. 225.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 225-226.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Geoffrey Crossick, London, 21<sup>st</sup> April, 2009.

<sup>26</sup> Conversation between the author and Julian Richman, 5<sup>th</sup> November, 2009.

<sup>27</sup> Interview between Geoff Richman and Margaret Dickinson in Dickinson (ed.), *Rogue Reels*, p. 227.

<sup>28</sup> The first chorus of protests against American military action in Vietnam began in earnest following the Gulf of Tonkin incident, on 7 August, 1964, and emanated from across the political spectrum including a powerful contingent led by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

had come of political age during the dangerous McCarthy years.<sup>29</sup> As a medical student in the mid-west at the University of Wisconsin, Henry had adopted a public stance as a Communist when too so demanded conviction in the face of potential personal ruin.<sup>30</sup> Sheli came from a Jewish Communist family, but her left upbringing had been tempered by a cultural circle of hootenannies and socialist summer camp activities.<sup>31</sup> When the couple first came to London from New York, in 1965, they gravitated to people of Communist Party backgrounds, engaged the Richmans in the increasingly disturbing issue of the Vietnam War, and introduced them to a community of young Americans in London who were active against it.<sup>32</sup> Many were graduate students, with a significant number attending the London School of Economics (LSE), or wives and girlfriends who had accompanied activist husbands and boyfriends to the UK. The Americans had come to Britain, drawn by the cheaper cost of living and often propelled by a desire to avoid the draft.<sup>33</sup>

In 1967 Henry and Sheli had joined the Stop-It Committee (Americans in Britain for US withdrawal from Vietnam), a London group of around 350 members supporting American draft resisters, running study groups and performing publicity actions for the organisation.<sup>34</sup> Stop-It's loose structure replicated the participatory democracy of student movements in the United States. It also embraced an agitprop protest style that testified to members' efforts to inject a radical flavour into what many saw as Britain's staid demonstrations.<sup>35</sup> Within this forum the couple met activists who would gravitate into CVSC when the Stop-It Committee made the official decision to

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<sup>29</sup> For details of Red-Diaper babies, see Judy Kaplan and Linn Shapiro, (eds.), *Red Diapers: Growing Up in the Communist Left* (Chicago, 1998) and Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York, 1987), p. 15.

<sup>30</sup> Wisconsin was Senator McCarthy's home state. See Michael O'Brien, *McCarthy and McCarthyism in Wisconsin* (London, 1980).

<sup>31</sup> Skype interview with Henry and Sheli Wortis, 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2009.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Robert Hurwitt, 'Stop It Gets Started', *Peace News*, 29 December, 1967, p. 3, in the Private Archive of David Robinson (hereafter DRA). See also, 'Angry Students and the Vietnam War', *Morning Star*, 21 October, 1967, p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. An example of Stop-It's radical cultural flavour was the Vietnam 'Revolutionary Festival'. Held in Trafalgar Square on 20-21 July, 1968, it was organised by Stop-It along with Agitprop representatives. The Americans had sought to use the occasion to pose 'an alternative way of life' whereby 'the form of the political event would be in keeping with its revolutionary message', supporting the NLF against American imperialism. For details on the festival, see Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream*, pp. 192-93; 'Agitprop ..... can it stand alone?' Article on Agitprop, *Red Camden*, Vol. 2, No.1, 1970, p. 5.

disband in November 1968.<sup>36</sup> They included film editor Ellen Adams and her biochemist husband, Richard Hammerschlagg, and David Slaney, an LSE graduate student, who, like many Socialist Society activists, briefly joined IS and participated in the national VSC committee.<sup>37</sup>

The old left rituals of the Trotskyist groups: soap boxes, megaphones, newspaper selling, and the formulaic rhetoric dominating meetings, were anathema to the cultural innovation and fun characterising Stop-It's new left milieu.<sup>38</sup> Their alienation from the old left imprint on the VSC resonated with the sentiments of Geoff Richman and other CVSC activists disillusioned with the increasingly factional national anti-war movement. Geoffrey Crossick was a History postgraduate at London's Birkbeck College, who had worked alongside Richman on the VSC national committee, and, along with Henry, Sheli and other CVSC members, led calls at the February 1969 National Conference to reorient VSC around individual membership rooted in a series of local branches.<sup>39</sup> The Friday Group provided a model for the CVSC branch in which members sought to realise their vision for localised activism. In the Friday Group the Richman and the Wortis couples had already begun to 'consider the problems of being a revolutionary in a non-revolutionary situation', and to amalgamate the new revolutionary politics both couples envisaged.<sup>40</sup> Crossick recalled that by the time he met Geoff Richman in VSC, the socialist doctor was articulating 'a different vision of politics on the left', looking to 'Gramsci's idea that had a critical component of rethinking what political movements and what political oppression were all about'.<sup>41</sup>

The new left ideas Henry and Sheli injected into the Friday Group derived from their own

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<sup>36</sup> Skype interview with Henry and Sheli Wortis.

<sup>37</sup> In March 1968 Slaney drew on the international activist discourse of complicity to publish a list of British universities undertaking research for the US. Department of Defense (DOD). His findings confirmed to activists in the anti-war movement that Britain was directly supporting the US DOD in protecting American imperialism. See Dave Slaney, 'British Complicity in US Defense Department Research', *Vietnam Solidarity Bulletin* No. 12, March 1968, p. 6, DRA.

<sup>38</sup> Correspondence from Sheli Wortis to the author, 6<sup>th</sup> September, 2009, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> See Romala and Edwin Guiton, Henry and Sheli Wortis, Geoff Crossick, Geoff and Marie Richman, 'Proposals for Discussion by the National VSC Council', VSC Conference Material, 1969, pp. 13-14, Hull University Archives (hereafter HUA), DYO/12/87. See also Geoffrey Crossick and Geoff Richman, 'The Perils of Ernestine or Ad Hockery Revealed', p. 1, London School of Economics Archives, International Marxist Group/4/2. For a definitive account of Richman's criticisms of the political degeneration of the national VSC movement, see Geoff Richman, 'End of a Tactic' in GRA.

<sup>40</sup> Richman, 'On Strategy', p. 11, in the Private Archive of Geoffrey Crossick (hereafter GCA).

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Geoffrey Crossick, London, 21<sup>st</sup> April, 2009.

activist experiences in the San Francisco Bay area of California. In 1967 the couple had participated in a series of small political groupings initiated by New Left activist, James O'Connor. In 1964 O'Connor had played a formative role in shifting the discursive and activist landscape of the American New Left on to the agency of the poor and the marginal when the New Left journal, *Studies on the Left*, published his article on community unions, his model for future working-class organisation and struggle.<sup>42</sup> His political imprint was transferred to CVSC and transposed to the local political and socio-psychological context of the Camden collective, adding its weight to the eclectic international discourses shaping members' vision for the local community as a site for a new left identity.

Beyond the Richman and Wortis couples, the Camden inner core included artistically-minded Sue Crockford and Tony Wickert, a couple influential in shaping the collective's creative culture. Wickert was an Australian actor at the BBC when in late 1968 he first encountered CVSC. He was one of a number of film and television workers attending the regular political meetings at Tony Garnett's house in Kensington Square; here he encountered the Trotskyist brandishing of Gerry Healey, the SLL leader renowned for his bullish tactics.<sup>43</sup> Seeking to recruit left-wing media workers, Healey's 'heated and intimidating' personality did little to entice Wickert – 'was this what politics was like I wondered?'<sup>44</sup> In September 1968 he and Crockford found a politics 'more our style', at their first anti-war meeting in Hampstead High Street they were 'enthralled' by the Richman and Wortis couples.<sup>45</sup>

Crockford was a film student attending Hornsey College of Art when she joined CVSC. Her political consciousness had been shaped by disturbing images of black America she had seen on New

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<sup>42</sup> James O'Connor, 'Toward a Theory of Community Unions', *Studies on the Left*, Spring, 1964, pp. 143-8, and 'Toward a Theory of Community Unions, Part 2', *Studies on the Left*, Summer 1964, pp. 240-257. The debate to which O'Connor contributed along with New Left spokesmen Stanley Aronowitz, Norman Fruchter and Robert Kramer, provided a theoretical model for the Economic Research and Action Project (ERAP), the community organising projects, initiated by SDS in the first half of the 1960s. For further details, see Breines, *Community and Organization in the New Left*, pp. 133-139, and Anthony Ashbolt, 'The American New Left and Community Unions', *Illawarra Unity*, 8:1, 2008, pp. 37-42.

<sup>43</sup> Correspondence from Tony Wickert to the author, 21<sup>st</sup> April, 2009, p. 1.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

York news reels. Active at university against South African apartheid, she held a passion for social justice; politics for her was always implicitly personal, imbued with the empathy she felt for individuals underlying the campaigns: 'I couldn't not put myself in someone else's shoes ... I always wanted to know the motives behind why people did things.'<sup>46</sup> Her attachment to art and literature shaped her connection to people's stories; in the case of Vietnam the graphic televised images of wounded civilians meant that the issue never became bigger than these individuals.<sup>47</sup>

Around the CVSC core members were drawn into the group via word of mouth through London's American anti-war community, left circles around the LSE, and the small circles of artists and scientists active against the war; all brought with them valuable international contacts upon which the collective came to draw. Members shared common characteristics as young adults: many were newly married or just starting families, professionals in science and education, artistically-minded, and all passionately opposed to the war. Many had histories of political activity in other national contexts and seem to have been attracted by CMPP's attempts to carve out a participatory socialist politics where members sought to explore moral and political issues around the war in ways that drew wider parallels with their own experiences of life in a capitalist society.

Mark and Angela Melamed joined Camden VSC shortly after their return from Los Angeles where they had been active in the anti-war movement at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Mark was South African, on the left, and had participated on the edges of the anti-apartheid struggle before coming to Britain. The couple were part of the scientific left circle around Camden VSC; Angela knew Henry Wortis through her work at Mill Hill prior to moving to LA.<sup>48</sup> Stephen and Alicia Merret joined Camden VSC shortly after Alicia joined Stephen in London, in July 1967. He was an economic researcher at the Ministry of Technology and Alicia was a librarian at the LSE. She had left her home country of Argentina where she had been involved in student demonstrations at the University of Buenos Aires. The couple had met during Stephen's work-related travels through India

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<sup>46</sup> Interview with Sue Crockford, London, 30<sup>th</sup> September, 2010.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Angela Melamed, London, 10<sup>th</sup> October, 2009.

and Latin America.<sup>49</sup> Upon returning to London, he was initially involved in the May Day Manifesto project<sup>50</sup>, but both made political contacts through LSE's scientific circles, including the Medical Aid for Vietnam group in which CVSC members Pam Simkin and Stephanie Segal were also active.<sup>51</sup>

From their origins in the North West London ad-hoc committee the aim of CVSC members was to work locally to raise the level of understanding about the Vietnam War. The initial motivation behind this community focus derived from the collective vision members had held for the national VSC movement. Discussions following the 27<sup>th</sup> October demonstration had led to consensus that, in order for the national movement to evolve, it had to realise its true potential for mobilising individuals' consciousness about the war.<sup>52</sup> The CVSC modelled their collective on the NLF practice of 'People's War', as Richman understood it. Along with other anti-war activists around the globe CVSC members were inspired by the example the Vietcong were providing 'of people running their own lives, their own country, their own war against oppression'.<sup>53</sup> Just as the people's army could 'live like fish in the water amongst the peasantry', so CVSC members had to 'envisage a prolonged struggle, winning the people to revolutionary views, and transforming their consciousness'.<sup>54</sup> In order to achieve this aim members sought to initiate 'direct dialogue with local people' to raise understanding about British complicity in the conflict.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Interview with Stephen and Alicia Merrett, Wells, 16<sup>th</sup> December, 2009. For details of the Merrett's political and personal experiences prior to their days in London, see Vernee Samuel (ed.), *Darling Alicia: The Love Letters of Alicia Kaner and Stephen Merrett* (Leicester, 2009).

<sup>50</sup> Launched in May 1967 by socialist intellectuals, including representatives of the first New Left, Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson, the Manifesto was an attempt to unite and revitalise a left disillusioned with Wilson's Labour government. The project sought to propose an alternative socialist programme, but proposals to put up parliamentary candidates signalled the Manifesto's failure to appeal to the radicalised young cohort active around the VSC. For details of the project, see Raymond Williams (ed.), *May Day Manifesto* (Harmondsworth, 1968); Lin Chun, *The British New Left* (Edinburgh, 1993), pp. 86-87, and Nick Tiratsoo, 'Labour and its Critics: The Case of the May Day Manifesto Group' in Cooper et al. (eds.), *The Wilson Governments, 1964-1970*, pp. 163-183; Andrew Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party* (Basingstoke, 2008), pp. 145-165.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Angela Melamed; 'From an interview with Dr. Malcolm Segall, freely transcribed, *Red Camden*, Vol. 2, No. 4, 13 April, 1970, pp. 2-3. For details about collaboration between CVSC and Medical Aid for Vietnam, see 'Politics in their Blood', *Red Camden*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 9 January, 1970, p. 8.

<sup>52</sup> Guiton, Wortis, Crossick, Geoff and Marie Richman, 'Proposals for Discussion by the National VSC Council', pp. 13-14, HUA, DYO/12/87.

<sup>53</sup> Richman, 'Camden Movement for People's Power, p. 1, GRA.

<sup>54</sup> Richman, 'On Strategy', p. 6, GCA.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, p. 11.

## The Writings of Geoff Richman, CMPP and a New Left 'Personal Politics' for Camden Town

Richman's writings on the 'new left' personal politics he envisaged for the Camden collective represented an amalgam of radical voices responding to the post-war climate of affluence, consumerism and popular culture, which critics believed had shaped a socially and culturally impoverished mass society. The ultimate socialist vision underlying CMPP was for a revolution to destroy the existing institutions of bourgeois capitalist society and to create a socialist society based on 'radically different social relations'.<sup>56</sup> The starting point for CMPP politics derived from 'the individual and his/her own experiences and needs, rather than from a consideration of institutions'.<sup>57</sup> This was because 'the principal source of revolutionary conflict' was 'the contradiction between the social nature of production, the increasing interdependence of people for all the aspects of their lives, and the private nature of appropriation'.<sup>58</sup>

In Britain the political sentiments behind CMPP had been resonating since the late 1950s in fears voiced by intellectual dissenters that the working-classes were being distracted from the repressive nature of capitalism by mass 'spectacle', the American-style mass media images corrupting organic working-class culture and community.<sup>59</sup> Laments from Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) to Raymond Williams' *Communications* (1962) found similar intellectual tenets in the Marcusean strands of thought critiquing the 'repressive tolerance' of post-industrial Western Europe and the United States where consumer society could be seen diverting human energy away from fulfilling real social, civil and sexual needs into the false illusion of consumption.<sup>60</sup>

CMPP members saw themselves as amongst the many social groups – students and recent

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p. 1.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p. 14.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>59</sup> See Chun, *The British New Left*, pp. 63-64, Robert Hewison, *Too Much: Art and Society in the Sixties, 1960-75* (London, 1986), pp. 2-14, and Alf Louvre, 'The new radicalism: the politics of culture in Britain, America and France, 1956-73' in Bart Moore-Gilbert and John Seed (eds.), *Cultural Revolution? The challenge of the arts in the 1960s* (London, 1992), pp. 51-52.

<sup>60</sup> See Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956-1976* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 146-147. In the late 1960s and 1970s sociologists saw the increasing popularity of psychotherapy as a symptom of the ethical impoverishment prevailing in British society; see, Mathew Thomson, *Psychological Subjects: Identity, Culture, and Health in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2006), p. 267.

graduates, teachers, apprentices, clerks, doctors, technicians and white collar workers, and militant skilled manual workers - who felt alienated from the dehumanising impulses of bourgeois society.<sup>61</sup> They argued that 'beyond work the major patterns of our lives are fixed for us. We are free to act in isolation, individually, to teachers, bosses, T.V., landlords, housework, children, racism, ill health, loneliness'.<sup>62</sup> Members saw the corrective to lie in the principles of civic power, community control, and collective will. The group's new left critique took on a visual dynamic in their street theatre play, 'The Hole in the Wall', which was written and first performed, in 1970, from their stall in Camden's Queen Crescent market; every Saturday morning members tried to engage stall holders and passers-by in discussion on issues ranging from Vietnam to alienation and social concerns affecting the local community. Following the critical tradition of the literary critic, F. R. Leavis, and his post-war disciples, 'The Hole in the Wall' spoke of the stultifying effects of television as but one of the modern mass communicative mediums damaging community bonds and citizens' engagement.<sup>63</sup> The play depicted the monotonous routine of two separate households centred round the nightly television programme in order to dramatise the damaging role of consumer technology in determining the major patterns of daily life.<sup>64</sup>

In accordance with new left thinking the economic struggle over the distribution of wealth was for CMPP 'subsidiary in importance to the conflict over culture, social values and social control'.<sup>65</sup> The *raison d'être* of CMPP – community – saw a continuation of the new left socialist humanism amalgamated with Third World revolutionary discourse, perpetuating the preoccupation of post-war radicals and intellectuals whose search for an organic community transcended political discourse alone, harking back to poets and theologians from T.S. Elliot to C.S. Lewis, and resonating in the literary impulses of D.H. Lawrence that Cambridge radicals had injected into post-war cultural

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<sup>61</sup> Richman, 'On Strategy', p. 3, GCA.

<sup>62</sup> Richman, 'Camden Movement for People's Power', p. 3, GRA.

<sup>63</sup> Hewison, *Too Much*, p. 11.

<sup>64</sup> Geoff Richman, 'The Hole in the Wall', Tape recording of a CMPP street theatre play, GRA.

<sup>65</sup> Richman, 'On Strategy', p. 3, GCA.

criticism.<sup>66</sup> Richman understood that for people to counter their isolation and powerlessness, they had to come together through a variety of relationships.<sup>67</sup> Due to the absence of a revolutionary movement capable of replicating Fidel Castro's revolutionary vocation, the creation of a collective was the first step in the protracted struggle to win people to revolutionary views.<sup>68</sup> Before the political slogan of the Women's Liberation Movement, "The personal is political", penetrated the British left, Richman's vision for a new left collective drew upon C. Wright Mills' idea of personal politics elaborated in *The Sociological Imagination*, and evoked by Tom Hayden, the author of *The Port Huron Statement*, in the prefigurative politics espoused by the American New Left movement, SDS.<sup>69</sup> In SDS the essence of prefigurative politics had been the need 'to create and sustain within the live practice of the movement relationships and political forms that "prefigured" and embodied the desired society'.<sup>70</sup> In CMPP members' personal problems and needs were seen as integral to the collective life, fusing 'the personal and the political, the public and the private'.<sup>71</sup> The revolution was a process embodied in the building of new forms of social relations.<sup>72</sup> The implication was that all aspects of activist political and personal life acquired a political dimension, the private individual dissolved; within the collective people were 'bound together by their identification with the group, and no longer with themselves as individuals'.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Elizabeth Wilson, *Only Halfway to Paradise: Women in Postwar Britain: 1945-1968*, (London, 1980), pp. 134-135.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3.

<sup>69</sup> See C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Oxford, 2000), pp. 3-24. See also Horn, *The Spirit of '68*, p. 146.

<sup>70</sup> Wini Breines, *Community and Organization in the New Left, 1962-1968: The Great Refusal* (New York, 1982), p. 6.

<sup>71</sup> Richman, 'On Strategy', p. 14, GRA.

<sup>72</sup> Breines, *Community and Organization in the New Left*, p. 44.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*.

## Political Culture and External Relations between CMPP and the Metropolitan Network

In CVSC members' artistic talents and collective organising skills were facilitated by the 'do-it-yourself', collaborative ethos that prevailed across the metropolitan network. Camden Town was home to a penumbra of radical cultural and community groups: Poster Workshop<sup>74</sup>, CAST, Agitprop<sup>75</sup>, and the Camden Community Workshop.<sup>76</sup> The eclectic political culture that characterised the collective's activities testified to members' interests in international politics – 'we didn't know any national boundaries' - and their readiness to avail themselves of the wide array of international and local contacts at their disposal.<sup>77</sup> News reports in the monthly bulletin, *Red Camden*, ranged from bulletins on political and military developments in the Vietnam War and the Vietcong, to the poems of Regis Débray and the guerrilla movements of Latin America.<sup>78</sup> Relations

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<sup>74</sup> From the spring of 1969, Tuesday evening meetings at Poster Workshop formed a regular part of CVSC's busy weekly itinerary of political and social activities: Advert for Poster Workshop, *Red Camden*, Vol. 1, No. 6, 1969, p. 2. Situated in the basement of 61 Camden Road, beneath a hairdressing salon, the Poster Workshop was run by a group of radical artists who had been inspired by the Atelier Populaire set up in the Parisian *Ecoles des Beaux Arts*, in May 1968. From two smoke-and solvent-fumed rooms, artists produced silkscreen posters for the plethora of radical movements, organisations, and local community groups active in Britain and beyond – from LSE student protests, VSC demonstrations, the Greater London Council (GLC) tenants' associations, to squatters, Zimbabwe Solidarity and even the California Farm-Workers' Union. Finances to sustain the Workshop drew upon the voluntary ethos underlying the network; groups contributed what money they could afford for the posters. Much of the funds came from benefit shows performed by CAST and Agitprop Street Players along with other donations from supporters. For details, see Sarah Wilson, 'The Poster Workshop', April, 2009, [consulted at <http://www.posterworkshop.co.uk/aboutus.html> (1 February, 2010).

<sup>75</sup> At the initiative of CAST member, Roland Muldoon, in May 1968, a meeting at Unity Theatre brought together a host of left-wing playwrights, actors and activists, with the aim of improving communications and services across the activist network. Out of the meeting the Agitprop radical booking agency had emerged as a service organisation for the left, based initially in the home of John and Wisty Hoyland. After the agency evolved into two separate entities, the Agitprop Street Players, a radical street-theatre collective, and Agitprop as a service organisation, encompassing radical lawyers, doctors, and architects in addition to radical cultural groups, the latter had established premises at 160 North Gower Street, in Camden, where they aimed to be 'a non sectarian national co-ordinating centre for the left.' Interview with John Hoyland, London, 19<sup>th</sup> November, 2009; interview with Roland Muldoon, London, 8<sup>th</sup> December, 2009; 'Agitprop ..... can it stand alone?' Article on Agitprop, *Red Camden*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1970, 5. 'Agitprop Information', a poster advertising Agitprop's services and its 'Revolutionary Cousins', Private archive of John Hoyland (hereafter J.H.A.).

<sup>76</sup> The Camden Community Workshop (CCW) was one of a number of community organising projects, such as the Notting Hill People's Association, that began to spring up in London in the wake of CND and the May Day Manifesto. For details, see John Cowley, 'The Politics of community organising' in John Cowley, Adah Kaye, Marjorie Mayo and Mike Thompson (eds.), *Community or Class Struggle?* (London, 1977), pp. 222-242. See also the minutes of the CCW in the Private Archive of John Cowley. For details of the Notting Hill People's Association with whom CMPP members liaised, see Jan O'Malley, *The Politics of Community Action: A Decade of Struggle in Notting Hill* (Nottingham, 1977).

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Tony Wickert,

<sup>78</sup> In the August 1969 bulletin Alicia Merrett had included a report on the Tupamaros, or National Liberation Movement of Uruguay, a clandestine revolutionary group that acted in an urban context. She highlighted the

between the Angry Arts Society and CMPP illustrate the way in which the cultural shape of the collective grew out of its spatial situation, the nexus of the global and local perimeters of the network, and the personal interactions inside it. The Society emerged out of the Angry Arts Week that Stop-It held during the summer of 1967, when Ellen Adams and Richard Hammerschlagg revitalised film showings to pay off a debt Stop-It had incurred from the week's activities.<sup>79</sup> By the autumn of 1968 the couple had become distributors for Newsreel films, a New York group founded by SDS activist, Norm Fruchter, and radical film director, Robert Kramer. Like Agitprop, Angry Arts performed a vital servicing function for the wider UK activist scene, communicating political ideas, news of recent activist projects, and American protest forms to national and local radical groups. CVSC members facilitated this cultural cross-over from inside the collective. After collaborating with CVSC over the making of the film *End of a Tactic?*<sup>80</sup>, Adams began attending CVSC meetings and participating in activities; Angry Arts became a political appendage to CMPP, a sub-interest group along with the Health Workers' Collective and Education group.<sup>81</sup> At the end of 1969 the Society became closely integrated into CVSC as the collective embarked on its transition from a local VSC group to CMPP, a group oriented around 'community control'. CMPP members aided Crockford and Wickert in taking on the organising of Newsreel films. In the voluntary spirit of the network Crockford had put herself forward after Adams and Hammerschlagg announced their intention to leave London; she was motivated by a habitual tendency to 'assume personal responsibility for any silence in a room', and the intimate affective ties of solidarity binding members together— 'acts of

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political lessons that could be learned from the Tupamaros' example of relating to their population just as Camden members sought to do. See Alicia Merrett, 'The Tupamaros', *Red Camden*, Vol. 9, No. 9, August, 1969, p. 7.

<sup>79</sup> Interview between Ellen Adams and Margaret Dickinson, in Dickinson, *Rogue Reels*, p. 228. For details of Angry Arts Week, see Richard Boston, 'Out of the Way: Angry enough about Vietnam?', *New Society*, 6 July, 1967, p. 22.

<sup>80</sup> *End of a Tactic?* depicted the final VSC demonstration that took place in London on 27 October 1968. It accompanied a critical paper that Geoff Richman had written outlining the reasons for the failure of the demonstration. He and other CVSC members argued that the act of demonstrating was insufficient to make it a political act; demonstrations had to raise marchers' consciousness as part of a wider process of political education. CVSC members provided the commentary accompanying the film.

<sup>81</sup> Interview between Ellen Adams and Margaret Dickinson, in Dickinson (ed.), *Rogue Reels*, p. 228.

kindness just used to happen'.<sup>82</sup> Whereas activists had previously viewed political films as passive consumers, CMPP members reshaped the Society to stimulate post-film discussions.<sup>83</sup> In these forums the aim was to encourage maximum participation by challenging the formal political setting in which old Labour left meetings were traditionally held. Watching political films together, sharing discussion, soup and coffee in small groups away from the regimentation of rows, echoed the participatory democracy of the O'Connor groups, and testified to the global cultural suffusion informing CMPP's philosophy that 'only by being socialist in your behaviour can you presume to be socialist in your ideals'.<sup>84</sup>

The film shows, ranging from the Vietnamese struggle, the Berkeley People's Park, meat co-ops, health issues, and the Women's Liberation Movement<sup>85</sup>, complemented the collective's range of creative cultural mediums that were intended to foster more open, accessible forms of communication and engage people in an exploration of their own lives.<sup>86</sup> These included the distribution of animated leaflets to people queuing outside the Everyman Cinema, street-theatre performances in Camden's Queen's Crescent market, and the creation of a street poster at their regular Saturday morning stall inviting passers-by to express their relationship with Camden Town as a site where they lived and worked.<sup>87</sup> In CMPP cultural activities served as small scale 'scientific experiments' for personal and cultural transformation - the lode stones of prefigurative politics.<sup>88</sup> Although testament to the ease with which macro and micro New Left prefigurative politics met and coalesced away from the national Campaign, members' subjective responses to local activities highlight symbols of belonging and individuals' experiences vis-à-vis the collective. CMPP's creative

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<sup>82</sup> Interview with Sue Crockford, London, 30<sup>th</sup> September, 2009.

<sup>83</sup> Ellen Hammerschlag (Adams), 'Angry Arts', CMPP pamphlet accompanying the Angry Arts film week-end, 3<sup>rd</sup> July, 1970, p. 4, GCA.

<sup>84</sup> Sue Crockford, 'Article written for the *Morning Star*', 24 June, 1970, in CMPP pamphlet accompanying the Angry Arts film week-end, 3 July, 1970, p. 2, GRA.

<sup>85</sup> For details of the range of films Angry Arts and CMPP showed together, see CMPP pamphlet accompanying the Angry Arts film week-end, 3<sup>rd</sup> July, 1970, pp. 1-16, GCA.

<sup>86</sup> Geoff Richman, 'Activities', Unpublished paper, p. 1, GCA.

<sup>87</sup> See Geoff Crossick, 'What Is A Leaflet?', *Red Camden*, Vol. 1, No.7, 1969, p. 3; 'Local News', *Red Camden*, Vol. 1, No. 11, 9 August, 1969, p. 4 and 'Queen's Crescent Market Stall', *Red Camden*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 6 February, 1970, p. 1.

<sup>88</sup> Richman, 'Activities', p. 14, GCA.

approach to activities echoed the 'expressive politics' of SDS activists who embraced participatory democracy.<sup>89</sup> The idea was that individual participation in a political struggle would bring fulfilment, create a sense of community, and radicalise participants. Hence the Berkeley Free Speech Movement (FSM) slogan, "The issue is not the issue".<sup>90</sup> Activities took on immediate personal and political focus inside the CMPP collective where one key purpose was what they revealed about how members related to each other.

### **Contradictions between the Political and Personal: The Internal Life of the CMPP Collective**

Understanding how individuals engaged in the cultural activities of CMPP and how they felt in relation to the cultural life of the group raises crucial questions about gendered group dynamics, personal relations between male and female members, and the way in which challenges that prefigurative politics presented core members became intertwined with the new politics of Women's Liberation. Starting with the premise that power in the collective lay undeniably with the core, the spectre of influential personalities, subtly gendered power relations and members' conflicting feelings become apparent. The initial challenges that confronted the collective about how to achieve a working practice of participatory democracy, and to resolve divisions between politically articulate and less confident members, assume significance in this context because of the emphasis traditionally placed on the contradictions between the participatory democracy of New Left protest movements, and the marginalised role women played inside these anti-hierarchical yet patriarchal organisations. Women's Liberation has been situated within the contradictory spaces between purported equality and discrimination that characterised New Left movements and outer post-war society.<sup>91</sup> Given that core members established CMPP as a new left forum in reaction against the old left tenets of the activist scene, it is important to consider how far their ambition to

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<sup>89</sup> Gerard De Groot, "'Left, Left, Left!' The Vietnam Day Committee, 1965-66', in Gerard De Groot (ed.), *Student Protest: The Sixties and After* (Essex, 1998), p. 90.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Evans, *Personal Politics*; Breines, *Community and Organization*, pp. 38-39; Ruth Rosen, 'The female generation gap: daughters of the fifties and the origins of contemporary American feminism', in Linda K. Kerber, Alice Kressler-Harris and Kathryn Kish Sklar (eds.), *US History as Women's History: New Feminist Essays* (Chapel Hill, 1995), pp. 313-334; Tischler, 'The Refiner's Fire', pp. 192-93.

extricate themselves from this socially and culturally masculine-rooted politics led them to realise more equitable social relations, and to dissolve divisions between personal and political life. In this respect it is notable that as early as March 1969 new CVSC member, Carole Sturdy, felt compelled to speak out on behalf of individuals like her who had come into CVSC without any prior experience of activism within a political group. Although she underlined the 'informal, truly democratic nature of the meetings', she also noted how she and others felt 'too politically naive to participate much in discussions, looking instead to the old campaigners for leadership'.<sup>92</sup> At a meeting on 12 March Sturdy and others accused 'the so-called "top-table"' of running the group as 'an intellectual elite'.<sup>93</sup> The incident implied that from an early stage in CMPP individual belonging was predicated on members' position in relation to the core and the periphery.

At the heart of CMPP's practice of participatory democracy an internal contradiction allowed intellectually dominant voices to prevail. The very existence of an inner intellectual core, encompassing Geoff Richman, Geoffrey Crossick, and Henry and Sheli Wortis, rested partially on the manner in which CVSC had emerged out of the Friday Group. Having come together around a conviction of what a local group should do, the emphatic rejection of issue politics created a political preoccupation; every activity came to be scrutinised for what it revealed about members' social behaviour and relations. What this meant in practice was that prior to CMPP meetings the inner core met to discuss ways in which to ensure wider group activities were in constant keeping with their theory. Crossick reflected how:

I, Geoff, Henry and Sheli would say, well, we have got to take this back. We have got to get people thinking about this, this and this, and it was something that there is a problem about; this identity. There is too much just activity going on and what is the direction, and so on? ... If we felt that activity was what built identity,

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<sup>92</sup> Carole Sturdy, 'Viewpoint on ... Camden VSC Meetings, *Red Camden*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1969, p. 3.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

surely we would just trust the activity ... but we didn't trust that because we could end up just being ... a single-issue group.<sup>94</sup>

Although this collective search was in itself a sign of core members thinking and acting together, the essence of their power as a collective derived from a consensus of what they were not – a political party - rather than what they were. It suggested political belonging underlined by an insecurity that created a set of expectations on the part of the core about how CMPP members should invest themselves inside the group. In 'On Strategy', written around 1970, Geoff Richman envisaged the process of moving from a group to a movement. In his view the denial of a separation between daily life and politics anticipated members subordinating their private lives to the group based on the need to engage in constant activity from which collective identity would develop. Attention to social detail included a list of twenty questions taken from a previous document, 'Revolutionary Organisation', written jointly by him and his wife, in January 1968. Concerned with the social behaviour of members during meetings, the questions underlined the 'experimental' nature of meetings as situations where the group could 'observe itself scientifically, with the aim of understanding its own behaviour and raising its own consciousness'.<sup>95</sup> They included: 'Does everyone speak at a meeting, or only one or two people? If someone remains quiet does anyone try to find out why? If a person is inactive do they feel guilty or inadequate, rejected or under moral pressure?'<sup>96</sup>

Despite core members' intentions for the new politics to develop a more participatory, egalitarian culture, Sturdy's comments show how efforts to avoid any turn to issue politics could inadvertently lead to the controlling social behaviours they sought to avoid. However, it did not follow that the contradictions at the heart of CMPP's new left practice translated to a simple authoritarian model of relationships that were felt most negatively by women. In CMPP social status, relations, and emotional belonging rested on a complex fusion of radical and traditional

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<sup>94</sup> Interview with Geoffrey Crossick, London, 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 2009.

<sup>95</sup> Richman, 'From a Group to a Movement', p. 5, GCA.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

social values and attitudes that found their most overt expression in members' mixed responses to Women's Liberation.

In the first instance the capacity of core members to exercise an influential presence in the collective, and to shape a challenging intellectual ethos, owed much to the way in which members' sense of place was related to age and political experience. Aged only nineteen when she became involved with CVSC, Geoffrey Crossick's girlfriend, Rita Vaudrey was one of the collective's youngest members. Her insecurity amidst the milieu derived partly from her inclination towards shyness and a still developing social and intellectual confidence tied to her youth: 'It was quite judgemental and so I wouldn't put on the line what I thought ... but then I was younger than them, not by much, but those years between twenty and twenty-two are when you are developing your confidence and ideas.'<sup>97</sup> In contrast, Henry and Sheli Wortis articulated a political and social self-confidence that derived at least partly from the fact that, along with the Richmans, they were in their mid-thirties compared to most members still in their twenties.<sup>98</sup> Unlike other core members the Wortis couple also had a history of American prefigurative political activism; their faith in its potential to shape personal and social change rested upon evidential grounds.

### **Sheli and Henry Wortis**

Sheli Wortis' influential presence in the core denies any simple explanation of male domination and female exclusion to account for Sturdy's protest. Characterising herself and her husband as 'the social head of the group', Sheli saw herself as a core member on the same terms as her male friends and comrades: 'Whatever we decided to do was fully consensus politics even though there was leadership. I mean Geoff [Richman] clearly dominated in terms of his intellect. People looked up to him, and I think they looked up to Henry too, but there were other people in the group who were strong and convincing, and we could have discussions without people feeling intimidated by others

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<sup>97</sup> Interview with Rita Vaudrey, London, 2<sup>nd</sup> September, 2009.

<sup>98</sup> Skype interview with Henry and Sheli Wortis.

in the group.<sup>99</sup> Although her reference to the two leading intellectual men implies an absent female presence, her emphasis on how she felt fully part of the core decision-making process confirmed other respondents' memories about her role in relation to her husband. To observers the couple's commitment to personal and political mutuality seemed to showcase the potential for personal and political life to coexist successfully. Amidst the wider activist scene around the VSC Henry's libertarian and egalitarian attitudes provided a refreshing outlook on male-female personal-political relations.

In December 1967 Sheila Rowbotham listened with astonishment as the 'good-looking' Stop-It comrade had calmly explained that the brusque manner with which opinionated Trotskyist men had cut her out of the discussion carried with it a political name: male chauvinism.<sup>100</sup> Crockford similarly recalled the deep impact the Wortis couple made on her: 'They just took it for granted that you were radical, and what was good; they had a good working marriage ... I couldn't take for granted that your sexual relationship was also your political relationship. They did.'<sup>101</sup> The political framework of Sheli's relationship with her husband provided her with an intellectual role alongside but independent from him. Integrating the meaning of personal politics into their marriage as well as their political lives, the couple's relationship, characterised by egalitarianism and emotional openness, seemed to embody the very equitable personal relations socialist feminists sought in their efforts to extend the meaning of personal politics into their relationships with men.<sup>102</sup> As a prominent core member who enjoyed good political and personal relations with CMPP men, Sheli's decision to establish the Tufnell Park Women's Liberation group was far removed from the critique of male supremacy and sexism which, from 1967, characterised American women's revolt against their male comrades, and which from 1969 also began to define the 'fraught' 'collective urgency' of

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream*, p. 161.

<sup>101</sup> Interview with Sue Crockford.

<sup>102</sup> Ellen Adams, 'Some Notes on the Family', p. 2, in MNA; Rowbotham, 'Women's Liberation and the New Politics', p.15; Rowbotham, *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*, p. 43; *Shrew*, September, 1970, p. 16, 'Meeting the Men', *Shrew*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1971, p.5.

British female activists meeting elsewhere in the network.<sup>103</sup> Her early involvement in the Tufnell Park group formed an organic extension of the mutual personal politics she and her husband had invested in CMPP, conceived to complement and not to oppose the collective. Henry always supported the argument that 'women needed a political space away from men' to be 'women identified ... to develop ideas and to develop as people'.<sup>104</sup>

In the June 1969 *Red Camden* bulletin Sheli detailed the attempts of women and men, active around Tufnell Park and CVSC, to set up 'A People's Crèche' in north-west London. Her ideas show her understanding of Women's Liberation as a logical extension of the group's core identity, developing around 'community control'. According to Wortis the adults using the crèche met together in a private home for about seven hours on the weekend; they read and compared 'bourgeois and socialist manuals on child rearing and child development' while one or two supervised the children. The intention was to provide a place 'for parents to do collective political work near their children, but not always administering to them'.<sup>105</sup> They proposed setting up crèches at future conferences, even developing them to enable children to sleep at the crèche on some evenings to allow their parents to go off to meetings together.<sup>106</sup> For Wortis there was an explicit connection between this practical need for CVSC parents and the collective's politics: 'We want them off the streets, playing together, and having the sort of collective life of their own which would reinforce the ideas we have about socialisation and development rather than the ideas of competitiveness, hostility, racism, religion and aggressiveness which they learn through school and the mass media.'<sup>107</sup>

The ideas underlying the crèche derived from the experience of the West German Action Council for the Liberation of Women.<sup>108</sup> At the SDS Conference in Frankfurt, in September 1968, Helke Sanders had directed a strident criticism to SDS men, condemning their complicity in the

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<sup>103</sup> Rowbotham, 'The Beginnings of Women's Liberation in Britain', in *Dreams and Dilemmas*, p. 34.

<sup>104</sup> Skype interview with Henry and Sheli Wortis.

<sup>105</sup> Sheli Wortis, 'A People's Creche', *Red Camden*, Vol. 1, No. 9, June, 1969, p. 4.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

capitalist system by perpetuating a sexual division of labour in their private lives.<sup>109</sup> In response to men's refusal to correct the situation, women employed the device of setting-up *Kinderläden* or Kinder-Shops, mainly around universities, as centres for children and their mothers.<sup>110</sup> However, unlike SDS women, the crèche Wortis envisaged was informed by her understanding of CMPP embedded in the everyday lives of her and her comrades in a culture in which the family retained positive meaning, even though Tufnell Park and Belsize Lane members would later critique its oppressive features.<sup>111</sup> She was one of a number of respondents for whom the leitmotif of family denoted the 'affective solidarity' prevailing throughout the collective.<sup>112</sup> One of the principal sources of pleasure she and her husband derived from CMPP was the space the group provided for incorporating their own family life into their activism: 'People were wonderful with other people's children ... We were all really aware that this was something different from other left groups' (see figure 4.1).<sup>113</sup> The Wortis' two young daughters attended the group's weekend and outdoor political activities, and they developed an emotional attachment to the Richman children and to adult members that suggested social bonds in CMPP replicated older extended familial patterns alongside members' efforts to cultivate more respectful, equal power relations.<sup>114</sup>

### **Intimacy and 'Family' Within the Collective**

Throughout respondents' narratives the leitmotif of the family recurred in various shapes and cultural symbols associated with the life of the collective. The conflicting meanings attached to these symbols signified the uneasy presence of traditional and radical social values, ties and

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<sup>109</sup> Eva Maleck-Lewy and Bernhard Maleck, 'The Women's Movement in East and West Germany', in Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert, and Detlef Junker (eds.), *1968: The World Transformed* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 379-380.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, p. 378. For an account of the Storefront Day Care Centres, see Authors' Collective (eds.), *Storefront Day Care Centres: The Radical Berlin Experiment* (English translation by Catherine Lord and Renée Neu Watkins, London, 1973, of orig. edn, Cologne, 1970).

<sup>111</sup> Ellen Adams, 'Some Notes on the Family', p. 2, in MNA; Dinah Brooke, 'The Nuclear Family as an Image of the Self', *Shrew*, Vo. 3, No. 4, May, 1971, p. 2; Michaela Nava, 'The Family: a critique of certain features', in Michelene Wandor (ed.), *The Body Politic: Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement in Britain 1969-1972*, (London, 1972), pp. 36-49.

<sup>112</sup> Serenelli-Messenger, '1968 in an Italian Province', p. 356.

<sup>113</sup> Skype interview with Henry and Sheli Wortis.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

emotions binding members to the collective and shaping gendered experience within it. Taken together the wealth of meanings negates any straightforward picture of oppressive patriarchal norms informing women's attraction to Women's Liberation. In the CMPP milieu women and men alike experienced torn loyalties in relation to each other and the Tufnell Park group because its arrival confused the traditionally gendered social roles and kinship ties that remained embedded in men and women's political and personal lives.

The dominant presence of familial tropes suggested the existence of an intimate, close network of relations and kinship ties binding members to CMPP's political project and to each other as comrades and family members.<sup>115</sup> Positive portrayals of CMPP as a community where personal and political lives came together in a joyful and supportive manner drew upon notions of kinship ties that often echoed nostalgic representations of working-class community with its interlocking familial bonds.<sup>116</sup> Queen's Crescent market and Hampstead Heath represented two collective sites of remembrance, embodying the spirit of collective self-determination, support, and trust which members envisaged for the group and Camden Town at a point of social transition in traditional working-class London communities (see figure 4.2).<sup>117</sup> For Sue Crockford Queen's Crescent market served as an emblem of the mythic community CMPP envisaged. She understood the market to be one of the few 'egalitarian places' in society which allowed for 'normal human transactions regardless of class'.<sup>118</sup> She illustrated this with her memory of Bill the stallholder:

The January after we started... Bill suddenly said "You're from the Vietnam stall aren't you?" I said "yes". He said "We took a bet. We only thought you'd last a couple of months, but you've been here six months. You've

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<sup>115</sup> For similar findings of the positive connotations of family in a local Italian new left group, see Serenelli-Messenger, '1968 in an Italian Province', pp. 351-364.

<sup>116</sup> Geoff Eley, 'The Family is a Dangerous Place: Memory, Gender and the Image of the Working-Class', in Robert Rosenstone (ed.), *Revisioning History* (Princeton, 1993), pp. 15-16; Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (London, 1957); Jeremy Seabrook, *Working Class Childhood. An Oral History* (London, 1982); Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (London, 1957), pp. 76-88.

<sup>117</sup> Evidence that CMPP members were engaging with the break-up of traditional working-class London communities can be found in *Red Camden*: Geoffrey Crossick, 'The Greater London Development Plan', *Red Camden*, Vol. 1, No. 12, 19 September, 1969, pp. 9-10; Author unknown, 'Play Spaces', *Red Camden*, Vol.2, No. 6, 1970, pp. 2-4; Geoff Woolf, *Red Camden*, Vol. 1, No. 12, 19 September, 1969, p. 11.

<sup>118</sup> Interview with Sue Crockford.

Figure 4.1 Photograph of CMPP members (Sheli Wortis and Rita Vaudrey from left to right) and their children during a Sunday gathering on Parliament Hill Fields, c. 1969-1970.



Source: *GRA*.

Figure 4.2 Photograph of CMPP members (left to right,) Marie and Geoff Richman attending to an unknown activity on the Saturday stall, surrounded by passers-by at Queen's Crescent market, c. 1969-1970.



Source: *GRA*.

earned the right to tell me about Vietnam” (Laughs). It really was one of the loveliest conversations, because I used to go down and buy my fruit and veg without talking about Vietnam, because I thought this is oppressive; I’m not going to buy cabbages and say oh by the way, but he asked me; we had proved.<sup>119</sup>

The communal landscape Crockford depicted cast CMPP as the desired socialist community she and other members had envisaged. At one level the symbols of remembrance drew upon the narrative members had represented to others and to themselves as a group of people who genuinely enjoyed political activity together. Geoffrey Crossick indicated how the collective style of CMPP’s activities, predicated on the belief that politics had to be ‘enjoyable and fulfilling, not a moral duty’<sup>120</sup>, informed this nostalgic spirit of community: ‘It was the collective style activity, the construction of a story of ourselves that made all these decisions together.’<sup>121</sup> Story-telling and imaginative forms of representation were vital tools for how, externally, members shaped a collective image of CMPP as an embodiment of the new political and social relations. This extended to how members depicted themselves in their bulletins. Reporting on the Liberation Tour of June 1969 Richman noted how ‘People take to our happiness; they are not antagonised, as by the usual demonstration ... You’re enjoying yourselves. That’s your own form of communication’.<sup>122</sup> Through their political and social activities as well as through their written reports members narrated a collective identity of themselves as local activists embodying the new socialist life.

Familial tropes, channelled through collective sites of remembrance, also signalled members’ sense of place in what had become a psychic landscape. Sally Alexander argues that ‘memory, a way of thinking as figurative as it is literal, fuses the imaginative world with everyday life, dramatizes and recreates the past as it is retrieved’. As such, ‘memory works on the cusp of inner

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Richman, ‘From a Group to a Movement’, p. 5, GCA.

<sup>121</sup> Interview with Geoffrey Crossick, London, 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 2009.

<sup>122</sup> Geoff Richman, ‘Liberation Tour’, *Red Camden*, Vol. 1, No. 7, 1969, p. 2. The tour had seen members performing sustained-street theatre across the borough outside locations, symbolising British complicity in the Vietnam War and the wider oppressive political and social system. Outside the Gideon Richter Factory in Tollacre road members staged a presentation about the ‘ironies of the means of production’ because they had discovered that the factory was a subsidiary of Dow Chemicals, the US manufacturer of the war chemical napalm. See Hilary Anderson, ‘Reaction to the Liberation Tour’, *Red Camden*, Vol. 1, No. 6, 1969, p. 5.

and outer reality'.<sup>123</sup> Understood in this manner, CMPP denoted for Crockford a surrogate family enclave, interwoven with her joyful memories of early motherhood. She depicted her son as being 'born into' CMPP; 'the adopted little babe'.<sup>124</sup> The egalitarian relations Crockford associated with the market were also interwoven with the liberating, participatory ethos she had found in the opportunities CMPP's activities created for artistic exploration and political development: 'I think you could hesitate, you could admit you didn't know something, you didn't have a ten point plan. You changed your mind; if things didn't work you found a better way to do things; and because we were constantly doing plays and demos you were constantly being creative.'<sup>125</sup> For Crockford CMPP stood out in relation to other left groups where mundane administrative tasks were often relegated to women. In CMPP, she explained, activities were equally shared: 'We all did it. I really think that was different. We all did it. I mean in terms of cyclostyling and the designing and things it was whoever was good or who could or was free.'<sup>126</sup>

Rita Vaudrey's narrative, mediated through the market and the heath, similarly told a story of friendship, love and familial ties, but in her account these collective sites also assumed conflicting connotations of authoritarian family relations. Memories of her developing relationship with her boyfriend and membership in CMPP signalled subjective tensions underlying CMPP's culture of prefigurative politics. These took vivid focus in:

a wonderful photograph of Geoff and me at Queen's Crescent market and Geoff is sitting typing on the market stall, and it is obviously a cold day, and I am sitting next to him, quite the girlfriend, you know, sitting by, looking over his shoulder as he is typing, and the whole world is going past us and we are not connecting in any way ... And I am all wrapped up because we would be going to see Spurs in the afternoon ... We had Saturdays together. We wanted it.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Sally Alexander, 'Memory Talk: London Childhoods', in Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (eds.), *Memory, Histories, Theories, Debates* (New York, 2010), pp. 236-237.

<sup>124</sup> Interview with Sue Crockford.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Interview with Rita Vaudrey, London, 2<sup>nd</sup> September, 2009.

The scene Vaudrey depicted was redolent with feeling: the unspoken companionship between the couple signifying the intimacy between them; her thick layers of clothing suggestive of the protective cocoon their private world promised away from the collective. This private world represented a haven away from the life of the market and the political need to connect with the people in it. Her commentary accompanying the scene denoted the tension she felt during the intense two years the couple spent together amidst the collective – ‘we were cultivating a relationship’ - torn between her loyalty to Crossick, his attachment to CMPP as well as her own affection for members within it. Her story told of the collective’s capacity to envelope young members at a point of life when they were hungry for personal and political transformation. The parental role models Geoff and Marie Richman assumed in memories of the collective symbolised the conflicting emotions surrounding this leading core couple and the survival of traditional patriarchal power relations their roles denoted. In positive terms, the couple’s roles fostered for Vaudrey familial bonds of attachment to the collective that reinforced the ties she felt through her love for Crossick. On the weekends she hitchhiked to the capital to visit him her gradual inclusion into CVSC was facilitated by the warmth with which the Richmans enveloped her into their large open house in Kilburn: ‘I think that was one of the first attractions to them – children and family and, you know, when you are a student, it is nice, a nice meal and a few kids around, and a nice house and convivial conversation.’<sup>128</sup>

Her introduction into the Richman’s cultured middle-class circle coincided with a recent taste of freedom from her working-class Liverpool upbringing, so that their household and political circle were simultaneously imbued with the familiar associations of home and the excitement of otherness: ‘Actually it was Geoff and Marie I was drawn to initially ... they were quite cultured people anyway, and there were lots of conversations around arts, and it was a nice milieu, and it was a middle class milieu which I was unused to, and liked that sort of easy, you know, eating, drinking

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

and talking which didn't happen in my house or my life really.'<sup>129</sup> Besides engendering feelings of belonging, Vaudrey soon came to appreciate that community and family carried with it social demands and cultural pressures to conform. CMPP's parental figures presented unwelcome challenges to her newly found social and cultural independence away from her large family: 'I was really enjoying a room of my own, being by myself, thinking what I wanted to think and not joining anybody else's party, so being on the edges of it and not being attracted to that whole community spirit was to do with me being... having escaped one community and not being interested in committing heavily to another one.'<sup>130</sup>

The family tropes present in respondents' memories were not exclusive to CMPP women. Vaudrey's boyfriend, now husband, Geoffrey Crossick also drew upon parental tropes to depict the divisions of loyalty the collective created between self and collective, public and private life. As a paternal role model Geoff Richman was simultaneously 'inspiring' and his wife nurturing – 'Marie would cook for lots of us. That's how I got to know them. They would feed me, an impoverished PhD. student, before national VSC meetings'. Yet in his demands for absolute political loyalty Richman also challenged Crossick's filial loyalty to his own parents. On Friday evenings 'my parents would expect me to go to them because in Jewish families you go home on Friday evenings, and then I think there was this reading group; so there was this real sense that my loyalties were being torn'.<sup>131</sup> During 1970 his life began to move in other directions: he had begun to build an academic career for himself, his relationship with Vaudrey was developing, he knew CMPP was not central to her life, and part of him was beginning to tire of the same repetitive collective activities. Pressure from the Richmans that the couple cancel a hitchhiking holiday to Morocco to participate in the Liberation Tour confirmed Crossick's early doubts about how far he was prepared to invest the level of commitment his mentor and friend expected: 'I remember thinking I am living this, it matters to me, but is it really going to deliver anything and do I want to make the total commitment, and the

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Interview with Geoffrey Crossick, London, 21<sup>st</sup> April, 2009.

answer is no.<sup>132</sup> In 1971 the couple's withdrawal from the milieu coincided with the wider fragmentation of CMPP, as other core members began to move to other locations: Henry and Sheli Wortis returned to Boston in mid-1970, continuing their activism in the anti-war movement there; Sue Crockford focused her activism in the WLM and set up a collective childcare centre, One, Two, Three, whilst Tony Wickert became heavily involved in developing Angry Arts. For Crossick and Vaudrey the end of their relationship with CMPP represented a consciously chosen decision to commit themselves to each other and their individual private lives. Their accounts signify the psychic challenges CMPP's prefigurative politics presented for private subjects as the lingering presence of the external social climate militated against efforts to rescind the boundaries between public and private, individual and collective life. However, the threat the new politics posed to Vaudrey's social and psychic freedom carried additional significance in the challenge it presented to her freedom as a modern woman. Her experience points to the masculine undertones of CMPP's new politics, illuminating the subtle points of social and psychic division between the women and their male partners that informed the arrival of Women's Liberation within the collective.

### **The Persistence of Gender Roles**

Outwardly, the full inclusion of women in the collective's political and social life, and the kinship ties between them and their male comrades seem far removed from accounts of female marginality or 'casual' male chauvinism through which female activists elsewhere entered the early WLM.<sup>133</sup> The collective's new left politics were deliberately designed to privilege space for the subjective everyday of the personal through small group meetings, which allowed space for every voice to be heard, and which would find continuity in the intimate political and emotional space characterising the Tufnell Park consciousness-raising group. Despite Marcus Collins' claim that late sixties radical enclaves represented a powerful challenge to mutuality, the narratives of CMPP men and women

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<sup>132</sup> Interview with Geoffrey Crossick, London, 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 2009.

<sup>133</sup> Collins, *Modern Love*, p. 176.

present evidence to the contrary.<sup>134</sup> Emotional belonging inside the collective was interwoven with relationships based on concepts of friendship, comradeship, romantic and sexual relations as well as paternal and maternal social models. That many respondents from the Tufnell Park group highlighted the intellectual character of the group and the sharp, politically attuned minds not only of Sheli Wortis, but other American women, such as Ellen Adams, Caroline Roth, Sue O'Sullivan and Karen Slaney, highlighted that these women came to Women's Liberation with a background of rigorous political engagement alongside and not in deference to men. O'Sullivan recalled that in political discussions with her school and college friends, the women dominated as much as the men.<sup>135</sup> Vaudrey remembered the awe in which she held CMPP and Tufnell Park women: 'The women were pretty intellectually strong in that group. They had a role.'<sup>136</sup> Yet within the familial tropes signs of Marc Bloch's "underlying feeling" reveal hidden internal dislocations that related to the women's struggle to make sense of long-term shifting social patterns from which even as radical activists they were not immune.<sup>137</sup> As wives, mothers, and young women negotiating the contradictory social codes of late sixties society, the disjuncture they felt in relation to men outside the group assumed a much more subtle internal shape within the egalitarian culture of the collective.

Inside the milieu the external model of traditional gender relations never entirely dissipated so that beneath the affective bonds of political solidarity women and men's subjective positions lay along invisible but internally fractured gender divisions. The constraints upon her social freedom that Vaudrey came to resent derived from an implicitly masculine authority because of the way in which Richman's social criteria for the new politics rested upon a traditional model of gender roles that posited equality based on difference. His and his wife's expectation that members devote themselves entirely to the group drew upon their own personal model of family life in which not

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid, pp. 175-176.

<sup>135</sup> Sue O'Sullivan, 'My Old Man Said Follow the Vanguard', in Sara Maitland (ed.), *Very Heaven: Looking Back at the 1960s* (London, 1988), p. 121.

<sup>136</sup> Interview with Rita Vaudrey.

<sup>137</sup> Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (Manchester, 1954), p. 166, cited in Alexander, 'Memory-Talk', p. 236.

only were their children's lives integrated into the collective, but their own leading positions echoed the traditional roles each partner fulfilled in their marriage. Within the core of the collective the social shape of the Richman's family life was on public display. As the leading intellectual in CMPP, Geoff Richman exuded an intellectually authoritative presence and fulfilled a traditionally dominant role by shaping the political agenda for the group. Crossick saw the Gramsci reading group as part of Richman's attempt 'to impose an intellectualism on the group' he believed necessary to its success.<sup>138</sup> Within his marriage, too, Richman was the professional and breadwinner. Marie Richman had been a full-time housewife since early on in the couple's marriage when she gave up work as a costume maker for the Royal Opera House.<sup>139</sup> Although she exerted an equally influential presence within the core, she did so through a traditionally female role that supported men and women's separate spheres and deferred to male intellectual authority. On one occasion, Vaudrey remembered, 'there was a camping group and I was asked [by Marie] to do the catering for it. I was twenty, you know, and I had never fed anyone in my life'.<sup>140</sup> Respondents recalled how Marie regularly typed up her husband's notes, deferred to his opinion, and could be quick to jump in and defend him if she sensed other members might be criticising him. Through her domestic role she carved out her own sphere of political influence within the collective. Cooking meals for core members was one way of helping to cultivate the close relations that existed between the main core couples who shaped the life of the group.

The traditionally gendered roles the couple performed within the public life of the collective instilled a powerful social dynamic into CMPP, informing the masculine undertones of Richman's new politics that theoretically foresaw women's equality, but through a longstanding patriarchal model of social difference that had seen a resurgence in the post-war years.<sup>141</sup> At the heart of CMPP's new politics lay a gendered paradox. Outwardly, CMPP's mode of organising – building

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<sup>138</sup> Interview with Geoffrey Crossick, London, 21<sup>st</sup> April, 2009.

<sup>139</sup> Skype interview with Henry and Sheli Wortis.

<sup>140</sup> Interview with Rita Vaudrey.

<sup>141</sup> Birmingham Feminist History Group, 'Feminism as Femininity in the Nineteen-Fifties', *Feminist Review*, 80, 2005, p. 8.

collective pleasure, trust, and openness through creative activities – implied a politics that anticipated Women’s Liberation by rejecting the individualistic, egocentric behaviours that had prevailed in the masculine militant street politics of the VSC. Yet the very demands Richman’s new politics made upon members to ‘interact freely, openly, frankly’, to achieve equality without difference, rested on an understanding of social equality for men and women that imbued an essentially masculine model of social authority, and failed to account for the individual loyalties each core couple had invested in their relationships inside the core. Any prospect of creating the collective Richman sought denied the possibility for emotional frivolity or ‘persistent personal weakness’.<sup>142</sup> The notion that ‘kindness’ could ‘be patronising’, and that constructive criticism was part of a larger exploratory political process suggested that within the collective the possibility for social equality created demands for members to conform to an assertive model of social behaviour that allowed little space for insecurity or inhibition.<sup>143</sup>

Although Sheli Wortis displayed an intellectual confidence and self-assertion that denied a mono-gendered model of social and political behaviour, the experiences of Rita Vaudrey and Sue Crockford confirmed that women and men’s subjective positions were complicated by their relationships with each other and their status in the core. Crockford reflected:

There were three main couples: Sheli and Henry; Geoff and Marie, and me and Tony, and I would deliberately never sit next to Tony ... I don’t know if you have ever read Konrad Lorenz and the brown rat syndrome, but a bunch of rats all running around the floor, the first pair to make it as a couple dominate all the rest ... I don’t mean it quite like this, but the power and synergy of some couples where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts can be a great force for good, and can be a negative influence on other people, can make them feel slightly adolescent, smaller, not joined up yet ... and Tony used to see it almost as a sign of disloyalty, and it wasn’t meant like that at all ... I was trying to be loyal to all the other people in the group.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Richman, ‘From a Group to a Movement’, GCA, p. 6.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>144</sup> Interview with Sue Crockford.

Yet internal fractures between the men and women were not simply a matter of torn loyalties between the individual, the couple and the collective, but involved an invisible inner gulf felt most often on the part of women for whom their sense of difference related more widely to their marginalised role in mainstream society. Crockford illustrated how, regardless of the fun, intimate ethos of CMPP, women like her sometimes felt ill at ease alongside articulate male comrades:

There was a couple there, I shan't name names, but who would be discussing the next project or whatever it was, and they would start to say "we should probably..." and they would have deliberate pauses, and I would think the confidence to talk when you haven't thought it all out, to have a pause and to know people would listen. I would be spewing it out so fast I would have to repeat it, because nobody would hear it, and I thought that's confidence, and it was mostly the men.<sup>145</sup>

Crockford's awe of the men's social self-confidence is especially insightful because her thoughts echoed in women's voices across the wider activist terrain, as throughout 1969 women began to articulate a collective social and emotional gulf from the activist politics surrounding the VSC.<sup>146</sup> The previous chapter showed how even the most intellectually-assured and politically active woman could find it hard to make herself heard on the same terms as her male peers. In CMPP, too, women still felt a sense of themselves as not only marginally separate from, but inclined to want to defer to CMPP men, and this seemed to find expression most commonly within the discursive arena of the collective.

When asked about her involvement in CMPP, Angela Melamed repeatedly emphasised how 'very unclued up about theory' she was. She explained that 'I think there was a hidden agenda which was theoretical which perhaps I wasn't part of'.<sup>147</sup> Nor was this feeling simply an outcome of her absence from the inner core. She went on to explain how her relationship with her husband and their role as a couple within the group enabled her to feel included even after their baby's arrival

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Rowbotham, 'The Beginnings of Women's Liberation in Britain', in *Dreams and Dilemmas*, pp. 35-36; Janet Ree, in Michelene Wandor, *Once a Feminist: Stories of a Generation* (London, 1990), p. 94.

<sup>147</sup> Interview with Angela Melamed, London, 10<sup>th</sup> October, 2009.

restricted the amount of time she could devote to activity, because 'Mark continued to go to meetings and so on'.<sup>148</sup> The implication was that through her husband she retained a place in CMPP, but because of her inability to access the group's meetings and discussions this was a secondary status. Struggling to remember her time in CMPP, it was notable that she either failed to recall or deliberately omitted to tell how both her husband and her began to withdraw from the group after their child's birth. Having recently purchased a new house, 5 Dalmeny Road, in Tufnell Park, the couple began devoting increasing time away from the collective in favour of their private domestic world. Their absence attracted criticism from the Richmans who argued openly in meetings that the couple had responsibilities to the group.<sup>149</sup> This omission was one of many areas where Melamed seemed reluctant to discuss or even mention her husband's role in relation to her activism. In this instance her difficulty in remembering her time in CMPP seemed directly related to him; the discursive confidence one needed to participate made it a political arena for her husband that she never felt fully able to access. She explained: 'I was eight years younger than my husband and he was much more sophisticated I suppose, much more well-read. He brought a lot.'<sup>150</sup>

Richman's emphasis on the constant questioning process underlining all CMPP activities and his understanding of the collective as dependent on equal participation from all members encouraged the intellectualised ethos that young women particularly found uncomfortable. Vaudrey found none of the group's activities 'unintimidating', even the weekly volleyball games on Parliament Hill Fields (see figure 4.3). Tony Wickert had introduced the game as a collaborative, non-competitive exercise where members could follow Ho Chi Minh's example of emulation not distinction. As well as opportunities for collective relaxation and fun, the Sunday gatherings were another component of the collective's public narrative: players would demonstrate to observers the spirit of the group.<sup>151</sup> For Vaudrey the games symbolised the uncomfortable pressure she felt to conform: 'I would very rarely play, only when forced to, and people didn't like that ... what would

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Interview with Geoff Crossick.

<sup>150</sup> Interview with Angela Melamed.

<sup>151</sup> 'Volleyball', *Red Camden*, Vol. 1, No. 11, August, 1969, p. 4.

Figure 4.3 Photograph of CMPP members Geoffrey Crossick (forefront) and Tony Wickert playing volleyball on Parliament Hill Fields.



Source: *GRA*.

happen... I would miss the ball and everyone would shout at me. You know, this is the collective. I didn't need that, you know, that had happened to me at school.<sup>152</sup> The familial trope resurfaced as the collective assumed the image of school or parental authority Vaudrey had previously resented. The memory signified how collective pressures to conform resurrected childhood feelings of powerlessness. She felt this intimidation most acutely in small meetings:

I remember one evening everybody brought along poetry they found interesting or inspiring, and I found that very difficult because ... people challenged you for your ideas so you couldn't just sort of say something and

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<sup>152</sup> Interview with Rita Vaudrey.

not back it up if you like ... I was a literature student. In my head I had a vast array of poetry I could have chosen and would have chosen if I had been in, if you like, an unthreatening environment.<sup>153</sup>

Within this discursive arena the dominant masculine presence shaping sixties social codes and legislation acquired a psychological shape in the assertive intellectual voice of activist men. Underlying Richman's new politics, and echoed in the articulate voices of leading CMPP and other activist men, was the implicit assumption that they had the right to speak, to be heard and to direct individuals' political actions. Such authority rested on the belief not only that they had something important to say, but, as Pauline Boty observed in 1965, and female respondents confirmed, that women around them would want to listen.<sup>154</sup> The subtle social gulf that could lie between educated political men and women was rooted in a post-war social climate which not only restricted female social freedom, but also psychologically constrained socially mobile activist women. It wasn't that these intelligent left-thinking women did not have as much to say as their male contemporaries, or even that they never managed to contribute fully to political discussions. Rather, their ease to communicate their ideas could falter on the inward uncertainty that their opinions carried equal weight. Sue O'Sullivan noted how she and the women she knew had plenty to say, but they, as much as the men, tended to assume that some areas of conversation and concern were more the men's.<sup>155</sup>

### **New Left, Mutual Politics in Retreat? The Arrival of the Tufnell Park Women's Liberation Group**

What complicated women's connection to CMPP and accounts for their struggle to identify their social and psychic needs for Women's Liberation were the simultaneous feelings of respect, warmth and love they felt for the strong male personalities most of whom supported them in their new political endeavours. Vaudrey immediately countered her claim that CMPP was 'a threatening

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> 'Pauline', Nell Dunn, *Talking to Women* (London, 1965), p. 21.

<sup>155</sup> Interview with Sue O'Sullivan, London, 19<sup>th</sup> January, 2010.

environment' – 'I always liked them'.<sup>156</sup> The arrival of Women's Liberation received a mixed reception amidst the milieu, but where fractures emerged their primarily psychic nature underlined the challenges the new politics posed not only to members' loyalties to the group, but to women and men's own sense of political and social selfhood as it had been shaped by the mutual ethos of the collective.

It is difficult to identify the founding moment of the Tufnell Park Women's Liberation group. Sheli Wortis was unable to remember precisely when she and Karen Slaney started the first meetings. Most female members dated their entry to 1969 and the first issues of *Shrew* confirm that by the autumn of 1969 Tufnell Park members held regular Tuesday evening meetings at the Slaney's house; 31 Dartmouth Park Hill, Camden Town.<sup>157</sup> For the CMPP women who joined Tufnell Park, including Angela Melamed, Sue Crockford, Ellen Hammerschlagg and Hilary Anderson, Sheli Wortis played a formative role in communicating the newly emerging ideas of Women's Liberation from the United States. She and her husband allayed Crockford's fears about whether or not to attend the meetings: 'When the Women's Movement came along I resisted for the first three months because Tony said, along with others, this is going to divide the left, and I talked more with them [Sheli and Henry] and then I thought I am just going to go.'<sup>158</sup>

As a member of the San Francisco O' Connor group Wortis had joined one of the first Women's Liberation groups set up by the activist Mary Lou Greenberg.<sup>159</sup> By the time she set out her ideas for the north-west London crèche, in June 1969, she was drawing directly from Helke Sander's paper, arguing for an all female collective to aid local Camden women to make political connections between their isolated lives as women and conditions of life under capitalism.<sup>160</sup> She

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<sup>156</sup> Interview with Rita Vaudrey.

<sup>157</sup> The second Women's Liberation group to form was the Peckham Rye One O' Clock Club in South London. See 'A Brief History of the Women's Liberation Workshop', the Women's Library, University of Metropolitan London (henceforth WL), 7SHR/B/1 Box 4. See also Lois Graessle and Sue O'Sullivan, in Michelene Wandor (ed.), *Once a Feminist*, pp. 129, and 218, and Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell, *Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women's Liberation* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn., Oxford, 1987), p. 8.

<sup>158</sup> Interview with Sue Crockford.

<sup>159</sup> Skype interview with Henry and Sheli Wortis.

<sup>160</sup> Wortis, 'A People's Crèche', p. 4.

and Henry had been alerted to the paper and to the development of the West German women's movement by SDS leader, Rudi Dutschke, and his wife, Gretchen.<sup>161</sup> The couple had come to London to seek refuge after the attempted assassination on Dutschke in April 1968, and with the aid of the VSC network they were situated near to the CMPP milieu, in Golders Green.<sup>162</sup>

The all-female collective Wortis envisaged derived from her understanding that in political matters directly affecting them as women, women felt most comfortable talking solely to other women.<sup>163</sup> Her statement echoed sentiments marking two generations of women's movement campaigning that had seen middle-class feminists consciously urging women's claims to female representation.<sup>164</sup> However, set against CMPP's mutual politics her desire for a separate female group implied recognition of a deficiency in the all-encompassing political vision she and her husband had helped to shape. The overt chauvinism and marginalisation she had experienced as a female activist in the Californian anti-war scene was far removed from her place in the closely-knit familial collective. Yet, intruding upon her place in the core, she discerned a contradiction between her intellectual and social validation alongside CMPP men, with her egalitarian marriage, and her sense of place as a woman in late sixties society. She explained her decision to establish the Tufnell Park Women's Liberation group as follows:

I personally felt the effects of sexism in many ways: professionally, I was trained as an experimental psychologist, and I didn't feel there was a place for women who had children. My entrance into the women's movement was really as a young mother ... that is what I wanted to form: a group around the politics of being a woman who wanted to be active either professionally or in work or in society, who also had children in a society in which women as mothers were not really valued and so that is how that came to be, and it was just never as much a priority in CMPP to talk about that.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Skype interview with Henry and Sheli Wortis.

<sup>162</sup> Interview with Sabby Sagall, London, 12<sup>th</sup> March, 2009. The SDS couple rented a room in a house shared by IS activists, owned by Sagall.

<sup>163</sup> Wortis, 'A People's Crèche', p. 4.

<sup>164</sup> Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1914-1959* (Basingstoke, 1992), p. 3.

<sup>165</sup> Skype interview with Henry and Sheli Wortis.

Wortis' identity as a mother remained an overt biological force shaping her internal life as a female activist, removed from her relationship either with her husband or the wider collective, even in spite of her attachment to both. As a prominent figure both in CMPP and in Tufnell Park, her account highlights the subtle, yet powerful inward constraints with which motherhood separated her from men with whom she shared affective new left ties. Nor was this sense of separation unique to Wortis. She soon found common parlance with women who came into Tufnell Park either through CMPP or the wider milieu of anti-war activists living around Northwest London, many of whom, like Nan Fromer, Sue O'Sullivan, Ellen Hammerschlagg, Karen Slaney and Caroline Roth were also American. What initially drew women to the Tufnell Park meetings and made them return was identification with at least some of the contradictions they saw in their lives as women only after having children. It was no coincidence that over half of the women were young mothers. Many had also received a university education and were in relationships with highly intellectual, active left men. Most highlighted Tufnell Park's significance as having awoken underlying perceptions that for Wortis had risen to the surface much earlier. Nan Fromer, pregnant at the time of her first meeting, recalled:

Late in 1969, a woman I barely knew invited me to a woman's meeting in Tufnell Park. 'They call themselves revolutionary socialists', she said. ... If it did not provide me with instant sanity, it did provide assurance that I need no longer consider myself a candidate for the 'farm', since so many of the women arrayed in that small sitting room, despite their surface differences, seemed to share what for so long I had believed to be my own idiosyncratic suffering.<sup>166</sup>

Before they attended their first meeting, women from outside CMPP often found it difficult to conceive a possible connection with a women's political group. In 1968 O'Sullivan first heard about Women's Liberation as a new mother whilst visiting friends in New York's lower east side: 'They were in SDS ... and were talking about Women's Liberation and I can remember thinking, oh this is

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<sup>166</sup> Nan Fromer, Draft transcript for the 1978 *Spare Rib* article, p. 1, MNA.

vaguely interesting, but what the hell does it have to do with my life?’<sup>167</sup> Many women recalled how it was husbands and male friends around the anti-war scene who alerted them to the group and encouraged them to attend. To these new left men Women’s Liberation represented a logical extension of the more general liberation struggle framing their activism, and they were keen to support it.

### **Personal Relationships Shaping the New Politics of Women’s Liberation**

In the winter of 1969 John Cowley encouraged his wife, Sue O’Sullivan, to attend an early Tufnell Park meeting. One of a number of couples situated on the edge of the CMPP milieu, they had recently returned from New York where Cowley had been involved with the New Left scene around the New York School for Social Research, teaching graduate students, many of them in SDS, and editing some issues of the New Left journal, *Studies on the Left*.<sup>168</sup> Having set up home at Stratford Villas in Camden Town, the couple shared mutual friends with Karen and David Slaney who Cowley knew from the LSE. It was from Slaney that Cowley first learned of the Tufnell Park group and knowing his wife’s unhappiness at the time, he persuaded her to attend.<sup>169</sup> O’Sullivan’s initial doubts upon learning about Women’s Liberation confirm the enduring bodily dimension of sexual difference, which Lyndal Roper has shown to possess ‘its own physiological and psychological reality’.<sup>170</sup> As a young woman hers had been a largely external, national and international political focus; she had looked outward from inside a radical landscape that presented her with plentiful opportunities for female mobility. The physical demands of carrying, delivering and raising a child recast her and other women’s sights to the immediate world of the domestic arena and the local community where their everyday lives now focused. Their own internal condition came more overtly to the fore, as their new identities as mothers raised new questions, doubts and possibilities

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<sup>167</sup> Interview with Sue O’Sullivan.

<sup>168</sup> Interview with John Cowley, London, 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 2009.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1994), p. 3.

about their lives to come: 'I think I was not entirely clear about what I was going to be doing except having a baby, and that was already clear, in a shocking sort of way ... there was going to be conflicts and contradictions in my life from thereon in.'<sup>171</sup>

Michaela Nava heard about the Tufnell Park group directly from David Slaney in the summer of 1969. She too was situated on the edge of the VSC network; married to a Mexican photographer, José Nava, the couple lived in Camden's Netherall Gardens, in a large house filled with individuals from across the activist and underground scene, including radical émigrés from Israel, South Africa and Latin America. Nava's story of entry told of an inner conflict between middle-class maternal identity, a domestic life that was familiar and comfortable, and her search for an intellectual and political identity she envied her husband, but felt unable to reconcile with her background and maternal life:

Not only was I looking after two kids, I was working. I taught English as a foreign language and so I didn't get to go to Hornsey, you know.<sup>172</sup> Pepé was out there doing the political thing ... I was always aware of the politics ... I remember having a big meeting in '68 after the massacre in Mexico and so I was looking for a place and not really finding it, okay, so looking for the left and feeling I didn't really belong. I thought it was just too phoney to be part of the revolutionary left when I could drive and I had the kids in the house, you know that didn't feel appropriate. I wasn't a student, although I recognised that I wanted to be one.<sup>173</sup>

Situated in the nexus between motherhood and politics, Nava's ambivalent political status and uneasy internal state signify the appeal Women's Liberation held for left-thinking young mothers within the CMPP milieu. It provided the possibility to simultaneously escape from and reconcile old and new intellectual and maternal components of self, to dissolve separate spheres of public and private along with the social contradictions of equal but different.

O'Sullivan and Nava's accounts of joining the Tufnell Park group echo many personal and

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<sup>171</sup> Interview with Sue O' Sullivan.

<sup>172</sup> Nava's husband photographed the student demonstration at Hornsey Art School in north-east London in May 1968. For details of the dispute, see Students and staff of the Hornsey College of Art, *The Hornsey Affair* (Harmondsworth, 1969).

<sup>173</sup> Interview with Michaela Nava, London, 20<sup>th</sup> November, 2009.

secondary histories of Women's Liberation; emphasising the sense of instant revelation, transformation or homecoming the women found in discussions. Concluding her narrative, Nava reflected: 'I suppose what happened with the women's group... this is where I belonged, and although in a way I had been building up to it, there was this huge transformation because here, yes, this made sense.'<sup>174</sup> O'Sullivan similarly recalled: 'I had never experienced this sort of feeling before. It was as much a feeling as an intellectual sort of amazement and challenge and so on, but it was as much a feeling, a gut feeling that this was something [that was] going to transform my life.'<sup>175</sup> Upon initial examination, the close resonance between these women's accounts and the official histories of the early movement might raise questions concerning how far the women consciously or unconsciously drew upon publically available, discursive cultural narratives to shape their own stories. Assessing a collection of interviews with Australian feminists, Julie Stephens argues that cultural scripts are most likely to emerge when questions follow a chronological template. In her view questions about a respondent's first experience with feminism often prompt them to recount 'a "conversion-like" experience'.<sup>176</sup> Although Nava's and O'Sullivan's accounts were products of a chronologically framed, life-history interview, even allowing for the influence of cultural scripts, when listened to and read in the overall context of their histories, their narratives signalled the 'space' remaining 'for the consciously reflective individual'.<sup>177</sup> For the two women telling their stories the feelings were very much their own, the culmination of earlier experiences with adolescent hopes and expectations, new left politics, personal relations and early motherhood. O'Sullivan adopted the dual role of narrator and interpreter when she considered the pitfalls of retelling experiences she had first recounted in the 1980s: 'If you've put your mind to recalling the past, it becomes almost like "the past" rather than what you... I am struggling to think because sometimes I feel like I am paraphrasing what I have written, like, fifteen-twenty years ago, but I

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Interview with Sue O'Sullivan.

<sup>176</sup> Julie Stephens, 'Our Remembered Selves: Oral History and Feminist Memory', *Oral History*, 38, Spring, 2010, p. 84.

<sup>177</sup> Anna Green, 'Individual Remembering and "Collective Memory": Theoretical Presuppositions and Contemporary Debates', *Oral History*, 32, Autumn, 2004, p. 36.

don't think there is any reason to doubt that my feelings were overwhelmingly, just staggeringly wow, this is just it.<sup>178</sup> The sense of revelation and instantaneous transformation they and other women have so often expressed is partly responsible for the emphasis contemporary and secondary accounts place on the 'meteoric rise' of the early movement.<sup>179</sup> Yet portraits of the early women's groups that focus exclusively on transforming experiences overlook more subtly felt emotions that accompanied the arrival of the new politics.

The introduction of the Tufnell Park Women's Liberation group did not mark a sudden turning-point in the political and personal lives of the men and women in and around CMPP. In political terms the women's turn of focus occurred at a point of transition in the collective, as the group struggled to move from anti-war to community-based politics. As women in the Tufnell Park group began to address the personal dimension embedded in the new politics, and to start 'changing the way we lived', they continued a political and personal process that CMPP members had previously, if not wholeheartedly, initiated in their prefigurative politics.<sup>180</sup> The emotional challenges Women's Liberation initially raised for CMPP members became interwoven with tensions that accompanied the Richmans' efforts to reorient the group and increase demands for members to invest themselves in the collective. The family tropes embedded in respondents' memories and the traditionally gendered connotations they contained, signalled the political, social and psychological continuities that endured in the milieu after the arrival of Women's Liberation. Close attention to O'Sullivan and Nava's testimonies reveals hesitations and uncertainties alongside expressions of revelation, which hint at the forthcoming political and psychological contradictions accompanying the new politics. O'Sullivan reflected that as well as being 'instantly captivated', she also felt 'frightened, I think probably, like what did this mean?'<sup>181</sup> Nava explained that, although on arrival at Tufnell Park she realised she had found her 'place to operate in', the experience was 'sometimes

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<sup>178</sup> Interview with Sue O'Sullivan. For examples of O'Sullivan's writings on Women's Liberation, see Sue O'Sullivan, *I Used to be Nice: Sexual Affairs* (London, 1996).

<sup>179</sup> Setch, 'The Women's Liberation Movement in Britain', p. 8.

<sup>180</sup> 'Nine Years Together: A History of a Women's Liberation Group', *Spare Rib*, 69, April, 1978, p. 43.

<sup>181</sup> Interview with Sue O'Sullivan

quite difficult and extremely disruptive to our personal lives, and extremely consuming in terms of what we thought about all week, and how we changed'.<sup>182</sup> The women indicated that within and around CMPP women and men faced challenging questions about what it meant to be political and how they might reconcile the external social landscape with their own internal radical world.

### **Finding New Ways of Being: Tufnell Park and CMPP**

There were several points of political continuity between CMPP and the Tufnell Park group from the membership of the surrounding network to political ideas both groups shared. When, from the summer of 1969, female CMPP members began attending the meetings, most did so out of curiosity and not animosity with male partners in the collective. The women felt no immediate desire to end their involvement with CMPP; the structural and emotional fissures that culminated with the demise of the collective towards the end of 1970 had begun to emerge gradually the previous year, and Women's Liberation only exacerbated members' turn of attention to projects elsewhere. By the end of 1969 the growth and co-ordination of a national Women's Liberation Movement, orchestrated by the LWLW, led to women in and around CMPP becoming increasingly absorbed in Workshop activities. Sheli Wortis reflected, 'I don't think the women wanted to, you know, constrict their activities in CMPP. They wanted to be part of the wider women's movement.'<sup>183</sup> Crockford agreed that 'some of us started to do other things. There were natural growth patterns. I remember later on when Cambodia happened. I thought, shit, I really have left Vietnam behind, and that was because you couldn't do it all'.<sup>184</sup>

In many ways the co-operation between men and women in the north-west London crèche typified the relative ease with which CMPP and Tufnell Park came to co-exist for the short period up to Tufnell Park's division in April 1970. By this time pressure to accommodate an extensive and continually expanding membership prompted the decision to divide the group into three separate

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<sup>182</sup> Interview with Michaela Nava.

<sup>183</sup> Skype interview with Sheli and Henry Wortis.

<sup>184</sup> Interview with Sue Crockford.

geographic groupings based in north London: Islington, Tufnell Park, and Belsize Park Swiss Cottage.<sup>185</sup> Within CMPP the general consensus of support for Women's Liberation derived from the new left personal politics the group advocated. Geoffrey Crossick reflected: 'Given that an awful lot of that politics was how people lived their lives and their relationships ... CMPP was supportive of the women's movement. You couldn't *not* be supportive of it.'<sup>186</sup> On the periphery of the collective, Rita Vaudrey assumed the role of observer, and she confirmed the relative ease with which women established the Tufnell Park group alongside CMPP. Reflecting on the impact of the group inside the collective, she recalled that 'Henry was very pro and my Geoff was never a problem, and he was quite happy with it, and on the whole it wasn't a problem and most people tried to be aware of course [that] it was women's difficulties'.<sup>187</sup>

As an early advocate of Women's Liberation, and an actively involved father, it was unsurprising that Henry Wortis took an active part in setting up the crèche along with other parents from the Workshop. As Lynne Segal has argued, 'though it is now often hidden from feminist history', men in this milieu shaped with female partners a mutually supportive environment for both sexes to balance activism with family life.<sup>188</sup> Affective political and personal ties between these men and women facilitated women's ability to unleash their energies 'into women's liberation from its earliest days'.<sup>189</sup> When, over the weekend from 27th February to 1<sup>st</sup> March, 1970, women from the Tufnell Park group helped to orchestrate and then attended the first Women's Liberation conference at Ruskin College, Oxford, Henry and David Slaney assisted John Cowley in organising the first crèche of its kind accompanying the radical conference (see figure 4.4).<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> *Shrew*, April 1970, p. 5.

<sup>186</sup> Interview with Geoffrey Crossick, London, 21<sup>st</sup> April, 2009.

<sup>187</sup> Interview with Rita Vaudrey.

<sup>188</sup> Lynne Segal, *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men* (London, 1990), p. 288.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.* See also Lynne Segal, 'Slow Change or No Change?: Feminism, Socialism and the Problem of Men', *Feminist Review*, 31, Spring, 1989, p. 13.

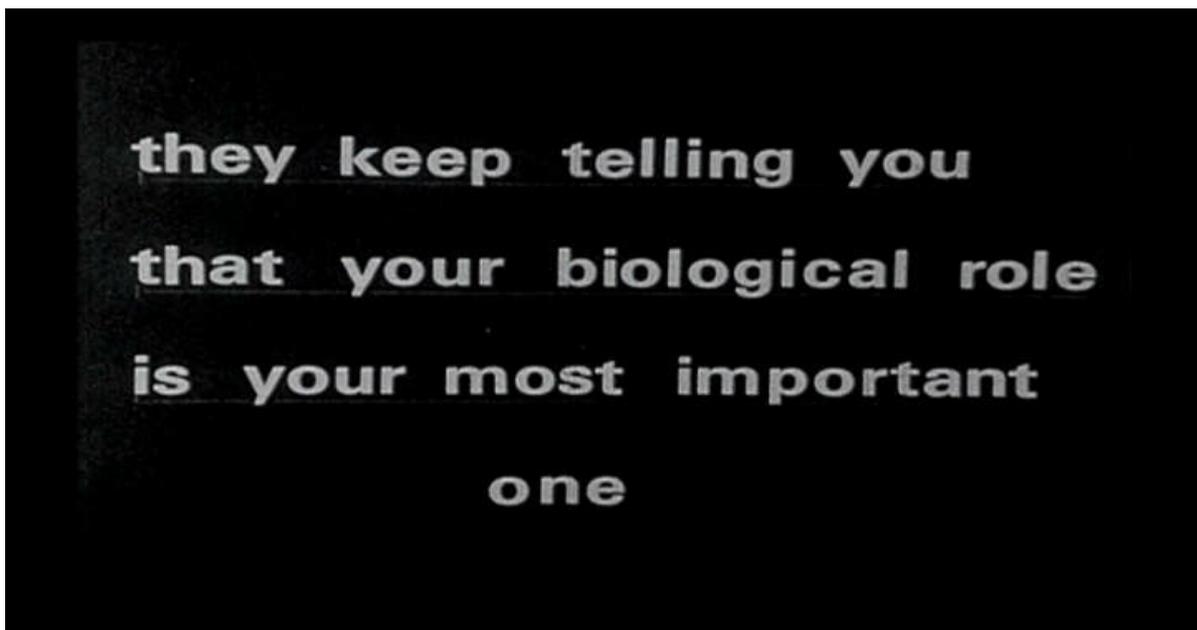
<sup>190</sup> Skype interview with Henry and Sheli Wortis. Letter from John Cowley to participants of the Women's Liberation conference regarding details of the crèche to be made available for the weekend of 27<sup>th</sup> February-1<sup>st</sup> March, 1970, MNA.

Figure 4.4 Scene from the film, 'A Woman's Place', showing the crèche CMPP men helped to set up and run.



Source: Liberation Films, 'A Woman's Place', GRA.

Figure 4.5: Still photographic image from the Angry Arts' film, 'Woman Are You Satisfied With Your Life?', depicting the negative influence of the advertising industry perpetuating the image of motherhood as the essence of womanhood.



Source: Liberation Films, 'Woman Are You Satisfied With Your Life?', GRA.

Along with female members of Liberation Films, Sue Crockford and Ellen Hammerschlagg, Tony Wickert made a film of the conference to commemorate the occasion. He intended 'A Woman's Place' to be an ongoing project to explore the movement's development.<sup>191</sup> At the time there were few women with technical training or expertise in film, and for Crockford the fact that there were always 'thoughtful men around to help to make the project successful' exemplified the understanding and support her male friends and political colleagues showed her and fellow women.<sup>192</sup> Wickert's decision to become involved in this all-female event derived from his earlier involvement in the making of the eight minute film, 'Woman, Are You Satisfied With Your Life?', produced in the spring of 1969 by women from Tufnell Park (see figure 4.5).<sup>193</sup> Made from still photographs, the film had raised general questions about the socialising influences shaping women in society, including advertising, education and popular imagery and, in line with the groups' socialist orientation, suggested links between women's oppression and capitalist society.<sup>194</sup>

The political principles underlying the women's film project highlight the symbiotic relationship between CMPP and Tufnell Park; women active in both groups transferred political ideas and modes of organising that were rooted in direct experience from radical activity and everyday life. Sheli Wortis recalled: 'The things I learned from CMPP I would pass on in terms of ways of interacting and establishing involvement of the people, you know, organising, I could bring that into the women's group to help other people to develop, so in my mind they were very supportive of my own political development.'<sup>195</sup> The very nature of the small, local consciousness-raising group Tufnell Park members created derived influence from the prefigurative politics of CMPP. In an article on the small Women's Liberation group, 'Organising Ourselves', the second

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<sup>191</sup> Skype interview with Tony Wickert. The film, 'A Woman's Place', is divided into two parts, the first half devoted to the weekend of the conference, including footage of the speakers, the open discussion forums, and interviews with local Oxford women, the second half shows footage of the first national women's demonstration to be held in the country since the suffragettes, on 6 March 1971.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid. See also Sue Crockford, 'Angry Arts Film Society and Liberation Films', in Margaret Dickinson (ed.), *Rogue Reels*, p. 231. The final film was called *A Woman's Place* and included the first big Women's Liberation march that took place in Central London, in March 1971.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Caroline Roth, 'Women's Liberation', *Red Camden*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 9<sup>th</sup> January, 1970, p. 12.

<sup>195</sup> Skype interview with Sheli and Henry Wortis.

Tufnell Park group acknowledged the 'helpful ideas on the small group' that came from Geoff Richman's 'On Strategy' alongside overseas' articles such as 'Small group: big job' by Arleen Sunshine and Judy Gerard, and 'The small group process' by Pamela Allen of Sudsofloppen.<sup>196</sup>

The 'small group process' underlying Women's Liberation rested largely on the 'universally acknowledged' acceptance that it provided 'a secure, accepting, positive place' where women could feel safe to engage in political meetings where 'inarticulacy, shyness' and 'the habit of depending on a man' had previously inhibited them in large meetings.<sup>197</sup> However, the tenets of the small group, outlined by the Tufnell Park members, echoed many of the same new left sentiments embedded in CMPP. Both groups saw the small group not just as 'a model for political work', but as a 'microcosm of a future good society', a collective or community where members' decisions would 'arise directly from the experience of its members' to combat the isolation capitalist society imposed on individuals.<sup>198</sup> In a transcript from a recorded meeting amongst the first Tufnell Park members, in October 1969, CMPP women's voices were audible above those of other members who proposed traditional mass mediums of communication CMPP had eschewed as alienating. Advocating small-group discussions as a more effective method of communication, they also expressed concern for members to participate 'in the right way', although the distinction between the two forums could be felt in the caution Tufnell Park members advised women to exercise to avoid sharp criticism and conflict.<sup>199</sup> In contrast, Richman's concern to foster total participation meant that he did not shrink from potentially forceful engagement between members, arguing that 'the method of criticism, like that of questioning', was 'to discover the contradictions between individuals stated views and his/her actual behaviour'.<sup>200</sup> This distinction underlined the gendered subtext of political participation in the collective. CMPP women understood the mass meeting as especially detrimental to their hopes of reaching women because, like the authoritative education process they had

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<sup>196</sup> Tufnell Park Women's Liberation group, 'Organising Ourselves', an article published in *Shrew* in March, 1971, p. 4, The Papers of Sheila Rowbotham, WL, 7SHR/B/1 Box 4.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1.

<sup>198</sup> Richman, 'On Strategy', p. 3, GCA.

<sup>199</sup> 'The Discussion', *Shrew*, No. 6, October, 1969, p. 3.

<sup>200</sup> Richman, 'On Strategy', p. 6, GCA.

undergone, mass communication denied the possibility for political and social interaction; hence their 'opposition to the notion of "the expert" telling us about his subject"<sup>201</sup>. Both CMPP and the Tufnell Park group emphasised that liberation could only come with 'real trust', but whereas CMPP's small group remained an essentially masculine-oriented political space, in the small consciousness-raising group freedom to criticise remained secondary to 'the freedom of the group to sustain the trust of its members'.<sup>202</sup>

### **Tensions between CMPP and Tufnell Park**

Despite the political symbiosis between CMPP and Tufnell Park, and the solidarity men and women mutually invested in the Women's Liberation group, its emergence was not without political or psychic tensions for members and their families. Many of the challenges arose precisely because the close political resonance between the two groups testified to the partnerships and friendships embedded in the shared politics of CMPP and in the milieu surrounding the collective, which raised certain questions of loyalty. In CMPP the arrival of Women's Liberation represented an uncomfortable intrusion for Geoff Richman and his wife who perceived the new politics as a dual political and personal threat. Richman dismissed Women's Liberation as a distraction from the all-encompassing vision he held for the collective, which, if it were ever to become a true community, demanded members' total commitment. In his view a Women's Liberation group could only ever remain 'a social interest group', a subsidiary to the collective:

To take an example of a woman, who may be concerned with her work, a women's liberation group, her neighbourhood and the children, school ... if she maintains a revolutionary position, and fails to give primary consideration to the needs of the revolutionary collective ... then not only will the collective be disrupted, but her behaviour in the social interest groups will be inadequate.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> 'The Discussion', *Shrew*, No. 6, October, 1969, pp. 2-3.

<sup>202</sup> The Tufnell Park Women's Liberation group, 'Organising Ourselves', p. 4.

<sup>203</sup> Richman, 'Activities', p. 3, GCA.

Part of the threat Richman perceived in Women's Liberation also derived from the way in which it challenged his own understanding of equality between the sexes, and especially the traditional division of labour that existed within his own marriage. Vaudrey remembered that as some of the women started becoming more assertive within CMPP, he was asked to explain his attitude: 'He didn't see it as the main issue. Women were equal anyway. "We are all equal here, we are all equal", so therefore it wasn't an issue.'<sup>204</sup> The main area of departure between the Richman couple and Tufnell Park women rested in the latter's aims not merely to critique the nuclear family structure, but in their desire to explore alternatives that, whilst not intended to 'abolish' the family, did include a commitment to eliminating the sexual division of labour, which for some, such as Ellen Hammerschlagg, Mica Nava, Nan Fromer and Sue Crockford, meant enthusiasm for communal patterns of living.

Marie Richman found this critique, and feminist arguments exposing the 'myth of motherhood' personally threatening, as they undermined the very identity she had developed as a female activist, wife, and mother, contained as they all were within the domestic sphere. The Tufnell Park group threatened to dismantle the collective political life she and her husband had cultivated over several years in Camden. In July 1970 she underlined her political and emotional distance from Women's Liberation in an account of the film showing of Mai Zetterling's *The Girls*. The event had been hosted by about thirty members of the WLW including Tufnell Park members.<sup>205</sup> After the mixed audience had shown some resistance to the women's suggestion that they break into small groups to discuss the film's ideas about women, Marie Richman had intervened to facilitate the discussion. However, she emphasised that her action was motivated not because she was a member of Women's Liberation, 'but because I am a member of CMPP, a political group working locally in Camden, who have been consciously seeking new methods of communicating with

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<sup>204</sup> Interview with Rita Vaudrey.

<sup>205</sup> Romola Guiton, 'The Girls', CMPP pamphlet reprinting articles about events in which CMPP and WLW had used film politically, July, 1970, p. 6, GCA.

people for over a year now'.<sup>206</sup> Her loyalty lay with the collective that was interwoven into her and her husband's family life. She had attended the event along with two CMPP men and, like them, she too felt 'despair and frustration at the way the meeting was going and the inexperience of the WLM in this situation'.<sup>207</sup>

Marie Richman's hostility to Women's Liberation strained the affective political and friendship ties between herself and Sheli Wortis, intertwined as these were within the collective core the two couples had created:

Well it was awkward. I mean Marie who was intelligent, really wonderful and responsible for carrying out a lot of activities in CMPP, she very much took a back seat to Geoff's ideological arguments, and in fact she typed all of his writings ... I was well beyond that in my thinking, but I also felt that it gave her such satisfaction, that she felt so much part of a team with him that I didn't really want to challenge her.<sup>208</sup>

Neither was Marie Richman the only woman in CMPP who failed to join the Tufnell Park group. Alicia Merrett remained ambivalent towards Women's Liberation even though she was in many other respects committed to the prefigurative politics that saw her and her husband join the collective household at Bramshill Gardens together with Ellen Hammerschlagg, Sue Crockford and Tony Wickert. At a time when women in the early groups were struggling to find ways of drawing increasing numbers of women into the movement, Merrett's apprehension towards Women's Liberation reveals the misperceptions and internal fears precluding involvement.<sup>209</sup> Unknowingly, she shared much in common with the women in the group: she was committed to improving women's role in society, in Bramshill Gardens she was waging her own struggle against the sexual division of labour by putting pressure on her husband to cook. As a mother she was also interested in discourses of progressive education, notably A. S. Neill's writing on the experimental school,

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<sup>206</sup> Marie Richman, 'The Girls', in *ibid*, p. 7.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>208</sup> Skype interview with Henry and Sheli Wortis.

<sup>209</sup> For examples of members' discussions about how to extend the membership of the movement, see 'The Discussion', *Shrew*, No. 6, October, 1969, pp. 1-4; 'The Politics of the Campaign', *Shrew*, October, 1970, p. 3; 'Getting Our Message Across', *Shrew*, October, 1970, p. 5.

Summerhill, which echoed in the movement's early support for collective childcare.<sup>210</sup> Yet her reluctance to join rested on her sense of social and intellectual inferiority in relation to Tufnell Park members, a feeling that extended from her marginalisation in CMPP. Although, like many female respondents, her identity as a mother did not detract from the meaning she derived from being active, the way in which she interpreted her community activism, primarily through her interests as a mother, seemed far removed from the anti-mother ethos she imagined Tufnell Park represented. Asked about her own encounter with the Tufnell Park group, she replied:

I think they were much more high-powered in their outlook than I was at the time. You know I seemed to work on my own more. I am a joiner in some things, but not in others, but it is funny, I never felt any strong compulsion to join that group, but I was never specially invited to join it. I had my point of view, you know.<sup>211</sup>

Merrett's belief that an invitation was necessary for entrance into the Tufnell Park group ran contrary to the ethos of this early consciousness raising group, which placed emphasis on its openness to newcomers.<sup>212</sup> Her reluctance to concede that major changes could be made to the roles of men and women seemed to derive from the domestic identity she maintained and, like Marie Richman, sought to protect: 'I was kind of into the thing that people should have more of a say but I wasn't convinced that you could change the male and female ways that much. You could try and get someone like Steve to cook, if you really put pressure on them, but...' The myth, since perpetuated, that Women's Liberation condemned the experience of motherhood, had real roots for Merrett and Richman for whom Tufnell Park represented an internal threat amidst a milieu where, prior to Women's Liberation, they had felt comfortably able to combine their activism with pleasure in homemaking.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Interview with Alicia Merrett, Wells, 18<sup>th</sup> December, 2009. For details of Summerhill experimental school, see Alexander Sutherland Neill, *Talking of Summerhill* (London, 1967).

<sup>211</sup> Interview with Alicia Merrett.

<sup>212</sup> Interview with Sue O'Sullivan. See also 'Organising Ourselves', p. 105.

<sup>213</sup> Segal, *Making Trouble*, pp. 84-85.

## Sue Crockford

The objections the Richmans and other CMPP members made to Women's Liberation highlighted how, within the milieu, questions of political loyalty and commitment over the new personal politics cut across close relations and friendships, challenging personal loyalties and tempering the release women found in Tufnell Park. Crockford's account of her early days in the women's group presented a host of contradictions, as she found herself torn between loyalty to her partner and their mutual politics, and her newfound loyalty to the Tufnell Park women. In 'Organising Ourselves' the second Tufnell Park group warned about the 'uneasiness that comes with a shift in loyalties from one's husband or lover, maybe, to the group'.<sup>214</sup> They recognised the powerful emotional ties women had to straddle after initially joining, but they failed to articulate the dual loyalties previously political women strained when their personal relationships and political selves were also deeply embedded in their left groups. The public and the private, the personal and the political existed in relentless tension throughout Crockford's narrative, and her inability to comfortably situate her account within either sphere, spoke of her torn loyalties between her partner, CMPP politics, and the private world they represented, and the newfound collective identity she found in the Women's Liberation group. In Tufnell Park she discovered an affective connection with women she had never known in any previous political or personal relationship; her entry seemed to mark an inner rupture with a political selfhood that had been rooted in an intellectual and social world profoundly shaped by men – 'I would always have said I learnt far more from blokes up to my thirties than I had done from women'.<sup>215</sup> Coming to Women's Liberation from a political group that had already stressed the relevance of direct experience and social relations, Crockford's testimony showed that her encounter with the new politics recast how, within CMPP, she had understood personal politics. The

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<sup>214</sup> 'Organising Ourselves', p. 105. Other women reported the perceived criticism in the early WLM that surrounded the culture of domesticity and homemaking. Interview with Judith Milner, London, 2<sup>nd</sup> December, 2008; 'Janet Ree', in Wandor, *Once A Feminist*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>215</sup> Interview with Sue Crockford.

'homecoming' she experienced related to the legitimate political space the women's group provided for emotional interiority and release:

When the women's movement came along all other kinds of things were put on the table to discuss that hadn't been up for discussion; they had not been deliberately not up for discussion, they had just not been part of the plateau of conversations ... You were more relaxed because you were with your own sex, that's for sure, so if you said something daft they are more likely to giggle ... I think that it wasn't so much sex in CMPP, it was the intellectual rigour; so you wouldn't have been daft because you had things to get through; so some of the things that might have been worrying you, you would have censored as not being important enough.<sup>216</sup>

Not only did Women's Liberation reshape her conception of public and private within the context of political and personal life, but the demands to realign inner and outer life created tensions between her and Wickert, who felt threatened by the capacity of the new personal politics to penetrate the private in a manner CMPP had never done. Asked how, if at all, she had incorporated CMPP's concept of personal politics into her life, she responded: 'I suppose to some extent it didn't cross my mind not to ... I assumed I was in a relationship that was equal. I think I got a shock the first time I got an inkling ... that he didn't really respect the women's movement. I assumed he would'.<sup>217</sup> Her 'shock' signalled her awakening to the true political departure of Women's Liberation. Despite the collective political and social life Crockford and Wickert shared as a couple in CMPP, clear demarcations remained between political and personal, public and private life. At Bramshill Gardens, they shared the social and political life of the floating commune, but retained a private sphere by living as a private couple in the house next door: 'Oh we had a private life. We had the best of both worlds because we went home to be private and they had a communal house next door and we liked that.'<sup>218</sup>

Wickert's insecurity over the intrusive capacity of Women's Liberation cast into doubt Crockford's initial enthusiasm for a personal politics where no areas of life were out of bounds. Her

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

self-questioning became evident through her contradictory reflections on the distinctions between the personal politics of CMPP and Women's Liberation. Acknowledging Rita Vaudrey's insecurity, Crockford defended the intellectual rigour of CMPP, and the need for clear distinctions between political issues in relation to personal life: 'Say, for someone like Rita it wouldn't have been appropriate, there wouldn't have been space to say, oh, I am feeling a bit left out ... We were there for a reason, Vietnam, that was above our lives.'<sup>219</sup> With these thoughts Crockford deferred to the very sentiments she and other women had reacted against within Women's Liberation where direct experience had a relevant bearing on every aspect of political and social affairs. She echoed the sentiments of her partner who had believed that 'personal life should be completely private; you shouldn't talk about it with anyone else'.<sup>220</sup>

Her memories and reflections reveal how her entry into Tufnell Park posited her not only between her women's group and her partner, but between two concepts of new left politics that, in their own separate ways, had each defined her anew. Her need to affirm the level of honour with which she upheld private, intimate matters, highlighted the internal dislocations the new politics of Women's Liberation had created vis-à-vis her self-understanding within the political context of public and private: 'I didn't lie. I said, yes, we discuss things, but there is a level of honour ... I wouldn't discuss everything ... I've always had this split that you can go so far in your relationship with a group but actually you have a loyalty in your relationship.'<sup>221</sup> In emphasising the distinctions between the personal and the social which Women's Liberation taught its members, Crockford signalled how she had reconciled her loyalty to CMPP, her partner, and to Women's Liberation; in her mind she had created space for a hidden private world that was better kept out of the public arena for group discussion: 'What the women's movement did was, you could put all of your issues on the table and learn that this little bunch was absolutely primarily yours, oh this bunch is political and finances and so on, and yours to deal with and what it did, it helped instead of saying, god all of

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

these problems or issues, you learned which of these were for society to do something about' and which were not.<sup>222</sup> This internally negotiated position stood in contrast to the release other women found in the early consciousness-raising groups, which provided therapeutic forums where no private issues were out of bounds.<sup>223</sup>

The political and personal challenges Tufnell Park presented for CMPP members signalled the beginning of political and psychic demands facing men and women in the milieu, as they embarked on 'the long and difficult task' of transforming their daily lives and relations in accordance with the new politics.<sup>224</sup> The threat Marie Richman and Alicia Merret perceived to their identities as mothers, homemakers, and socialist women represented only the start of the internal dislocations that ran across the milieu, crossing lines of socio-economic background, political experience, education, and social and gendered roles. As a politics rooted in the personal lives of members, fractures and divisions were often deeply personal, sometimes highly emotional occurrences, especially in the early days when women and men were feeling their way in their efforts to change their personal lives. For the women especially commitment to the Tufnell Park group and to the new politics demanded several layers of realignment, emphasising, as it did, direct personal experience and awareness of one's own life as the first major step for the realisation of general oppression in society. Releasing themselves from 'the inner and outer bondages' necessitated a left politics that would allow legitimate space for emotional interiority to inform the microcosm of the everyday.<sup>225</sup> This entailed learning new ways of being political, but also the commitment for activists to live their politics, to make real changes in their own lives in ways that carried politics far more deeply into their internal selves beyond the demands CMPP had required.

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Lee Comer exemplified the openness she found in the Leeds consciousness-raising group she joined in 1969 when she admitted that 'we would talk about experiences that would made us feel bad as women, like the guy who paid me for sex, apart from you the only other people I have told were my women's group' - interview with Lee Comer, Leeds, 3<sup>rd</sup> June, 2009. Interviewing women who had participated in consciousness-raising groups in Scotland, Sarah Browne noted the 'liberationist narrative' running through the women's accounts – Sarah F. Browne, 'The Women's Liberation Movement in Scotland, c. 1968-1979' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Dundee, September 2009), p. 89.

<sup>224</sup> 'Nine Years Together: A History of a Women's Liberation Group', *Spare Rib*, 69, April, 1978, p. 43.

<sup>225</sup> Rowbotham, 'Women's Liberation and the New Politics', p. 30.

## Chapter Five

### The Adult Life of Non-Aligned and Trotskyist Activists

In the first half of the 1970s adult life in the activist terrain coincided with multiple layers of political, economic, social and psychological shifts. Whilst the international spectrum retained a powerful political point of focus, domestic political and economic upheavals, and the social transformations that followed the new politics made the external state and society a more immediate and engaging presence within the milieu. Activists' efforts to formulate radically new ways of being involved them in the challenging task of negotiating opposing cultural codes of the two social worlds in which they were situated.

This final chapter will continue to examine the relationship between external society and culture, and the social patterns and internal emotional condition of activists embarking on adult life. Amidst signs of increasing stratification on the part of non-aligned left and Trotskyist milieux, the personal politics of the WLM came to be felt at different levels of the political world. Non-aligned men and women, actively embracing the new politics, explored 'the internal experience – inside the home, inside the head, inside the bed – as well as the external, verifiable experience'.<sup>1</sup> This dual attention to external and internal meanings of politics realigned conceptions of personal and political, public and private in ways that sought to radically reshape how they lived and felt as social citizens as well as private internal beings. Without eschewing the identity politics of feminism or gay liberation, Trotskyist men and women continued to situate personal life within the traditionally demarcated arena of the private citizen. However, this chapter will show that in both non-aligned and Trotskyist arenas conceptions of personal, political, public and private often existed in fluid and competing states, because immersion within the activist world created multiple, sometimes fractured identities that women and men struggled to reconcile. Where the previous chapter raised

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<sup>1</sup> Michelene Wandor, 'The Small Group', in Michelene Wandor (ed.), *The Body Politic: Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement in Britain 1969-1972* (London, 1972), p. 114.

the spectre of the authorial father figure as a symbol of the traditional social order, this chapter will explore the trope of the collective mother as a symbol of the WLM and the social patterns accompanying a new female authority that came to inhabit activists' internal psychic worlds. The intention is to show how the subjectivity of the adult activist rested on a host of contradictions that arose from attempting to reconcile, at an individual, private level, the new social order that spread the new politics from the public sphere of the activist meeting room to the previously private sphere of the home.

Highlighting how social differences can be 'interwoven with conflicts ingrained in families, in friendships, [and] individuals', Luisa Passerini wrote of the contradictions on which identity is constructed, located not only in the private sphere, but often translated into the external locus of society.<sup>2</sup> This chapter will pursue this theme as part of the desire to trace the psychic imprint of two competing external, social and political forces: an austere perceived post-war world in which activists' memories of childhood were embedded, and the new political culture where they sought to embrace libertarian social and political patterns. The aim is to understand how internal dialogue in relation to these two cultural forces shaped socio-psychological life within the non-aligned and Trotskyist milieux, including perceptions of political selfhood, social relations and emotional connection to socialist feminist politics.

The first half of the chapter will examine these areas by continuing to focus attention on the non-aligned milieu surrounding CMPP, the first and second Tufnell Park Women's Liberation groups and the Belsize Lane group before moving on to examine the experiences of activists who joined the Trotskyist milieux of IS and IMG.

### **The Personal Politics of Motherhood**

The small consciousness-raising groups that characterised the early WLM underlined the political and psychological importance socialist feminists attached to process and affect when it came to

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<sup>2</sup> Luisa Passerini, *Autobiography of a Generation. Italy, 1968* (translated by Lisa Erdberg, Hanover, 1996), p. 23.

redefining the concept of politics.<sup>3</sup> Instead of a left politics that was situated externally to members' personal lives, defined in terms of effect, external structural theory, paper sales and mass demonstration tactics, Women's Liberation called on women to understand their relationship to the group and the movement in psychological terms of internal attachment and change.<sup>4</sup> This revised concept of revolution involved a commitment for members to participate politically by changing the way they lived as well as how they conducted themselves in the political arena. After the initial, sometimes hesitant steps of joining the group, women in the Tufnell Park milieu embarked on collective and individual efforts to incorporate the new politics into their personal lives and political spheres of activity. Yet, as they sought to make sense of the personal turmoil, confusion or simply curiosity they had each brought to the group, not only did they raise familiar contradictions about their social situation and cultural engagement, they also met unanticipated psychic challenges that arose from within themselves and between each other. The women's memories reveal how individual and collective experience within the milieu was profoundly shaped by the internal imprint each member brought from their upbringing, their relationship to external society and to the activist scene in which many had come of age. Alongside objections from some male partners that they take a greater share of childcare and domestic tasks, the greatest barriers came from within the women themselves, as they struggled to reconcile desire for individual and collective liberation with inner female selves which had been shaped by ingrained patterns of thinking, feeling and acting in accordance with the conservative social climate of girlhood. When considered alongside men's accounts, the women's experiences suggest the possibilities for expanding our understanding of liberation politics in relation to the impact of the new politics on individual activists and their web of familial, social and political relations. The process of remembering and speaking honestly about how

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<sup>3</sup> For details of the practice of consciousness-raising in the WLM, see Sue Bruley, 'From Women Awake, the Experience of Consciousness-Raising' in Feminist Anthology Collective (eds.), *No Turning-Back: Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement, 1975-80* (London, 1981), pp. 60-66; Sarah F. Browne, 'The Women's Liberation Movement in Scotland, c. 1968-1979' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Dundee, September 2009), pp. 87-95; Eve Setch, 'The Women's Liberation Movement in Britain, 1969-1979: Organisation, Creativity and Debate' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, Royal Holloway, July 2000), p. 36.

<sup>4</sup> See Sheila Rowbotham, 'The Beginnings of Women's Liberation in Britain', in *Dreams and Dilemmas: Collected Writings* (London, 1983), p. 35; 'Bringing the Revolution Back Home', *Shrew*, May, 1970, p. 19.

they had felt within their first Women's Liberation groups offered several women opportunities to voice emotions which at the time they had felt unable to share with members for fear of damaging relations and inflicting hurt. The fragility they portrayed shows the unstable psychological roots on which the women's early understandings of liberation rested. Where solidarity to the early movement had inhibited them from voicing personal sentiments that might have undermined their collective cause, reassessing their past internal selves presented the women with more meaningful interpretations of liberation that incorporated the deeply psychic ties to childhood selves they struggled to relinquish. Commitment to the small group and to the movement as a whole raised questions about every aspect of identity, challenging and reframing loyalties and relations as endeavours to realign concepts of personal and political presented new possibilities, variously fulfilled, for the women to reshape female social selfhood and to replace the traditionally male social order with a new internal female form.

As a group of women who had come together politically as young mothers, the related issues of childcare and the glorification of motherhood aroused the greatest questioning about female social and left selfhood because the discussions touched each of the women at their most vulnerable and unstable sites of identity. In the winter of 1970 Tufnell Park members read and talked about a paper written by Sheli Wortis on maternal attachment.<sup>5</sup> Based on her own preliminary study of mother-infant interaction, Wortis presented a critique of child psychologist John Bowlby's influential attachment theory, published by Penguin in his 1953 work, *Child Care and the Growth of Love*, which argued that children separated from their mothers were likely to suffer permanent emotional trauma.<sup>6</sup> She demonstrated the way in which the attachment theories had been interwoven into the socio-cultural framework of Western societies to bolster ideological arguments for confining women to the home.<sup>7</sup> She challenged social scientists and psychologists specialising in infant development to study infants' responses to their fathers, and men in general to

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<sup>5</sup> Nava, 'Rough Notes for the Belsize Lane, *Spare Rib* article', c. 1977, p. 3, MNA.

<sup>6</sup> See John Bowlby, *Child Care and the Growth of Love* (London, 1953).

<sup>7</sup> Rochelle Paul Wortis, 'Attachment Behaviour Reconsidered', Draft copy of a paper for the conference of Biopsychology of Development, New York, 20 November, c. 1969-1970, pp. 3-4, MNA.

determine what effect paternal or masculine interaction had on child behaviour in relation to maternal or feminine interaction. Finally, she highlighted the importance of an overall stable and stimulating environment for children whether provided by the mother, father, or in fact several people.<sup>8</sup> For Mica Nava the paper, which Wortis later presented at the first Women's Liberation Conference, provided 'the single most significant and liberating experience of the early movement'.<sup>9</sup> Having first read Bowlby's work as a sixteen-year old at Bedales School, by the time she became a mother in her mid-twenties 'the post-war *zeitgeist*'<sup>10</sup> of family and motherhood had virtually offset the rebellious instinct that had led her eighteen-year old self to vow never to marry. Like many other women of her age she 'accepted without question', albeit with 'increasing disquiet and resentment', the notion that the care of the children was primarily her responsibility and she felt 'wracked with guilt about the harm' she could do to her children by her absence.<sup>11</sup>

Wortis' critique resonated because it touched upon the internal division Nava felt between herself as a 'natural' 'earth mother' and radical. Delighting in the physical sensation of pregnancy, breast feeding, and affective bonds shared with her children, simultaneously she sought an environment that might accommodate her intellectual and radical instincts with her relatively privileged, middle-class background.<sup>12</sup> In 1969, when she arrived at the Tufnell Park group, this internal tension was heightened by the '68 upheavals. Nava revealed how once inside the group conflicting opinions between members exacerbated the psychic tension between public and private, collective and individual, because overt and implicit criticisms from other women cut sharply across both spheres. When Wortis employed the term 'bourgeois solutions' to refer to the women's use of au pairs as a current childcare solution, she struck at the core of Nava's unease over her upbringing and status. She thought, 'what, am I supposed to give up my bourgeois solutions and have collective

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, pp. 6-7, MNA.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 3, MNA.

<sup>10</sup> Angela Davis, 'Critical Perspective on British Social Surveys and Community Studies and their Accounts of Married Life, c. 1954-70', *Cultural and Social History*, 6, March, 2009, p. 49.

<sup>11</sup> Nava, 'Rough Notes', p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Mica Nava, London, 20<sup>th</sup> November, 2009.

households?’<sup>13</sup> Nava seemed to feel Wortis’ comments acutely because of how strongly she admired, even envied, the intellectual and political assuredness Wortis displayed. It had been she, after all, who had provided Nava with the connection she found with Women’s Liberation as a site for a new political identity when all her other instincts were pulling her away from a women’s group.<sup>14</sup>

Present within the narrative of each Tufnell Park and Belsize Lane respondent was the divided female and activist self. Already torn as mothers and women between the image of contented motherhood as an embodiment of female selfhood, and the frustrations, loneliness and desires they suppressed for identities beyond maternal life, early discussions addressing these feelings added further layers of division between the collective political identity women discovered in the group, and individual feelings that stood at odds with women who they otherwise felt emotionally connected to as socialist sisters. In contrast to discussions about childcare, which to Nava ‘seemed to be about the possibilities of ridding ourselves of the constraints of the past’, discussions about the ‘myth of motherhood’ seemed to call into question the very existence of ‘the intense emotional and physical relationships’ between mother and child upon which her maternal identity rested.<sup>15</sup> Played out within the political arena of the small group, and in articles printed in *Shrew*, the discussions extended the critiques Wortis had initially voiced in relation to the cultural influence of Bowlby’s attachment theory. They criticised the post-war discourses of motherhood for providing ideological justification for withdrawing women from the labour market, and containing them within the domestic sphere where, by perpetuating the myth that through having children women proved their legitimacy as ‘real women’, they were to service men and children to facilitate capitalist enterprise.<sup>16</sup> Instead of providing women with a deeply rewarding experience, it was argued, too often motherhood isolated women so that ‘her helpless child’ became ‘her jail’.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Nava, ‘Rough Notes’, p. 4, MNA.

<sup>16</sup> Caroline Roth, ‘Women’s Liberation’, *Red Camden*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1970, p. 12.

<sup>17</sup> *Shrew*, October, 1970, p. 1. See also Lee Comer, *The Myth of Motherhood* (Nottingham, 1972).

In the Tufnell Park group Nava perceived such critiques to be directed at her personally. In a *Red Camden* article CMPP and Tufnell Park member Caroline Roth had characterised Tufnell Park members as still ‘victims of the myth of motherhood’, condemning the claims to female legitimacy as having children and loving them, as mere ‘token payments’.<sup>18</sup> However, it was Sue O’Sullivan with whom Nava openly disagreed about pregnancy, childhood and mothering, and who left her feeling ‘confused’ and ‘defensive’.<sup>19</sup> The women’s experiences of childbirth and motherhood placed them poles apart, and all the more vulnerable to reading each other’s comments as personal criticisms because O’Sullivan was pregnant with her second child and Nava breast-feeding her third son.<sup>20</sup> O’Sullivan’s feelings about the oppressive nature of motherhood reinforced the criticisms Nava heard from members like Roth, whose criticisms rankled more acutely since Roth had yet to become a mother herself.<sup>21</sup> Reflecting back on those tense early days from the perspective of the late 1970s, when Nava sought to illustrate the ‘complex and unpredictable process’ by which political discussion was ‘profoundly affected by the personal’, she wrote: ‘I had invested a great deal of energy in bearing children over the previous six years, and was very ready completely to restructure the process of childcare but I could not bear to concede that all I’d been through, that the sometimes rich and sensual feelings of pregnancy and babies were mere illusion, that I was a victim of a myth perpetuated by capitalism.’<sup>22</sup> Not only did the criticisms strike at the very core of her physiological and psychic self as ‘earth mother’, but the rational, intellectual tone of the arguments with which she felt unable to disagree, struck at the very core of the divisions she faced between the intellectual and political self she sought and the rich emotional maternal life she relished.<sup>23</sup>

O’Sullivan’s account of herself in relation to the discussion, and the underlining tension she experienced with Nava, confirms the picture of the fragility and torn identities Tufnell Park women maintained between their inner and outer selves. Her own conflicting reading of the affair suggests

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<sup>18</sup> Roth, ‘Women’s Liberation’, p. 12.

<sup>19</sup> Nava, ‘Rough Notes’, p. 3, MNA.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Mica Nava.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Nava, ‘Rough Notes’, pp. 4-5, MNA.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

the deeply individual place from whence it was possible for women to remain situated inside the new collective. The constant, often intense focus O'Sullivan felt the women maintained on motherhood aroused 'emotional, psychic conflict' with Nava because listening to her passionate tales of motherhood confirmed her innermost fears that she was a failure as a mother. Nava embodied the very image of idealised motherhood O'Sullivan had held since her college years when she fulfilled the role of 'dorm mom'.<sup>24</sup> Hearing Nava talk about these feelings of maternal love compounded her disappointment that she had been unable to experience the anticipated instantaneous love for her newborn son: 'Mica said that giving birth was the closest thing to having an orgasm she had ever experienced. I had had the absolute opposite experience ... I can remember feeling that she had the moral high ground; that that's what everybody would want, you know, and somehow I had failed.'<sup>25</sup>

#### **Gender Roles in the Tufnell Park Women's Liberation Collectives**

O'Sullivan's oral and written accounts of political and personal subjectivity in the Tufnell Park Women's Liberation groups testify to the way in which individual women in this milieu invested different components of self within their small female collectives. After the division of the first Tufnell Park group in April 1970, she joined the re-formed second group. The following month she recorded in *Shrew* her feelings of 'solidarity' in relation to women in the first group, at odds with sensations of herself as an outsider in the second.<sup>26</sup> Her dislocations suggest the diverging ways in which it was possible for women to invest themselves and to feel grounded in the WL group on a private and inner as well as on a more public collective plane. The affective ties of solidarity O'Sullivan found with women in the first group were interwoven within sensations of optimism and belief she and other women held in the wider Women's Liberation politics. In 'Rambling Notes', she wrote: 'I at times could falter over WL intellectually but emotionally I knew it was right ... The hope

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<sup>24</sup> Interview with Sue O'Sullivan, London, 19<sup>th</sup> January, 2009.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Sue Cowley, 'Rambling Notes', *Shrew*, May 1970, p. 3.

behind everything we did was that the women we reached would begin to question their roles in all sorts of ways.<sup>27</sup> Her sense of political and affective belonging derived from her self-understanding as an agent in a wider female socialist cause even if, at times, she felt individually removed from her small group. For O'Sullivan the 'very, very important' relationships she formed in the first Tufnell Park group were 'primarily contained for me within the project of the small group and whatever activities and however else we situated ourselves within the movement'.<sup>28</sup>

The psychic dislocation women in the Tufnell Park milieu displayed between how they situated themselves individually and collectively within the small group and the WLM shows that during the period of political transition on the activist left, between the demise of the VSC and the ascendancy of WL, the internal divisions that had plagued many women amidst the male dominated VSC scene continued to prevail in new forms, as they sought to realign themselves as political and social beings. The point of continuity between the divisions related to those aspects of the female self which remained firmly grounded in the psychic landscape of post-war girlhood. Opening up oneself to being vulnerable in front of the female collective was for many women at odds with their social upbringing and the institutional culture of British post-war education that had underlined the strict demarcation between public and private life. O'Sullivan reflected on the cultural distinctions she observed between herself, other North American women in the first Tufnell Park group, and English members who, against the sometimes 'brash' social confidence the American women displayed, seemed to be 'all so quietly spoken and reticent'.<sup>29</sup>

Angela Melamed was one of these quieter English women. She defined her young self as coming from a 'very repressed English family' and remaining 'in many ways very conventional'.<sup>30</sup> However, she was unable to recall any situation where this background inhibited her ability to talk freely with the other Tufnell Park members. Instead, the delight she expressed in feeling herself a participant in the early movement signalled how the egalitarian ethos that derived from the

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Sue O'Sullivan.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Angela Melamed, London, 10<sup>th</sup> October, 2009.

women's shared understanding of themselves as political pioneers, shaped an empowering collective identity transcending the social and intellectual insecurity she felt in relation to her activist husband:

It was a very positive, supportive environment and we were very much feeling our way ... I mean I think the whole 'personal is political' is a cliché now, but I think it really did mean something, it did help you to see that the family life is socially constructed ... I think I am a very conventional person in many ways and yes, I had seen 'politics' as one thing and 'personal' as something else, and it was the first time and it was exciting.<sup>31</sup>

The point at which Melamed felt divided from Tufnell Park members occurred at precisely the same point where she had felt apart from CMPP members including her own husband, i.e. in the intellectually discursive arena:

I do remember really enjoying it, although *again* I do remember that some people had a really quite academic agenda. There was a whole kind of psycho-analytic sort of school of writing and so on, which I think had quite a strong influence, which I could never really access ... I think when we split and we became much more local groups, and we had small children, it was more around the sort of lived local experience. It was great.<sup>32</sup>

The distinction Melamed made between the academic agenda of the first Tufnell Park group and the community-oriented action of the second is notable because it signals how affective attachment to Women's Liberation was for her removed from an intellectual arena of politics she associated with the post-war social order in which she deferred to male authority.

The discussions and activities of the first Tufnell Park group do not corroborate Melamed's understanding that the first group was overtly more academically-oriented than the second. Throughout 1969 members of the first Tufnell Park group interviewed women at the February Ideal Home Exhibition, attended the equal pay rally in Trafalgar Square on 18 May, 1969, and handed out leaflets at the photographic exhibition on women held in April at the Indoor Coventry Arena (ICA).<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with Angela Melamed.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Mica Nava, 'A history of the first Tufnell Park group', c.1977, pp. 1-3, MNA.

Both the first and second groups were keenly discussing issues surrounding motherhood and childcare, which found practical application in the childcare groups each group attempted to set up: the crèche in the case of the first Tufnell Park group and the Tufnell Park playschool and baby-sitting rota in the case of the second.<sup>34</sup> Throughout her interview Melamed struggled to remember details of her experiences within the CMPP and Tufnell Park milieu; her narrative was disjointed and emerged uneasily, and it may well have been the case that she confused her time in the second group with her involvement in the Wittington Community Centre that began in 1972, two years after she joined the second Tufnell Park group.<sup>35</sup> The significance of the distinctions she made lie in what they reveal about how she felt most at ease in sites of discussion or activity that rested in her identity and experience as a mother, and in a realm of female political authority that was removed from the intellectual insecurity and political inexperience she had felt in relation to her husband.

The insecurities the women variously displayed amidst their small groups were embedded in the social and cultural conditioning they had received as girls and young women, in Melamed's case in the social and cultural messages she had received in her childhood home, school, workplace and marriage, which had led her to defer opinion to the authorial intellectual male voice of her left-wing father, the male scientists she had worked with, and her politically active husband.<sup>36</sup> The collective female agency women like O'Sullivan and Melamed derived strength from signified the symbolic presence of the WLM as a new female authority on the left that brought a new psychic power within their milieu. In many of the women's narratives this new female authority acquired a distinctly intellectual and academic form in the leitmotif of the scholarship girl. Where a woman such as Mica Nava had found a collective, public identity in the opportunities WL had provided for carving out a much-longed for academic and political identity, the intellectual shape of the female collective was central to the power she found within it:

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<sup>34</sup> For details of the childcare groups the second Tufnell Park set up, see Sue Cowley, 'Rambling Notes', p. 3, 'Playgroup', *Shrew*, May, 1970, p. 4, and 'More than Minding', *Shrew*, Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 6.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Angela Melamed.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

There is no doubt about it that feminism alerted me, gave me the confidence to become an intellectual ... I went from not being very advanced to feeling it is okay, and it was a passion for the political moment. I think... the men couldn't cope, but I don't sort of blame them and the women, we discovered something and we were so strong and we didn't know how strong we were but we were so strong that we sort of actually destroyed a lot of stuff around us. You create and you destroy.<sup>37</sup>

For Nava there was a direct link between the collective power she found in the public sphere of her Women's Liberation group and the individual agency she transferred to the private sphere of the home.

Symbolic of the interweaving of personal and political, individual and collective agency Tufnell Park women transferred from the group to the domestic sphere was the domestic setting of meetings. In the Tufnell Park milieu WL literally entered the private sphere of members' homes on a weekly basis, evoking a long-standing symbol of female emancipation that had been central to the passionate undertone of 1920s feminism: the room.<sup>38</sup> Whereas for generations of women growing up in early twentieth-century Britain yearning for a room of one's own had signified a search for a site of individual refuge from the anxiety of an uncertain female future, for Nava the meeting room expressed the opposite, an assertive engagement with the body politic and the promise of the long-deferred change in the female self.<sup>39</sup> The domestic meeting place represented the arrival of the new female authority within her own life and on the wider left, displacing, as it did, the individual political assertiveness her husband had previously exercised. Its role in facilitating her newly intertwined roles of mother and feminist intellectual also underlined her own prominent status in the small group, and as an agent in the growing movement.

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with Mica Nava.

<sup>38</sup> For discussion of the relationship between female empowerment and the domestic setting of Women's Liberation meetings, see Browne, 'The Women's Liberation Movement in Scotland', pp. 92-93.

<sup>39</sup> Sally Alexander, 'Room of One's Own: 1920s Feminist Utopia', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 11:3, 2000, pp. 273-287. The symbol of the room took on a similar meaning for Lee Comer in her account of her experiences in the Leeds Women's Liberation group she joined in 1969; she claimed the spacious downstairs room in her and her partner's recently acquired flat for use by her WL group: 'I thought, oh look at this room, we could have all the women's group here ... and of course all of the phone calls were for me and not him, and then of course I popped this baby out as well, and so I was more of a star than anyone else.' Interview with Lee Comer, Leeds, 3<sup>rd</sup> June, 2009.

Notable exceptions where the Tufnell Park collective accorded more closely to the 'transitional space' the room had performed for early twentieth-century women occurred in the accounts of Ann Hunt and Judith Milner. The two women had met after Milner became active on behalf of the BRPF alongside Hunt's husband, IMG and VSC activist, David Robinson. According to Hunt they were drawn 'closer together' by a 'shared connection' through their working-class family backgrounds, by 'a belief in activism' as well as a dislocation with both VSC and the Tufnell Park milieu.<sup>40</sup> Unable or reluctant to internalise the collective female identity or what Lynne Segal terms the 'grounding of self' that most women found through shared political struggle, for these women the WL group remained confined to a place for momentary escape or desire rather than an entry route into new social roles and political engagement.<sup>41</sup> Hunt's social insecurities in the company of the mainly middle-class, university-educated women prevented her from accessing the personal, exploratory space that other women gained reassurance from. She explained: 'They were very well spoken, most of them. I felt stupid really and I felt patronised slightly too'.<sup>42</sup> Disappointed by the group's failure to meet her hopes for personal transformation, Tufnell Park became a site that provoked but contained her private desires: 'I wanted to support them and to be part of the group ... I wanted things to change at home. I hoped that other women in the group may have found ways of dealing with these issues and that I could learn from them ... The reality was that there was mainly theoretical discussions at the meetings. I do not remember discussing my personal problems very much.'<sup>43</sup> Unlike her friend, Milner felt no desire to be absorbed by the female collective; she took most pleasure from the legitimacy the group accorded her to gain private time away from her life as a wife and mother, transferring the role of compliant outsider she had fulfilled in the VSC: 'I didn't welcome a group identity and was always struggling to maintain an individuality, but certainly in the early women's group ... there was a great feeling of struggling out of a net.' The collective assumed

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Lynne Segal 'Who do you think you are? Feminist Memoir Writing', *New Formations*, No. 67, Summer, 2009, p. 127.

<sup>42</sup> Correspondence from Ann Hunt to the author, 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2010, p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

an uncomfortable presence when the company of other members forced her to confront long-held, underlying insecurities: 'I lagged behind with a lot of different things that women did, but it raises the point that in a mixed group of people I didn't think that way but in a women's group I did.'<sup>44</sup>

The women's memories showcase the simultaneously unsettling and empowering presence the new female authority raised within members of Women's Liberation collectives, in what were new political sites in the Tufnell Park milieu. Not only did the new politics demand a much more emotional, personal investment from the women as political beings, one that could provide freedom from previously submissive social roles, but it also raised searching questions about internal identity and social life patterns that prompted members to reflect on themselves in relation to other women. In this respect the personal became not only political, but also public and often comparative, as the feminist conscience encouraged supportive collective practices alongside critical scrutiny over how far members were each striving for change.

### **Childcare**

Inside the Tufnell Park and Belsize Lane groups the women's efforts to retune their understanding of how to be political as affective beings was an inclusively female concern. Outside, however, their attempts to translate their new politics to the personal, previously private arena involved a much more mutual effort that called upon husbands and male partners to engage in a joint process of realigning their traditional roles as women and men, wives and husbands, mothers and fathers. From the women's early discussions in the first Tufnell Park group liberation was implicitly understood to mean challenging socially-determined, 'historically considered limits and "natural states"' that constrained women's and men's lives.<sup>45</sup> Whilst at a discursive level this meant understanding the social and economic roots of the family as an oppressive institution, in everyday life this demanded that women and men formulate practical alternatives to the social practices surrounding the post-war nuclear family.

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<sup>44</sup> Interview with Judith Milner, London, 10<sup>th</sup> October, 2008.

<sup>45</sup> Ellen Adams, 'Family', *Shrew*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1970, p. 5.

The importance of developing alternative practices of childcare, where men could take a more equal part in caring for children, was a logical first step in the debates on maternal attachment and the glorification of motherhood that sought to ameliorate alienating social roles of men as economic provider and women as child-bearer and care-giver. Projects such as the first Tufnell Park crèche and the second Tufnell Park play group were designed to respond to the political debates inside the milieu by providing alternative units of socialisation for children outside the nuclear family where several adults, men and women, could be involved in 'helping children grow'.<sup>46</sup> However, activists participating in the radical Berlin-inspired crèche soon discovered the difficulties of attempting to transplant political ideas directly from one national political arena to another amidst differing political, social and economic contexts.<sup>47</sup> Sue Cowley (née O'Sullivan) reflected on the problems in *Shrew*: 'The German experience was not totally relevant, here we were in England with no "movement" to base ourselves on, no storefront to provide a public and permanent place for the crèche and not much idea of what could hold us together besides the kids. We came out of our separate isolations and had no unifying experiences.'<sup>48</sup> Despite the common concerns to break down the barriers between public and private life, and to embed new childcare practices at the heart of new community endeavours, the British state was not the relatively authoritarian West German Federal Republic, and men and women around the Tufnell Park milieu did not share their counterparts' preoccupation with the need to counter a Nazi heritage.<sup>49</sup> Whereas political education in the Storefront Day Care Centres imbued a defiant confrontational air, endeavouring to 'consciously' attack 'the foundation and aims of authoritarian education', far more central to the early 1970s childcare projects that developed amongst the Tufnell Park milieu was the emphasis on nurturing; the desire to 'discourage the development of a hierarchical pattern of relationships' necessitated developing 'feelings of mutual commitment, solidarity and trust' amongst adults and

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<sup>46</sup> Adams, 'The Family', p. 8.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Sue O'Sullivan; interview with Henry and Sheli Wortis; Sheli Wortis, 'The People's Crèche', *Red Camden*, Vol. 1, No. 9, 1969, pp. 3-4.

<sup>48</sup> Sue Cowley, 'The Tufnell Park Crèche', *Shrew*, Summer, 1969, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> Wolfgang Kraushaar, 'Hitler's Children? The German 1968 Movement in the Shadow of the Nazi Past' in Ingo Cornils and Sarah Waters (eds.), *Memories of 1968: International Perspectives* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 101-102.

children alike.<sup>50</sup> It does seem, however, that the Tufnell Park women shared similar difficulties to their West German counterparts when it came to men's tendencies to want to 'co-opt' the new childcare projects to fit their own political agenda, and their inclination to run the proceedings.<sup>51</sup>

Activists' commitment to these mutual, egalitarian forms of social interaction arose out of their new roles as parents amidst a radical milieu in which their own childhood memories of familial and social relationships remained an influential, sometimes haunting presence. At the heart of the personal endeavours to cultivate more open, loving relationships the echoes of the paternal trope signified the reactive essence of the new personal politics. In the home as well as in the WL groups women and men, lacking personal models on which to draw, looked inwardly to adapt the alternative social and political practices they read and heard about in other national contexts to their own personal situations. The practices they developed, whether inside private couple-occupied homes or collective households, were designed to respond to their everyday social, economic, political and emotional needs as activists, citizens and parents.

In 1972 Sue Crockford left CMPP to focus her energies on the Children's Community Centre, a parent-controlled, collective childcare nursery that was set up at 123 Dartmouth Park Hill, in Highgate New Town.<sup>52</sup> Informing the project were the new political ideas mothers and fathers introduced from their involvement with WL. The pamphlet, outlining the practices of the nursery, stated: 'We do not want to reproduce the social relationships present in society at large and are trying to develop different ways for children to relate to each other and to adults ... We believe that it is possible to rear different kinds of people: people who can work together (at school they call it

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<sup>50</sup> An Authors' Collective (eds.), *Storefront Day Care Centres: The Radical Berlin Experiment* (translated by Catherine Lord and Renée Watkins, Boston, 1973), p. xv, 'More than Minding', *Shrew*, Vo. 3, No. 2, 1971, p. 6.

<sup>51</sup> Cowley, 'The Tufnell Park Crèche'. For details of the West German case, see the Resolution of the Action Council for Women's Liberation, West Berlin Chapter, Berlin, October 16, 1968, in An Authors' Collective (eds.), *Storefront Day Care Centres*, p. 25.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Sue Crockford. For details of a similar Women's Liberation-inspired playgroup, set up in Calthorpe Park, Birmingham, see 'Out of the Pumpkin Shell: Running a Women's Liberation Group', (Birmingham, 1975), in the Private Archive of Andrew Tolson (hereafter ATA).

“cheating”), who support and care for each other and who are sensitive to each others’ needs’.<sup>53</sup>

Crockford reflected on these beliefs in relation to her newly discovered role as a mother and her own experiences of child-adult relationships:

When you have a kid you suddenly realise there is nothing more important. This first couple of years are crucial. You screw a kid up and you’ve fucked him for life, so we absolutely believed in alternative childcare ... My parents loved each other for which I am amazingly glad, but they didn’t have what I would call an intelligent, creative, thoughtful, loving relationship ... So there we all are trying to make relationships with no models at all.<sup>54</sup>

Crockford’s participation in the Children’s Community Centre was also a response to her own social and economic needs as a politically active mother living in north London. Like the other collective childcare projects that activists in the Tufnell Park milieu developed, the 123 nursery involved WL members who, as mothers, ‘realised that the only way they would get nursery provision before their own children went to school would be to start their own nursery’.<sup>55</sup> The projects reflected the severely limited and often inadequate childcare provision that existed in the densely populated, predominantly working-class residential areas of north London where a child of three would likely have to wait at least a year for a nursery place.<sup>56</sup> As such, they aimed to involve local women and men to meet the childcare needs of poor, working-class families in the immediate neighbourhood. The Children’s Community Centre, hoping to forge strong links with the local New Town community, echoed the wider local focus that underlay the non-aligned new left milieux and their projects growing up around north London from the early 1970s onwards. From CMPP to the Camden Community Workshop and the milieu surrounding the alternative local newspapers, The *Hackney*

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<sup>53</sup> ‘Children’s Community Centre: our experiences of collective child care’, a pamphlet written by members involved in running the project, c. 1972, Private Archive of Sue Crockford, p. 7; ‘123 Children’s Community Centre’, pamphlet on the ideas and experiences of planning and opening the Centre, WL, 7SHR/P/03/4, Box 10. For film footage of the nursery told by the parents and children themselves, see *One Two Three: Our Experiences of Collective Childcare*, directed by Sue Crockford, 1975.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Sue Crockford.

<sup>55</sup> ‘Children’s Community Centre’, P. 3, SCA.

<sup>56</sup> ‘More than Minding’, p. 6.

*Gutter Press* and *The Islington Gutter Press*, the 123 nursery formed part of activists' endeavours to apply the new left liberation politics to the predominantly working-class neighbourhoods in which they lived as international as much as local citizens.<sup>57</sup> The Centre's local orientation spoke of members' ambitions to transcend class as well as gender hierarchies as part of a 'consciousness-raising process' for all concerned.<sup>58</sup> Ultimately, this latter aim faltered on the social reality of the voluntary rota system; working-class, full-time working parents were able to give little if any time to running the nursery.<sup>59</sup> Dialogue with the local neighbourhood was also uneasy, as many older New Town residents expressed resentment that, in providing childcare places for squatters, families on social security, unsupported mothers, and middle-class families, the Centre was further destabilising the local neighbourhood at a time of redevelopment when the Council were refusing to spend money on repairs for older houses.<sup>60</sup>

In the initial years of Women's Liberation the alternative projects of Tufnell Park activists supplemented socially mainstream, private childcare arrangements the couples continued to make. Such patterns reflected that, before libertarian cohorts developed in north London from 1972, active through squatting and alternative lifestyles, the Tufnell Park milieu represented a transitional radical cohort, poised between the post-war social model and the new collective life. Tufnell Park and Belsize Lane members often took turns in sharing childcare between themselves to allow each other the valued space for activity and self that Judith Milner recalled. Ann Hunt remembered that fellow Tufnell Park member Wisty Hoyland periodically looked after her children.<sup>61</sup> In 1970 women and men around the second Tufnell Park group set up a baby-sitting rota as an immediate, short-term

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<sup>57</sup> Testament to the confluence of libertarian new left politics and local community politics was the political statements of the alternative papers which echoed the self-determination of international liberation struggles inspiring the activist journalists and editorial collectives. The *Hackney Gutter Press* proclaimed a desire for the newspaper to serve as 'a weapon to fight for our own control of Hackney'. *Hackney Gutter Press*, No. 4, c. 1972, p. 1. The *Islington Gutter Press* claimed to be 'on the side of working people' and 'opposed to the planners, property-owners, speculators and the commercial forces' that had brought about the "crisis of the city". It aimed to provide a forum bringing together claimants, tenants, squatters, teachers and students who wanted 'to control change'. *Islington Gutter Press*, No. 1, 1972, p. 2.

<sup>58</sup> 'Children's Community Centre', p. 3, SCA.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, p. 15.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4.

<sup>61</sup> Correspondence from Ann Hunt to the author, 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2010.

solution to women's isolation, out of recognition that a full-scale playgroup would take time to create.<sup>62</sup> Sheli Wortis' critical reference to the use of au pairs was no doubt made in full awareness that in the absence of effective alternatives, as professional working parents and political activists, she and her husband saw no choice but to employ mainstream childcare practices normally reserved for the middle-and upper-middle strata of society.

### **The Yellow Brick Wall**

How far men and women from the Tufnell Park milieu had already, by mid-1970, begun to successfully incorporate co-operative principles into their daily lives and social relations could be gleaned from observing their weekly Sunday gatherings on Parliament Hill Fields. The gatherings had expanded from the original CMPP core to encompass members and their families from the second Tufnell Park and Belsize Lane groups. Mica Nava highlighted their dual political and socio-psychological purpose for men and women alike. For the men, she noted, 'this was an opportunity for them not only to play v.b.[volley ball] but also to watch the way in which we related to each other (among ourselves?), to get to know the other women and to meet other men in the same position as themselves'.<sup>63</sup> The 'most significant feature of the picnics in the long-term', though, she saw as helping to provide collective support and reassurance for the women as principal agents of the new politics. They enabled them to 'establish connections with each others' children, men and friends so that our relation to each other was broadened and no longer confined to the context of meeting and the movement'.<sup>64</sup>

Implicit within Nava's narrative was the political and emotional upheaval women and men in the milieu were facing as activists, parents, and sexual, loving partners. Her reflections also raise the question of how far the new social and domestic practices evolved out of a mutual arrangement between couples or whether the impetus came from the women, supported by their small groups.

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<sup>62</sup> Sue Cowley, 'Rambling Notes', p. 3.

<sup>63</sup> Mica Nava, 'Volley Ball and Picnics', Rough notes for the *Spare Rib* article, c. 1977, p. 1, MNA.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

The fact that the men liked to come to these picnics, Nava inferred, reflected their healing purpose for private couples, and the male collective, reassuring the men as political and sexual beings: 'Over the years those most involved with us had felt quite threatened by their exclusion from our meetings and activities.'<sup>65</sup> That they had not, by 1971, progressed as far as many of the women would have liked in challenging traditional gender roles and the sexual division of labour was evident from observing the children's interaction with their parents. In this respect, the gatherings put the men on trial: 'They had to demonstrate the quality of their relationship with the children. Often they only demonstrated their ineffectiveness. Many of the children were very young and still quite dependent; it was sometimes difficult for some of the women to play for any length of time without the kids demanding their attention.'<sup>66</sup> For Nava such an incident represented 'an almost shameful demonstration of our inability to progress beyond the stage of consciousness-raising'.<sup>67</sup> The importance she attached to presenting a visual picture of transformed domestic practice echoed Judith Milner's sentiments about the capacity of the new female authority to evoke women's inner self-critic and to hold themselves up for comparison with women around them. Nava's account shows both the internal pressures that existed to publically demonstrate personal change, and the frequent disjuncture between internal and external life. The scrutiny that women like Nava were exercising amidst the company of fellow WL members, their men and children, reveals the insecurity the new personal politics aroused on the part of female activists whose psychic lives were still deeply embedded within the post-war maternal ideology they had rejected as new political beings. Nava characterised the crux of the dilemma facing her and other women in her milieu: 'not only to recognise our own complicity in tolerating what was suddenly so patently intolerable, but also how to distinguish between what of our old lives had to be jettisoned and what was worth keeping'.<sup>68</sup>

Nava's narrative also draws attention to the psychic tension hanging uncomfortably between the sexes during this transitional period for non-aligned activists. In public and private

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>67</sup> Mica Nava, *Changing Cultures: Feminism, Youth and Consumerism* (London, 1992), p. 18.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p. 17.

spheres women struggled to manage their own as well as their partners' uncertain responses to the changes being demanded of them as socially-constructed, gendered beings. Many of the tensions arising over domestic responsibilities in the home showed that social constraints and dilemmas that had been a feature of early post-war middle-class living remained an enduring feature of activist parental life even after the immediate arrival of Women's Liberation, as both sexes faced the challenge of suddenly rejecting '29 years of social moulding'.<sup>69</sup> Wisty Hoyland was not unsympathetic to the plight of her husband, *Black Dwarf* and *7-Days* journalist, John Hoyland, when she detailed the 'crisis situation' that had arisen in their relationship: 'A. spent a large part of his time at political meetings or discussions with friends, or writing in his study ... I demanded that he take an equal share in looking after the kids ... At first he refused to agree to this until I found something to do as productive, idealistic and useful to society as his work was – this response, of course, carried with it the assumption that my work was menial, meaningless, and totally useless to anyone.'<sup>70</sup> Through involvement in the second Tufnell Park group she had acquired 'a hypercritical awareness of my own oppression' that made her sensitive to the challenges of 'giving up privileges'.<sup>71</sup> The contradictions women carried into their small groups between the equal social and intellectual expectations they had been fed at school and university, and the traditional social expectations that remained on them as wives and mothers often remained personal obstacles that were difficult to overcome outside the sustaining womb of the group. Hunt recalled that, whilst she found it helpful to be able to call upon other parents in the milieu to baby-sit, the need to reciprocate did not help to resolve her dilemma as the wife of a full-time activist still struggling to attain a more equitable division of labour: 'David was often out at meetings in the evenings and I was then needed to look after our children.'<sup>72</sup>

Struggles often only truly began to arise in activist homes once women's involvement in WL groups initiated a change of consciousness, and they began to see previously personal issues as

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<sup>69</sup> 'Charity begins at home', *Shrew*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1971, p. 4.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Correspondence from Ann Hunt to the author, 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2009, p. 6.

collective social dilemmas. Whilst Hunt's struggle remained a largely private affair, in March 1971 Hoyland turned ongoing disputes with her husband into a public political affair when she consulted her Tufnell Park group for advice and support. Members responded by calling an emergency meeting for three days time which all the men were asked to attend.<sup>73</sup> Yet the 'rather limp' outcome indicated that attempts to resolve common personal problems through public exposure and collective male-female discussion remained an idealistic hope during this fragile, transitional phase in the couples' lives.<sup>74</sup> Discussion between Tufnell Park members revealed that Hoyland and her husband were not alone in their difficulties resolving tensions over childcare, housework or her struggle 'to begin to define herself and her needs' away from her role as care-giver.<sup>75</sup> Efforts to distinguish the personal from the social were immensely problematic at a time when, especially for men outside the WL group, all dilemmas felt inextricably private affairs. The meeting was intended to be neither a theoretical discussion of alternative ways of living nor 'a personal vendetta', but a safe political arena for mutual discussion and resolution. However, attempts to 'get down to basics' failed to transpire for several reasons. Neither sex opened up to the other because only the women shared the security of familiarity from their ongoing group meetings; the men knew few others present.<sup>76</sup> In this uncertain environment individuals felt 'nervous', 'shy' or simply uncomfortable. Where earlier efforts to incorporate male partners into WL meetings had seen men voicing disproportionately loud opinions, by 1971 women had redefined the criteria for political conduct in the small group.<sup>77</sup> Men had no direct experience of consciousness-raising and no political or social model upon which to draw to open up the sort of personal, public dialogue the Tufnell Park women

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<sup>73</sup> 'Meeting the Men', *Shrew*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1971, p. 5.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> In 1969 Jan Williams recorded the origins of the Peckham Rye Women's Liberation group in *Shrew*. Only after Juliet Mitchell and Hilary Rawlings attended the Sunday evening meetings and prompted women to exclude the men from the group did the women feel free to talk 'honestly', away from the safe topic of the crèche, on the topic of women's oppression in relation to their lives. See Jan Williams, 'Peckham Rye', *Shrew*, reprinted in a Special Review Issue, March, 1970, p. 7.

hoped for. In this new, intimate setting issues that had come out in Tufnell Park meetings failed to materialise as tasks for political action.<sup>78</sup>

### **Iguana Woman and the New Man**

The emergency meeting pointed to the parallel personal and collective social fissures discernible in the Tufnell Park milieu by the early 1970s. The new politics widened pre-existing tensions in already fragile couple relationships, but private struggles also signified wider socio-psychological fractures on the part of the non-aligned male left, as Women's Liberation began to challenge the very essence of the political masculinity that left men had internalised since their early days in the VSC network.<sup>79</sup>

The men's inability to open themselves up to the mixed group formed part of a collective internal silence on the non-aligned male left during the transitional years between the emergence of Women's Liberation and the appearance of the first men's groups in the summer and early autumn of 1973.<sup>80</sup> When read against the early men's meetings, the silence spoke of internal dislocations on the part of non-aligned men that would form the basis for a new masculine left movement in the second half of the 1970s.<sup>81</sup>

The conflict between the Hoyland couple touched upon the disjuncture in gender relations that arose in response to role reversals taking place in the milieu. Despite initial resistance, Hoyland did eventually concede to make changes to his activist patterns, and the couple drew up a rota designed to share domestic tasks along more equitable lines: 'I ended up working two and a half days a week and she did two and a half days, and we split it down the middle, and by that time the

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Mica Nava noted pointedly that in the Belsize Lane group all the women separated from their husbands and partners in the immediate ten years following the group's establishment. Interview with Mica Nava.

<sup>80</sup> 'Brothers', a Men's Liberation Newsletter, June 1973; Men Against Sexism Newsheet, No. 2, October, 1973, p. 1, in the Private Archive of John Hoyland (hereafter JHA).

<sup>81</sup> John Hoyland, 'The Women's Movement', hand-written notes in JHA; 'Islington Men's Group', ATA; interview with Max Farrar, Leeds, 4<sup>th</sup> June, 2009. For details of the emergence of the men's movement, see Sarah F. Browne, "'Brotherhood is Powerful": Anti-Sexist Men and the Women's Liberation Movement in Britain', Unpublished paper, May, 2011, pp. 1-20; John Rowan, *The Horned God: Feminism and Men as Wounding and Healing*, (London, 1987); John Rowan, 'Achilles Heel and the Anti-Sexist Men's Movement', *Psychotherapy and Politics International*, 3 (1) 58-71, 2004; Lynne Segal, *Slow Motion, Changing Masculinities, Changing Men* (London, 1990), pp. 280-83, and Andrew Tolson, *The Limits of Masculinity* (London, 1987).

Red Ladder<sup>82</sup> people were living with us, and so by then the children had me as much as her.’<sup>83</sup> The reality of exchanging full-time activism for a new part-time role of house-husband evoked uncomfortable feelings that spoke of a larger displacement of male political authority in the wake of the VSC’s demise. In his unpublished novel, *The Iguana Woman*, written in the late 1970s, Hoyland expressed the internal dislocations that as an activist, husband, and father he underwent during the transitional phase of the new politics. Removed from the company of his comrades, his presence at home minimised his role as an agent working out a new direction for the left movement. Through his protagonist, Steve, he reveals how constraints on his external activity led him to question his legitimacy as a male activist:

Jenny’s liberation as a woman was nearing its completion. This, he thought, was on the whole splendid and right-on. But the trouble was he didn’t feel any more that he was achieving very much for himself. His own fulfilment, which he had always envisaged as something rather more grand than learning to cook, didn’t seem to be taking place. Sometimes, in fact, he even felt a sense of panic that he wasn’t what you might call a proper *man* anymore.<sup>84</sup>

In reversal to the experiences of women in the milieu the role of active fatherhood coincided with an exchange of the public political for the private domestic setting. Conceding the new politics as a real presence in his personal life meant Hoyland also re-learning a new manner of being political as a non-aligned left man. *The Iguana Woman* symbolises the discursive and psychic presence of the new politics in his life. She is a myth his protagonist conjures in response to the movement, embodying women in his milieu in the wake of their involvement with Women’s Liberation; ‘what he

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<sup>82</sup> Red Ladder was a mobile workers’ theatre that evolved out of the Agitprop theatre group set up in 1968. In 1972 they were granted an Arts Council grant which enabled most members of the group, five men and four women, to work full-time. They travelled in a large red van and up to 1974 performed plays on themes of unemployment, the Industrial Relations Bill, the Housing Finance Act and Women’s Liberation. For details, see ‘Red Ladder: Mobile Workers’ Theatre’, *Spare Rib*, No. 30, December, 1974, pp. 34-37; <http://www.redladder.co.uk/bm/who-we-are/about-red-ladder.shtml>

<sup>83</sup> Interview with John Hoyland, London, 19<sup>th</sup> November, 2008. In 1971 the Hoylands and two couples from Red Ladder set up a collective household in Tufnell Park, employing communal styles of living according to a rota system that before long extended to multiple, open sexual relationships between household members.

<sup>84</sup> John Hoyland, ‘The Iguana Woman’ (Unpublished novel, c. 1977), Part Two, p. 10, in JHA.

had heard called the Anima – the supposedly perfect female counterpart of his male self'.<sup>85</sup> This crisis of masculine political identity derived from Hoyland's understanding of activism embedded within the dynamic, external street militancy around the VSC and rooted in an image of left masculinity embodied in the Communism of a father who had been active in the labour movement and who was killed fighting fascism.<sup>86</sup> Although he relished his active-involvement as a father, and intellectually approved of WL, the personal politics presented him with a new political role far removed from the street politics that had shaped his activist selfhood. The waning of the VSC occurred inversely in relation to the ascendancy of the WLM; as a non-aligned activist this meant that Hoyland's inability to connect with the Trotskyist organisations created pressure to look elsewhere for a sphere of activity that only began to emerge once the community activism and collective lifestyle politics emerged after 1972:

All of us [who were non-aligned] understood Marxist theory and there was no question about it. You worked through a revolutionary organisation. You couldn't really pretend to be a proper revolutionary if you weren't in anything ... The fact that we couldn't connect with any one of the organisations was something which on the one hand we defended as being honest but on the other hand felt like a real lack.<sup>87</sup>

The emotional and social transitions that accompanied early adult life and parenthood coincided with ruptures on the activist left that, although at times thrilling, could also be deeply unnerving for men and women carving out new left social and cultural practices. David Widgery referred to the 'under life' of the new personal politics as an unknown, unpredictable, even frightening force that as a male activist was often difficult to comprehend.<sup>88</sup> Where class politics above ground was familiar and fathomable, the new politics inhabited subterranean psychic channels that in the early days could hamper communication between men and women alike.

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid, Part Six, p. 3, in JHA.

<sup>86</sup> Interview with John Hoyland, London, 4<sup>th</sup> March, 2009.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Interview between Ronald Fraser and respondent C896/18, 9<sup>th</sup> October, 1984, p. 12, Ronald Fraser Interviews: 1968 A Student Generation in Revolt, British Library Sound Archive.

## Maternal and Paternal Subjectivity and the New Politics

The experiences of John Cowley and Sue O'Sullivan illustrate the way in which realigning gender roles in the milieu brought unanticipated contradictions shaping maternal and paternal as well as political subjectivity. Of all the couples in the second Tufnell Park group, on the surface Cowley and O'Sullivan provided the nearest live model for mutual personal politics. Since his late adolescence he had supported female emancipation and alternatives to a nuclear family model that had seen his father removed from his day-to-day childhood even after returning from war service in Palestine: 'I had a very strong commitment to trying to find another way of living with women other than the way my mother and sister [had lived], and I was strongly committed to that and so I liked all that engagement of getting involved in the cooking and cleaning.'<sup>89</sup>

As a new father, keen to be involved in raising his children, Cowley welcomed the ideas O'Sullivan brought home from the Tufnell Park group, and the arrangements the couple made to share domestic and childcare responsibilities evolved through an organic process of discussion and expediency as needs arose. One day Cowley saw his wife 'giving the kids fish fingers ... I remembered my mother's cooking and I took over the cooking, at first it was just at the weekends and then it was all the cooking'.<sup>90</sup> In contrast to the difficulties with which Hoyland and Hunt communicated their needs to activist husbands, O'Sullivan remembered the ease with which the couple discussed Women's Liberation and began to allow each other time to develop their lives as activists and parents:

Once it was discussed, it was like 'yeah, that seems right. Yeah, yeah, let's do that', and when we were around the house together he would have three hours and I would have three hours, and one of us would disappear and go and read or whatever ... I think probably of all the fathers in our group he was certainly the one who lived up to the ideal of what you wanted a male partner to do and share in terms of sharing and equality.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Interview with John Cowley, 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 2009.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Interview with Sue O'Sullivan.

Cowley's commitment to active fatherhood was facilitated by the supportive Women's Liberation network that by the early 1970s had begun to evolve around the Tufnell Park milieu in conjunction with the LWLW and local activist groups in the north London area. By 1970 CMPP had successfully established the much discussed and planned 'people's centre', the Hole in the Wall, in Kentish Town, which was intended to serve as an alternative political space for Camden activist groups as well as a social facility for the local community.<sup>92</sup> Cowley was one of a number of men and women around the centre helping to run a local crèche, providing opportunities for collective socialisation between the children along with support for parents.<sup>93</sup> His role in running the Camden Community Workshop also helped him to establish social relations with neighbours and children in the Stratford Villas area, and to set up childcare arrangements with local mothers on a weekly rota.<sup>94</sup> The Cowley's home became a collective base for childcare, community organising, the LWLW, and weekly Capital reading groups in a manner that exemplified the interconnected web of CMPP and Women's Liberation personnel, new left social practices, and culture within the Tufnell Park milieu by the early 1970s.<sup>95</sup>

Although on the surface the democratisation of paternal role responsibilities provided the couple with equal opportunities to be both activist and parent, beneath the collective arrangements the new roles sat uneasily with inner aspects of self that remained situated in mainstream society. The maternal guilt O'Sullivan struggled with in her Women's Liberation groups was compounded in the site of motherhood, the private home: 'I think I felt in the first period..., I think I felt pleased and grateful ... you know, oh isn't it good to be in a relationship where... but I think, you know, through no fault of his own, his enthusiasm for dedicating himself to those kids and getting a lot of pleasure

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<sup>92</sup> 'The Hole in the Wall', a CMPP leaflet about the community centre, GCA. Mothers and fathers from the Tufnell Park milieu also participated in the children's event, Moonrock, which took place every Saturday morning at the Roundhouse (Centre 42). Set up originally by ex-Notting Hill Situationists, the event injected the counter-cultural spirit into the new collective ideas for childcare that involved minimal adult interference in activities including painting, live pop music, light shows, drama and puppets. See 'Camden News', *Red Camden*, Vo. 2, No. 6, 1970, p. 3. See also 'Infants Love-in at the Roundhouse', *Red Notes*, No. 4, April, 1970, p. 2.

<sup>93</sup> Interview with John Cowley.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid; interview with Sue O'Sullivan.

out of it made me feel guilty.’<sup>96</sup> Her husband’s commitment to his children and the apparent ease with which he managed their needs magnified the critical internal voice that echoed post-war maternal discourses confirming her inadequacy as a woman.

Nor was O’Sullivan’s struggle to reconcile her commitment to Women’s Liberation with internalised images of parenthood an exclusively female concern. The reality of living the new politics re-shaped Cowley’s experience of fatherhood and activist life away from personal political tenets by reasserting the primacy of the individual private world. His emphasis on total paternal commitment saw him striving to maintain separate boundaries between the roles he fulfilled as a father, community activist and full-time lecturer, his paternal guilt signalling the isolated inner life that could result when activists strove to maintain two feet in both radical and mainstream cultures:

I called it walking on two legs. It is a phrase that comes out of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, you know, trying to modernise society and maintain some strong traditional practices like they did in villages ... I used to call [walking on two legs] my having a job and trying to be critical in my work, and a union activist, and on the university senate and council, everything and doing all these things here... I felt my kids were in the middle of it.<sup>97</sup>

Paradoxically, O’Sullivan and Cowley’s accounts of the transitional years following the arrival of Women’s Liberation echo the very constraints Tufnell Park and Belsize Lane members sought to liberate individuals from. In their group discussions and articles for *Shrew*, members began to champion collective living as a logical solution to the isolation of the nuclear family, which arose from a domestic ideology of ideal womanhood perpetuated by corporate monopolies and state-sponsored social institutions. In May 1971, in a hand-sketched diagram, Belsize Lane members Carol de Jong and Sally Frazer illustrated the emotional and practical domestic support mothers sought to gain from pushing ‘down a few walls and fences’.<sup>98</sup> Sue Crockford and Nan Fromer drew upon the ‘do-it-yourself’ community spirit informing the milieu when they encouraged women to take the

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<sup>96</sup> Interview with Sue O’Sullivan

<sup>97</sup> Interview with John Cowley.

<sup>98</sup> *Shrew*, Vol. 3, No. 4, May 1971, pp. 6-7.

initiative to change their own housing arrangements: 'If you leave it all to Them: the big boys, the government, the councils, the businessmen, when will your needs ever be the priority?'(see figure 5.1).<sup>99</sup> Fromer embraced communal living as the *raison d'être* of personal politics and for a time thought it possible that the Belsize women's group, 'with our kids and our men, would embark on this experiment together'.<sup>100</sup>

That Belsize Lane members did not embrace this collective vision as a group together, did not, however, mean that they eschewed it altogether. Fromer herself recognised that 'to have the positive conviction that a communal environment might make less intensity and more variety in human relationships is one thing; to live it out is quite another'.<sup>101</sup> As in the case of childcare, the collective housing arrangements activists in the milieu adopted reflected individuals' recognition that, however committed they were to their new political ideas, 'the old responses and resistances' persisted.<sup>102</sup> The hesitations they displayed to the new political and social practices reflected that, although inwardly and outwardly radical, the men and women were also individuals whose social patterns and values had been shaped by post-war social discourses. The psychic dislocations they experienced as they attempted to break the cycle of unquestionably accepting these values and patterns of responses point to a gulf between activist and mainstream social selfhood that was a crucial, transitional feature within the new political subjectivity.

*Figure 5.1* A hand-sketched diagram by Belsize Lane members Carole de Jong and Sally Frazer illustrating the benefits of community living for men, women, and children.

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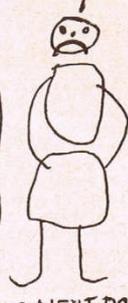
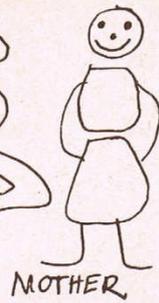
<sup>99</sup> Sue Crockford and Nan Fromer, 'When is a house not a home?', *Shrew*, Vol. 3, No. 4, May 1971, p. 12.

<sup>100</sup> Nan Fromer, Rough notes for the Belsize Lane *Spare Rib* article, 1977, p. 2, MNA.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid; 'A childhood', *Shrew*, Vol. 3, No. 4, May, 1971, p. 1; Dinah Brooke, 'The nuclear family as an image of the self', *Shrew*, Vol. 3, No. 4, May, 1971, p. 2; 'Parents', *Shrew*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1971, p. 9.

IF BUSINESS AND SAY YOU ARE WHAT YOU BUY  
SAYS



NO WASHER

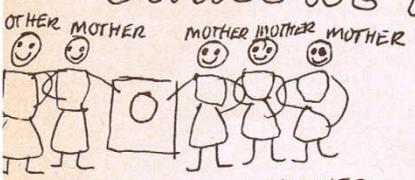


"BEHIND EVERY SUCCESSFUL MAN THERE IS A WOMAN"

\* YOU ARE YOUR HOUSE  
YOU ARE YOUR HUSBAND  
YOU ARE YOUR KIDS  
YOU ARE YOUR MACHINES

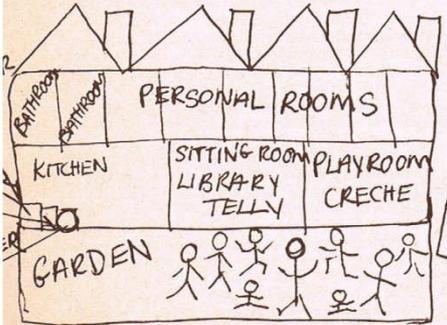
FATHER IS PUSHED TO GET MORE MONEY TO GET A WASHER LIKE THE OTHER MOTHER BUT HE MUST NOT STRIKE OR SHE MAY LOOSE THE TELLY SHE HAS ON H.P.

HOW SHALL WE FIND OUT WHO WE ARE?



WHY NOT FOOL BIG BUSINESS AND SHARE OUR MACHINES?

WHY NOT EVERYBODY SHARE THE UPBRINGING OF KIDS AND EVERYBODY WORK PART-TIME?



WE NEED EACH OTHER

WHY NOT PUSH DOWN A FEW WALLS AND FENCES?

Carole de Jong  
Sally Frazer

Source: Shrew, Vol. 3, No. 4, May, 1971, p. 7.

## Activism Within Trotskyist Milieux

In terms of political culture Trotskyist men and women faced a much more linear continuation between student and adult life than their counterparts on the non-aligned left. In IS and IMG the upsurge of union militancy and industrial strife that flourished in the period 1969-72 confirmed the leadership in their ambitions for building the revolutionary party.<sup>103</sup> Politics remained embedded above ground in external sites of struggle; the masculine militant culture that had characterised the VSC continued to prevail. However, activists remained emotional, gendered beings and political pressures to demarcate inner and outer life created their own demands for men and women to compartmentalise conflicting identities in private and public, political, social and psychological spheres. Adult life and the ascendancy of a new women's movement on the left created a host of subtle differences between the way in which women and men invested themselves as activists and social beings. In the early 1970s adulthood in the Trotskyist milieu also involved processes of political and personal realignment, of learning new ways of being.

The oral narratives of Trotskyist adulthood provide valuable access to 'the small self', the privatised inner landscape of men and women who dedicated early adult years to the IS and IMG organisations.<sup>104</sup> Alan Johnson has noted the difficulty of opening up the subjective experience of British Trotskyists 'to understanding in their own terms'.<sup>105</sup> Too often personal pressures, especially the tension between political activism and 'domestic life' 'remain a private struggle conducted by the individual'.<sup>106</sup> Although sociability in the IS and IMG after 1969 retained many points of continuity with the youth sub-cultures that had permeated the milieu in the mid-to-late 1960s, the

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<sup>103</sup> For selected accounts of this wave of union militancy and industrial strife, see Andy Beckett, *When The Lights Went Out: What Really Happened to Britain in the Seventies* (London, 2009); Ralph Darlington and Dave Lyddon, *Glorious Summer: Class struggle in Britain 1972* (London, 2001); John McIlroy, Nina Fishman and Alan Campbell (eds.), *The High Tide of British Trade Unionism: Trade Unions and Industrial Politics, 1964-79* (Aldershot, 1999); Alwyn Turner, *Crisis? What Crisis? Britain in the 1970s* (London, 2008).

<sup>104</sup> Alan Johnson, "'Beyond the Smallness of Self': Oral History and British Trotskyism", *Oral History*, 24, Spring, 1996, pp. 39-48.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid*, p. 39. For discussion of the difficulties of foregrounding the personal in Communist Party and labour movement auto/biographies in oral testimony and written format, see Jo Stanley, 'Including Feelings: Personal Political Testimony and Self-Disclosure', *Oral History*, 24, Spring, 1996, pp. 60-67.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, p. 45.

organisations' distaste for the indulgence of the identity politics of the WLM and Gay Liberation Front (GLF) testified to the way in which the inner self was often subordinated to the struggles and activities of the moment. The oral testimonies militated against this political culture, and equipping activists with a route through which to channel the personal, they reveal how for Trotskyist men and women the markers of early adulthood – social relationships, work and parenthood – were equally subsumed by the politics of the milieu.

### **From Student to Full-Time Adult Activist**

The decision of young activists to immerse themselves into the organisations following graduation provided a logical means of cementing identities they had located as adolescents or students. Many IS members populating the LSE Socialist Society remained close by, sharing houses near to IS branches including Tottenham, Islington, and Hornsey, they continued social and political patterns that had marked their university years. From a house in Golders Green Martin Tompkinson, Sabby Sagall, John Rose, Basker Vashee and Phil Hall supported student patterns of branch meetings, paper sales, political debates and drinking by part-time teaching.<sup>107</sup> Total immersion into activism was a logical end-point to the politics they had pursued whether since adolescence or university. John Rose explained his motivation to move to West London, around Greenford IS. He and LSE comrade, Alan Balfour, had been sent by Cliff to agitate in the engineering factories dominating the area<sup>108</sup>: 'All I wanted to be, quite simply, was a professional revolutionary. That's all I wanted to be.'<sup>109</sup> Steve Jeffery's ambitions to become a professional agitator were tied to his family's history of trade union activism:

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<sup>107</sup> Interview with Martin Tompkinson, London, 6<sup>th</sup> November, 2008; interview with John Rose; interview with Sabby Sagall, London, 12<sup>th</sup> March, 2009.

<sup>108</sup> Notable as an activist site for IS in the Southall area was the bus and commercial vehicle manufacturer Associated Electrical Company (AEC). For details of other engineering factories in the region, see T. F. T. Baker, C. R. Elrington (eds.), *A History of the County of Middlesex: Volume 7: Acton, Chiswick, Ealing and Brentford, West Twyford, Willesden*, pp. 23-30 (consulted at <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=22549&strquery=Southall> [5<sup>th</sup> May, 2011]).

<sup>109</sup> Interview with John Rose, London, 30<sup>th</sup> October, 2008.

My father had been secretary of Dunlop's Trade Steward Committee which was quite unusual for an unskilled worker. When I saw my life I suppose it was acceptable one of the things you could do within my family and their history was to work in a factory, and so when I saw myself as being an agitator as soon as I left LSE I got a job in Lucas CAV in London in 1968 and learned there from the Shop Stewards who were both Communist Party and IS Shop Stewards, about the stakes.<sup>110</sup>

Laurie Flynn's Scottish labour heritage similarly informed the activist trajectory he envisaged: 'I was going to be a trade unionist ... I had received an education to help people who didn't have one.'<sup>111</sup>

Dedication to the organisation and immersion into the world of militant labour politics placed various demands on young activists who pursued this life into adulthood. The male-dominated, physical environment of the factory, the docks and the mines called upon activists to subordinate the self to a working-class industrial world in which activist culture was imbued with a discourse of industrial efficiency carrying connotations of speed, agility, and productivity. Male and female respondents narrated themselves in terms of action and political skill, showing how the external art of politics engaged internal psychic life as activists learned to think of themselves mediated through the culture of the organisation. Rapid absorption from student activist to full-time politico entailed an immense learning curve as activists sought to keep abreast with the momentum of internal organisational politics and external political events that culminated in the 'glorious summer' of 1972 when a wave of factory occupations, national strikes by builders, dock workers, and miners saw the number of strike days rise from less than five million in 1968 to 23.9 million in 1972.<sup>112</sup> Activists' effectiveness within the organisation became interwoven within this dual momentum. The politico whose life revolved around the union politics of the factory floor

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<sup>110</sup> Interview with Steve Jefferies, London, 13<sup>th</sup> November, 2008. In 1968 Lucas CAV Ltd had its headquarters in Acton, London, manufacturing diesel fuel injection and electrical equipment. For details, see Baker and Elrington (eds.), *A History of the County of Middlesex* (consulted at <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=22549&strquery=Southall> [5<sup>th</sup> May, 2011]).

<sup>111</sup> Interview with Laurie Flynn, London, 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 2008.

<sup>112</sup> Chris Harman, *The Fire Last Time: 1968 and after* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, London, 1998), p. 223; the term 'glorious summer', referring to the high point of the strike wave in Britain during the years 1969-74, comes from the opening speech of William Shakespeare's Richard III, adapted to this period by Ralph Darlington and Dave Lyddon. See Ralph Darlington and Dave Lyddon, *Glorious Summer*, pp. 1-3.

judged him or herself in relation to members' abilities to keep pace with the speed of national and local politics during this period of grass-roots industrial upsurge.

Dave Lyddon's account of his sudden transition from Oxford student and part-time activist to full-time IS organiser showed the centrality the momentum of time and events played in relation to the acquisition of political skill and his absorption into the centre of the organisation. In October 1971, aged twenty-three he became editor for the new IS rank-and-file paper, *Car Worker*, based in the industrial car centre of Oxford.<sup>113</sup> Whilst initially his new role saw a relative continuation of his student existence - living with IS comrades in a cheap student house, surviving on the dole, re-reading Marx's *Das Kapital*, and casual sexual relations with female comrades - the start of the miners' strike at the beginning of 1972 'rudely interrupted' the idyll.<sup>114</sup> The organisation's rapid response to the dispute<sup>115</sup> set him on a new trajectory into the heartland of industrial militancy and organisational politics:

So I get this phone call from the centre saying can people go down to London to help out. We need people to man the phones ... from early January until November I'm basically living in London but am registered on the dole in Oxford ... I would be staying with one woman or another but found myself being drawn into the heart of the so-called industrial side of IS because I had proved myself to be fairly competent by then and what happens ... you are getting absorbed in some of what was happening, going to the factory occupations.<sup>116</sup>

The fast pace with which Lyddon delivered his fluid narrative echoed the rapidity of events as they occurred, his use of the present tense recreating the tension and energy through and on which he was living day-to-day. As protagonist he presented an account of himself in relation to this

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<sup>113</sup> Interview with Dave Lyddon, Keele, 15<sup>th</sup> July, 2009. The setting up of *Car Worker* formed part of the IS rank-and-file strategy inside the trade union movement, which sought to emulate the Communist Party Minority Movement of the 1920s. For details about *Car Worker* and its influence in car factories, see Frank Henderson, *Life On The Track: Memoirs of a Socialist Worker* (London, 2009), pp. 73-77.

<sup>114</sup> Interview with David Lyddon. For details of the miners' dispute, see Beckett, *When The Lights Went Out*, pp. 60-87; Darlington and Lyddon, *Glorious Summer*, pp. 31-70; Harman, *The Fire Last Time*, pp. 239-242; Jim Phillips, 'The 1972 Miners' Strike: Popular Agency and Industrial Politics in Britain', *Contemporary British History*, 20:2, 2006, pp. 187-207; Malcolm Pitt, *The World on Our Backs: The Kent Miners and the 1972 Miners' Strike* (London, 1979).

<sup>115</sup> John Charlton, 'The Miners: The Triumph of 1972 and the Way Ahead', *International Socialism*, 57, April, 1973, pp. 10-11 and 14-15.

<sup>116</sup> Interview with Dave Lyddon.

momentum; implicit was the way in which his developing political skills depended on his ability to keep pace with the speed with which external politics were moving around him. At times his individual agency seemed to be vulnerable, as he struggled to respond to the demands that national and local politics placed on the organisation and on him as an organiser close to the centre: 'I got myself into a situation where I found myself what [was] I thought out of my depth, where I was having to take on more responsibility for things and I just didn't feel I had the knowledge.'<sup>117</sup>

Lyddon's repeated emphasis on the multiple layers of learning he underwent during this period of rapid political momentum – 'we are all learning because [of] the involvement of most of us in this; we are all learning at the same time' - underlined the dual intellectual and dynamic activist role he had quickly to acquire. Despite the fast pace of events, learning how to be a grass-roots politico in this milieu sometimes entailed a tentative process of inner transformation that sat uneasily with the external facade of efficiency it was important for activists to maintain in the face of comrades and worker-militants. Lyddon recalled his insecurity in relation to the political experience of executive committee members and factory convenors around him: 'I am a very minor figure; these people are steeped in the stuff.'<sup>118</sup>

### **Branch Life and Recruitment Strategy**

Parallel to the constant momentum of activity organisational selfhood incorporated the methodical, routine patterns of branch life. Respondents' attention to the daily minutiae of branch activity conveyed the markers against which they assessed themselves as effective activists. Through a careful exposition about branch culture, organising speakers, building the contact list, and composing and distributing leaflets, Sandy Irving illustrated the methodical dedication shaping activist selfhood. His account of the public meeting contained underlying messages of loyalty and attachment to the organisation, becoming a lament for a lost radical culture that had offered possibilities for revolutionary social and political change: 'There was the planning of the next

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

meeting, so you would look around for the next public speaker, someone you have got some faith in who will a) turn up and b) do a good platform performance ... The culture of the evening was you come to a public meeting. I actually did enjoy this. I miss it actually, I really do miss it.<sup>119</sup> The eagerness and diligence with which Irving performed the routine tasks of branch life conveyed a self-discipline and pride of belonging that went hand-in-hand with the discourse of efficiency and productivity permeating Trotskyist culture. Relating himself to fellow branch members, he expressed an economy of feeling about the politics of comradeship: 'I've always thought you should go to meetings because you want to go, and whether you like people or don't like people is a secondary question.'<sup>120</sup> However, repeated references to a senior comrade, who had nurtured Irving in the political and cultural ways of the branch, showed how comradeship, loyalty and belonging were interwoven within the familiar rhythms of branch life defining membership: 'Dave was very practical, and wanted to get on with running the organisation and I used to go out with him in his car going round meeting some of these guys he was trying to sign up. I admired him because he was organised, focused.'<sup>121</sup>

Integral to the political skills young activists had rapidly to acquire was the challenge of learning how to initiate and build relations with workers they were trying to recruit. This applied particularly to the cohort of IS student recruits who became caught up in the process of education and organisation in the process known as the 'turn to the class'.<sup>122</sup> After 1969-70 IS began more systematic efforts to work around industry and the trade unions, which, given the still small numbers of industrial workers inside the organisation, meant turning the mainly student and middle-class membership into a force capable of exerting influence amongst the industrial working-class.<sup>123</sup> A

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<sup>119</sup> Interview with John Charlton and Sandy Irving, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 2009.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Interview with Sandy Irving, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 2009.

<sup>122</sup> Martin Shaw, 'The Making of a Party? The International Socialists 1965-1976', in Ralph Miliband and John Saville (eds.), *The Socialist Register* (London, 1978), p. 108.

<sup>123</sup> Ian Birchall, 'Building "The Smallest Mass Party in the World": Socialist Workers Party 1951-1979: Part 2', p. 8 [consulted at <http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/revhist/otherdox/smp/smp2.html> (11/03/2008)]; 'The New Militancy', *International Socialism*, No. 41, December 1969/January 1970, pp. 1-2; 'Revolutionary Strategy', *International Socialism*, No. 48, June/July, 1971, p. 1.

breakdown of membership showed that even at Easter 1972 IS had only 26 per cent manual workers and 31 per cent white collar workers.<sup>124</sup> In September 1970 a recruitment campaign began in earnest aimed at bringing in five hundred new members over three months.<sup>125</sup> Members engaged in intensive work around the factories equipped with new IS propaganda, notably Cliff's book on the 'employers' offensive' of productivity deals, which had been compiled from contact with industrial workers up and down the country, and in which members held faith for its ability to make an impact.<sup>126</sup> The tasks of recruitment, intervening in struggles, winning workers' faith in IS politics, and the challenge of persuading new recruits to stay, placed a series of political and social pressures on young adults in the milieu. Where new activists had no family history or prior experience of working with the labour movement, the need to rapidly acquire a working-knowledge of its traditions and practices compounded social pressures to earn workers' trust and respect, a task often made more difficult by the entrenched influence the Communist Party retained in the industrial sectors of the trade union movement.<sup>127</sup>

The goal of recruiting workers became intertwined with activists' self-identities as IS members, cutting to the heart of their self-image as activists building a revolutionary party. Members made inroads into factories or industrial sites through building political relations with contacts inside factories. John Rose showed how uncomfortable the industrial environment and its shop floor politics could be for the middle-class graduate lacking any grounding in this rough, unfamiliar terrain. The sheer physicality of the men he sought to recruit seemed to point to the social gulf between him and them, symbolising the endurance he had to exercise in his efforts to earn their trust. Yet his admiration for their plain-speaking politics, physical strength and engineering skills pointed to an idealised image of masculinity he associated with the revolutionary activist. The qualities of speed, militancy, and political deftness he aspired to fulfil as an activist

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

<sup>125</sup> Circular letter from Duncan Hallas, IS National Secretary to IS members, 14 May, 1971, MRC, MSS.128/158.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid; Tony Cliff, *The Employers' Offensive: Productivity Deals and How to Fight Them* (London, 1970); 'Newsletter from Chris Davison and Richard Kuper to all branches on the selling of Tony Cliff's *The Employer's Offensive: Productivity Deals and How to Fight Them*', c. 1970, MRC, MSS.128/158.

<sup>127</sup> John Callaghan, *British Trotskyism: Theory and Practice* (Oxford, 1984), p. 108.

derived from an image of the working-class militant who was revered on the shop-floor. In the early 1970s Rose established contact with engineering militant and IS member Ian Morris.<sup>128</sup> Proving himself to Morris as a serious activist inside the factory became a means for Rose to fulfil an image of political masculinity he saw embodied in Morris' physical strength and political foresight: 'Ian was very important for me because he was an older worker, completely without any bullshit, a hard, tough welder, skilled engineering worker, very suspicious of the Communist Party.'<sup>129</sup>

In the course of protracted workers' struggles, the loyalty and affection activists developed towards worker-intellectuals became part of the fraternal bonds binding them to the organisation. During the 1972 miners' strike Irving toured the working-men's clubs in Ashington, Cumbria, selling copies of *Socialist Worker*.<sup>130</sup> He expressed conflict between the need to relate to workers as potential recruits and his desire to be accepted as a fellow man and comrade:

At what point do you reveal this more political task? There were one or two people I got to know in Ashington with whom I remained long-term friends, but I think it was very difficult because at what point do your personal preferences to move on and mix with people socially erode whatever obligation you feel to these people you have picked up with?<sup>131</sup>

In certain respects the admiration activists displayed towards worker-intellectuals suggested the dignity of labour nineteenth-century middle-class radicals had projected onto the working-class.<sup>132</sup> Yet social relations that took activists beyond political sites of struggle and into workers' homes could also unmask a social realism fuelling a grittier sort of dignity. In 1972 coal miner Jim Deacon prompted John Charlton to temper his approach to recruitment:

He was a young man who read books. He had three children and lived in a colliery house just west of Barnsley. I would go to the house and there was a young working-class wife. "Would you like bacon and egg?" You

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<sup>128</sup> Interview with John Rose.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, 'Travellers in a Strange Country: Responses of Working-Class Students to the University Extension Movement – 1873-1910', *History Workshop Journal*, 12, Autumn, 1981, p. 66.

know it was like that. It was an insight really into the world, into a workers' world. It was actually a bit of a... I don't like the word humbling actually because it is a bit... it isn't quite the right word, but it made you think and it made you cautious in ramming ideas down people's throats. I mean people had plenty of ideas. This wasn't some blank page you were putting your ideas into.<sup>133</sup>

Another meeting with a miner from Bentley, near Doncaster, provided a stark lesson about the sometimes prejudicial world of the working-class man, cautioning Charlton against the dangers of idealising such men as political agents, and providing a mirror with which to scrutinise his own behaviour as a husband:

I was on a regular visit to this guy and it is kind of 'Mary will make your tea. What would you like? Mary, a cup of tea. Two cups of tea, Mary. Do you take sugar?' You felt bad. You have got a lot of children around. You felt this guy actually was really indulging. He was enjoying the company of intellectuals ... in particular of my companion who happened to be an attractive middle-class young woman.<sup>134</sup>

At a time when IS women were struggling to get the messages of Women's Liberation heard and taken seriously by leading men, including Charlton, the miner alerted him to sexism in a way female members had been unable because he embodied a militant masculinity he and other activists sought to emulate: 'You know you might be a bit more articulate about how you deal with these matters at home, but basically you were just like they were.'<sup>135</sup>

### **Worker Activists From Outside**

The ultimate experience in social realism came for the minority of activists who in the early 1970s made the commitment to immerse themselves into the militant working-class world of the assembly line. The motivation to take up a factory job often derived from a combination of political commitment and economic expediency. In November 1972 Lyddon began night shifts in the Cowley car factory in Oxford; against advice from the IS leadership, mounting pressure as industrial

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<sup>133</sup> Interview with John Charlton, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 2009.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

organiser persuaded him that in order to properly fulfil the role he needed to gain first-hand experience as a car worker.<sup>136</sup> The economic reality of surviving on the dole had also taken its toll and the factory offered a short-term solution at a time when industrial manual work offered a good hourly and weekly wage in comparison with the public sector.<sup>137</sup> By the end of the 1970s an average manual worker could expect to earn £90 whereas a typical weekly wage for manual workers in the public sector was only between £49 and £54.<sup>138</sup> At the Cowley plant, from October 1971 the flat hourly rate for males aged over twenty was £1.05 per hour for 'A' grade work (all machine operators in the full bonus scheme), and £1.0125 for 'B' grade work (those currently on ninety per cent work). There were also additional rates for overtime and night shift premiums.<sup>139</sup>

From life at the centre of the organisation the shift to full-time assembly work entailed another rapid social and cultural transition. Whereas everyday needs had previously been subsumed by the immediate demands of political struggle, the assembly line carried a steadier, routine rhythm that brought Lyddon's immediate attention back to the physical body and psychological self: 'Everyday life when you are working can be very mundane ... when you are effectively full time it takes over your life, but when you are on night shift there are certain elements of survival, getting enough sleep, getting something to eat.'<sup>140</sup> The monotony of assembly work and the sheer endurance of adapting the body to the routine of night work created a distance between self and politics as the social reality of the men's daily working lives awakened him to the limitations of industrial militancy.<sup>141</sup> Just as personal encounters with worker-intellectuals could temper hopes activists might previously have invested in such men, the daily grind of the assembly line provided a stark reminder of distinctions between the moderate mass of workers and industrial militants who willingly aided activists to make inroads inside the unions:

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<sup>136</sup> Interview with David Lyddon, Keele, 15<sup>th</sup> July, 2009.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out*, p. 471.

<sup>139</sup> Paper detailing the October 1971 pay agreement at the Cowley car factory, Papers of Alan Thornett, MRC, MSS.391/3/28.

<sup>140</sup> Interview with David Lyddon.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

The only thing, all you are doing is tempering people. You are not trying to build a wet blanket. You are thinking, well, actually, the world, we have our bright ideas, but actually most of the time people aren't concerned. They are concerned about the bloody football results.<sup>142</sup>

In addition to the militant world of the organisation and the sometimes emotionally intense world of the private home, as a new social and political landscape the factory created further demarcations between the public activist and the private internal man with the result that it could be difficult to situate the different components of self within the three arenas. As a politico Lyddon maintained his role in the organisation, moving back and forth between London and Oxford, editing *Car Worker* and attending meetings and demonstrations. In this environment he had begun to feel increasingly comfortable as a publically situated activist surrounded by comrades from similar university backgrounds. However, in the factory the need to survive in the job necessarily meant tempering his militant identity as well as disguising his social roots. The factory, like the organisation, provided a self-contained world from which to shut out mainstream society and the turmoil of private life. But on the assembly line Lyddon's self-awareness of his social dislocation as a 'de-classed' militant added to the strains of trying to negotiate three separate lives at a time when he was also facing turbulence in his relationship with his girlfriend.<sup>143</sup> However, life on the factory floor created a broader space for identifying with the mass of workers through the collective 'healthy contempt for authority' Cowley workers displayed towards management.<sup>144</sup> Through this collective hostility Lyddon was able to re-connect with the 'instinctive class feeling' that had first surfaced when as a working-class student he encountered the middle-and upper middle-class world of Oxbridge.<sup>145</sup>

The class solidarity activists only fleetingly found as external political agents came within closer reach on the assembly line through workers' shared physical discomforts and social

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<sup>142</sup> Interview with David Lyddon.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid. During the 1970s workers at the Cowley car plant held a reputation for their high degree of political consciousness and militant trade unionism. See Alan Thornett, *From Militancy to Marxism: A Personal and Political Account of Organising Car Corkers* (London, 1987) and Alan Thornett, *Inside Cowley: Trade Union Struggles in the 1970s: Who Really Opened Up the Door to the Tory Onslaught?* (London, 1998).

<sup>145</sup> Interview with David Lyddon.

humiliations. In *The Assembly Line* French Maoist Robert Linhart conveyed how the 'gradual anaesthesia' of the Choisy Citroën factory hindered his student dreams of insurrection.<sup>146</sup> Tasting, at first hand, the monotony of workers' lives, he came to respect the social and political equilibrium, the indecency of raising workers' hopes and stealing precious break time for political meetings.<sup>147</sup> Steve Jefferys described his experience in the Glasgow Chrysler plant in similar terms: 'Initially I had social relations in a kind of non-political way because that is what you did. You found solidarity in the work experience.'<sup>148</sup> However, unlike Linhart, on the line Lyddon and Jefferys consciously managed the psychological challenge that came from monotonous work by separating mind from body. At Cowley Lyddon would be 'spot welding a screen on and it would take you about a minute, and you release the jig from the car and so I would read, and I learnt to read a page a minute, yeah and you kept it in your mind'.<sup>149</sup> At Chrysler Jefferys not merely survived but thrived as an agitator who displayed his politics for all to see. Building contacts inside the factory, he transcended the physical grind of factory life that informed Lyddon's experience, and continued to live out his self-identity of agitator:

Within the factory I began operating as an activist, talking to people, and asking if they were interested in *Socialist Worker*. Eventually I had a newspaper round of about 40 people ... Very opportunistically I said we needed to have a union member and there was no contest. I got elected, so I became the AEU steward for the whole building ... I also got put onto the Engineering Union Workers' Committee which meant once a week I was allowed to go for a two-hour meeting to meet the engineering senior stewards from all the other buildings, and so very rapidly they got to know me throughout the whole building. They used to call me big Stevie.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Robert Linhart, *The Assembly Line* (translated by Margaret Crosland, London, 1978), p. 49.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>148</sup> Interview with Steve Jefferys, 13<sup>th</sup> November, 2008.

<sup>149</sup> Interview with Dave Lyddon.

<sup>150</sup> Interview with Steve Jefferys.

## Worker Activists From Inside

For the minority of men who joined IS as apprentices in the early 1960s adulthood in the organisation provided even greater continuum between factory and organisational life. As working-class militants they moved fluidly between the world of shop-floor politics and branch life. Whereas the organisation discouraged middle-class activists from going into factories as outside agitators, they recognised the valuable information factory workers could bring to the organisation's new recruitment strategy.<sup>151</sup> As a result worker-activists embodied the Trotskyist discourse of politico unlike any other member, maintaining a constant level of agitation that saw them arguing and persuading, leafleting and selling papers, working to organise stoppages and strikes even whilst they worked their tools. The ability to live out this image of activist, held up for admiration within the organisation, and, even if vilified, alive inside the factory, infused individual workers like Alan Watts and Roger Cox with a political agency and self-confidence that derived from witnessing small, but progressive social and political shifts in their local workplaces. At the MK Electric factory where Watts worked in the early 1970s the AUEW held a strong position that provided him with a ready base in which to move. The active life of the trade union workshop created a high level of political interest that facilitated equally high levels of paper sales.<sup>152</sup> Moving swiftly around the factory, distributing literature and making himself a familiar face amongst the two hundred or so workers, he took 'great delight' in working out their politics and negotiating areas for winning their solidarity: 'I remember this one guy once said to me "the trouble with you is that you make people think about things they don't want to think about".'<sup>153</sup>

For Cox IS membership facilitated a dialogic relationship between the organisation and blue-collar workers. His status and agency as a militant pushing for workers' control translated fluidly between the factory and IS, but between the late 1960s and early 1970s he retained ultimate loyalty

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<sup>151</sup> T.A. Bull, 'The White Collar Worker and Trade Union Consciousness', p. 5; 'National IS Committee Minutes', 23 May, 1970, p. 1; IS Bulletin, December, 1972, p. 22, MRC, MSS. 128/158.

<sup>152</sup> Interview with Alan Watts, London, 20<sup>th</sup> March, 2009.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

to workers in his various workplaces; in the Acton Lucas CAV factory where he worked as a diesel engine tester, in a nuts and bolts factory, and on Paddington Station.<sup>154</sup> His identity as a worker was integral to his self-image as an activist: 'What drives you is that you always have to do the best for the people you are trying to represent ... One of the things in the working-class movement is that you have your say, especially if there is an attempt to actually make things better for them, to give them a lead.'<sup>155</sup> His collective identity as a member of a broad labour movement informed his sense of political duty towards workers as a member of an enlightened revolutionary organisation. He saw his duty as being not only to initiate collective political resistance amongst workers against state bureaucrats, but to inject the best values of liberal toleration he had received from his IS education. Using an old parable of his father's he signalled the familial bonds informing his workplace activism:

You have got to line the working-class in one line and get them to spit [at the people on the other side], and there is so many of us, you get them to spit at them and they will drown them. The problem is instead of spitting at them they will start arguing amongst themselves and spit at each other. It was a bit crude but my role was to stop workers spitting at each other and get them to fight at one common enemy.<sup>156</sup>

The social divisions that could feature in the factory on account of class, race or nationality failed to translate into the organisation where workers and graduates derived collective belonging from IS politics and an interpersonal network binding members as comrades. Despite the awe with which Watts viewed leading IS men – 'In my head all these people were up on a pedestal because they were so good at speaking in front of meetings' - the organisation provided a socially pacifying role, directing his militant class consciousness away from middle-class graduates towards 'a common set of ideas' – 'you know that everyone around you is singing from the same hymn sheet if you like'.<sup>157</sup>

Open identification with IS politics inside factories brought clear social risks as worker-activists risked antagonising supervisors and workers alike. Watts knew only too well the precarious

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<sup>154</sup> Interview with Roger Cox, London, 24<sup>th</sup> March, 2009.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Interview with Alan Watts.

position he occupied as a militant; frequently appointed as shop steward of his factory floors, his confrontational style with management resulted in his repeated dismissals from tool rooms from Enfield's Auto Light factory to Southgate's Standard Telephone and Cables factory.<sup>158</sup> Selling *Socialist Worker* throughout the factories also brought its own set of difficulties at a time when the paper openly supported the IRA and opposed immigration control.<sup>159</sup> Cox came face-to-face with these difficulties in the CAV factory: 'It was an absolute nightmare let me tell you. Every time you sold it they would go, "what's that then, what is it this time? I suppose you are supporting the Irish". You knew he was reading it, but I had to keep this up ... one of the guys used to give me a hard time, but always used to buy it, and the other guy was a residual racist.'<sup>160</sup> However, when it came to recruitment their upbringing and immersion within this physically challenging, morally black and white world lent them resilient insight into how to approach workers, and negotiate prejudice. The ability not only to survive, but also to thrive as militants inside the factory depended on activists' willingness to be audacious and their ability to read and negotiate awkward social situations. As worker-militants Watts and Cox utilised the class solidarity uniting workers in their common suspicion of outsiders in a bid to earn their trust and respect. They benefitted from IS opposition to the trade union bureaucracy that Tony Cliff saw as working in union with the defenders of capitalism to contain the growing shop floor militancy of the early 1970s.<sup>161</sup> Worker-activists were able to fulfil active roles as trade unionists because, although encouraged by the organisation to do so, the servicing role they saw the organisation performing strengthened their agency to act on behalf of workers. According to Cox, 'if anything went wrong you could point to the fault of the trade union leadership, it's them, look'.<sup>162</sup> As agitators negotiating the ambitions of the organisation with the

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> By the beginning of 1972 the IS adopted a position of 'unconditional but critical support for the IRA', recognising its importance as the main force in the struggle against the British army, but opposed the use of terrorist bombing against civilian targets. See 'Ireland and the British Crisis', *International Socialism*, No. 72, October, 1974, p. 6.

<sup>160</sup> Interview with Roger Cox.

<sup>161</sup> IS Industrial Conference Paper, Birmingham, 1970, MRC, MSS. 128/158; 'Editorial [Industrial Relations Bill], *International Socialism*, No. 46, February/March, 1971, p. 1.

<sup>162</sup> Interview with Roger Cox

interests of workers, their stance as trade unionists equipped them with a get-out clause to guarantee the loyalty of the men on their shop-floor.

### **Trotskyist Women**

For women as much as men, who absorbed themselves in IS and the IMG, validation as an activist derived from the same terms of mobility, efficiency, intellectual debate and action that revolved around daily organising and class struggles. Drawing upon these terms to describe the thrill of meeting workers, branch activity, and demonstrations, the militant labour culture shaping Trotskyist membership defined a normative standard of political agency for women as well as men.<sup>163</sup> In the public spaces members occupied from the meeting room, the pub, the factory forecourt, and the picket line women exercised key organising skills just like men and felt themselves affirmed as revolutionary beings.

During the uncertainty following graduation from Oxford, whilst unemployed and squatting, IS provided Bronwyn Davis with identity and security just as it did for her comrade David Lyddon. The tasks of the committed activist provided a ready-made occupation and space for belonging within a circle of comrades and contacts connecting the Oxford branch and national organisation: 'I am not sure we did get treated very differently as far as possible. You know you were expected to get up and sell the paper and do everything men would do ... in a way joining IS solved a lot of problems because you didn't have to think too much about an individual solution because you had a line and a paper to sell.'<sup>164</sup> Sheila Hemingway testified to the powerful transformation it was possible for women to find in IS. The daughter of manual working-class parents, in contrast to other female respondents, as a teenager she adhered to the cultural patterns of the area, following her mother into the tailoring industry before marrying and having her first child at the age of seventeen.

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<sup>163</sup> For details of a similar case where women saw themselves participating "just like men" through the public struggles of the movement, see Deborah Cohen and Lessie Jo Frazier, 'Talking Back to '68: Gendered Narratives, Participatory Spaces, and Political Cultures' in Deborah Cohen and Lessie Jo Frazier (eds.), *Gender and Sexuality in 1968: Transformative Politics in the Cultural Imagination* (New York, 2009), pp. 164-171.

<sup>164</sup> Interview with Bronwyn Davies, Llanishen, 17<sup>th</sup> June, 2009.

In 1971 she reluctantly accompanied her husband to the Leeds IS branch meeting held in the local Trades Council hall. Hemingway recalled memories of early activism in strikingly similar terms to women who joined the Tufnell Park WL group: 'I felt a sense of freedom. I can't describe it in any other way really.'<sup>165</sup> Yet, as a Trotskyist woman she represented herself in something of a cultural vacuum. In accounting for the ease with which Hemingway articulated her story, Penny Summerfield offers insight: 'Women come to oral history interviews with experience of a range of confessional occasions from which they are likely to select a model that seems most appropriate.'<sup>166</sup> In modern Western culture women have been especially encouraged to take on the identity of the 'confessional animal' that sees private experiences released into the public domain for common consumption through popular literature and the media.<sup>167</sup> In this vein Hemingway readily gave a confessional account that saw her reassessing her social and sexual conduct in the light of her current values and status as a single woman, grandmother and ex-party member.

IS membership provided Hemingway with an avenue for a meaningful identity beyond wife and mother; as a northern working-class woman, prior to joining she had instinctively deferred to her husband. Her first meeting provided a surprising revelation:

This woman came up to me and said, 'Hello, who are you?' I said, 'oh I'm Brian's wife. She said, 'no, you're not. What's your name?' And I thought this woman's mad so I said: 'My name's Sheila'. She said, 'Well there you go, you're not Brian's wife, you're Sheila' ... It took me a while to get it into my head what she was on about, and then it clicked.<sup>168</sup>

The discovery that her experiences as a working-class woman and mother held political value to the organisation proved crucial to Hemingway's developing autonomy within IS. In 1974 Paul Foot asked her to write a series of articles for *Socialist Worker* on any subject of her choosing. Free to select

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<sup>165</sup> Interview with Sheila Hemingway, Wakefield, 7<sup>th</sup> June, 2009.

<sup>166</sup> Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives: Discourse and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War* (Manchester, 1998), p. 30.

<sup>167</sup> Chlöe Taylor, *The Culture of Confession from Augustine to Foucault: A Genealogy of the 'Confessional Animal'* (London, 2009), p. 173. See also Lynne Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (Abingdon, 2010), p. 73.

<sup>168</sup> Interview with Sheila Hemingway.

topics concerning her, Hemingway discovered her voice and wrote on subjects connected to her own experiences, including one article reflecting as a mother on the child murderer Mary Bell. She remembered the day when she first saw her words in print: 'It were unbelievable. But actually, I don't know whether it did make an impact because once you started doing it, it was like you were expected to do it ... It was part of being IS, part of being a comrade and you just did it. Yeah, I was just another comrade.'<sup>169</sup>

Where women around the Tufnell Park milieu had rejected the left groups in the VSC for their formulaic, belittling political culture that denied affective internal life, Hemingway's narrative signifies the autonomous space the Trotskyist milieu provided women as political, publically-situated beings; through external activity came internal renewal and camaraderie. The organisation put women in touch with a wider external world from local and national class struggles to international liberation and Third World conflicts, and judged them in the same terms as men skilled in the art of organisation, writing, and speaking. As a result women lived out identities as revolutionaries within the same fraternal spaces inhabited by male comrades and defined themselves through the discourse of efficiency, productivity and mobility pervading the organisations.

Joan Smith earned credibility as a female activist and IS intellectual in the LSE Socialist Society. From 1971 she continued this role within the all-male northern Glasgow branch where as a PhD student she had the flexibility to undertake organising responsibilities manual working members did not have. In the early 1970s the Scottish branches remained small and geographically removed from the London centre; in March 1970 average membership figures rarely surpassed ten in total.<sup>170</sup> Within her closely-knit branch Smith attained prominent status as chief organiser and speaker. Any deference members showed to her as a woman occurred only after meetings when the men selected a choice of pub:

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Booklet on the IS in Scotland, No. 4, March, 1970, p. 9, MRC, MSS. 128/158.

People would say 'Joan, are you coming for a drink now after the meeting', and I would say 'no I don't think so'. They would say 'okay', and I didn't know they were going to the tenant's bar up the road because it was better beer, and this was the bar that had the sign above it 'no women or dogs allowed'. If I said I was going they would go to the other pub underneath, *The Chancellor*, and nobody ever said anything. They would just hover by the door to find out where I wanted to go. It was fine and they were just nice.<sup>171</sup>

Organising on issues from Ireland to the Upper Clyde yard work-in, of June 1971, any sense of difference Smith might have felt as a woman dissolved under the weight of branch responsibilities.<sup>172</sup> In this vein of constant activity, even the challenge of feeding the scores of hungry activists descending on Glasgow during the work-in elided into the political realm; domestic arrangements fell to Smith not because she was a woman, but principal branch organiser. As such she approached the task with the same artful efficiency as she applied to all activities, allowing male comrades few opportunities to evade their share of domestic responsibility: 'I would say to the butcher I think I need twenty chops ... I just threw it all in the slow cooker ... They could scrub baked potatoes. It was a ten minute job. It was as much as I would do.'<sup>173</sup>

### **IS Women and the Women's Liberation Movement**

The personal politics of Women's Liberation seemed to challenge the essence of Trotskyist political selfhood. As revolutionaries Trotskyist women derived political agency from a public arena that privileged the masculine world of industrial work, far removed from the internal consciousness-raising of the small groups. However, as word of the new women's movement began to spread across the network, IS and IMG women did not eschew, but actively supported WL, albeit imparting their own political line. The shared enthusiasm with which Trotskyist women attended the first WL conference in February 1970 reflected the broad, inclusive nature of the early movement and the

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<sup>171</sup> Interview with Joan Smith, London, 20<sup>th</sup> March, 2009.

<sup>172</sup> In June 1971 Upper Clyde Shipbuilders (UCS), the consortium which owned four of Glasgow's five shipyards, went into liquidation following the government's refusal to inject public funds into the firm. In protest UCS workers overwhelmingly supported the proposal of the joint stewards' committee to occupy the yard, which was moderated to a work-in by workers as they were made redundant. For details of the dispute, see *Socialist Worker*, 14 June, 1971, p. 1.

<sup>173</sup> Interview with Joan Smith.

initial excitement women shared for the incorporation of the personal alongside the previously class angle of the political.<sup>174</sup> Yet women inhabited their female corporeal and psychological selves in complex dimensions, and for some IS and IMG activists it took time to process where to place themselves in relation to an emerging politics that implicated a central core of their identity unlike any other. The uncertain relationship between Trotskyist women and Women's Liberation reveals the complex inner and outer, gendered personal and political spheres women inhabited in the organisations, and the internal tensions and contradictions they lived out as activists equal to but different from male comrades.

In both their organisations and the WLM many women found a collectivity that was not always compatible with either one. The women who founded the North London IS Women's Group in 1970 exemplify the way in which, as IS activists and women, they invested different components of self in different political spheres. The North London Group grew out of an informal meeting at the Ruskin conference as a discussion group for about twenty women from the North London IS branches.<sup>175</sup> Attending the conference independently from the organisation, Anna Paczuska had been astonished to see so many familiar IS faces. She arranged to have a tannoy announcement for IS women to meet in the lobby and between thirty-to-forty members responded.<sup>176</sup> The spontaneous, intimate meeting testified to the network of inter-personal-political relationships developing after the conference between the IS women's group and the wider WLM.<sup>177</sup> Paczuska shared the excitement of women elsewhere on the revolutionary left who embraced the informal

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<sup>174</sup> Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell, *Sweet Freedom* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Oxford, 1987), pp. 12-13; Sheila Rowbotham in Wandor, *Once a Feminist*, p. 37.

<sup>175</sup> Notice about the formation of the North London IS Women's Group by Margaret Renn, Hazel French and Anna Paczuska in the Papers of Richard Hyman, MRC, MSS. 84, Box 1.

<sup>176</sup> Interview with Anna Paczuska, London, 4<sup>th</sup> January, 2010; Notice about the formation of the North London IS Women's Group, MRC, MSS. 84.

<sup>177</sup> The IS women's groups that emerged throughout the course of 1971, in the aftermath of the North London IS Women's Group, incorporated women who were also active as members of the WLM. In the autumn of 1970 it was through the night cleaner, May Hobbs, making contact with IS women in North London that the Night Cleaners' Campaign commenced in collaboration with the LWLW. For details, see Sheila Rowbotham, 'Cleaners' Organising in Britain from the 1970s: A Personal Account', *Antipode*, 38:3, June, 2006, pp. 608-625; Margaret Renn (Hornsey IS), 'A Union for Night Cleaners', *IS Women's Newsletter*, No. 2, December, 1970, pp. 16-18, MRC, MSS. 84, Box 1.

intimacy of the small WL groups<sup>178</sup>; away from the mixed IS branches, the North London Group provided legitimate political space for members to begin to work from the personal, from direct experience and feeling, in a manner disapproved of by the organisation:

There was a connection that the IS politics didn't always have. I didn't have to talk about the theory with women. I didn't have to read a book on what Lenin said on it and what Marx said on it. We did read a lot about what Marx said on it and what Lenin said on it because that was kind of a weapon in our debate with the male comrades, but it felt kind of close to home ... the theory began to make sense because you were starting with you.<sup>179</sup>

Yet, having come to left activism through IS, her loyalty to the organisation remained steadfast; there was never a question of choice between the two political arenas.<sup>180</sup> Paczuska derived social agency as a woman from the new politics, but political agency from IS; and it was out of enthusiasm for Women's Liberation, not antagonism as a woman to the organisation that she sought to carry it into the branches. Having discovered the mutual joys of IS membership in the upsurge of 1968, it seemed logical that male comrades would want to share Women's Liberation as an extension of the liberation politics they had embraced as students. She told them: 'This is exciting. You've gotta listen. This is great. You've gotta listen.'<sup>181</sup>

Finding their political voice as women so soon after finding their voice as IS activists made it hard for women like Paczuska and Margaret Renn to separate the two and to see how their involvement in the growing WLM threatened an organisation that provided them with space to move as autonomous, daring young women. Renn recalled: 'We were absolutely pulsing with confidence. And in a way we had no idea that we were... I mean we obviously knew we were being challenging, but in a way we couldn't see what the problem was. I mean we had sort of been kept

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<sup>178</sup> Interview with Sue Bruley, London, 14<sup>th</sup> May, 2010; Audrey Battersby in Wandor, *Once a Feminist*, pp. 113-115; Val Charlton, in Wandor, *Once a Feminist*, p. 165; Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream*, p. 230.

<sup>179</sup> Interview with Anna Paczuska and Margaret Renn, London, 4<sup>th</sup> January, 2010.

<sup>180</sup> Val Charlton expressed similar sentiments of loyalty to the Communist Party in relation to Women's Liberation. See Charlton, in Wandor, *Once a Feminist*, p. 163.

<sup>181</sup> Interview with Anna Paczuska and Margaret Renn.

quiet without knowing it because we were young and not involved and these things happened very quickly on top of the other.<sup>182</sup> Genuinely surprised at the 'scornful and unhelpful remarks' with which male comrades greeted the new politics as 'frivolous' and 'diversionary', initially female members adopted a defensive stance by 'trying to "sell" WL' to the organisation, arguing that support for the movement would increase membership.<sup>183</sup> IS women worked alongside WL members, supporting the Women's National Co-ordinating Committee<sup>184</sup>, and by December 1970 a dozen women's groups were being run by IS women or in conjunction with IS branches, encompassing non-IS and WL members.<sup>185</sup> But by 1971 the organisation's continuing opposition provoked female defiance after a resolution attempting to discuss WL was defeated by the IS Easter conference.<sup>186</sup> Paczuska signalled the North London Group's refusal to continue pacifying male comrades by proclaiming Women's Liberation 'an important principle that must be recognised by any organisation that calls itself revolutionary and socialist ... irrespective of whether it increases our membership or not'.<sup>187</sup> Southampton member Kathleen Ennis confirmed that IS women could not 'hope to make things easier for ourselves within the group without a tough fight'.<sup>188</sup> However, though IS women continued to support the WLM, by early 1972 Paczuska's endorsement of personal politics had fallen on deaf ears as women's organising was increasingly brought in line with the IS industrial strategy<sup>189</sup>; female members criticised the movement's failure to 'get through to ordinary women', and the thirty-two women's fractions prioritised activity around 'working women', arguing

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Anna Paczuska, 'Comment', IS Women's Newsletter, No. 3, April, 1971, p. 1, MSS. 84, Box 1, MRC.

<sup>184</sup> The Women's National Co-ordinating Committee (WNCC) was set up in the wake of the Ruskin Women's Liberation Conference as a national, federal organisation designed to allow all Women's Liberation groups to affiliate and participate in promoting the debate on the means for women to achieve liberation. The body published a bi-monthly journal, *Women's Struggle*, to which any group or individual in the movement could contribute. See 'Leaflet on the WNCC and Women's Liberation Movement', in the Socialist Woman Papers, MRC, MSS. 128/95.

<sup>185</sup> Anna Paczuska, 'IS Women's Groups', IS Women's Newsletter, No. 2, December, 1970, p. 1, MRC, MSS. 84, Box 1.

<sup>186</sup> Paczuska, 'Comment', p. 1, MRC, MSS. 84, Box 1; Gill Simms (Harrow IS), 'Comments on the discussion of women at the annual conference', MRC, MSS. 84, Box 1.

<sup>187</sup> Paczuska, 'Comment', p. 2, MRC, MSS. 84, Box 1.

<sup>188</sup> Kathleen Ennis (Southampton IS), 'Women's Liberation and the Revolutionary Party', IS Women's Newsletter, No. 3, April, 1971, p. 6, MRC, MSS. 84, Box 1.

<sup>189</sup> Paczuska, 'Comment', p. 2, MRC, MSS. 84, Box 1.

that they offered 'more developed' politics and 'greater value' to IS than housewives.<sup>190</sup>

IS men's responses to Women's Liberation need to be understood in relation to a culture that privileged class struggle and fostered an underworld of private emotion beneath the official world of the organisational activist. Inside this political space intimate relations were an unwelcome distraction.<sup>191</sup> Women were respected as comrades on equal terms with men and their desire to organise on behalf of women's activities was tolerated as long as they subscribed to the image of a good IS activist. Sandy Irving epitomised this attitude when he explained: 'The IS might give the impression of being male dominated, but nonetheless you would meet in the course of things a number of very strong women and you just accepted that is how it was. They were good organisers, good speakers, held their own ground.'<sup>192</sup> In this vein male comrades supported women in their endeavours with women's politics where they saw their activities helping to develop their skills as effective politicians, and working to extend the political influence of the organisation. Paczuska reflected on her husband's encouragement towards her campaigning efforts:

I think my husband at the time used to like to say, well, if you are going to do the National Abortion Campaign this is how you take it over. This is what you do to be a real influence. It was always a very organisational bias to the thing. It wasn't how we get abortion or equal pay or whatever, it was how can you be the most dominant person in the movement and influence the politics of everybody else around you, so I think in that sense the men were always very supportive because they felt they had a lot of experience to give and they did.<sup>193</sup>

Some IS women too supported 'women' as a legitimate area for political activity only as long as it remained mediated through the language of class. Wendy Henry epitomised the hostility that some IS women displayed towards Women's Liberation when at the 1971 Skegness WL conference she

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<sup>190</sup> Valerie Clark (agreed by Hazel French), 'IS Work on the Question of Women (Blue Paper)', c. 1972, MRC, MSS. 84, Box 1.

<sup>191</sup> In April 1971 Anna Paczuska noted that 'some comrades would argue that we cannot interfere in the sphere of personal relationships'. Anna Paczuska, 'Comments', p. 2, MRC, MSS. 84, Box 1. IS member Alan Watts recalled a comment he heard in relation to another members' personal difficulties that the organisation 'isn't a hospital'. Interview with Alan Watts.

<sup>192</sup> Interview with John Charlton and Sandy Irving, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 2009.

<sup>193</sup> Interview with Anna Paczuska and Margaret Renn, London, 4<sup>th</sup> January, 2010.

reportedly made IS delegates 'tremble' by reporting that WL members spent their time talking about 'sexual hang-ups'.<sup>194</sup> In this vein Di Parkin recalled her distaste for the 'naval-gazing' of the consciousness-raising group she briefly attended at the University of Kent in 1972, which sat uncomfortably with her self-image of revolutionary woman exuding autonomy and authority.<sup>195</sup> Joan Smith saw 'the emphasis on the personal as political' as 'wimpish', countering her understanding of female strength.<sup>196</sup>

However, for other IS women Women's Liberation marked a dislocation between inner psychic and outer political and social life that echoed the conflict of non-aligned activists struggling to realign personal and social roles. Gilda Peterson remembered the internal tension that activism in the women's movement aroused over how, as an IS member and a woman, she invested herself in far left activity. In terms of personal oppression Women's Liberation felt removed from her life; she was 'pretty caught up with IS ... caught up in this big relationship with my other half'; he was open to women's politics, activism was a shared bond between them.<sup>197</sup> Open to radical psychology and sociology, she sought a 'class politics, but one that would make sense of the personal' to also encompass her interest in social work as a means of empowering families.<sup>198</sup> As a result she took an interest in IS women's discussion groups, and in the mid-1970s participated in women's demonstrations in the National Abortion Campaign (NAC), part of a 'patchwork of socialist feminist activism' developing across the network.<sup>199</sup> However, investing herself within IS and the women's movement, she became aware of an inner conflict that related to how, practically, she could accommodate class and women's politics to incorporate a personal dimension: 'There was a kind of

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<sup>194</sup> Simms, 'Comments on the discussion on women at the annual conference', MRC, MSS. 84, Box 1.

<sup>195</sup> Interview with Di Parkin.

<sup>196</sup> Interview with Joan Smith.

<sup>197</sup> Interview with Gilda Peterson, Leeds, 4<sup>th</sup> June, 2009.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> The NAC began as a grass-roots campaign in 1975 in response to the threat MP James White's anti-abortion bill posed to the 1967 law. It incorporated feminist activists from across the spectrum of the British Left that by 1978 extended to the trade union movement. See Browne, 'The Women's Liberation Movement in Scotland', pp. 213-238; Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell, *Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women's Liberation* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Oxford, 1987), p. 38; Rowbotham, *The Past Is Before Us: Feminism in Action since the 1960s* (London, 1989), pp. 66-69; Eve Setch, 'The Women's Liberation Movement in Britain, 1969-1979' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, Royal Holloway, July, 2000), p. 277; David Widgery, 'Defending Abortion Rights', *Radical America*, Vol. 11:3, May-June, 1977, pp. 75-77.

sense in your life that maybe you couldn't have it all ... a conflict in terms of wanting to be active. ... one's identity as a woman, particularly with a family, was something quite complicated and something set aside I suppose in that sense.<sup>200</sup> However, Peterson also recalled how marching on abortion demonstrations alongside thousands of other women she attained an empowerment that briefly overrode her doubts about the liberating potential of Women's Liberation. In the interview she chanted out loud the NAC slogan she and the demonstrators had shouted through loud hailers: 'Our Bodies, Our Lives, Our Right to Decide.'<sup>201</sup> The energetic moment conveyed the way in which the emotional power of an all-female demonstration provided a tangible connection between womanhood as a corporeal identity and female political agency, transcending differences on the left, and uniting her and other socialist feminists around her.<sup>202</sup> Her experience confirmed Rowbotham's claim that, despite attempts to work through different forms of political organisation, including parliament and the labour movement, the emotional components of political consciousness remained at the heart of the NAC, because of the way in which it repeatedly brought campaigners into contact with women's personal stories.<sup>203</sup>

### **Women in the IMG**

The internal division Peterson described highlights the psychic challenges that some Trotskyist women encountered in response to the different social roles they occupied as activists inside the organisation and as women still struggling to situate themselves in mainstream society. Despite the coherence that revolutionary women derived from the IS and IMG, their inner female selves at times stood at odds with the way in which, as activists, they inhabited the same political spaces as their male comrades.

Jacqueline Thompson's narrative of IMG activism shows the way in which contradictions women had felt in the early masculine sub-cultures followed them into the adult milieu. From the

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Interview with Gilda Peterson and Caroline Burn, Leeds, 5<sup>th</sup> June, 2009.

<sup>202</sup> Browne, 'The Women's Liberation Movement in Scotland', p. 218; Rowbotham, *The Past Is Before Us*, p. 67.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid, pp. 68-69.

moment of joining in late 1970, Thompson rapidly came to think of herself as an extension of the organisation. Unemployed and with few social ties in London, full-time activism provided a 'total life' cemented by camaraderie from a small circle of comrades in a shared house in Brick Lane and (from 1972) a squat in Tolmers Square, Camden: 'I sold all my literature books to give the money to the organisation. I was that devoted.'<sup>204</sup> Heavy involvement in the Irish Solidarity Campaign saw her honing covert organisational skills that allowed her to live out a romanticised image of the red guerrilla factions developing in West Germany and Italy.<sup>205</sup> By 1971 the IMG was declaring unconditional support for the IRA struggle against 'British imperialism and its puppets', and for grass-roots activists like Thompson participating in civil rights demonstrations presented live experiences of militant resistance from the police authorities previously only seen in Western and Eastern Europe.<sup>206</sup> On the 30 January 1972 she and her comrades had a close encounter with mounted police in a demonstration of 20,000 people through the Catholic area of Derry.<sup>207</sup> On a day later known as Bloody Sunday, troops from the British Parachute Regiment opened fire on unarmed demonstrators, killing thirteen marchers fleeing a carpark.<sup>208</sup> For the IMG the event symbolised the brutality of British imperialism, but Thompson remembered the romantic shadow colouring her experience of the occasion. Going into hiding after the demonstration, she assumed the mantle of an ultra militant complete with party name; Peter Gowan called her Molly Maguire after the nineteenth-century Irish-American secret terrorist organisation.<sup>209</sup>

As a militant activist Thompson not only felt of equal status with male comrades, but her

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<sup>204</sup> Interview with Jacqueline Thompson, London, 10<sup>th</sup> February, 2009.

<sup>205</sup> For selected literature on the red terror developing in West Germany and Italy after the high-point of 1969, see Dorothea Hauser, 'Terrorism', in Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth (eds.), *1968 in Europe: A History of Protest and Activism, 1956-1977* (New York, 2008), pp. 269-279; Wolfgang Kraushaar, 'Hitler's Children? The German 1968 Movement in the Shadow of the Nazi Past', in Cornils and Waters, *Memories of 1968*, pp. 69-101; Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies* (Berkeley, 2004); Leonard Weinberg, 'The Red Brigades', in: Robert J. Art and Louise Richardson (eds.), *Democracy and Counterterrorism: Lessons from the Past* (Washington, D.C, 2007), pp. 25-62.

<sup>206</sup> *International*, Vol. 1, No. 6, September/October, 1971, p. 6; *Red Mole*, No. 8, August, 1971, p. 1; IMG leaflet 'Ireland. What Side Are You On?', MRC, MSS. 128/90; interview with Peter Gowan, London, 13<sup>th</sup> November, 2008.

<sup>207</sup> Interview with Jacqueline Thompson.

<sup>208</sup> *The Times*, 31<sup>st</sup> January, 1972, pp. 1-2.

<sup>209</sup> Interview with Jacqueline Thompson.

sense of womanhood seemed to dissolve amidst the intensity of covert activity that subsumed the personal: 'We felt ourselves equal. We didn't dress up, we didn't act sexually overtly ... in the Irish thing it was incredibly intense and intensive. Going back to how I felt as a woman I don't know. It is hard to say really. I felt just like a man.'<sup>210</sup> Reluctant to participate in activities concerned specifically with women's oppression because they denied opportunities for a revolutionary role, the implication was that, for Thompson, women's issues lacked legitimacy as an area of activist politics. Within this total culture the female goodness of post-war girlhood had been inverted to assume a new meaning of dutiful radical. Living out the identity of 'good activist' meant suppressing emotions that threatened to undermine the political role outlined by the organisation. This revised concept of the good Trotskyist represented a psychic continuity between the post-war mother and the female activist, wherein both implied subordinating personal freedoms to the needs of the social and cultural climate shaping women's conduct. In this context the motif of mother signified the social and psychic constraints which the Trotskyist landscape continued to exert on female members.

Thompson's ambivalence towards women as a legitimate campaign area mirrored the rather inconsistent approach the IMG adopted towards the women's movement. Initially IMG women were at the forefront of the campaigns against women's oppression. In 1969 Leonora Lloyd headed a group supporting the trade union organisation for women's equal pay and equal rights, the National Joint Action Committee for Women's Equal Rights (NJACWER).<sup>211</sup> The IMG recognised the legitimacy of the WLM<sup>212</sup>, and from early 1969 female members in Nottingham set up a Socialist Women's Committee, followed in the summer of 1970 by a group in London, with branches

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> See *Socialist Woman*, Vol. 1, No. 2, March/April 1969, pp. 1-8, and *Socialist Woman*, Vol. 1, No. 3, July/August, 1969, pp. 1-2, and *Socialist Woman*, Vol. 1, No. 5, December 1969-January 1970, p.p. 2-3

<sup>212</sup> Minutes of the IMG national committee meeting on 11-12<sup>th</sup> May, 1968 show the interest of members in the WL campaign in response to which members agreed to produce a pamphlet from the articles printed in the special women's issue of *Black Dwarf* (*Black Dwarf*, Vol. 13, No. 9, 10<sup>th</sup> January, 1969), to initiate internal education on WL in the branches and to present a paper at a forthcoming cadre school which would then form the basis for the formation of a socialist woman committee. Minutes of the IMG National Committee, 11-12<sup>th</sup> May, 1968, Papers of the International Marxist Group, MRC, MSS. 128/66.

thereafter extending to Oxford, Leicester, Lancaster, Glasgow, Cardiff and Bristol.<sup>213</sup> The organisation also set up a separate women's caucus to deal specifically with women's struggles.<sup>214</sup> The Socialist Woman Committee characterised themselves as a 'Women's Liberation Group' and members worked alongside WL groups in campaigns such as the London and Oxford Night Cleaners Campaigns and the Fakenham Women's Work-In of March 1972.<sup>215</sup> The IMG also showed early support for gay liberation with members participating in GLF activities such as the LSE think-ins.<sup>216</sup> However, in line with the IS, 'class solidarity' rather than 'sex solidarity' remained at the forefront of their approach towards women's oppression.<sup>217</sup>

In June 1971 members of the Nottingham Socialist Woman's Group came into hostile conflict with members of the majority tendency leadership when the latter took control over the *Socialist Woman* journal in an effort to sever the women's links with the WLM and to bring the Group in line with their turn towards 'the industrial front'.<sup>218</sup> In response members of the original editorial board printed a letter in *Socialist Woman*, denying any link between the new journal of March 1971, produced in London using the SW name, and the original committee members.<sup>219</sup> In May, IMG members on the Nottingham SW Committee - Antonia Gorton, Anne Black, Jo O'Brien and Mary Donnelly - found themselves accused of 'direct defiance' against the IMG National Committee and women's caucus meetings; having taken no action to publically dissociate themselves from the view expressed in the insert, they had shown 'disloyalty to the IMG' and 'utter contempt for the

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<sup>213</sup> The first Socialist Women's Committee was open to both housewives and to women who worked outside the home, but maintained continuity with the NJACWER campaign by seeking to implement a socialist programme for the attainment by women of equal economic, social, and political status. See letter from Barbara A. Wilson to Sheila Rowbotham regarding an advertisement about the setting up of the Socialist Women's Committee, 1969, WL, 7SHR/B/Box 4. See also Anne Black, 'Why a Socialist Women's Committee?', *Socialist Woman*, Vol. 1, No. 2, March/April, 1969, p. 1.

<sup>214</sup> *Socialist Woman*, Vol. 3, No. 4, July/August, 1971, p. 14.

<sup>215</sup> Advertisement for Central London Socialist Group, MRC, MSS.128/95; *The Night Cleaners Campaign: a socialist woman special*, in the Private Archive of Dodi Wepler (hereafter D.W.A.); Report on the Post-Conference Visit to Fakenham, MRC, MSS.128/95.

<sup>216</sup> Lucy Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left in Post-War Britain* (Manchester, 2007), p. 98.

<sup>217</sup> 'Don't Call US Birds!', *International*, 1968, p. 7.

<sup>218</sup> Letter from C. Singh to J. King, Lancaster, 9<sup>th</sup> June, 1971, in MSS. 128/97, MRC.

<sup>219</sup> Minority Report from the Commission Set Up to Investigate the Socialist Woman Affair, 18 June, 1971, Appendix 2, pp. 2-3, MRC, MSS. 128/95.

right of the leading bodies of the IMG to direct the work of its members'.<sup>220</sup> After an internal commission was set up to investigate the allegations the four Nottingham members were ordered to cease all women's work.<sup>221</sup> In an appeal to the National Committee the women argued that after a decision, taken without their presence, they had already resigned from the Nottingham WL Group and had not since spoken to members in it. They defended their right to continue working in the Nottingham Women's Action Co-ordinating Committee (WACC), since it was 'an independent organisation building actions on one of the four main demands of the WLM', publically supported by the IMG.<sup>222</sup> They also expressed understanding that the IMG's position towards the WLM was that the movement had to be brought to an industrial orientation by giving priority to those demands which the majority believed related to most working women.<sup>223</sup> In barring them from internal women's discussions and the Nottingham SW Group, the women accused the majority leadership of showing 'an attitude of indifference, tokenism, and tail-endism towards the WLM'; of trying to separate them from their 'sisters' who were striving for liberation; and of creating a factional, witch-hunting atmosphere' in their efforts to manoeuvre against them to solve their own political issues. They resolutely refused to be 'ghettoised' and to leave the Fourth International, as Nottingham National Committee member, B. Simister, was urging them to do.<sup>224</sup>

The dispute between the Nottingham SW members and the majority leadership spoke of the fractional divisions of political and personal loyalty Trotskyist women had occasionally to confront in the face of outright chauvinism and hostile political manoeuvring on the part of the male leadership.<sup>225</sup> It also illuminates the political culture informing Thompson's self-understanding of

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Appeal to the National Committee from the Nottingham Tendency Members, 3<sup>rd</sup> January, 1972, p. 1, MRC, MSS. 128/95.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid, p. 4

<sup>224</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>225</sup> Further evidence of these attitudes can be seen in internal bulletins female IMG members wrote to alert male members of the political relevance of campaigning on women's oppression, which included criticism of the 'crude sexist attitudes' men displayed towards women 'in their conversations' and references to one male member who had referred to the 'raving feminism' of women in the organisation. See Internal Bulletin Number Six, January, 1973, pp. 6-8, MRC, MSS. 128/60.

the 'good activist'. The image of masculine politico she embodied derived from a culture of hostility and suspicion towards the WLM as a competing source of political authority to the IMG. In this climate demonstrating loyalty to the organisation meant adopting a model of social conduct that adhered to the leadership's disregard for personal relationships and issues of sexuality as distractions from the true political focus of class struggles. After the miners' strike of 1972 the organisation turned towards an overt workerist line. The succession of the John Ross tendency, replacing Pat Jordan and Tariq Ali, saw the beginning of a sustained campaign to improve the IMG's standing amongst manual workers, calling for a general strike and removing a leadership too closely associated with the VSC and a largely student membership base.<sup>226</sup> Although embedded within this revolutionary milieu, Thompson remained unable to deny her apparently contradictory emotional responses towards the debates and ideas she heard filtering through from the WLM, and unconsciously they began to shape her female social conduct apart from her androgynous militant persona:

I didn't wear make-up because men should take you as you are. I was very anti being a sex object. That was the women's movement ... I used to love high heels and things but that was a part of me that was quite contradictory ... It is difficult really. I was difficult. I wanted to be equal in a man's world and I felt I was, but I was chatted up quite a lot because I was attractive and that annoyed me intensely.<sup>227</sup>

Thompson's narrative testified to the way in which the IMG provided opportunities for women to enact self-assertive images of sociability in a way that in the early 1970s had yet to readily translate into the public spheres of mainstream society. Women's Liberation alerted them to the reality of the social restrictions continuing to constrain them as mainstream social beings, and in so doing it signalled the impossibility of demarcating political and private life. Thompson attempted to

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<sup>226</sup> Callaghan, *British Trotskyism*, p. 131; Red Mole Special on the miners' strike, 17<sup>th</sup> February, 1972, p. 1; *Red Mole Strike Special*, No. 1, 25 July, 1972, *Red Mole Strike Special*, No. 2, 1972.

<sup>227</sup> Interview with Jacqueline Thompson. Ironically, when selling papers in working men's clubs, Thompson adhered to the masculine authorial culture that prevailed in the IMG. Dressing in a 'respectable' skirt and jacket, she ascribed to the traditional image of fifties femininity out of political deference to the men she sought to recruit.

reconcile the two competing identities of revolutionary and affective, socially-subscribed woman by fantasising herself as revolutionary mother: 'There didn't seem to be any difference between being a mum and being a revolutionary, because of course we had read so much about the African movements and so many international movements where women were fighting and having babies.'<sup>228</sup> The vision represented an attempt to bridge an activist landscape that demanded attention to the present within a socially conservative society that continued to elevate motherhood as the pinnacle of female achievement; denying potential conflict between the two identities she achieved psychic composure as both revolutionary and woman acknowledging the role society and her physiology shaped for her future.

### **Activist as Mother**

For women whose activism coincided with motherhood demarcations between activist and domestic life was rarely straightforward. The multiple pressures accompanying each role shaped political subjectivity in quite different terms from male comrades. Di Parkin provides particular testimony, as one of few women to have written on the experience of activism and motherhood. In 1972-3 she began a correspondence with her close friend and IS comrade, Lorraine Hewitt, that became akin to a series of diary entries. The two women confided the daily minutiae of their lives; battles with poverty, the difficulties of single parenthood, and the challenges of living as women engaged in the present, working to change tomorrow. In a milieu which allowed little time or space for personal reflection the intimate letters gave the women momentary release from the demands that befell them as activists and mothers, and testified to a friendship rooted in their shared identities as revolutionaries, mothers, and women. Their lives integrated all these elements to foster a collective way of being that they felt only each other could understand.

Parkin's letters to Hewitt illustrate the untidy daily business of integrating the demands and responsibilities of branch life alongside the practicalities of motherhood. Each intruded rudely on

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

the other, making it impossible for the women to approach the domestic dramas of nappy rash and lost bubble bath with the same neat efficiency that Joan Smith applied to the catering challenges of the Glasgow IS.<sup>229</sup> Details of political activity and opinions on current political issues were interspersed with tales about the children's development, and the day-to-day domestic tasks made harder by surviving on little money. They also illustrate that Parkin felt complete only when immersed in activism. After the birth of her second child Rosa (named after Rosa Luxemburg), in a letter on 5 December 1971, she joked to Hewitt that 'I did a quick check over myself like they feel people for broken bones after accidents. Finding myself able to think about Gramsci and Trotskyist Tendency and the nature of scientific objectivity, I concluded that I still existed. Feeling fit enough by bedtime to leaflet several council estates concludes the story of health'.<sup>230</sup> From the moment of birth 'the business of being a revolutionary and a mother were woven together'; the children's arrival disturbed the neat divisions the women had sought to maintain between public activism and private life.<sup>231</sup> As long as Parkin was able to find some form of outlet for expressing her revolutionary self, the weight of motherhood became more bearable. Whereas the Tufnell Park WL group provided women with a collective political identity to reconcile the previously all-consuming role of mother, for a revolutionary like Parkin her private letters to Hewitt achieved the same effect; in the spring of 1973, after her separation from her husband, she acknowledged to her friend: 'I am a mother. I say this not defeatedly, as I once did (for I am more certainly a revolutionary than ever) but somehow this fact used to escape me. I used to escape it.'<sup>232</sup>

Women's struggles to fit organisational life alongside motherhood aroused psychic tension that pervaded their experiences of these competing worlds. Parkin shamefully remembered how in 1972 she left Rosa in her carry cot parked around the corner from a miner's picket where she was

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<sup>229</sup> In a letter from Parkin to Hewitt, in the spring of 1973, Parkin underlined the implicit understanding the two women found in each other as mothers and revolutionaries by her ability to regale her friend with the latest tales of buying nappy rash cream and raging as the children poured into the bath the entire contents of a new bottle of Matey bubble bath. Letter from Di Parkin to Hewitt, Oxford, Spring, 1973, DPA.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Letter from Di Parkin to Lorraine Hewitt, Oxford, Spring 1973, DPA.

busy fighting with police.<sup>233</sup> Sometimes desperate to immerse herself in activity, she resented her children as ‘my jailers’, though she ‘knew it was not their fault’.<sup>234</sup> IS member Prue Chamberlayne explained the insufficient space motherhood allowed for revolutionary life. She could only ever inhabit either realm at any one time. In the late 1970s, after joining the Workers Socialist League<sup>235</sup>, she shared a house and childcare responsibilities with Parkin: ‘I would be eking my time out and not going at the appointed time, and I imagine I would find myself so engrossed in what I was doing and think it was so important.’ Like John Cowley she wore ‘two heads’ so that ‘the minute I was back home I would be immediately back in that sphere [of motherhood]’.<sup>236</sup> Yet the women’s guilt overrode any boundaries they tried to maintain between domestic and activist life. Parkin wrote: ‘just as the day light hours were drilled with paper-sales, with writing, duplicating, and giving out leaflets, they too were drilled with guilt’.<sup>237</sup> Sheila Hemingway felt guilty ‘because I used to get baby-sitters in more than I should have’.<sup>238</sup> As a single mother the organisation came to supplant the place of her husband as a lover might have done. She reflected: ‘I tried to find out if the grass was greener on the other side.’<sup>239</sup>

The contradictions and dislocations between the masculine culture of industrial class politics and inner female life impinged upon the revolutionary mother perhaps more intrusively than any other women in the milieu. Parkin’s letters to Hewitt show how motherhood opened up an emotional depth of existence that disrupted her early masculine political self. Suffusing the correspondence is an implicit understanding of the psychological transformations each woman had undergone since becoming a mother. In 1972 she told Hewitt: ‘You and I are the only people we

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<sup>233</sup> Interview with Di Parkin.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> The Workers’ Socialist League, part of the Fourth International, was founded in 1975 by former members of the Workers’ Revolutionary Party (formerly the Socialist Labour League), based around Oxford and the Cowley car factory, after their expulsion from that group in 1975. For details, see Internal Bulletin – Workers’ Socialist League and *Socialist Press*, 6<sup>th</sup> February, 1975, MRC, Papers of Alan Clinton, MSS. 539/2/2/14.

<sup>236</sup> Interview with Prue Chamberlayne, London, 8<sup>th</sup> May, 2009.

<sup>237</sup> Prue Chamberlayne and Di Parkin, ‘Women, Sex and Revolutionary Politics’, European Social Science History Conference, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, March, 2006, p. 11.

<sup>238</sup> Interview with Sheila Hemingway.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

meet in the hours of children time who confirm, who we really are – that we are not party to the small chaos and impossible tension of the domestic hysteria of the under 3 year olds. They are the forces of the wild and irrational, while we are part of the force of revolution.<sup>240</sup> They were unusual examples of IS women who embraced communal practices explicitly designed to aid them as revolutionary women: perform political activity, study, and cycle to men’s beds.<sup>241</sup> In Canterbury they established a so-called ‘Mother’s Commune’, a group of women who took turns looking after the children for one afternoon a week.<sup>242</sup>

### **The Trotskyist Personal and Political**

Understanding the place and nature of relationships in the Trotskyist milieu provides an important channel for exploring the elision between the personal and political. Whereas in the non-aligned milieu, especially in relation to WL, the emerging critique of exclusive sexual relations placed a new emphasis on the importance of friendships alongside egalitarian romantic relations, relations conducted inside and in the immediate vicinity of the organisations were also shaped in particular forms, performing specific social, political and psychic functions for activists.<sup>243</sup> The importance of female relations for women struggling to combine motherhood with politics has already been shown. But for men friendships, casual sexual relations and loving partnerships also helped to sustain their self-image of politico, as in the daily business of class struggle they subordinated the internal individual to the immediate demands of the cause.

Friendships sometimes performed a dual purpose, reinforcing the multiple identities activists held in public and private spheres. The bonds of comradeship men held in the political arena were imbued with friendly competition surrounding paper sales, trade union contacts, and recruitment success that reinforced the ever-changing pace of activity. In the Greenford engineering

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<sup>240</sup> Letter from Di Parkin to Lorraine Hewitt, Canterbury, 1972, DPA.

<sup>241</sup> Di Parkin, ‘For Georgia and that the world grows worth her’, p. 6, DPA.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>243</sup> For further discussion on the role of friendships and the new libertarian model of relations, see Victor J. Seidler, *Rediscovering Masculinity: Reason, Language and Sexuality* (London, 1989), pp. 25-26.

factory John Rose's friendships tied into a social life shaped by the business of organising, hosting parties and educational evenings for workers his task it was to recruit. Yet underneath he remained uneasy in their company, preferring to 'sneak back to north London where I used to live and see my old friends including Basker [Vashee]'.<sup>244</sup> The friendships facilitated 'a kind of double life because it was, however kind of exciting it was, it was a bit much'.<sup>245</sup> In Newcastle (from July 1973) David Carter's friendships with IMG men informed a subversive revolutionary image of the 'red mole'.<sup>246</sup> In a 'high octane life' lived through the branch and household, bonds of friendship were rooted in a common hinterland of Trotskyist agitation and factional debate that reinforced Carter's public school experience that had denied the personal: 'People were quite theoretical, very intense, a bit too intense ... We were men who were Trotskyists ... The idea that we would all open up and talk to each other about each others' personal hang-ups, that just didn't happen.'<sup>247</sup> IS national committee member, John Palmer, spoke of close male comrades 'with whom I discussed the politics intensely, and the personal feelings came through, but I never sat down with any of them and said I think this is having an effect on me'.<sup>248</sup> David Widgery confirmed the personal ignorance his IS male comrades held towards each other during this period. Even though he had shared adjacent bedrooms to male friends through intense emotional experiences he never once saw them cry.<sup>249</sup>

The personal did, however, feature in the sexual and romantic relations that took place in the political world male and female comrades shared. But whereas the organisation presented a structured set of guidelines for conducting activity and political relations<sup>250</sup>, personal and familial

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<sup>244</sup> Interview with John Rose, London, 30<sup>th</sup> October, 2008.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> Interview with David Carter, Middlesex, 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2009.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Interview with John Palmer, London, 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 2009.

<sup>249</sup> Interview between Ronald Fraser and respondent C896/18, p. 21, Ronald Fraser Interviews: 1968 A Student Generation in Revolt, British Library Sound Archive.

<sup>250</sup> Political education through branch meetings and weekend schools and conferences was central to the activities of both IS and IMG members. In the IS such education extended to the field of industrial politics and relations, educating members on how to build up contacts inside the labour movement through a series of regular industrial schools. See, for example, Notice of IS industrial school, 9/10<sup>th</sup> May, 1970, Grange Farm, Chigwell, London, MRC, MSS. 250, Box 4. In the IMG branch structures were in place, designed to manage any incidents of discordant relations. In November, 1971, for example, a proposition was drawn up and voted on by members after a female member of the Bristol branch had accused a male member of his 'mechanistic and

arenas were far less ordered and tangible. In an ever-changing political climate male activists like Carter were able to evade the uncomfortable and unfamiliar realm of personal feeling by extending the rules of political engagement to personal relationships. Joining the IMG had helped to eliminate a feeling of otherness that Carter had carried to York University from his insular background in the Isle of Mann.<sup>251</sup> The IMG promised to fulfil his desire ‘to be subsumed within part of something’; assuming the revolutionary identity of the red mole; once in Newcastle he soon extended his peripatetic political lifestyle into an overlapping series of secret relations with women in his branch.<sup>252</sup> Just as Jacqueline Thompson justified her political distance from the women’s movement by subscribing to the role of the ‘good activist’, so Carter evaded the personal tensions that arose around his multiple relationships by evoking the same image:

I knew I wasn’t being totally honest but part of being a revolutionary is by definition not being totally honest. It is a subversive activity. You don’t reveal everything. That is part of revolutionary politics. Firstly, I didn’t see personal relationships as being that important and, secondly, subverting what I felt and keeping my relationships hidden from other people that wasn’t very important because revolutionaries did that.<sup>253</sup>

Within this moral framework Carter’s own personal conflicts formed an extension of the national power struggles he saw played out at conferences and national meetings where personal attacks were not uncommon.<sup>254</sup>

The fluid sexual relationships Carter described reflected a continuation of the transitory sexual patterns common in activist circles around the VSC. As Anna Davin testified (chapter three), sex became another way in which personal and political life fused together, dissolving boundaries between public and private life, and providing activists with an additional layer of personal meaning

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formal approach’ to IMG branch business. Minutes of the Bristol IMG branch, 17<sup>th</sup> November, 1971, p. 1, MRC, MSS. 128/90. Membership in the Bristol branch was understood to be dependent on an individual’s ‘political level’ and degree of ‘political commitment shown’. Minutes of the Bristol IMG branch, 7<sup>th</sup> November, 1971, p. 1, MRC, MSS. 128/90.

<sup>251</sup> Interview with David Carter.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid; interview with Julia Fairchild\*.

to the sense of themselves as socialists or revolutionaries. Women and men who spent most of their time in the company of comrades, sharing the heightened emotions of struggles, sometimes found political passions spilling over into the bodily realm. Whereas in non-aligned circles open sexual relations acquired a consciously political meaning, a way of challenging the possessive individualism that characterised established capitalist society, in the Trotskyist milieu fluid relations between members were an extension of the cultural patterns they had carried through from their student days.<sup>255</sup> Sexual freedom for men and women formed a further expression of the social self-determination, which in the late sixties had drawn upon the shared culture of personal freedom prevailing in the underground and left circles alike, facilitated by the greater availability of contraceptives, notably the pill, as well as the increasing publicisation of sexuality in mainstream culture.<sup>256</sup> Commitment to realising social agency outside the dominant patterns of capitalism encouraged the experimentation of political communication and self-expression, although sexual liberation in the underground also purported to relate to the mind-expanding culture of altered consciousness men and women sought to attain as 'part of the vital and present task of experiencing experience'.<sup>257</sup> Roland Muldoon highlighted the importance of the fluid, emancipating climate surrounding him and the others in CAST when he explained that sex 'was in the air. Everybody did it. It was liberation, everybody was free'.<sup>258</sup> Jenny Diski observed similar attitudes inside the late sixties underground: 'People had sex because they and it were there, like climbing mountains but with less

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<sup>255</sup> For details of the non-aligned libertarian sexual culture, see Max Farrar, 'The Libertarian Movements of the 1970s: What Can We Learn?', *Edinburgh Review*, 82, Winter 1989; Hoyland, 'The Iguana Woman', JHA; Segal, *Making Trouble*, pp. 78-79; Seidler, *Rediscovering Masculinity*, pp. 34-39; Segal, *Making Trouble*, pp. 78-79; Red Collective, *The Politics of Sexuality in Capitalism*, 1978, MNA.

<sup>256</sup> Marcus Collins, *Modern Love: An Intimate History of Men and Women in Twentieth-Century Britain* (London, 2003), p. 139; Marcus Collins, 'The Pornography of Permissiveness: Men's Sexuality and Women's Emancipation in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain', *History Workshop Journal*, 47, 1999, pp. 102-3; Kate Fisher, *Birth Control, Sex, and Marriage in Britain 1918-1960* (Oxford, 2006), p. 240. For a revisionist discussion of the central role of the pill in facilitating female sexual agency in sixties Britain, see Hera Cook, 'The English Sexual Revolution: Technology and Social Change', *History Workshop Journal*, 59, Spring 2005, pp. 109-128.

<sup>257</sup> Jenny Diski, *The Sixties* (London, 2009), p. 60. See also Jonathan Green (ed.), *Days in the Life: Voices from the English Underground 1961-1971* (London, 1998), pp. 421-425.

<sup>258</sup> Interview with Roland and Claire Muldoon, London, 10<sup>th</sup> December, 2009.

effort and preparation required, and, as we thought then, danger free.<sup>259</sup> Understood within this logical framework, sex was there to be enjoyed because it could be. Faced with the decision to have sex or not to have sex, Muldoon questioned, why not?<sup>260</sup>

For women, as for men, brief sexual encounters formed in the upsurge of class struggle provided additional confirmation of the social and political self-determination to be enjoyed as mobile revolutionary beings. Social and psychological empowerment, which derived from membership in the organisation extended fluidly into the realm of sexual selfhood. Thompson explained that, as a revolutionary and sexual being, if a man on the left came on to her she responded as she freely wished. As a result she denied feeling victimised when leading political men flirted with her, because like visible male figures in the counter-cultural scene, prominent men in the IMG were also regarded as substitutes for political gurus akin to Lenin, Trotsky or Che Guevara.<sup>261</sup> Women as well as men testified to the ways in which romantic relationships acquired an explicitly political edge as comradesly, loving, and sexual relations fused into one fluid entity. The idea of personal life as a deviation from politics was not exclusive to male IMG members. Julia Fairchild\* explained how within a personal relationship between two members of the organisation 'the parameters were not around relationships, the parameters were around politics' so that love remained subjugated to members' responsibilities to the organisation.<sup>262</sup> Understood within these terms the emotions accompanying love were not necessarily absent for activists, rather such feelings existed at a subconscious level to the expense of politics.

IS members more readily acknowledged the place that loving relations formed in cementing political and emotional union between a couple, though this is not to argue that such relations did not also exist amongst couples in the IMG. Carole Reagan described her and husband, Bernard

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<sup>259</sup> Diski, *The Sixties*, p. 60. For further details on the libertarian sexual attitudes prevailing in the underground and activist circles, see Green, *Days in the Life*, pp. 401-404 and 423-425; Collins, *Modern Love*, pp. 175-76; Mary Ingham, *Now We Are Thirty: Women of the Breakthrough Generation* (London, 1981), p. 67; Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream*, p. 160; Rowbotham, *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*, p. 113.

<sup>260</sup> Interview with Roland and Claire Muldoon.

<sup>261</sup> Interview with Jacqueline Thompson, London, 10<sup>th</sup> February, 2009.

<sup>262</sup> Interview with Julia Fairchild\*, London, 11<sup>th</sup> August, 2009.

Reagan, 'growing up' together in left politics, a process that continued when in 1973 they took the decision to leave the IS and join the IMG together.<sup>263</sup> Dave Lyddon highlighted the importance of an intense relationship with a female Oxford comrade in transforming him into an IS politico: 'Obviously if you have a very intense relationship that counts for a lot ... we had a shared world view and it is one which we felt... it is hard to explain how uplifting it can be. It sounds almost... you have got a way of understanding of the world.'<sup>264</sup> David Widgery explained how, if, at the same time as oppressed peoples were finding a political voice and power, two activists were also discovering each other it followed that the politics imbued love with tremendous hope and purpose. In his understanding a politics of mutuality entailed a reciprocal relationship based not only on the exchange of political ideas, but also of lessons concerning the very essence of being, of human interaction and potentially better relations.<sup>265</sup>

Relationships formed within the organisations were, though, a double-edged sword. In a culture where the organisation refused to grant political space to personal issues, relationships fulfilled a psychologically supportive role to bolster members during times of political disappointment or strife. However, where such relationships failed, the organisation was unable to supplant the emotional props it had fulfilled. Paczuska explained the dual emotional dislocation that ensued when her marriage to a leading IS man broke up: 'I felt displaced, terribly, terribly displaced. I didn't feel the party was a substitute or a comfort in any way. In fact I felt very exposed by being a single person in the organisation without anyone supporting me ... I think I felt phone calls from male comrades, who saw this as an opportunity to maybe get a look in, rather devastating and distressing.'<sup>266</sup> Her comments illuminate the specific patterns of male behaviour that informed the reluctance of both the IS and IMG leadership to take the issue of women's oppression seriously. Although they tolerated and even encouraged women's organising efforts in so far as they extended

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<sup>263</sup> Interview with Carole Reagan, London, 20<sup>th</sup> August, 2009.

<sup>264</sup> Interview with David Lyddon.

<sup>265</sup> Ronald Fraser interview with respondent C896/18, 9<sup>th</sup> October, 1984, Side 2, p. 4, Ronald Fraser Interviews: 1968 – A Student Generation in Revolt, British Library Sound Archive.

<sup>266</sup> Interview with Anna Pacuska.

the political influence of the organisation, as long as personal life remained a deviation from the class struggle, Trotskyist culture did little to challenge the sexually exploitative attitudes and behaviour older members, especially, continued to display towards younger female members or their wives at home.

The revered status of leading men gave them certain social and sexual *câché* they sometimes took advantage of. The heavy drinking culture that accompanied meetings, educational weekends and the annual IS conference held at the Skegness miners' camp facilitated easy social and sexual conduct on the part of older men for whom the assertive intellectual and social behaviour of young female members came as a cultural shock.<sup>267</sup> Caught between conflicting continuities and change shaping gender roles in post-war society, Palmer suggested how older men were also consciously pushing the boundaries of permissible social freedom away from the framework of their family background and education. He indicated the cultural shock that greeted him in the late sixties as he observed the influx of IS students: 'Those sixties young women had no precedent ... so stunningly beautiful and self-confident.'<sup>268</sup>

Palmer's testimony points to the private, undisclosed world of personal feeling that existed for many older as well as young Trotskyist men. At a time when political and personal culture had begun, often unintentionally, to coexist more closely together, and women in the organisations were finding comfort in close female friendships, emotional markers of adulthood, such as long-term relationships and fatherhood, often continued the *de facto* segregation that had traditionally existed on the far left between the private personal and public political. Within hidden, private realms the pressures of balancing activism with personal life created a wealth of feelings for which neither the organisation nor the domestic sphere provided an appropriate expressive outlet, not least because older men like Palmer lacked a political and personal language to articulate such feelings. Just as motherhood unleashed its own set of responsibilities and divided loyalties, fatherhood too created

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<sup>267</sup> Virtually all respondents recalled the lively holiday atmosphere that accompanied the Skegness conferences where sexual dalliances between members accompanied the evening parties following day-time political lectures.

<sup>268</sup> Interview with John Palmer.

pressures for Trotskyist men to straddle the divide between the organisation and the home. The challenge of how to manage the two spheres was all the more acute when politics threatened to endanger the domestic. After the Aldershot bombing in February 1972, when the IRA targeted headquarters of the British Army's sixteenth Parachute Regiment, Palmer's home was searched in a police raid because of his activism inside the Anti-Internment League and the declared IS support for the IRA.<sup>269</sup> The experience became all the more traumatic after the police searched his baby's cot with the child still in it. Palmer echoed the guilt of IS mothers who subordinated activity to children: 'I think the family suffered. I did not give the time I would have given otherwise, small things that are often important like being away at weekends at conferences and so forth, which my first wife would tell you about. You know there were three in the marriage and it was rather crowded, except that the third person was an organisation.'<sup>270</sup>

It was sometimes marginally easier for activist couples to balance home and organisational life because each understood the pressures the other faced. Ian Birchall and his wife extended their organising skills to childcare arrangements: 'We used to have on the wall of our kitchen a chart extending to six weeks ahead ... if one or another of us was hooked up to do a meeting we filled in that day and we had to arrange a baby-sitter.'<sup>271</sup> Supportive of the women's movement and his wife's activism, national IS committee member Richard Kuper was also keen to take on childcare. He and his wife routinely took their children along to meetings, reflecting his commitment for the organisation to improve female participation.<sup>272</sup> However, the IS baby-sitting rotas and the conference crèches that began gradually to emerge from the mid-1970s onwards provided little provision to help members cope with the sheer pressure of demands the organisation placed on their time. Birchall recalled: 'Just the sheer pressure of time; trying to do a full time job, and raise a

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<sup>269</sup> After the bombing the Irish Squad, a group of about a dozen detectives working from Scotland Yard, began a systematic search of homes, offices and shops in London known to be used by IRA sympathisers, especially in the western and northern suburbs, which had many Irish residents. See *The Times*, 23 February, 1972, p. 4. IS member, building worker Frank Campbell, was the second of four IS members whose homes the police search. See *Socialist Worker*, No. 264, 25 March, 1972, p. 1.

<sup>270</sup> Interview with John Palmer.

<sup>271</sup> Interview with Ian Birchall, London, 4<sup>th</sup> November, 2008.

<sup>272</sup> Interview with Richard Kuper, London, 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2009.

family, and be a professional revolutionary meant a lot of demands on your time and it did cause tensions in relationships. I would come home at one am after speaking somewhere and have to prepare my teaching for the next day and get to bed at three to five am quite often.<sup>273</sup>

The reticence with which many IS and IMG men responded publically to the new politics rested upon an undercurrent of uncertainty and anxiety about how to reconcile the multiple, competing roles they faced as political and private beings. Coming to political and emotional maturity within the organisation, by the early to mid-1970s immersion in a climate of external class struggles had imprinted a left masculinity that reinforced the early social practices of home and school subordinating the personal. Within this landscape the challenge of learning how to accept challenges to long-held social and cultural patterns entailed a longer-term, gradual psychic process that conflicted with the shifting politics beginning to occur inside the organisations in response to the economic downturn of the late 1970s.

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<sup>273</sup> Interview with Ian Birchall.

## Conclusion

The narratives of male and female activist life do not, of course, end at the point at which I left them in the closing chapter. Stories of self-realignment between internal psychic and external social and political life continue to permeate the second half of the seventies before Thatcherite retrenchment curtailed the extra-parliamentary space necessary for grass-roots change. Representations of seventies activism have traditionally painted a darker, pessimistic and fractious picture in contrast to the utopianism of the preceding decade. This is epitomised in Britain by accounts of Women's Liberation that place emphasis on internal divisions with the ascendancy of separatist revolutionary feminists and the movement's demise from the final national conference of 1978.<sup>1</sup> Certainly, the second half of the decade created challenging economic and political conditions for activists to operate in. In 1975-76 the impact of world recession and the doubling of unemployment deflated the militant confidence of trade union leaders that had characterised the national strikes between 1972 and 1974.<sup>2</sup> Workers' reluctance to resist Labour's wage controls and the general move to the right prompted internal shifts within the IS and IMG that brought a series of political realignments, personal ruptures and renewal.

In IS internal changes designed to respond to the declining impetus of rank-and-file groups, and the downturn in the organisation's fortunes brought personal as well as political turmoil for men and women interviewed in this study. From 1974-75 the launch of the IS Opposition signalled the beginning of the end for a number of respondents; this internal body of members came together in 1975 under a platform championing internal democracy, the independence of the rank-and-file movement, and a more coherent approach to the Labour government.<sup>3</sup> In the IMG some members followed the earlier forays of IS activists by making their own industrial turn through entry into

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<sup>1</sup> Eve Setch, 'The Women's Liberation Movement in Britain, 1969-1979' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, Royal Holloway, July, 2000), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Chris Harman, *The Fire Last Time: 1968 and After* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, London, 1998), p. 268.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Shaw, 'The Making of a Party? The International Socialists 1965-1976', in Ralph Miliband and John Saville (eds.), *The Socialist Register* (London, 1978), pp. 28-29.

factories to take up work on assembly lines. From 1977 belief that the time had come for the revolutionary left to join forces also saw attempts by the organisation to field Socialist Unity candidates in by-elections, supported in 1978 by the revolutionary grouping, Big Flame.<sup>4</sup> In 1982 this new political direction would lead IMG members back to the organisation's roots inside the Labour Party.

Although confronted with bleak prospects for revolutionary upsurge, the late 1970s did not represent an end-point in the activist trajectories nor years of individual or collective despair within the milieu. The changing political climate instead opened up new spaces in which activists could realign their political and personal selves. In the short-term the intense pace of organisational life continued unabated, with renewed emphasis on trade union struggles concentrated inside the factory, school or college in which members worked. These were also the years of renewed campaigns; for the IS/SWP the Right to Work campaign and the Anti-Nazi League; for the IMG the Socialist Unity electoral challenge. For many women the arrival of motherhood brought renewed perspective and commitment to the women's movement through activism in the NAC, from 1977 in the Reclaim the Night campaign, and, for IS women, in *Women's Voice*, the organisation's female journal. Of course the climax of bitter internal disputes did also see many activists deciding to break from the organisations that had absorbed and shaped them from adolescence to adulthood. The decision to leave was often considered incredulously by those who remained; in the IS, members referred to the process in semi-religious terms, as 'going into the wilderness'.<sup>5</sup> Casting off the organisational identity and the familial network that accompanied it was likened to purgatory. The experience brought an uncomfortable consciousness of the ties between identity and politics, as former members took stock of life and self outside organisational activism. In some cases the ruptures brought added grief when the severing of formal revolutionary ties was accompanied by painful ruptures in friendships and long-term loving relationships intertwined within the organisation. Anna Paczuska compared her decision to leave IS as a 'double divorce', from comrades

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<sup>4</sup> John Callaghan, *British Trotskyism* (Oxford, 1984), p. 161.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Richard Kuper, London, 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2009.

within the organisation as well as from her husband: 'As soon as people found out that you were no longer in the party they stopped being your mate.'<sup>6</sup> Yet Richard Kuper was relieved to discover that leaving 'wasn't the wilderness, because I met so many people on an everyday basis with whom I talked politics, just not organisationally focused politics'.<sup>7</sup> Roger Cox, who remained in the SWP, remembered how the slowing pace of activist life opened up new opportunities to pursue neglected leisure activities such as cycling, even decorating, as well as allowing more time for his wife and children.<sup>8</sup>

Narratives of activist life in the Trotskyist milieu in the late 1970s provide rich oral sources for a follow-up study. Testament to the commitment and affective ties all respondents retained to the left and to a network of former comrades, the picture surely defies the pessimistic tenets that have defined previous accounts of this period.<sup>9</sup> Andy Beckett has recently reminded us that, far from being the 'hangover after the sixties', the seventies represented a decade 'when the great sixties party actually got started'.<sup>10</sup> Whilst it may be rather far-fetched to apply his interpretation to the latter end of the decade, he certainly highlights the potential that remains for further in-depth studies to be carried out on Trotskyist selfhood during what have traditionally been depicted as dismal days for the left.

For non-aligned activists also the picture in my study seems barely begun. In many respects the seventies represented the high-point of the libertarian milieu as far as their political evolution and membership growth was concerned. Whilst this account has focused attention on the transitional experience of a cohort of men and women attempting to live out the new politics in personal everyday life, further research is yet to be undertaken on the political, private stories of non-aligned activism; of male-female political experiences and relations in local community

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Anna Paczuska, London, 4<sup>th</sup> January, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Richard Kuper.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Roger Cox, London, 24<sup>th</sup> March, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Callaghan, *British Trotskyism*, pp. 118-121, pp. 161-162; Peter Shipley, *Revolutionaries in Modern Britain* (London, 1976), pp. 148-150.

<sup>10</sup> Andy Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out: What Really Happened to Britain in the Seventies* (London, 2009), p. 209.

campaigns; Women's Liberation childcare projects, tenants' disputes, trade union and council struggles, and private relations inside collective households. Efforts to understand the impact of Women's Liberation as a new female political authority calls for historians to read male and female experiences of public activism and private life against each other. John Hoyland's testimony about a crisis in masculine left identity suggests how recent female-centred studies of Women's Liberation raise the potential for similar studies to be conducted on the anti-sexist men's movement as a specific response by non-aligned men to the new female subjectivity transforming their political and personal lives. By 1973 Hoyland was one of a number of non-aligned men participating in the Tufnell Park men's group, one of several north London consciousness-raising groups that emerged across the country in a male network encompassing London, Brighton, Birmingham, Leeds and Manchester. Whereas in 1971 male partners in the Tufnell Park milieu had been unable to access the new feminist language of the small group, only two years later non-aligned men were clearly making conscious efforts to overcome political and personal inhibitions.

The new male left movement sought to reconstruct a white, masculine politics of gender rooted in softer feelings and a capacity for empathy, honesty, and compassion. This apparently sudden transformation amongst libertarian left men raises important questions about the political and emotional impact of the new politics in re-shaping male left subjectivity. In the midst of wider societal changes concerning the roles of women, men, and the shape of the nuclear family, pro-feminist men confronted personal dilemmas of male identity as biological, single and surrogate fathers, as workers, and as sexualised beings, which they saw as having wider social purchase beyond the immediacy of the activist milieu. Examining men's experiences of the feminist-inspired consciousness-raising practice, alongside their efforts to develop more honest and equal relations between themselves, their female partners and their children, offers to bring the gendered study of non-aligned selfhood full circle. The story of the men's movement completes the post-war narrative of activist selfhood as a complex political, social, and psychological dialogue between two interconnected cultures, mainstream and radical dissident life.

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This thesis set out to provide an integrated account of the shaping of radical left cultures and activist selves that took place during the post-war years of British society, between roughly 1945 and 1974. Ultimately, it has perhaps told more a story of Britain's private 1968. Specific attention has been given to the narrative memories and subjectivities of men and women who joined the main Trotskyist organisations and non-aligned left milieux that grew up around and out of the VSC from 1968-9. In concluding this study I do not intend to try and collate the scattered memories together in order to impose upon them some overarching narrative meaning. Such an exercise would undermine my original intention to create historical space for individual dissenting voices to exist alongside the dominant collective identities characterising 1968. It is, though, impossible to ignore common themes emerging from the narratives that inevitably raise questions about social and cultural changes occurring both inside the activist terrain and in wider post-war British society. It is to the relationship between the private stories of 1968 and the two social worlds that I intend to turn as an end-point.

Firstly, however, I wish to address the inevitable disappointments that will accompany the expectations that some respondents may well have attached to this study. Throughout my research I have been aware of the pressure of responsibility I have felt towards respondents who have entrusted private, sometimes intimate, and previously hidden memories, feelings and reflections during the interviews. I have often wrestled with anxiety and guilt about how to represent their memories in such a way that respects the ways in which they told their stories without also eschewing my instincts as a historian to search for deeper meaning in gaps, silences, and subterranean layers. A letter one respondent wrote to me after the interview left me feeling decidedly uneasy. He was puzzled by my interest in the social life and individual felt experience inside the activist milieux, and wondered why I did not seem to be focusing my efforts on the political campaigns themselves. His comments told much about the way in which he had invested himself in IS as a young man – 'the aspect of social cement was less than the importance of

implementing the next immediate decisions (this sale/that contact/the other demo... etc)'.<sup>11</sup> They also conveyed much about his 'expectations of memory', tied up with his political ideas about what should and should not be remembered or represented in historical accounts of sixties activism.<sup>12</sup> During the interview he showed me a letter he had written to *Socialist Worker*, the SWP journal, in February 2008, in which he had praised an article by a former comrade who had criticised the cultural misrepresentations of 1968 as 'a year of sex, drugs, and rock n' roll – and "student riots"'.<sup>13</sup> My respondent found 'sickening' the 'flower power' images of hedonism the media continued to perpetuate as a dominant narrative of the period, and offered the same political narrative he sought to portray in the interview by emphasising his activism in the London West India docks during the period of the Devlin Report.<sup>14</sup> He was one of four other respondents (all former IS and IMG members) who had initiated contact with me in response to notices I had placed in various left journals seeking potential interviewees. Clearly, he sought to use the interview as an opportunity to offer a corrective narrative of Britain's 1968 that would allow centre-stage for the world of industrial left politics he and others felt had been written out of the histories. His agenda reflects Stuart J. Hilwig's arguments about the way in which the methods of oral history prompt respondents not only to draw from their personal and collective memories, but also to historicise the events in the knowledge that the interviewer will record their testimony for historical posterity in a printed text.<sup>15</sup> He was one of several IS and IMG respondents who communicated expectations that my historical account should accord with their politicised-cultural frame of class-based, industrial struggles. For

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<sup>11</sup> Correspondence from Nigel Coward to the author, 9<sup>th</sup> April, 2009, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> John Foot, 'Looking Back on Italy's 'Long '68''. Public, Private and Divided Memories', in Ingo Cornils and Sarah Waters (eds.), *Memories of 1968: International Perspectives* (Oxford, 2010), 109.

<sup>13</sup> Ian Birchall, '1968, the Power of the Masses', *Socialist Worker*, 19 January, 2008 [consulted at <http://www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=14022> (8<sup>th</sup> April, 2009)].

<sup>14</sup> Nigel Coward, 'Lessons from the Struggles of 1968', *Socialist Worker*, 2 February, 2008 [consulted at <http://www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=14022> (8<sup>th</sup> April, 2008)]. The Devlin Report of 1965, chaired by Lord Patrick Devlin was the result of an investigation into the workings of the docks that recommended the decasualisation of all dock labour in the pursuit of 'modernisation' and 'rationalisation' that would also serve to reduce the number of militant unofficial strikes. For details, see Great Britain Committee of Inquiry Under the rt. Hon. Lord Devlin Into Certain Matters Concerning the Port Transport Industry, *The Final Report of the Committee of Inquiry Under the rt Hon. Lord Devlin Into Certain Matters Concerning the Port Transport Industry*, (London, 1965); Paul Foot, 'The Devlin Report', *International Socialism*, No. 24, Spring, 1966, pp. 6-7.

<sup>15</sup> Stuart J. Hilwig, 'An Oral History of Memories of 1968 in Italy', in Cornils and Waters (eds.), *Memories of 1968*, p. 225.

these men and women the politics of youth had carried on into the present to shape a 'politics of memory' around Britain's own relationship to 1968.<sup>16</sup>

The doubts respondents raised about the personal focus of this study aroused important questions concerning my desire to historicise remembered personal accounts of Britain's 1968: who may claim to speak for a neglected culture and what are the implications for the ability of social actors to achieve psychic composure, to resolve 'the-past-in-the present'?<sup>17</sup> The issue of authorial power, representation, and responsibility may be set aside for now since it raises deeper questions about the relationship between oral historian and respondent that may be better addressed elsewhere: should theirs be a therapeutic relationship? Should the oral historian mirror the politics of the respondent? How far should the oral historian write him or herself into the final narrative to acknowledge the interactive process of shaping selves? However, the question of psychic composure, memory and 'the past-in-the-present' relate directly to the theme of self-realignment that brings this study full-circle.

Underlying all respondents' narratives, following the life-history from post-war child to adult activist, is the search for belonging, the attempt for individuals to make sense of themselves in relation to families, localities, and contradictions discernible between post-war processes of change and modernisation; the post-war vision of prosperity, full employment, welfarism, and the opportunities of expanding education, and older lived patterns of class, social relations and mentalités that penetrated the radical landscape. If the memories that informed this account were less concerned with a search for national healing and identity (witnessed in post-war European efforts to come to terms with a fascist or Nazi past), they nonetheless told personal stories of individuals struggling to negotiate a multilayered social and political landscape, and to realign older radical histories, ways of seeing and being, with the new political and cultural impulses being transmitted on a national as well as a global scale. Returning to the relationship between culture

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<sup>16</sup> Foot, 'Looking Back on Italy's 'Long "68"', p. 111. For further discussion on the political meanings embedded within remembered narratives, see Katherine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (eds.), *Contested Pasts: the Politics of Memory* (New York, 2003).

<sup>17</sup> Bill Schwarz, "'Not Even Past Yet?'" , *History Workshop Journal*, 57, Spring, 2004, p. 103.

and self, and to Rowbotham's question about why it was that men and women in her radical world sought each other in new ways, the prevalent search for belonging and psychic ease that took place within the milieux raises another question about why and how individuals were striving to realign the past-in-the-present.

The conflict between the self and the social, the emotional and the political that echoed throughout these histories signals repeated tension between continuities and fractures within both the mainstream and radical landscapes in which activists were socialised and politicised from child to adult. Although British activists shared the collective international subjectivities discernible across the globe, as they too found affective solidarity with liberation struggles being played out from Alabama and Berkeley to Berlin, Paris, and Haiphong, on a private day-to-day level struggles over subjectivity related to more specifically localised attempts for men and women to situate themselves within a radical milieu that was caught between older political, cultural and social patterns, change and renewal. In this respect the symbol of the family punctuating the narratives resonates with the few Italian studies of 1968 that have endeavoured to unlock this largely silent area of experience.<sup>18</sup> In the case of Macerata, Sofia Serenelli-Messenger directly related the widespread description of family tropes in respondents' memories to the local context of the Catholic subculture and sharecropping tradition that placed the family at the centre of the social structures and cultural representation of the Manifesto Group.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, within the British terrain the leitmotifs of father and mother told of activists' efforts to immerse themselves in older Trotskyist, labour and new left communities that had been shaped largely by men from a pre-war realm of political and social experience. Entry into the early milieux offered young men and women a way of translating instinctive childhood and adolescent recognition of hypocrisy and contradiction into a concrete way of seeing. The Marxist framework they discovered within these fluid left circles enabled them to bridge the gulf that by the early 1960s had opened up between the Communist,

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<sup>18</sup> Luisa Passerini, *Autobiography of a Generation Italy, 1968* (translated by Lisa Erdberg, Hanover, 1996), pp. 26-36; Sofia Serenelli-Messenger, '1968 in an Italian Province: Memory and the Everyday Life of a New Left Group in Macerata' in Cornils and Waters (eds.), *Memories of 1968*, pp. 345-375.

<sup>19</sup> Serenelli-Messenger, '1968 in an Italian Province', p. 356

New Left and Labour left world of their parents. In this context the leitmotif of father, punctuating respondents' memories, symbolised a traditional masculine authority that continued to shape political subjectivity, social conduct and culture in the early milieu. Just as Frank Mort has recently argued that it is possible to speak of a *longue durée* of social and sexual relations during Britain's post-war years, so it is equally possible to identify a *longue durée* of left intellectual patterns and political relations shaping the subjectivities of men and women in the shifting left landscape of early and mid-sixties Britain.<sup>20</sup>

Familial tropes denoted the affective ties underlying the early political communities as young activists consciously sought for ways in which to reinvest the left sensibilities of fathers, mothers and other family members into a post-war world in which older patterns of class jarred against the transformations accompanying Cold War bloc politics. The paternal trope signified the attempts of the young left man striving to make a new political self in the image of the Communist father, the apprentice finding emotional and intellectual connections between International Socialist speakers and his anonymous work-a-day, blue-collar world, and the inspiration New Left intellectuals Thompson, Samuel, Williams, Hall, and others provided student activists through face-to-face meetings and mentoring friendships. It also denoted the daughter's rupture from the middle-class Communist mother; assuming a masculine model of left subjectivity and conduct, the daughter sought to reclaim the mother's abandoned radical youth. Within radical journals and newspapers occupying activist basements and bedrooms repeated articles about historical revolutionary models showed that young men and women were consciously drawing upon older radical models for inspiration. From their earliest days in the YS and CND to the VSC and the activities surrounding it, they drew lessons from older Marxist figures in a way that denies any notion of a total generational rupture. The interconnections were even there in the utopian impulses between 1970s non-aligned socialists and the networks of nineteenth-century New Life fellows; both lived out a quest to formulate more egalitarian human relationships and cultural

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<sup>20</sup> Frank Mort, *Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society* (London, 2010), p. 5.

patterns, and both strove to make personal connections by transcending class boundaries.<sup>21</sup>

In the activist milieu the emphasis on community, though not peculiar to Britain, drew upon new left discourses that related directly to laments for a utopian working-class world of local kinship ties fragmented by new media technology, and post-war re-housing schemes. Yet it was in the search for belonging, for connection between self and culture, that older left impulses recurred inside the network.<sup>22</sup> It can be seen in the veneration activists attached to worker-intellectuals they came across in mining and dockland communities as well as in the imaginary community CMPP members conjured up during their weekly activities and gatherings at Camden Town market and Parliament Hill Fields. Attempts to recreate an imaginary socialist image of the past-in-the-present found its strongest expression in the People's War activity CMPP held between 26 April and 1 May 1971. Through a series of film-showings, stories, and activities members sought to involve the citizens of Camden in efforts to re-enact the wartime spirit of community and social belonging that was bound up in the post-war idealisation of wartime national cohesion.<sup>23</sup> In their eyes the Blitz spirit offered a model for the social renewal they sought to inspire within their small collective and the wider Camden community, whereby 'the war in fact satisfied for many the need to be a wanted member of society, encouraged spontaneity, and gave fuller self-expression'.<sup>24</sup> The event is notable for what it suggests about the relationship between the activist communities and selves that emerged in post-war Britain. Where their wartime parents might have found individual purpose and collective belonging through mobilising activities, inside the activist milieu young men and women found similar emancipation and personal realisation by participating in collective struggles over local rent rises, national industrial disputes, the Ford Sewing Machinist strike, the Industrial Relations Bill, national coal, dock and building worker strikes, and the Pentonville Five affair, as well as

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<sup>21</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love* (London, 2008), p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> Rowbotham, 'Introduction', in *Threads through time*, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> Geoff and Marie Richman, and Tony Wickert, Pamphlet accompanying 'The People's War Event, 26 April-1 May, 1971', pp. 3-26, GRA.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3, GRA.

international liberation campaigns from Vietnam, Cambodia and Portugal.<sup>25</sup>

Activist communities, real or imagined, existed at macro, micro and internal levels, and functioned as various sites of renewal and refuge. Whilst the milieux provided spaces for men and women to renew the left tenets imparted by radical families, they also facilitated divisions from the parental home. Victorian prejudices, heard at home, school, and in local working, lower and middle-class communities, and related to issues of class, race and sexuality, were actively rejected by young adults absorbing a left mentalité as another modern form of reflexive selfhood. Once inside these communities, belonging derived from the collective self-identity of being part of a radical minority that was heightened by the day-to-day reality of negotiating 'the system'. Sue Crockford explained:

There weren't that many of us. There really weren't, and you were having to invent it on the hoof, and when anyone complained ... I went to lecture at Hammersmith School of Art because I ran out of money for my MA. I had a scarlet winter coat. I was told by my head that was provocative. Vietnam time. I had an NLF bag. He said "Don't bring that again". Came in next week, and he saw it again. I said "They're breeding." But you had people in positions of authority over you who saw a scarlet winter coat as an act of defiance.<sup>26</sup>

Her testimony indicates how as students, citizens, employees, and parents activists maintained one foot in mainstream society. The milieu not only bolstered collective political hopes and ideals, but sheltered individuals against everyday incidents and remarks that confirmed prevailing inequalities and prejudices yet to be defeated. In the same way as the libertarian collective household offered single mothers like Jo Robinson, Lynne Segal, and Alison Fell refuge and succour, so the Trotskyist milieux performed a similar role for men and women like David Lyddon, David Carter, Di Parkin, and Sheila Hemingway through the masculine camaraderie and revolutionary identities that made everyday private life easier to bear. Within these communities the familial tropes denoted the inter-personal network of affective bonds that created enduring collective identities and enabled individuals to more easily negotiate a multilayered society.

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<sup>25</sup> James Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives* (Oxford, 2010), p. 200.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Sue Crockford, London, 30<sup>th</sup> September, 2009.

In the non-aligned libertarian milieu the family assumes direct political significance when from 1971-2, with the influence of Women's Liberation, women and men began consciously to dismantle the post-war family and to re-shape it in the collective image of New Life socialists and Russian communards. Underlying these new left projects the notes of subjective belonging resonate even more strongly as men and women, in their search for radically new social relations, embarked on what Lynne Segal termed a process of 'making families, from whatever comes to hand'.<sup>27</sup> Alongside her 'gang' of socialist feminists and pro-feminist male comrades, she attained 'a certain confidence' as a political being and single mother that enabled her to overcome her fragile individual sense of self.<sup>28</sup>

As sites of refuge, from their earliest beginnings in the mid-sixties, the activist communities tell of the internal disquiet that young activists began, as children, to discern with a social order that delineated long-standing class structures, gender roles, and attitudes over nationality, race, religion, and sexuality. However, the release the left spaces offered from the perceived hypocrisies of Britain's Victorian legacy could be deceptive. Belonging and self-realisation were disrupted by dislocations between outward culture and inward subjectivity. The private story of 1968 was pre-eminently one of left subjectivity as a complex gendered process of men and women negotiating a conservative post-war society and a radical landscape. Dislocations between interiority and outward culture arose because activists were not simply seeking to reject the established society, and to shape an alternative. Political culture inside the milieu was inextricably interwoven with dominant social and cultural patterns, and as such efforts to reconcile old and new left forms with new youth cultures, and social and sexual models brought activists into conflict with the subterranean psychic depths of Victorian inequality that continued to dominate post-war society. The politics of the late sixties engendered angry impulses from the young, impatient with the tired myopic practices of old-world political leaders, but at the same time the scrutiny with which they held up old political, social and sexual models for account, stood at odds with the extent to which consciously and

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Lynne Segal, London, 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2010.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

unconsciously the new left cultures drew upon existing patterns. The result was for a radical social and cultural scene wrought with contradictions between continuity and change that found visible expression in ruptures in political and social relations. Whilst young activists looked up to older individuals on the left as intellectual and activist role models, ruptures also occurred. Generational conflict was apparent in the divisions within the VSC between younger members keen to embrace new left local community models, and the reluctance of leading IMG spokesman, Ernest Tate, to abandon the well-honed national demonstration practice, discernible also in the gulf that opened up in 1968 between the first New Left and younger left activists, who had for now abandoned all hope in the parliamentary left as an avenue for change.

The widening gulf between the left generations reflected the fact that the years 1968-72 witnessed a rapid political transition on the British extra-parliamentary left that mirrored the longer-term 'moment of crisis and opportunity' taking place in 'northern European states', and especially pronounced in 'Mediterranean Europe'.<sup>29</sup> On the British scene subjective experiences of self-realignment played out against a background in which the demise of the VSC initiated a paradigm shift across the network. Whereas the VSC had, from 1966-69, served as a prism for an all-encompassing New Left scene, incorporating Trotskyist, non-aligned, and counter-cultural-inspired artistic and theatrical groups alike, in its wake emerged a demarcated activist scene characterised on the one hand by an exclusively non-aligned libertarian New Left, and on the other hand by a Trotskyist milieu that increasingly displayed the centralist tendencies of far left organisations elsewhere in Northern Europe.<sup>30</sup> Despite the cross-over of personnel that was visible on national demonstrations throughout the 1970s, the new personal politics of Women's Liberation informed a post-VSC New Left in which libertarian communities came to be defined by loose associations of feminists, gay liberation activists, socialists, and anarchists committed to forming local alliances with squatters, tenants' associations, claimants, single parents, and mental health patients. Inside this

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<sup>29</sup> Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956-1976*, pp. 228-229.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 160-161.

New Left activists' attention to living their politics in private, internal life as much as in public, external political arenas occurred in response to a new female political authority that from the early 1970s began to reshape left subjectivity along new gendered lines. On the far left, in contrast, increasing commitment to building the revolutionary party saw centralising power structures occur in tandem with an exclusive, externally-focused politics that revolved around industrial class struggles. Within this milieu a traditionally masculine political authority retained a dominant presence, discounting internal affective life a legitimate political space. Yet, in the transitional years in which this political and cultural mutation began to occur, in both the post-VSC New Left and far left milieux activists, who had come of political age at the height of the VSC, struggled to negotiate the still fluid political and personal, public and private boundaries to realign themselves as political beings. During these years of rapid political change left subjectivity remained a pre-eminently mutable affair.

The area of gendered subjectivity and gender relations highlights how inside the milieux men and women consciously and unconsciously transferred enduring social patterns from mainstream society. Situated at the point between two competing social worlds, activists struggled to relinquish traditionally gendered models of selfhood, as familial cultural patterns and childhood structures of feeling found echoes in the private radical life. In this respect the prevalence of parental tropes also carried turbulent undertones, as they signalled the competing presence of old and new male and female subjectivities. Attempts to break away from long-standing social models were thwarted by the enduring psychic imprint of gendered models that activists transplanted into their activist lives and selves; the image of the good woman, mother, wife, and dutiful public activist, the scholarship boy; public revolutionary, and hidden, private man. In the mid- and late sixties the bonds of comradeship, shaped in the best traditions of post-war mixing, offered women and men a way of mediating the gendered contradictions between equality and difference. Assuming the masculine model of political authority prevailing around the VSC, young women displayed a social mobility and sexual self-determination that even in sixties society remained the preserve of men.

That women struggled to reconcile this masculine subjectivity with their internal female not only confirms the cautious, darker picture of sixties permissiveness<sup>31</sup>, but it also tells of the longevity of post-war social conservatism in regard to gender roles and male and female selfhood. Although female experiences within the Trotskyist organisations present far from a uniform picture of social subordination or sexual exploitation, even the public life of the revolutionary woman sat uneasily with the internal image of the post-war girl and mother, shaping contradictory identities that confirmed the prevalence of the mantra 'equal but different'. Inside the activist terrain women's narratives confirmed the apparent impossibility of being active 'just like a man'.

Yet men's narratives of the private experience of activist life have also shown that the process of forming a left identity and finding a self within the Trotskyist and non-aligned milieux was far from straightforward. Here too older masculine models proved often difficult to relinquish and the competition on which public revolutionary models rested allowed little space for vulnerable feeling or insecurity to find a voice. The testimonies of men from CMPP show that prior to the emergence of Women's Liberation unease with the competitive militancy of the street politics around VSC was not a solely female concern, and the political precursors of the new politics were also being mutually developed in an intimate group modelled on North American prefigurative politics. However, alongside women the arrival of the new politics also saw men struggling to remake activist selves and to reconcile previously separate public and private, political and personal lives. The new female political authority in many cases sat uneasily with the internal activist man because of the way in which it challenged long-standing discourses of public and private masculinity. In this area further research is needed to examine the experiences of non-aligned men attempting to reconfigure the spheres of personal and political life as part of efforts to internalise the new left subjectivity being shaped by socialist feminist partners and comrades.

Ultimately, for both men and women the search for belonging within the activist milieux was a life-shaping, gendered process ongoing to the present day. For some individuals, as we have seen,

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<sup>31</sup> Mort, *Capital Affairs*, p. 5.

it remained elusive, within sight, but never actualised; for others belonging arrived through activism in later movements. James Hinton explained how:

My comfort zone was a middle-class politics, and that is probably why I can't remember why I went into IS, because of the guilt, and why I was very involved in CND in the 1980s, because I came home. Suddenly my spontaneous reactions to things were the right ones ... that gulf between theory and practice haunted me. I remember that vividly at Cambridge and then along comes END in the 1980s. Edward [Thompson] provides the theory. It is called Exterminism, that's fine, it's not perfect, but it'll do, and I provided the practice. I was good at it.<sup>32</sup>

Returning to the eagerness with which former Trotskyist men and women sought to provide a corrective account of Britain's '68 activism, their narratives told another active stage of self-realignment. Their desire to re-situate the past-in-the-present suggested a process of mourning for the lost world of class-based left politics that had left them discomposed as revolutionary beings. For male respondents like Nigel Coward and Sandy Irving this discomposure was an inherently gendered process. Since the deindustrialisation of British society in the wake of Thatcherism the transformation of the social and political landscape, the demise of the industrial heartland of the factory, the docks, and the union shop floor, had in the minds of such men become intertwined with the feminisation of politics and the cultural appropriation of a masculine political sphere in which as young men they had served out an activist apprenticeship and discovered a left selfhood. In a joint interview with Irving and his former SWP comrade, John Charlton, Irving provided a telling comment about his past and present understanding of his IS activism and his place within its culture. He responded bluntly to my invitation to reflect on how he had felt in the mid-1970s during his opportunity to chair an important meeting with the socialist republican Irish Bernadette Devlin, expressing his irritation at such 'touchy feely stuff' which he found too often in the Green Party and which greatly irritated him. He answered that it was not a question of what the event had meant to

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<sup>32</sup> Interview with James Hinton, University of Warwick, Coventry, 20<sup>th</sup> November, 2008.

him personally.<sup>33</sup> Although he explained how 'on a selfish note' he felt 'pleased to have been there', he emphasised that he did not attend the meeting thinking about what he was going to get out of it.<sup>34</sup> In his opinion the late 1970s had witnessed 'the stick' beginning to be 'bent too far the other way', by which he referred to the new politics associated with the mantra, 'the personal is political, the political is personal', and the 1979 *Beyond the Fragments* discussions of socialist feminists Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal and Hilary Wainwright.<sup>35</sup> He remembered the impact of Women's Liberation on the new politics emerging in the 1980s: 'When I joined the Green Party and went to the first national conference I had this crappy attunement session when you all sit in silence and get your thoughts into gear before saying anything. It made me want to go to the bar actually ... I personally have never felt comfortable with this.'<sup>36</sup>

For Irving his motivation in engaging with the oral interview seemed to derive from his determination to reclaim a legitimate space for his past and present revolutionary selves within what he perceived to be the feminised discourse which had displaced the masculine sphere of industrial class politics.<sup>37</sup> As a result he felt the need to educate me in the cultural minutiae of IS politics, responding to me as a young woman who had come of age in the wake of second-wave feminism, not because he entirely rejected the cultural discourse of the 'new man' (he saw the responsibility of caring for children to lie equally with male and female partners, and disapproved of the neglect to children he had occasionally witnessed during his years in the organisation), but because the effort to intricately recall the conduct of meetings, the tactics concerning paper sales, and recruitment related to his effort to resurrect his revolutionary self.<sup>38</sup>

For Di Parkin her earnest desire to provide an account of herself as a revolutionary woman

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with John Charlton and Sandy Irving, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 2009.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. See also Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal and Hilary Wainwright, *Beyond the Fragments: Feminism and the Making of Socialism* (London, 1979).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> For discussion of the impact of second-wave feminism, demographic changes in the shape of the family, and the rise of the 'new man' on narrative constructions of masculinity, and the 'composure' of masculine narratives in relation to a young female interviewer, see Hilary Young, 'Hard Man, New Man: Re/Composing Masculinities in Glasgow, c. 1950-2000', *Oral History*, 35, Spring, 2007, pp. 71-81.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Sandy Irving.

and to see that account represented in the public domain suggested a need to recapture this validation for the purposes of composure in both the political landscape and her private life. Entrusting to me what she referred to as 'her life', her treasured correspondence between her and IS comrade, Lorraine Hewitt, her narrative became a means of mourning her beloved friend, who she had lost to cancer in June 2002. Her account became a dual elegy for Hewitt, her other self, and her identity as a revolutionary woman in a period of British society when political and personal change had seemed truly possible. Her need to revisit the past, and to locate herself within the correspondence between her and Hewitt, was an attempt to resurrect her friend once again, and to come to terms with her identity in a world inexorably changed beyond class politics: 'Now I find it a comfort to return to those days of how we were ... I seek to climb back into that time; if I go back there, then she'll be there.'<sup>39</sup> She seemed to be mourning the loss of a sense of the possible, and her narrative spoke of her difficulty in situating herself in the present: 'We stood then on our tiptoes, we danced, stretching our lithe arms towards all kinds of futures, our banners fluttering. We had the world to win and knew we would win it. Yet, here now, we stand beyond our losses, beyond Thatcher (even Blair now stale and older) ... many of us creaking and broken, trying for optimism beyond the defeats.'<sup>40</sup>

Yet alongside the desire for former activists to narrate their stories, to celebrate and confirm their young lives on the left, silences, and reluctance to make public private experiences of personal-political exploration also speak of the desire to forget, or keep hidden, memories that remain raw, capable of wounding others as well as themselves. Several non-aligned men declined my permission for interviews; their silence suggests a number of possible conclusions. On an individual level the men's silence may have been an act of self-preservation; the possibility of conjuring memories of buried identities threatened to disturb present composure. If this was the case the desire to remain silent may also extend to a wish to protect other comrades from their former collective. However, when considered against the narratives of men and women from Trotskyist organisations, the men's

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<sup>39</sup> Di Parkin, 'Remembering the 1970s: Two Women Revolutionaries', September, 2005, p. 2, DPA.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p. 1.

desire to preserve the silence over the private realm of new left personal politics suggests further expectations or ideas about what should or should not be remembered or forgotten. For such men the private world of the non-aligned left man remains a subject for forgetting or at least protecting. How far it is for the historian to contradict her subject's judgements about what should or should not be memorialised for historical posterity remains open to debate. What is certain for now is that this thesis has shown how the private history of Britain's '68 left activism remains incomplete and contested terrain where the politics of memory is still being individually and collectively assembled.

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