

***THIRTY YEARS OF FEMINIST ACTIVISM:
WOMEN IN WELFARE EDUCATION REFLECT***



Doctor of Philosophy,
Social Work Unit
School of Social Sciences
Faculty of Arts, Education & Human Development
Victoria University

Joanne Dillon
2007

ABSTRACT

This thesis traces the economic and socio-political changes in Australia over the final three decades of the twentieth century from the perspective of 25 women engaged in social work and welfare education. A period of significant change in its social, economic and political history, Australia moved from Keynesian inspired trends to social democracy under Whitlam, through the corporatist experiment of the Hawke/Keating regime to an embrace of free market economics under the current Howard coalition government. Utilising a narrative approach and framing the research within feminist historical materialist standpoint, after Smith (1991) and Naples (2003), I explore the ways in which this group of women experienced changes to the policy context, theories as they informed their education and practice and, of particular interest, changes to feminist theory and the impact of the women's movement on social policy, service delivery and in each woman's personal lives. Participants reported general feelings of frustration at the erosion of hard won gains, especially for women and living the adage 'the personal is political', and increased pressures in their work and private lives over time. There was a sense of distancing of social work from social policy alongside increasing alienation from a women's movement that they saw as largely out of touch with an increasingly diverse and globalised world. In this context however, the women generally remained positive for the future, providing clear strategies as to the contribution a reinvigorated feminism and women's movement could make to social work and social policy of the future.

DECLARATION

Doctor of Philosophy Declaration:

“I, Joanne Dillon, declare that the PhD thesis entitled *Thirty Years of Feminist Activism: Women in Welfare Education Reflect*, is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work”.

Signature

Date

4/9/08

DEDICATION

For Ruby, my first granddaughter, sadly not with us;

and for Maurice and Beatrice Dillon my parents, who always encouraged me to pursue tertiary education.

In memory of Wendy Weeks, friend, mentor, feminist social worker extraordinaire and enthusiastic supporter of this project who passed away July 2004.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My heartfelt thanks to –

Carolyn Noble for her encouragement, support and faith in this thesis; Trish Harris from Murdoch University for her dedication and supervisory wisdom in the early stages; Phil Connors, my partner in life for his practical support as well as riding the emotional see-saw with me, in the words of Martha in Dr Who, ‘Now we can be Doctors together’; my daughters Karla, Jerusha and the rest of my family and friends who encouraged and supported me to completion, truly, this would not have been possible without you all.

Most importantly to the 24 of my women colleagues around Australia who gave so generously of their time and reflections, I hope I have done justice to each and every one of your stories. Thank you, may the Goddess ever hold you gently.

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*There's life in the old girl yet,
and sister you'd better bet,
we can't afford not to remember,
what the world wants to forget,
there's life in the old girl yet....*

Judy Small, 2005

INTRODUCTION

How I came to this thesis

Emergence of my critically reflective feminism

The story of how I came to this particular thesis is intimately bound up with the journey of my commitment to social justice, the development of understanding of my own privilege as a white, 'middle' class, educated Australian woman and ultimately the emergence of my feminist thinking.

Describing the social movement for women's rights of the time, the word *feminisme* was apparently first coined in France in the 1880's. The anglicised version, 'feminism' was not used widely however until it was adopted by the Women's Liberation movement in the 1970s as a descriptor for women who challenged patriarchal understandings of women's economic, social and political rights (van der Gaag, 2004). While I find it difficult to remember a time in my life when I have not been outraged that women were treated differently to men, I could not name this sense of gendered injustice as feminism however until I engaged theoretically with feminist theory in the late 1970s – 80s as part of my social work degree. Even though I have now been actively engaged in and have taught feminism for more than twenty five years, it is hard to accurately pinpoint a particular moment of awareness. For me there was no specific 'click' moment, (Hercus, 2005 after Ms Magazine, 1972) - that sudden epiphany when one makes sense of accumulated experience and collectively identifies those experiences as subordination. Rather my emergent feminism was a gradual process.

The seeds of feminist consciousness were first planted in my childhood, in my education and workplace experiences, in the relationships I encountered and especially perhaps in my mother's story as representative of her generation of rural women. Each of these factors one way or another had a profound effect on my identity and compounded to a latent gendered awareness that gradually unfolded once I commenced tertiary studies. To this extent I often wonder how much the word 'feminist' is a university phenomenon, reflecting the privilege and education level of the woman naming herself thus, paradoxically perhaps naming herself as a member of

an elite club, see the 'I am not a feminist but'... syndrome (Hercus, 2005). There was no specific book that I can recollect reading that I could relate to in such a way that my experience was crystallised in recognition. Quite the opposite as I recall. While many of the participants in this study name reading Germaine Greer's 'The Female Eunuch' as one of their 'ah ha' moments, I read the book in the early 1970s and it was like gobbeldy gook to me. This despite the fact that at the time I was in an unhappy marriage and frustrated and constrained in many of the things I wanted to do by household and child care responsibilities.

Neither did my moment occur through my undergraduate Arts degree, which I commenced as a mature age student in 1974. Through sociology I was able to name my sense of injustice as primarily a Marxist or neo Marxist perspective. By the time I formed a relationship with my second partner, with whom, (perhaps not incidentally) I had been studying philosophy at the time, I was able to clearly articulate my expectations of what an 'equal' relationship would look like. At this point I was coming from a very individualised understanding of women's experience and, while I had almost certainly been introduced to the word 'feminism', I remember thinking that a specific focus on the needs of women was perhaps a little inward looking and maybe somewhat sad given the overwhelming magnitude of the social justice agenda. With my family involvement in the ALP and as my undergraduate major was in Political Science, I was of the view that social change would most likely occur through class based social activism and strategic lobbying to influence the development of governmental policy. Hence, women's issues were to me at that stage just one aspect of a broader range of needs to be met.

Later, during social work studies I was exposed to radical feminist activists whose work had culminated in the establishment of a number of women's refuges in Hobart. As they were also openly lesbian however and I was not, I identified feminism with the clique that they formed, and indeed was quite intimidated by the power dynamic that this particular collective of women seemed to project as a group. Even in 1979 when I was just about to complete a degree in social work, I remember having a discussion with the lecturer (male) who supervised my dissertation in which I asked him to explain to me what the fuss was about the use of sexist language. I recall that

he, (now a broadly published Professor of Human Rights) said he didn't quite understand the logic either - clearly we have both moved on. Certainly through the social work degree, I became much more aware of the nature of disadvantage of specific groups and the impact that social policy had on either improving the situation or exacerbating it, or indeed more often than not, having contradictory effects. These contradictions were the stuff of Marxist analyses of the Welfare State (Bailey & Brake, 1975; Corrigan & Leonard, 1978; Galper, 1975), in which those contradictions were seen to be the key to bringing about a transformation to socialism. The contradictory relationship that women especially had with the welfare state was highlighted by Elizabeth's Wilson's landmark book, "Women and the Welfare State", initially published in the UK context in 1977.

I remember using this book as a reference for my final dissertation for the social work degree which was essentially about the Freire(ian) method of conscientisation and how this might relate to working with (community) groups (Dillon:1979). However this was used in this instance as a reference to make specific points about the value of utilising consciousness raising groups as a basis for activism generally, rather than a tool for the liberation of women. In hindsight I must have absorbed some feminist theory because, by the time I had completed a social work degree in 1979, I was equipped with a complex, albeit somewhat chaotic, academic awareness of the relative disadvantage of women. I could even say I had the tools to cautiously identify my persistent sense of injustice at the way women were treated as (socialist) feminism (Wearing, 1986).

My first social work position was in the obstetrics division of a major public hospital. Here I saw women consistently belittled and vulnerable to the patriarchal and often blatantly sexist attitudes of the male medical students with whom I had shared first year science subjects at university five years previously. Somewhere in their training these young men – and indeed some young women, had taken on as part of their professional identity that particular brand of hubris that exemplifies at one and the same time their capacity for 'power over' and their comparatively lowly status in the medical hierarchy. However at this point, I still intellectualised the world primarily through a neo-Marxist lens at the same time that I continued to individualise my

experience of gender. This even though after having my second child, my life in relationship had become emphatically unequal, given that it then took me the same amount of years to complete one degree as it took my partner to complete two. While C. Wright Mills (1970) had written of the indivisibility of private troubles - public issues, as far as I was concerned personally, the private and public spheres remained frustratingly separate. Like Smith (1991) and other colleagues whose thoughts are shared within this study, the spheres of my existence and hence my consciousness remained categorically 'bifurcated', characterised by 'double days' running between the set of the public stage and the joys and demands of the domestic sphere. Despite my tertiary education, I had uncritically adopted dual roles in a system whose boundaries and time frames were clearly set by patriarchal understandings. My consciousness had started to shift however. By the time I started contract tutoring at WAIT (West Australian Institute of Technology, now Curtin University) in 1981, the next incident I remember is admonishing a group of senior male academics in the staff tea room for their sexist language a few weeks after my arrival. They simply laughed at me, in their minds dismissing my concerns about exclusivity of language as nonsense. This was my first real critical awareness of the exercise of male power (over junior women colleagues) through trivialisation, but as I had individualised my feminist perspective to the point of fine art, at that point I felt very alone, with nowhere to go for understanding and support.

As time wore on however at WAIT, along with some other women tutors I started to utilise feminism in my teaching and as the 80s progressed we were emboldened by lectures given at local conferences by known feminists such as Lois Bryson and Dale Spender. In 1982 I attended one of the first Women in Welfare Education meetings. WIWE is a national collective of academic women teaching in social work or welfare education and from its early days I became and remain an active participant in that network. It was in this forum alongside women colleagues that I was able to articulate more clearly my feminist understanding and to realise that many other women colleagues shared similar experiences. Wendy Weeks had just returned from Canada and I recall not just her incisive understanding of what she had to say about the need for feminist analysis in social work teaching and practice and in social policy, but also most importantly the *way* she presented the information. Rather than

a formal presentation per se, Wendy sat with us in a circle and after giving an overview of the issues, she encouraged dialogue through questions and discussion, inviting us all the while to share our experiences and knowledge in a respectful and considered way. Our discussions then *became* the analysis and the focus for problem solving in small groups. As I was already attempting to put into practice a model of education based loosely on a Freirian understanding (Freire, 1970), this meeting showed me how useful a feminist approach was to both the teaching and practice of social work and community development.

Another text that impacted on my teaching through the 1980s was Marchant and Wearing's book 'Gender Reclaimed', home grown feminist theory published in 1986 focusing specifically on a gendered analysis of women and social work. This and Baldock & Cass' earlier 'Women in Welfare', (1983) were both heavily utilised in the elective I offered through the mid 80's on Women in Social Policy which effectively (and invariably) turned into a consciousness raising group. It was in this forum that I began to see alongside the students, the political nature of the personal. Like many consciousness raising groups before us, the lively and often impassioned discussions in this group gave voice to the political nature of such topics as - work/study/home balance; sex and relationships; marriage; domestic violence and prostitution as well as subjects already on the public agenda such as income maintenance and sexual assault. In structuring this unit in a way that gave control of content and voice to the participants themselves, I was particularly inspired by the approach legitimated by Wendy Weeks at that first WIWE meeting and further validated by Brenda Smith's (1986) article on the need for a feminist approach in Social Work education. Articulating a view that I was not at that point in my career emboldened enough to publish, a feminist approach Smith argued –

challenges the prevailing male world view, forcing us to question certain dominant assumptions about our everyday lives and the way we construct our knowledge. It redresses omissions and distortions in course content by including material on women from their viewpoint. It suggests 'solutions' in the form of alternative types of practice. It questions traditional educational methods, attempting to develop new pedagogical approaches congruent with its principles. Its dual and simultaneous focus on personal and political action adds to our understanding of the dynamic relationship between private pain and public issues, which has long been a major concern for social workers (Smith, cited in Marchant and Wearing, 1986:211).

My feminist perspective gradually evolved over the eighties and nineties and has now in the new noughties become an intrinsic part of my identity – my professional and private persona. The viewpoint now incorporates ecological, anti racist/colonialist and post structural understandings as an approach that I understand as critical global feminism. This is also the analytical lens through which I approach this thesis. This positioning will be further explored in the research approach below and elaborated in each part of the thesis alongside the particular context(s) in which it was developed.

The thesis

When considering a PhD in the late 1990s, it was clear that whatever the particular topic, my key focus would be social justice and that feminism in particular would underscore the *raison d'être* of the thesis. While feminism played out in my public role as lecturer and persistently caused tensions to arise in my private life, it was also providing for me a path for the future. Hence, I was curious about how other women colleagues had experienced their journeys through feminism and where they felt they were headed. In addition to my commitment to feminism, I have had a life long interest in history, especially women's herstory and a passion to bring to life women's feminist activism. Therefore it seemed natural to pursue a line of enquiry that not only spanned the decades of second wave feminism, but which gave potency to the voices of those women who had been engaged in feminist activism in their practice and teaching of welfare, social work and social policy. Women who teach social work and welfare education have made a significant contribution to Australian welfare history and I considered it important to write a thesis that explored this collective experience. After some consideration of the options, I decided to track the way changes to the socio-economic and policy context had impacted upon my women colleagues in welfare education in Australia over the past three decades. Of particular importance was how those changes played out in my colleagues' teaching, theory and practice and activism, how they experienced feminism and the women's movement and how they saw the future for feminism, social policy and social work.

Social policy, social justice and social work

One of my observations over the years had been that while social work is enacted within specific social policy contexts, presentations on social policy per se from the

social work academy in Australia at least seemed to have decreased, especially from a feminist critique. Social Policy is taught in all social work courses in Australia that are accredited by the professional association, (see AASW website) hence at the level of rhetoric at least, social work and social policy remain connected. This is not necessarily the case in social work courses in other countries (see for example UK), however where social policy is increasingly taught as a separate discipline and as an ‘offshoot’ of more generalist public policy (see GCSS website). In most social work courses in the UK social policy is either not taught or seen as an added extra. Indeed, although social policy is taught in other courses here in Australia such as politics and in other areas of social science, it is largely as a part of a broader public policy framework. The drift towards common two year degrees in social work in my view can only exacerbate this trend. As social policy largely determines the context in which social work operates, I see it as of critical importance that social work as a profession remain engaged with social policy. I suggest however that as the responsibility of the state for people’s welfare has increasingly been passed over to quasi or non-government organisations (Jamrozik, 2005; O’Connor et al, 2003), that the capacity of social workers (let alone service recipients), to influence policy has diminished or become increasingly fragmented. None the less, social workers work every day with the fallout of ill conceived, unjust or simply unmanageable social policies. Statistically speaking most of those affected are women (Antrobus, 2004; Baldock & Cass; 1983, Ungerson & Kember, 1997), but the gendered nature of the impact of social policies appears to have become increasingly invisible, in the Australian context at least, in dominant discourse. It seems to me however, that as social issues have become increasingly dominated by economic rationalist and managerialist perspectives, the response from the social work academy has largely been to either retreat into pragmatic practice issues or to defend specific sites of practice against the impact of those policies (Ife, 1997). Born out of Keynesianism, social policy as a concept is inherently about redistribution of wealth (Bryson, 1992; Graycar, 1983) to adequately meet people’s needs. The paradox here I feel is that while Keynesianism is largely discredited in current economic discourse, (Fenna, 2004; Jamrozik, 2005), notions of redistribution of wealth in the interest of meeting of people’s needs is now, perhaps more than ever an urgent priority. If the response of social work to socio economic change has largely been to retreat into micro or

parochial issues, then what has happened to the concept of social justice in social work? Add to this the historic perception of social policy as a 'male' domain (Antrobus, 2004; Land, 1979; Ungerson & Kemba, 1997; Williams 1989), and I suggest increasingly so if men are the primary authors of economic rationalism - I considered the time was ripe for a gendered analysis of the mix between social policy, social work and social justice in the Australian context. Where better to derive this than from women who have lived and breathed and taught these subjects for many years? If as social work educators we provide leadership in ideas, how we see and how we teach issues of social policy is ultimately going to have a strong flow on effect in the wider profession. Thus as well as having an interest in how women SW educators had experienced contextual changes over time, I felt it was important to see if my colleagues were concerned about changes to the auspice of social policy and if they (still) consciously identified social work with social policy. Hence my research questions were designed to elicit information on a number of levels.

Shaping the research process

Research however is rarely (or should not be) simply a straight forward task of asking questions and writing up the answers. Questions of epistemology and methodology determine the manner in which information is both uncovered and interpreted (D'Cruz & Jones, 2006; Weiler & Middleton, 1994). It was important to me to find an approach to research that was consistent with my values and beliefs and an ethic of practice which did most justice to the participants in the study. The approach that I have taken to this research arises out of the theoretical frameworks that have informed my teaching and shaped my identity as a practitioner and how those understandings have shifted over time. The epistemological assumptions and the inner debates/reflective processes that I have engaged in to get to this point are outlined below.

Approach to the research

Theorising an approach to research

Throughout my undergraduate degrees, I was strongly drawn to Marx & Engels' (1978) Historical Materialism as a way of understanding social injustice and relations

of ruling within capitalist societies. Historical Materialism locates identity within a class structure in which owners of means of production in any given society maintain power through ownership and control of economic institutions and are also able to control production of culture through the notion of false consciousness within the 'under classes'. According to Marx & Engels, once false consciousness was exposed, the working classes would rise to revolution and assume social/democratic ownership of the means of production and this collective ownership would prove the path to true equality. The Marxist critique was of course open to criticism, most notably in those societies where revolution among the working classes had resulted in state socialism, the resultant 'equality', was maintained not through the ideal of democracy, but through seriously repressive regimes. Arguably Marx & Engels could not also predict the 20th century rise of consumerism as replacing religion as the 'opiate of the masses', and the power of this to become the new hegemony, ensuring a new, more subtle kind of subjugation among the general populous, thus in my view effectively ensuring the demise of Marx' predicted 'necessary revolution'.

None the less the notion that identity and status within society is tied to economic position continued to be (and remains) a core factor in my social analysis and my commitment to the creation of more equal and just societies (Poppo & Leighninger, 1999). Over the years however, I have moved away from the determinist Marxist position of societies heading inevitably towards socialist revolution. In this as a new graduate in social work in the late 1970s, I was particularly influenced by the works of Antonio Gramsci (Femia, 1980; Salamini, 1981) and Paulo Freire (1970/72). Gramsci because he challenged the determinist position of classic Marxism, suggesting instead that capitalism was infinitely adaptable and could survive various challenges. That creation and control of culture through control of the social institutions through which culture is created - 'rule by ideas' (cultural hegemony), was a key factor in ruling elites maintaining economic and social power within capitalist societies. Similarly, Paulo Freire was another important influence because of his notion of critical consciousness as a precondition of political praxis.

Critical consciousness and social transformation

The common and central theme in reading Marx, Gramsci and Freire is the notion of (political) praxis, the process – integration of action and reflection that develops transformative consciousness. For Marx, (generally attributed as the founder of the notion of praxis), revolutionary praxis would arise as the contradictions inherent in capitalism became obvious to the masses (Marx & Engels, 1978). This was an integral part of class consciousness and the inevitable social and political antagonisms between workers and owners of capital which would result in revolution (Salamini, 1981). Gramsci on the other hand, while holding on to the Marxist principle of the need for socialist revolution, did not accept the determinist position that revolution was inevitable or that class consciousness could be brought to the workers from above (Femia, 1980; Hoare & Smith, 1971; Salamini, 1981). Rather, the key to social transformation in Gramsci's view was the process of hegemony, 'that phase of history in which an organic unity is realised', in which the 'moment of consciousness is central' and a new (transformative) hegemony is born. (Salamini, 1981:136-137) Gramsci argued that if intellectuals involved in the process of development of critical consciousness were to be authentically engaged with the reality of the masses, they must be able to put aside their elite status to work effectively with 'the people'. To do otherwise would be to remain 'servant(s) to dominant power' and so 'become a marginal stratum whose knowledge is not wanted by society at large' (ibid:121). Importantly for me however, was Gramsci's ideas that the moral role of intellectuals in this system was to work alongside oppressed people to challenge the system and create a 'new hegemony' (Femia, 1980:356). It was this imperative for educated professionals to work *alongside* people to create positive alternatives to the current system that has consistently informed my social work practice and my preference for engaging with people at the community level. It also remains at the heart of my critical reflective approach as a social work educator.

Critical reflection and political praxis

In developing a critical reflective approach to practice and to education however, I was most influenced by the works of Paulo Freire. Freire (1970) argued that oppressed peoples need to have knowledge before they can act to challenge the material conditions of their lives. Like Gramsci, Freire saw the role of educators as

playing a critical role in developing ‘man’s (sic) ontological vocation to be a subject who acts upon and transforms his (sic) world and in so doing moves ever toward new possibilities of richer life individually and collectively’ (Freire, 1970:14). Through education based on meaningful and authentic dialogue, oppressed peoples become engaged in a constant critical unveiling of reality and in recognising themselves as the ‘victims of injustice’, pave the way to ‘enter the historical process as responsible subjects’ (Freire, 1970:18). This process of ‘naming and acting on the world’ through dialogue, (conscientisation) stands in contrast to what Freire refers to as the banking concept of education in which the educator deposits ‘knowledge’ in much the same way as one would money in a bank. This pervasive method of education invariably reflects the interests of the dominant. In naming the world *for* others, the educator replicates the dominant relations of ruling and suppresses the potential of the oppressed to challenge and recreate the world in their own interest. Hence according to Freire, in the interests of freedom, the educator must only be the *facilitator* of dialogue, they must not speak or act *on behalf* of the oppressed, to do so effectively results in re-colonisation of those with whom they work (Freire, 1970).

In a previous dissertation (Dillon, 1979), I utilised ethnographic and participant observation research methods to explore if a Freirian approach to community development resulted in galvanisation of a disadvantaged group in Chigwell, Tasmania, over issues that affected their local community. In concluding that building relationships within marginalised communities through the use of a Freirian dialogical approach to explore issues of concern was a valid basis for social work practice at the community level, I was also able to give voice to a practice methodology that fitted the aforesaid Gramscian ideal of the intellectual. This understanding also provided a basic framework for developing a critical reflective epistemology.

Dialogue and trust

Freire also believed that the role of educated intellectuals (whom he saw as being of the oppressor class) was fundamental, but was concerned that in their conversion to the cause of the oppressed, they may still bring their elitist baggage with them and lack basic trust in the people. As he wrote –

Our converts.....truly desire to transform the unjust order; but because of their background they believe that they must be executors of the transformation. They talk about the people, but they do not trust them; and trusting the people is the indispensable precondition for revolutionary change. A real humanist can be identified more by his (sic) trust in the people, which engages him (sic) in their struggle, than by a thousand actions in their favour without that trust (Freire, 1970:42).

Hence Freire believed that for true dialogue to occur, professionals committed to working alongside people in their struggles for transformation need 'faith in people as an a priori requirement for dialogue'. Implicit in his writings is the need for the kind of humility and capacity for critical thinking that allows for a collaborative naming and recreation of the world. This in turn suggests an understanding of dialogue which stresses a dynamic relationship between reflection and action such that if 'one is sacrificed, even in part, the other immediately suffers' (ibid:68).

Role of subjectivity

While classic Marxism largely overlooked the role of subjectivity, in making an argument for conscientisation as a transformative process, both Freire and Gramsci were critically concerned with the role of subjectivity. However they saw subjectivity as conceptually inseparable from objectivity and existing only in dynamic relationship with the other. Many years before the ascent of the post-modern critique Freire wrote:

...one cannot conceive of objectivity without subjectivity. Neither can exist without the other, nor can they be dichotomised. The separation of objectivity from subjectivity, the denial of the latter when analysing reality or acting upon it, is objectivism. On the other hand, the denial of objectivity in analysis or action, resulting in a subjectivism which leads to solipsistic positions, denies action itself by denying objective reality. Neither objectivism nor subjectivism, nor yet psychologism is propounded here, but rather subjectivity and objectivity in constant dialectical relationship (Freire, 1970:32).

In a similar rejection of positivist idealism, Gramsci also believed there was no such thing as 'extra human objectivity' (Femia, 1980:334). Acknowledging the influence of economic forces as restricting human freedom, knowledge and all things mental to Gramsci however were the product of social life, there being no extra human reality to which humanity remained subordinate. To Gramsci, reality was mediated by thought,

but not constituted by it, a position well summarised by Femia who interpreted Gramsci's position as such –

Man's (sic) relation with nature is always dialectical. Man (sic) shapes it as it shapes him, there is no understanding one without the other. Nature is nothing to us until it becomes the object of historically defined human purpose – further, nothing that enters into relationship with man (sic) remains simply non-human (Femia, 1980:334).

Hence for those writers, reality – knowledge – understanding was essentially built through active contact – relationship with, rather than moulded through objective laws external to those who 'know', a point of view expanded in later decades by feminist scholars.

The lessons I take from these key three writers for an approach to research methodology are firstly, the importance of situated knowledge – of grounding the research in the material conditions of people's lives. Secondly, the necessity of relating research to transformation; and critically related to this, the importance of uncovering knowledge through a process of dialogue *with* those with whom we work through exploration of subjective realities. I also take from these writers that to do otherwise is to objectify and colonise and most importantly to potentially reproduce relations of domination. This is the basis of my critical reflective approach to this research project. However while all three writers challenged dominant understandings of what constituted knowledge for their time, they also incorporated the interests of women under men's. In assuming universalist and generalised categories of 'working classes' and 'the oppressed', they also subsumed the interests of diverse populations into a totalising whole. It was largely feminist researchers who challenged these assumptions and who initially extended the subjective/objective debates of the social sciences to incorporate understandings of diversity. In doing so they pointed to the gendered assumptions of the classic sociologists. It is to those writers that I now turn.

Feminist research

Arising from the consciousness raising groups that gave birth to the second wave women's movement in America in the late 1960s, feminist research articulated a

specific intent of giving voice to women's experience which had been rendered almost invisible within traditional 'scientific' research methodology (Stanley, 1990). Consciousness raising allowed women to explore the myriads of ways that the world had been put together by men with little recognition of what women had to say. In early consciousness raising groups, discussion focussed on shared experiences of issues such as sexuality, relationships, family, work and participation in new-left politics (Naples, 2003; Stanley, 1990). There were no formal guidelines, but as many of the women (albeit predominantly white) had been involved in civil rights movements and were politically activist, discussion centred on collective political change rather than individual or group therapy (Weiler & Middleton, 1999). While many of the groups incorporated readings into their sessions, the starting point for action was invariably women's experience. The public world as represented in social institutions, in the media, in government and policies and in culture was seen as by and large created from the view of men. Through this process women discovered that they had been 'in various ways silenced – deprived of the authority to speak' (Smith, 1993:1), that as a result women's experience, especially their role in the private sphere

lacked indeed a language, for we had taken from the cultural and intellectual world created largely by men, the terms, themes, conceptions of the subject and subjectivity, of feeling, emotion, goals, relations and an object world assembled in textually mediated discourses and from the standpoint of men occupying the apparatuses of ruling. We came to understand this organisation of power as 'patriarchy', a term that identified both the personal and public relations of male power (ibid:1-2).

Owning the language of research

Without a language, the experiences of women uncovered had no name (Naples, 2003). The insight that the personal is political that emanated from consciousness raising led feminist researchers to challenge the dualistic assumptions informing traditional social scientific method. Echoing Freire (1970) among others, early feminist researchers challenged the dichotomies of method that separated action and reflection, subject and object, theory and practice and the notion of distance between researcher and researched and the public from the private sphere (Naples, 2003; Stanley & Wise, 1990). Rather a feminist perspective suggested that the guide to theoretical understanding was experience and feeling. This approach 'reflected the

realities of women's socially defined subjectivities and the conditions of their lives' (Weiler & Middleton, 1999:22).

Feminist pedagogy and research

As the women's movement evolved, consciousness raising found institutional expression in the rise of women's studies courses which emphasised feminist scholarship and the search for feminist pedagogy that was ultimately to challenge traditional bases of knowledge. Early feminist critiques pointed to the 'partial and distorted accounts in traditional analyses' (Harding, 1987:2), and fundamental problems arising out of concern simply with method. Rather to avoid an 'add on' approach, writers such as Harding (1987) and Smith (1987, 1993) were concerned to develop specifically feminist epistemologies. As Harding suggests, feminists have argued that traditional epistemologies have –

whether intentionally or unintentionally, systematically excluded the possibility that women could be 'knowers' or agents of knowledge; they claim that the voice of science is a masculine one; that history is written from only the view of men (of the dominant class and race); that the subject of a traditional sociological sentence is always assumed to be a man (Harding, 1987:3).

Similarly Smith (1987) speaking of the North American context argued that established sociology over the last century at least –

gives us a consciousness that looks at society, social relations and people's lives as if we could stand outside them, ignoring the particular local places in the everyday in which we live our lives (Smith, 1987:2).

Bifurcation of consciousness

On her early thinking on feminism Smith writes of the 'bifurcation of consciousness', the double life she experienced in moving between the public world of academe and the private, if absorbing world of her home and family. From that vantage point she sees the merits of being able to be 'totally absorbed' in the relations of ruling – in men's world.....of seeing the world from one mode of consciousness rather than experiencing the strain of constantly transgressing a gendered boundary between two separate modes that could not coexist with the other, even if they existed within the same person (Smith, 1987).

Challenging the relations of ruling

Smith argued that there is a 'singular coincidence', between the privileging of male knowledge in sociology and what she describes as the 'relations of ruling'. A concept that 'grasps power, organisation, direction and regulation as more pervasively structured than can be expressed in traditional concepts provided by the discourses of power' (Smith, 1987:3). Smith contends that our knowledge of society is to take on the standpoint of men and by inference, the standpoint of 'the relations of ruling'. In contrast to this, Smith (1990) proposes a reorganisation of the relationship of sociologists to the objects of their knowledge such that it is acknowledged that the only way of knowing a socially constructed world is from *within*. In this view the starting point for inquiry is experience and the socially organised 'actualities of our everyday world' (Smith, 1990:23), as she explains –

By taking up a standpoint in our original and immediate knowledge of the world, sociologists can make their discipline's socially organised properties first observable, then problematic (Smith, 1990:23).

Standpoint as homogenisation?

On the face of it the homogenisation of 'men' and 'women' as universal categories is open to criticism from a post-modern critique as denying multiple subjectivities. Certainly debate continues among feminist researchers about what defines research as feminist (Naples, 2003; Reinharz, 1992, cited in Alston & Bowles, 1998; Stanley and Wise, 1990, cited in Stanley, 1990). In his critique of feminist standpoint theory Pease, (2000) has argued that the association of masculinity with objectivity denotes a 'false universalism', essentially based in biology and falsely ascribed to all men 'regardless of their theoretical position' (Pease, 2000:138). Similarly some post structural critics (Belenky et al, 1986; Clough, 1994; Hennesy, 1993, cited in Naples, 2003) have argued that standpoint theory reduces the notion of women to essentialised categories and by default actually *reduces* women's ways of knowing. These writings suggest that the plurality of women's experiences and feminist perspectives make a unitary feminist methodology hard to define. While acknowledging the problematic of a singular idea of 'women', in my reading of Smith and other standpoint theorists, I feel this critique may well miss the point about the privileging of men's knowledge in sociology and the gendered nature of general academic discourse or indeed, the

myriad of subtle ways in which all men benefit from patriarchy. On the contrary, I would argue that in breaking down the false division between women's productive and reproductive lives, feminist standpoint theory renders visible the complexity of women's daily existence. The multiplicity of roles; the balancing acts of parenting and caring combined with work outside the home; women's creativity in science and the arts; the achievements in the public sphere and so on, all historically unacknowledged in classic academic discourse. And of course this is all experienced in different ways in differing situations and times, and most importantly perhaps, in differing engagements with the 'relations of ruling'. As Smith remarks –

If we begin from the world as we actually experience it, it is at least possible to see that we are indeed located and that what we know of the other is conditional upon that location. There are and must be different experiences of the world and different bases of experience. We must not do away with them by taking advantage of our privileged speaking to construct a sociological version that we then impose upon them as their reality. We may not rewrite the other's world or impose upon it a conceptual framework that extracts from it what fits with ours. ***Their reality, their varieties of experience, must be an unconditional datum. It is the place where enquiry begins*** (emphasis mine) (Smith, 1990:25).

Situating inquiry

In arguing for a standpoint of women then, it is important to acknowledge the 'bifurcated consciousness' that women experience as a result of the gendered separation of the public and private domains in dominant discourse and the objectification arising from the separation of objective and subjective, researcher and researched. In situating inquiry in our everyday world as women and problematising it, we become 'authoritative speakers of our experience' (Smith, 1990:28). This also makes it possible to explore the location of multiple experiences within the social relations within which experience is embedded. Standpoint theory as developed by feminist researchers aims then to legitimate and value the diversity of women's experience as a foundation for method. For, as Harding points out - 'In the very best of feminist research, the purposes of research and analysis are not separable from the origins of the research problems' (1987:8). In feminist research, as in Freire's (1970) perspective, the objective – subjective divide ultimately becomes a contradiction in terms.

Themes in feminist methodology

Feminist scholars may not have been the first to scrutinise the objective – subjective divide, nor indeed to note the importance of locating research in people's lived experience. For many years anthropologists in particular had worked with various groups of people in a participatory and engaged way. There are a number of important ways that feminist research differs from participatory and ethnographic approaches however. Reinharz (1992) argues that feminist methodology rather than attempting a unified approach to research encompasses a spectrum of ten themes that characterise feminist method as opposed to traditional approaches. Most notable in these themes are the inclusion of the researcher in the research process; the guiding of research by feminist theory; the centrality of women in the process; the goal of creating social change; the representation of human diversity and attempts through interactive research to build relationship with the people studied (Reinharz, 1992, cited in Alston & Bowles, 1998).

There are other important contributions that feminist theory has offered to debates about research. Feminist scholars have consistently raised questions about issues such as power imbalance between researcher and researched, the responsibilities that researchers have to those whom they study and how strategies of self-reflection impact on or alter ethnographic practice. They have also given considerable attention to 'insider – outsider' debates (Naples, 2003; Reinharz, 1992; Smith 1993). Smith writes of how 'entry to the virtual realities of the relations of ruling call for actual practice of their social organisation' (1993:9), thus suggesting participation as a prerequisite to effective research in particular local sites. Naples (2003) on the other hand dismisses the notion of insider as somewhat mythical, pointing out that in communities that to all intents and purposes appear as cohesive, individual members invariably feel 'othered', at least in some ways. Arguing that the construction of insider/outsider sets up a false dichotomy that neglects interactive processes, Naples suggests that it may make more sense to recognise the fluidity of insiderness/outsiderness and for researchers to acknowledge three key methodological points –

as ethnographers we are never fully outside or inside the ‘community’; our relationship to the community is never expressed in general terms but is constantly being negotiated and renegotiated in particular everyday interactions; and these interactions are themselves enacted in shifting relationships among community residents. (*And most importantly*) These negotiations are manifest in local processes that reposition gender, class and racial-ethnic relations among other socially constructed distinctions (Naples, 2003:49).

Critical reflective strategies and research process

From my experience in community development I would certainly agree that relationship is always being negotiated and renegotiated in the everyday, but I would add that length of relationships and status within groups and communities also makes a difference to what it is that people are likely to tell you. Building trusting and mutually respectful relationships is key to effective participatory research as is accountability to the community concerned, hence the need for the employment of critical reflective strategies at every point in the research process. On this latter point Naples in particular suggests that if researchers do not explore how ‘their personal, professional and structural positions frame social scientific investigations, researchers inevitably reproduce dominant gender, race and class biases’ (2003:3).

In challenging the tendency to perpetuate the status quo, Naples draws on Harding’s (1987) distinctions between epistemology (theory of knowledge), methodology (theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed), and method (technique for gathering evidence), to argue that –

...the specific methods we choose and how we employ those methods are profoundly shaped by our epistemological stance....Our epistemological assumptions also influence how we define our roles as researchers, what we consider ethical research practices, and how we interpret and implement informed consent or ensure the confidentiality of our research subjects (Naples, 2003:3).

Hence research methods are ‘not free of epistemological assumptions and taken for granted understandings of what counts as data, how the researcher should relate to the subjects of research and what are the appropriate products of a research study’ (Naples, 2003:5). In linking feminist theoretical debates on ‘positionality, interpretive authority and activist research’ with case studies from her own research and practice, Naples hopes to ‘illustrate the strategies developed for confronting the particular challenges posed by feminist, post-modern, third world, post-colonial and queer scholars’ (ibid:4). These include how to resist universalising trends and acknowledge

power differentials between peoples. In response to such challenges, a case is built for a multi-dimensional materialist feminist standpoint epistemology informed by reflective research strategies as a base for feminist research. In arguing this case, Naples (2003) draws on standpoint methodology (Harding, 1987; Smith, 1987), materialist feminism (Fraser, 1989; Smith, 1987) post-modern theories of discourse and power, (Foucault, 1972) and insights from racialisation theorists (bell hooks, 1994; Omi & Winant, 1986).

Resisting juxtaposition

Arguably in acknowledging the complexity of theory and drawing on seemingly contradictory knowledge in this way, it may be possible to resist the juxtaposition usually ascribed to postmodern and modernist theories. In similar vein, Weeks (1998) argues that ‘oppositional logic’ such as defining Foucault’s approach as ‘post modern’ and dismissing Marxism as ‘modernist’ reduces ‘modernism to a straw figure, to a homogenous model of enlightenment thought’ (Weeks, 1998 cited in Naples, 2003:6) thus dismissing and denying the breadth and complexity of both (so-called) modernist and post modernist thinking and limiting the possibility of insight from both. On reflection, I have also often found the tension between so called ‘modern’ and ‘postmodern’ to be frustratingly simplistic and limiting. While I consider these debates in more depth in later chapters, I agree with Smith’s assertion that as feminism has evolved it has bypassed the old ontological problem of subject-object relations, rather –

...the irremediable disorder and confusion threatening the sociologist is a problem of the richness of the material to be mined rather than its intrinsic lack of order....the standpoint of women has already provided an escape hatch, emerging at a point in women’s contemporary struggles when we had to place a radical reliance on our experience in learning with each other how to speak together as women (Smith, 1993:3-5).

Much more useful in the overall scheme of things I would have thought.....

Principles that inform the research process

Hence I am approaching this research informed by an historical materialist understanding from Marx, but developed within feminist research by Smith (1987,

1990) and Naples (2003), among others; a standpoint position that recognises the multidimensionality of women's experience as I am at the same time engaged with the women who are participants in the research (Harding, 1987; Smith, 1987, 1990; Naples, 2003); an approach to research that is political in that it aims to uncover with women the location of their lived experience in the social fabric of the time (Freire, 1970; Naples, 2003; Smith, 1987, 1990, 1993); a critical reflective approach that incorporates an ongoing awareness of the need to maintain respect and trust within the research relationship in order to avoid objectification of participants in the research and the need for dialogue as a means to collectively explore mutually agreed interests (Freire, 1970; Gramsci as cited in Femia, 1980) and finally, the necessity of ongoing scrutiny of my own epistemological assumptions and the insight or baggage that this brings to bear on the research (Freire, 1970; Naples, 2003).

Method

While the above approach might seem unnecessarily clumsy to the casual observer, the multifaceted nature of the approach lends itself closely to the considerations I wanted to bear in mind when undertaking this research. Rather than attempt to research outside of my experience, I wanted to centre my research on women's experiences that were 'close to home' so to speak. Capturing the stories of how a number of my women colleagues experienced the changes to the social policy and social work environment over time seemed a worthy project for all those reasons previously outlined. In referring in a generic sense to 'women colleagues', I refer to a group of self selected women educators who teach (or have taught) in social work and welfare courses in various university contexts throughout Australia and who were of an age to remember as far back in herstory as the 1970s. All of these women have been trained and practiced as social workers at some stage over the thirty years in question and as academics or people working in senior management positions most have pursued at least some level of post-graduate study. Most of the women concerned have described themselves as 'activist' in the sense of actively working for social justice for disadvantaged groups and informed in this practice by theoretical bases that point to unjust distributions of wealth and resources in varying social contexts. Most of the women – although by no means all – also describe themselves as strongly influenced by feminist theory in their teaching and practice.

While initially I had planned for the research to be localised, drawing on potential participants from universities within Western Australia where I was based as I commenced this research, with the best of intentions the reality of the need for a larger group of respondents meant that realistically the research would be Australia wide. In line with principles of consciousness raising and the importance of dialogue (the benefits of collective sharing to awaken consciousness) as a tool of feminist research, I had also initially intended to conduct a number of focus groups. But in this I was defeated by the reality of geographical distance, the punishing workloads of my colleagues which made time (to get together) and space an issue as well as access to resources to conduct an Australia wide study. As a consequence I settled on an open-ended questionnaire which women who wished to participate could complete on line in their own time. I also took advantage of a Social Work Education conference in Melbourne to conduct a number of interviews using the same questionnaire. Prior to this I had contacted women in all the schools of social work in Australia via Heads of Schools with an open invitation which outlined the objectives of the research and provided contact details for those wishing to participate. On contact respondents were posted a university headed consent form with stamped addressed envelope for signing and a further letter of explanation. On return of the consent form participants were emailed an open ended questionnaire which also asked people to suggest a pseudonym (for purposes of anonymity), (see Appendices 1, 2 & 3). Overall there were some 24 participants with various complexity of response from simple one or two liners to whole narratives that stand alone as records of each decade. While a lot more information was gleaned from actual interview, the responses to the questionnaires were concise, to the point and the women had clearly made an effort to prioritise information. Hence, I came to the view (especially while transcribing the information) that the open ended questionnaire delivered on-line in this particular instance was an efficient and highly effective research tool.

As an 'insider' I was personally known to most of the participants and to others I was known by reputation. Initially I had hoped for simple comment on each decade, that I could incorporate within an analysis of the changes, with perhaps some reflective content to add depth of experience to the analysis. Indeed a very few participants

gave me just this. An interesting addition was a group of women editors for the Women in Welfare Education Journal who completed the questionnaire as a collective, each of whom have given single line comments. For other women however, the extent of their lives that they were prepared to share was both humbling and breathtaking, much of it clearly written 'in the moment'. The prime objective of the study is to draw on the insights outlined above to render visible the diversity and complexity of my women colleague's lives utilising time frames representing situated knowledge(s). In specific terms -

Firstly, I wanted to chart how women colleagues had experienced the *socio- political and economic changes* that had occurred over thirty years from 1970 – 2000. In order to achieve this, the first question asked the women to address the changes that had occurred in each decade by way of what they were doing, how they had experienced the context and their perception of the impact of those changes.

Secondly, I wanted to trace any *revision in theories* participants were utilising in their teaching/practice over time. Hence participants were asked which theories informed or influenced their practice and teaching at each point of the journey.

Thirdly, I wanted to see how at the various stages, the *women's movement/feminism* had impacted upon the women's lives and their teaching/practice; whether and how they saw the 'personal as political' and if this changed over time. Hence the question for each decade addressed the evolution of this impact.

Fourthly, I was interested in how my colleagues saw *social work engaging with social policy* at each of the stages and the last question addressed if/how participants thinking about social policy and social work had changed over time.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, I was interested in seeing how my colleagues saw the *future for feminism, social policy and social work*. To this end participants were asked a simple open ended question about how they saw the future in those terms.

In each decade participants were also invited to make further comment on significant moments and for final comment in the futures section.

When all questionnaires were received and interviews completed, I utilised codes to order responses into themes for each decade as they emerged from participant's stories (Fraser, 2004; D'Cruz & Jones, 2004; Naples, 2003). In writing up the responses I wrote *about* what the women had said all the while locating their comments within the context and developing themes as they emerged. To this end I also utilised quotes that made particular points around specific themes, this use of narrative added life and richness to the discussion. At every stage of the process I wanted to remain mindful of the critical reflective and feminist ethnographic approach to research articulated and argued above which essentially –

- foregrounds the experiences of the women in the study while it locates them in the specific historic and materialist circumstances of the time;
- approaches both method and analysis in a way that that does not objectify participants nor separate the personal from the political;
- moves beyond simple narrative to locate participants experience in what Smith (1990) describes as the gendered 'relations of ruling' of the respective time periods, while at the same time rendering visible the diversity and complexity of that experience.

Consequently, this thesis represents a feminist herstory documenting how a number of women teaching social work and social welfare in Australia experienced changes in the social policy context over the decades of the 1970s – 1990s. At each stage of the research there were dilemmas most notably around potential objectification of my colleagues especially in the use of language to describe them. I flirted with use of royal 'we', for a time thinking this would reflect the collective nature of the exercise, but it became awkward and confusing. Similarly I considered the use of feminist terms such as 'wimmin', but this still seemed to 'other' my colleagues. At the end of the day at the risk of being accused of engaging with patriarchal institutions in a supposedly feminist thesis, I compromised and apologetically settled on the use of conventional terms 'respondents', 'women in the study' and 'participants' alongside the use of 'my colleagues', with full awareness of

the potential objectification these terms imply and the limitations of language based in patriarchy in feminist research. Worth mentioning here also however as it impacts on the reading of the thesis, are the issues of my own involvement and the departure from convention in terms of utilising chapters as a way of organising the thesis.

Myself as ‘insider researcher’

One of the particular dilemmas I found was the question of including my own experience as part of the research. As an academic who has lived the experiences of the changes I was documenting, on the one hand I saw my own reflections as being as legitimately a part of the research as those of my colleagues. On the other hand however, I was wary of the potential to privilege my own narrative and for potential confusion arising with my position as narrator. Given the philosophical base outlined above, I also wanted to let the women’s experience speak for itself without passing judgement, to provide analysis but not criticise and for myself to be a part of the fabric of the story without dominating. I finally settled this dilemma by deciding to introduce each timeframe with a vignette of incidents where the personal and political intersected with the theoretical from my own experience of the time. This positioning at the beginning of each part, stands as metaphor for the changing policy context in each decade and is an important aspect of feminist epistemology (see Harding, 1987; Naples, 2003; Smith 1990/3). Each personal vignette follows selected quotes from my colleagues which point at one and the same time to the diversity of responses for each decade and bring into sharp relief the intensity of their experiences.

Structure of the thesis

As this thesis is essentially a chronology, tracking participant’s experience of specific areas of concern that are repeated over three decades, the use of conventional chapters proved unwieldy and potentially confusing. Consequently, the thesis is divided into four parts, three of those parts representing the decades of the seventies, eighties and nineties respectively and the fourth examining the future and final discussion. Each of the parts representing a decade is divided into four ‘frames’ which are repeated for each decade, each providing a ‘snapshot’ of reflections on context, theory, the impact of the women’s movement and an overview and summary. In that it departs from the

framework of the questions, the final part varies from this format with three 'frames' only, context, women's views on the future and concluding remarks.

In *Part One, The Seventies*, I firstly outline the context against which the women as participants start to develop the narratives of their lives. The seventies was largely a time of optimism in the welfare field and a period of momentous social change in Australia generally. Against this backdrop participants are introduced with brief biographical details alongside their comments on specific aspects of the time frame, thus setting the scene for analysis and critique of the period. The seventies was also a time of activism as people working in social work and welfare engaged with the opportunities to develop the social policies that were a particular emphasis of the Whitlam years. The second frame then, outlines the debates and the theories that excited us at this time, again foregrounding women's experience as the basis of critique. The seventies was also the time when many of us had started to think about feminism as a lens to develop awareness of oppression, in others and ourselves. The third frame outlines the beginnings of those - often tentative journeys into feminism and/or our relationship with, and the impact of the women's movement. The final frame draws together any themes and dissonances that have emerged into a concluding 'sense making' analysis of participant's experiences. Again it is important to point out that as part of the principles of this research, no attempt is made to deconstruct participant's experience per se. Rather the use of narrative highlights the multi-dimensional impact of the context and the ways that women mediated their relationship to the system and challenged or resisted constraints. All the while tracking shifts in consciousness and noting the importance of significant events to this process.

Part Two, The Eighties, explores the path through Australia's experiment with corporatism and the theories that were current in social policy and social work at this point. Again there are four frames to this part each foregrounding women's experiences of context, theories and relationship to feminism respectively with a concluding section that draws the discussion together. Again the voices of women participants are used as primary critique supported by, or juxtaposed with critiques emerging from critical theory or the feminist movement in this period.

Part Three, *The Nineties*, continues the story of Australia's journey towards social conservatism and the embrace of relatively unbridled ideology of the free market from both sides of politics and our respondent's reactions to it. Theories of post modernism and post-structuralism as they informed our thinking are discussed along with the dilemmas these understandings brought for our (Western) constructed feminism(s), all this set within the context of burgeoning economic globalisation (globalism). The rise of alternative social movement theory is also discussed alongside the beginnings of an international perspective in social work. The frames in part three are the same as the previous two parts and again give priority to participant's voices as critique.

Part four considers what the future for social work, social policy and feminism looks like from the perspectives of participants and the final section reviews the situation that we as women social work academics find ourselves in as we move further into the new century. I outline strategies suggested by the women in the study which allow us to look forward with some hope for a reinvigorated vision of feminism and social policy for a sustainable future in the 21st century and a reintegrated social work agenda that informs and supports this view. This final part is a synthesis of participant offerings and my own position alluded to throughout, given my situation as colleague to the participants and as narrator of the research.

PART I

1970s

FROM GREER AND GOUGH TO THE GOBLINS

1970 was the year of the New York strike for women's equality, which echoed around the world in demands for free child care, equal pay, access to abortion and help with household work and caring. Kate Millett came to New Haven. My partner and I went to hear her, with two other Australians..... At the end of Kate Millett's talk, I joined the standing ovation – while the three I had come with stayed seated. It was one of those moments, which one feels is lonely, yet inevitable. This was not my first encounter with feminist thought, but it was a special memory in my gradually increasing radicalism.

Marli.

The Race Relations Act under Whitlam was a major breakthrough for racism. Al Grassby was wonderful and worked so hard to establish committees anywhere and everywhere. We formed a committee in Mt Isa and we were then open to taking complaints. The process was that you got the complaint, put it in writing (via a telegram) to Al Grassby (collect at his end) and Al would then telegram you back with authorisation to undertake an investigation. One investigation that I was involved with highlighted the gulf between policy and practice. The complaint was that the hospital at Normanton would not allow 'blacks' inside, they were treated on the verandah regardless of their condition, even sleeping on the verandah; they were fed the scraps; and they were using World War 2 army issue blankets.

A committee member who worked for the Federal Dept of Aboriginal Affairs and I elected to drive to Normanton and investigate the complaints. This was about a twelve hour drive over very rough roads – thanks goodness for a com car! We reached Normanton as the sun was setting and went to the hospital where the matron was standing on the steps with her veil on (had to not laugh as she looked like a ship in full sale) and hands on hips. We explained who we were and showed her the telegram from Al Grassby – her comment was 'humph that poofster who does he think he is'. She then proceeded to tell us that the complaints were true and that this was her hospital and she wasn't about to change anything. No amount of talking was about to change her mind!! We decided that it was probably prudent to leave. We went into town where there was only one pub with a long line of Aboriginal people lined up at the side of the building where there was a window. They were waiting to be served alcohol so we pulled over and got out of the car and started talking to them. Not surprisingly they were being charged to have their cheques changed which was illegal and being charged exorbitant amounts for alcohol.

Unbeknown to us the local boys were watching us speak with the Aboriginal people and so they came around and wanted to start a fight. We decided that it was best to jump in the car and take off – only trouble was that the local boys jumped in their four wheel drives and got one either side of us and drove at breakneck speeds showering us with dust so you couldn't see and leaning out and demanding that we stop. We had no intention of stopping as it would have been suicide to do so. We drove for about 50 kilometres until they got sick of the game and did big wheelies and drove back to town. We both drove on a bit further and got out and peed in absolute relief.

Zenobia

Into the mix, where the personal met the political, personal reflections on the 1970s

My wedding in 1968 was no muted affair. Sung by a choir I had been a part of such a short time before, in the cathedral attached to the Catholic girls school I had left just over two years earlier, at all of 18 years of age, I stood before the God I then believed in and swore everlasting love and fidelity to a man that I had known only six months, barely two years older – and definitely no wiser than me. What was I thinking? At the time I was engaged in this folly, radical feminist writers such as Firestone (1970), Greer (1971) and Millet (1970) were penning their various treatises on heterosexual ‘love’ as the foundation of women’s oppression and the family as the ultimate source of ongoing inequality between men and women.

The political intersected with the personal for me in many ways in the 1970s. As a ‘baby boomer’ I had been educated by nuns having spent five years of the 1960s in Catholic boarding school, I had married by the time I was 18 and had a child by the time I was 19. I entered the seventies as a refugee from an increasingly violent and unhappy marriage largely to do with the fact that my then husband had been drafted into the army and was being trained along with other ‘natives’ to go to Vietnam. In this we were saved by the incoming Whitlam government, one of the first acts of which was to recall all servicemen from Vietnam and to end conscription, including the immediate release of those already conscripted. However the damage had been done, the psychological impact of army training had left my partner with serious issues which rung the death knell for a faltering relationship.

I also had my first encounter with a social worker in the early seventies. In those days there was a six month gap between separation and eligibility for Commonwealth benefits – the ‘widow’s pension’ as it was called then. (There was no such thing as single parent benefit in those days, one needed to have actually been married to be seen as deserving). Hence single mothers needing financial assistance were required to regularly approach their state welfare department to state their case for assistance, a risky business as the likelihood of being placed under surveillance was high. In my case, I had been granted child maintenance by a court in Hobart, but the NSW police consistently refused to deliver the court order for garnishee of wages to my ex husband’s workplace in that state. Given this blatant exercise of patriarchal collusion, as such I was financially reliant on the good will of my ex, which was more often than not lacking. While occasionally I obtained casual work as waitress or barmaid in a local hotel while my parents looked after my daughter, sometimes this was not forthcoming and I was always desperately short of money. In one particular instance I approached the state welfare department and was referred for assessment to a social worker. While in hindsight she was simply doing her job in implementing policy as she understood it, I will never forget the patronising attitude nor the judgmental and intrusive approach she took to her determination of my eligibility for a small amount of money euphemistically called ‘relief’. Feeling totally demeaned, I resolved never to go back, but at the end of six months as a ‘deserted wife’ became eligible for a Commonwealth pension, which I continued to receive while undertaking university education until the implementation of the Whitlam National Employment and Training Scheme (NEAT).

One of the Whitlam government’s initiatives was to abolish university fees. A key program aimed at promoting access to education and training for those who hitherto had been unable to consider university education was the NEAT scheme. This scheme provided those on low incomes with a basic wage to retrain in a chosen trade or profession. The initiative enabled me to comfortably undertake university study, firstly in an Arts degree and then (paradoxically perhaps – given the experience outlined above) a social work degree which given I had a second child in 1976, I finally completed in 1979. By then however the Fraser

government as part of its budgetary measures had abandoned the NEAT scheme incorporating it under the tertiary allowance scheme at considerably less than the basic wage. Although at that time universities still remained free of student fees.

The seventies were arguably the most exciting time in Australia's history to be attending university and I loved it. While I was less enchanted with psychology, the intellectual stimulus of studying philosophy, politics, international relations, sociology and ecology at that time opened doors into a labyrinth of hitherto unexplored regions of my brain and consciousness. I was instantly drawn to the macro and excited by the conviction that this study was my route to making a difference – and I was but one of many students in the 70s who believed that we were on the threshold of creating great change. This passion for social justice was further refined and reinforced in moving into social work study in a 'new' social work course developed and headed up by Adam Jamrozik with its strong emphasis on social work and social policy as activism. Although the context has changed significantly, the intellectual grounding I received at that time equipped me with an ongoing critical and structural analysis that has served me well over the years and has pointed me in the direction that I follow in this thesis.

FRAME ONE: POLICY CONTEXT

The seventies, the last vestige of the Keynesian welfare state

Most Australians over the age of 40 can remember where they were when they heard that Gough Whitlam had been sacked in 1975. Whitlam indeed symbolised the first half of the seventies – a period of great change, great hope and for those with humanitarian vision, a time of great promise for the future. But the Whitlam years also represented in Australia the last great flourish of Keynesianism. By the end of that decade those visions were seriously shaken and certainly for those at the bottom end of the income scale, those whose fortunes are inextricably linked to the welfare state, such optimism has not since returned.

The liberal/national party coalition had been in government since 1949, all through the economic boom years of the 1950s and 1960s. The Labor party under Whitlam captured the imagination of many Australians with the catchy election jingle ‘It’s Time’. In 1972 the majority of Australians were indeed ready for a change in political landscape (Fenna, 2004). Our involvement in the Vietnam war had left doubts in the minds of many, with a number of our young men, too young at 20 to vote, but conscripted into a conflict not their own, being brought home from Vietnam in coffins. The liberal party had lost confidence with the retirement of long time Prime Minister Robert Menzies and the death in office of one of his successors. The ‘reds under the beds’ fear of communism common under Menzies had thawed and Australia was starting to be swept along with the tide of critical opinion arising from the burgeoning social movements elsewhere in the sixties (Singleton et al, 2002).

The unique Australian welfare state

Prior to the 1970s the Australian culture of welfare provision had been largely borrowed from the British tradition and reflected strongly its colonialist past. Notions of the liberal welfare state had come into being at the end of the Second World War, primarily as a result of the Beveridge report in Britain (Dickey, 1980; Jones, 1980). It could be argued however that the seeds of the Australian welfare state were fixed when Australia was established as a penal colony and the British government assumed

responsibility for the welfare of white settlers, free or otherwise, and some measure of ‘protection’ for the indigenous peoples. Formal government mechanisms to ensure redistribution were not established in the colonies until after the depression of the 1890s, after which some landmark decisions involving collective provision were initiated in Australia (aged pension) and further refined after federation (Jones, 1980; Roe, 1983). The early establishment of aged and invalid pensions (from 1908); the establishment of the minimum wage for male workers in 1907 and the highest rate of home ownership in the world (50% by 1911, peaking at 72% in the 1960s), gave the impression that Australia had less poverty and more equality than most other countries (Castles, 1989; Jones, 1980; Kennedy, 1982). In reality however, irrespective of the establishment of such mechanisms, there had historically been a comparative lack of redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor – and from male wage earners to women and other marginalised groups (Cass, 1983). Despite the fact that Australia had evolved its own unique set of social institutions and was perhaps more aptly termed a ‘wage earners welfare state’ (Castles, 1989), Australian governments, where they had the will or saw it as their mandate to do so, had been constrained in achieving even minimal reforms (Bryson, 1992; Jamrozik, 2005; Roe, 1983). The reasons for this are complex and based in a unique combination of political, economic, socio-cultural and ideological factors that lie in Australia’s historical development. As a consequence the welfare system had always been characterised in a narrow sense as providing specifically targeted services to a selective section of the population. If Castle’s (1989) notion of a wage earners welfare state is correct, then the major beneficiaries of the peculiar blend of occupational and social welfare (Titmuss, 1968) in Australia up until the 1970s were white, male wage earners. Up until then the indigenous population, women and the unemployed were disadvantaged within a highly selective, targeted and residual welfare system (Jamrozik, 2005; Roe, 1983). The welfare state in Australia then had historically been concerned mainly with the establishment and maintenance of public support systems. As well as the narrow focus on the dominant interests of white male workers at the expense of other groups, the Australian welfare state also reflected a lack of understanding of citizenship or broader and institutional concepts of welfare as conceptualised in some European models (Bryson, 1992; Kennedy 1982).

The 1970s was a period in history when it looked for a brief moment that the welfare state in Australia could possibly have become more institutional; when the links between the social and the economic could have been made stronger and more democratic; and when Australia could have adopted a more civil and just social approach to the distribution of wealth and resources within this society (Beilharz, Considine & Watts, 1992; Graycar & Jamrozik, 1989; Jamrozik, 2005).

Social Policy in the 1970s

The election of the Whitlam government in 1972 brought sweeping changes to the welfare system and the way that provision of welfare was viewed. The years from 1972 to 1975 were a whirlwind of creative thinking in sociopolitical circles, and a number of writers (Bryson, 1992; Ife, 1997; Jamrozik, 2005) suggest that these years provided the only serious context in which a progressive and institutional welfare state could have developed. Whitlam brought a broom to notions of government and the interrelationship of the social with the economic and political. Under Whitlam, perhaps seriously for the first time in Australian history, the ‘social’ was really on the agenda – and in many ways I suggest, the welfare sector were ill prepared for it.

The centrepiece of the Whitlam government’s approach to welfare was the Australian Assistance Plan (AAP) (Australian Government Social Welfare Commission, 1973, 1974; Ife, 1995). Institutional and democratic in concept its aim was to ensure the participation of everyday Australians in planning and decision making processes that affected their lives. With a projected annual budget in the order of \$35 million (Graycar, 1979), its ambitious objective was to change the face of Australian welfare through regionalisation and a shift from a residual charity based welfare culture to a community development and a preventative approach to social policy and social planning (Ife, 1995; Jamrozik, 1991).

The seeds of the ideas behind the AAP had grown from the Community Development Programs in Britain and the ‘War on Poverty’ in America. These programs were a response to the rise of social movements that had started in the sixties. In many countries, movements opposing the Vietnam war, support for black and gay rights, and feminists had all joined with more traditional voices of students and trade union

activists in demanding more say in political decision making and in calls for a more equal and peaceful society. Poverty in the midst of affluence had been rediscovered (as it had in Australia) and the response of governments was to initiate large social planning programs aimed at improving people's lives, attacking poverty and encouraging wider participation at the community level (Piven & Cloward, 1971; Rothman, 1974). While much of this was tokenistic and as some writers (Arnstein, 1971, Craig et al 1982; Mowbray, 1985) suggest, an attempt to draw attention away from structural inequalities at the time, it did have the effect of changing in some measure the way those in social work and social policy viewed welfare. The AAP in other words encouraged creativity around the possibility of change and social justice and perhaps by default opened up the possibility of structural change.

Many Australians, especially those employed in social policy and welfare, were buoyed at the prospect of a bright and social democratic future promised by the Whitlam government. It did not last long though, Australia was not well placed economically to deal with the world wide recession precipitated by the oil crisis of the early 1970s (Graycar, 1983; Jamrozik, 1991; MacIntyre, 1985). Stagflation, rising unemployment and a blow out in overseas debt saw the Whitlam government dismissed in November 1975 in an unprecedented move by the then governor general in concert with the leader of the opposition. Add to this the essential wariness/conservatism of the Australian public in terms of government spending and the prospect of rapid change and the Coalition government led by Malcolm Fraser swept into office in the aftermath of the dismissal. In many ways the Whitlam government's attempts to steer Australian welfare in a more social democratic direction had come too late (Bryson, 1992). As Whitlam himself later lamented –

We wanted to establish a welfare apparatus which was devoid of class discrimination and could not be stigmatised as providing charitable concessions to the 'deserving poor' (Whitlam, cited in Bryson, 2001).

The last great flourish of Keynesianism in Australia could not survive, the Whitlam government was removed from office, not before some major reforms however, only a few of which remain (albeit in modified form) at time of writing. Changes to the Australian welfare system initiated under Whitlam included:

A comprehensive national health service (Medibank),
Single parents allowance,
Abolition of university fees,
Automatic adjustment of pensions in line with Consumer price index,
The NEAT scheme (National Education and Training),
Non-means tested old age pension,
The Australian Assistance Plan,
Legislation on equal pay for equal work,
The Race Relations Act,
Land Title for aboriginal communities,
Funding for women's health, refuges and information services,
The appointment of a women's advisor to the Prime Minister (Bryson, 1992;
Jamrozik, 2005; O'Connor, Wilson & Setterlund, 2003; Summers, 2000).

Policy initiatives aimed to address inequities of previously marginalised groups were established. The historical disadvantage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, was addressed in part with the establishment of indigenous managed services and the first tentative steps toward recognition of land rights. Ethnic/cultural diversity and disadvantage was highlighted through policies of multiculturalism, assuring a greater inclusiveness in policy making (Bryson, 1992). Women received formal equal pay and were acknowledged through the establishment of the position of women's adviser to the Prime Minister to advise on gender equality in 1973. Women's refuges were established and publicly funded as were information services particularly targeted at women (Summers, 2003). These reforms led to a re-positioning of social policy that had hitherto been marginal in Australia, both at the bureaucratic and university levels. In such a climate intellectual discussion around notions of welfare flourished. Many of these initiatives were progressively undermined or revised under the so called 'razor gangs' of the Fraser government from 1975 – 1983, although the basic, albeit by now reluctant collectivist (George & Wilding, 1976), structure of the welfare state remained in place. It was under Labor in the 1980s that that most sweeping ideological changes towards neo-liberalism occurred (Beilharz, 1989; Bryson, 1992; Jamrozik, 2005; Pusey, 1991).

Social Work in Australia in the 1970s

The seventies was also a time of great change in the social work profession in Australia. Up until the late sixties professional social work education in Australia had been dominated by either the medical model (a hangover from the origins of professional social work in Almonby) or by psycho-social theories emanating from the US which individualised social problems (Ife, 1997; Tomlinson, 1978; Throssell, 1975). Influenced by theories largely arising from sociology in the UK (Bailey & Brake, 1975; Corrigan & Leonard, 1978), a number of newly established social work schools in the early seventies introduced a broader range of subjects to the social work curriculum. These new subjects emphasised the social causes of issues of poverty and disadvantage and challenged social workers to work with communities for localised change or to join the burgeoning social movements aimed at structural change. Most notably perhaps the role of social work in social policy was stressed. There had been a long standing tradition of social work engaging with wider movements for change, (see Jane Addams/Mary Richmond debates in US, Addams 1999; Richmond 1944) and social workers such as Bertha Reynolds had made claims for fame in working alongside the union movement (Reynolds, 1942). Arguably, such activity had long been marginalised with the dominance of individualist discourse in various guises in professional social work circles. I maintain that this had resulted in Australia in a culture of social work as casework informed in the main by texts from the US (see Biestek, 1961; Perlman, 1970) with very few resources for social work based in the context of Australian experience. Throughout the seventies with notable exceptions (Throssell, 1978; Tomlinson, 1977), the theoretical base that ushered in a more critical tradition was still derived from overseas, but had shifted from the US to a pre-eminence of texts from the radical schools of the UK (Bailey & Brake, 1975; Corrigan & Leonard, 1978; George & Wilding, 1976; Ragg, 1977; Simpkin, 1979; Statham, 1978) and a very few leftist writers from the US (Galper, 1976; Piven & Cloward, 1971/72 - the latter rather unfortunately named 'Poor People's Movements'!)

Most of these works were ideologically positioned within a Marxist or neo Marxist critique and pointed to the 'over-emphasis on pathological and clinical orientations to the detriment of structural and political implications' (Bailey & Brake, 1975:1) in social work. It was also argued that where critical debate in welfare had occurred, it

tended to be reformist rather than radical, and articulating a need for an understanding of class deprivation and engagement with social transformation via socialism (Bailey & Brake, 1975; Galper, 1976). Other writers were more cautious about the revolutionary potential of social work. Statham (1978) suggested that the notion of radical social work was essentially a contradiction in terms. Given the context of capitalism and the polarised role of care versus social control ascribed to social workers in the context of the welfare state – itself in contradictory relationship with capitalism, the possibilities for social work as a vehicle for transformation were indeed limited. At best, Statham argued, social work practice – in the British context at least – existed within a liberal radical tradition common to the structure of most professions. From this position it was seen as possible to advocate for reform, but not to challenge the basis of society. As such in Statham's view, social work should not be viewed 'in isolation from the social and economic structure in which it operates' (1978:8).

The links between social policy, social science and social work/welfare practice were also highlighted by British writers from the mid seventies (George & Wilding, 1976; Marris & Rein, 1974). In arguing that the compartmentalisation of social sciences into separate disciplines had led to an obscurity of the relationship between social theory and social policy, George & Wilding (1976) for example, identified a vacuum in critical social policy analysis. Social policy they argued -

is analysed as if it were an autonomous set of social institutions unconnected with the normal processes of the social and political system in which it is set and which it serves. This lack of theorising is not a politically neutral approach to social policy, as is sometimes claimed, but an implicit conservative stand for it accepts existing social and economic relationships unquestioningly (George & Wilding, 1976:1).

In pointing out that 'the welfare state is clearly not the end of the road of social evolution', George and Wilding challenged those who work in the welfare and social policy field to a 'reconsideration of fundamental social objectives' (ibid:138/39) of equality/inequality, notions of social justice and redistribution of resources rather than an over concern with piecemeal social reform.

These influences were key to those practitioners and students of social work and welfare keen to 'make a difference' in the seventies and working in the climate of rapid and exciting change wrought by the Whitlam years. Against this backdrop the experiences of the women in the study were varied. While some had already commenced their social work careers, most, like myself were involved in raising families, parenting, working in other occupations or studying, or all of the above. A small few were still at school, at least in the early seventies. However the seventies were experienced the events thereof had a profound impact on the practice of social work and the understanding of social policy unlike any other preceding decade. It is to the experiences of these women who are so much a part of the making of welfare history in Australia that I now turn.

Women's voices - context

Whitlam government

In their initial recollections of the 70s, the dismissal of the Whitlam government tended to be one of the first things that came to mind for those participants who were living in Australia at the time. The reaction to this unique event in Australian history was articulated in the main as a sense of outrage and shock. Jill had left school in 1974 to work as a student nurse in a 'very conservative class ridden teaching hospital' before moving into social work studies in 1977. On the day of the dismissal in 1975, Jill remembers leaving her nursing post and marching in the protest demonstrations. Similarly Jane while still at school through much of the seventies, recalled that her interest in politics was awakened in high school by a history teacher who 'brought the whole event to life'. By the end of the seventies Jane had commenced the three years of training to become a nurse. Linda was also a student at the time of the dismissal, having commenced social work education in 1973. She recollects –

The Whitlam era had an enormous impact on my political thinking. I remember the day Whitlam was dismissed, we were in a third year social policy class, someone ran into the lecture theatre to say what had happened – the whole lecture theatre streamed out instantly. Students were pouring out of buildings – marching down to the town hall.

Even for those who were overseas the dismissal was news. Jez had practiced social work since the beginning of the seventies having received a cadetship to study social

work from a federal Department. Her political/industrial consciousness had been raised about industrial issues while working for that department in a highly industrialised town. Taking a break to consider her future in 1975, Jez went overseas and was in Turkey at the time of the dismissal, feeling frustrated about lack of access to information after being told by a couple of travellers from New Zealand that ‘your PM has been sacked’. Even though she describes herself as politically naïve at the time, this event galvanised Jez to think politically. Her reaction to the news was –

We thought they had the wrong story, this couldn’t be right you know, but in fact we ran into an English couple who had SW radio and they told us it was true, so we hopped in our car and as we wanted to vote went back to Thesolonika. In a sense I was becoming politicised then, I came from a conservative family in the country and so there was no way for me to even think about voting Labor at that period of time, but in fact that was what we wanted to do.

If the dismissal of the Whitlam government was a trigger for activism and increasing political awareness for some of the participants, the impact of the actual policies that were introduced during Whitlam’s time in office are remembered with a certain sense of nostalgia. Members of the WIWE collective recall funding for services like community health, the ‘AAP’, ‘free’ university education and the beginnings of recognition of multiculturalism as important initiatives of the Whitlam government. As students at the time they recalled the marches against the Vietnam war, noting that one of the members actually marched, while others were simply ‘observers’. Important advances for women that this group cited were the first decade of equal pay for women and the first women’s refuges. Through the seventies three of this group moved into social work or welfare studies (H, K & M) and later into practice and one completed her nursing training by the end of the seventies (F).

Similarly, Millie spent much of the seventies working in a large psychiatric hospital dominated in her words by ‘the medical model and theories around therapeutic communities’. She especially remembers the effect of conscription and its reversal by Whitlam. Indeed, as pointed out in the introduction to this part, the election of Whitlam certainly impacted upon my own life in that my then husband was in National Service and about to go to Vietnam. I still clearly remember the sigh of relief when Whitlam won the election as I knew that that no more soldiers would be

sent to Vietnam and indeed, all the 'Nativos' were released from duty as soon as practically possible.

The AAP and Social Work

For those already involved in social work the Whitlam era was an exciting time. Madonna had moved from Tasmania in the early seventies and completed her post graduate social work degree at a South Australian University. She returned to Tasmania to take up position as social worker with the Education Department before taking up a lecturing position in Social Work in 1977. For Madonna the seventies was an 'era of great social change and idealism – and of questioning everything'. But more than that Madonna saw this period as instilling a strong sense of structural analysis because –

(The Whitlam Government) impacted on social work vis the growth of the AAP and so on. So social work and social policy was part of the defining process. There was a real integration of social work as part of the change that was going on....I remember being very profoundly influenced by a very strong sense of social work being at the heart of social justice and inequality.

Linda was similarly impressed at the attempts to 'bring about change', but was also aware of the 'processes the new Labor government got wrong'. And the changes were dramatic, the Australian Assistance Plan (AAP) as the keystone of the Labor governments welfare agenda provided social work in Australia with an opportunity to move beyond individualised and imported models of social work into a preventative social policy understanding. As Linda surmises –

I remember being in awe of what Whitlam was trying to take on. I saw Australia as an incredibly boring/country – social problems/minority groups were just ignored/denied. Suddenly it was all out there. The Henderson report, the Karmel report etc. There was real sense problems were being named and solutions could be found. The AAP was a dominant part of our training – though my own employment in 1976 went down a casework route, I had been influenced by it.

Hence the AAP brought social work understanding in Australia to a new level. For the first time community work and social policy were seen as legitimate and integral parts of social work practice and these changes were quickly reflected in the curricula in social work courses throughout Australia. Social workers who had previously worked as caseworkers were employed as coordinators of regional community

development programs, as evaluators and as chairs on policy development committees. Suddenly social workers were being consulted on social policy issues and were involved in the planning and implementation of preventative type programs. There was however very little locally situated theory initially to guide the practice and many mistakes were made (Graycar, 1979; Ife, 1995). The inclusion of community development and social policy as subjects in social work courses from that time was arguably a factor that challenged the conservative/individualistic mindset of social work in the Australian context substantially and made social work the broad generic degree it is today.

Awareness/activism

For a number of the respondents, the marches against the Vietnam war in the late sixties and very early seventies provided an initiation into social activism. Anne recalls being involved on the periphery of the peace movement as a student as a catalyst for her ‘developing sense of activism’. Anne had spent the first half of the seventies studying social work. After graduation she went to England and worked in a local authority as one of only three qualified social workers. Here she became a member of the Communist Party and returned to Australia to have a child in the late seventies before commencing work for a non government organisation in 1979 where she felt ‘very stifled’.

In the early seventies Athena also described herself as a ‘politically active’ student at university where she completed a BA in Psychology and went on to complete a diploma of education. Athena marks her involvement in the moratorium movement as the catalyst for her activism. For Athena however, involvement in the moratorium movement at the time was probably more about being – ‘anti-American, anti-colonial and being involved in the peace movement and trying to create an identity for Australia separate from Britain or America’, than about any notion of social justice or about any notion of feminism. On graduation Athena went on to spend time in England and undertook her social work degree on her return to Australia in the mid seventies. In 1977 she was working at a major women’s hospital and was instrumental in establishing the health care consumer movement in her state. As part of her activist commitment Athena had also spent time working with a Social Security (welfare

rights) Union, thus at this point clearly identifying activism as a legitimate and necessary part of her social work practice.

In the main however, where women in the study had become politicised during the seventies, it tended to be through engagement with the Labor Party or in left wing politics rather than feminism or through social work. The Whitlam era had opened up opportunities for involvement for social workers on any number of consultative committees. The (re)discovery of poverty as evidenced in the Henderson (1970) and Karmel (1973) reports combined with the realities of everyday social work practice emboldened social workers to become involved with organisations providing direct challenge to the system. Beth was teaching social work in the 1970s and as an active member of the Labor Party was involved in many public seminars on welfare issues, including those affecting aboriginal people, women's issues, and housing. Aside from her teaching, Beth was instrumental in setting up an advocacy service on issues of poverty, mental health and health consumer's rights. While lecturing mainly to first year social work students at the time, Beth found herself involved in a series of public seminars on issues such as aboriginal welfare, women's issues and housing. While this was clearly a part of a reformist agenda in her own time she, along with other progressive social workers were –

active in opposing high rise housing developments in Perth and developed an organisation, known as the Social Action Lobby, which took up issues of poverty, mental health, health consumer's rights etc.

Such action was contentious however and at this time there was a long way to go before such advocacy on behalf of disadvantaged groups was considered an appropriate part of professional social work practice. As Beth points out –

All of this was outside of my general social work area, but some students were influenced by what their staff did. Some were not – I, and I think one other member of staff, received a petition from some students complaining we were too political!

For some participants, joining the Labour Party was also a response shaped more by class consciousness than any other awareness of structural positioning at that point. Linda claims she saw herself more in left wing political terms than as a feminist at that time because 'the broader political framing was reinforced in the second half of the seventies by the awful poverty I saw in my job'. Similarly Madonna felt that

although feminist theory was a part of it, and there had been some defining moments in going to women's parties as a student, it was not however as strong an influence as the structural analysis.

For other participants also the context of their work was a major factor in shaping awareness and activism. Jez maintains that having gone through a fairly conservative course, she was not politicised in any way until she had worked for a federal department dealing with immigration and was sent as a social worker to a major industrial town. For Jez, working in this context –

changed a whole lot of things. I was the only social worker there and I was probably a bit new and raw, but it exposed me to a whole lot of things that I wasn't exposed to in, like the situations in the steel works and the control of the sort of shitty conditions that workers worked in, the real life conditions of immigrants in Australia as I see it. That had a profound effect on me.

By 1970 Jewel had been a graduate social worker for ten years and had worked in the Mental Health system before relocating interstate in 1972 with a new husband and two children where she became 'a stay at home parent for some time and had another child'. In the mid seventies with her enduring interest in all things art, she set up a gallery guides program at a prominent art gallery. Jewel's experience of migration however was a little more personal in its impact. Pointing to the conservative outlook and vestiges of the White Australia Policy through the sixties and at the beginning of the seventies she wrote:

Migration was a hot topic and Santamaria was very vocal! I had done my part by marrying one who had come from terrible experiences in war torn Hungary. This was not a wise move! Middle class Australia was in a very protected position.

Hence the inter connection of class and ethnicity and the multi dimensional layers of oppression had started to become apparent in this context and resistance to dominant discourses was emerging in both public and private arenas. Where there were political dimensions, social work courses had not hitherto generally increased students awareness and it was not until immersion in the deep end of practice that many of the women in the study became aware of the complexity and depth of persistent injustice. For instance, once she had started to become politicised for Jez, it was 'like a bulb went on and all those things started to make sense'. In similar vein, many of the

respondents spoke of the profound impact this increased awareness had on their lives. Imogen had completed her honours in anthropology in 1970 and after working for a federal department in Canberra and moving to England for a short period, she returned to take up a scholarship with a state department for community welfare to complete a social work degree. On completion of this degree, Imogen worked with the department in a remote area and found that her practice with aboriginal communities forced her into an activist position on colonialism and racism. For Athena however, who was working with health care consumers, the politicisation centred around how badly women were treated in the public health system.

Whatever the work context, the rapid politicisation that occurred during the seventies in social work was also helped along by the increases in funding for programs that accompanied the Whitlam government's welfare agenda. Participants spoke for example, almost with fondness, of the charismatic Al Grassby and the progressive policies he instituted on race and multiculturalism. Yet, while the rhetoric about change was at the forefront of policy, many of the women felt that old attitudes remained and without a theoretical base to support the new paradigm, social work practice remained essentially very conservative. Where people were treated well, it was according to Pearl for instance, more about respect and individualising clients (in her case young women), rather than making assumptions about them. Pearl had started work as a newly graduated social worker in 1970 and worked in youth welfare for a couple of years before moving to the country in 1974 where she joined an embryonic women's group which later became a WEL group. Pearl spent the remainder of the decade working in policy development with the Department for Social Welfare before taking time out between 1978 and 1981 to rear her two children. So for Pearl at least the politicisation through practice found early expression in the formulation of policy.

For most of the participants however, in the early seventies at least, social work had still to catch up with models and practice bases that were 'nice' but of minimal relevance for a period of intense change. Where the women were politically active, it was initially on the fringes of practice, but by the time the Whitlam government had been removed from office, the changes in awareness for participants were such that

much of this activism had been incorporated into their practice and/or their teaching. For many this practice usually took the form of advocacy or, at the level of social policy, through work on advisory committees, informed largely by social theories of class and social stratification with some understanding of cultural difference. For most of the women in this study feminism, while on the periphery of awareness, impacted little during the seventies. Where it did impact it was more at the personal level than in the public domain.

How respondents experienced the (practice) context

Of note for those who were working in agencies or universities at this point, is how respondents experienced their working environments. For instance Ruth's main recollection of the time was the relative freedom she was accorded in her job which she felt allowed her to respond to particular areas of need and to community demand. Ruth had completed her social work training in 1974, by which time she already had two young children. From 1975 until 1978 she lived in Papua New Guinea and came back to her first social work job in the state welfare department in country Victoria. Looking back at the autonomy she encountered in the workplace through the seventies she says –

At the time I did not think this particularly remarkable, but as I observe the current managerialist agenda, I realise how fortunate I was.

Similarly, Sin as a newly graduated social worker in a psychiatric hospital felt she was a valued member of the team with her input highly regarded by other staff who included all manner of other health professionals. Sin had graduated as a social worker in 1971 and worked for a number of years in the mental health system with both individuals and groups and families in the community before moving to the UK towards the end of the decade. Hence she felt well trained and confident even though she had no previous experience of psychiatric social work. At the time she recalls social work as a profession had high status and that jobs were plentiful.

Jewel also recalled being very excited by the autonomy she experienced working in a mental health context where she was able to utilise creativity to start a 'social club' for mental health patients. This club was run by a committee of patients and included such activities as dancing, films, discussions, games nights and so-on and often

included a meal – all made by the patients themselves. The social club apparently outlasted Jewel's employment, continuing for many years after she left. At a more formal level Jewel was involved in establishing day programs which were a mixture of life skills and self awareness groups. In a forerunner to programs for those with mental health issues and disabilities today, Jewel described the program she initiated thus –

It was not a long term sheltered workshop, but very much a training place to help people who had been in hospital to get back into the workforce. It was quite indicative of the times that the unions allowed this work for which they got pocket money (paid by the firms that used the workshop) and that people could then find simple work in the community. This became more and more difficult as we moved through the seventies.

Athena also working in a health setting was able to devote creative energy to the health consumer's movement. As she was working in a women's hospital at the time and had been flirting on the 'fringes of feminism', this activity was to galvanise her to her 'epiphanic moment' of talking about and becoming a feminist activist.

While for most of the women in the study the experiences of excitement and creativity in their work environments were recurring themes, others however felt ill equipped for the situations in which they found themselves. Anne spoke of her lack of experience as a newly qualified social worker in a local authority in England as 'totally overwhelming'. Mainly it seems because of a lack of industrial clarity in the job itself, in a harbinger of what was to happen in later decades in Australia, Anne explained –

I was the child care officer, the mental health officer, the officer in charge of aged and disabilities, I had no idea what I was doing! The people around me were more experienced, but did not have the authority to take children into care or people into a psychiatric hospital, so it was left to me to do those things when I was 21/22 and inexperienced.

Linda also spoke of being overwhelmed by the complex problems she faced, but in trying to find theories that provided explanation of the practice issues she faced, of her frustration in trying to find any of help.

I returned to the radical theorists....but they didn't help, because they gave such little directives for practice in the sprawling public housing estates ofTown, the neglect and abuse in families and I remember clearly thinking that the social work literature I was reading, even the radicals, had not got their heads near or around what I was facing on a daily level.

Thus while many of the women felt self assured in their practice context and knowledge base, a number of women conversely felt that the gaps in theory and practice left them feeling industrially exploited and confounded by a lack of theory that engaged with their practice experience.

Overseas experience

For others the seventies provided a sense of adventure with overseas travel and experiences from the radical edges of places like the US, Canada and in newly developing countries like Papua New Guinea and Tanzania. Lilith for instance, after working in black theatre with aboriginal groups in Redfern for three years and at 25 years of age, ventured overseas (alone) on what she describes as a ‘modern day pilgrimage’. On this trip Lilith travelled through Europe to the Arctic circle and worked in (religious) communities in India and across Africa. These experiences gave her a solid commitment to community development as a form of social work practice and exposed her to a range of radical thinkers from black power through to liberation theology. Lilith went on to spend some time working with communities in PNG in the mid seventies. She recalled one particular instance while she and another community development worker – a Papuan woman, both lived in a little squatter camp ‘with no running water, electricity etc – (I had) never been happier in my life’. Lilith was however the only white woman in the village and she rapidly became aware of ‘the challenge to the whole society of a white woman being ‘bossed around’ by a black woman’. Hence through this experience she became disconcertingly aware of the racist assumptions that as a white woman she would be in charge, when in fact she actually was ‘at the bottom rung’.

Ellen’s years of teaching at the University of Papua New Guinea in 1972 after completing her doctorate in Columbia the year earlier led her to become ‘totally absorbed’ with the effort to provide culturally appropriate education, especially as this period coincided with the PNG’s transition to independence. As such cultural awareness and issues associated with development became major factors in the models of social work education she was developing at the time. While Pen was still in school in Tanzania for much of the 70s, the context of socialism in a newly

independent nation also influenced her ideas about collective provision of social services that she has continually ‘engaged with since the early days’.

Marli had married and given birth to her first son in 1970 and left Australia to accompany her husband to the USA where he undertook post grad studies at a prestigious University. Much of Marli’s political awakening and her commitment to women’s issues and the development of an anti racist perspective occurred while she was resident in the USA, and living as a student’s family – well below the poverty line. Later, she and her husband moved to Canada where she undertook post graduate study. Through most of the seventies Marli taught social work and was actively involved in development of women’s services in Canada. She returned to Australia to take up a teaching post in 1980.

While she and her partner spent the majority of the time overseas in Canada, there are several memories that Marli claimed stood out for her as ‘life changing events’ from that early period in the US. The first of these was May Day in 1970 when a large freedom rally to free the Black Panthers (a militant black organising group whose key members were imprisoned in New Haven), was planned. From the vantage point of their flat on the main street, she watched the US army enter the town and circle the demonstration with ‘bayonets fixed’. Enraged at the injustice of it all –

With a baby on my back I attended the mass rally to hear powerful speakers demanding justice for black Americans. After the meeting there was violence and tear gas in the streets, shop windows broken and then boarded up. It was my first encounter with the street protests and associated violence which happened in many Western countries in the 1970s.

The second memory Marli cites is attending the poor women’s baby clinic. Living below the poverty line in America with no universal system of maternal and child health centres, and being ‘too poor’ to consult a paediatrician, Marli was obliged to seek immunisations and health checks for her child at the ‘well baby clinic’ in the local church hall.

The women and children were predominantly black or hispanic, with a few students. Volunteer doctors gave a day a month. We all sat around the hall, being interviewed loudly in public by a nurse, until it was our turn to go in and see the doctor. Each month, of course, there was a different doctor. Prior to attending this clinic, I had to

endure a home visit from one of the nurses. I tried to explain, (given our apartment had very few belongings in it), that our trunks had not arrived yet. Nevertheless, I could not help noticing that she wrote – as though we were in total and on-going poverty, ‘very bare apartment’! For a young social worker it was a good example of someone not understanding their clientele, not able to understand people coming from across the world, albeit it with a similar language.

Working for the New Haven Legal Assistance Association undertaking research into the experience of the black community in getting legal assistance and into the conditions of their lives further heightened Marli’s sensitivity to racial injustice. As an art lover she was also particularly struck by the first all Black artist’s exhibition which she travelled to Boston to see. According to Marli this exhibition –

portrayed the poverty, the beauty, the music and the fight for life by the militant panthers and other groups. One collage showed the bullet-ridden door of the house where one of the Black Panthers was shot by police, while in bed.

If living in the US and Canada for Marli proved an epiphany in terms of her awareness on issues of racist inequality, it was also ultimately to equip her with the means to more clearly articulate her emerging feminist analysis. While she was particularly influenced by the women’s studies scholars at University, it was hearing Kate Millett speak on the New York strike for women’s equality in 1970 that was to prove a turning point, both in her professional career and, as it happened, in her marriage.

The New York strike for women’s equality echoed around the world in demands for free child care, equal pay, access to abortion and help with household work and caring. Kate Millett came to New Haven. My partner and I went to hear her, with two other Australians. At the end of Kate Millett’s talk, I joined the standing ovation – while the three I had come with stayed seated. It was one of those moments which one feels is lonely, yet inevitable. This was not my first encounter with feminist thought, but it was a special memory in my gradually increasing radicalism.

Marli’s focus on women’s issues dates to this point. In 1975, International Women’s Year, she and her husband separated and she became a single parent. Meanwhile her activism in women’s issues continued and in 1978 she and another colleague introduced a women’s studies subject into social work at her University, which she taught for three years before returning to Australia.

Working with aboriginal communities – racism

Another significant change during the Whitlam era was the Race Relations Act. Although legislating against racism and setting up mechanisms to manage complaints may have had little immediate impact in practice or on racist attitudes in country areas, this Act alone became a major contributor to attitudinal change over time.

Marion was in high school until graduating in 1972 and was awarded an exchange scholarship to the US in 1973/74, she had started a degree in medical technology, but transferred to social work in 1975. After completing this degree in 1978, Marion commenced work with the Department of Community Welfare in a remote mining town. If work overseas was an adventure and women came back inspired with stories of creative activism, this was not the case for Marion. In her first job, she was confronted and affronted by the blatant racism towards aboriginals that she was witness to among other professionals and agencies and recalls how powerless she felt to do anything about it.

I was horrified to hear the chairperson of(a good Catholic girl who I had known in high school, exceptionally bright, now a social worker at the....hospital), at a meeting state that there would be an unwritten policy that Aboriginal women would not be allowed to stay at the refuge. Protesting made little difference.....

Marion explained in some detail how some aboriginal women and their sick children had been excluded from treatment at the local hospital and sent to the women's refuge where –

The women and babies were accommodated under sufferance by the refuge and hence they called me as early as would be decent. Basically I was asked 'to get them out' with various complaints about mess in the kitchen etc. I saw the women and their babies in the refuge kitchen. Despite their limited English, racial discrimination doesn't need words - their eyes told me they knew why I was there. I was so embarrassed for their sakes and there was nothing I could do to alter the immediate problem of years of ingrained racism – even in welfare services for women.

Zenobia's detailed account of her experiences in another mining town as a member of a committee for processing complaints under the race relations act, mirror this account of the extreme racism in outback communities. Zenobia worked in bars on the Gold Coast before moving to a major mining centre where she became actively involved in the community and initially studied welfare at the local technical college. Discovering and resonating with feminism early in the seventies, Zenobia was

committed to 'living her feminism' through her work and had joined the Labor party just before the election of the Whitlam government. After completing her welfare studies, she spent some time working as a project officer of the Community Youth Support Scheme (CYSS) before moving to the Queensland Coast in late 1978 where she commenced social work study. Zenobia's story of being run out of town by the local rednecks in their four wheel drives on being spotted talking to aboriginal groups outlined in the introduction, is reminiscent of the extreme activity of the Klu Klux Khan in the deep South of the US, rather than the supposedly laid back context of the Australian outback, belying the myth of Australia as the land of 'the fair go'.

Hence, even though the race relations act had become law by the mid seventies, it did little to counteract racist attitudes that were so much a part of the dominant (white) culture, especially in rural areas. It took many years for that act to filter through to the extent that aboriginal groups themselves felt sufficiently empowered to collectively challenge instances of racism. Certainly in the seventies racism and anti colonialist practice may have been at the edge of social work consciousness, but where it was referred to at all was covered only marginally in Australian social work courses. It was those practitioners who had worked in aboriginal communities who were later to play a strong role in bringing an anti racist critique and indigenous content to the social work courses they were to teach in. These academics also joined with aboriginal groups to lobby for changes in social policies that affected aboriginal communities. Most often however it was not social work courses that had heightened the awareness of racial issues, Imogen for example, had majored in anthropology before taking on a post graduate social work degree. It was this that informed her practice and her activism with aboriginal groups when she started working in remote communities in the late 1970s.

I was interested in social action, but I never went in any of the marches...I was interested in the issue of race which was why that was my anthropology topic. I was actually in Sydney when I was part of the Spring Boks protest in 1973/74. It wasn't until I started work for the state welfare department and I went to what really got me was aboriginal issues and what was going on there. Though I hadn't really been an activist until that point, when I actually went out to practice, *where* I found myself practicing forced me to an activist position.

For both Imogen and Lilith, the work with indigenous groups gave them a deeper understanding of working *with* communities and an appreciation of notions of ‘community control’. As Lilith comments of becoming a part of the an inner city indigenous community –

While [I] had been involved in a welfare community in, I decided in my early twenties I didn’t want to do it that way. My first educational theory came from grass roots communities in Central and Western Australia talking about community control.....about working *alongside* of people and not setting the agenda, but most importantly about [the] interconnectedness of each communitys’ liberation.

Thus, for women in the study whatever their location, the context of the 1970s was remembered primarily as a time of hope and change. For those engaged with social welfare, the seventies provided an impetus for and a backdrop against which they could start to relate their political activism to their social work practice. Many reported feeling that as (often newly graduated) social workers they had a lot of autonomy and respect in their workplace which they were able to utilise for creative and purposeful project and policy work. In the Australian context this was facilitated by the Australian Assistance Plan and the sweeping legislative changes brought by the Whitlam years, which although somewhat curtailed, carried on through the more restrictive Fraser years. Initially centred on class awareness, it was the work on the margins and everyday work with the dispossessed as well as overseas experience for some that challenged practitioners in thinking about the relevance of imported social work theory. An increasing awareness of issues of race for many, and, for a very few, an increasing understanding of gender as a basis for marginalisation, led to a questioning of models of social work and social policy that were at that time essentially individualised or derived from either US or UK contexts. It was the beginnings at this point of a critical questioning that was ultimately to lead to the development of a uniquely Australian approach to social work theory that emerged in the 1980s and burgeoned through the 1990s. It was also a critical point in which social work practitioners and academics alike became highly politicised and through their work with various agencies, advisory boards and organisations were able to be influential in the development of social policy. The theoretical journey to this point for participants continues in the next section.

FRAME 2: THE DEBATES

While social work theories were still largely based on clinical theories borrowed from other professions at the beginning of the 1970s in Australia, (see Biestek, 1961; Compton & Galaway, 1994; Perlman 1970), the major debates that informed social policy in the seventies essentially ranged from reluctant collectivist to collectivist (George & Wilding, 1976). These arguments found expression most notably in Keynesianism, (alongside concepts of social democracy) and Marxist analyses and critique. By the mid seventies social work as a profession had also engaged with sociological understandings and was grappling with implications for practice and, largely due to the political changes wrought by the Whitlam government had also engaged more seriously with social policy per se. Towards the end of the seventies, largely as a result of Thatcher's radically ultra conservative political platform in Britain, the so called 'new right' agenda started to creep into Australian discourse. It was not taken seriously however by the welfare academy until after the election of the Hawke Labor government in 1983. In Australia at least in the early seventies, feminism was also still on the margins in welfare Academe until later in the decade. Towards the end of the seventies, feminism as a theory had started to trickle into social policy and certainly to resonate with the participants who struggled to incorporate it into their teaching and practice and integrate it into their private lives. The impact of the women's movement and feminism for social work and social policy will be considered in some depth in the next section.

Keynesianism

By the 1970s the welfare state had developed from notions of collectivist provision espoused since the end of WW2 (George & Wilding, 1976). A number of writers have traced the development of the concept of the welfare state in some depth and it is not my intention to reproduce those analyses here. (see Bryson, 1991; Dickey, 1980; Graycar and Jamrozik, 1989; Jones, 1980; Mishra, 1984). Rather I intend to briefly outline/summarise the key points of those major debates in order to more effectively trace the shifts in thinking that occurred over time.

Anti collectivist views (George & Wilding, 1976) so dominant before the 1950s were largely out of fashion by the 1960s. It was seen that the way forward in a period of affluence was to rectify any imbalances of wealth within the capitalist system through wealth redistribution via increasingly sophisticated welfare programs (Graycar & Jamrozik, 1989). Keynesian economics emphasised the management and stimulation of demand in a market economy through judicious state intervention, (e.g. the payment of unemployment benefits in periods of high unemployment). Hence, ideas about the welfare state reached their peak in the 1960s when all industrialised societies, almost without exception, embraced the welfare state ideal (Graycar, 1979; Mishra, 1984). In Western economies, post war, Keynesianism was held as a basic tenet by even conservative political parties as it was essentially seen as a way of making capitalism even more efficient (George & Wilding, 1976). Under the influence of Keynes' and Beveridge's (cited in Mishra, 1984) ideas about underwriting social protection and creating an institutional framework by the state for the maintenance of minimum standards of living, the role of the state in welfare provision in industrialised countries increased dramatically at that time. In the UK, USA, New Zealand and Australia, the type of welfare state to emerge from these ideas was very much that of a welfare sector separate from the forces of the market and lacking an integrated or planned approach. That was the residual or differentiated welfare state (Mishra, 1984; Ife, 1997).

The assumption behind this approach was that increased state intervention would complement the market economy and reform liberal capitalism without any necessity of changing the economic or class structure in any way. As articulated by Mishra –

The overall intent was to make the liberal market economy more productive, stable and harmonious....In short, the welfare state was to make liberal capitalism more productive economically and more just socially (Mishra, 1984:7/9).

Although it is often said by Marxist critics (Corrigan & Leonard, 1978; Gough, 1979; Tomlinson, 1978) that the aim was to make capitalism more palatable to the masses, the promise of the liberal welfare state was to modify the market towards delivering –

economic security to those who are at a disadvantage within the market economy of capitalist societies. (Bryson, 1992:2)

a promise which according to Bryson was largely fulfilled. There can be little doubt that the standard of living of those most disadvantaged in most industrialised countries was improved with the welfare state. The greater promise of social equality however did not eventuate in most countries and certainly not in Australia. There is mounting evidence that those gains are now in retreat world wide as the gaps between haves and have nots continues to widen under a pervasive neo-liberal agenda (Brecher & Costello, 1994; Jamrozik, 2005).

Keynesian economic views and the rise of the welfare state as a means to a harmonious and stable society arose out of, and indeed were legitimised by the dominant social science paradigm of the time. Keynesian economics as the bastion of modernity, saw no functional incompatibility between the concepts of market capitalism and of welfare. As such the views espoused were firmly based within functionalist or positivist social science where stability, harmony and order are seen as the normal state of affairs and necessary to effective functioning of society (Ife, 1997; George & Wilding, 1976; Graycar, 1979; Howe, 1994). Conflict in this view was seen as a problem of transition more than of the way society was structured. The possibility of a 'science of society' is also a basis to this paradigm however and within Keynesianism, a need for 'piecemeal social engineering' (Mishra, 1984) was stressed and the correction of particular and specific social dysfunctions, rather than overall social planning was emphasised. Within this perspective the state, the relationship between the state and the economy and the administrative apparatus of the state were all seen as neutral. Any notion of unintended consequences and possibility of sectional interests within the state was discounted or ignored (Fenna, 2004; Mishra, 1984) The position is summarised thus:

We have identified a set of factors, some material, others ideological, which gave legitimacy to the post-war welfare state: a buoyant economy, the Keynes-Beveridge rationale for state intervention, theories of industrial society and post-capitalism, the promise of a science of society and the pursuit of socialism through welfare (Mishra, 1984:19).

Throughout the 1960s writers such as Wilensky and Lebaux (1965) and Titmus (1976) had rather optimistically predicted that western societies were on the path to a much less residual and more integrative approach to welfare provision. Such writers

anticipated that the distinctions between welfare and other societal institutions would become increasingly blurred in most countries and the concept of ‘welfare’ would become a broad social aim, that is in the parlance of the day - an ‘institutional’ welfare state.

By the end of the seventies in most English speaking industrialised countries at least, the legitimacy of this paradigm had diminished along with steady economic growth. Keynesianism and piecemeal social engineering as a guide for state intervention largely lost credibility with the onset of a world-wide recession which saw stagflation accompanied by rising unemployment in most industrialised countries and hence the disintegration of faith in the ability of the nation state to manage mixed economies. (Bryson, 1992; Jamrozik, 2005; Mishra, 1984)

The welfare state under Keynesianism was essentially a product of social democratic values and in those (European) countries where social democratic traditions have been long held, welfare states appear over time to have fared better historically (Castles, 1989; George, 2006). Thus proving that under some circumstances it is possible to find a sustainable and appropriate balance between social spending and economic growth. In arguing the case for expansion of the ‘European’ model of a fair and equitable social system against the neo-liberal advance of the European Union, Susan George recently noted that while far from perfect –

At the most basic, even tautological level, the existence of this model, here and now, proves that it is possible. It holds up to the world the fact that a decent life for everyone can be imagined and largely put into practice; that politics must remain dominant over the market place; that the system of taxation and redistribution can result in universal social protection; that people are not only less stressed and depressed when they benefit from economic security, but also more productive and creative; that this system generates positive, measurable economic benefits as well as social ones (George, 2006:6).

In those countries where social democratic traditions were not so well developed however, notions of social democracy to provide a way through the kind of economic crisis that hit Australia in the mid seventies were flawed. In Australia without an entrenched culture of socially democratic values, the critique remained largely concerned with distribution at the political level. In the face of unintended consequences such as increasing inflation, lowering of investment and increasing

higher wage demands, proponents of social democracy in Australia were only able to offer a limited alternative or plausible vision (Beilharz, 1989; Castles, 1989; Jamrozik, 2005). With social democratic ideologues being caught short in this way, the new right was, albeit by default, effectively able to fill the gaps. Hence in the late seventies, the social democratic view of the welfare state based in Keynesianism was seen in Australia to have had its day and failed (Bryson, 1992). The other key critique on offer in sociology, social policy and social work in the late seventies was Marxism, and discussion of the impact of this position follows.

The Marxist critique and welfare

Marxist analyses of the welfare state, although largely relegated to the margins as not relevant in the 50s and 60s, and largely denied credibility during the cold war, re-emerged as potential explanations as the problems of the welfare state became apparent with the economic crisis of the 70s. A number of writers with a Marxist critique of the welfare state, social policy and social work had emerged from the UK context (Boulding, 1968; Corrigan and Leonard, 1978; George and Wilding, 1976; Gough, 1975, 1979) in the late 60s and early 70s and by the mid 70s at least a small number from the US (Galper, 1975; Piven & Cloward, 1971, 1979). These critiques were largely concerned with providing a leftist critique of the reform agenda of the social democratic movement and pointing out the limitations of the welfare state in achieving its state aim of social justice and equality.

The Marxist critique of the welfare state and the problems associated with it in the 1970s pointed to the welfare state as beset by contradictions. The welfare state on one hand was seen as an instrument of capital that effectively appeased the masses, and on the other a gain for collectivism achieved through working class demands (Gough, 1979; Graycar, 1979; Statham, 1978). If viewed in the context of class struggle social legislation on which the welfare state is founded –

....is not the outcome of a rational and objective willing by the common good by all members of the community alike; it is the price paid for those legal principles which secure the predominance of the owners of property. It waxes and wanes in terms of their prosperity. It is a body of concession offered to avert a decisive challenge to the principles by which their authority is maintained (Laski, cited in George & Wilding, 1976:99).

If, as pointed out in the above quote, social legislation was forced out of the ruling class by working class demands and pressure, the unity and strength of the working class was seen as a central variable to the equation. Arguably, as social mobility has increased and the concept of class identity has become more complex and fragmented, important gains appear to have now been lost. Additionally however, some Marxist analysts believed in the 70s that the social reform movement (the development of the welfare state under Keynesianism), had actually delayed the collapse of capitalism by humanising it and making it therefore more acceptable to working people (George & Wilding, 1976; Gough, 1979; Miliband, 1973). As George & Wilding pointed out –

Social policy legislation, by reducing tension, promotes social cohesion and thus makes continuity and stability of the social system possible (George & Wilding, 1976:101).

Marxist writers claimed that reforms that had been implemented by welfare state regimes fell far short of eradication of the problem (Gough, 1979; Rawls, 1972). Similarly, others argued the self-contradiction of an ideology of inequality as integral to the welfare state. Bryson (1992) for example claims that the essential paradox of the welfare state, whereby the better off continue to benefit more than the poor from state mediated interventions at the same time that the welfare state is hailed as a mechanism for promoting social justice, was largely ignored. Further, this critique also points out that the welfare state did not redistribute from the rich to the poor, rather, where redistribution occurred, it had done so horizontally. In the Marxist critique, the effect of this de-radicalisation was that the same social problems persisted in capitalist societies and continued to increase despite endless government efforts to eradicate them. Given that the role of the state in Marxist terms was seen to maintain and reproduce the essential features of capitalism, as such the welfare state was always limited in the amount of reform it could realistically bring about (Corrigan & Leonard, 1978; Gough, 1979).

Marxist writers of the seventies and eighties suggested that the contradictions of state intervention in capitalist economies could only be resolved under socialism where the two principles of economic planning and political democracy are made compatible (Galper, 1976; Gough, 1979; Taylor-Gooby & Dale, 1982). Such writers suggested that under a system where resources are collectively owned, narrow self-interest

(necessary for the survival of capital) would be transcended and society conceived as a totality. Under such a system, the concept of welfare would become redundant, as the interests of society were focussed on people's needs, rather than on profits of individuals or particular interest groups or on the market. As Taylor-Gooby & Dale explain –

If humanity has an interest, that interest is in control over the use of, and access to, things that people need. People can only be described as free when social arrangements make it possible for the Land, 1979ir needs to be met. Our society makes it impossible for this to be achieved because it is founded on quite other principles...The ideals of communism suggest a vision of freedom. We do not know if this is possible. We do know that the notion of socialism as democracy, plus a planned economy, represents a possibility of the realisation of greater freedom than the welfare state (Taylor-Gooby & Dale, 1982:68).

Hence in the seventies social policy analysts in industrialised countries realised that the welfare state was not achieving its stated goals. In pointing out that social democracy did little to challenge the inequitable basis of the capitalist economy their argument had strength. Hence, certainly at the level of analysis, Marxism provided more credibility than alternatives. In my view however, Marxism has historically ignored power relationships other than those of class, such as those based on gender and race. In practice as a prescriptor of alternatives it has also had little to offer as an alternative to capitalism. History has shown that working state socialism as experienced by China and the USSR while initially levelling out great inequalities did so under incredibly repressive regimes. This has made socialism and its cousin communism unpalatable to those in the West and in any case by the mid eighties such theories were ultimately discredited by both the left and right of the political spectrum. There are however factors other than this that need to be considered, and that state socialism as it existed in the USSR and China until relatively recently was not a popular alternative, does not necessarily negate arguments for socialism per se as potentially the most equitable social system yet devised. Marxist analysis by the 1980s had matured in content and I will return to this debate in the following sections. The Marxist critique became popular with progressive social work academics from the mid seventies on. Writers such as Bailey and Brake, (1975) and Leonard (1975) emerged from the UK with possibilities for radical practice that aimed to politicise welfare clients with awareness of the structural reasons for their oppression. Clinical practice was seen as maintaining the status quo and social workers who practised with

individuals or from a psychological perspective were seen to be a) upholding an unjust system through b) pathologising the individual when the ultimate foundation of social disadvantage was structural. The vision of progressive social work was to work towards structural change alongside oppressed groups and through making links with unions and other social movements. Community development was taken up by social workers in Australia as representing the 'radical' side of practice (Tomlinson, 1978). This view was largely advanced within the context of programs under the Australian Assistance Plan and in innovative participatory programs such as the Family Centre Project, a brain child of the Brotherhood of St Laurence in Melbourne (Benn, 1981; Liffman, 1978). The latter half of the seventies was also a time when the notion of professionalism itself was under critique as being elitist and again, maintaining the status quo (Throssell, 1975). At this point many newly graduated social workers took up positions in areas that had not necessarily been the province of social work, such as work with unions, tenant associations and in advocacy associations loosely allied with broader social movements.

Feminism and welfare in the 1970s - the gender blind welfare state

Marx believed that social progress could be measured by the social position of the female sex and his co-author Engels saw the institution of marriage as little short of prostitution of women (Hamilton, 1980). These points appear to have been lost to Marxist analyses in general over time however and certainly to accounts of the history and development of the welfare state, certainly up to the mid-seventies. Such accounts excluded the impact of changing policies and ensuing welfare practice on women, among other excluded groups. Mainstream analyses of the welfare state in the seventies outlined above and in social work also largely ignored the specific needs of women or subsumed them under the needs of men. Inspired by the feminist revival of the late sixties and early seventies, British feminist writers from the mid seventies pointed out that women were both the main beneficiaries of the residual welfare state, and also that they have formed the main bulk of workers in a mixed economy of welfare. As such, social policy has historically impacted on women differently and to a larger extent than men (Land, 1979; Wilson, 1977). Incorporating feminism into a Marxist analysis Wilson argued, makes it possible to see –

how the state defines femininity and that this definition is not marginal but is central to the purposes of welfarism. Woman is above all Mother, and with this vocation go all the virtues of femininity; submission, nurturance, passivity. The 'feminine' client of social services waits patiently at clinics, social security offices and housing departments to be ministered to sometimes by the paternal authority figure, doctor or civil servant, sometimes by the nurturant, yet firm, model of femininity provided by nurse or social worker. In either case she goes away to do as she has been told – to take the pills, to love the baby (Wilson, 1977:8).

The welfare state according to Wilson, was not just the welfare policies that it sought to pursue, but also the 'ideology in which they come wrapped' (ibid:12). In a capitalist society, the welfare state in this view was established as an institution to create integration and discourage alienation. As an instrument wherein governments attempted to create a particular vision of society, specific forms of family relationships were seen as key. The idealised modern family according to Wilson –

for most people is the only place where they give and receive affection. There, physical care is mediated by means of on-going emotional and physical relationships of the most intense kind; sexual and parental. Women in particular are reared from birth, certainly from early childhood, to conceive of happiness and emotional fulfillment in terms of their future relationship with husband and children.....The welfare state has always been closely connected with the development of the family and has acted to reinforce and support it in significant ways (Wilson, 1977:9).

While falling short of pointing out that the family is also the locus of violent relationships, Wilson's arguments about the state sanctioned repressive dependency of women in marriage and in social policy proved a harbinger for feminist writers from more radical perspectives (see Barrett, 1980; McIntosh, 1978/81; Rich, 1976). These writers in the early 80s explored the complex relationship of women to the welfare state in broader contexts and from arguably, a more activist position. These arguments will be examined in some depth alongside participant responses from the eighties in Part 11.

Feminism in the Australian context

Women remained largely invisible in mainstream Australian social policy throughout the seventies. While the occasional article (see Cass, 1978b; Cox & Martin, 1976) dealt with the impact of specific policies on women and indeed there were a number of notable books that examined women's comparative disadvantage, (Deveson, 1978; Summers, 1975), or the history of women's oppression in Australia (Daniels, 1977;

Daniels & Murnane, 1980), few authors in Australia in the seventies however examined women's particular relationship to the welfare state. Many reasons for this exclusion are cited, Roe (1986) for instance argued that the reasons for women's invisibility in the Australian context may be attributed to Australia's colonialist history with its distinction between deserving and undeserving inherited from the canons of nineteenth century poor relief. Roe also pointed to the carry over of Victorian attitudes to women enshrined at the turn of the 20th century in the federal constitution which continued, particularly at state level, until challenged by second wave feminism in the seventies. Conversely, it must be said, that prior to the late seventies in Australia as elsewhere, feminist analysis, while being concerned with impacts of specific policies and women's historical relationship with welfare, did not largely address itself to what was going on in the welfare state. In this context the awareness of and applicability of feminist theory to social work practice and social policy in welfare Academe was ad hoc and according to participants in this study, very slow in coming.

Women's voices - theory

The theoretical developments outlined above represent the larger context in which theory was developed. For the women in the study theory was less abstract, related to the experience of practice and it appears, by the end of the seventies, to what was going on in their personal as well as their professional lives. Participants reported a sense of frustration at the lack of local specialised knowledge given that, the main sources for theory for social work throughout much of the 1970s were either from the US or from Britain with some sociological influence from Europe. While by the end of the 1970s, in part due to the influence of the AAP, there were various Australian articles and perhaps one or two key books (Throssell, 1975; Liffman, 1978) that were social work specific, at that point the theory that informed social policy was also largely imported, (see Marshall, 1950/65; Titmuss, 1976) despite the fact that there had been a major survey into the extent of poverty in Australia at the turn of the decade (Henderson, 1970). Towards the end of the decade other major reports on the impact of the Australian Assistance Plan and on the state of welfare for families in Australia (Coleman, 1976) emerged. There had also been a number of politics texts that dealt with public policy process and theory (Hughes, 1968; Davies, 1958), but

again in the main adopted or adapted from models from elsewhere. Much information on social policy in the Australian context was also derived from government sponsored reports, which although of interest and certainly informative to the social work profession largely focussed instrumentally on specific issues rather than on process or critique. At the beginning of the seventies however few schools of social work included social policy in their curriculum. As the seventies progressed AASW guidelines for accreditation were developed that required schools to incorporate social policy, community development, research and social administration into courses as a condition of accreditation (see AASW website). Up until that time, most schools of social work placed a strong emphasis on psychological theory and much of this was derived from the US theory base. Social Work in the US remained predominantly in the mould of Mary Richmond (1944++) and placed much emphasis on empowerment of individuals and in my view the adoption of these theories reinforced in the Australian context a culture of social work as casework with individuals.

Psycho theories – imported theory

Some of the main importees in terms of social work theory – especially from the US were the psycho-social, psycho-dynamic and psycho-analytic theories. Millie, Linda, Sin, Beth, Pearl and Jewel and F from the WIWE collective all mentioned that at the beginning of the seventies and in their initial practice at that time, these were the theories that most influenced them with varying degrees of success. Jewel and Sin both found these theories especially useful in the mental health contexts in which they were working. Of her time at Melbourne Uni, Jewel remarks –

The theoretical underpinning was very psycho dynamic – Freud a la Hall and Erikson. There was also quite an interest in Behavioural Psychology, again a new field and I remember there was a laboratory of rats somewhere! The theories behind social work are less clear. We still read Mary Richmond, almost nothing about Jane Addams. The only two theories were ‘diagnostic’ and ‘functional’. I was functionalist as it seemed more rebellious. I majored in group work and it was expected I would work with youth, that was what group workers did. Oh, and they arranged the chairs in a circle and drew cute diagrams of everyone’s interactions. Hasn’t changed much!

Jewel also pointed to an awareness of the radical anti-psychiatry movement, ‘the time of Laing and Szazz’ who ‘we saw as very exciting and they led to a lot of discussion, but I think we did not incorporate them into our daily work’.

Outside of these contexts however the application was more challenging. For Beth, the fact that the text books ‘reflected an earlier period of social work and were mainly American’ created a hiatus between teaching and practice. As Beth discovered when she was asked to teach community development, even the community work texts were based largely on out of date American texts. (*Begging the question - Is this what we are now giving developing countries when they ask for text books?*) What British texts were available were seen as largely irrelevant and according to Beth –

The only useful tools were social history books – a marvellous one by Kathleen Woodroffe from SA, and communications and group work texts, which were essentially practical. I guess my thinking broadened (rather than shifted) from an interest in psychiatric social work (chiefly counselling) to community work and minority rights.

Pearl also felt that the lack of local material led to a separation of theory and practice and noted that as a new graduate working with youth, the theories on offer did not prepare her adequately for the work she was undertaking with young women. For her, available theory was a ‘bit too general’ and while it provided principles it was ‘really quite universalising’. This led to some creative practice on her part – and no doubt high levels of stress. Elaborating on the difficulties at the time Pearl recalled –

I remember thinking ‘hey I’m a worker, what the hell am I doing?! I understand the environment I am working in, but I don’t understand what the immediate practice demands are’ and I felt that I had to work it out. ‘What do I do with these young women who come in to see me – or I’d go out and see’. So it was a bit of seat of the pants putting theory into practice at that stage, I hadn’t learnt about how to do it with young women, in any meaningful sense and we were working – creating practice as we went. In fact, we were being encouraged to write about it, but didn’t have the confidence to do that at the time, and we were doing some pretty interesting stuff. Yes, we had the ego psychology in frameworks, but it just didn’t seem to fit. Melbourne Uni SW at that stage had a very strong psycho-therapy base and there wasn’t much if any structural analysis. It was all pretty pathologising.

Apart from the pathologising nature of the theory and a dearth of parochial literature, Pearl also pointed to gender blindness as one of the weaknesses as a part of the lack of practice specificity of those theoretical perspectives, a view that she now sees ‘in hindsight’.

Madonna also noted that during the seventies Australia had yet to develop its own tradition and cultural response to social work. While the American tradition was not her foundation in social work, she was exposed to the British and European sociological theories, and she claims there was a strong emphasis on community work after the AAP, most of which emerged from the UK. The lack of Australian specific social work identity had implications, as Madonna explains –

One of the things people say looking back was that social work did not take advantage of the opportunities they had – or didn't know how to. (We) didn't have the understanding of context, didn't have the skills, were not prepared as we didn't have (an) indigenous social work. So a window of opportunity was lost as time went by.

One of the important things to come out of the British literature for Madonna was the critique of professionalism. While she is of the view that the anti-professional movement in Australia had legitimate and strong roots, she pointed to the fractures that occurred in social work that in her view has had lasting ramifications for social work identity in Australia.

You remember it was that time too when we had the social welfare union and the AASW lost its industrial arm? Some people look back and question what was lost in all of that. And I think its taken a fair way to rebuild an identity of social work that is not elitist, but what is its contribution, what is its place? So I think that was a time when there was a fracturing of social work with people moving into different spaces and not a lot holding it together.

Athena also alluded to the anti-professional movement and cites Illich's work on deschooling as a major influence when she was undertaking a Dip Ed during the seventies. It seems however this was at the informal level rather than as part of the mainstream curriculum on education, hence for Athena it was more of an adjunct to her campus activism than a theory that informed her view of professionalism at the time.

Not all respondents were critical of imported psycho-social theories or their possibilities, Linda for instance says of her training at Sydney Uni with a case work major –

Despite the faults, It was a great theory for leading me to think in a linear/competency thought way. I also learnt (and this has shaped my thinking throughout my career) that social work has a rich and extensive knowledge base.

Similarly, Sin also remarked, 'I was very influenced by psychoanalysis and still feel it has a lot to offer in regards to understanding the inner workings of the mind'. Clearly these respondents were keen not to 'throw the baby out with the bath water' and did not see that work with individuals precluded progressive practice or activism for social change. Thus at the level of practice at least for some, complexity of explanation/theory was starting to become apparent and theoretical explanations painted in black and white increasingly less relevant.

Moving into the macro

For Ellen however, none of the social work theories she had learnt fitted her new situation. Working in PNG it was more the cultural specificity of the Western emphasis on individual casework that as far as she was concerned simply did not fit an environment where cultural notions of the individual and the family were alien. Hence, most of the theories, that influenced her, were those related to culture and development. It soon became clear to Ellen that 'it was a time for new visions rather than Western style solutions', in which community development, group work and a much broader approach to families and social networks figured as an essential part of this vision. As such it is clear that as early as the 70s, Ellen was developing models of post-colonial practice of which many of us were only vaguely aware until much later. While Pen was not practising social work at the time she felt that having been brought up in a socialist country in Africa which was 'preaching self reliance and socialism', has had a lasting impact on the attitudes she brings now to her teaching and practice. To her the 'idea of the collective' was one that she consistently engaged with 'since those early days'. While Pen felt she no longer subscribed to 'blind isms of any kind', she saw her past as playing a large part in her continuing interest and attraction to 'models relating to mixed economies of various kinds'.

Anne, Marli and Bridget, L & H from the WIWE group had all encountered a strong structural influence in social work while working overseas in the mid 1970s. For Anne it was the influence of colleagues who were members of the communist party in

the UK who ‘introduced me for the first time to real living communist ideas and thinking and dope – simultaneously!’ On a more serious level, Anne felt that generally social workers in Britain at the time were far more oriented towards structural issues in society and that nothing in her social work training ‘had actually prepared me for that’. Bridget encountered the radical social work literature in the UK in the mid seventies and recalls being strongly influenced by the British alternative news-sheet *Case-Con* and the ‘first Bailey and Brake book’. For Marli living in Canada it was meeting Maurice Moreau and other key thinkers at her University that stimulated an interest in the structural approach.

Athena’s life also became more political while spending time working in England in the early seventies. Athena recalls being involved in a teacher’s strike which was the first industrial action she had taken and she remembers being impressed by the development of the women’s refuge movement and opening of the first women’s refuge in London, (Erin Pizzy’s) which sparked an interest in feminism. However it was while she was working on housing estates in Lewisham that she felt she became really radicalised. Athena spoke of her experiences of the English class system –

What really shifted me in England was the pervasiveness of the class structure, like I had never experienced it before. In Australia I had experienced anti-semitism, I’d also experienced class. Anti-semitism meant you could never join a golf club, (not that I ever wanted to join a golf club), but every Jew knew they could never join Royal Sydney Golf Club, just like you couldn’t join it if you were Catholic. So I was very conscious of how religion and class....but in England – in London particularly, the class structure was so in your face, you lived it every day. It was like there were no go areas, if you were working class you never went there, or if you were upper class you never went here. So it was all pervasive.

It was with this heightened personal cognisance of the multi-dimensional layers of oppression fresh in her mind that Athena returned to Australia mid seventies to take up a bursary to study social work.

Notwithstanding these recollections from those who had returned to Australia from countries where awareness of structural theories had already started to impact in social work, as the seventies progressed, most of the women in the study see themselves as having moved from individualist understandings of social problems to more macro frameworks. Firstly into advocacy and social policy, then largely

through community work to structural approaches and for some, anti racist perspectives. Ruth for instance reflected that ‘without knowing it, I began challenging traditional social work paradigms, rejecting micro practice perspectives and moving quickly into program planning and policy positions’. Likewise Jill felt that it was Marxism that drew her to social work as a way of addressing major social inequalities. For Jez it was involvement with a left group ‘Inside Welfare’ which met monthly in Sydney where members would take it in turns to present papers that –

speeded up this sort of stuff. That was a priority for me, really important, I’d never been involved and it’s like a light switched on. **Now** things are starting to make sense, all the sense of comfort and dis-ease was beginning to be put into place.

Marion on the other hand, saw advocacy as important in addressing the problems that were presented to her by clients utilising the services of the Department for Community Welfare in the mining town in which she was based. A lot of her work was taken up with referrals to community agencies and in advocating for clients within and outside the department to address policy anomalies that prevented them from accessing services. Her view at the time was that ‘Services were there to help people and if they couldn’t because of policy then they (the policy) should change! (It was) not the clients fault!’

Differing contexts however produced differing levels of awareness and not all social work courses in the early seventies were strongly influenced by psycho-social/casework approaches. Madonna recollects that her strongest theoretical influences as a social work student at a South Australian university in the early 70s were ‘structural theories of inequality’. This course had a strong social policy and structural analysis that Madonna puts down to ‘the Jamrozik influence’. (The course was initiated and headed by Adam Jamrozik who later became head of school at the Hobart course where I completed my SW degree later in the 70s). For Madonna however –

One of the most significant thinkers I remember and think of often is C. Wright Mills, *Sociological Imagination – Private troubles, Public issues*. I still think this is one of the strong foundations.

Madonna was unsure however about how prepared she really was at the age of 23, for the practice reality of social work in a disadvantaged schools program by her exposure to C. Wright Mills! For her, moving into academia in the latter half of the 1970s provided ‘another great opportunity for me to gain exposure to theory’, a comment that again suggests at least a perception of separation of theory and practice at the time.

Beyond structural theories

By the late 1970s then, for the majority of participants the radical social work literature largely based on Marxist analysis had become influential in varying degrees, but respondents were also becoming aware of the gaps in theory and practice. The re-election of a conservative government in 1975 impacted on social work and social policy in many ways. Not least of which was, as Madonna pointed out - ‘a regression in the late seventies into casework and away from activist and critical social policy and community development’, seen at the time as the progressive, even radical sides of social work practice. While Zenobia writes of being influenced initially by theories of ‘structural disadvantage; stratification of society; (and being) much more influenced by left wing politics and developing a much better understanding of Marx and socialism’, as time went on she also felt she –

broadened (my) thinking to encompass and analyse everything with feminism always being in the background of and wherever possible in the foreground of everything I did. I also found community development was **real** and a wonderful medium within which to work.

Added to this Zenobia felt that in the latter half of the seventies, racism and sexism had increasingly become part of the public agenda. Having experienced both of these at first hand she calculated she was well placed at the ‘vanguard of progressive thought, which was exciting as well as challenging’. Similarly Bridget while still practising in the UK, reflected that while the influence of structural theories was ‘all good stuff’, the realisation began to dawn ‘of its silence on gender issues’. This was an issue that she felt Peter Leonard began to pick up on in public lectures and, in due course in his book on social work under capitalism (Corrigan & Leonard, 1978). When she moved to Australia Bridget immersed herself in the radical community

work literature and also started to pick up on early work on Women and Community Work, by British writers such as Marjorie Mayo.

Jez, still working in the context of immigration also experienced a shift in rhetoric in government policy from casework to community work by the mid seventies. Jez's perception of change was however a little more cynical she maintains that –

....in real terms it didn't amount to much, it amounted to casework in the community, rather than casework in the office. So while the rhetoric was there, the actual practice didn't change. The location may have changed, but the practice didn't.

After a change of government made working with the contradictions and 'bureaucratic imperatives' in immigration 'too difficult', Jez travelled overseas, before coming back to Australia in the late seventies and taking maternity leave.

Parenting

A number of respondents considered the birth of a child as having the most significant impact on their lives, their thinking and their theoretical understanding, as it was here that they felt the personal clearly became enmeshed with the political. For Pearl especially, the expansion of her community development and social policy focus into feminism and the importance of services for women occurred at this point. She recalls becoming radicalised around issues of women's rights to decent childcare and the need for women 'to participate in shaping of it according to their needs and (for childcare) to be flexible enough to meet their needs'. Pearl remembers being affronted but energised by the climate of backlash she experienced when lobbying for change.

Local government people were accusing me of creating needs by encouraging women to think about childcare – (as if) they wouldn't have thought about it unless I suggested it! There was this sort of discourse going on in the community institutionally.

Thus, in the late 70s, Pearl consciously added a feminist dimension to her community activism. While she had been engaged in working primarily with women all through the seventies, it was at this point, especially around issues of child care, that her work became 'more explicit about women's issues per se'.

Anne also named having a child as ‘probably the most defining experience in terms of my identity from a feminist perspective’. For Pen also ‘the experience of bringing up children might have turned me into a feminist more than any book or theory could manage to do’. Antoinette too, living in country Victoria with children and searching for something to ‘make sense of my experiences and feelings’, found Germaine Greer’s (1971) book, *The Female Eunuch* was ‘quite life changing’.

I think this was my first exposure, or at least meaningful exposure to feminism. Suddenly I was not alone with my feeling that things were not right in the world and I had a framework for thinking further about social conditions and injustice.

Hence by the late 1970s, most of the women had identified shifts in theoretical influences from imported psycho-social understandings to an increasing structural awareness. Initially this was inspired by radical social work literature emanating predominantly from the UK. As the decade wore on however and social work as a profession engaged with localised critical social policy and community development programs, an increasingly confident Australian theoretical base began to emerge towards the end of the decade. A number of participants had worked overseas and named an increasing awareness of structural issues as part of their experience. While some brought this awareness back to their social work practice in Australia, for most the practice encounters demonstrated the importance of context based theory.

Although feminism had started to filter into some of the women’s lives over the course of the seventies and indeed a very few named a feminist perspective as a key part of their praxis, it was the experiences of motherhood that galvanised a number of women into feminist activism. These women’s lives began to change in terms of child bearing and rearing precisely at the time that feminist literature started to appear on bookshelves and for many it was at this point that the personal started to encroach upon their public lives. Indeed for most of the women in the study by the end of the decade, feminist thinking had started to overtake, or at least sit alongside of, structural awareness as a major theoretical influence. It is to an examination of the impact of feminist theories and the women’s movement on participants lives in the seventies that I now turn.

FRAME THREE: WOMEN AND WELFARE

Even though formal equal pay had been achieved by the mid 1970s in Australia and a number of policy initiatives had occurred at the bureaucratic level to advance women, especially during the Whitlam years, feminism was slow in being taken seriously within welfare Academe. Throughout the decade some of the leading lights of the feminist movement in Australia had been instrumental in achieving a number of changes in legislation that made life easier for many disadvantaged women (Summers, 2000). Second wave feminism had permeated sociology and had started to be an integral critique in other disciplines and through the activism of mostly radical feminists a number of women's refuges had been funded. Important gains had been made in funding for women's health and the single mother's benefit was an initiative of the Whitlam government. None the less until the late seventies in Australia, literature on the welfare state and women was relatively thin on the ground. In a landmark publication in the UK, Elizabeth Wilson (1977) pointed out the invisibility of women in welfare, suggesting that an analysis of the position of women is not marginal, but central to understanding the welfare state. Wilson saw the welfare state as an institution that on the one hand enabled women to more happily undertake motherhood free from economic and social stress, but on the other a mechanism of the state to control them as well. Hence Wilson was one of the first feminist writers to identify the ambivalent relationship that women have to the welfare state – the control/reform contradiction. The feminist critiques that followed out of the UK in the late 70s, took up on issues of dependency, the patriarchal nature of the state and issues surrounding assumptions of women's role in the family (MacIntosh, 1978; Rose, 1978). The issues those early feminists addressed are to some extent mirrored in the responses of the participants in this study which are highlighted below. I maintain however that at that point in time there was a gap between theoretical feminism and the actual lived experience of most women working in welfare that has probably never been fully resolved.

Women in welfare retrospective

While the seventies were exciting years politically in Australia, and it was 'one of our own' who had written one of the key books to catapult women into questioning their own lives (Greer, 1971). The feminist movement for many years however remained

the province of educated women in the liberal arts of history and politics and sociology (see Daniels, 1977, Rowbotham, 1973, Summers, 1975). There is no doubt that some of these writers and the women's groups they were a part of were instrumental in achieving change that made life easier for many disadvantaged women. While some of these writings had filtered into social policy, feminist theory however had certainly been comparatively slow to catch on in social work. Those who were working in social work or welfare education in other countries at the time may have had exposure to intellectual feminism as an attempt to make sense of the experiences of the women they were working with. By the end of the seventies for most however, the consciousness had begun to shift. Women in social work and welfare education in the Australian context had started to embrace feminism and were attempting to engage with it and incorporate it into their social work theory and practice, if not for most their private lives at that stage.

Women's voices – impact of the women's movement

From limited awareness to conscious feminist activism – or not

For most of the women in the study feminist consciousness began to emerge alongside other critical perspectives in the late seventies in varying degrees and contexts, for others however feminism had little impact at this time. There were various reasons cited for this. Millie for instance felt that she probably related less to the women's movement than she does now as she 'enjoyed parenthood and didn't have my thoughts around the radical feminism of the era' and consequently felt quite disconnected from it. Jane also, still in school, remarked that she was 'not really switched on about these issues at the time'. Ruth and Imogen both felt that feminism 'passed them by' in their work in country towns as their preoccupations were elsewhere, although both found themselves with a lack of ease with the conventional roles ascribed to them in marriage and on becoming parents. Of this time Ruth wrote:

I married in 1971 and took on the role expected of me, although fighting it along the way. Feminism was certainly a dirty word in the country community where I lived and worked, and I had few peers who shared my way of viewing the world.

Imogen puts her lack of engagement with feminism at this point largely down to her academic success. Even though she had been exposed to feminist literature in Britain in the early seventies, it wasn't until she worked for a state welfare department in a remote region in the late seventies that issues of gender really hit her. In working in communities with a high percentage of Aboriginal people, Imogen's primary preoccupation was with countering racism. So even though she was 'vaguely aware', feminism was not a key issue. As she states –

Feminism? I don't know where I was, but it never registered. I remember reading some wonderful English magazines – really in your face magazines with lots about Germaine Greer, and I read all that but never got.... Well...there was a part of me that had done very well in the education system, nobody had ever stopped me from doing what I wanted to do. So really nothing got in my way until...I went to It's a real shock to the system to get up to the hill-billy outback where because you're a woman you can't do this and you can't do that and only the men have a say, and I found that a bit 'oh gosh', but I coped.

Imogen recounts how when she first went to work in those communities, there were few women anyway, but as more and more people became involved in aboriginal issues 'more women came'. The reaction of rural men to university educated professional women at that time she recalled was astonishing if predictable in its backlash. As Imogen discovered –

they were all dubbed 'the hairy legged brigade' – by the men. Because being a feminist – standing up as a woman in your own right meant that you were a lesbian and you had hairy legs and you could tell them a mile off and they were really disgusting and beyond the pale.

However as Imogen had previously become an accepted part of the community, she found she was not included in this denigration/trivialisation, a point she found perplexing and somewhat confusing. She continued –

So, whenever they used the term 'hairy legged brigade' to dismiss any woman who was around, they'd always say 'we know you're not one of the hairy legged brigade Imogen', in a very kind sort of inclusive gesture which brought me back. And it took me a long time to deconstruct that and say 'Well bloody hell, I don't shave my legs, and I have got hairy legs and I'm standing on this...'

So for Imogen it was as if people could clearly see race as an issue, but not gender and in this context there was ongoing tension between the two positions. For aboriginal people especially, gender awareness and feminism was not even on the radar in terms

of priority as a social issue. Making an important point about perceptions of human rights and binary thinking, Imogen goes on to explain –

a lot of people involved in the issue of race and a lot of aboriginal people themselves, didn't see any connection between human rights and racism and human rights and sexism. And that was something, I think we still haven't really got that one out. It's like it's too hard to hold two ideas in the air at the same time.

Also working for the department in the country, Marion saw her primary focus on the injustices and disadvantages that clients (mostly women) faced, which she addressed through advocacy 'within the system'. While she realised that notions of social justice were gendered, it was not with an awareness of feminist theory per se at that stage. Ellen on the other hand had encountered the early phases of the women's movement in the late 60's while studying in New York. On arrival in Papua New Guinea (PNG), she claims 'it quickly became apparent that some revision and adaptation would be needed'. The dilemmas she faced were that although women students found the largely male dominated climate oppressive, there was a wariness of what they saw as the 'strident and aggressive approach' promoted by many expatriate women on campus. Hence in those very early days the need for context based feminism was already apparent to Ellen and the limits of Western feminism in developing countries was persistently noted. As Ellen pointed out 'we had to move more slowly to encourage a change of attitude that could be 'digested' and seemed more culturally acceptable'. Thus even in the seventies, Ellen's awareness of culturally aware community development practice intersected with her feminism. Although change occurred in the PNG context over the seventies, for Ellen it seemed a painfully slow process. Ellen also pointed to the danger in blaming cultural factors as limiting advancement, when sometimes it was the cultural bias of the outsider that needed self-reflection, particularly in relation to enacting feminism, again from the seventies development context, a recognition of the need to avoid a culturally imperialist mentality and the ongoing dilemma of this in relation to Western feminism. At this point it is worth mentioning that Ellen went on to become the first woman professor and Head of a University department in PNG, appointed to both in 1979. At the time this appointment was seen as a sign of positive progress for women as indeed it was a remarkable achievement.

Conversely perhaps, while Pen felt that her ideas about various notions of social justice were developed in Africa before she knew feminism, encountering ‘Western feminist expressions/articulations’ on coming to Australia gave her ‘an abundance of language to tap into’. This discourse (and her own experience) also gave Pen a heightened awareness of both the position of women in Africa and the positioning of diverse groups of migrant women living in Australia. As she said – ‘Though had been talking about equality for a long time, it was now easier to see how this talk is really gendered’, points that Pen felt she has remained mindful of in her practice since the seventies.

Tensions within feminism

In Beth’s experience the class differentials in feminism were a limiting factor. Beth claimed that feminism in its early years was very anti-professional and she felt that made it difficult for her as an academic to participate in feminist activities. On this point Beth commented –

I remember giving a paper at a national women and health conference and being attacked because I was a researcher. I understood the point of view, but it was difficult to get across that I was sympathetic to the cause. Being under attack, as I was, certainly underlined the basic roots of the women’s cause for me.

As a result of the anti-professional stance within radical feminism, Beth recalled that social workers were unpopular within the women’s movement, mainly because in this view social workers were allied to a male bureaucracy which controlled women. Beth claims she spent a lot of time thinking about how to ‘bridge the gap’. As a consequence according to Beth, ‘many of us were members of women’s organisations, but kept our occupations secret’. Beth had also been a part of the equal pay campaigns in the sixties but noted that by the end of the seventies the fight had shifted to equality in job progression and the status of women.

Political correctness in the women’s movement was also mentioned by a number of other respondents. Linda claimed that early in the seventies feminism clearly impacted on her –

My personal life was the evolution of women’s freedom throughout the 70s – contraception, independence in relationships, income, education. I felt strongly

women should not be subject to male domination. I took part in demos at Sydney uni, eg women entering public bars, establishing Elsie, Pre term...

As the seventies progressed however, Linda moved away from feminism, mainly because of 'the people involved' and a perception of alienating political correctness within the movement.

There were 'lines' one had to take. Powerful personalities. It seemed to refuse to acknowledge class differences between women. Hence uni educated women were assuming they knew the lives of the women I worked with. I got tired of arguing the point.

Pearl also mentioned ideological differences within feminism that created fractures in the women's movement in her area of work which ultimately impacted on levels of service provision in the region. Her view was that in a rural conservative community it was important to operate from a 'consensual, reasonably low key process' in garnering support for services such as neighbourhood houses and child care. But, Pearl claims –

we struck quite an ideological conflict when we started developing a model for a centre against sexual assault which was then opposed by the women's refuge group who wanted a rape crisis centre.

The ensuing battle led to bitterness and polarised positions within the community and as Pearl indicated 'it took years for people on both sides to talk to each other again, to heal the rift and there was a real breakdown in trust'.

Athena also refers to the sense of marginalisation she experienced when she tried to become involved in the women's refuge movement in the mid seventies. Athena spoke of a particular refuge group as being the first feminist group she had been actively involved with and recalls going to a meeting, 'sitting on the floor on bean bags', discussing domestic violence and the need to set up a women's refuge. As Athena had actually experienced domestic violence first hand in her own family, she was really excited by this, but did not attend another meeting because –

Most of them were separatist feminists and the refuge was to be run on separatist lines. Well, firstly I was a married woman and secondly I think I wasn't a lesbian and I didn't think there was a place in that conversation for women who had relationships with men. You were made to feel unwelcome, you were made to feel a traitor.

Although I knew that some men were bastards, I didn't believe all men were bastards. So I never went to any more meetings as I did not feel I had a voice in that.

Athena also mentioned class factors as a divide in early feminism, pointing out that in her social work degree that class and race were talked about, but feminism was not discussed at all. Again the influence of strong personalities impacted, in Athena's case one woman in particular seemed to be able to set the agenda for the rest of the group.

The most intellectually stimulating person was T..., who just put the fear of god into everybody and she was an unreconstructed Marxist, so she was very strong on class and on culture. But I think she saw feminism as a very bourgeois activity in the sense that people like Simone de Beauvoir (who she had read and introduced us to), were middle class women. So for someone like T..., who came from the east end of London, feminism was not something working class girls engaged with, it was something middle class women did and we didn't talk about it for that reason.

So in those early days of the feminist movement in Australia, many of the women in the study while feeling they had something to offer, actually felt quite alienated from the seemingly politically correct views they felt were being pushed by dominant groups within the women's movement. Most especially from those who subscribed to radical and/or separatist understandings of feminism, or alternatively from those who saw class or race as more immediate issues.

From tentative steps to full embrace - engaging feminism

Other respondents however fully embraced feminism and the women's movement at this point to varying degrees, some more tentative than others. Sin for instance, a Marxist from her university days and active in 'the 60s people's movement' claimed she was 'flirting on the fringe of feminism' and just beginning to address the gender issue when she 'got on a boat and went to London'. K from the WIWE group reported that for her in the seventies a 'touch of feminism was beginning to emerge' as her key theoretical framework. For Bridget feminism affected her 'probably more personally than in her work', having made an early decision that rather than follow in her mother's footsteps of marriage and maternity, she would pursue a career and achieve and maintain economic independence. As such Bridget feels that feminism provided her with an 'early (faltering but growing) sense of agency; of taking action to influence if not determine my own fate'. In line with these decisions Bridget felt –

it was this that propelled me into post graduate studies, albeit needing encouragement from (male) lecturers. I didn't have the confidence to be so presumptuous to think I was up to it without this encouragement.

Bridget delayed motherhood, 'in the face of much bewilderment and downright hostility from friends of my husband in particular'. On moving from the UK to Sydney in the final years of the decade, Bridget was happy to find herself living in the stimulating environment of the inner city and close to the university where she worked. And moreover, close 'exposure to the progressive (feminist) literature promoted by Gleebooks which was just around the corner from where we lived'!

Other respondents wrote of 'being on the periphery' of feminism until the late seventies early eighties. Jez became involved with the women's movement through her 'peripheral' involvement with WEL and being asked to help 'rescue the family planning association from conservative hands'. Pearl also became involved through joining an embryonic women's group that later became a WEL group in her region, but again in a tentative way.

I guess at that stage my feminist education started. We didn't actually have a consciousness raising group as such, although they were going at the time, but there was a fair bit of discussion about women and aggression and such. I don't think we were very radical and no-one was really identifying with the notion of *themselves* being oppressed.

Hence, Pearl felt that expressions of feminism through the seventies were largely in service provision for women rather than personal consciousness. As such the group with whom she was involved established a child care centre and a network of neighbourhood houses in the area. And although they weren't reading much about feminism they were –

very conscious of working with women clients and consciously wanted to develop a fairly women centred approach that was very respectful and conscious of the way in which these women had been dis-empowered and the potential for our practice to still be dis-empowering and consciously wanting to redress that.

While most of the participants were at the very least cautiously moving to an engagement with feminism, both in their daily lives and in their practice or teaching, a number had fully embraced it at this point and were very active in the women's movement. Jill in the latter half of the seventies became strongly activist in women's

campaigns such as pro-abortion, rape and domestic violence awareness and had begun reading feminist literature. Zenobia also reflected that she was able to achieve many different things because of her feminism and felt a lot of the time that ‘we were breaking new ground’. She cites as an example of this that she was the first woman elected to an executive position on the local Trades and Labour Council and being able to stop the married women’s race at the Labor Day picnic. Much of this Zenobia put down to her own personal impact in the community –

I was generally accepted because it was assumed that I was a lesbian so the women didn’t see me as a threat to their husbands and the blokes didn’t try to crack on to me.

However it was probably just as much to do with the passion with which she engaged with the issues as she recounts –

I lived my feminism and the boundary between work and personal life was blurred and I was very happy for this to be the case. I believed you could not be a feminist and not live out your convictions. I had quite strong ideas about the role of women in society and generally was very vocal about this.

Marli also described her total immersion in feminism as more than a theory, for both Marli and Zenobia it seems throughout the seventies that feminism became a lifestyle choice. In response to the question ‘What impact did the women’s movement have on your life’ Marli’s response was –

Totally – personally, in how I lived my everyday life; in my practice and activism. I became actively involved.

Still living in Canada at the time, Marli remarked that ‘Canada had excellent health policies, a civil society and in 1970 had a Royal Commission on the status of women’. Thus she was of the view that Canada was well ahead of the Australian environment, both in social policy and intellectual contexts. Added to this the key thinkers she encountered who came to speak at the university ‘Carol Germain, Vic George, David Gil, Sheila Rowbotham, RD Laing, Ralph Miliband and Dorothy Smith – to name a few’ and Marli was able to confidently claim –

This was a wonderfully stimulating intellectual environment, where critical thought and a structural analysis was the central practice – not a marginal activity.

It was this environment that provided the stimulus for Marli's total commitment to feminist ideals and broad ranging activism that was to continue on her return from Canada to Australia in 1980.

Being part of a Women's religious community gave Lilith her first sense of collective power, even though she was conscious that 'there was always going to be limits'. On her arrival in the USA mid seventies, Lilith found that feminism was very strong, especially in some religious communities. Lilith spoke of nuns marching in pro-choice marches and then being 'kicked out' of their religious orders. While many of the women concerned had retreated and 'hid away somewhere', a few had said 'no, we did this because it is something we believe in, further we believe it is a valid position for a member of this community or this church, in fact we should be here'. This challenge to the patriarchal authority of the church was an inspiration to Lilith, although ultimately her time in the US precipitated a crisis of faith and she eventually left her religious community. Lilith subsequently brought her feminist and humanist principles to bear in involvement with the peace movement and global politics and later in community development on her return to Australia.

For Madonna feminist theory and the Marxist critique were intertwined. She cited the emergence of women's literature such as Wilson's *Women and the Welfare State* and Greer's *Female Eunuch* as having a huge impact 'in that we lived it as well as read it'. Madonna however points to tensions which she feels still remain unresolved, 'While women wrote about feminist theory the boys wrote about Marxism and (that is) still probably working itself out'.

Madonna too spoke of the importance of strong role models for social work students and remembers in her social work practice and education always being surrounded by 'pretty strong women'. She paid homage to women in the history of social work from previous eras who made such a strong impact at both practice and policy levels.

I can think of women too, strong women, some never married, obviously very bright and social work is littered with that kind of strength, it was always there. Those strong women were so much role models on the ground wherever you were and they (really) made a difference.

Women, social policy and social work

Madonna was one of a very few participants who pro-actively mentioned women and social policy as a part of the experience remembered of the seventies. Commenting that the relationship between women, social policy and social work was not strong at that stage, she pointed to the first women's refuge being set up in 1974 and after Whitlam came to power that single mothers were able to obtain independent benefit as gains for women. But went on to claim that –

Feminism didn't have an impact until the late seventies. Australia (was) pretty much comatose in terms of social policy until Whitlam. Then we got senior bureaucrats like Anne Summers and Elizabeth Reid, but the flow on effects didn't happen until later. The analysis was not that strong, it took some time for the feminist critique to gel. (It was) still largely premised on the notion of the working man's welfare state. We saw the impact of graduates coming out of social work and especially women's studies, especially in places like Canberra, but then we started to see women's role in the shaping of policies.

Thus as the decade moved towards the eighties the impact of the women's movement slowly started to be felt in social policy and also in social work. While initially feminist practice was largely informed by radical feminism, grass roots in character and potentially exclusive in effect, the emergence of the professional feminist bureaucrat gave legitimacy and voice to more liberal and broader bases of feminist activism. Clearly, many of the women in this study were at the forefront of this movement in the Australian context.

Personal impacts of feminism

One of the interesting aspects of this research for me has been answers to questions that were not actually asked, but which may have been assumed as a subtext by the respondents. In both questionnaire and interview the women were given the freedom to provide as much or as little as they liked or wanted known to a specific set of questions. While for those filling out the on line questionnaire this mostly meant a paragraph or two on each question, a few respondents however have given quite detailed and very personal accounts of their recollections of each period. Given the richness of these I have incorporated selected quotes from their journeys as comments/vignette at the beginning of each decade. I wish to highlight some of the information at this point however as these are all accounts of the differing evolution

of consciousness as experienced by those women in their ‘becoming feminist’ (Hercus, 2005), and they all point in one way or another to the very personal angst involved. The comments also speak clearly of the level of emotion involved when the personal stands in increasingly intimate relation to the political.

Zenobia for instance talks about how difficult it was to be feminist, let alone a lesbian in a remote mining community in the seventies, amidst a climate of oppression for women that operated at many different levels. She tells of how the wives of mine managers were not allowed to work, their primary role being to act as host to various morning teas, dinners and so on for visiting dignitaries; of how married women in the town had large families which was quite at odds with the rest of Australia and suggested a lack of information or education about birth control; of how it was ‘really quite a wild west type of town’ with a ratio of roughly 7-1 men to women. But of her feminism and lesbianism in that time and place she recalled –

Living feminism at this point was difficult as there was such an established dominant heterosexual hierarchy and public discourse that women were often not ‘allowed’ to mix with me for fear that they would become like me – outspoken and assertive. There were of course many high times when it felt like we had a win. When *Four Corners* was filmed in (the town) and Lex Watson spoke about homosexuality, it seemed that gay, lesbian and transgender people finally had a voice. Some people lost their jobs for attending and many were bashed as a result of this show, but I think if anything it furthered our resolve to keep fighting. It also certainly got the town talking and did provide a forum for some people to ‘come out’.

Marion similarly reflected on her experiences in attending a Catholic girl’s school after having arrived as an immigrant from an Asian country in the late 1960s and of other influences which made her life very confusing at the time. She wrote of coming from a very conservative Catholic family who had internalised the view that ‘authority as the government was either right/correct or in control’ and not to be challenged. She wrote of being a conformist herself in those days and of never having to ‘really think about the moral questions for myself – the church told us the right way to live’; of the influence of the church in her life and – as a new immigrant from another culture of her naiveté, especially around issues of sexuality, as Marion recalled of those teenage years –

Sex (we didn't have the word 'sex' mind you) before marriage was not on. This was discussed using fables that told us about girls who had done 'impure things' with their boyfriends and then suddenly died in car crashes etc 'with black hearts' (Nothing like scaring impressionable and ignorant young girls). (I) was rather stunned to attend 'sweet sixteen' birthday parties (1971) and school dances and see my colleagues in action with the boys from the local boy's colleges – I always thought that kissing only happened on TV or films, I didn't know real people did it!.....I had no idea of sexual or other sort of attraction – in the hetero sexual mode, I thought a man asked you out, you said 'yes', you married him and that was that really.

Marion's horizons were expanded even more when she went to the US as an exchange student on completing high school. She felt very self-conscious as the only 'coloured' person in a small mid west town in an ethnic mix of people of predominantly Irish or German descent. However she was more shocked at the early age that school children started partnering with the opposite sex, often becoming sexually active in primary school and forming alliances that would more often than not see them through high school and after when the couple married. Referring to that period Marion wrote –

Despite what I had heard about the strong feminist movement in the US, it was hard to see what relevance it had for the women and girls I associated daily with for that year. The whole social system was so strongly influenced by hetero-sexual partnering that the key school events always had a male and female as 'King' and 'Queen' of something or other, e.g.: the homecoming, the Prom.

When she herself had her first 'rather innocent' experience at sexual activity, 'the usual double standards applied with girls at the school being ostracised or otherwise losing status because they were seen as 'sluts'. Marion was able to de-construct this however, coming to the conclusion at the age of 17 that the 'sluts' were probably a lot more honest than those who condemned them, but did the same things in secret. It was not however until she started her social work degree in 1975 that Marion found all her cultural values and fundamental beliefs under serious challenge.

I think in first year social work I learnt more about myself and my rigidities and moralities as imposed by the Catholic Church than I did about anything else. I was confronted by people who had completely different views from mine, when I had thought all my life that there was only one morality and way to live. Furthermore these others could argue plausibly for their positions and I could only say it was church teaching and just get angry because I could not argue for my case or get the others to see that MY morality was 'the right one'. I really had to think through what my moral and ethical position was and reason it out for myself. Hence I substantially changed my position on contraception and divorce and a lot later on abortion.....Many female colleagues in social work were active in feminism, and many were experienced in life being mothers and wives or had had a variety of experiences that were a lot more than I had. Some of my female colleagues told me I

was oppressed as an woman and I probably was in their eyes, although I did not feel oppressed. I don't know when I 'became' a feminist – it was not an overt part of the social work course by any means.

In Lilith's case her commitment to social justice was also originally bound up in her religious beliefs. Lilith joined a religious community in the early 1970s, in hindsight suggesting that it was a good way for working class women to get educated. Finding that her initial community was 'more on about the rhetoric than about the practice of social justice', she left to join another community founded by a French woman which had come out of the priest worker movement within the Catholic Church. For Lilith, living in a contemplative community where she engaged with 'the whole notion of meditation, doing work of the community you were living within and earning your own living and working with communities on whatever *they* wanted', was a particularly influential time. At this point Lilith felt she was strongly influenced by 'black theology, liberation theology and Marxist stuff out of the church', and also 'many of the lesbian feminist theologians were starting to make statements at that time' and she was able to identify with this.

For Jez by the end of the 70s, the experience of parenting combined with a new job teaching social work 'quickened my political understanding'. Parenting especially created dilemmas –

the sort of stuff around having kids was also really important for me. What I should be feeling as a mother, I was not feeling as a mother and I'd talk to other people and they're not feeling that as a mother either, so those sorts of 'shoulds', that ideal situation we began to question..... that was politicising as well'. At the same time that that happened, I was dealing with some of the personal stuff around being a woman and what that meant, what it didn't mean in terms of rights, privileges, that sort of stuff – and also dealing with the politics of social work.

For Athena, her activism in the early seventies as a young woman at university was as much about impressing boys as developing her own identity. She recalls of her participation in anti Vietnam war marches –

..at my school there were a group of us who debated the Vietnam war and Australia's involvement in it and saw it as colonial imperialism and so on. And one of the other reasons I went in the marches was that I was interested in boys and one of the boys I was interested in was already going to university and he was involved in organising part of it as a first year arts student. So he

said ‘would you like to come along’ and like a lap dog I said ‘of course I will, of course I will’. So I went for those reasons.

Athena was not totally untouched by the feminist movement in those early days of university however. She recalls watching television programs of Germaine Greer in debate and remarked –

And I was watching it with my friends and there were blokes there and they all thought she was over the top. And the young women in the room watching the program, we all thought she had some useful things to say. But you know at that stage we were much more interested in boys than we were in standing up for feminism.

Athena goes on to mention a number of role models of women who were active on women’s issues at the university at the time ‘there were lots of visible women, many of whom were gorgeous, but generally played second fiddle to these male academics or male university guild wheeler dealers. So yes, feminism was sort of there....’ Athena recalled the women’s common room on campus as the result of successful feminist activism by these ‘visible’ women.

I suppose one of the examples of feminism in a funny sort of way is that there was a women’s common room on campus, and that was always a safe place to retreat when your menstrual blood had flowed onto the back of your skirt and you had to go somewhere. There was always a special tampax supply. So at some level the women’s common room was a great space. Although mostly the shrinking violets resorted to the common room while those who were more politically active were part of the Labor party or the guild or the drama society. ...So in the early 70s, feminism was coming on the wave, but really the peace movement, the moratorium was much more in your face than the discourse on feminism.

In similar vein Jewel (who was sitting in on the joint interview with Athena and Imogen) also pointed to the necessity for women to be ‘sexy’ or at least outrageous to be noticed in the seventies. Having actually attended university with Germaine Greer Jewel noted –

Its just how Germain Greer was sort of....you had to be a Germain Greer to be noticed as a woman in that era. Eva Cox was another person and Anne Summers of course. You had to be really something for anyone to take any notice. And Germain was outrageous at university, absolutely outrageous.

At this point Imogen added ‘she was outrageous, but she was also very attractive too, that was her power base’. Jewel continued –

She was too, and very sexy and she spent a lot of time on that and talking about feminism in a very, very, extreme way. When she spoke on social issues, she was actually quite moving, but she tended to be into the sort of radical way of speaking and misbehaving and defying and... (*I: being transgressive, because I think you needed to be to disrupt*)... Yes, well I see that's what it was, and I think it's interesting that by the time you're talking about her, she was writing these books and was sort of part of the establishment almost, not so outrageous.

For me, these comments by participants raise questions as to the extent that early feminists felt they had to use sexuality or outrageous behaviour to get their feminist ideas across or to be noticed, even to university educated audiences. In an age when sexuality was just emerging as an increasingly accepted part of dominant discourse, to what extent was feminist leadership equated with personal power channelled via sexual magnetism and/or personal charisma? Was this a dilemma for early feminists or was it a reflection on the strength of the discourse that sexuality = power? Alternatively did it reflect feminism of the seventies primary engagement with politics of identity? I don't actually have an answer for these issues, the potential contradiction in terms remains an interesting question however, albeit relating to the points in the introduction that herstory is not made outside of ourselves, we are all, at one and the same time creating and recreating the material conditions of our lives in dynamic interrelationship to the context that surrounds us. More importantly perhaps is the question has the charisma/sexuality equals personal power for feminism changed over time?

Notwithstanding such questions, from the accounts above, it can be clearly seen that even in the seventies, gendered awareness was a multi dimensional process. Most often mediated through relationships and impacted upon by factors such as family, (especially the rearing of children), religion, culture or discourse and context as much as the influence of formal education or literature.

FRAME FOUR: SUMMARY

The richness of the insights into the context of the seventies outlined above indeed render visible the complexity of women's experience of the time and while it is tempting to allow the participants stories to stand alone in all their diversity, some concluding critical reflective points are offered. This is not to 'rewrite the other's world or to impose upon it a conceptual framework' (Smith, 1990:25) that fits *my* thinking, but to draw some conclusions on what I feel participant's reflections tell us of the context and time – and the situated knowledge they reflect. Concluding comments will also highlight directions for Part 11, the 1980s.

For the women in the study (myself included) the socio-political context of the nineteen seventies was remembered positively. For those living in Australia it was characterised by optimism for change buoyed initially for this group of women by the election of the Whitlam reformist government, but continuing after 1975 even when government spending, especially on welfare was curtailed with the election of a more conservative and austere Fraser government. There is a sense from the women's stories that the 1970s was a time when they discovered social activism. While some of this was a response to the social movements of the late 60s and early 70s, especially at universities wherein many of the respondents were students at the time, much of the activism was shaped through the women's experience of social work practice and/or experience in programs like the Australian Assistance Plan. Alternatively activism was inspired through community development programs funded by governments in partnership with NGOs such as the Brotherhood of St Laurence. Whether involved at the community level or in direct casework, women invariably reported becoming increasingly radicalised and politicised through their diverse work with those most marginalised at the time.

The politicisation of social work that occurred through involvement with such programs and socially marginalised groups, led to a close interrelationship between social work and social policy in which participants felt they had a strong role to play in social reform. As the decade wore on, confidence in social work having a legitimate role to play in policy development increased and in their agency contexts, many of the women felt in the seventies a great sense of professional autonomy that

allowed them to develop this role. For many of the women involved in this, lobbying, developing, writing and involvement in or chairing various policy committees became as much a legitimate part of their increasingly politicised social work practice as it was of their political activism. For most of the women in the seventies, social work practice and political activism became increasingly integrated and the boundaries between them quite blurred.

By the mid seventies, much of this activism was informed by radical theories from overseas. Prior to this, social work in Australia (certainly in the twentieth century) had developed largely in a casework or clinical mode, informed by imported psychological or psychoanalytic theories which clearly delineated the boundaries of professional social work/client relationship. Informed essentially by Marxist theories and theories of participation and social change that arose mainly out of the social movements in the UK and US, the radical theories to emerge by the mid seventies had a profound impact on social work education in Australia. The emergence of such theories also forced the social work profession in Australia to rethink its professional boundaries and, in evaluating its relationship to social justice in a climate of reform to increasingly engage with structural approaches to social change. For the women in this study, through most of the seventies this meant engagement with class theory as explanation for the disadvantage they were working with. As time went on however and the shortcomings of imported theory as explanation for localised practice became increasingly obvious, some of the women in the study looked to incorporate sociological concepts of race and culture into their practice wisdom, especially where they were working in indigenous or development contexts. By the end of the decade they had started to incorporate gender as well.

Feminism as a theory was relatively slow to filter into the collective social work consciousness in Australia. At least one of our number had been exposed to and even taught feminist theory while teaching overseas and a number of women reported engaging with feminism at an individual level through reading the feminist literature at the time or through their university years. However at this point for most of the women in the study, where they had engaged, the experience of feminism was more at a personal level than as a point of engagement for their social work theory and

practice, most notably occurring alongside relationship issues or parenting. In fact, many of the women reported feeling initially alienated from what they saw as political correctness within feminism, especially when this played out in policy issues around women's services and refuges or in class and cultural divides within feminism. Increasingly as the decade wore on the women in the study began to realise the nexus between the personal and the political. As their consciousness shifted into gendered awareness, activism centred on class politics was increasingly replaced by that of feminism and for some the realisation of divides other than those of class and gender. A very few of the women had fully embraced feminism by the end of the decade as the key informant, or at least an integrated part of their theory and practice and their activism. Most of the respondents however moved more cautiously to some engagement with feminism and the women's movement or involvement in service delivery for women by the end of the decade. By the middle of the next decade however, the politicisation that occurred through their involvement in service delivery and women's policy meant that most of the women in this study were actively involved in the women's movement in one way or another. This feminist activism was varied and centred on activities as diverse as teaching feminism or in being at the forefront of feminist activism through women's policy development and initiating programs specifically for women.

PART II

1980s

***ARMANI SUITS, SHOULDER PADS AND BIG
HAIR: THE CORPORATIST 80s***

I see the eighties as a dead decade, personally and politically, and, as my kids would say, even the music was horrible.

Madonna

It was an exciting time as feminism was strong in my work place and with my friends, many of whom were leaving their marriages and forming lesbian relationships as an alternative way of living and loving. I remember feeling we could do everything and anything. Women's coalitions were developing in all workplaces and government policy was supportive of feminist initiatives. I began researching and publishing and was determined to make a career out of my job and stay true to feminist politics. I was chair of the EEO/AA committee at work and saw many policies and strategies introduced to help women achieve some sort of equity in the workplace. I was also beginning a longitudinal study into women in higher education as well as planning to do my PhD. I attended conferences on women's issues and began to travel overseas to international events. I loved it and was excited to be an academic and have such freedom to think, debate and argue for structural changes for women and students in Academe.

Sin

One of the Hawke government's pre-election promises was that the Labor government would fund women's services in non Labor states at 100%. We were ecstatic at this news so when the dinner was to be held in T..... for the first time of parliament ever being held outside of Parliament House to coincide with the opening of the new Commonwealth building, we decided that a spot of non violent direct action was on the agenda.

A group of us met and designed a strategy. As a member of the ALP I had volunteered to do the seating so I had access to the room before anyone else so I could let the girls in. We made flags of Qld that said 'Fund Women's Services Now'. We rolled them and put one at every place. We also did a massive banner that was held outside by a group of women. Because Hawke was the Prime Minister there was amazing security. The whole building was locked (everyone was locked in) and then one door opened and he came in a flash car. At this point when the doors were unlocked the women with the banner marched in and proceeded to go behind the main official table and put the banner up on the wall. We had put some pegs in the wall for this to happen.

Organisers were outraged – but the good thing was that every single photograph of the main table had the banner in the background. We had a women's table (couldn't call it a feminist one,) but some women chose not to sit with us because they thought that might damage their chances within the party at a later date. So we circulated and worked the politicians until they were heartily sick of us. We got the message that we could reapply and were successful in getting funding for the Women's Centre and the Refuge Referral Worker that was then funded called theCombined Women's Services. What a feat – we all felt so happy that this had finally happened.

Zenobia

Challenges and Revelations, A theoretical and personal journey through the 80s,

In 1980 I discovered non-violence. I had hitherto been vaguely aware of a Ghandian philosophy and was acquainted - at least intellectually, with various non violent campaigns for social change. However contact with Sugata Dasgupta and workshops that he and his colleagues were running on challenging structural violence through community development in 1980 was to have a profound and lasting impact on my life and social work practice. The inextricable links between the personal and the political were brought home to me in no uncertain terms through non-violence. The simple principles of starting with the weakest; that there is no enemy (only potential allies) and of non cooperation with unjust systems (Dasgupta, 1977) were as inspiring as they were potentially profoundly challenging to my own personal (and intellectual) privilege. Those workshops of discovery had been well attended by my colleagues and were ultimately adopted as guiding principles for my workplace at the time. The subsequent actions of a number of my male colleagues however, made me realise that Ghandian non violence had no words for the subtleties of gendered injustice and as such an important dimension of structural violence was missing from the analysis.

As a newly graduated social worker, the eighties was a busy and very rich decade for me as it was for my colleagues in the study. There were numerous points in which the personal intersected with the political, with the professional, with policy and certainly with the theoretical. It was such an exciting time that it is difficult to choose which points to highlight without significantly privileging my story over those of my colleagues to follow. So I have chosen a couple of examples that tell a tale not just about my positioning in terms of theoretical development, but also to relate the complexity of the time especially in terms of social justice and gender awareness.

Practice

In 1980 I was working in what was the Youth Support Unit in Hobart, a specialist advisory unit on youth affairs attached to the Premiers Department. While I wasn't at the time particularly expecting to go into the youth field and while I spent only one year in this job before relocating to Western Australia, this position was to provide experiences that resonate in my life even today.

A colourful incident that heightened my awareness of gender issues in the year I spent at YSU concerned a group of transsexuals to whom the centre provided support. These young people all of whom were in various stages of transition from young men to young women would sweep theatrically into our lives from time to time. They were part of an organised group who regularly had their air fare paid from Hobart to work the gay beats in Palmer St, Sydney, all drugs supplied, with predictable catastrophic results. Often these young people would be found in sub standard accommodation or even in the gutter with drug overdoses and - if they survived, would have their fares paid to come home to Hobart by various charitable institutions. We were all fascinated with their lives, although the youth workers pretended not to be. The women in the office and myself however were totally upfront with our curiosity and were always full of questions as to what they had been up to. One day in the front reception area one of the 'girls', totally dressed to the nines, with heaps of make up, short skirt and very revealing top designed to show off her latest breast implants, decided to give us a practical demonstration of the advantages of saline vs silicon. To do this she rapidly whipped out one of the saline breasts for us all to examine while at the same time waxing eloquent about the benefits of said implant. Of course we all prodded and poked her breast and made appropriate noises to express our approval. At that precise moment however the

assistant to the Minister and his tie and suit entourage walked in to the reception area unexpectedly and definitely unannounced. He was in the process of showing off the innovative unit we were involved in to high ranking visitors from interstate. It was like a scene from a Victorian melodrama. Initially very obviously shocked into silence by the scene before them, they quickly recovered their composure and totally acted as though nothing had happened! We all waited on tenterhooks for the unit to be closed down, or at least another 'please explain', but it was not forthcoming – not then anyway. But I can imagine the conversations in the upper echelons of the bureaucracy!

Our 'girls' lives were indeed fascinating, they were also incredibly sad. I was working with one young (wo)man who had just come out of hospital following an overdose, to try and convince him/her that this lifestyle was not a sustainable option in the long term and desperately and creatively looking for an alternative that s/he could engage with. But there was none that did not seem totally inane - even to my own ears. S/he told me of a desperate desire to be a woman, but also of the experiences of his/her friends who were further down the sex change route. One of whom got as far as having the operation to reconfigure his/her genitals but found this still did not bring happiness. The result was that in desperation this young person wrapped herself in an electric blanket, jumped in the bath and turned it on. Suicide or attempted suicide was inordinately high in the transsexual community. I wondered at the time what it was about socially constructed gender roles or sexual identity (or perhaps more accurately social notions of masculinity), that is so insidiously entrenched, that perfectly healthy young men feel such an incredible drive to become a 'woman'. Not just your everyday (no such thing I hear you say?) kind of woman decked out in everything from tracksuit pants to office suits, but the epitome of feminine glamour - dramatically so, and these people's lives were for the most part pure theatre and usually very short. While not wishing to misconstrue or trivialise the very real angst involved, I felt that if people (in this instance young males, but the same logic could equally apply to women undertaking breast implants or cosmetic surgery, or women wanting to be reconstructed as men), were so unhappy in the body that nature provided, that they were prepared to pump it full of hormones (more often than not making themselves physically ill in the process), in order to undergo the very hazardous procedure of genital reconstruction to turn themselves into an ultimate fantasy object, then something is very awry with our gendered understandings. Why also was it mainly men wanting to become 'women'? It seemed to me that there was something about what it was to be a man that was socially more limiting than what it was to be a woman. For some, to then be so dissatisfied with the outcome that they attempt and often succeed in committing suicide seemed to only compound the tragedy. Rather than construe this as a physical or psychological fault with any individual, to me this was about the value that society places on the construction of gender (particularly masculinity, but also in this instance the idealised vision of femininity) and sexuality and I found it particularly sad. The situation also raised questions for me about whether indeed transsexuals could ever claim that status of woman given that they remain genetically male and at the social level have lived with the privilege of being male with all that that brings in a patriarchal society. I still wonder that those few that I worked with really wanted to be 'women' however this is constructed, or desired the ultimate in feminine glamour. Clearly issues here I have yet to resolve.

Moreover, as a social worker I simply had nothing to offer these people as an alternative to the round of drugs and prostitution, money and high living excitement that they were engaged in - a traineeship in suburban Hobart? a place on an EPUY program learning life skills? Acceptance, yes – a rare commodity in 1980s Tasmania, but all of the available options simply sounded just so very inane. I felt I had failed them, but on reflection, it was the enormity of social expectation and the very conventional and often confining boundaries of the social policy framework within which we operated. I often wonder where they are now 20 + years on and ponder their ultimate fate, those dynamic and thoroughly interesting people who enlivened our comparatively ordinary lives on those occasions.

Work at the YSU was not always dealing with individuals in crisis, there was a serious policy development aspect attached to this job. Further, because of the unique situation of being a unit specially attached to the Minister's office *and* having contact through the various programs with young people, it provided an opportunity to bypass the usual bureaucratic channels and advise the Minister directly. This experience gave me a unique insight into the potential for policy 'from the bottom up' but also a healthy disrespect for (mostly male at that time) bureaucrats in ties. At this point in my life I questioned whether I should ever trust a man in a tie. While being wary of making blanket cultural statements, in my view a tie well represents the uniform of patriarchy – perhaps more so than any other item of apparel. I feel that wearing a tie is to openly claim membership of a club where conformity to the rules and boundaries of behaviour and debate may be unspoken but are none the less clearly expected and acknowledged; in politics and the echelons of the public service at least, in my view, it also a club from which women are blatantly excluded.

Policy Background

Over the course of that year as research officer, I completed five evaluations of various projects from which the unit developed recommendations for policy direction to advise the minister. Not that they ever took much notice in practice, as government reading of policy recommendations seemed to me to be very selective. One of the projects that my team undertook was to make recommendations of future employment projections for young people in Tasmania. Part of which involved the possibility of setting up worker cooperatives as potentially a socially just way of creating employment. In this we drew on information and philosophical traditions associated with cooperative movements in other countries, particularly Mondragon in the Basque region of Spain. But alongside social sustainability we were very concerned about ecological sustainability, and in this sense were perhaps somewhat ahead of our time. With this in mind I wrote reports with recommendations to the effect that as much processing of raw materials as possible be encouraged before export and that Tasmania move to industries that promoted localised, environmentally sound processing and manufacture. In this way the economy would not be dependent on the destruction of native forests for woodchips, an industry that was in its infancy at that time. While our suggestions fell on deaf ears within the government, similar recommendations were later utilised in the original platform for the Tasmanian Greens in their campaign for a seat in state Parliament. Having just moved back to Tasmania after twenty seven years absence at time of writing, the destruction of forests for logging and woodchips remains perhaps the most politically divisive issue for the population of that State, framed as 'jobs versus the environment'. In an ironic twist the suggestion of localised processing of raw materials before export has now been taken up by a state Labor government to justify the development of a pulp mill that will further encroach of Tasmania's old growth forests.

The year spent working with the YSU in Hobart further expanded my view that to be a social worker is to work at a multitude of levels. It is (and remains for me, so many years later) about working with people, particularly at the community level to develop socially sustainable relationships and systems. To do that it is often necessary to develop and create community based alternatives that are economically and socially just and environmentally and ecologically sustainable. It is also a solid base from which to influence and indeed lobby policy decisions. With the broad base of knowledge and multiple skills that make up most social work degree programs in Australia, I think social workers are, perhaps more than most other professions, in a unique position to do this. This was an inspiring time in retrospect, as those of us who worked in the unit were without exception, dedicated to social change and had a lot of autonomy to work with people in developing their creative potential. We had many successes and despite the odd disaster, despite which I believe we were able to make a

lot of positive changes to many people's lives. The Youth Support Unit was a product of its time and particular context and was disbanded soon after I left.

Moving into Teaching

At the end of 1980 I was appointed to a position which involved part time tutoring at Curtin University (then WAIT) in Perth, but also supervising students on job creation projects in a partnership between the School of Social Work and Anglicare. This one year contract was the start of a 23 year career in teaching social work at Curtin. Over time we were involved in getting a number of innovative projects off the ground. I was initially involved in coordinating the establishment of a recycling project with unemployed people with the support of one of the Anglican parishes in Perth, in doing so building on the experiences that I had at the YSU in the development of cooperatives and ecologically sustainable practice. Bayswater recycling ran for five years and was a prototype for recycling programs now run by other municipalities throughout Australia, except that it was run as a cooperative of unemployed young people rather than a fund raising venture by local councils.

By the early 1980s I had joined a small number of women staff members in openly including feminism in the curriculum. In 1982 I attended my first Women in Welfare Education meeting and through that was able to start reflecting on and linking what was to become my Freirian educational practice with a feminist approach to teaching. WIWE also gave me a national network of women colleagues that I have now been able to draw upon for this research. At this stage, I introduced an option on Women and Social Policy into the curriculum. This unit essentially turned into a de-facto consciousness raising group where we came together each week in a casual setting to discuss the impact of gender in our lives. These sessions were semi structured around a theme which each woman chose as the topic for the week. They were highly emotive sessions and there was much anger directed at men in general. We all learnt so much and it provided a space for us as women to articulate in a safe environment that which we felt but hitherto may not have been able to find words to say. Most of the time these groups consisted solely of women, but occasionally men came along as well. The men were usually very quiet and often I believe felt uncomfortable in that context for simply being a man. Whether or not to allow men in the group was a constant source of tension for me as an educator. Certainly the dynamics were different when a man was present. Women were definitely not as forthcoming and when they were there, I felt sometimes the men were protected and often 'rescued' to some degree by some unnamed code of discretion. It always seemed so much simpler when they weren't there, as different dynamics – often unconscious, came into play when men were present. And there was only ever one or two, so it really wasn't possible to split them up and tell them to go away for awhile and do their own thing. There were some interesting times. One day, in a 'round robin' to choose a topic one of the men chose prostitution. I certainly initially felt suspicious and uncomfortable about this, but come the session, he had done his research well. He had managed to interview a number of prostitutes (although was not only surprised, but indignant that they wanted payment for their time!) and in the process he was told that the police in Perth were actually running the prostitution industry. This (un-legislated at the time) policy was largely about keeping sex workers in brothels and off the streets. All of this was very fascinating to the rest of us, but in the discussion, it emerged that one of our number was in fact a sex worker. After we'd settled down from our collective astonishment, we were delivered an inside view of the ins and outs of the sex industry in Perth. It was an informed, insightful and very lively session, and certainly provided good fodder for critical questioning of gender roles and sexism.

Without doubt these sessions provided an outlet for pent up anger at the oppressive practices we had all allowed ourselves to be subject to in our everyday lives and relationships. For me both as a woman and teacher, I think the collective experiences of women shared in this way

provided more critical reflection than the reading of feminist texts alone has ever done, although my role as academic and assessor in those groups did raise ethical questions about power that were difficult to resolve within the theoretical framework.

Feminism

Feminism in the early 80s seemed a rather fixed ideal and I can identify in some ways with those who saw/see feminism as overly militant and politically correct. Such was the power of the separatist discourse on feminism at that time, in many ways I found myself feeling apologetically feminist because of my heterosexuality, which seemed like an inherent contradiction to the goals of feminism to which I aspired as *the* ideal. I felt many of my radical lesbian friends looked down on those of us who they saw as fraternising with the enemy because we remained in relationships with men or had many men friends. I felt sometimes my feminist activism was in many ways hollow and superficial because of this ‘flaw’ of heterosexuality, which I was simply not noble enough to overcome. It was only in the mid to late 80s that I became aware that there were possibly many different categories of feminism, largely because of Marchant and Wearing’s (1986) book ‘Women and Welfare’. Being equipped with this knowledge I happily wore the hat of ‘socialist’ feminist for the rest of the eighties, as for me it allowed for heterosexuality, class and culture to be a legitimate part of the complex juggling act that I increasingly considered my feminism to be.

Part of that juggling act of course was my primary relationship and my family responsibilities. Ten years earlier my partner with whom I had studied philosophy and psychology at university, had been more than happy to go along with my (then) radical ideas about sharing parenting and home responsibilities and the need to maintain independent finances. In practice as I spent more and more time in the mid eighties working and he spent more and more time cooking (because as a teacher he was able to leave work at 3.30pm) and looking after our daughter, my ‘radical’ ideas were wearing thin. One day he told me he wanted a ‘wife’ because he was sick of coming home and doing the cooking – I told him so did I. Thus was the tension that living feminism brought to relationships. The thin edge of the wedge for us both came when he was required to do a country placement to obtain permanent employment as a teacher and I was left in Perth with no alternative but to continue to work full time, but also have virtually sole care of my two daughters, the elder of whom was in year 11 in high school. I wrote letters of protest to the education minister suggesting that this was a sexist policy as it assumed that women could quite happily pack up whatever job they were doing and follow their man to the country. It was an inequitable policy because while on paper men and women were treated the same in practice, women with families were not required at that stage to move very far away. Such protests about the disruption to all our lives fell on deaf ears however and with a sense of *déjà vu* I virtually became a single parent again. The enforced separation ultimately took its toll on the relationship and by the time he returned to the city two years later we had become practical strangers. The relationship was over and I went into the nineties a single parent again. It seemed to me this was inevitably what happened in relationships when one tries to live up to ones feminist ideals and in understanding the reality and the pain of the feminist slogan ‘The Personal is the Political’.

Collectivism in Practice

While on study leave in the UK in 1988, I attended an international social work conference in Stockholm where I was privileged enough to hear one of my heroes Paulo Freire speak just before he died. This was one of the highlights for me as indeed visiting Sweden at that time was enlightening from a social justice and policy perspective. The other keynote speaker at that conference was Lilian Palmer, whose husband Olav as Prime Minister had been recently assassinated as he walked in the street with his family. Her steadfast and uncompromising but gentle articulation of the ongoing need for social justice was truly inspirational. The

assumption of social democracy in Sweden at the time was a breath of fresh air, it permeated all aspects of Swedish culture and social justice and fairness seemed to be as natural as the air people breathed. I believe political and economic culture in Sweden has shifted to the right over the recent decades. At that time however, the ideals embedded in political culture in Sweden provided a beacon of light as to how the economic and the social could indeed coexist happily and with minimal tension. This revived my faith that all things are possible with collective will and understanding. However the experience left me rather disillusioned about the possibilities for a similar collective understanding in Australia and along with many of my colleagues, my faith in this possibility declined even further throughout the nineties as Australian social policy along with political culture moved increasingly to the right of the political spectrum.

None the less, the eighties were very much an opportunity to try and enact in practice all those ideals with which we were inculcated as students in the 70s. Through my work in the eighties there was ample opportunity to reflect on and incorporate the theories of community development and transformative educational practice that I had written about in my dissertation for my undergraduate degree. Throughout I had been very influenced in my work with unemployed young people by the cooperative movement occurring in the UK in the 1880s and emulated in Mondragon in the Basque region of Spain in the mid 20th century which still survives as the Mondragon Cooperative Corporation today. I believed that if we were to talk socialism as a vehicle towards social change, then basically we had to live it. This feeling was reinforced through exploring the radical possibilities of Ghandian non-violence (Dasgupta, 1977) and applying it more specifically to the practice of community development. Reading Tonnies (1955) had already given me a theoretical base to the practice of community development with the idea that the more industrialised society became, the more atomised, individualised and contractual our relationships would inevitably be – the shift from what Tonnies described as ‘Gemeinschaft’ (loosely translated as community) to ‘Gesellschaft’ (loosely translated as society or association). This seemed to me to be almost as prophetic as the Marxist view of Historical Materialism, which made a lot of sense, certainly about persistent and increasing social inequity. In Australia in the early 1980s however, I did not feel that revolution was an inevitable outcome of the alienation associated with industrialisation. Rather it seemed to me that with rampant individualist consumerism increasingly taking over as social *raison d’être*, that inevitable revolution was still a very long way off and the concept of alienation somehow did not capture the complexity of the industrialised soul. In addressing the issue of structural violence and positing non-cooperation with the system as a realistic alternative, the Ghandian view (Dasgupta, 1977) alongside the concept of *gemeinshaft* (Tonnies (1955) allowed for the reclaiming of human spirit through non-violent process as an indispensable part of any desired outcome(s). To me therefore, for individuals seriously engaged in the process of regaining collective spirit, community was a necessary starting point for social change of a grand scale to occur.

The reality of Social work in the field in Western Australia however appalled me! In the social work course under the guidance of Adam Jamrozik in Tasmania we had focussed on social work as a potential vehicle for social change and had never questioned that social work could be about anything else but social justice. I was in for a shock in moving to Western Australia as the culture of social work at WAIT and in the field in WA was very clinically and psychologically based. Social work was very much about treating individual pathologies – and if by default, about social control. While there had been a reformist edge to work of some social workers in the field, (who met in secret behind closed doors), overall there was very little structural understanding of the reasons for people’s relative disadvantage and this was reflected in the curriculum of both social work courses in the state. In the early 1980s, this was fed by (in my opinion) an ultra conservative and blatantly racist state government, who protected and pushed mining interests over those of indigenous owners of the land. And who acted severely to curtail activities by social workers who might be engaged with any activity

that could perceptively lead to challenge of those interests. Under the Court government,(as narrated by Imogen in this section), social workers in the field in North Western Australia were transferred overnight for even suggesting to aboriginal groups that they might wish to exercise their right to vote. Any suggestion of ‘community development’ by social workers as an effective means of working with people was liable to result in permanent banishment to the nether regions of the bureaucracy.

At the beginning of the 1980s, my views on the role of social work in social change were probably somewhat idealistic, if naïve, I became increasingly disillusioned with my profession as the eighties wore on. My experiences of the 1980s in consolidating my career, developing a feminist consciousness and constantly juggling the public and the private however mirrored to a large extent those of my colleagues. It is to those accounts I now turn as they sit (with varying degrees of easiness and sometimes even juxtaposition), alongside my consideration of the political and economic context.

FRAME ONE: POLICY CONTEXT

Political and economic context – cutbacks, citizenship and corporatism

The women in the study had moved from a sense of excitement at the possibilities for change in the early seventies to a sense of unease with the austere measures wrought by the Fraser government by the end of that decade. Political and economic events of the 80s however were ultimately to lead to a heightened sense of anxiety that hard won political gains would once again be whittled away. The eighties were a mixed blessing in terms of social policy reform. Even though there was a climate of austerity at the federal level after Fraser, in some states, the climate of reform from the seventies rolled on into the eighties and many changes were wrought in policy at this level, especially for women. While initially it looked like Fraser would retract policies for women initiated by his predecessor, due particularly to persuasive arguments by senior women in the liberal party, funding for women's refuges continued, the Office of Women's Affairs remained and a National Women's Advisory Council was instituted. Most notably in that period, family endowment was replaced by family allowance, a universal allowance paid directly to women acknowledging their primary role in the care of children (Summers, 2003). The single mother's benefit became supporting parent's benefit, a shift in policy that removed some of the stigma of single motherhood while it extended eligibility to men as well as women (Fenna, 2004). Indigenous peoples and other marginalised groups did not fare as well however. Other states, most notably Western Australia and Queensland continued to experience highly conservative and even repressive regimes, especially in relation to indigenous rights and the perceived conflict with mining interests (Fenna, 2004; Jamrozik, 2005; O'Connor et al, 2003).

Despite these reforms, the beginning of the eighties saw a continuation of the retreat from the social democratic reforms in government which had occurred under Whitlam. In a shift back to a more reluctant collectivism in the late seventies, Phillip Lynch (federal treasurer under Fraser), and his (so-named) Razor Gang had slashed government spending dramatically, especially in welfare, education and health. Notable retrenchments included the abandonment of the AAP and dismantling of the

universal health care system, Medibank (Fenna, 2004; Graycar, 1983; Jamrozik, 2005). These cuts to spending were symptomatic of a wider trend in thinking about welfare statism wherein the legitimacy of claims against the state were in retreat. This in turn reflected a shift in ideological positioning that placed more emphasis on the responsibility of individuals, families and local communities for welfare provision (Graycar, 1983). In Australia at the start of the eighties writers such as Mendelsohn (1981) had started to refer to the 'crisis' in the Australian Welfare State. This term had been used by policy analysts in the UK and US context to describe the move to the right of the political spectrum and ensuing social policy changes under Thatcher and Reagan. Similarly writers such as Graycar were arguing by 1983 that in English speaking countries at least, 'the corner was never turned' towards the proposed new golden era of social welfare characterised by 'distributive justice, maximum feasible participation and social supports which would maximise self worth and dignity, minimise stigma and (the creation of) an equitable and just society' (Graycar, 1983:1). However, this was the first time the contraction and retraction of spending in social policy under the Fraser government had been referred to as such in the Australian context. The trend was so marked that in a conference in Australia in 1980, Martin Rein was wryly able to predict that if 'the 1960s was the decade of the social worker, the 1970s the decade of the economist.... the 1980s (would be) the decade of the auditor' (Rein, 1980, cited in Graycar, 1983). Mendelsohn (1981) also noted the increasing inequalities in Australian society and the stalemate in political and social debate. Indeed, through the Fraser years real social expenditure generally levelled out to the point of barely keeping pace with population growth, even though spending on social security actually doubled in the years 1975 – 1982 (Graycar, 1983; Graycar & Jamrozik 1985). Despite the re-election of a Labor government under Hawke in 1983, cuts to spending at federal level continued and heralded the beginning of the end for the Keynesian welfare state in Australia as it had existed since the 1950s. The policies of the Hawke government, according to a number of critiques (Bryson, 1992; Beilharz, 1994) paved the way for the ascendancy of free market ideologies in the 90s. Hence while social policy analysts such as Mendelsohn (1981); Graycar and Jamrozik (1985); Wheelwright (1980) and Kennedy (1982) had spent the first years of the decade providing a critique of Australia's failed attempt of social democracy under Whitlam and lamenting the changes under Fraser, by the end of the decade

those same writers were analysing the ‘failure’ of the Australia’s attempt at corporatism – the Accord.

People working in the welfare system generally were optimistic that the election of the Hawke government in 1983 would restore the losses to welfare funding which occurred under Fraser. The rhetoric of ‘the Accord’ initially gave hope for a new partnership between business, government, unions and the welfare lobby to achieve a progressive and balanced approach to running the country. The Hawke government reintroduced a national health system under Medicare, and policies aimed at some redistribution of wealth from high income earners such as fringe benefits tax, tax on lump sum superannuation and the assets tests on aged pensions (Fenna, 2004). Historically most initiatives in the Commonwealth sphere had occurred under Labor governments (Graycar & Jamrozik, 1989; Jones, 1981). In this case however, these were only minor reforms, the Hawke Labor government was mostly concerned with economic policy and towards the end of the eighties had turned their focus to economic rationalism and the support of free market economic policies, even more so than their coalition predecessors (Graycar and Jamrozik, 1989; Fenna, 2004; Pusey, 1991). Citizenship became for a brief moment in the eighties and early nineties the catch phrase in welfare in Australia and corporatism the means to achieving it (Fenna, 2004). With hindsight however, the concept was noble, but conceptually flawed, at least in the Australian context. By the end of the eighties it was clear that Australia’s attempt at corporatism had indeed become the vehicle for the shift to the political right that had already occurred in a number of other English speaking countries. It is my view that ultimately the Accord also became a means by which groups that were excluded from the policy process (women, the welfare lobby and indigenous groups among others), were further marginalised. Even for those that had been included, it could be argued that the Accord inevitably became a cynical exercise in cooption to an increasingly dominant economic agenda. With the significant shift to the right from 1983, changes have taken place in all spheres of welfare provision and since that time there has been a marked increase in service provision by non-government welfare organisations (Fenna, 2004; Jamrozik, 2005; Saunders, 2002). The paradox here is that the Hawke and Keating governments were elected on a claim of

commitment to the implementation of social reform to create a fairer society (Fenna, 2004; Jamrozik, 2005).

According to Beilharz (1994) and Graycar and Jamrozik (1989), through the decade of the eighties, the discourse of welfare shifted significantly. These writers suggested that as ideas of welfarism and Keynesianism become outdated from the early 80s, economic rationalism provided the outer parameters to debate about matters both economic and social. Thus shifting the discourse of welfare from objectives such as full employment and state provision of services to an over concern – almost fetish, with ‘the market’, budget deficits and privatisation in various guise.

Hence, in setting the scene for understanding the ‘material conditions of their lives’ (Scott, 1991), the women in the study entered the eighties with a Federal coalition government that in five years had rapidly demolished many of the legislative and financial and administrative gains that disadvantaged communities had benefited from under Whitlam. Through the eighties, despite the election of a Labor government with a stated commitment of social reform, the gap between the haves and have-nots continued to widen. Under policies of economic rationalism the purse strings of government had tightened considerably and as a result solidarity among many social groupings had begun to break down. Of particular concern during the Fraser years was the influence of right wing women’s groups in the allocation of funds and development of policy in relation to women and a narrowing of scope and effectiveness of the then Office of Women’s Affairs (Dowse, cited in Cass & Baldock, 1983). A very few of the reforms of the Whitlam government were carried through by his successors however, albeit in modified form, and, as outlined above, these reforms included policies in relation to women. The net result of an increasing emphasis on the economic over the social for social policy however, was increasing fragmentation of service provision and a decrease in government responsibility for those on the margins. Arguably the shift in emphasis also impacted on the role of social workers in social policy which I suggest became gradually but increasingly marginal through the decade of the eighties. Ultimately, this resulted in a setting of the scene for ‘the worst was yet to come’ for those same groups in the nineties.

Women's voices – context

The shifting profile - what respondents were doing in the eighties

As they entered the eighties a very few of the participants were yet to graduate with social work degrees, or were considering moving from other careers into social work. Most of the other participants however were by now (or had been), engaged in social work practice of one kind or another and many had moved into teaching and academia. For many women however marriage/relationships and parenting took centre stage at this point in their lives. Jill for instance married in 1978, relocated interstate in 1979 and had her first baby in 1983, just after completing her social work degree. A second baby was born in 1984 and she combined parenting of both these children with paid employment.

Ruth was still with a state welfare department in the country for much of the 80s, but had moved into direct program and policy positions, while Millie had moved into training volunteers for the organisation in which she worked and later on in the decade began lecturing at her university. In 1980/81 Pen undertook a Diploma in journalism before migrating to Australia, 'starting that business of bringing up children' and eventually moving into social work in 1985. Similarly, Jane 'ditched nursing for many reasons, including a resistance to the medical model and the low status of nurses', moving into the social work studies after commencing political history and sociology in 1982. At the beginning of the 80s Linda was working in a predominantly black borough in the UK. She then spent a couple of years in Sri Lanka before moving to the US to complete her PhD at a black university.

As well as organising a homebirth group, Sin was studying for her MSW and was appointed as a university lecturer in 1984. In 1988 she became a sole parent and then worked full time to support her family. Bridget continued her teaching at Sydney University and continued to live happily in inner Sydney, 'heavily influenced by the progressive forces around us'.

Marion continued working for 'the department' until 1989 when she completed her MSW overseas. Marli moved back to Australia from Canada at the end of 1980 to

take up a position as principal lecturer and deputy head of school in a Victorian University. Ellen remained in her post at the university of PNG throughout the 80s while constantly being challenged in living with 'the realities of a country while independent politically, was still economically, technically and administratively dependent on Australia'.

Beth also continued teaching social work through the 80s, but was also actively involved with the ALP in her personal life and worked voluntarily with a number of community organisations. Zenobia moved from social worker to manager of all non-medical and outreach services for a quasi government organisation in North Queensland, but her area of responsibility also included other major towns in the region. In 1986 she moved interstate to set up the Sexual Assault Centre for a regional Health Service.

Antoinette commenced full time employment with a state Education Department in 1980 after her younger child had commenced school. She completed her Masters before moving to a women's hospital as student unit coordinator where she 'realised that I enjoyed working with students and started to think that one day I might work at a university'.

After spending some years in the 70s as a full time parent, Jewel studied cultural anthropology for two years in the early 1980s before taking up a position in an aboriginal art gallery, pointing out that 'at this time it was run by white people'. In 1985 Jewel returned to Social Work in a private hospital setting, although having 'been out of the field' for so long, she feels her social work theories were 'almost non existent' so she 'embarked on a learning spree! I went to every training course, workshop and self growth seminar I could find – all at my own expense'. Which clearly paid off however as Jewel was rapidly promoted to senior social worker in the hospital context.

Lilith was working with aboriginal communities in central Australia in the early 80s and then went to the US to study theology in the latter half of the decade. She returned to Australia in 1989, but by then had left her religious community and enrolled in a

social work degree. Anne returned to social work practice part time in 1979 after having a child and had moved into teaching welfare students at TAFE by the time her second child was born. She married and divorced in the 80s, 'remarriage never on the agenda', and then commenced her teaching career in social work at university. Madonna identified her defining moments of the eighties as having her older son in 1982 and giving birth to twins in 1986. So for her the 80s were 'pretty much involved in the personal with child rearing'. At this point Madonna was employed as women's coordinator at TAFE and was also heavily involved with the AASW, ...COSS, WEL and nursing mothers. In 1984 as well as continuing to teach 'one morning a week' Madonna took on a job as area coordinator of social work in DSS and by the end of the eighties had relocated to Canberra where she took up a Directors position in the same department. It is not surprising that Madonna describes the 80s as 'all of a blur really, (I was) so busy, even though I had a partner who only worked two days a week'.

Jez had also left work to have a child in 1979 and when she returned one year later she decided that working in immigration had become too hard and she 'couldn't live with the contradictions'. Jez then started teaching at university while undertaking her Master's research on women and workers compensation. This research introduced her to the issue of violence and women, which in turn led to teaching in this area and her involvement in lobbying for sexual assault services and her ongoing interest in reclaim the night marches.

Childcare became an issue for Pearl when she had three children between 1978 and 1981 and worked part time in between. When she returned to work in the health department in 1981, Pearl was employed in an early childhood development program where 'the development of child care services and encouraging community groups to develop child care options became a major focus'. In 1984 Pearl commenced teaching at her university and was also chair of a regional consultative council on developing regional women's policy. In the mid 80s Pearl also started a Masters program on 'feminist social work' which she completed by the late 80s.

Imogen was still in a remote location in WA in 1980. She had given birth to her first child in 1979 and was still on maternity leave from her position as social worker with a major government department. Imogen was still actively involved in aboriginal land rights, voting and mining rights which ultimately led to she and her partner being transferred to the other side of the state at the behest of the then Minister for Welfare. The grounds for the transfer were that 'aboriginal people had been happy and quiet until some communists from Moscow had infiltrated the welfare department and disturbed things'. In her new location Imogen spent some time employed as a social worker in the euphemistically named 'homemaker' section of the department before resigning to have her second child. After the birth of her child Imogen was offered federal funding to write a manual 'teaching people how to work with aboriginals'. Although this publication was not well received by the department for Aboriginal Affairs, it was eventually successfully published elsewhere in 1989 and remains at time of writing a notable resource for non aboriginal people in engaging with indigenous communities. In the meantime Imogen had started part time teaching in social work in 1984 'and my life was ever after an educator at ----- University'.

Athena started teaching social work at university in 1980 and in 1983 joined WEL after becoming radicalised around the issue of superannuation and maternity leave on having her first child. Athena was also actively involved in the development of the university women's group and instrumental in the appointment of the university's first equal opportunity officer. Athena described herself as particularly active in the union movement through the eighties, especially around women's issues and feels she was able to achieve much through this and her membership of a number of university committees. Of the WIWE group, M reported that the eighties was spent 'having children, starting a Masters and earning enough money to pay the mortgage'. H described herself as working in community health and therefore became 'more politically aware' in the process. K had started social work in disability but moved into research 'in order to have more impact as not achieving much'. By this time also F had moved from nursing to social work as part of her 'growing political awareness'.

How respondents experienced the (practice/policy) context

The eighties proved a mixed blessing for the women in this study and responses to the political and policy landscape at the time were quite varied, even sporadic. Certainly many respondents did not seem to recollect what they were doing in the 80s in as clear a way as they did the seventies. The reasons for this are open to conjecture. Mirroring many respondents, Beth for instance maintained that she did not ‘remember the eighties as well as the seventies’, although she did remember that it was a time when welfare rights were given some recognition. While Imogen saw the ‘eighties as more of the seventies in some ways’ and others picked up on this point. For others however their recollections, especially of the policy context were quite clear. While still employed in the State Department for Community Welfare, Marion had relocated from the outback to the city, in the process moving from direct fieldwork to a policy position. Here she found (at least the beginning of) the eighties to be –

quite a generous period of government where families and communities were still properly resourced and social workers at the Department could undertake decent work with families in crisis.

Marion recollects that the possibilities still existed to initiate preventative and supportive programs and funds were readily available to assist with crises. Marion also reflected that during this time many government departments were transformed by reviews of recruitment and selection criteria and, perhaps, importantly, by the appointment of Equal Employment Officers (EEO) officers after the implementation of Equal Employment Opportunity legislation and policy at both state and federal levels. While she observed the subtle changes to these policies wrought over time by economic rationalism, Marion recalls that the passing of this legislation initially had a ‘huge’ (positive) impact for the expectations of women employees.

Making a difference

Many other participants also saw the early eighties as a time of continued opportunity. Zenobia for instance saw the 80s as ‘a consolidation of many of the things we had either talked about or tried out in the 70s’, and points out that in her situation there was still much optimism and indeed, many ‘funny moments’. For her the early eighties at least were a time of creative energy when she felt she was able to

incorporate her feminist ideals in practice, even though she found the Queensland political scope under Bjelke Petersen to be generally ultra conservative. Of this paradoxical situation she wrote –

I began working for the Society for Crippled children as a social worker and after three months thought I would resign as it seemed quite pointless. It was such an entrenched mode of working and I thought I couldn't make any change. I talked to the boss about this and he offered me a management position that gave me all the clout I needed to make the changes.

It was then, from her new position of manager of all non-medical services, Zenobia felt she was able to institute some lasting changes, especially in encouraging young disabled people to have relationships. As she explained –

Many of these people had lived in the institution all of their lives and had little idea of what possibilities there were for them outside of its boundaries. We went to the pub, dances, concerts and generally were very visible in the community. It was a time of great energy when it was assumed that change could and would take place. When I left somewhat disillusioned as I had been told by the board that I was far too radical and a woman so they would never consider me to be the CEO, even though I had been groomed for this position by my boss. I felt that my most significant achievement was that whatever happened in the lives of those young people in the future, they would never return to how it had been as they had these different experiences and could now advocate for themselves.

A number of other respondents, while not commenting specifically on the context, felt that the early eighties were still a place where they had the opportunity to be involved in a meaningful way in creating social change. In her policy role in the country, Ruth found herself 'particularly intent on tackling some of the urbano-centric and xenophobic directions which were evident in policy and practice', and trying to challenge the impact of the National party on the lives of rural women. Jill was also still involved in class politics, even though she had two small children. Similarly Madonna, working full time with three young children, felt that in the eighties in her workplace that she 'tried to create an environment where social work could make a difference'.

Utilising social work skills to foster change was a common theme for many participants who were parents and much of the pro-active work of the time centred on this. Sin remembers feeling 'we could do everything and anything' and tells of how as a full time mother she was a founding member of a homebirth group, becoming

active politically in women's rights to choose their place of birth. This activity 'gradually began to herald a small movement across Australia of women wanting the ultimate choice of where, how and with whom they became mothers'. Hence for Sin personally this was a 'very exciting time'.

I organised conferences, published newsletters and formed national alliances with groups springing up all over Australia. I was the media spokesperson and regularly quoted on newspapers and on TV – very empowering.

So for all these respondents, the experience of the 80s context, at least in the early years was pretty much a positive one. Whether working for an agency or voluntary work around parenting, the possibilities for making a difference seemed to be impacted upon only marginally by the conservative Fraser years and there were many remarkable achievements at this time. Even with increasing busy-ness in their lives for a number of the women, mostly around becoming parents and combining this with ongoing work, the climate remained essentially positive, even exciting, albeit hectic and certainly often challenging. Generally speaking the women in the study were still largely optimistic about the opportunities for positive social change and their hopes for the future were raised by the election of a Labor government in 1983.

Disenchantment

For other respondents though, particularly those who had returned from overseas, the eighties seemed like a time warp. Anne had returned to Australia in the late 70s and by the early 80s had taken up a position with a major charity aimed at providing services to individuals and families. However after the autonomy she experienced as a social worker in the UK, she found the conservative organisation to be somewhat of a 'culture shock'. As she pointed out –

There were no radical thinkers, no people who thought structurally in that area of work. It was very focussed on individual responsibility and individual problem solving and those sorts of things. It was a culture shock and I must say I didn't challenge it very much – felt at that stage very disempowered I think, coming back to Australia in this unfamiliar situation - and I had a baby.

Similarly, while acknowledging the important advances for women that occurred under the Labor government that came into power in 1983, in sex discrimination, affirmative action and equal opportunity, Marli also voiced the difficulties she

encountered in returning to Australia in 1980. Marli found that returning to what she saw as a very conservative Australian social and political context after years of women's movement involvement and a decade of life on the cutting edge of theory and activism in Canada 'personally profoundly depressing'. She wrote –

These were hard years personally and it seemed like an error, in retrospect, to have returned from Canada....in contrast to the Canadian welfare state, it seemed like light years behind (and I believed it was!) – though no one welcomed that sort of critique. One of the things I learned about Australians is that they do not like their/our country criticised, and at that time seemed not very interested in hearing how it is elsewhere.

Marli felt she had gone back twenty years to a traditional society where women were still unable to speak out and be valued and for her it was a 'shocking personal blow'. Starting again doing things that had been done before in Canada to Marli felt like recreating the wheel only 'in a much more patriarchal climate'.

Riding the changes – working with contradiction and paradox

For most respondents however the experience of the policy context as the eighties progressed was much more mixed or changed over time. Jewel described her job at a private hospital as 'very interesting, though difficult politically', remarking at the same time that the pay was low and the structure of the organisation very hierarchical and patriarchal with (male) private psychiatrists being 'top dogs' who 'did not consult and handed out vague instructions'. In her own words,

One had to ask permission to see a patient individually....one referral from a psychiatrist was 'yes, you can have a nice girl to girl chat with her' - one of the patients suicided!

Jewel also pointed out that she felt the clients were 'totally unaware' of the way that power was exercised and in fact happily gave all the power to 'these men'. She felt that ultimately the only outcome of this exercise of power was 'revolving door clients'. Apart from this, Jewel found her psychiatric work 'fascinating and exciting', working a lot with therapy groups which focussed on self-awareness in a positive way with little interference 'from the medicos'.

For Ellen, working in PNG through the eighties also brought mixed experiences. In her view the transition of PNG to independence whilst still reliant on Australia for

economic, technical and administrative expertise impacted on all programs and service delivery. As a result inexperienced local graduates were expected to implement and evaluate programs with very little administrative backup. Her own field work in surveying projects that had been largely designed and funded by Australians added to her sense that such programs were often initiated without due regard for either the context or cultural appropriateness. Neither did they often reflect the realities of rural areas. (As I edit this the Howard government is in the process of sending in troops to sort out high levels of child sexual abuse in aboriginal communities – without appropriate consultation with those communities). On the other hand during the 1980s, university and other training programs in PNG were strengthened in the hope that these would solve many of the problems of lack of sufficiently trained local personnel. In 1988 however, the Bougainville conflict led to the closure of the copper mine which had enormous economic impact and in turn caused a deterioration in an already fragile service delivery system. As Ellen points out, ‘This was a major and continuing problem which contributed to increasing economic, social and political instability’. Ellen’s comments raised questions of the impact of economic changes on service delivery. As these mirror the changes that were to happen in Australia later in the eighties, it seems there was much to learn from the overseas experience.

Back in the Australian context, Beth also pointed to the tensions in political and social programs of the eighties, especially when the ALP regained office federally. Beth reflected that although on the one hand Bob Hawke’s government was dominated by the ALP right, it did however ‘make minority and welfare issues a priority’. Beth felt that at that time ‘aboriginal people got a better go and poverty was tackled – although not obliterated as Hawke had (so famously) prophesied’. Another plus for Beth was that students and staff at her university no longer had to hide their political affiliations as they previously did and she felt that in fact through the eighties it was those who had none who were ‘on the outer’. Beth felt that her main struggles at this time in working in community organisations were with other established professions who often had trouble accepting that social workers had something to offer.

Becoming politicised

For many women in the study, their major recollection was of becoming politically active at the local level. For Lilith, returning to work with disadvantaged communities in Australia in 1989, one of the key revelations of the 80s was that she ‘didn’t have to seek the poor elsewhere’. Jez similarly described the eighties as her time of political awakening. Her involvement with a left group which dated from the late seventies and met monthly, provided her with a forum to understand the political basis of the context of her practice. That forum ultimately became a priority in her life, a catalyst for political activism because –

...this was really important, I’d never been involved and it’s like a light switched on. NOW things are starting to make sense, all the sense of discomfort and dis-ease was beginning to be put into place.

As far as developments in social policy were concerned, Jez recollected that the first few years of the Hawke Labor government was a ‘place for big movement, but then it slowed’, in her view disintegrating as the policies of the right took hold.

Pearl particularly remembers the policy initiatives for women of the eighties as positive, but laments that in her experience social work was not a large part of this process – at least at the state level. The result in her view was a lack of acknowledgment of the differing but legitimate ideological positioning occurring within community organisations on women’s issues. Without social work input, there was in her view little facilitation of process to resolve those issues and a lack of leadership from the bureaucracy in this respect. The outcome was some well meaning, but largely irrelevant service provision that may not have adequately met people’s needs and ongoing conflict within and between service providers. Hence Pearl feels that many opportunities for significant change were lost as a result of social work’s non-engagement at this level.

Higher education

Jocelyn Scutt (1987) identified access to university education under Whitlam as a key factor in the burgeoning success of the women’s movement in Australia. While many of the respondents (and myself) took advantage of the abolition of university fees in

the 1970s to pursue undergraduate degrees, throughout the eighties many of the respondents took on post-graduate study. A number spoke of the benefits that they gained from this in terms of their general awareness and in linking theory with practice. Undertaking her Masters provided Marion with the opportunity to develop her structural perspective and ‘gave me a way of understanding and analysing social experience and inequality – I could link experience to structure and look for ways of challenging oppression’. Similarly, Antoinette considered that her Masters by coursework and thesis combined with a two day workshop on the subject exposed her to the ‘structural approach to social work’. An approach that she felt was clearly ‘most in keeping with my own ideas and the approach to practice that I had developed’. Ruth also named the completion of her Masters degree as one of her ‘significant moments’ in the eighties. And through the process of completing her MSW, Sin felt that she was ‘reintroduced to feminism and became convinced that a feminist analysis was the only way to make sense of my experiences and that of other women’. Jez felt that her research on women and worker’s compensation and her readings around feminism in the process of her research Masters, led to her developing her knowledge and teaching in that area. While Pearl’s starting her post graduate degree paradoxically led to her stepping back from much of her activist work with women at the same time that she started to engage in a ‘more thorough way’ with feminist literature.

Interestingly, all the women who undertook their Masters programs in the eighties in this group focussed on women (either fully or partially) and without exception this became a major vehicle in their developing feminist consciousness. For Linda however, undertaking her PhD at a black university in the US exposed her for the first time to black and feminist academics in social work. While her practice in a predominantly black borough in the UK and later in Sri Lanka had alerted her to the ‘cultural bias of social work’, Linda’s study in the US brought together the issues of race, class and gender that she had hitherto theoretically struggled with in those practice contexts.

Awareness – putting beliefs on the line

For other respondents the consciousness shifts of the eighties came about through their practice or their teaching and although for some cultural awareness and social disadvantage were a major part of this, for most a good part of these shifts were around gender relations and the status of women. It was issues of pro-choice and racism for instance that led Lilith to leave her religious life and to move into formal social work education instead. For Anne it was the way that service was delivered in the agency in which she worked that provided the most challenge and led to take a strong position on human rights and social justice issues through ‘linking the personal and the political’. Anne considers at this point that her structural understandings from the seventies were ‘subsumed into my feminist thinking’. In Imogen’s case issues around marginalisation associated with casual and part time work after becoming a mother were those she found quite challenging and which led her to start to focus more on feminism.

Often however personal beliefs were put to the test and in these situations women sometimes had to consider how far they were prepared to go in defence of those beliefs. In Zenobia’s case practising in Qld in the eighties was as much about finding loopholes in the system to exploit as it was about creative practice. In her ongoing fight for gay and lesbian rights she often found she had to put her beliefs on the line, even to the point of possibly being arrested. Zenobia was the licensee of the monthly gay and lesbian dances (under the name T....G.... Livers Club) and in 1985 new legislation was introduced making it illegal to service ‘Known Perverts, Homosexuals, Lesbians and Paedophiles’ alcohol. As she recalls –

It was a sloppy piece of legislation which was designed to allow police to bash and imprison anyone who fitted this description and could not really be enforced. We got the nod that our dances were going to be raided and that I would be the test case. After many meetings we agreed I would not resist as I could always do my PhD in jail. As the time came close I lost my nerve and we decided that we would have a News Year’s Eve party and this would be our last function. News always travels fast – over 500 people turned up to my house as I lived on the main road it was rather impossible to notice, but we had no police visit. People came from as far away as C.... as our dances were legendary and at the end of that night it certainly felt like the end of an important era.

And it was. Soon after Zenobia moved interstate to set up a sexual assault centre and ‘so began another very different phase of my life’.

In describing the practice and policy context the descriptions are already different in the 80s than they were in the seventies. The women’s experiences in this period of time seem to have become much more eclectic and even disparate. While some of the excitement of the seventies remains, the themes that have come through as responses to the same questions are moving away from the confident expectation of the seventies and into more sober and considered responses. This may reflect a ‘reality check’ that accompanied the more austere approach to government after Fraser in 1975, or it may simply reflect the increasingly busy lives of the participants themselves. The shifts in consciousness that occurred with higher education, (especially where the major focus was feminism) for some and through developments in their practice for others are also a key factor. The beginnings of a much more critical approach in social policy and social work theory per se combined with a stronger sense of the interrelationship of the personal and the political are other considerations. These developments are considered in some depth in the following section. In accordance with Smith’s (1991) feminist historical materialist standpoint, the shifts in consciousness and the activism that flowed from this, represented a combination of all of these factors. In their reciprocal but often dialectical relationship to the context in which they found themselves, the women in the study were impacted upon at the same time as they continually engaged with, deconstructed, resisted and ultimately recreated the material conditions of their lives.

FRAME 2: THE DEBATES

Social policy and the corporatist welfare state

At the end of the seventies as many buoyant economies around the world succumbed to stagflation and recession, the Keynes-Beveridge rationale for state intervention also lost legitimacy. In the UK and USA under Thatcher and Reagan, this approach was replaced by economic rationalism, but in many countries in Western Europe and elsewhere, including Australia under the Hawke government from 1983, the approach was replaced by corporatism.

Arising out of economic policies in many Western countries that were moving towards corporatism, a number of writers on the welfare state pointed to the corporatist welfare state as the ‘way ahead’ (Mishra, 1984; Offe, 1984; Taylor-Gooby & Dale, 1981). While sounding warnings about the potential pitfalls of social policy based on a corporatist approach, at the very least many writers at the time identified corporatism as a more palatable and socially just alternative to the policies of the emerging ‘new right’ and (so called) economic rationalism.

The essential features of corporatism as outlined by Taylor-Gooby and Dale suggested–

...an economy based primarily on private ownership, but where there is considerable state control over prices, wages and investment decisions, combined with a political structure which incorporates trade unions and business organisations in national planning (Taylor-Gooby & Dale, 1981:250).

Thus, rather than an ‘added on’ or piecemeal approach to welfare aimed at correcting the tendencies to inequality inherent in capitalism typified by Keynesianism, the corporatist welfare state emphasised the integration of the social and the economic, each in reciprocal relationship to each other. As Mishra explained –

...corporatism recognises the feedback of the social for the economic, (and vice versa) and tries to come to terms with it. Thus it sees distributive issues as inseparable from those concerning production. The upshot is that, unlike in the differentiated (residual) welfare state, the economic implications of social policy are not shirked, whilst social policy objectives are introduced quite explicitly into economic policies (Mishra, 1984:104).

This integrated and systematic approach to welfare closely resembled the institutional approach outlined in the 1960s by writers such as Wilensky and Lebaux (1965) and Titmuss (1963). Mishra (1984) as an enthusiastic proponent of the corporatist welfare state claimed that this notion carried the logic of collective responsibility for social economies forward beyond Keynesianism to see society as a ‘web of interdependent functions and interests which require cooperation’ (ibid:105). European countries with social democratic traditions such as Sweden and Austria were readily cited as examples of how market economies and the notion of the ‘welfare state’ could sit quite comfortably together and be closely interrelated and coordinated. According to Mishra, (1984), there were some preconditions that needed to be met for corporatism to be successful however.

- Firstly, the approach required cooperation between the owners of capital and workers towards a common goal. In this instance that goal was the health of the nation as opposed to the interests of one class. The social objective of full employment for instance required owners to compromise on profitability and workers to offer higher productivity and wage restraint as a necessary basis for economic growth and social welfare.
- Secondly, in economic terms, corporatism suggested a management of demand as well as supply, the objective of production became social distribution rather than simply profit, the latter a radical if idealistic departure from policies of the free market and the new right.
- Thirdly, collective and consensus decision making was essential and institutionalised. Structures needed to be established to enable workers, employers and the state as the major economic interests to cooperate in the broader interests of society (Mishra, 1984).

Given the collective underpinnings of the corporatist philosophy, it followed that those states with developed social democratic and labour movements were able to pursue corporatism most effectively. On the other hand those countries where collectivism had declined and labour movements were nonexistent or seriously

weakened, such as USA or the UK under Thatcher, accordingly found it difficult to embrace the full potential of a corporatist understanding (Offe, 1984; Mishra, 1984).

Indeed many social policy writers (Esping Anderson, 1990; Offe, 1984; Taylor Gooby & Dale, 1985) predicted that as the state apparatus became increasingly dependent on powerful and organised social interests, cooperation between major players in capitalist economic systems would be vital. Further it was believed that as liberal democratic institutions (parliamentary processes, the judiciary, political parties etc) became increasingly irrelevant, they would be replaced by corporatism with more informal modes of representation and bargaining becoming the primary method of decision making. Where these writers departed from Mishra's (1984), analysis however, was in their criticism of the desirability of corporatism as a decision making process. For Offe (1984) in particular, corporatism sought to exclude and repress political demands and to institute state supervised and informal modes of bargaining between key interest groups. As such in this view corporatism was ultimately another tool for capital to maintain control over decision making processes. As Offe wrote –

Corporatist policies are designed to develop a consensus among power elites in order to readjust welfare state policy making and administration to the requirements of the economic subsystem. Corporatist mechanisms rely upon arcane and highly inaccessible *elite* negotiations and increased political repression and surveillance, rather than autonomous public discussion and accountability (Offe, 1984:27-28) (emphasis mine).

The critique is so different one wonders if the respective authors are actually talking about the same thing. Corporatist decision making was assumed to embody equal representation of capital and labour. Many writers (Beilharz, 1994; Offe, 1984; Taylor-Gooby & Dale, 1981; Talor-Gooby, 1985; Watts, 1987) however predicted that in reality organised labour and other non represented interests would be disadvantaged, because the outer limits to bargaining were ultimately defined by the power of investment and non investment by representatives of capital. In other words in a corporatist system, there was an in-built bias as the limits of negotiability were set by the limits of investment, hence proponents of corporatism tended to neglect the issue of the power of capital to set the corporatist agenda. According to Offe (1984) issues or demands seen as excessively controversial or unworkable were automatically excluded. He also contended that a trend to disequilibrium was intrinsic

to corporatism because of the reliance on the power of investment or non-investment. The main criticism put forward by Offe however centred on the perceived inevitability of elite decision making, which would, he claimed, eventually be challenged. In this view then corporatism had an inherent tendency to generate new conflicts and tensions because of 'questions of equity, elitism, legitimacy and the extent to which decisions are binding' (Offe, 1984:28).

Corporatism in the Australian context

In the Australian context the Hawke government's attempts to implement a corporatist approach to management of the economy in the Accord met with mixed responses from politicians, business and trade unions and much criticism from social policy analysts and the welfare lobby, much of which reflected the concerns outlined above. There were other concerns specific to the Australian context however. Watts, (1987) also pointed to inherent contradictions between ideas and strategies of economic recovery and social reform objectives implied in a corporatist approach. He argued the difficulty of protecting the interests of the socially and economically disadvantaged by redistributing income towards economically vulnerable people *and* encouraging investment at the same time. To back this argument Watts provided convincing figures (1985:113) to show that under the Accord in fact a redistribution of income in more, not less unequal direction actually occurred in the Australian context. Further, in his view this redistribution did not have the intended effect of encouraging business with the prospect of increased profits to invest in new enterprises and thus stimulate the economy. Given the built in contradictions and the necessity to stress restoration of the capacity of capital to generate growth and profits, Watts (1987) like Offe (1984), concluded that the Australian experience raised questions about how much corporatism is an agent of 'or obstruction to' political and social transformation. As pointed out, the dividing line between 'economic' and 'social' is ever difficult to define, however under corporatism in this view, economic interests tend to dominate.

According to Watts, in the Australian context under the Accord, the emphasis had been on economic rationality and fiscal restraint at the cost of social reform. This is demonstrated in figures that indicate that under the Hawke (then Keating) Labor

governments, no category of benefit recipient improved their position vis-à-vis the poverty line and in fact suffered from cuts to welfare providers. (Watts, 1987) Similarly, Bryson (1992) provided figures to demonstrate that income inequality in Australia increased by over 20% between 1982 and 1989. In pointing out that under corporatism unions were coopted and made party to the erosion of many hard won gains, Bryson suggested that under the Accord the whole basis of Australia's welfare state was under threat –

While the major focus remained on relatively traditional areas of industrial policy, those who historically have been disadvantaged remained so. The issue of 'who benefits' was hardly raised, let alone effectively answered. It was falsely assumed that an industrial climate would automatically benefit all (Bryson, 1992:99).

Thus, rather than achieve the stated goals of social justice alongside economic growth, it could be argued that in the Australian context at least, the corporatist experiment of the Accord set the stage for the rise in the legitimacy of theories of economic liberalism which dominated the economic and political agenda from the late 1980s.

But there were other factors at work here as well. A number of writers suggest that the failure of the Accord to ensure distributive justice lie largely in the culture of the Australian Labour movement and the narrow definitions of social justice embedded therein. Castles, (1989) in particular identified Australia's push to equality through the wage fixing system as the basis of the Australian welfare state as a major factor in the limited success of the Accord. Similarly, according to Beilharz (1989), the dominance of labour in the Australian context led to the expression of an essentialised form of class interest that remained both masculinist and racist. Beilharz argued that in countries like Sweden, social democratic ideas inherent in the political culture focussed more broadly on people as citizens. In Australia by contrast citizenship has never been a prime issue in the reform process which has primarily and historically been a wage earners welfare state. The culture of labourism in Australia according to Beilharz precludes a broad notion of citizenship because it –

..identified its political subject as the organised, male, working class and developed a strategy directed towards the defence and protection of the interests of that 'class' (Beilharz, 1989:137).

This culture of labourism in Beilharz's and Castle's (1989) view is evident in many historic reforms in welfare from the Harvester judgement of 1907 which guaranteed a basic living wage to unskilled labourers, their wives (sic) and dependents, to changes to policies under the Accord. What was missing in all of these reforms according to these writers was an understanding of the objectives and nature of social democracy outlined as –

...transcend(ing) both individualism and collectivism, instituting universalistic provisions, giving citizens rights because they are citizens rather than employers or employees ('productive' citizens) and developing these rights into the realms of economic democracy.....Social democracy is conceived as pursuit of *political* democracy, followed by the pursuit of *social* democracy and culminating in the project of *economic* democracy. Rendered thus, social democracy has a greater theoretical potential than labourism because it has a broader socialist horizon (Beilharz, 1989:134).

In that the labour movement in Australia had never seriously challenged existing market structures in the main or the role of the state in the economic process, the above writers argued that the ideology of labourism in Australia is essentially liberal in focus rather than socialist. Arguably on this basis and with a lack of any systematic social democratic vision, it is little wonder that Australia's attempt at corporatism led to an increased focus on the market economy at the expense of a broader concept of welfare than had hitherto been possible. The Union movement in the Accord could not hope to adequately represent the interests of all marginalised groups in Australia at the table, even if they had the inclination and mandate to do so. In this I concur with Bryson (1992) who argued that the preoccupation of the labour movement in Australia with wages and conditions has historically caused problems for those marginalised groups not associated with the movement. It has therefore largely benefited white working class males at the expense of women, aboriginal groups and other racial minorities. Hence in my view, those marginalised groups were only notable by their lack of effective representation in the institutionalised decision making process of the time. These were decisions that were to have lasting and profound effects on those people's lives in ensuing decades.

The Marxist/political economy critique

In the eighties, critiques from this perspective largely focussed on the limitations of corporatism to achieve the stated goals of an integrated welfare state and also in challenging the growth of neo-liberalism as the dominant ideology in countries like the UK. While the contradictions of the welfare state had been pointed to by Marxist policy analysts in the seventies, in the context of the eighties where nation states were pursuing either corporatist or free market principles to guide their economic policies the Marxist critique of the welfare state became increasingly complex. Writers from the political economy critique consistently argued that the healthy functioning of the welfare state was innately dependent on the healthy functioning of the economy as the source of revenue and was thus one of mutual interdependence. The primary function of the state in this understanding was to provide social overheads that allowed the economy to function smoothly. However as Offe (1984) pointed out, as the nature of the economy was largely private – (and increasingly distant), management of the economy was largely out of the control of the state. Given the constant threat of non-investment, nation states in this view were ever beholden to forces largely beyond their control, hence the welfare state was necessarily primarily concerned with preserving the capitalist economy.

By the mid eighties, writers such as Offe, argued that welfare states were generating ‘more policy failures, political conflict and social resistance, than they are capable of resolving’ (Offe, 1985:13). Rather than humanising the capitalist system and providing social cohesion and stability within the system as suggested by George and Wilding (1976), the welfare state by the mid eighties was seen to be overburdened and in crisis. As Offe claimed –

The welfare state is rapidly ceasing to be a viable solution to problems generated by late capitalist societies because systems of economic and social life are not in harmony with the requirements of the administrative/political system (Offe, 1985:14).

From a Marxist perspective, the reasons for the welfare state being overburdened was not then to do with the extent of service provision to disadvantaged groups. Rather it was suggested that the viability of capitalist growth increasingly depended on ever-larger investment projects and consequently the cost of required ‘social overheads’ (health, housing, energy etc.) provided by the state also rose (Offe, 1984; Beilharz,

1989). Thus this analysis essentially indicated that the state was not so much overspending on social services but on supporting capital. In this sense there can be little doubt that government spending on infrastructure has historically supported industry. One only has to look at the location of roads and public housing estates in Australia over time to see evidence of this claim.

The political economy critique also suggested that as the state was required to intervene to provide the preconditions for the successful functioning of capital, the welfare state was inherently self-limiting and subordinate to the capitalist economy (Offe, 1985; Beilharz, 1989; Esping-Anderson, 1990; Miliband, 1975). In contrast to the corporatist position, in this view the potential for anything other than ad hoc state planning was limited because of capital's ability to exercise private power of veto against welfare state policy making via general investment strikes. This continually endangered fiscal viability as well as ensuring that state planning remained disjointed, incremental and basically clumsy.

In similar vein, but extending the argument into another dimension, Graycar and Jamrozik (1985) suggested that as the focus of debate about welfare, particularly in the Australian context, had historically concentrated on more visible social welfare it has provided only a partial picture. The well-entrenched view in the Australian community was that the welfare state was seen as something for those in poverty or disadvantaged and as such was seen as a burden on the community with the majority of the population supporting an unproductive minority. In my view this has changed little over time, becoming more entrenched as social divisions in Australian society deepen. Such a view invariably conceals the facts about who benefits from welfare provision in this country. In their analysis of the period, these writers along with Bryson (1992) reminded us of Titmuss's (1962) three divisions of welfare – social, fiscal and occupational, pointing out that other sectors of society apart from the disadvantaged consistently benefited from both fiscal and occupational welfare. Hence, in concentrating solely on *social* welfare many beneficiaries of the welfare state were concealed. Added to this, conventional frameworks for research and social policy analysis which focussed on social welfare alone were deemed inadequate to encompass the reality of the 'multidimensional functions of the welfare state'

(Graycar & Jamrozik, 1985:279). As such Marxist writers analysing social policy in the eighties were suggesting the need to incorporate a broader analysis and conceptual framework. One more adequate to the task of determining 'who benefits' (Bryson, 1992:1) and conversely who loses from existing arrangements and hegemonic understandings of welfare.

The strongest critique from the political economists in the eighties however was reserved for the ideology of the new right and its attendant strategies of privatisation. While these critiques emerged largely in the UK context in the early 1980s, in the Australian context they found their full force from the early 1990s, hence I will consider them more fully in discussions of that particular decade.

Wherein feminism?

Over the course of the eighties feminist theory became a key critique in both social work and social policy. As with the critiques outlined above however, main stream social policy throughout the eighties continued to overlook the specific needs of women or subsumed them under the needs of men. Historically social policy has impacted on women in differing ways and to a larger extent than men (Wilson, 1977, Baldock & Cass, 1983). Most generalised accounts of the history, development and contemporary crisis of the welfare state put forward through the eighties however still excluded the impact of changing policies and ensuing welfare practice on women. Male writers on the welfare state through the eighties were particularly negligent in their treatment of gender issues. Arguably, assumptions about the role of women embedded in social policy discourse differ from assumptions about men and it is important that these are identified. Some of these assumptions about the role of women in society are clearly spelt out, but some are hidden or more subtly conveyed. In any case it may be said that any theory that misses out on the relative disadvantage of half the population and discusses notions of social policy and equity in virtually the same sentence is seriously remiss. In the early 1980s such cases in point included Jones (1980) and Dickey (1980), major text books for social work students on the history of welfare and social policy. Both writers in their historical overviews if they mentioned women at all, did so marginally or as an afterthought. While Dickey (1980) described the sick, the aged, the destitute, aboriginals and children as the main

targets of welfare provision, there was no mention that historically most of the poor in Australia's history have been women and children because of their financial dependence (on men) and relative labour market disadvantage (Roe, 1983). Jones' (1980) reasonably comprehensive overview of the history of Australian welfare since colonisation also lacked any mention of the particular social policies on either minority groups or women. To make the point about the prevailing attitude of male social policy academics to women of the time, in the closing chapter of the book, Jones made the following remark –

Women are the key to the modern welfare state. Modern society relies on women to provide many of the caring functions especially for children, the old and the troubled. Demands for female equality could have important implications for the welfare state... (Jones, 1980:209),

this (blatantly sexist on a number of levels) comment despite over a decade of second wave feminism at the time. While later influential writers mentioned class and perhaps race as special categories in terms of the impact of social policy, they often did not mention gender. As recently as 1989, notable contributors to social policy debates in Australia wrote –

Indeed, inequalities and social division in Australia may be found in three interacting dimensions: an age dimension; ethnic and cultural dimensions; and socio economic or class dimensions. Which of these three is dominant depends as much on the social reality as on the perception and theoretical orientation of the analyst (Graycar & Jamrozik, 1989:10).

Categories that are very real, albeit somewhat incomplete.

In the eighties (in Australia as elsewhere), it was left to feminist theorists to develop analysis of the relationship between gender and the state, and some notable feminist authors in social policy emerged at this time (see Barrett & MacIntosh, 1982; Bryson, 1983; Dominelli, & McLeod, 1989; Cass & Baldock, 1983; Hanmer & Statham, 1988; Pascall, 1986; Wearing, 1984). Feminist analyses however, while being concerned with specific policies and women's historical relationship with welfare, had not hitherto in the main addressed the crisis/problems of the welfare state. This may reflect the historic ambivalence of feminist analysts to the state, especially concern over the consequences of the social control/reform contradiction. I would argue that

this stalemate contributed to the ongoing marginalisation of gendered understandings of social policy. Most of the recipients of welfare state services have historically been women, and certainly it is highly appropriate that women's interests be represented (in the main) by women. Arguably, however, while it was only women who generated theory on women's disadvantage and men's relative advantage, this increased marginalisation of those theories. Gender issues are never just women's problems, however I suggest they are and indeed will remain so as long as they continue to be defined as such by dominant academic discourse.

Never the less, the eighties was the decade in which the feminist critique started to be taken seriously and much of the arguments that were put forward by feminist writers are considered in depth in the following section. In the Australian context it was also a time of legislative change that continued to advance women, most notably with the introduction at both Federal and state levels of Equal opportunity legislation and affirmative action programs.

Social work theory in the eighties

Analyses of corporatism and the swelling tide of monetarism dominated the debate in social policy and provided the backdrop to the practices at the time with limited input from feminist and anti racist writers. In their reflections however, respondents were more inclined to focus on developments in social work theory, especially as these related to/informed immediate practice. In this way the women were involved themselves in building theory for the Australian situation. But it also must be said that corporatism did not seem to touch the women in quite the overt way as policies initiated by Federal governments of the seventies. Was this perhaps the start of the marginalisation of social work from social policy?

While in the seventies respondents expressed concern about the use of imported theories, in the eighties (even though much of the theory was still 'imported'), this was not highlighted by respondents as so much an issue for concern. This may have been because in the eighties some notable Australian based texts had started to appear in social work (eg. Marchant & Wearing, 1986; Thorpe & Petruchenia, 1985; Throssell, 1975) alongside increasing numbers of cutting edge papers presented for

discussion at AASW and ASWWE conferences during the eighties. For those involved in academia, these sat alongside social policy and sociology texts, also written for the Australian context as tools to analyse and critique practice. Key critiques in social work centred around ideology and practice (George & Wilding, 1984; Thorpe & Petruchenia, 1985) and added to the radical critiques of professionalism from the seventies which were to have significant ramifications for social work (Freire, 1970; Illich, 1977; Throssell, 1975; Tomlinson, 1978). Within social work Academe however, there were increasing divisions between traditionalists who saw social work as largely about working with individuals either as casework or in counselling and those working from a reform or social change perspective, the latter informed by structural or increasingly feminist understandings. For the respondents, these divisions were often to prove quite problematic. Many ructions emerged within schools of social work as a result of these polarised positions and in my experience the situation was often also very confusing for students.

Women's voices – theory

Broadening the structural understandings

By this point most of the participants had moved into some kind of engagement with structural understandings and certainly by the end of the eighties most had also engaged with and were incorporating some level of feminist understanding in their teaching and/or practice. For social work academics, this engagement with feminism and structural approaches was not necessarily straightforward, or indeed universal. M and K from the WIWE group saw radical social work and collective action as the main informants of their theoretical base. While Millie for instance simply stated that 'empowerment became prominent in social work – I probably became more radical in my thinking', Jill on the other hand reflected how changes in the global context were challenging her understandings. She wrote –

While (I was) still committed to Marxism, I could see the groundswell of opposition to state socialism and felt confused. I believed (and still do to some extent) that moves against socialism were the result of propaganda mounted by powerful lobbies in capitalist countries.

For Jez also ‘the Marxist stuff’ helped her to make sense of practice contexts in the early eighties, whereas feminism was just starting to have an impact, especially on her personal life, but she was aware of the tensions. As she said –

That, combined with the left stuff began to help me make sense of my life, what I was doing, where I wanted to go – at least in a cognitive sense. There were a lot of contradictions in my life at that time. You know running home picking up the kids – on and on you go...

Thus at that point in time, structural theories tended to be focussed on the public sphere, but had little to say about the political nature of the personal. Marion also engaged with structural social work at this time, pointing out that ‘this was probably old hat to an academic, but I was a public servant who hadn’t really engaged with up to date theories since graduation’. Marion had also become involved at this stage with Amnesty International and Community Aid Abroad and as well as her local work was becoming increasingly aware of the broad perspective on international human rights and community development that the philosophies of these organisations offered.

Grappling with complexity

While some of the respondents were still managing individual caseloads in the early eighties, they were starting to build on the traditional individualised approaches that had been favoured in the seventies in favour of theory that was based more on notions of empowerment. Jewel, working in the area of mental health was still involved in running groups with some individual case-work and through the eighties had started to build her theory in innovative ways. As she explained –

I did individual work when allowed, all sorts of things based mainly on psychodynamic theories. I tried many ways of working, but although I could not name it, I used many methods that reflected my later interest in narrative practice, such as the use of narratives and working with client’s strengths. My other influence was feminism, (but again I may not have theoretically named it). The power of male expert thinking on working with people (¾ of the patients were women). I like to think I used ‘passive resistance and ‘polite disobedience’ at times when I saw the inequality that was practiced in a controlling and abusive way.

As the eighties proceeded, the women in the study were starting to grapple with complexities around theory, especially the limitations of structural explanations for practice, often incorporating feminist understandings and utilising a range of theory to

build creative practice. For some respondents however the anti-professional critique was not necessarily seen as a positive for social work practice. Again commenting on the impact of imported theory, Beth articulates the issue she saw at the time –

From my remembrance this was the decade of self flagellation for social workers. Most of the anti –social work literature came out of the UK and reflected the protest against the welfare state bureaucracy there. Not all of it was relevant to Australia, and therefore it was difficult to get the concepts across to students.

Beth claimed that in her view that the critique of social work was probably more appropriate as a tool for those who had trained earlier to review their work practices and philosophy. She thought for new students however that ‘the anti-social work literature was confusing and disturbing’, thus a tendency to ‘throw the baby out with the bathwater’. Beth also highlighted the tensions between those in social work education who taught counselling and individual approaches and those who espoused social action, informed by structural approaches. In the eighties with the emergence of critical thought informed by Marxist analyses, working with individuals was often seen as maintaining the status quo. Beth recalled that in essence social work Academe was divided into two camps, the ‘conservatives’ or the ‘radicals’ who often had little to say to each other. As Beth perceived it, positive changes for counselling eventually emerged out of these tensions. As she wrote –

There was a battle between counselling and social action which eventually had salutary effects on counselling. Counselling became more client controlled, rather than counsellor controlled as a result.

Another shift that Beth pointed out was that in her view community work became more activist in theory and that activism became ‘an acceptable part of social work, whereas in the previous decade it was something you did in your spare time’. The emergence of a more radical community development understanding could also be a factor in the changes that emerged in counselling at the same time. These understandings were also initially informed by imported theories from the UK, but the mid eighties saw the first ‘homegrown’ Australian community development publication (Thorpe & Petruchenia, 1985). This publication pointed clearly to the differing ideological positioning that informed practice models and added

significantly to the debates and the expansion of what constituted social work practice for many.

Still working in the bush, Ruth found the 'emerging anti-racist literature and policy literature enabled me to critique the dominant approaches to policy making in respect of Aboriginal people'. It was not until later in the decade that Ruth 'discovered' feminist theoretical approaches, 'through colleagues and friends' and remarked –

Although this did not significantly change the way I thought and acted, it gave me a more coherent framework. However I was more influenced by women's fiction than texts.

Similarly, having expressed frustration with structural and feminist theories as explaining the tensions in her practice in the seventies, Linda warned against what she saw as an overly simplistic application of theory to practice. On being introduced to Soloman & Marris and Robertson's work on the Indian self while still in the US in the early eighties, Linda claimed –

I feel I now had a way of theoretically bringing together my own practice experience of gender, class and race. It also reinforced my belief that conceptual reductionism serves little purpose, be that gender (Jeffries) or race (Dominelli). Equally whatever we do intellectually must arise from and meet the needs of practice.

For Ellen, the importance of contextual based practice was also of key importance and in some ways the theories with which she found herself engaging while teaching in PNG were far ahead of their time. Ellen stressed that it was international development, with its emphasis on small scale change and community development rather than Australian social work theory that seemed most relevant. Foreshadowing the critiques of globalisation and ecological perspectives that emerged during the mid to late nineties in social work and social policy literature, Ellen commented –

Once again it was the development theorists whose impact was the most important. Human Development, appropriate technology, 'small is beautiful', the roles of women and youth in development, environmental issues such as the negative aspects of uncontrolled mining and forestry development were key issues during this period. But at the same time, we were working to develop more appropriate models to assist individuals, families and small groups.

In differing ways, but primarily through working in multicultural practice and/or teaching contexts, theorising in the eighties saw a number of respondents move from structural to more complex understandings of practice contexts. Those respondents began to engage with the problematic of universalising theory and how to reconcile local or site specific practice with an increasingly homogenised dominant discourse of what constituted economic development at the political level.

Engaging the personal with the political – the increasing impact of feminism:

Hence, while some respondents in the eighties were finding a mix of structural theory overlaid with race and culture as a helpful tool in their emerging reflective analysis, others were expressing their concerns about the rigidity of a 'one size fits all' approach, especially in international contexts. Not all respondents however found engagement with theories problematic or difficult. For many, engagement with theory was a continuation of the growth of consciousness they had encountered during the seventies, wherein respondents had started to move to incorporate feminism into their structural understandings and this group embraced the new theoretical developments, especially those based on feminist understandings with enthusiasm. H from the WIWE group had no problems in integrating her growing feminism with her socialist perspective and Sin similarly recalls the influence of both feminism and socialism which 'provided me with an academic and personal analysis from which I could inform my teaching and personal decisions'. Marli similarly 'continued to develop my structural-feminist approach and also became interested in developing feminist social policy' at the same time that her loyalty to social movements, especially the 'women's movement and the indigenous peoples, the peace movement and the labour movement, continued and strengthened'. Jane, still a student in the early eighties, 'relished the opportunity while at uni to learn about feminist theory', naming socialist feminism as an aspect of feminist theory that 'given my cultural background, acknowledged the cultural and class dimensions of women's experience'. Socialist feminism to Jane also 'reflected a shift in thinking about women and the social construction of gender'. In the early 80s, this theory proved a profound 'personal, political and professional awakening' which had ramifications for both Jane's personal and professional life.

Bridget also names feminism as her strongest theoretical influence during the 80s. In hindsight she felt that she was influenced to consider feminist perspectives by her colleagues who had introduced her to the writings of such as Dale Spender and Mary Daley. However her involvement in the women's movement and the differences in understanding between 'hetero' and 'separatist' feminists led Bridget to 'became a bit perturbed by issues of choice, versus doctrinaire approaches to feminism'.

Anne also identified feminist thinking as 'more influential than any other theoretical orientation' in that period of her development, both professionally and personally. Having now moved into academia she felt she was exposed to more theoretical positions than she had been while a practising professional. Anne reflected that as the 80s progressed –

In other words I'd lost – well not lost, but it was secondary, the structuralist, socialist/communist influence that I'd had from the seventies was subsumed into my feminist thinking. I didn't think so much about issues related to class, I was much more focussed on gender issues at that point.

This pattern of moving into academia and engaging with theories, most notably feminism is a recurring theme with the responses about the 80s, as is the perceived gap between theory and practice. While taking on higher education has already been mentioned, the engagement with literature as part of the job was also highlighted. K from the WIWE group found (perhaps conversely) that feminism gave her the confidence to do her PhD. Pearl similarly feels this engagement with feminist literature 'gave me a few more tools to think through some of these issues', although she laments that this occurred at the same time that the structure of universities changed and academics thereafter found it difficult to sustain engagement with the field.

Incorporating feminism and anti-racism into class analysis

For Athena it was the intersection of class and gender through her work with the union movement that primarily informed her teaching and practice at this point. Pointing out that at the beginning of the eighties the discourse of class was the primary theory that was used and that this was reflected in the texts, Athena cited

books by Corrigan and Leonard, Simpkin and Galper as her early primary influences. But ‘then came Statham’ who ‘was the only one who talked about feminism’ and later Fiona Williams who incorporated anti-racism alongside a (black) feminist approach. In Athena’s view however feminism in the early 80s was primarily seen as a middle class activity in social work courses and ‘very, very marginal to the curriculum’. As she recalls –

It was books by Daphne Statham and particularly I remember, Fiona Williams, that really gave a voice to bringing together in the social work literature, issues of class, gender. I found the writing really gave me a language with which to talk about some of the practices. I feel like – certainly when I was working in psychiatry, the sort of work at a tacit level was informed by feminist reading, but there was nothing written about it that I knew about at all. In university, it was seen as things that women played with. It was only later in the mid 80s that I engaged with these (British) writers and was able to place it at the centre of my teaching. So it was a very long journey.

Consequently, in the early eighties, women in the study had all engaged (albeit at different levels) with structural issues and in reading about feminism were largely able to link structural situations with the personal and practice issues in their lives. Once they became aware of this, it was about practice informing theory for many women. In social work this was quite a radical turn around in the way theory was perceived and this legitimisation of (women’s) experience ultimately had quite important ramifications for the way scholarship in social work was perceived. However whilst much theory was built on the run and certainly utilised in teaching, it was unfortunately rarely documented at that point. Furthermore, in that much of this conscious reflection on theory coincided with the women moving from field practice into academia, there is an indication of a perceived gap between theory and practice, certainly at the level of practice. This period however, marks the beginning of ‘critical reflective practice’, in Australian social work which arose primarily out of engagement with structural issues and feminist practice as well as the complexities of specific locations of practice. Importantly, the resonance of the idea of the personal as political was realised by respondents at this time. Much of the activism of the period centred around creating spaces for the legitimisation of women’s perspectives. And this was as exhilarating as it was (often) simply fun. On this added dimension Athena recounted –

for me it was meeting people like CJ and SF and we were all on the women's committees together and we'd have girl's nights in the dorms and we'd talk and talk. And it was fantastic. I suppose in the 80s I made a decision that it was through the union movement that I would make a difference, and that was like the collision of class and gender. But I wasn't using it for class because I knew about that. I was using class as a vehicle for women.

This comment mirrors my own experiences of hilarious women's nights when women staff (both academic and general) would meet intermittently for dinner at local restaurants. These sessions were great for breaking down barriers between staff members and as such made for positive team building, increased collegiality and ultimately a more cooperative working environment. As such in my view they represented a fine example of feminist leadership. I don't believe the male staff ever followed our example. These group outings continued through the eighties and up until the late nineties until work pressures made it increasingly difficult to find the time on a regular basis.

Really getting to the complexities of the personal is the political – parenting

If at this point the personal and the political started to intersect for many women through their reading, teaching and practice, then it was none more so than for those women who were trying to combine this with effective parenting. For these women the realities of combining parenting and career often made life appear somewhat surreal. Madonna was 'pretty much involved in the personal with child rearing' through the eighties, feeling as a result that she was 'out of the action for most of the time'. This despite the fact that as well as giving birth to her older child in 1982 and then twins in 1986, she taught in TAFE and in her state welfare department. Madonna was also actively involved in ...COSS, AASW, WEL and Nursing Mothers before returning to her position in a federal department in a management position. Here she became involved in supervising and in social policy and administration 'dealing with issues of income support and inequality'. Not surprisingly perhaps, Madonna recalls the eighties as 'all of a blur really'.

From these experiences Madonna remarked with some attitude of self deprecation, 'I see the eighties as a dead decade, personally and politically, and, as my kids would say, even the music was horrible'.

Imogen also saw much of her life in the eighties as centred around child rearing and juggling this and her responsibilities as a (newly) part time university educator, and on this she spoke of her initial feelings of inadequacy and marginalisation. In explaining why she was not actively involved in on campus industrial issues or at the vanguard of feminist teaching she pointed out –

I was a mother in the 80s, and I was really busy getting dinner on the table...I had three children and was consumed with being a mother – and that's a very consuming task. And in the eighties I really wasn't clear about anything any more as I was just busy surviving, because looking after three kids and being a part time tutor and just trying to justify your existence is a terribly consuming activity.

Referring to her part time and contract status, Imogen remembers feeling apologetic about her existence as 'I thought they'd stop me coming if I didn't deliver'. Hence in living the theory that she felt others were 'just' teaching or reading about, Imogen commented,

So, all those issues about casual work, part time work, how it dis-empowers people, I was enacting it and I was really grateful that anyone could give me a job, 'cos after all I was a mother with three children.

At the core of these latter responses is the gendered discourse at the time. That the notion of mothering and the sense of responsibility attached to this role can have such an impact on the lives and the confidence of highly educated and clearly competent women, begs the question of the power of gendered roles around parenting. Is the discourse of mothering so embedded in women's consciousness that their role in parenting becomes the ultimate in the private/public divide? In the instances cited above, both women had (supportive) male partners and it is interesting to speculate whether these partners came equally unstuck or whether their parenting role resulted in them viewing life through quite the same foggy lens...if I were a betting woman.....?!

Integrating experience into theory, achievements and struggles along the way

Certainly these reflections on the schizophrenic existence that women academics/professionals experienced, concurs with Smith's (1996) 'bifurcated consciousness', the term she used to describe her straddling of the public and private worlds she inhabited and moved between as a parent and academic.

For most of the women in the study the theoretical developments of the eighties were inextricably linked to their experience, be that parenting, social work practice and engagement with community groups or reflective teaching. As such there was very little 'ivory tower' syndrome evident in participants engagement with abstract theory, nor was there seemingly much engagement with the corporatist welfare state, rather the concerns about social policy were much more immediate and embedded in practice. Links between theory and practice had been perennially stressed in social work courses, and the links between the personal and the political informed in part by writers such as C. Wright Mills (1959/70) and Paulo Freire (1970) in earlier years. However it was the engagement with the gendered nature of the personal and political aspects outlined in feminist understandings that challenged traditional and positivist notions of scholarship. This provided a strong base through the eighties for the development of critical reflective practice as a foundation in many social work courses in Australia through the nineties and beyond. This evolution of theory through the eighties was not without struggle and incorporation of feminist theories was often met with much resistance from the establishment, from students and often from other women. Invariably some women were put in 'no win' situations that sometimes required creative energy to overcome. At worst the experience of backlash from both students and anti/non feminist staff was isolating and demoralising. This often led to feelings of disillusionment. As Zenobia remarked, often –

The taste of feminist success was great, but then when it seemed that change had been stalled it was hard to find people who were willing to continue the journey. I often felt that my own learning within feminism also stalled and that there was some idea that 'women had it all'. I always said that if this was having it all then I felt short changed! I was constantly trying to empower women around me and was myself empowered, often by the most unlikely people, some of whom were men. Always using feminism as my rationale for whatever change I was trying to instigate, I became adept at using the system to make change and was then often criticised for

working within the system rather than fighting against it. I believe that I was able to be more effective during these years knowing my way around organisations and being able to work them in ways that brought about change.

Despite strong resistance, through collective discussion in supportive groups and national networks such as Women's Electoral Lobby and Women in Welfare Education, (WIWE) which came together initially in 1982, women in universities were generally able to achieve much change through the eighties. These changes ranged from the incorporation of feminism in courses, the introduction of women's studies units and through dialogue and strategic lobbying, shifts in awareness on gender issues at the highest levels in universities. These shifts ultimately played out in the introduction of EEO and Affirmative Action programs alongside education programs on sexual harassment. Feminist Social Work academics played a key role in these national changes. The greatest shift for social work education at this time however was the shift to incorporating feminism as a key component of critical reflective practice.

Largely as a result of backlash however, by the end of the eighties there was a strong push by the establishment within universities to modify women specific units to 'gender'. While a number of us reluctantly bowed to that requirement, it was not without some measure of discomfort and the sneaking suspicion that somehow that we had been coopted and cheated. Further, given that women's equality was far from achieved, a growing perception that the cause of women's emancipation had indeed started to go backward.

FRAME THREE: IMPACT OF WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Incorporating women into the curriculum

Influenced by the growth of women's studies courses in many universities in Australia at this point, many social work courses in the 1980s integrated specific women's subjects into their curriculum. In the late seventies and early eighties, feminist authors from the UK (Barrett and MacIntosh, 1982; Land, 1978; MacIntosh, 1978/81; Pascall, 1986) had written of how women's dependency on men is reinforced in social policy. These writers pointed to the ways that women are defined by the state by the prevailing sexual division of labour as carers for men and children and other roles in the private/domestic sphere. They argued that women are inevitably disadvantaged by the assumption of dependency inherent in social policies and that the institution of marriage is 'very likely to render them dependent, deprived of personal economic security as unpaid domestic workers and disadvantaged in a competitive labour market by their domestic responsibilities' (Baldock & Cass, 1983:xii). Barrett & MacIntosh (1982) similarly argued that the ideology surrounding the family (familialism), perpetuated the assumption of women's dependence on a male breadwinner and social policy based on this, inevitably sustained the separation of the public and private spheres.

In the early 1980s Australian authors such as Baldock and Cass (1983) also argued that social policy reinforced women's subordinate social status. In pointing out that in reality in Australia in 1982 'of all women over the age of fourteen, only one in three could be presumed to be fully supported by a male partner' (1983:xiii), these authors argued that social policies assuming women's dependency were seriously misguided. Baldock and Cass also maintained that while in the Australian context political gains such as women's pensions and supporting parent benefit, family allowances, advances in childcare and women's refuges explicitly redistributed benefits for women, all of these gains were under constant contest and open to review.

In social work by the mid eighties feminist scholars in Australia had begun to scrutinise their practice from a feminist perspective. In their landmark edited work from this period, Marchant and Wearing (1986) provided a forum for women scholars in social work in the Australian context to write about the issues they grappled with in

both their practice and teaching. In bringing together practice reflections in this way, these authors provided social work educators and students with tools to make sense of individualised experiences from a feminist perspective. The book also provided inspiration to other feminist academics in social work to take up the challenge and incorporate feminist analyses in their writing and educational practice. Wearing (1986) for instance, in outlining the divisions within feminist understandings of the time helped us make sense of the tensions between feminist practitioners. By pointing to the differences in emphasis between radical feminism, Marxist feminism, liberal feminism and socialist feminism which incorporated an understanding of cultural difference, Wearing foreshadowed the complexity of understanding uncovered much later by post-modern and post colonial feminist scholars. Importantly, in this work Wearing also outlined the conservative or what she called ‘anti-feminist’ dominant view of women and many of us shifted uncomfortably in our seats as we were challenged to think of how entrenched our everyday assumptions about women had become. While with hindsight this article may be criticised as somewhat over-prescriptive, at the time it was useful in assisting social work students and academics to make sense of their differing understandings of feminism and also in group discussion to focus on what they had in common. Similarly Marchant (1986) provided a feminist critique of systems theory as a practice model that reinforced women’s traditional role in the family and as previously mentioned, I was personally inspired by Smith’s (1986) argument in the same volume for a feminist pedagogy that equated transformative education with consciousness raising.

Women’s voices – impact of women’s movement

Mixed feelings: Experience of feminism

In addressing the question about what impact the women’s movement/feminism had on their lives through the eighties, not all responses were positive. Linda for instance claimed that she ‘moved away from the women’s movement and feminist theory’ during the eighties as she ‘found much feminist writing (with few notable exceptions) had become alienatingly polemic and uncreative’. Jill also believed that feminism impacted adversely, creating pressure to ‘do it all’. This led to a sense of guilt over any minor lack of time that she spent with her children. As she said ‘I interpreted feminism to place a lot of pressure on me to be a superwoman – to combine full time

work with parenting’. Ruth on the other hand alluded to the tyranny of distance stating simply ‘Not much, I was cloistered away, 200 miles from the city’ and hence in her view somewhat removed from developments in feminist theory and understandings.

Other responses indicate that women had clearly linked feminism to their theoretical understandings, but also saw feminism as empowering personally. M from the WTWE collective saw feminism as empowering in that ‘it made me feel I could do everything’. Similarly H discovered that her ‘personal discoveries broadened out with role model of feminists’ in her job, while F ‘started to challenge earlier beliefs’. Millie tells of how she began to have a ‘better understanding of feminism as a counter to oppression’, but also mentioned that after discovering feminism she felt more comfortable returning to paid employment ‘rather than just rearing my children’. For Jane seeing life ‘through a gendered lens was powerful’ and ‘feminist theory certainly had an impact in my developing social work practice’. Jane saw her social work placements during the eighties as opportunities to understand different forms of women’s oppression and as she was largely engaged in working with young women with disabilities, feminist theory became a vehicle for ‘acknowledging their experiences of oppression and liberation’. Developing a feminist consciousness was not without cost however and Jane tells of looking at her family of origin differently and of ‘major ideological differences between my parents and myself’. This in turn led to ‘heated arguments’ and finally, a ‘clam recognition that we held different views about the role of women in society’. So while feminism provided respondents with a view of the world that assisted in the naming of their experiences, it did little to help negotiate the fallout in relationships that ensued.

Feminism in practice

For Pen feminism provided an approach that gave ‘me additional ways of seeing – of working’. While Pen saw her primary theoretical orientation as grounded in ‘political economy’, overlaid by theories of race and cross cultural issues, feminism provided an important point of reference in the eighties because –

the recognition of the importance of process was a critical and valuable lesson – I’m still learning about it. The valuing of the intangible, the subjugated knowledge feeds into my thinking and approaches to work in a whole range of areas. That said, I also looked beyond feminism and was informed by other perspectives.

Similarly Marion saw feminism as a theory or movement was a ‘sort of vague backdrop’ against which to ‘look at lived experiences and social interactions and ask questions all the time’. For Marion feminism was also a basis for critical reflection in which ‘we evaluate our own positions and practices for their potential oppression of others’.

Other participants saw feminism as directly impacting of their activism and achievements. Bridget had by this stage moved to a ‘very conservative’ university with a ‘small L liberal as head of department who *allowed* (I wouldn’t go so far as to say encouraged!) me to develop and introduce an elective on Women and Welfare’.

This small gain had ripple effects however and the women’s elective –

led to my becoming the convenor of the Women’s studies section of the ...conference held at ... in 1987, and in turn this led to the introduction of a gender studies subject in the master of Social Work degree and, within the wider university to the establishment of a Women’s Studies Centre.

Bridget adds that she also continued to work in the ‘radical social work tradition’ which resulted in co-authorship of the first Australian social work text in that vein. She also spoke of her work with a feminist collective which ‘took on board feminist and anti-racist perspectives as well as those of class’. So again feminism was a bridge to incorporating other change oriented perspectives, breaking down the binary thinking that hitherto accompanied ideological frameworks. Bridget also noted that throughout the 1980s ‘there were great WIWE (Women in Welfare Education) conferences which reinforced feminist perspectives in my work as a social worker/community welfare educator!’.

For Sin feminism was the stage for her activism on women’s issues in both policy and practice. By the late 1980s Sin recalls that she was involved in feminist politics in higher education and social work, but she also became involved in feminist social work activity and part of this was forming ‘strong friendships with like minded women’. As she recollected –

It was an exciting time as feminism was strong in my work place and with my friends, many of whom were leaving their marriages and forming lesbian relationships as an alternative way of living and loving. I remember feeling we could do everything and anything. Women's coalitions were developing in all workplaces and government policy was supportive of feminist initiatives. I began researching and publishing and was determined to make a career out of my job and stay true to feminist politics. I was chair of the EEO/AA committee at work and saw many policies and strategies introduced to help women achieve some sort of equity in the workplace. I was also beginning a longitudinal study into women in higher education as well as planning to do my PhD. I attended conferences on women's issues and began to travel overseas to international events. I loved it and was excited to be an academic and have such freedom to think, debate and argue for structural changes for women and students in Academe. I was a committed feminist and help form groups nationally and internationally that sought to promote women's activities in social work, eg WIWE and women's caucus of IASSW. I helped start an academic journal for women academics and began researching with a feminist lens!

In similar vein Marli reflected that the women's movement affected her work and her personal life totally, but she recalled 'it was often disappointing'. Marli often felt isolated in her feminist activism as –

in some years I was among only two or three other women (often the students) on the Academic board at.... I was an elected Council member and sexual harassment advisor – we were making change, but it was slow and often hard.

Marli saw her involvement in initiatives such as sexual assault centres, WIWE and women's studies in community development as chances to start from scratch with feminist principles and this was 'very exciting'. But for Marli there were significant acknowledgments as well. During the eighties she was appointed to the State Premier's advisory Council where she became friends with the aboriginal woman who was also appointed. Later Marli and the woman concerned worked together on introducing indigenous studies into the social work curriculum in her State. Marli was very proud of this achievement and saw it as one of the high points in her career during the eighties.

Advancements for indigenous women in PNG were also the key points mentioned by Ellen. The impact of the women's movement in that context was that –

women were now more vocal and women's groups, as well as individuals were now prepared to raise issues of concern. Violence in the work place and in the home, were among these issues.

Ellen also noted that this was a time when there were more women students and women began to be appointed as departmental and section heads in the public service, although as she points out, the ‘proportion was still very low’.

Back in the Australian context Beth was still teaching at her university whilst maintaining her contact with the women’s movement through her involvement in women’s refuges. While she considered that the women’s movement was getting more recognition in the eighties, Beth felt that ‘it was still an uphill battle. Women’s refuges got funding but fairly minimal’. Remarking that she felt that universities were probably more accepting places than most for women to work, Beth felt however that ‘we were in a feminist ivory tower, often’. In being promoted in her job Beth felt she ‘did not have many of the personal experiences of discrimination that many women lived through’. However although she felt ‘allied to the women’s movement’, and ‘feminist consciousness raising put in an appearance’, Beth did not consider herself an activist, despite no doubt much hard work on behalf of the refuge movement. This of course begs the question as to how the feminist activist of the eighties was perceived, what it was that made some women and not others identify as a ‘feminist activist’ or whether we as women were internalising popular (mis)perceptions of ‘feminism’ of the time.

Feminist campaigns

As far as Zenobia was concerned the ‘impact of the women’s movement’ was inherently bound up with the success of feminist campaigns. She had been part of a women’s collective in Queensland actively campaigning for funding for women’s services in the town. This group was able to effectively utilise a visit by the newly elected Prime Minister (Hawke) to advance their cause. Zenobia’s story of the feminist campaign highlighted at the front of the 1980s points to a creative and successful campaign strategy. In 1986 Zenobia relocated interstate to set up a Sexual Assault Centre and was happy that at last she was working in feminist inspired service delivery although there was some resistance to the centre from the (predominantly male) hierarchy in the local hospital. Zenobia wrote of resistance and backlash played out through a lack of resources and entrenched sexism in the workplace thus –

Although I was in a feminist service, the hierarchy of the hospital were not impressed. On my first day the medical superintendent advised me that they didn't really want me (the position that is) as they had wanted a heart/lung machine and on this basis they had returned the capital works money with which they could have build a specialist centre. I did not have an office and carried my cardboard box of books around and sat in whatever social worker's was not around on that days desk.

One incident that stands out was with the deputy CEO and the Medical superintendent when our policy person from the sexual assault education unit visited. The medical superintendent sat and rolled a pen with a naked woman in it up and down during our discussion. We then went to the Deputy CEO who had a tattoo on his shin of a naked woman on a dagger. He sat with his trouser leg up and flexed the muscle so that all we saw in our discussion with him was this woman rippling. That year at the Christmas party the medical super told a rape joke when he had my attention and some of the blokes laughed. I was naturally outraged and suggested to him that he had a problem and left the party. We did not communicate for the following year other than hand written notes which he usually left under the windscreen of my car.

When the next Christmas party drew near the Chief Social Worker was concerned that we speak (why I don't know) so she orchestrated a topic (motorbikes) that was neutral so that he could save face. There had been much discussion obviously and so Santa came over and tried to kiss me!! I think it encapsulated that sexism was rampant. I of course was a humour less feminist!! I realised that I would have to start looking for other work as I felt that I had done as much as was possible with the current management and that someone new would be able to take the service to the next level. The woman who replaced me wore stiletto heeled shoes, didn't carry a case load and had a six month waiting list within a month of starting.

At the end of the day, much of the hard work put in to advance the feminist cause stumbled at the political level. The institutional sexism that Zenobia pointed to in the legal system also found its way into political lobbying. This ultimately impacted upon proposed legislation that would have benefited victims of sexual assault. As Zenobia succinctly put it –

I trained 450 staff in the Area Health Service in Mandatory Notification only to be faced with a situation where the legislation was not proclaimed, (it) seemed like a terrible waste of energy.

Needless to say, at this point Zenobia thought it might be time to move on again, work-wise, thus pointing to the significant personal cost of maintaining a principled feminist position in a strongly resistant patriarchal climate.

Jez spoke about her experience of the IWD marches which was one of the ways her feminist convictions were expressed through the eighties and on. To Jez involvement in a number of small campaigns such as fighting for sexual assault services and going

to reclaim the night marches, was important simply ‘in terms of being present and just watching things happen over the years’. Further, to her the IWD marches were a consistent form of political expression – and she would take her camera and hence in interview was able to ask the question –

Do you like old photos? I have photos of all IWD marches! I’ve got them all, I took my camera to every IWD march, so that would be a really important thing for me, marching, being political like that. I used to feel a real sense of guilt if I missed something. It was a real commitment.....I also ran into friends that I never saw at any other time. Perhaps we met in the early eighties and continued to meet at women’s day marches in Oct and March.

Feminism in Service Delivery

Working in a psychiatric unit of a major hospital and developing a service for women who had attempted suicide gave Athena plenty of material to reflect on in terms of her emerging feminist consciousness. As she stated simply ‘I think there is nothing more graphic about watching feminism at play than working in a psychiatric unit’. Athena initiated a service for women who had attempted suicide as –

...every Monday you would come back on ward round and there would be one or two admissions of women who had attempted suicide over the weekend. Nothing was done and they would just be sent home.

Athena developed a proposal that every woman who had been admitted for attempting suicide should be referred to her so that she at least could see what the women were going home to. According to Athena, the women would stay in hospital for only a very short time and ‘because most of them were defined as ‘hysterical’ personalities, they weren’t worth bothering with’, meeting with the women uncovered many of the issues that feminism is concerned with.

So work in that area opened up the whole area of domestic violence because many of these women were in really abusive relationships. It also opened up the area of the family court, a lot of women were having real struggles with the family court. It also opened up the whole area of separation – a number of women attempted suicide when their kids were leaving home, they had no-one.

However it was the blatant sexism in the treatment of attempted suicide by women by psychiatric professionals that upset Athena the most. As she stated –

I also observed psychiatrists, some women, but mainly men who were incredibly sexist and incredibly brutalising to their women clients. They classed most of them as having hysterical personalities – inadequate personalities and so on. It was a real eye opener. To be honest I didn't challenge most of them up front, I didn't feel confident to do that. But I felt that by working with the women who had attempted suicide and were referred to the unit in an everyday way, I could provide a meaningful service to these women who otherwise would get nothing. But I don't think those psychiatrists were called to account for their behaviour in any way.

According to Athena some of the psychiatrists were later taken to court by some of their clients for their abusive practices and in reflecting on why she did not feel able to challenge the practices at the time remarked –

I did talk up, but if I knew what I know now and could take it back, I would be a much more effective practitioner. I think what I did was the best thing I could do under the circumstances. Remember I was a young woman, but I had a good network with a much older social worker and we really supported each other in quite meaningful ways, although we were certainly aware that in the pecking order of the team that our power was at worst marginal and at best conditional.

So although she was keen to resist wherever she could and was creatively engaged with challenging the system, as a young and newly graduated female social worker, Athena felt herself caught up in the patriarchal nature of the model of service provision with which she was engaged. Athena's story encapsulates the employment situation and the entrenched institutional sexism of the time, especially for young women.

Backlash/resistance/ambivalence

Another point that was highlighted was the issue of backlash, especially in education which had started to creep in by the end of the eighties. As well as a developing resistance from students and practitioners about the need for 'this gender stuff' in the curriculum, for Jez the backlash was most obvious around women and violence. The focus on men's violence against women was 'found to be problematic for some conservative members of the community and even the Labor Party'. Zenobia saw this backlash in terms of 'experiencing the change from a pro-feminist stance that of having once again to defend'. She tells of how having experienced many victories in the court system in relation to sexual assault, 'the tide turned and the barristers personalised the feminist stance of our work and it became almost impossible to win court cases, even when they seemed 'open and shut'. Madonna also experienced

backlash as a response to the initiatives she was trying to establish for women as part of her work as women's coordinator at TAFE. She related the story of trying to organise something as simple as a women's lunch and was taken aback with a rather nasty incident of sexist backlash that she described thus –

TAFE was a pretty hostile environment; many of the men did not want me there. I organised a women's lunch and got all these really hostile and aggressive letters in my pigeon hole. TAFE was the ultimate bastion of where 'blokes who were blokes' teach.

While these incidents of backlash were quite blatant, Marion also mentioned how at the state government level, EEO policies were often subtly subverted by the bureaucrats who were responsible for their implementation. As she explains –

I don't remember the dates that well, but I do remember the rhetoric of managerialism that transformed women's rights to equal employment opportunities into economic arguments. Many of the people that worked there (EEO) basically 'worked for management' and told anyone with a grievance how they could redress *their* problem and make themselves more acceptable in the internal job stakes. I was pleased when we had EEO policy, but the gloss soon wore off when I saw how people subverted the policies and learnt to discriminate and harass others without leaving any 'real evidence' or something that would be accepted as a grievance under the legislation. As I was once informed by the EEO when I phoned with a grievance, if it's not mentioning the categories of discrimination or harassment, you don't have a complaint.

Backlash and resistance occurred within the women's movement as well however. For Pearl the tensions that she experienced between various women's groups in the late 70s and early 80s in trying to get women's services established in rural areas continued up until the time she left to commence work at her university. Pearl was saddened at the polarisation that occurred and saw it as inherently counterproductive and as such perhaps as damaging to the women's movement as the backlash that was occurring elsewhere. Another related issue that Pearl identified from the time is that the enactment of social policy in relation to women's issues by feminist bureaucrats was often contradictory and ambiguous. So while the policy was there, in that initiatives such as the women's health policy unit were developed, the process of implementing policy on the ground was often fraught with difficulty. In this instance it was a lack of skills on behalf of the women staffing the policy unit to resolve disputes about direction for service delivery. As Pearl commented –

They were led by some women who were quite strong and I think very broad minded and willing to accept that there were a number of positions, and they fairly determined to get the best solution for the community I think. However they seem to have been taken over by people who didn't help to resolve the conflicts that were going on. They weren't social workers, they were policy people, bureaucrats. I remember that we were disappointed in their level of analysis and their inability to separate out what – I guess at the time we probably would have liked them to side with us – but at another level we were disappointed that they weren't seeing that there were legitimate ideological positions here, let's facilitate a process that is going to resolve some of this stuff. They could have pursued this, but they tended to be rather more reactive than I think was helpful in the situation.

So while feminism as a theory informed the policy decisions, enacting them on the ground required reflective skills and practice that did not automatically accompany the feminist understandings.

Patriarchy within?

Notions of collectivity and cooperation in feminism were fine in theory, but there was some perception among participants that often the reality did not match the ideal. It was differences between women colleagues that was cause for concern for Imogen and Athena and to make this point they referred to what they perceived as a culture of political correctness in the WIWE network. The Women in Welfare Education network in Australia came together in 1982 as a loose national collective of women educators in social work and welfare courses to support women in addressing the gender imbalance in welfare curricula and to support women in progressing their academic careers. Many of the participants have been or continue to be an ongoing part of this network and have found the collective to be a major source of support. Athena and Imogen both felt that their relationship with the WIWE network has been ambivalent however. Athena spoke of how she had attended early meetings of WIWE and read the feminist writings that were largely coming out of this network and she remarked –

What upset me about their writing was say that women did casework and interpersonal helping skills and family therapy, but they didn't do policy, they didn't do management, they didn't do social administration and that these were the territories women should be colonising. In the very act of doing that, they undervalued casework. They marginalised casework and group work and working with families as being conservative – as being the ruling class, as being patriarchal. So at the very time they were de-constructing what it was to be a woman social worker, providing services to women and some men clients, I think they were in some ways enacting – their critique was endorsed by patriarchy... And what I felt was that

we were claiming men's territory while we were devaluing the work that women do, we were devaluing case work and group work.

Athena pointed out that her practice combined individual work with a strong community activist background and hence she 'never saw social work in categories, to me it was quite seamless'. She told of presenting a paper on this at an early WIWE conference and although some women supported her she felt 'very marginalised and like a leper' because she was making a claim for the personal. Athena felt that at least in the early culture of WIWE –

the only way you could be political was through management and policy. You couldn't be political through direct practice. The only way you could be political through direct practice was through community work, you couldn't be political through direct practice by working at an individual level....so I've always had an ambivalent relationship with WIWE as I found that a very painful experience.

Imogen also revealed her problematic relationship with WIWE. Of the perceived tension between counselling and activism in social work practice Imogen commented 'there was no openness to exploring what the difference was, it was very much shut down of difference', then went on to relate her WIWE experience thus –

I have to say you reminded me of my WIWE experience. When I came back from America in 1994, there was a WIWE conference in Perth, and they were saying how difficult it was for women to get PhDs. And I think A had pointed out in celebratory mode that we had someone in the room who had just achieved a PhD, and one of the women said 'Oh Poof, an American PhD, they are not worth anything!' So that just reminds me that sometimes the processes within feminism needed honing up in terms of honouring what the principles were about and recognising where people were coming from and valuing all women wherever they are and making a space for dialogue. And I think all of us still all have the potential to shut people down.....

Hence as gains for women were realised through the eighties, they were often met with varying levels of resistance, often from what were perceived as unlikely sources and sometimes even from within. Issues of political correctness within the movement sometimes blinkered the vision of potential sites for change. In this sense feminist activists were often (unwittingly) opening themselves to the criticism of reinforcing the oppressive relationships that the movement prided itself on challenging. This understandably led to some feelings of disillusionment and ambivalence in those women who were working very hard to initiate positive changes. It is also an

argument for the importance of ongoing critical self review as a key factor in reflective practice and in living the idiom the ‘personal is political’.

Personal Challenges/Notable Achievements/Special Moments

The critical moments and challenges that the women cited to the eighties were varied and reflections ranged between what was happening in their work situation to intimate details of private lives. Again responses varied from simple one liners to complex and highly personal recollections of what was going on in their lives. Millie cited her critical moments of the eighties as ‘becoming a university lecturer, (and the) 1987 stockmarket crash’, while Anne simply cited her critical politicisation around the industrial issues that she experienced as a key factor. Jill spoke of her personal battles and her continued activism. For her the death of her mother six weeks before her first baby was due was ‘an intensely sad event’. At the same time she spoke of her struggles to support her alcoholic father and how she ‘continued to be active in left and feminist politics at the community level’, especially in relation to her involvement in a women’s community information centre and women’s shelter. Ruth cited completing her master’s degree and ‘tentatively entering academic life through my first position’ as her major recollections. For Jane however, the ‘sudden death (suicide) of one of my mentors at Uni certainly challenged me to think about the high pressures on women to achieve’.

Linda’s main recollections were of her increasing disconnection with the women’s movement and a specific moment of awareness that occurred around this issue.

I remember attending a public lecture given by Sheila Jeffries and feeling this has so little to do with my life or the life of the women I work with.

For Sin it was ‘feminism mainly’, but it was also ‘hard to remember as I was also overwhelmed with my career and my children who were very demanding in their own special way’. Bridget recalls moving into senior positions and becoming very career focussed as her prime moments of the eighties, but at a more personal level –

This was reinforced by discovering we were unable to have children and by my partner’s encroaching disabilities which lead to my taking the role of sole breadwinner. It was also encouraged by the climate in the uni (among women at least!) of needing more women to move into senior positions.

During the eighties Bridget was promoted to Deputy Dean of the faculty of Arts in her university – a major achievement!

In a foretaste of the impact of economic rationalist cuts to services through the nineties, Ellen cited the Bougainville crisis as having a lasting impact on PNG. She felt that the increase in unemployment, especially among young men combined with rural and urban migration and the continuing deterioration in services had a huge negative impact. This was compounded by corruption in government which was to become an even greater problem, but there were positives as well, as she pointed out ‘at the same time, self help programs initiated by women’s groups and local communities were a countervailing force’. Having played a role in training the social work graduates who initiated these services Ellen was able to confidently claim –

When I retired from the University of Papua New Guinea at the end of 1989, social work graduates were working all over the country, many in policy and planning positions who were working to develop local strengths and problem solving initiatives.

A fine achievement indeed.

For Pen, one of the most important periods that happened in her life in the eighties and which affected her profoundly was her migration to Australia. Not only did she go from being a married woman to a single parent, ‘as a migrant starting in a new country, I certainly found my status reversed from middle class in T....., to being at the bottom of the ladder in Australia’. This experience has led to Pen undertaking a ‘fair bit of advocacy work in both paid and unpaid positions’ especially with migrant families in her continuing belief that people should be supported in gaining access to opportunities in this society.

One of the major challenges that Zenobia recalled of the eighties was fallout from the first death from AIDS in her town in 1985. In a salient reminder of the impact that this epidemic (which in some ways characterised the eighties) had on communities and with characteristic panache, Zenobia related the story and the intensity and the difficulties of her involvement thus –

A friend who had been ill for some time – had every test, but nothing showed up and then the last test showed he had AIDS. He was hospitalised and the Chief Social Worker refused to allow social work services to this man and his partner and family. I then had to go in as social worker when he was a close friend. His parents did not know he was gay, the community was reeling from the shock waves. We knew he would not live long and it was about 7 days in which I don't think I have had to encounter and deal with so many new and different, but equally difficult events – it was as if my life was speeding by me and I couldn't stop and think about anything.

As this man had an open relationship he had many lovers which raised the problem of testing. Many of those requiring testing were my staff so again I had to do the pre-test counselling and organise a situation where the test could be done through the Commonwealth Labs for anonymity and at the same time do my paid work at CC. I felt it was musical chairs, but the music never stopped long enough for me to sit down.

The finale to this event was the funeral. P had been a chorister and had a fabulous voice so the service was held in the Anglican Cathedral by a priest who was gay and a social work academic. We invited everyone to come dressed as if it was a dance party, so you could imagine the colour, leather etc. the Cathedral was massed with flowers, but the snag was that the funeral directors were loathe to have the body in the coffin. There were no clear guidelines then, so they refused to dress P, so we felt it was poetic justice that he would go to his grave naked in front of the Lord – he would have been rapped! Only problem was, we didn't know whether the coffin would actually have the body in it. We had arranged for a contact to give the nod and when we got that it was such a relief and the service was one of the most spiritual that I have attended and there have been many since the AIDS epidemic.

As far as Lilith was concerned one of the key things about the eighties was the insight that 'theory is always steeped in practice – always closely intertwined, some people practice, practice, practice, with little preparedness to step aside and reflect'. So for her this period was one in which there was lots of reading and lots of reflecting on her experience of 'global relationships and the realisation that what is written is not what people are'. Pointing out that learning about international politics (from books) is different from understanding the realities of people as they are encountered through working on the ground Lilith spoke of her personal experience and distress. Speaking in 2001 just after Sept 11 and reflecting on her overseas experiences of the eighties Lilith suggested –

Things like the possibility of bombing Afghanistan has different significance when you know seven or so people who live in Kabul. Or in Lebanon when we heard that six people we know had been hit by a truck and killed, or in Algeria when three brothers were killed in a flood.

Another key life choice for Lilith in the eighties was studying in the US and the epiphany that she no longer ‘needed to belong to patriarchal institutions’, something that she has with difficulty been trying to avoid ever since.

Hence for the most part, feminism and the women’s movement became an integral part of the lives of the women in the study throughout the eighties. While some of the respondents reported ambivalence about feminism, most notably in alienation from perceived political correctness, for the majority feminism became the largest theoretical informant of their practice and carried through as a key guiding principle in the busy political labyrinth many felt their lives had become.

FRAME FOUR: SUMMARY

However the context of the eighties was received, what comes through in the responses is that for most of the women life in the eighties became increasingly complex. Also coming through here is a deeper and more integrated understanding of how the personal intersects with the political. This understanding through the eighties was informed largely by feminist theory but expanded upon through reflections on practice experience, higher study, from parenting, the migrant experience or in work and study overseas, and in some instances, from an ambivalent relationship with the women's movement itself. From this deepening awareness it seems that throughout the 80s, participants started to move away from general understandings of structural disadvantage into working more with specific groups. Through all of this complexity, almost without exception, the women remained – or became - activists for social change in whatever field of interest they were involved. If the activism of the seventies had been generally focussed on social change at a macro or policy level, in the eighties the locus became more specific and for most represented an involvement at some level with women's services. In an era of corporatist understandings at the policy level, this may well have reflected an increasing marginalisation of the welfare lobby from policy and political process. Given the growing elitism associated with decision making at the policy level, the shift may also represent a start of the move away from collectivist understandings. Irrespective of this question which will be addressed further as we move along, the eighties became a time of many and varied achievements for the women in the study.

At the practice level the women were involved in establishing innovative projects that challenged traditional models of social work practice. In universities women were involved in unions and in establishing women's rights through the development of equal opportunity and affirmative action programs. Many were promoted to senior positions within university or public service hierarchies. Many combined parenting with their career and took the opportunity to utilise their social work and policy development skills in issues around childcare and parenting. Many were involved in the refuge movement or in organising reclaim the night marches or in research and developing policy addressing violence against women, or in lobbying for sexual assault centres. Others were invited onto key consultative committees on women's

policy issues and in working with indigenous groups on human rights campaigns, while others worked in development contexts or made strong links with international social movements campaigning on issues as diverse as AIDS or the environment.

Despite these achievements, as the 80s came to a close however, there was a sense that optimism for the future began to wane as increasingly social change theory and feminism began to be challenged by the discourse of individualism that accompanied a move to the right in political culture. Women in the study experienced this as a general sense of weariness, but also in increasing marginalisation from decision making and at a more sinister level in some instances, serious incidents of backlash against feminism and collectivist ideals which were to continue well into the nineties.

PART III

1990s

***THROUGH THE PAST DARKLY: FREE MARKET
RULES***

Certainly the demands of maintaining an equitable relationship and marriage have been interesting and I think this has been an area of success. My partner and I share the domestic and parenting very equally and I think the women's movement has created some room for these developments to occur in relationships.

Jane

I experienced probably the worst part of my career and felt absolutely worn down and disillusioned with women as colleagues.....I think this decade was for me a time when I felt that I had to reinvent myself. It was a new experience to be seen as a dinosaur because of my beliefs – I expected this at the end of my life rather than in the middle. It seemed that all the things I held dear were no longer seen as important or relevant by others. Feminism was over, identifying as a lesbian was to marginalise myself and as for collegiality and friendship, that was for others. I felt a deep sense of aloneness and other than remaining involved in areas that were feminist oriented, I could have curled up in a corner and not been missed. It seemed that my contribution was expected, but not acknowledged in so many areas where it had always been of great strength and creativity to myself and those involved.

Zenobia

Post modernism just took us out of that space where you were right or wrong, and opened up being able to have conversations and actually work with difference instead of making judgments about difference. And of course I think that working in aboriginal issues was always post-modern and it was necessary to move away from the dominance of modernist discourse..... which shaped what we were doing. We were talking about feminism or racism or other things, but within a framing of you are right or wrong, it's this or that. And I think post modernism lifted the veil over quite a lot of stuff. Opened up things for enquiry, research, wondering, questioning...

Imogen

Thesis diary entry

In reflecting on the 1990s while waiting for my questionnaires to be returned in mid 2001 I wrote –

'IF GOD IS ALIVE, HE (USED ADVISEDLY) HAS GONE MAD.....

I sit here six months into the third millennium writing a thesis that earnestly seeks a better way. In the background reports on Radio National suggest that the Japanese, who have given the world the beauty of Zen, have reputedly bribed a number of poorer nations with the promise of significant aid to vote with them to restore whaling in the South Pacific. Every night on the news, Palestinians and Israelis continue in their quest to destroy each other, with no compromise on either horizon, and given the entrenched belief on both sides perhaps no compromise is possible. Tamil suicide bombers attack the airport in Colombo taking out a number of airforce planes and specifically targeting Sri Lankan Airlines, leaving numbers dead and thousands of tourists in Sri Lanka without means to leave the country. In Genoa at a G8 summit the British Prime Minister claims to represent the poor while 150,000 people outside protest against increasing gaps in wealth distribution within the free market economy. At the same venue anti globalisation protests spill over into violence and one protester is killed. A dubiously elected US president waxes eloquent as to why the US should not be part of the Kyoto agreement on global warming, allowing the largest polluter in the world to unashamedly continue to poison our atmosphere with green house emissions. Self proclaimed representatives of God in Afghanistan have removed women virtually overnight from the public sphere and banned them from receiving any form of education or health services, let alone independent income. It is said that women are the new beneficiaries of economic globalisation as they are the ones who are most employable, and given most jobs. Yet under this global regime in many countries of the majority world, women work in free trade zones or for sub contractors to multinational companies in conditions of less than subsistence pay, seven days a week for long hours, in unsafe and often toxic conditions. When cheaper labour is found in other countries, companies relocate virtually overnight, leaving those women who may be supporting families and have migrated from the country at the mercy of the burgeoning sex industry. The treasurer of the Liberal Coalition government in Canberra proclaimed this morning that globalisation helps the poor. I'm sure his assumptions about the distribution of GDP is some comfort to those whose health needs immediate attention; who have no roof over their head; those who want work and are unable to find it; and those women in the majority world and in our suburbs who have effectively become 'the call girls of the global labour market' (Friedman, 1999)'.

Two months after that diary entry, planes piloted by Islamic extremists ploughed into the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York City. In my view the world wide move to a market economy with the moral anomie and alienation that accompanied it through the nineties fuelled fires of nationalism and religious extremism, particularly in those countries where the gaps between the haves and have nots expanded rapidly over the course of the nineties. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, whole peoples gradually started to feel that they had little control over the breakdown of traditional culture as it was gradually replaced by values that accompanied rising individualism, greed, commodification and consumerism as part and parcel of the transition to market economies.

Peace activism and international feminism, personalising the nineties, Jo's story.

Against this backdrop my own experience of the nineties was of relative privilege and economic comfort. I started the 1990s in angst at the breakup of my long term relationship and with my confidence and self worth totally shattered. The idea of single parenthood second time round was not a bit appealing to either myself or my daughters, however this time I was better prepared financially to support my family as since the mid eighties I had been a full time tenured academic. Just as well, as like many women in that situation there was very little financial support forthcoming from my ex partner and I really did not have the time or emotional energy to proceed to claim our rights through the court system. I was also better resourced in terms of knowing where to look for emotional healing and to seek help to lighten the baggage I had taken into the relationship that contributed to its demise. My current partner and I have travelled since the end of 1991, writing, teaching, living, and writing Phds together as well as renovating the occasional house along the way, but we travel cautiously, knowing that there can be no guarantees in any relationship in this uncertain world. We both remain however similarly committed to the cause of a socially just, environmentally sustainable and peaceful future for the world.

The nineties were also for me a time of expanding my horizons in terms of my social activism and of an increasing awareness of the need for critically reflective and creative approach to my work and educational practice. There were a number of events that I recall that inspired these revelations. In 1991 as well as meeting my current partner, I was introduced to the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. In 1915 Jane Addams, a social worker in America had joined with a number of women from all over the globe to join in dialogue with German women at a meeting in Den Hague to jointly suggest ways that the carnage that was World War 1 could be stopped. Unfortunately the suggestions these brave women made were not taken up until after the First World War and formed the basis of the League of Nations. Subsequently Jane Addams became the first social worker to receive the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of her efforts in establishing the Women's International League and her dedicated work towards lasting peace. On a trip to the USA to research and write an article on women's peace movements, I met and was inspired by Elise and Kenneth Boulding with whom I stayed in their cooperative Quaker enclave in Boulder, Colorado. In the footsteps of Jane Addams, Elise had just finished her term as International president of WILPF and Kenneth was well known internationally as a critical economist. The couple were also known and respected worldwide for their activist pacifism, I remember with fondness walking to the local pond with Kenneth to feed the geese while discussing the links between the global economy and (lack of) world peace. This gentle and unassuming but great man left an indelible impression that fired my enthusiasm for exploring the links between social and economic justice, nonviolence and the need to live harmoniously with the environment. Later Elise took me to my first WILPF meeting and it was through this organisation that I discovered my current interest in international women's movements. At that meeting we celebrated the 85th birthday of Irene, a Jewish woman who had been a member of WILPF in pre war Germany and who had seen her whole family taken to the gas chambers. She and her husband survived the concentration camps and escaped to the US with the help of some gentile family friends. I was in awe of Bianca, a woman of similar age to myself who had walked across America in the interests of peace, who in her spare time had delivered food and other consumables to war torn El Salvador, risking at every moment the potential to become one of the 'disappeared'. I was totally blown away by the young black lesbian law student who so capably and confidently chaired the meeting, as I was inspired by feminist leadership the group of women projected as a whole. This group of diverse and fascinating women had moved past their individual differences in outlook, to a commitment to the common cause of non violence, social justice and peace activism. In WILPF I had found an organisation where

my philosophical and theoretical understandings had a home wherein I could use my community development, policy and educational skills to make a difference. I just had to be involved with this inspiring organisation that then, as now, had so much potential to change the world.

1995 was another watershed year for me. I had been on study leave researching women's activist groups in Sri Lanka and (as a long standing interest), had visited the Mondragon cooperatives in the Basque region in Spain. I had also interviewed a number of women peace activists in Northern Ireland on how they saw women's involvement in the peace process before attending a course on globalisation and sustainable economics with Vandana Shiva at Schumacher College in the UK. This centre for ecological studies was initially established in the spirit of spreading the 'Small is Beautiful' message extolled by Fritz Schumacher in the 60s and 70s through placing holistic, ecological and sustainability issues at the centre of education. The course with Vandana opened my eyes to the parochial and even privileged nature of social justice debates and moved my feminism to more ecological understandings. The Schumacher experience per se instilled in me the awareness of the need to take a much more holistic view of change. As a committed feminist I had been aware of the personal as political message for some time, and through Freire (1970) also the need for education as a process to be consistent with the social justice principles that we were trying to instil in students. It was not until I experienced education at Schumacher that I really understood the importance of living social activism. I became aware that the community created through the simple act of preparing meals with other social activists was as important to the social change process as the change of consciousness experienced by listening to Vandana's (significant) words of wisdom. As I had worked in and taught community development, at a head level I had intellectualised the importance of shared simple activities as important to the creation of networks and the development of solidarity, I had not however experienced the buzz of interconnectedness and ripe possibility that the philosophy of learning and doing that this pedagogical model brings. In later visits to Schumacher, my spirit and faith in the possibility of achieving change have been renewed. While the privileged nature of my particular experience needs to be acknowledged, along with the privileged nature at education that Schumacher provides, the renaissance of thought aligned with activism that characterises the pedagogical process at Schumacher and similar centres of learning in other parts of the world, was inspirational and very exciting. It would be very hard indeed to leave such places unmoved by the strength of commitment to creating a better world that is shared by participants who attend the college and which is at the centre of the Schumacher educational praxis or without a shared commitment to challenging those politics and economic practices that would have it otherwise.

In 1995 also it was as a member of the Women's International League that I travelled on the Peace Train from the WILPF congress in Helsinki to Beijing via Eastern Europe and the old Silk route through China where I participated in the United Nations' Women's conference in Beijing. En route to Beijing on the train, I developed and coordinated workshops for peace train participants on the social impact of economic globalisation, in large part sharing the information I had gleaned from the course at Schumacher with Vandana Shiva. I was surprised at the time to find how few peace train participants were familiar with the term, given their international connections and commitment to peace and social justice issues and indeed, the mission we were undertaking. Each day from the comfort of our train we saw the impact of the encroaching free market economy on the countryside in those countries previously closed off by the Iron Curtain. In cities where the peace train stopped overnight, we were greeted by women's groups whose issues were directly a result of the rapidly changing social and economic structures, which we documented and presented at Beijing. I was stopped in my tracks in the streets of Sofia, by the mournful strains of a well played violin and in doing so encountered at an individual level the impact of the sweeping changes since the breakdown of the Soviet Union. The violin player, a man in his late seventies

perhaps, had previously played in a major soviet orchestra. For him the changes meant he no longer had a state pension and sustained himself by playing his violin in the streets. Needless to say this particular musician was unimpressed with the transition to a market economy and the increasing impoverishment of his people. In Romania close to the border with the Ukraine, we passed traditional sustainable farms where agricultural production was still rotated between four plots and the harvest in progress was accomplished by the whole community with horses and carts. As we moved closer to Bucharest and Ceausescu's obscenely beautiful palace, built on the blood and sweat and poverty of the Romanian people, traditional farms gave way to the acres and acres of rather sad looking corn on which the Romanian economy would depend for the year, no expensive pesticides or fertilisers here, but no 'comparative advantage' either. In Bucharest I was saddened by the insistence of very well educated Romanian women trade union leaders that we be given Coca-Cola as refreshment for morning tea, rather than their traditional drinks. This undoubtedly more expensive offering was because their understanding of western culture from the media was such that they thought Coca-Cola was what we all drank and would prefer. I was similarly, but for different reasons, saddened and embarrassed by the fact that a number of my American peace train colleagues, educated social and peace activists all, could stand up (as guests) in the Ukraine parliament in Kiev and presume to tell the Ukrainians, who had welcomed the peace train with brass bands and provided us costly and lavish entertainment, that they need to do more to dismantle their nuclear arsenal. The misguided but very well meaning hospitality of the Romanian women and such blatant bad manners of my American colleagues both spoke volumes to me about the global power of (largely US) cultural imperialism. It also brought home to me that non-violence starts with critical self reflection and the understanding that all people be accorded fundamental respect no matter what their politics.

Given these experiences, on arrival in Beijing a short time later, it felt like I had been transported to another planet when I attended a forum of Australian women to discuss the concerns that they would be raising. Having just witnessed firsthand the experiences of women in those countries in transition, the policy concerns of women in Australia seemed comparatively insular and privileged – and the discussion (for me) uncomfortably and unsettlingly parochial. Also at Beijing under somewhat interesting conditions, I presented a paper that attempted to make sense of all these experiences. I argued (along with many others) at that conference that women, at the forefront of change needed to work globally to develop collective strategies if we are to effectively challenge the negative impacts of economic globalisation. What emerged from this conference for me was that such strategies needed to draw on feminism's attempts to link the personal with the political, the intellectual with the spirit, the practical with the academic and encompass respect for diversity as the basis for a global women's movement that works for sustainable peace. In my view such peace would only be possible in the wake of social justice and a more equitable distribution of the world's wealth.

My experiences of the nineties outlined above represents – as do the women's stories that follow, a metaphor for how the personal, the theoretical and the situational intersect in the political, and in the nineties, whether acknowledged or not, globalisation left none of us untouched.

FRAME ONE: POLICY CONTEXT

The globalised economy – the signature tune of the nineties:

Unfettering global capital – the political economic context of social policy in the nineties

In the 1990s it became obvious that the fall of the Berlin Wall in the late eighties meant the metaphoric fall of walls surrounding the sovereignty of nation states everywhere. According to Friedman, (2000) the triumph of the market economy was that those walls, which were not just made of soviet concrete, but of protective tariffs and regulated capitalism; principles of collective ownership; diverse political systems; not to mention ‘unique forms of life, politics, economics and culture’, (Friedman, 2000:45) were all virtually blown away with the changes wrought by the demise of State Socialism. Arguably such changes have had dramatic effects on the ability of nation states to set policy agendas with far reaching effects generally and profound implications for the welfare of peoples worldwide (Fenna, 2004).

Politically more right than we ever dreamed possible

It is my observation that the expansion of global capitalism throughout the nineties was corresponded by a shift to the ideological right in politics not seen since the late 1800s in industrialised countries. While this had started in the late 1970s in both the UK and USA under the political leadership of Thatcher and Reagan respectively, it reached its zenith in many countries, including Australia in the mid nineties with the election of a right wing coalition government. These political changes completed the shift from Keynesian to monetarist economics started in English speaking countries particularly in the late 1970s and the accompanying shift from social democratic to neo-conservative political formations and discourse. This shift has had far reaching effects on employment and welfare entitlement, has influenced how state organisations are run and has affected the standing of the critical tradition in universities, all of concern to the women in this study.

Traditional socialist and democratic political parties even adopted the economic doctrine of market liberalism as exemplified in the Hawke – Keating Labor government in the Australian context (Fenna, 2004; Jamrozik, 2005). Throughout the nineties, the dominant political discourse was that Keynesian ideas of universality, full employment and increasing equality had simply outlived their usefulness and were no longer relevant or appropriate to the conditions of a global capitalist economy where all aspects of production are increasingly characterised by flexibility and transience (Jenkins, 2001; Leonard, 1997; Mishra, 1999). This phenomenon has been named the ‘blind worship of the Goddess TINA’, (Jenkins, 2001), the doctrine that ‘There Is No Alternative’ to the market economy, a term originally attributed to Margaret Thatcher in the 80s. Through the nineties the dominance of the discourse of the market economy arose largely unchallenged by traditions both left and right of the political spectrum. Greeted with outright ideological enthusiasm from the right and it seems, with somewhat less enthusiasm, but a certain inevitability from the old left, liberals and social democrats (Castles, 1999; Fenna, 2004; Leonard, 1997).

Within this understanding, notions that the state would remain the primary arbiter of well being were no longer seen as reasonable. Rather notions of collectivity, community, solidarity and social protection, liberal aspirations on which the welfare state was founded, were expected to give way to the economic realities of individual competitiveness, flexibility and survival (Leonard, 1997; Mishra, 1999). Within the ideology of the free market, there was little room for collective responsibility. The outcome of this entrenched discourse was increasingly to roll back the responsibilities of the nation state through decreased spending and increased reliance on the non-state sector for service provision and the provision of welfare, health and education. Keynesian understandings of full employment as the first line of defence against poverty appeared long gone even within so called liberal discourse. In English speaking countries at least, global capital was now able to exercise such power over national governments that they were no longer able to pursue, even if they wished to, policies such as full employment and redistribution of wealth towards goals of equality through universalist welfare objectives (Fenna, 2004; Jamrozik, 2001; Leonard, 1997; Mishra, 1999).

Hence through the nineties, the ideology of the market became so much a part of dominant hegemony that the policies of the political right were adopted without serious challenge and up until time of writing at least have become to be seen largely as ‘commonsense’. Throughout the eighties and nineties in OECD countries policies of neoliberalism (economic rationalism) and its tools deregulation, privatisation, instrumentalism, commodification and entrepreneurialism, have been vigorously pursued by governments of all persuasions. The imposition of such policies have increasingly characterised the Australian political context since the late 1980s and certainly since beginning of the 1990s with, it is suggested, serious implications for distribution of wealth and resources throughout Australian society (Dillon, 2000; Fenna 2004; Jamrozik, 2001, 2005).

The Australian context in the 90s: economic rationalism

The political context in which the women in the study found themselves as they entered the 90s was a Labor government in power federally which had progressively introduced major economic neo-liberal reforms since floating the dollar in 1984 and the stock market crash of 1987 (Bryson, 1991; Fenna, 2004; Jamrozik, 2005). As Australia’s position in international markets declined post 1987, the federal government under the leadership of Hawke and then Keating, introduced policies aimed at tightening government expenditure. Hence the inherent tensions between a social reform agenda aimed at creating a fairer society and the adoption of a free market economy were realised. These reforms included corporatisation and privatisation of some government owned utilities, such as Qantas and the Commonwealth Bank and over the course of the decade either contracting out of government services or the introduction of ‘user pays’ principles (Bryson, 2001). It was this Labor government which introduced fees for tertiary education and reintroduced means tests on old age pensions at the same time that they increased surveillance of people on unemployment benefits and social security benefits (Jamrozik, 2005). Other measures aimed at increasing economic efficiency by the Labor government included floating the Australian dollar, reduction of tariffs on imported goods and the deregulation of finance and product markets (Bryson, 2001; Jamrozik, 2005; Fenna, 2004). The crisis that had hit other industrialised countries’ welfare states in the early eighties came to Australia as we entered the 1990s. The term

for this acceptance of free market (neo-liberal) ideology as the driving force behind government in Australia in the late 80s and early 90s was termed ‘economic rationalism’ (Fenna, 2004; Pusey, 1991).

Although the restructuring of the Australian welfare state under Federal Labor at this point had firmly returned it to a residual model (if it had ever been anything else – and there is some debate about this), there were some modest reforms and some preventative programs set in place for certain population groups (O’Connor et al, 2003). Apart from the reintroduction of Medicare, pension rates increased to 25% of the average wage for the first time, labour market programs were developed for unemployed people and attempts were made to deal with poverty, especially in families with children in impoverished circumstance via a means tested children’s allowance (Bryson, 2001; Jamrozik, 2005). For the aged, the Home and Community Care (HACC) system was introduced, enabling older members of the community to remain in their own homes as long as possible (Bryson, 2001; Jamrozik, 2005; O’Connor et al, 1999). Aboriginal self determination and multiculturalism were both key policies under Labor, and by the time Keating had passed over the baton to his coalition successor, much had been achieved in terms of Aboriginal land rights (Fenna, 2004).

The greatest reforms of the Hawke era however were those set in place for women. Although tertiary fees had been reintroduced and universities had started processes of competitive tendering to offset decreases in federal funding, women’s education levels continued to increase to the extent that by the mid nineties women made up more than half of tertiary enrolments (Summers, 2003). Universal rights to 52 weeks maternity leave were enacted as was an abortive attempt to introduce 12 weeks paid maternity leave. Childcare increased dramatically through the provision of funding for child care centres and fee relief for parents. Similarly discrimination was targeted through expanded EEO and affirmative action programs for women as well as other disadvantaged groups. A Women’s Budget program had been introduced in the 1980s in which departmental expenditures were scrutinised for their potential impact on women, this continued through the early nineties, typifying a policy development named ‘gender mainstreaming’ which aimed to extend women’s policy beyond special interest programs (Whitehouse, 2004). After 1993 however the women’s budget was replaced

by a statistical yearbook and gender reporting which according to Sawyer (2003) were only partially implemented before the coalition government was elected in 1996. Another Labor initiative was the National Women's Health Program, funded jointly by States and Commonwealth (Sawyer, 2003; Summers, 2003; Whitehouse, 2004).

Such gains were arguably offset by the Labor government's economic agenda during the first half of the nineties. As Whitehouse (2004) points out, not only were there potential job losses in female industries with programs of privatisation and deregulation, manufacturing - the most significant employer of women was particularly hard hit by structural adjustment policies. In the workforce increasing trends to enterprise bargaining through the early nineties disadvantaged women who were clustered in workplace situations with relatively weak bargaining power. Other writers suggest that the Accord had proved a double edged sword for women. Claims for pay equity among certain women dominated groups such as nurses and social workers were difficult to maintain in a climate of wage fixing principles (Sawyer, 2003). At the same time centralised wage fixing was a welcome regulation device that prevented a widening wage gap between men and women. As this moved to a more decentralised approach in the early nineties, women became more vulnerable to exploitation. The 'Workplace Relations Act' introduced by the coalition in 1996 further opened the way for individual rather than collective bargaining, potentially weakening women's bargaining power further in a climate designed to reduce employer costs (Whitehouse, 2004; Summers 2003). The growing trend through the nineties to extend occupational superannuation ensured that working women were covered through employer contributions. However, it also potentially extended gender inequality by not accounting for women's erratic work histories, extended periods of non engagement with the paid workforce and comparatively lower wages vis-a-vis their male colleagues (Whitehouse, 2004; Sawyer, 2003).

Although it has been accused of derailing the union movement, one of the successes of the Accord was that by the time Labor lost power in 1996, there had been 13 years of relative peace in industrial relations (Fenna, 2004; Jamrozik, 2005). While it can be argued that the trade off by way of cuts to real wages in return for an agreement to maintain levels of social expenditure, largely left big business off the hook in terms of

social responsibility, the Accord did contribute to reductions in inflation and decreases in interest rates (Fenna, 2004; Jamrozik, 2005).

Many of these reforms were either retracted or altered to the point of non-recognition by the Howard coalition government elected in 1996. The unapologetic free market agenda saw radical deregulation of the labour market and a program of privatisation that was through the nineties only barely held in check by too few numbers in the Senate. The changes were compounded by a further weakening of the union movement, hitherto the largest social movement in Australia. Funding to human rights and aboriginal services were progressively cut or changed and the cause of land rights systematically curtailed by legislation impeding the interpretation of high court judgements (Jamrozik, 2005; Fenna, 2004; O'Connor et al, 1999). While Medicare remained, the introduction of incentives for higher income earners to pursue private health care combined with cuts in funding for public health resulted in an expanded two tier health system. Funding cuts to universities coupled with significantly increased fees saw a crisis in tertiary education from the mid nineties resulting in the pursuit of overseas markets for education funding and changes in workplace conditions for academic staff (Summers, 2003). Arguably the quality of tertiary education was also affected by increased staff workloads and decreases in resources for teaching and administration.

Women's services and economic rationalism

Of particular interest to this thesis are the cuts to women's services under the Howard Coalition government. While Summers (2003) considers that women's services at the Federal level were 'cold shouldered' from the 1993 election, arguing that this was a factor in Labor's loss at the 1996 election, actual cuts to women's services began in earnest after the election of the Howard government in that year. The first serious cutbacks to affect women were in child care. Over the four years from 1996 to 2000 some \$850 million dollars was taken from the childcare budget, thus seriously limiting women's choices for work (Whitehouse, 2004). In the second instance, according to Summers, the Office of the Status of Women was seriously weakened by 'appointing as its new head a woman with absolutely no qualifications or credentials to do the job' (Summers, 2003:127) and again slashing the budget by 40% (Sawer 2003; Whitehouse, 2004). Grants to women's organisations were initially abolished, but after some

backlash, the government relented and provided \$150,000 to women's organisations who were prepared to sign a contract preventing them from making public comments on women's policy (Summers, 2003). Feminist organisations like WEL and the organisation that I have been involved with, WILPF, which previously received small amounts of funding to help pay for rent for office space and perhaps a telephone, were no longer eligible by virtue of this 'no comments' rule attached to funding. At point of writing this is still the case. The Register of Women, a list of women suited to serving on various government and advisory boards was also abolished, as was the office of Sex Discrimination Commissioner after her 'voluntary' resignation in 1997 and the Women's Bureau in the Department of Employment and Training (Whitehouse, 2004; Summers, 2003). Another casualty was the Women's Statistics Unit of the ABS which had produced the 'Australian Women's Yearbook'. In like vein the Equal Employment Opportunity Act was reviewed by the coalition in the process of which reporting requirements were reduced or waived and the term 'affirmative action' removed (Whitehouse, 2004). Paradoxically perhaps, these cuts took place in a decade in which representation of women in Australian Parliament increased dramatically in all political parties (Lawrence, 2002; Whitehouse, 2004). Following the 1998 federal election women made up 28.9% of the senate and 23.6% of the House of Representatives, a total of 57 women in federal parliament. By the end of the decade the Labor party had more than met its affirmative action target of 35% of parliamentary seats filled by women (Sawer, 2003; Summers, 2003). Given these numbers, the cuts to women's services raises questions about whether parliamentary representation by women is strategy enough to ensure that women's interests are met or maintained, and conversely, the extent of power wielded in those areas of the parliamentary system where women remain significantly under-represented.

The rise of alternative political parties

Another feature of the Australian political system through the nineties was the rise of alternative political parties reflecting a dissatisfaction or disenfranchisement with the traditional parties, particularly by educated professionals. The environment movement had argued a political case for ecology in many countries for a number of decades, even achieving some formal parliamentary representation in a small number of European countries. In the Australian context through the nineties, the Greens gained enough seats

at both federal and state level to become a force to be reckoned with (Crowley, 2004). Similarly the Australian Democrats, a party founded on small 'l' liberal values gained ascendancy at the Federal level enough to hold, alongside independent members mostly of conservative persuasion, the balance of power (Singleton et al, 2002). These parties, while they had numbers in the Senate and/or formed alliances with the opposition were able to hold back, in some measure delay, some of the regressive legislation that would detrimentally impact on the most disadvantaged members of the Australian population through the latter half of the nineties. With mixed success, these challenges have included resistance to some of the legislative proposals that would have had a particularly negative effect on women and other marginalised groups (Crowley, 2004; Fenna, 2004).

The responses of the women to this climate where increasingly government 'initiatives' for women were aimed at providing support primarily for those in traditional family arrangements, was largely a marked increase in 'busyness' as they juggled the expanding demands on their lives.

Women's voices – context

By the nineties, the majority of women in the study had either moved into academia or were combining teaching with social work practice. At least two of the respondents had moved from teaching social work to either retirement or management positions, but were still involved on the periphery as advisors or consultants to various university courses. Most had undertaken at least some form of post graduate study and a few had completed or were enrolled in PhD study at the beginning of the decade. By the end of the decade, the numbers of PhD completions had grown and at least half the women were in various stages of completion. Most respondents continued their community activism and increasingly saw themselves as active researchers as 'part of the job'. Many were still combining responsibilities of parenting/caring with their full time careers often as single parents.

While some of the women had just started their academic careers, throughout the course of the nineties most became tenured academics and many were promoted to management and senior positions within their universities. A small number had

become head of school/department and another moved through the academic ranks to the position of Professor and then on to Dean. Some had relocated to other universities, but this was not always as a result of promotion or in pursuing promotion, rather at this point in their lives for some the move represented lifestyle choice. It is from these vantage points that women remember the impact of the context of the nineties.

Women's experience of policy context - economic rationalism

The dominant theme underlying the women's key recollections of this period was of the impact of economic rationalism at various levels. The four members of the WIWE group all teaching or involved in research at this stage, all pointed to their fight against economic rationalism as their key memory of the nineties. From her position as university lecturer throughout this decade, Millie too saw 'a much more individualistic society with certain groups struggling against this, the discrimination and disadvantage already suffered by many groups is very graphic'. To Ellen, who had retired from her professorial post in PNG but was still travelling working as a community development consultant in the South Pacific, Australia was a 'very different socio-economic context' compared to when she lived in Australia some 20 years before. Ellen was ambivalent about what she found describing it as, 'in some ways there was more openness and tolerance, in others one felt that it was a more materialistic society'. Ellen also pointed out that funding cutbacks were far reaching with the reduction in aid and 'knowledgeable interest and support' from Australia having a 'cumulative effect on institutional capabilities' on many of the countries in the South Pacific reliant on Australia's help to maintain social and political stability. Linda, recently returned from post graduate study in the US also commented on the conservative swing in the political landscape –

It was in the early – mid 90s that I realised that the rise of the new right in welfare that I had witnessed in the US could become a part of Australian culture/society – something I had never thought was possible in the 70s and 80s. I watched with dismay the election policies of the Howard government and the decline of the Labor Party's ability to differentiate a left agenda.

The effects of restructuring on universities was commented upon by Beth, who had moving into administration from teaching and felt that the period ‘was frustrating, if stimulating’, because –

my battles were with the university to keep a place for social work in the structure. Social Work is not a profit making occupation and during the nineties social work was under threat from a number of quarters. It raised the issue of how much we should ‘join them if we can’t fight them’. I think social work was compromised to some extent by the economic rationalist ideas.

Sin also described how constant restructuring in her university saw many courses disappear including the women in welfare elective she was teaching. Of these changes and the corresponding weakening of union power Sin remarked ‘It was depressing going to work and seeing all the cutbacks in HE (higher education) and the loss of union power meant changes occurred with little resistance – or ineffectual resistance’. Anne, also by now working in full time Academe, spoke of the time and energy that went into ‘all that restructuring business’. Of the resistance to the changes occurring across the board in universities she commented –

We were so much fighting for our own survival as a school, and for the programs and for field practice and for the students as a group. There was a lot of politicking and lobbying that was going on internal to the university, but also HECS fees came in, so it was a macro political thing. We were always demonstrating or writing to ministers, lobbying with our own Vice Chancellors, that kind of thing.

And, according to Anne, the changes impacted on the nature of social work education itself as there were increasingly industrial pressures on academics which ultimately had a flow on effect to students, as well as the changes that directly affected them. As a result –

the work became quite different. There was also a lot of pressure on us to research and then later in that decade to start being entrepreneurial and bring in money to the university. So I was no longer just in a class room with students and doing field visits and that kind of thing. I was now involved in a whole range of political issues related both to my own industrial conditions, but also to the students, eg: The existence of the welfare course, the number of times that nearly disappeared; the pressure to get rid of or reduce the field, despite our very strong political arguments about its necessity and its integration into the course. The fact that I work in a university in a poorer region of, where policy about HECS fees had a substantial effect on our students. And the way they can now be in the program, which is usually difficult for them full time as they have to work, pretty much full time work, fulltime student at the same time, that kind of thing.

The changes had flow on effects and a shift in social values was starting to emerge. In similar vein Zenobia identified a major influence of the time as ‘the oppositional process whereby economic policy and social policy are travelling on opposite pathways instead of one informing the other’. According to Zenobia this has had the effect of ‘social mores being tossed in the air and (the emergence of) a less caring and considerate society’. The resulting culture of individualism was often felt in the classroom where –

students often have little concern for others and are critical of the practice of colleagues when they do field placements. It seems that respect is a lost art form and that the individualistic mode of thinking and working has taken over and that we somehow ‘owe’ the students.

Effects of cuts on service delivery

Bridget, by now in senior management in her university, also referred to the increased workloads and managerialism resulting in cost cutting in universities, but she was especially concerned about the impact of changes in human services. Bridget felt that changes such as ‘competition policy, service contracts, performance evaluation and increasing managerialism’ ultimately impacted most strongly on women’s services. This point was also echoed by Marion who had moved from senior policy advisor to university lecturing by the mid nineties, noting ‘there was no room and no language for social justice at the top’. Marion wrote of her recollections of feminist activism related to the (Howard) government’s efforts to restructure family policy through cuts to child care. She saw the changes in policy as a direct attack on previously collective understandings of responsibility for children and a shift towards a privatised and more individualised understandings of women and of motherhood. In Marion’s view, the cuts to child care by the Howard regime were little more than ‘(c)overt attempts to reward two parent families where one parent is employed in paid work (guess who?) and one parent stays home undertaking child care duties (guess who?)’. As far as advances for women were concerned this particular expression of an economically rationalist agenda was seen by Marion as a backward step. It was to get worse however in the late 1990s –

and the Howard governments attacks on the achievements in legislation and policy for women, aboriginal people and immigrants, and generally on all who are not old, white anglo or heterosexual.

Marion also expressed her surprise that these policies were re-configured with very little concerted challenge from the women's movement, although she did regard the policy developments of the nineties as mixed. Against all the losses Marion pointed to the policy work on standards by the Public Service commission related to diversity as an attempt to 'move beyond gender and take account of race, ethnicity and culture' as a positive move. As she pointed out –

There was at least a rhetoric about inclusivity and I attended any sessions on offer to learn more about this approach as I felt, at least at an intellectual level there was recognition that Australian society was a lot more complex than gender alone.

Underlying the cutbacks however was an agenda to shift resources to more conservative service provision. Jez also expressed concern 'about the losses', especially in her chosen area of interest which is violence against women. The 'individualist push' in Jez's view and the subsequent moving of resources from funding specific women centred services, to a focus on families, as she saw it resulted in a sidelining of issues like violence against women. As Jez elaborated –

I think the changes have been massive, particularly in the last six years (but it was happening before that), around the conservatisation, the focus on families. So while you might have policies and lots of money going into partnerships against domestic violence, domestic violence is a privileged form, but the focus has been on families rather than women's issues and that has masked the situation to some extent. Someone was doing a critique on partnerships against domestic violence, I critique it too. (The idea) brought some good things, lots of resources, but lots of problems too. This person pointed out that that nowhere in the whole theme is the word 'women' mentioned. Men are mentioned, kids are mentioned, families too, but nowhere women? That's a real backward step in terms of women being seen, not in their own right, but as a member of a family. It just masks that gendered violence.

Thus participants identified the way in which economic rationalism impacted over time on universities and on service provision over the course of the nineties, with particular references to policy changes after the coalition government came to power in 1996. The women also spoke of how the individualisation associated with the economic discourse created a culture that is antithetic to caring and collectivity and of how this continues to be played out in the classrooms of social work courses.

Respondents also quickly identified the detrimental impact that the shifts in funding to conservative service provision had on women's services.

This varied according to state context however. In the early 90s women's services under federal Labor were still reasonably well resourced, but this changed very dramatically once the Howard government came to power in 1996. The election of a conservative state government in Victoria in the early 90s however meant that these changes were felt earlier and more keenly in that state. In her comments about precisely this issue, Marli pointed out that at the beginning of the nineties the Federal Labor government was still making changes that benefited women and cited the national strategy on violence against women as an example of this. Her concern about the impact of economic rationalist policies however was mainly at the state level with the election of the Kennett government in Victoria. Of this time Marli wrote,

When the Kennett government was elected in 1992, an era of market management was introduced and advocacy, community development and consultation were opposed. Local government was sacked, and Kennett resisted paying any attention to the early massive street demonstrations against his government's policies. When the federal government also went conservative in 1996, the control of the market continued – associated with a very pro-traditional family ethic and feminist backlash. We were back in the fifties as a welfare state – or so it seemed.

In this context it was increasingly difficult to maintain activist understandings. Pearl also spoke of her experiences of practice, teaching and management in the Victorian context, of the impact of cuts on women's services and those at the grass roots level. Of her struggles to keep some kind of feminist consciousness alive as Head of School and in the rural communities context with which she was involved Pearl remarked –

I guess most of the 'isms' were in some state of eclipse during the nineties. Of course in Victoria we had Kennett which put a damper on those kind of things. I guess there was so little money for services, and so little support for new social developments, I guess feminism in many ways became more a part of people's own personal frameworks and ways of doing and thinking perhaps (if they had bought them with them into the nineties!).

Thus it seemed that the changes also wrought a subtle if discernible shift to a more individualised feminism. Pearl pointed out that with managerialism there was some lip service given to the need to encourage women into management, indeed it seemed that most of the programs that universities offered for women at this point were

largely focussed on encouraging women into management positions. Similarly, in Pearl's view, feminist analyses of the time were mainly focussed on women in leadership, all of which she saw fed into increasingly individualised notions of what feminism was about.

On the other hand, when a Labor government came to power in Queensland, after many years in the political wilderness, Bridget was able to comment of those early years that 'all sorts of initiatives for women were introduced'. Bridget also was of the view that the 'strength of the femocrats nationally was inspiring, (at least in the first half of the decade until little Johnny came to power)!' For Bridget however, who had been promoted through the ranks to Dean and Head of school, the personal cost was high and by the end of the decade she described herself as seriously 'burnt out'.

Personal Impact of Changes

Other respondents also spoke of the personal impact that these changes wrought. Jane referred to her activities in the early nineties as a practising social worker as being influenced by the political environment in terms of 'funding priorities and the whole move to de-institutionalisation' at the time. However on moving into teaching and academia in the latter half of the nineties, Jane also saw the pressures on universities as having an effect at a very personal level. Typifying the responses and the increased pressure to perform at multiple levels Jane commented –

I think the pressures on Universities and the social work profession have impacted on my work. I have felt squeezed in terms of the demands to achieve a higher degree at the same time as be a good mother and teach well. I think this epitomises the dilemmas that many women had in the nineties. Trying to achieve and be a person and fulfil all of the other demands on your time.

Thus the creeping emphasis on conservative economics over the social through the nineties meant for many participants increasing challenges to the core value systems and ethics on which they had hitherto largely based their social work practice and which had informed their teaching in previous years. It also brought for most respondents an underlying and persistent awareness of the tension between the perceived need to challenge the system and advocate for the social, and the potential for compromise leading to the very real possibilities of cooption. The cost for many

was also at a personal level with increasing levels of stress and, in some instances burn out. Whether the restructuring was occurring at the universities or in the diverse range of service provision with which participants were engaged, it impacted, mostly adversely, at every level. This is a recurring theme throughout the responses for the nineties.

Activism

If there was a strong degree of consensus about the wide ranging impact of economic rationalism, recollections on the extent and nature of activism were muted. While some respondents spoke of political activism sometimes resulting in gains especially in the early nineties, increasingly as the decade wore on it seems, social activism often led to disillusion. The activism was also becoming more fragmented and women in the study were looking beyond social work networks and previous collectivities around general social issues to engage with specific areas of interest or focus. While a very few women spoke of being actively engaged in social activism the nineties, most felt that the increasing demands in their respective workplaces meant that they had less time and energy to be involved in more than a marginal way in lobbying for social changes. Indeed it appears that one of the big shifts was that where social activism was a part of the landscape, it was about holding on to gains that had been previously won, or, at the university level, holding on to feminist based curricula and resisting ever burgeoning workloads.

Responses were varied however, while for most the nineties were a very sobering time in the workplace at least, as far as Ruth was concerned the nineties were ‘a critical and liberating time’. Although a self-confessed ‘late starter’, for Ruth, moving from the country to academia in the inner city was a catalyst for significant change at both personal and professional levels. In her own words ‘I became entrenched in academia, divorced, became more strongly activist, taught women’s studies courses and discovered WIWE!’ Ruth essentially felt that moving to academia and to the city enabled her to ‘engage more critically with that context’.

For most of the women however activism continued to be more at the level of engagement with committees and issues of immediate concern within universities,

often to do with challenges to curriculum and maintaining quality of courses. As Pearl commented on the ways things changed –

During the nineties, I largely lost contact with the field – I still have a bit of a foot in the networks in...., but not nearly as involved. And I'm not on any regional or local committees, other than agencies like that. I used to be on all of the committees of management and was substantially involved in all the development of new services and management of some of them. I stepped back deliberately from them when I started my masters and really didn't ever go back once I had finished that. Universities changed dramatically in that time. We were amalgamated, became part of.... during that time and life was never the same again. I don't feel I had the same sort of time or opportunities, so I became much more introspective, more involved within the university than outside of it at that stage. I was head of social welfare and became deputy head of school. So in the nineties it was rather different.

And it was thus for most respondents, for the majority the nineties were a time when the focus of activity narrowed as they became more insular and their concerns more immediate.

Student culture and feminism

The challenges were not all top down however. Zenobia and Bridget both spoke of challenges from students. Of concern to Bridget was the issue of backlash amongst students against feminism, especially she noted from Catholic students in particular who had become very active in her particular university on the anti-abortion issue.

Zenobia had started the nineties enjoying her job as Women's Strategy Officer in TAFE. Her work involved liaising with faculty directors to develop inclusive strategies for women in mainstream courses given that government policy had closed down most women's courses as 'interest only' and not vocational. From this position Zenobia developed and had accepted into the curriculum a 'Wimmin in Welfare' elective, to her an exciting development. However it was not all smooth sailing as she recounts –

At last it appeared to be a way of dealing with feminism in a more up front way. I had a class of about nineteen women who were all very keen to do the subject. At the end of the first lecture I was devastated when one of the women said 'that was as boring as bat's piss – we didn't think we had to read anything – this was supposed to be a cruisy subject'. The next 17 weeks were agonising and quite nerve racking for me. There were about 6 students who did the reading and participated, but I couldn't say that it was one of my better efforts. I put it down to my trying too hard and used a more relaxed format the following year and it was much more successful.

Of these experiences in TAFE, Zenobia was left questioning how ‘the fundamental belief system of feminism could have become so disparate’. Given the competing pressures in the TAFE system, Zenobia soon moved to the university system because ‘I was trying to do my PhD and with the TAFE teaching load could see that it would never happen’.

Creeping disillusion

For a number of women however disillusion set in slowly and the busyness impacted in subtle ways or was realised over time, often triggered by personal loss or cost. For Sin, at this point ‘a full time academic, doing my PhD, working in feminist politics, raising my children, travelling the world and trying to keep my extended family and friends in my life as well’, there was ‘a gradual softening of feminist commitment’. Sin wrote –

I was beginning to become disillusioned with feminism, as my life seemed overburdened and I was doubting whether being an independent person actually was all it was cut out to be. One very special friend killed herself and two others suffered depressive illnesses. Relationships amongst my friends were breaking up and work pressures made it all very depressing.

For others however the narrowing of scope wrought by the economic changes signalled a decisive need for change. As far as Marli was concerned, as head of her department, the pressures created by economic rationalism removed opportunities for those involved in administration to remain active in voluntary activities outside the university. It also in her view detracted from research and publishing, (conversely perhaps) from the beginning of the nineties an increasing requirement for those employed in universities in order to maintain academic credibility. For Marli this resulted in a need to make some hard career choices, in explaining her decisions at the time she noted –

Personally in 1991, I stepped down from the Head of Department and took a non-permanent job at a salary loss and lower rank, in order to get closer to the community of women’s services and action, and do more feminist research and scholarship. The reasons were many – mainly organisational and to do with the destructive pressures for Universities to amalgamate. Looking back, I left thinking ‘the group’ was fine – perhaps I did not sufficiently value my part in it, but also I had worked very, very long hours for many years and I was tired of organisational internal advocacy. In

1991 I moved to a curious mix of old conservatism, yet valuing creativity and critical thought and avoiding some of the managerial technocracy which other universities encountered on amalgamation.

Her new position enabled Marli to continue publication and to work with various human services departments on reviewing services for women at the same time as developing curricula on women's studies among other notable achievements. It also enabled Marli to remain active on many committees and as such her activism remained very much at the level of developing and influencing social policy, especially in regards to the provision of women's services.

The lessening of community activism was lamented by other respondents as indicative of the wider context. While Jez had focussed her attention on issues of women and domestic violence by the eighties, she considered that the politics was 'becoming harder and harder to do..... fewer and fewer people to do it with'. Citing the example of yearly women's marches Jez commented –

As mentioned before, I go to women's marches every year and one of the things that was really positive in the early nineties was that it was a real celebration and an opportunity I would see lots of my friends, but now I see fewer and fewer of them each year. That's a really sad thing for me. Maybe I'm just sticking with what I think is important and thinking other people should be there too. It says something about – feels like a reflection of what is happening generally, there is far less activism. Although I have a sense that it is reviving in the last 12 months or so, but still single issue rather than bigger movements if you like. (There has been) a loss of ground, (the) focus shifted from women to family and we struggled to get those things on the agenda.

Jez went on to point out that while in previous decades there had been a lot of activism on campuses of universities which had sometimes been a trigger for activism in the general community, in the nineties this 'had gone'. Where there was student action in universities in the nineties it was largely around achieving better marks with perhaps some challenge to content or to policies and conditions affecting students, but this too was minimal and attributed as a part of the 'individualist push'. But Jez, like many other participants regretted the loss of the culture of activism on the streets, feeling that it represented a lack of challenge to the structures. Commenting further Jez suggested –

There are some fantastic students, but I think things have changed and maybe I'm still stuck in the seventies or eighties for me, where a lot of work was on the streets and perhaps there's different ways of doing things now. I'm involved in a couple of things (key committees on violence against women). That's not activism for me though. I've been around a few years and you kind of get put on these things after a while. But it becomes harder and harder to operate, even at that level to challenge some of the structures. I have the sense sometimes that I'm brought in to the structures to – not necessarily not challenge them but you know....

Hence rather than feel that these positions could be utilised to the betterment of service provision and seeing the chance to influence social policy in activist terms, Jez felt a certain sense of compromise and cooption. She also pointed to a need to maintain an awareness of the potential contradictions in her involvement at this level.

Tokenism, compromise and cooption

It is interesting that a number of participants iterated the view that their work on various committees that were largely engaged in developing social policy were seen as potentially ripe for cooption. Madonna relocated to Canberra in the early nineties to take up a director's position in a major government department and saw her representation on the board of ACOSS in these terms.

The real danger of the nineties was that of cooption. Knowing that you have to be a part of the solution, but questioning where you draw the line. You've got to be in there, but social work has gone through all these dichotomies, this is the place where change happens, but it doesn't happen there, etc. I think we've moved beyond that to see that the location of change could be anywhere, but the real issue is how you keep the sharp edge and remain clear about your focus and foundation. Social workers, like any other group can lose their focus as to what they are doing and become mere functionaries as much as anyone can. We see practitioners get into jobs and then seem to lose their edge as to why you would have social workers there doing that.

For Madonna the way through these issues was for social workers to engage in continuing professional education, importantly though, professional education aimed – not simply at skill development, but 'about critical reflection'.

In similar vein, Linda, who had also moved into academia in the early nineties on completion of her PhD, found that involvement in education raised some critical questions on her part of what social work students needed to be equipped with to face the challenges of the times. As she pointed out –

Now I had to seriously think about what is social work practice, what are we teaching for, how do we go about doing it? What all of this represented was a challenging to grasp the complexities of class, race and gender in a way that this could be effectively transmitted to students.

Lilith also, who had moved from community development into welfare education and was rapidly promoted to Head of Department in her university, had mixed views of the nineties. On one hand Lilith thought that the nineties brought positive changes, such as ‘lots of feminist critiques (including) lesbian writers, such as Carter’. Her involvement at the community level was also with the issue of violence against women and trying to set up services ‘sensitive to the needs of women in these situations’. When she moved into welfare education she found that economic rationalism provided particular ethical challenges. Articulating the struggle that other participants inferred but did not necessarily name, Lilith suggested that in economic rationalist times there was a need for social work educators to –

get really clever...how to educate people to survive within a system and be creative in challenging a system without belonging to it? (Importantly) – But the journey that we were training them for was one we had to undergo ourselves. How do you remain true to your core principles and ideas and not compromise them while managing to survive creatively within the structures?

If the eighties were characterised by busyness, achievements and marked shifts in consciousness for participants, the economically rationalist context of the nineties was experienced as fragmentation and largely by a sense of creeping disillusion. While the nineties brought some positives for respondents, especially in terms of widening of the theory base to incorporate understandings of inclusion/exclusion, for most this decade represented a narrowing of focus at every level. This was particularly the case for those colleagues who had hoped to maintain a strong feminist perspective in their thinking and in their educational practice. Increased workloads, cuts to services, particularly for women and increasing conservatism culturally and economically took their toll, especially towards the end of the decade. Disillusion and fragmentation was also increasingly evident in the theory base that informed social work education and its increasing distance from social policy critiques. It is to a consideration of those debates that I now turn.

FRAME TWO: THE DEBATES

In the 1990s debates within social policy, social work and attendant disciplines in Australia became multi-layered and varied. As the Australian political context swung more towards neo-liberalist policies, arguments resisting the economic rationalist agenda proliferated, borrowed in part from the experience of neo-liberalism in other countries, most especially the UK. There was a brief engagement with issues of citizenship while the Hawke-Keating Labor government remained in power, most notably led by feminist scholars (see Cox, 1995; Yeatman, 1990/8). By far the most significant shift in theoretical debate however was the move from structuralist perspectives to an engagement with post modern theories and for the women in this study at least, the relationship/interrelationship of this with feminism. While the social policy academy were slow to engage with post modernism, in social work, post modernism with its emphasis on understanding diversity and complexity was greeted with enthusiasm by many and a certain cautiousness by others. Others however sought ways to understand what was happening internationally and found that the political economy critique of globalisation alongside anti-racist, anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist perspectives useful as an informative base for developing policy and practice. While green perspectives had successfully filtered into mainstream political debate, with few exceptions, (Ife, 1991/95) this perspective remained largely on the margins in both social policy and social work throughout this decade, seemingly with little relevance to mainstream welfare debates.

Economic rationalism and privatisation, key debates in social policy

By the 1990s arguments in social policy were largely reactive to the policies of the right, specifically in the Australian context those of economic rationalism and the impact of its attendant strategy, privatisation. In the UK context in the 1980s writers such as Le Grand and Robinson, (1984) and Walker, (1984) had challenged claims for efficiency and choice in welfare provision by proponents of privatisation as flawed, especially in terms of contracting out provision or regulation of welfare services. In addition these writers contended privatisation was likely to have serious implications for social equity, enlarging inequalities in the distribution of resources and widen existing social divisions. In 1989, Graycar and Jamrozik had also expressed concerns

about trends to privatisation of health services, education and welfare services in Australia. These writers suggested that in countries where privatisation of services had progressed some way, the inevitable outcome had been greater inequality in access to services and had resulted in a 'two tier welfare state' (Graycar & Jamrozik, 1989:295). In sounding a warning for the Australian situation, Graycar & Jamrozik pointed out the fundamental incompatibility of welfare state principles and capitalist ideology, noting especially that –

Under the pressure of global market forces, preservation of the welfare state will be difficult and will depend on the economic viability of the countries concerned, as well as the political will of their governments and the support of their electorates (Graycar and Jamrozik, 1989:292).

That the welfare state had not met its initial objectives in creating greater equality within society and the meeting of human need was not seen by such writers as a case for further privatisation of welfare. In 1992, Bryson also challenged privatisation arguments by suggesting that the welfare state had largely achieved its goal of humanising capitalism, and while the more ambitious claim of equality was far from being achieved, there was little point in the current retreat from this objective. As Bryson observed of the Australian social context at that time –

There are still very significant inequalities between rich and poor; men's interests are generally better served than women's, many racial groups are oppressed and other groups are still disadvantaged. Nor is the development of the welfare state proving a continuous and seamless process ultimately leading to a more just and uniform post industrial society (Bryson, 1992:2).

While Australia had historically always had a mixed economy of welfare, in defending the maintenance of the welfare state and resisting the contracting out of services and functions of the state, social policy writers were in effect defending principles of collectivism. Support for collectivity lay in the fundamental principle underpinning the welfare state that service provision should be on the basis of need, not ability to pay (George & Wilding, 1976). This in turn raised the question of whether or not social costs were a matter of collective or individual responsibility, given the ideological assumption informing privatisation is invariably of human welfare as individual responsibility. As argued by Richard Titmuss in the 1960s (cited in Walker, 1984), in the welfare state, the costs of provision of services by the

formal (government) sector fall on the whole population, but at the informal (non-government) level tend to be borne more directly by individuals and families. Proponents of an increased privatised approach to welfare supported a return to residual, minimalist and targeted forms of welfare provision. However, as Taylor and Pitman (1992) pointed out, the growth of the modern welfare state was initially an acknowledgement of the failure of the free market to ensure minimum standards of living for all citizens. Hence it was argued (Bryson, 1992; Le Grand & Robinson, 1984; Walker, 1984) that the transfer of responsibility for service provision to the private or non-government sector was not liable to improve equity, rather it would make existing social inequalities worse. In terms of the impact on women especially, Taylor and Pitman (1992) predicted out that those committed to the ideology of privatisation would also be quite likely to be very committed to the importance of 'the family', usually very traditionally defined. Hence, in this view, privatisation would move the locus of care and service provision back into the domestic arena. These writers termed this phenomenon the 're-domestication of welfare services', the responsibility for provision of welfare services increasingly falling on the unpaid and voluntary labour of women (Taylor & Pitman, 1992:29).

Resistance to economic rationalism - citizenship in social policy

In the early 1990s there were attempts by some social policy writers in Australia to resurrect ideas around citizenship and the welfare state. Beilharz et al (1992) pointed out that the historical obsession with material provision in Australia mitigated against the ideal of community implied in active citizenship and created dilemmas for those who saw provision via the welfare state as a path to same. Pointing out that poverty is more than a fiscal problem, these writers suggested a broadening of understanding of social policy, rather the narrowing that they observed to be occurring under economic liberalism. They also pointed to an expansion of the roles of professionals such as social workers, and health professionals in the shaping of public programs because –

it is possible to argue that during the 1960s and 1970s when their elbow room was greatest, client advocacy and new forms of community participation flourished (Beilharz, Considine & Watts, 1992:154).

While in some measure this was a reaction to the increasingly obvious economic rationalist agenda by the then Hawke Labor government, such questions also arose as a critique of the public management model of the Accord. Much of the debate at the international level about citizenship in social policy at this point in time was led by women (Cox, 1995; Pascall, 1997; Pateman, 1983/8; Yeatman, 1990). In the Boyer lectures of the ABC in 1995, Eva Cox suggested that the importance of social connections integral to civil society was increasingly at risk of being squandered in the search for 'illusory economic development', (Cox, 1995:1). In Cox's view the social relationships that constituted 'social capital' were as important as financial or physical capital to the advancement of civil society. This concept of social capital Cox believed, was increasingly under attack by the social mores of individualism and competition which characterised and accompanied free market ideology. Cox presented a cogent argument against moves in social policy towards privatisation, suggesting rather that collective and communal ownership as part of the common wealth be retained. As a precondition of this understanding of collectivity however Cox's most pointed 'must' was to –

develop social trust, mutuality, reciprocity and a recognition that we work best cooperatively. The collective 'we' benefits is all rather than the singular self (Cox, 1995:80).

From structuralism to post structuralism and post modernism

While citizenship arguments outlined a need for collectivity across diversity as the basis of civil society, the main critiques to come to the fore in welfare thinking in the nineties were post structuralism and post modernism. Political economists and feminists had provided consistent critique of the exclusionary nature of the welfare state from the sixties, arguing the limitations of positivist reductionism as a base for analysis of exclusion and inclusion (see Bryson, 1992; George & Wilding, 1980; Gough, 1979; Ife, 1997; Leonard, 1984/97; Roe, 1988; Titmuss, 1968). Writers in sociology and welfare Academe in the nineties looked to Foucault (1965++) for explanation of the interconnection between knowledge/power and identity and difference. In doing so, such writers sought to explore the nature of professional and political alliances as tapping into 'unspoken dissatisfactions' (Wearing, 1996:33) they had with modernist thought and structural explanations of disadvantage. Within this post-structuralist understanding, it was acknowledged that while political economy

was important, it was not the only determinant of disadvantage. There were other factors that impinged on power in relationships that needed to be considered. Most importantly socio-cultural understandings, how exclusion and marginalisation are constructed alongside notions of domination and resistance and an analysis of the ‘institutional and everyday realisation of meanings and codes around difference’ (Penna & O’Brien, 1998:197), came to be considered central to an informed understanding of historical and political struggle (Carter, 1997; Penna & O’Brien, 1998; Parton, 1994; Wearing, 1996).

By the nineties this post structuralist critique had been eagerly embraced by many social work academics, largely because of its emphasis on reclaiming subjective power and the impact that politics of identity was seen to have on social struggle. The post modern critique – somewhat further along the subjective – objective continuum than its cousin, was equally well adopted in the social work academy. This critique challenged notions of universality inherent in structural analyses as not taking adequate account of the realities of socio-cultural diversity (Carter, 1997). This was of particular use in social work education as it allowed for the development of practice models based on diversity of experience and allowing for context based work. The post modern critique also pointed to embedded assumptions of domination and exclusion within empirical social science that informed the rhetoric of social work and the welfare state (Carter, 1997; Leonard, 1997; Parton, 1994). This critique suggested that power belonged to those who are able to formulate the dominant discourse, thus effectively colonising those outside of this discourse as ‘other’. Like feminism, socialism and anti-racist critiques, post modernism pointed to the failure of the welfare state to live up to its promise of emancipation. Where this critique departed from other perspectives, was in the suggestion that the notion of emancipation itself espoused a ‘singular idea of truth which leads invariably to domination’ (Leonard, 1997:xi). The post modern thesis proposed that all the world’s societies were undergoing a process of profound and fundamental change where notions of universality were replaced with cultural relativism and certainty with uncertainty. Parton for instance depicted post modernity as –

a world which has become disoriented, disturbed and subject to doubt....characterised by the fragmentation of modernity into forms of institutional pluralism marked by

variety, difference, contingency, relativism and ambivalence – all of which (the project of) modernity sought to overcome (cited in Penna & O'Brien, 1998:192).

Similar claims for post modernity were made by Carter who claimed –

Ideologies, philosophies and grand narratives that seek or are premised upon ultimate notions of truth or justice are not only flawed, but dangerous, terroristic even.....there is no universal design and the watchmaker is dead (Carter, 1997:8).

With this emphasis on subjectivity, the notion of 'society' was called into question. If there could no longer be 'society' as an obvious entity with distinct boundaries and definite and established groups, arguably the concept of social justice became problematic (if not contradictory) within a postmodernist stance. Much of what the women discuss below reflects these dilemmas. Indeed, in social policy debates, based largely on empiricist social science and Keynesian concepts of the welfare state, post modernism was slower to emerge and was seen in some circles as essentially contradictory to the aims of social policy, hence largely invisible at least within mainstream critique (Carter, 1997). Where it did emerge, post modernism added to the challenge of dominant empiricist and functionalist paradigms of social policy historically posed by feminist and anti-racist/colonialist critiques in all their guises. In my view, in the 1990s post modernism added a discursive and cultural turn to the evolution of ideas arising from the above critiques alongside political economy and emergent environmental debates within the welfare academy.

The political economy perspective in the 1990s

If post modernism appeared in direct contradiction to the universal and unifying tendencies in modern capitalism (although arguably at the same time an essential part of it). The political economy perspective attributed cultural and socio-political changes over the previous two decades to changes in economic structures rather than the 'cultural turn' as suggested by post modernism. Writers from this perspective (Leonard, 1997; Taylor-Gooby, 1993) agreed that society was increasingly characterised by rapid change and uncertainty, but pointed to the shift from Fordist production to post Fordist production as a major factor contributing to cultural change. While Fordism was typified by mass production and consumption, strong trade unions, hierarchical organisation and centralised planning, Post Fordism exemplified greater flexibility in financial and production systems, leaner production

combined with product diversification and flatter hierarchies of decision making. It also meant however, the reorganisation of labour (weakening of trade unions, leaving collective strength seriously eroded), fed in turn by fragmentation of the workforce and resulting in growth of unemployment and uncertainty (ibid).

This factor combined with the boom in information technology and the unprecedented rise in power of multinational corporations through the nineties indeed created a climate of profound change and insecurity. Leonard (1997) makes a link between the modernist welfare state and Fordism, arguing that the growth of the welfare state was about 'underwriting long term growth and profitability', and connecting economic production with 'interconnecting social relations' epitomised in the welfare state (Leonard, 1997:125). For Leonard, the social relations that arose out of Post Fordism on the other hand were characterised by an emphasis on diversity, individualism, fragmentation and uncertainty and by post modern understandings of class relations and ideologies. This in turn translated to the breakdown of the welfare state. Hence this writer at least, saw post modernism as an *effect* rather than a cause, contextualised as part of a rapidly changing world economy. Leonard (1997) and Taylor-Gooby (1993) argued in turn for a political economy perspective within welfare debates as potentially providing 'a necessary discourse of resistance' to dominant narratives which consistently 'attempt to separate the economic from the socio-political' (Leonard, 1997:125). By the end of the nineties, writers from the welfare academy internationally (Midgley, 1997, 1999; Mishra, 1999) and from the Australian context (Bryson, 1992; Dillon, 1999; Ife, 1997) were urging social work and social policy analysts alike, to engage seriously with debates around globalisation and join with wider social movements to build a broad base of resistance to the negative social and environmental effects of economic liberalism world wide.

The political ecology perspective

Another major critique to emerge in social policy in the 1990s was the ecology or green perspective. The green movement internationally had been arguing an ecological perspective throughout the eighties, even earlier in some cases (see Gorz, 1980; Merchant, 1980; Naess, 1989; Porritt, 1984; Shiva, 1989; World Commission on Environment & Development, 1987). Although these writers warned of the impact

of ecological concerns on human well being, within social welfare and policy an ecological perspective was slow to emerge. Indeed it was not until the 1990s that environmental concerns entered academic debates in welfare and even then were slow in being taken seriously within the social policy and social work academy. In the early 1990s writers such as Ife (1991) brought these understandings to the social policy and social work context. By the end of the decade, writers such as Penna & O'Brien (1998) were arguing for an approach to social policy that looked at the distribution of environmental degradation as reflecting the wider distribution of wealth and relative access to the economic system. Whereas a political economy perspective provided a critique of capitalism vis economic globalism, ecological perspectives provided clear messages about the limits of capitalist growth and what was needed for development to be sustainable. In a political ecological perspective, welfare is defined broadly, relating not just to economic distribution of resources and wealth, but to the impact on populations of environmental change caused by assumptions of limitless economic growth (Dillon, 2000; Penna & O'Brien, 1998; Shiva, 1992, 2005). Of particular concern in this understanding is the varied access that differing populations have to clean air, water and non degraded ecosystems as these, (or perhaps more pertinently, the lack of), in turn impact on health and general well being.

I have argued in a previous publication that social policy, where it took account of environmental issues in the nineties did so after the fact, reacting to environmental destruction rather than proactively engaging with sustainable solutions as an integral part of a welfare understanding. In doing so social policy aimed at incorporating an environmental critique, focussed largely on examining the distribution of costs and benefits of environmental concerns largely within a local or at best national context (Dillon, 2000). Ife (1995) however, drew a distinction between environmental and green responses to what he cited as the existing crisis within the current social, economic and political order. In Ife's view the environmental response sought specific solutions to specific problems, hence for example, an emphasis on the development of technology to solve problems such as the disposal of nuclear waste, global warming and pollution. In that this perspective relied on technological expertise within the existing system, Ife saw this position as essentially reactive,

based in the linear thinking that characterised the scientific, rational paradigm and not questioning the existing dominant mode of progress or providing challenge to the existing order.

On the other hand, what Ife (1995) termed the ‘Green’ or ecological response, saw environmental problems as symptoms of a much broader problem. This ecological response saw the existing social, political and economic order as blatantly unsustainable and requiring change at a more fundamental level. As such this view pointed to the need for an integrated response from both social and physical sciences and an holistic approach to complex questions of sustainability that implied engagement with social, economic, political, environmental and (some would say) spiritual understandings as well. Arguably in the challenges that such an approach offered to the global economic system, such an integrated response needed to go beyond local and national borders to address and encompass international concerns.

While Ife named this perspective a ‘Green’ or ecological response, elsewhere I have argued that the analysis needs to go further to consider the actual distribution of costs and benefits of environmental concerns. A *political ecology* approach incorporates this dimension and reflects the complexity and holistic understanding required to address the need for change at a more fundamental level than most social policy responses to date (Dillon, 2000). While respondent’s concerns through the nineties did not in the main reflect this debate, it is an important part of where I feel theoretical discussion needs to head in the future for social policy and social work and hence I will briefly return to this discussion in the final chapter.

Feminism

Feminist writing in the welfare academy through the nineties had a number of differing but interrelated themes. Over the course of the late 80s and early 90s a number of feminist writers internationally had provided a feminist critique of citizenship, (Cox, 1995; Pascall, 1997; Pateman, 1990; Voet, 1994; Wearing, 1994; Weeks, 1996; Yeatman, 1994). While many writers had argued for more rights for women, these feminist writers raised questions as to the way that women’s citizenship was precluded on the basis of their relationships, roles and obligations within the

family. Given that notions of citizenship had historically centred on public identity and the economic and social status derived from that, women were seen to have been excluded by the patriarchal assumptions inherent in the concept. Notions of rights and duties involved in traditional concepts of citizenship were seen to be problematic when differing gender roles were opened to scrutiny. Feminist debates on citizenship focussed the opposing strategies of attempting through legislative process to fully include women as citizens or whether it was necessary to alter the boundaries on the concept of citizenship per se. In summarising the position Pascall posed the following questions –

Should we try to achieve citizenship for women, in the knowledge of how inadequately it has served women in the past and how fundamental are the problems? Should we reject it as a state of grace reserved for men? Should we try to transform the notion of citizenship, so as to acknowledge the way that the public/domestic divide has undermined women's participation in citizenship as usually understood? (Pascall, 1997:125)

I feel it is important not to dichotomise these positions, while seemingly contradictory, the debate is not necessarily in my view mutually exclusive and indeed both positions need to be brought to the table for discussion.

Citizenship arguments in social policy in the nineties also sat alongside writings from feminists challenging racialised and westernised perspectives of writings within social policy. Williams (1989) had argued the interrelatedness of concepts of 'race' and anti imperialism, gender and class as central to a political economy critique of social policy in the UK context. As the nineties progressed however, much of the critique on the impact of free market policies and globalisation emerged from women activists in newly industrialising countries (see Norborg-Hodge, 1991; New Internationalist, 1995; Shiva, 1992; Sweetman, 1999; Walter, 1999). While from the mid nineties in most industrialised countries women's equality was seen as a 'fait accompli' by many, it was our sisters from those newly industrialising countries who were reminding us that the majority of women in the world continued to live in poverty and oppression; that although women's rights had been legislated for in the UN, men and their attitudes had actually changed very little (van der Gaag, 2004, New Internationalist, 1995).

In Western countries, as the nineties wore on, writings on feminism within social policy thinned considerably, certainly within the Australian context and were largely reactive to changes to welfare funding and the re-domestication of care, especially after the conservative coalition was elected at the federal level in 1996 (see eg Baxter et al, 1990; Sawer & Groves, 1994; Yeatman 1994). While feminism at the local level reached a stalemate in some ways by the mid nineties, this was paradoxically a time when many of us became more engaged with the international women's movement. This may have been a response to the 1995 Women's conference in Beijing, but it was also a response to increasing information via technology that expanded dramatically throughout the nineties. Certainly there were stories of inspiring and creative women's projects from localised situations to active and concerted collective challenge to the status quo in many newly industrialising countries led by women that fired our imagination.

The responses of the women in the study to the question of which theories influenced them over the nineties reflect the diversity of understandings outlined above. By far the most important concern for many of the women through the nineties was feminism. In previous sections I have named the neglect of gendered dimensions in policy as 'gender blindness', on reflection however, I think this description is too neutral a term to describe what is in fact an ideological construct. I concur with Peggy Antrobus' assessment that mainstream policy is in fact 'grounded in gender ideology that is deeply exploitative of women's time, labour and sexuality' (Antrobus, 2004:72). Hence, while mainstream theories remain ideologically gendered at this junction, certainly feminism and the impact of same was of significant importance to the women in the study and for many underpinned their theoretical approach. For others however their commitment to feminism became increasingly fragmented through the nineties and for some, feminist understandings were overtaken or subsumed under post modern or post colonialist understandings. The specific impact of feminism and the women's movement over this decade is considered in some depth in the next section. For now however, we proceed to how the women themselves reflected on theories available to them at the time.

Women's voices – theory

Moving into the post modern

The perceived need for creativity and critical reflection in managing a context unfavourable to social work and social policy aimed at change, was referred to frequently in respondents recollections on the theories that were influencing them throughout this period of time. Most notably over the nineties there was a move from structural theories and feminist approaches to an excitement about and engagement with post-modern approaches in various guise. For many post modern and post structuralist theories provided a salvation that removed the straightjacket of black and white (modernist) thinking and equipped social work with a more satisfactory means for working with the difference and diversity they had historically encountered in everyday practice. As Imogen remarked –

Post modernism just took us out of that space where you were right or wrong, and opened up being able to have conversations and actually work with difference instead of making judgments about difference. And of course I think that working in aboriginal issues was always post-modern and it was necessary to move away from the dominance of modernist discourse..... which shaped what we were doing. We were talking about feminism or racism or other things, but within a framing of you are right or wrong, it's this or that. And I think post modernism lifted the veil over quite a lot of stuff. Opened up things for enquiry, research, wondering, questioning....

and many participants outlined their journey through the nineties to their discovery of post structuralist and post modern theories. Ruth for instance, having moved back from the country to an inner city university was excited by the options, for Ruth –

The sky was the limit, I embraced structural/feminist/radical approaches followed by post modernism and post-colonialism. I had a lot to catch up with. Although working with diversity had been a practice theme, I now began to use a range of theoretical approaches to inform my teaching and practice in a more integrated manner.

While Millie traced her evolution through 'empowerment, feminism, structural theory, the strengths perspective and a move from individualism to collectivism', Jill cited 'post modern critical perspectives' and a moving away from her commitment to 'rigid class politics while still believing in the fundamental principles' as a key development over the decade. Jane also, while seeing herself as 'someone who regards some truths as given', on the other hand enthusiastically embraced the

‘potential that post modern thinking gives us in terms of understanding difference’. While describing herself as essentially a ‘pragmatic, postmodern feminist’, Jane felt that in the nineties postmodern theories had ‘definitely influenced and informed my thinking’.

Sin also, although still describing herself as still a feminist became ‘a little bit more cautious’ in her politics in a climate that she saw as no longer supportive of women’s issues. Sin had moved into some involvement with Aboriginal politics and this was a catalyst for exploring notions of ‘difference, many subjectivities and realities in life’. Bridget similarly cited the emerging influence of post-modern approaches to feminism as of key importance after having spent the first half of the decade working on women and violence issues with a focus on structural and cultural violence. Following her attendance at the UN Women’s forum in Beijing, (1995) Bridget further developed her interest in exploring ‘black women’s challenges and cultural differences’ (in feminism) albeit cautioning ‘against the de-politicising tendencies of post-modernism’.

Marion also cited authors writing in the traditions of ‘post structuralist, post colonialism and black feminism’, as her major influences. While Pen had written of ‘valuing of the intangible and subjugated knowledges’ as important, in the nineties she also considered that ‘theories of race and cross cultural issues have contributed to my thinking’ and added ‘to my brand of feminism, whatever you may want to call it’. Thus for many colleagues, post modern understandings were a logical extension of the theories they were already utilising in their teaching and practice rather than a new or separate ‘add-on’ or distinct theory in its own right.

The influence that post-modern understandings had on research in social work was mentioned as a key factor for Beth who felt that qualitative research gained some legitimacy in the nineties with particular spin offs for social work.

I think the recognition of qualitative research gave social work a status which it had always lacked before, being seen as a profession which relied on practice experience and borrowed theories from elsewhere. Suddenly practice experience was seen as valid.

Post modernism also led to new ways of looking at social work counselling, such as the revised application of Jung's theories and in Art therapy. By the same token Jewel found 'thinking post-modernly' and feminism the most successful approaches for observing the complexity of eating disorders. After training in family therapy, Jewel wrote that she 'deconstructed every taken for granted practice...and returned to the political' in terms of her understandings of eating disorders, an area in which she had specialised, mostly with young women, for some time. But it was when she commenced her Masters on the topic in the early nineties that Jewel was able to utilise post-modern and feminist theories to question the efficacy of the medical model, which had dominated treatment of eating disorders until that time with limited success. As Jewel explained –

My thesis was on the process of recovery from eating disorders from a sufferer's point of view. I did in depth interviews and learned an amazing amount about the individual nature of the recovery and some of the absurdities of medicalising the process. I also learned heaps about using this process and how all interactions have the potential for change. It is no wonder I happily and readily devoured constructivism, post modernism, post structuralism, narrative etc!!!

As a result, Jewel's expertise on the topic has received national and international acclaim.

Creative tensions

Not all participants necessarily saw post modernism as the way forward however. Jez expressed ambivalence about post modernism, arguing that while it is useful on one hand in terms of understanding or challenging the prescriptiveness of modernist theoretical approaches, on the other it could lead to social work getting 'stuck'. Weighing up the arguments for and against incorporating the post modern critique in social work, Jez stated –

Well, some people would argue that at one extreme you have the incredibly nihilistic post modern analysis, and some of my colleagues and friends would argue that in fact this is a major contributing factor to the loss of activism and the movement away from collective stuff to a much more individual focus. I think that's reasonable. I actually think that it's problematic in many ways. I think it is about how you interpret post modern approaches to some extent and I think they can actually contribute in many ways to enhancing our understanding, but it's when they get taken to absolutely de-construct everything that you've got nothing left that they become problematic.

For Jez it was essential to utilise de-construction in a creative way and make use of ‘what we can’. At the same time however it was important in a different world not to lose sight of some of the modernist ideals. ‘The ideals, hopes, I don’t want to lose that sort of stuff’, and to continue to engage with those aspects of modernist theories. It was however –

how you keep the critical edge that is the struggle for me now. In many ways I want to say that post modernism is really problematic, but in fact when I look back and think about the development of ideas, moving in different directions, I think its got a lot to offer in that way. I think some of the modernist theoretical approaches actually were too prescriptive, offered too simple explanations, were clear cut and simple and I think post modernism can make it more complex, can help us to understand some of those complexities a little better and help lead us in a different direction. So it is in a sense something I think you have to be really aware/remain sort of critical – on the edge – and that’s a struggle.

Similarly in moving from local social work more into international social development, Anne’s primary focus in the nineties was on issues of globalisation ‘related to poverty, oppression, human rights, those sorts of things’. Anne also saw it as important to maintain an interest in issues related to people in lower income groups and with ‘less of an educational background coming into higher education and study, (I’d hesitate to use the word class, but haven’t a good substitute word at the moment)’. Anne also referred to the ‘globalisation of disability and the implications of war and poverty and hunger on increasing rates of disablement in an international sense’ as an important emerging area of concern for her. While in this she saw post-structural ideas as helping to make sense of a diverse range of perspectives and ‘human rights in particular’, for her post-modernism was a part of a much broader critical understanding.

Others however were more critical and thought that other theoretical perspectives were more useful in providing directions for social work in an increasingly globalised international context. Marli for instance claimed –

I remain sceptical about post modernism, thinking its emphasis on language was better said by Marx in the German Ideology. I also think post modern thinking on the concept of women is flawed, as always the women’s movement was aware of the diversity of women.

This point was reiterated by Athena who felt that she ‘had done this journey’ through an understanding of feminism as ‘always being about (complex) relationships’. And despite asserting a tendency within feminism for political correctness to destroy relationships, this understanding of complexity came from ‘a really grounded strong feminist perspective by the 1990s’. It was important to Athena that her theory base remain informed by her practice and as such her understanding of post modernism was both incorporated within and informed primarily by her feminist understandings. Referring to post modernism, Pen was ‘still trying to make sense of that’ given that her position was basically informed by a strong human rights perspective, as she commented –

There’s a lot now in so called ‘post’ era. At the end of the day irrespective of what theories I might draw from – central to this are still the core values about sense connectedness, the valuing of the human race as a whole and promoting an environment where all individuals have a chance of actualising their potential and contributing to society in return.

Lilith too, continuing to work in the field of violence against women was looking to feminist critiques of violence and saw the recent critical writings of lesbian feminists as ‘more positive’ in terms of providing a ‘reflective edge’. Lilith also considered that social work and welfare education was at a point where ‘something has to change, that in fact there needs to be alternatives offered, but I’m not sure what they are’. Reflecting that while there was a ‘certain energy in the early to mid nineties’, Lilith felt that by the late nineties social work education had become bogged down and part of the mainstream/status quo. In her opinion the critical voice of social work was lost, ‘part of the malaise’. This Lilith attributed to ‘the oppression of structures (that) can weigh you down so much’ and the fact that ‘we are all so *busy*’.

Zenobia too saw the material and ideas around ‘structural disadvantage and social exclusion to be the ways in which ‘I am thinking and seeking to understand *my* world as much as the world in which I live’. While she still considered feminism to be the basis of her social analysis, Zenobia also expressed concerns about conservatising trends in theorising social exclusion. On the impact of many of her colleagues perceived reluctance to engage with feminist theory in particular she wrote –

So many colleagues won't use the 'F' word, and as for mentioning the 'L' word – heck, you could get struck down for that!! So in a sense we are our own worst enemies – we can't fight alone, but the notions around collectivity seem as far away as ever.

For Zenobia some salvation came in picking up her PhD and subsequent exposure to colleagues who also were engaging with 'very up to date post modern feminism - which took me into another realm'.

Other respondents pointed out contradictions within post modern thought. Pearl for instance questioned the generalising tendency within current theorising around difference and saw the idea that feminism could be subsumed under diversity as 'absurd', as in her view gender was one of the 'core ways of analysing humanity'. Pearl suggested that while diversity may have moved the race, class, gender and ability/disability distinction along to see the potential for 'othering all of those things', it was important not to fall into the paradox of diversity as a category or way of categorising. To Pearl this tendency was one of the 'awful contradictions of that sort of analysis', pointing out that use of the word 'diversity' could sometimes serve to weaken analysis, where 'what follows through with the analysis is the need to resource whatever is required to ensure that equality is achieved'.

Thus there were various levels of engagement with post modern theories amongst the respondents. For the most part post modernism was utilised as an integral tool of analysis, especially where it was important to identify the limitations of prescriptive solutions based on theories founded in modernist thought. Thus as a tool for social work practice post modernism was readily adopted. This was not the case however in keeping up with social policy where a more specific focus was often required.

Social policy and research frameworks

A number of respondents saw social policy as a major concern in this period as service delivery was becoming increasingly fragmented with the cutbacks to government spending and many of the women in the study found themselves increasingly involved in research with various marginalised groups. Ellen expressly named indigenous and multicultural issues as key issues which influenced her

thinking during this period. In the late nineties in particular, Ellen considered that ‘attitudes towards refugees and the increasing divide between different groups in Australia’ had become ‘a major concern’ and was looking to theory that challenged this.

Marli’s commitment to the women’s studies research unit she helped to establish led her to a view that research was a tool that could be utilised in women’s interests, especially ‘participatory and accountable research which is socially useful with excellent work on women’s lives and experiences and on women’s services’. To this end Marli had also extended her research and policy focus beyond the Australian context to ‘learn more about comparative social policy, and to engage with women in other countries’.

Antoinette’s focus at the beginning of the nineties was also on social policy and she brought her feminist analysis to bear on her work on youth homelessness before taking on a position as lecturer in a newly established social work course. In this position she ‘was attracted to the explicitly structural and feminist approach of the course’ and by the end of the nineties had completed her PhD, also ‘a feminist social policy piece’. While she told of engaging more with feminist theories in the process of completing her PhD, Antoinette also considered the ‘present shift from radical and structural towards anti-oppressive as a way of conceptualising/theorising politically progressive practice’ as an exciting and positive development.

Madonna also spoke of her keen interest in social policy as a major informant of her theoretical understandings throughout the nineties. Undertaking her higher studies in public policy provided Madonna with ‘a more rigorous look at what public policy actually was and some of the international comparisons’. Economics particularly, ‘deepened my analysis and gave me a stronger foundation for putting a number of things together in the public policy environment I was in’. Madonna felt that certainly early in the nineties, some feminist writers in social policy had an impact on the shaping of policy especially income support, citing the Cass report as an example. Madonna also felt that the nineties were largely a time of ‘recognising the complexities and of social workers understanding the interconnectedness of the social

and the economic'. In the public policy sphere however, Madonna also pointed to the importance of senior women executives in providing leadership and 'strong role models' as a way of enacting feminist principles in the workplace and of putting the 'social' back into public policy. Since the latter half of the decade however –

...a lot of that disappeared. I don't think we have a very strong social policy base in Australia at the moment. I think social policy in Australia is pretty non-existent, it doesn't seem to be led by any concern for equity, let alone be able to discern whether it has a strong equity base or strong feminist base, it just seems to be in a total vacuum, that's my sense. Look at something like welfare reform, it has no intellectual basis behind it at all.

As can be seen from the narrative above, theoretical debates in the welfare academy in the increasingly globalised context of the nineties shifted markedly from structuralist and feminist understandings to a broad engagement with post structural and post modern perspectives from early in the decade. Such perspectives were embraced at varying levels by the women in the study. Opinions about the usefulness of post modernism in particular were divided and ranged from enthusiasm to ambivalence and skepticism. Those who were working with individuals or in teaching social work as working with individuals and communities found post modernism very useful in explaining difference, especially in cultural understandings and the need for diverse approaches to working with groups. Those who were working in research and social policy however found post modernism of more limited use, particularly in challenging the status quo or in the latter half of the decade as a tool for analysing the impact of slashes in government spending on welfare services and deregulation. A post colonial and anti imperialist critique combined with community development approaches continued to be the most serviceable approach for those working overseas in development work. By the late nineties their experience and the critiques of economic globalisation emanating from overseas had started to impinge on the wider policy and practice understandings, certainly in Australia.

A sense of 'losing the way' in theory was expressed, particularly in relation to social policy and feminism. While a few of the women reported moving away from feminism in the nineties, most of the women still held onto feminism in one form or another as an underlying basis of their theoretical position. A certain level of disillusion had set in however and the sense of solidarity with other women appears to

have decreased or in some instances disappeared. As a result the engagement with feminism shifted to a more individualised approach, be that working on specific women's projects or service delivery or as integrated into a more mainstream analysis and often reconfigured as 'gender'. As such there was a sense among some respondents that – largely as a result of backlash – feminism had become reactive and increasingly apologetic. The next section deals specifically with participant's considerations of feminism and the impact of the women's movement through the decade.

FRAME THREE: FEMINISM/WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Services and programs for women in the 1990s

From the 1970s through the 1980s and early into the nineties women in Australia made many gains in terms of equal opportunity, especially at the federal level. From 1972 when the legislation of equal pay for women was enacted, there was steady progress by federal and many of the state governments in implementing legislation and programs aimed specifically at ensuring Australian women's participation as full and equal citizens (Sawer, 1997).

The Sex Discrimination Act (1984), backed up by equal opportunity and affirmative action programs ensured formal protection of women's rights in the workplace. Health services for women; funding for refuges; childcare funding; resources for sexual assault services and domestic violence; special women's units in many government departments at both federal and state level, not to mention research funding specifically aimed at women – all of these special services provided women in Australia with opportunities to take their rightful place as the other half of the citizenry of Australia (Summers, 2003).

By the mid nineties however this was to change dramatically. According to Summers (2003) the stage for the cutbacks to women's programs and services that occurred once the Howard coalition had come to power federally was set by the Keating led Labor government after the 1993 election. Summers suggested that Keating lost ground to the Howard led coalition, even though 46% of women had voted Labor in 1993, because he virtually ignored women in the interim between the 1993 and 1996 elections. Indeed as Keating barely mentioned women during the election campaign, and Howard won favour by promising not to dismantle Medicare or introduce a GST, issues of central concern to most Australian women, as Summers suggests, women did vote with their feet. The women's vote in 1996 dropped to 34% for Labor as opposed to 53% for the opposition (Summers, 2003). There was no hint in Howard's election promises however that he intended to dismantle and/or reverse 'more than thirty years of women's economic and social progress' (Summers, 2003:125; Whitehouse, 2004). However, as outlined more specifically elsewhere, this is exactly what Howard did, although it was some years before the full impact was felt as some

of the services were maintained or picked up at state level. None the less cuts to child care subsidies were immediately felt and had the effect of progressively forcing women out of the workforce as families could no longer afford childcare fees (Brennan, 1998).

More significantly perhaps, was the dismantling/disabling of women's research and policy agencies such as the Women's statistics unit of the ABS, abolished in 1996. Most notably the 'mainstreaming' of the women's bureau in the Ministry of Employment and Education and the moving of the Office of the Status of Women out of cabinet and to a junior portfolio (both 1997) (Whitehouse, 2004). While the OSW still exists at time of writing, there has been little significant research on trends in Australian women's lives published at the national level since those dates. Consistent with the conservative approach to women's issues there has certainly been very little advocacy within the federal government on behalf of Australian women or policy that challenges government thinking on major issues (Sawer, 1997; Whitehouse, 2004). Rather policies for the advancement of women were replaced by the coalition government by policies aimed to encourage traditional family arrangements, such as the Family Tax Initiative and the 'Strengthening Families Strategy'. These programs along with changes to child care funding made it increasingly difficult for women to work outside the home (Whitehouse, 2004; Brennan, 1998).

Fragmenting the women's movement

Women in the study had started the decade of the nineties with some sense of optimism remaining for change and perhaps even basking in the flow on effect of some of the generally women friendly policies of the Hawke government. By the end of the decade however there was a sense that things had gone horribly wrong. While in large part this was a response to the cutbacks outlined above, there were other factors that impinged and these factors in combination led to a depressing outlook by the end of the decade.

Through the nineties in the Australian context at least, writings on women and social policy became increasingly thin on the ground. Where feminist perspectives were articulated they tended to be reactive, arguing the problematic nature of free market

policies for women (see Brennan, 1998; Sawer, 1997; Shaver, 1997; Simms, 1994; Yeatman, 1994/96), or had moved away from a general focus on women's (in)equality to specific and localised aspects/sites of women's oppression, eg violence against women. Radical feminism became increasingly discounted, largely because of the critiques of white and western feminism arising from black women and women of colour that had emanated from the US or UK (see bell hooks, 1994; Williams 1989). These critiques which argued alternately the case for anti racist and anti colonialist feminism alongside post modern perspectives, pointed to the replication of existing power relationships and assumptions of homogeneity within feminism per se and argued for an understanding of diversity and complexity within feminist understandings. These points were amplified by the influx of information from international women's movements, and the increasing recognition of the internationalisation of women's issues, especially after the Beijing Women's conference in 1995 (Antrobus, 2004; van der Gaag, 2004).

In social policy there were also debates about women and citizenship which gained currency in the Australian context in the late eighties and through the nineties while the Labor government remained in power. Writers such as Pascall (UK, 1997) and Pateman (US, 1989) had explored the patriarchal assumptions behind the liberal notion of citizenship. These writers argued for a shift in the boundaries between public and private spheres to account for women's fluid role across both spheres as part of an inclusive and active citizenship. In the Australian situation writers such as Franzway (1989), Sawer (1994/6) and Wearing (1994) looked at the ambiguity of the (welfare) state as a guarantor of women's rights and conversely men's continued greater access to 'power – in and through the state' (Franzway, 1989:10). Other women writers on citizenship were perhaps less helpful to women. Pixley, (1993) for instance, in suggesting that alternatives to full employment would only increase the marginalisation of those already out of work, fully equated citizenship with employment, an argument that is clearly problematic for women. Especially so for those women engaged primarily in unpaid work in the private sphere and those typically unemployed or underemployed or part time, or those lacking in education and often language skills as the most marginalised of Australian society.

As pointed out by the women in the study, in universities throughout Australia over the course of the nineties, many of the women's studies courses that had been established through the eighties were largely defunded or disbanded as were many women specific units in social work curricula. Sometimes these were replaced by the more generic term 'gender', but more often than not mainstreamed or absorbed into other units, effectively masking women's continued disadvantage. In social work, feminist theory was increasingly impacted upon by the arguments for diversity put by post modern theorists and women of colour outlined above and also as part of an increasingly international focus (bell hooks, 1994, 2000; Van der Gaag, 2004; Waring, 1999; Williams, 1989). In some ways in my view, this cultural turn may have (inadvertently) fed the backlash against feminist courses at the very time it should have led to an expansion of this academic tradition.

The widespread resistance to feminism within universities largely reflected the dominant antifeminist discourse in the wider community that gained such credence from the mid nineties. The term post feminism started to be bandied around – (by no less than the Prime Minister!) a term which again ignored women's continued and escalating inequality. After over a decade of equal opportunity legislation at both federal and state levels, women's equality was assumed, however while women's numbers in universities and in the political system may have increased, women in Australia still remained relatively disadvantaged on almost every indicator (Brennan, 1998; Summers, 2003). By the end of the nineties this had worsened considerably almost to the point of reversal of previously won gains. While this may in part have reflected the lack of decision making power of feminist women in government from that time, arguably it also reflected an anti feminist hegemony/culture that accompanied political moves to the right.

My observations were that sexist language began to reappear in publically owned media (it had never disappeared from commercially owned) and feminist protests against sexist advertising practices were often greeted with howls of derision from some quarters of the general public. University educated (mostly young) women increasingly took their husband's surnames on marriage, and were even less inclined to question the institution of marriage itself. From the mid nineties, feminism became

very unfashionable in populist discourse and where it remained as an analysis, the feminist critique had largely moved from a collective to individualised understanding. As can be seen from the experiences of the women in the study, the backlash against feminism impacted seriously on women in universities.

In social work it was increasingly difficult to maintain a critical perspective in the face of rising individualism and feminism as a theory seemed to become just one part of many in the critical tradition. Reflecting the broader shift of culture to the political right, students more often than not saw feminism and its academic proponents as ‘old hat’ and ‘out of date’, often adding the insult of ageism to the injury of their sexism. At its extreme, resistance to hearing feminist perspectives from men in the class room sometimes led to aggression or violence against the educator concerned. At the very least the rise of men’s studies in juxtaposition to feminism further diluted the impact of feminist analysis. This ‘me too’ attitude had the effect of consistently redirecting attention away from women’s structural disadvantage in a similar way (and at the same time), that funds originally allocated for women’s shelter programs were used to resource men’s programs to address domestic violence via ‘anger management’ (WEL, 2001).

In this context however, the women in the study struggled with their feminism, many feeling increasingly isolated with the ‘sisterhood’ and often - that it had all become just a little too hard.....

Women’s voices – impact of feminism/women’s movement

Adding to the discourse

Over the course of the nineties most of the women in the study (with few exceptions) still saw feminism as an underlying philosophy that informed their work and impacted on their lifestyles to some degree or other. For many however, feminism and their activism within a broader women’s movement was now tempered by a complexity of factors in the increasingly austere context of the nineties. Three of the members of the WIWE group stated that they had ‘taught women and social work electives’, at the

same time that they ‘wrestled with the different challenges to feminism and student views’. Pearl suggested that feminism had become ‘more a part of people’s own personal frameworks and ways of doing and thinking perhaps’, in the nineties, and as a qualifier – ‘if they brought them into the nineties!’ While Millie considered that feminism ‘has provided a blueprint for other marginalised groups’, although she was ‘still concerned that it may not be representative/inclusive of all women, eg, indigenous, women with disabilities’. Ellen deliberated that as she became more aware of the differing perspectives in feminism ‘reflected in younger professional social workers’, her critique of ‘earlier aggressive approaches was now largely outdated’. Of these developments in thinking Ellen commented that she ‘enjoyed this new encounter with a different, more mature, and more culturally sensitive women’s movement’. Ruth similarly reported –

Sadly as I became more feminist, feminism appeared again to be discredited. I did find some tensions, as I found ‘race’ a more useful construct in my indigenous work and was cautious about applying western middle class notions of feminism in my theorising.

Disillusion

While for these women developments in feminism were an integral part of their shifting consciousness, there was also an increasing disillusion with feminism emerging which ranged from outright rejection of the directions that feminism had taken to ambivalence and an increasing recognition of tensions within. Linda at this point rejected feminism almost totally, feeling that feminist thinking had lost both direction and voice. As she wrote –

I wonder in all this where feminist thought and the women’s movement is. Perhaps its lack of voice is reflective of its failure to grasp more strongly the complexity. Where is my thinking now? I think gender differences do not exist now. Perhaps my thinking has arrived at a more humanist point – though I do acknowledge certain categories of disadvantage. It’s interesting, even academics I know who say they are feminist in fact espouse post modern critical theory more than feminist theory. I am still not sure where the practice directions are.

Marion meanwhile had developed a ‘reluctance to call myself a feminist because it always seems to occupy an elite status against ‘women’. On her experience of moving into academia and involvement in university women’s groups, Marion told of patronising attitudes and of unrecognised white privilege among women colleagues,

many of whom described themselves as feminist. Of this time and the sense of ‘other’ she encountered, Marion observed –

The differences and conflicts were as interesting as were the shared goals and ideas. It was an unspoken but emerging concern for me of how the ‘feminism’ that I was reading or exposed to did not seem to really include me as a ‘visible ethnic’, or a ‘single heterosexual woman’. (Where a lot of feminism’s goals focus on women with children or in heterosexual partnerships). I was often nonplussed at the rather superior behaviour of many women I knew who claimed to be feminist; either denying my experiences of racism by telling me that only Aboriginal people experience racism in Australia, or by patronising attitudes from female/feminist academics. I am sure they took for granted that their knowledge guaranteed them a place anywhere including a speaking position.

The result of this exposure to lack of critical reflection amongst her colleagues left Marion lacking in confidence and disillusioned with the exclusivity of white western feminism. In writing of the immediate impact of this exclusion Marion remarked ‘the personal and social isolation is terrible’. In response she had ‘coined the term *rhetorical feminist*, because I see no relationship between what they espouse and what they do’. Mirroring some other respondent’s views on the issue of political correctness, Marion also warned of the danger of orthodoxy.

I also think I have an aversion to belonging to anything that requires an adherence to a belief system or orthodoxy that prescribes how and what to think or else you are not whatever it is you say you belong to – shades of Catholicism which I have now stopped practising, but the fear of such control remains deeply ingrained. I also think it’s time we stopped the rhetoric and started to look at actual practices of exclusion.

While Marion’s sense of the other related to her experiences as a single (self described) ‘ethnic’ woman, Zenobia also wrote of her disillusion at this point. Not with feminism per se, but because of her sense of isolation and marginalisation from both colleagues and students because of her feminist beliefs and, she believes, because of her lesbianism. Her biggest disappointment was of ‘working with women who saw themselves as feminist, but how they acted out their feminism was miles from how I lived mine’. Of these unhappy times Zenobia wrote –

I experienced probably the worst part of my career and felt absolutely worn down and disillusioned with women as colleagues.....I think this decade was for me a time when I felt that I had to reinvent myself. It was a new experience to be seen as a dinosaur because of my beliefs – I expected this at the end of my life rather than in the middle. It seemed that all the things I held dear were no longer seen as important or relevant by others. Feminism was over, identifying as a lesbian was to marginalise myself and as for collegiality and friendship, that was for others. I felt a deep sense

of aloneness and other than remaining involved in areas that were feminist oriented, I could have curled up in a corner and not been missed. It seemed that my contribution was expected, but not acknowledged in so many areas where it had always been of great strength and creativity to myself and those involved.

Zenobia also identified student attitudes to their studies as a contributing factor in her disillusionment. Outlining her perception of alienation and anti-academic culture among students she continued –

I also face working on a small regional campus where students don't seem to want to read, (heavens knows what they think university is about), so there isn't much classroom debate other than how unfairly they think they are being treated. Some students even claimed to know nothing about feminism, whilst others believed that because we are all 'old' in the department, that we were teaching old feminism and anyway it's all irrelevant.

So increasingly among some of the participants at least, as they proceeded through the nineties, there was a sense that feminism was not living up to its promise. For some it had in many ways become a burden and indeed in some cases may have been a contributing factor in industrial burn out. Beth's view was somewhat more ambivalent, she considered that by the nineties, feminism had largely been coopted into the patriarchal male values reflected in the system itself, lamenting this she wrote,

...the women's movement had arrived. In some ways it was very satisfying, because women were getting recognition and being listened to. But, on the other hand, there was a feeling of selling out to male values – women became business persons, and often beat men at their game, but the values of cooperation and sisterhood seemed to have been largely abandoned.

Sin similarly reported that she was 'no longer as actively involved in feminist politics', while maintaining a commitment to women's publishing and the movement generally, 'but not so heavily'. Jez meanwhile still considered feminism 'really important', and wanted to 'keep some of the modernist stuff'. Qualifying this and outlining her pessimism about the state of the women's movement Jez added –

In a sense it's about left feminism, but being critical of some of the very dogmatic approaches that came out of modernism as well. I think that's really important. I'm not sure that the women's movement as such can contribute because I'm not sure there *is* a women's movement it is so fragmented. I think we've got to take the opportunities as they come along in terms of ensuring that we keep some aspects of that alive.

Women and social policy

In terms of women in social policy, both Madonna and Pearl looked to the state of the federal Office of the Status of Women as an indicator of the strength of feminist discourse at the policy level. Pearl noted that the OSW ‘had always travelled fairly leanly’ but over the nineties ‘its fortunes waxed and waned and it has maintained a reasonably conservative profile’. The process of encouraging aspects of women’s profile and activities and the resourcing of needs however, ‘seemed to have been a fairly low key process through the nineties’. Madonna was a little more scathing, remarking from her current position within the federal bureaucracy –

From where I sit there seems to be no overt articulation of women’s policy or even feminist theory. Take the OSW for example, it has no teeth at all. Remember in the days of Anne Summers and even after that, the OSW would do an impact analysis of the budget on women, that has now become a toothless tiger. Why?

Speaking before Summer’s (2003) analysis of changes to women’s services federally and outlined above, Madonna went on to point out that even though women may have moved into prominent positions as heads of service delivery, in looking at the federal bureaucracy (at time of interview), ‘there is still not one female head of department. It is still a very male dominated area’.

In similar vein, Zenobia expressed ‘extreme sadness as well as outrage’ that women politicians like Carmen Lawrence had ‘been burned’. Pointing out that although there are more women in Parliament, they are much more ‘silenced as well as silent – it seems that there is a terrible barrier to break through that is quite different to those we have experienced before’. In Zenobia’s mind it seemed that feminism needed to constantly reinvent the wheel, eg ‘The current debate on paid maternity leave is such an outdated construct’. Worse however in her view was the funding arrangement for women’s organisations under the conservative federal regime of the late nineties. As she remarked –

That there were only five women’s organisations officially recognised and funded through the Office of Status of Women is disastrous. I am a member of Business and Professional Women (one of those funded) and they are so conservative that it near makes me weep!

Lamenting the cultural shift to the right in community organisations that she had ‘served faithfully’, Zenobia considered they ‘are now unable or unwilling to see their internalised sexism, racism and homophobia – it is almost as if the debate of past times never took place’.

It was not just at the level of government or community that respondents felt that anti feminist sentiment persisted however. Marion was similarly pessimistic about the contribution of the women’s movement to social policy throughout the nineties, in fact she maintained that she learnt ‘a lot from (her) PhD on patriarchal practices by female social workers’. While pointing out that ‘we sort of expect it from males don’t we? - organisational policy clearly operates from a patriarchal and ethnocentric perspective – apart from all the other critiques one can make’, Marion argued that social workers, especially those in her area of child protection, have very little if any political understanding of ‘the place of child protection within the rationalism of policy and the privatisation of children’s care or the gender and race issues’. This was despite the fact that many of the women social workers she interviewed stated their commitment to feminist ways of working and to women’s issues. In pointing to the fragmentation she perceived in the women’s movement, Marion also expressed concern that the women’s movement appeared notable by its absence on other issues impacting on women. Most remarkable to her were the rapid advances in technology and her perception that women’s groups in fact appeared to have done a total ideological turn around on some (technological) issues that impacted on women’s choices. These issues (mostly from the latter part of the nineties) as outlined by Marion included –

the attempt to alter the Sex Discrimination Act to challenge the State court’s willingness to allow IVF for lesbians and single women; the appointment of apologist Pru Goward as Sex Discrimination Commissioner etc. (Also) among these issues is the debate amongst women’s groups including those who call themselves ‘feminist’ about women and motherhood and some who perceive children as a life style choice (a feeding into the privatisation of the family and children – rather than children being a public and community responsibility supported with appropriate policies); the IVF access issue (framed) as one of the rights of lesbians and single women (ie discrimination against sexuality and marital status) but not considering the issue of social class and the ‘access’ that is a private choice by women with money. I also wonder about the lack of broader engagement with the economic rationalism of human and social policy to one of commodification – where technology can give you anything you want if you can afford to pay for it and why this has not been critically questioned by feminists. Further is the almost 180 degree shift from the 1980s –

1990s where feminists debated the highly interventionist medical technologies that took control of women's bodies from them and did not challenge where the 'desperation' associated with infertility comes from and its potential to oppress women. The more recent debates seem more to do with an uncritical reinstatement of biology/pregnancy/maternity as central to women's fulfillment – maybe I have misread this debate, but I don't seem to have seen much in the way of alternatives put forward.

So while Marion was disappointed with the perceived 'about face' in terms of critical consciousness within what remained of the women's movement, begging the question of the relatively privileged nature of feminist debate, Marli, who had spent a greater part of the nineties involved in research and publication with a primary focus on women in social policy, was more optimistic about the collective future of women's projects. Commenting that 'The backlash against feminism has been palpable', in terms of funding for women's research and scholarships, Marli was hopeful however for the future of the collaborative projects with which she had been involved, mostly with women documenting the policy and practice of the programs with which they had been involved. As she wrote –

One of the things I am happiest about in the writing projects is that they were all collaborations with activists – facilitating them writing about their programs and practice. Another aspect of collaboration has been developing international networks, and becoming more aware of what Australia can and has to offer, in having systems which have remained, in spite of the rise of the market.

The issues the women have outlined above indeed remain some of the current challenges for the women's movement. One of the persistent difficulties is the fragmentation that makes concerted collective action increasingly difficult, precisely at a time when ongoing challenge to the patriarchal logic of the system has rarely been more necessary or urgent. There is cause for hope however, as can be seen in the increasingly international networks of women whose business is in the rebuilding of collective voice(s) (Marli; Anne; Ellen; Antrobus, 2004; van der Gaag, 2004). There is little doubt that this will require an intense and ongoing deconstruction of and critical reflection on the nature of privilege within feminism. It will also require a determination (especially among white western feminists), to hear the voices of their international sisters and to learn from the lessons of necessity that women's international development work has become.

Impact of life cycles

It was not all context that influenced changes in thinking however. Increasingly as women matured through the stages of their life cycles, the focus of their feminism also moved. While Bridget also commented that she ‘again experienced discomfort with the more doctrinaire expressions of feminism, eg against HRT, especially as I found myself needing to take it’, she also pointed to an increasing identification with emerging critiques by women in senior positions. Referring to the ongoing struggle for recognition and change at senior levels, these critiques were asking ‘is it really worth it’, especially in a context where ‘careers have (simply) become overwork’. Additionally as her role of carer increased, Bridget also became more interested in ‘issues of women and caring, women and aging, the menopause and so forth’.

Zenobia also commented on her experience of aging remarking that –

As a middle aged woman, I now don’t seem to have an identity in public other than as someone’s mother or worse still grandmother (give me a break!) I certainly couldn’t be a lesbian or a feminist. Seems amazing what grey hair does for you.

A sentiment with which I can wholeheartedly concur, having let my hair grow grey and experiencing a marked sense of ‘invisibility’ in social situations, particularly with men of similar age. For Jane however, at another stage of her life, the 1990s ‘was the time when I became a mother. I became really interested in the whole work family dichotomy and hence my research on the experiences of mothers and fathers as social workers’. As such Jane was impressed in the early 90s by the Keating government’s placement of work and family pressures and needs on the policy agenda. In reflecting the struggle of trying to live the political however, Jane also commented on the ongoing effort to maintain balance in her primary relationship –

Certainly the demands of maintaining an equitable relationship and marriage have been interesting and I think this has been an area of success. My partner and I share the domestic and parenting very equally and I think the women’s movement has created some room for these developments to occur in relationships.

Jane also pointed out that bringing up boys presents interesting challenges for a feminist. Of this she remarked ‘I am conscious that I need to socialise them to respect and understand women, but to see their role as boys as not having to fit to any particular gendered stereotype’. Jill who had children in ‘middle/older childhood’

also wrote of the struggle ‘to validate my son and daughter’. Jill also stressed her opposition ‘to radical feminists who seem to see individual men and boys as the problem, often in the face of evidence’.

Thus with some exceptions in the nineties, women colleagues mostly maintained their feminist understandings, often tempered by increasing workloads and difficult relationships with partners, colleagues and students and also in the face of theoretical challenges from post modernism and anti-racist feminism in increasingly individualised and divided work spaces. Where they did not, it was most likely on the basis of a perception that feminism was wanting in terms of analysis of social exclusion. Feminist understandings had become more fragmented and by the end of the nineties more often than not, for many of the women in this study sat alongside other critiques which included post structuralism, post modern and post colonial understandings.

Critical moments/Personal challenges

Responses to this question were varied. About half the women responded to this section and those reflections ranged from personal reflections on the social policy context to intimate details of relationships. Whatever the response, women invariably and clearly articulated their reflections on the political nature of their own struggles and of personal change. For some, changes and challenges to thinking over that period of time were part of a natural evolution, for others insight was often sharp and painful in terms of cost to self and family relationships. Responses were also quite diverse. While the WIWE group for instance cited the election of Howard at the federal level ‘where we went from right to extreme right’ as their collective perception of the most critical moment, Jewel was excited about increasing her international connections through her teaching, especially in the latter part of the nineties, she found teaching across other cultures to be ‘a very interesting and challenging experience which taught me more than any reading could have’. Ruth similarly claimed that ‘rather than critical moments, I think the change in my thinking and acting was gradual and evolving’, the catalyst for change in this instance revolving around her having moved from the country back to the city where she experienced ‘less conflict, ideologically and politically’. Ruth pointedly added

however ‘I guess another influence was my determination to now remain sensibly single’.

Caring Responsibilities

Much of the difficulties that women reported centred on the responsibilities of caring combined with increasing work responsibilities and sometimes relationship or family difficulties. Jill told of the difficult times she had experienced throughout the nineties - of the death of parents and her divorce; of support of a mother-in-law with dementia ‘with few formal supports in place’ and of her isolation; of her children growing up and of an ‘intense three year relationship involving domestic violence’. All while working as a social worker, doing her PhD and ultimately moving into academic life. After extricating herself from the violent relationship and completing her PhD however, Jill felt that while she had experienced ‘a hard personal time’ over this decade, at time of interview she ‘felt for the first time that she had many options’.

Bridget also wrote of the difficulties she encountered when the ‘ill health of my partner lead to my taking on significant caring roles at home combined with being Professor and Head of School in a University in the midst of major restructuring’. This was exacerbated by ‘no fewer than three ‘students from hell’ who took up enormous amounts of time and caused massive stress’. No wonder that at the end of the decade she described herself as ‘exhausted, but never the less well aware that no way would I want to give up work and become a full time carer, work is a kind of respite from caring, *but* overwork in these circumstances is a killer’.

Identity: challenges and discoveries

There was certainly a sense of becoming overburdened running through many of the descriptions of this time. Zenobia also spoke of being very worn down by her experiences through the nineties. Of relocating to her current teaching position in the mid 1990s especially, Zenobia reflected –

Again, my first semester was difficult as I was trying to get over the trauma of the previous job, fit into a new situation and function as a human being. My partner had a major accident and all in all I was beginning to question whether the feminism that I knew and worked within even existed.

There were positives for Zenobia however and her spirits were lifted somewhat in finding other feminists in her new work situation who were prepared to collaborate on a weekend residential wherein –

we thought we could use as a professional development exercise that would allow us to explore feminism for each of us and to re-connect in some of the ways in which we had years ago. I guess what this did for me was to rekindle the fire – guess it never really went out – but rather was like a pilot light waiting to be ignited so that once again feminism could stand tall, be seen and make a difference.

Certainly a plus for women's collectivity and solidarity (and I wish I'd been there)!

Madonna too spoke of difficulties and also challenges to her identity in a slightly different way. In her case it was relocating at the beginning of the nineties from Tasmania where she had 'a really strong network of social workers and people I had gone to university with, community links, family', to the relative anonymity of Canberra. 'To leave all that behind' she stated 'was a huge shock to my identity', and she felt that she had never re-established those networks in her new situation. Even though she was in a relatively powerful position in her new job, Madonna spoke of how the size of the bureaucracies in Canberra made it difficult to 'make a difference', especially as an outsider coming in without any contacts or networks. At this point she enrolled in higher education. Of this period in her life she reflected –

The nineties were a time of taking stock – I came to a new phase, went to ANU and did a Masters in public policy. I experienced a need for more intellectual input. I found the bureaucracy in the first years difficult, but learnt a lot about myself – namely that I did not like *not* being in charge. I went through a period where I felt pretty dead in the job, it is very easy in bureaucracy to just become a functionary, so going to study was a way of keeping an edge on it. I'd found with the politics I was just one of many and didn't enjoy it very much.

Identity was also mentioned as an important factor for Jane in this decade. Of Polish descent, the opportunity of taking study leave and 'again visiting Poland', was a significant event for her as 'whenever I go back to Poland I get in touch with other aspects of my identity'. Jane further wrote of the impact that undertaking a PhD has had on her at a personal level.

Becoming a PhD student has been huge. Taking on this responsibility has been very confronting at times, but the research has left me feeling really inspired and

energised. I have also been really excited and humbled by the experience of working with indigenous social workers and learning from them”.

Similarly, for Antoinette undertaking and completing her PhD was a satisfying and ‘wonderful learning experience’, simply because it provided her with an opportunity to challenge and develop her ideas, adding that ‘the discipline of study means that I have read much more widely in the feminist literature than ever before’.

Marion also wrote of the how ‘personal experiences and issues were understood through reading for my PhD’, especially her discovery of ‘black feminism which seems to have a lot more subtle resonances for me than I ever get from white feminism’. At the policy level however Marion identified the late nineties as a significant turning point. In particular she referred to –

The Howard government’s attacks on the achievements in legislation and policy for women, aboriginal people and immigrants, and generally on all who are NOT old, white, anglo, heterosexual – and privileged – males who are now reclaiming what they see as lost ground by attacking all the arguments using rather Orwellian language.

Linda told of the impact of becoming a social work academic as ‘major’. She also however cited ‘the realisation that some women can be patriarchal and oppressive and that some men are not patriarchal and oppressive’ as an insightful moment.

At the crossroads?

In the late 1990s, the ‘development of more positive links between indigenous and other Australians’ was cited by Ellen as a critical moment. On a more sober level however Ellen noted that most of the events of the nineties were ‘not major but reflect cumulative policy shifts’. In lamenting the cost of these shifts for the social work profession and the urgent task before us, Ellen pondered –

Political changes towards a more inward looking, less caring society which condemns others as ‘queue jumpers’ or ‘dole bludgers’ suggests that social work is at a cross roads. Do we merely implement the political social policy of the day or do we try to change it?

Indeed.

FRAME FOUR: SUMMARY

In a National context increasingly impacted upon by the ideological shift to the political right that accompanied economic globalisation throughout the nineties, notions of collectivity and universal provision of human services were replaced in Australia by increasing assumptions of user pays and provision within the private market. Popularly termed ‘economic rationalism’ in the Australian context, these policies had particular ramifications for service provision to disadvantaged and marginalised groups, especially women’s groups and also resulted in significant cost cutting to universities. Social policy in this environment became increasingly the province of economists and by the end of the decade there was very little input into policy direction from social workers or social policy Academe. This despite much literature from that quarter warning of the potentially negative impacts of privatisation, cuts to services and to universal welfare provision.

Participants spoke of increased pressure due to cuts heralded by economic rationalism which resulted in higher levels of teaching, more administration and they felt, less quality of product. There was a sense that more juggling in the workplace led to a retreat into a more individualised approach to work as a result of which collaboration with colleagues became increasingly difficult to maintain. Added to this was a generalised feeling that the more individualised workplace culture had contributed to less engaged students with more individual or parochial concerns within a less activist environment. The nineties were also identified as a time of increasing backlash against feminism, particularly from students, and an influx of conservative students contributed to this. Respondents spoke of increasing stress levels, in some instances leading to burn out and serious health issues, exacerbated by feelings of growing isolation and marginalisation from colleagues, and increasing relationship difficulties in their work environment. Importantly, it was pointed out that such challenging times required increasing levels of creativity in the work situation to maintain important gains and also to provide role models to students who would ultimately be engaging with ongoing restructure in their workplaces.

The women spoke too of increasing fragmentation within the workplace, largely as a result of dramatically increased workloads where people were feeling increasingly

stressed and pressured, but also as a response to a growing ideological divide in social work. This tension arose in the latter half of the nineties between the more individualised camp of reflective practice and those who maintained a critical approach based essentially on post structuralist understandings allied with feminism, antiracist and anticolonialist critiques. The potential of this fragmentation in an economically rationalised climate of university spending was to break down relationships and collectivity leading to divide and rule and a weakened ability to challenge a system based on increasing conservatism. For the women in the study it was expressed as a sense of increasing isolation and a sense of somehow ‘losing the way’.

If located against the wider global context, the sense of fragmentation that underlies the women’s experience of the nineties relates to the changes that occurred in the nineties at the economic and political levels. Post Fordist production with its emphasis on flexibility and responsiveness, the rapid growth of communications technology and the cultural turn exemplified by postmodernism all contributed to a globalised context of rapid change and uncertainty. In the local context of economic rationalism the women in the study experienced pressures of work commitments alongside significant breakdown in the old collectivities. Their responses indicate that they *lived* the contradictions, the diversity and the breakdown of the women’s movement as a unified entity. While they achieved much at an individual level and, for a few some successes at a policy level, the women generally felt they were going backwards in terms of social justice and gendered understandings, especially on feminist issues such as care. There was an overriding sense that in this climate patriarchy was on the ascendancy again. This was reflected in myriads of ways in popular culture and through social policy, from an increase in sexist language to the legitimacy of the anti feminist agenda in public policy discourse; from subsuming feminism as theory under gender to policy that challenged and in some instances removed EEO; to individual women feeling overburdened, isolated and stressed in their workplace. All of which reflects the changing context and the economic imperatives that accompanied the shift to free market economies.

At a more personal level the women spoke of issues of identity as women, particularly impacted upon by age and ethnicity. It was here that many of them expressed their sense of isolation from the women's movement and from feminism, a sentiment which seemed to become stronger as the decade progressed. This disillusion galvanised some to put forward suggestions as to how feminism might become more inclusive and relevant to a more diverse range of women's lives. These suggestions will be taken up in some depth in the final part.

For some the challenges of the nineties resulted in a more substantive focus on individual and local issues while others gradually engaged with international movements, becoming activist in global campaigns especially those instigated by women's movements. By and large however in a climate where social policy increasingly became the province of the economist, the women's concerns remained localised. There was a strong sense however that social work needed to reclaim social policy and in a climate of increasing internationalisation, that this reengagement would be best served through building stronger links between social work and international movements and in making more effective use of the charter of the IFSW (International Federation of Social Workers).

PART IV

THE FUTURE

At the start of the 21st century we are witnessing a consolidation of economic, political and social power on an unprecedented scale. The values, institutional processes and motivational imperatives around materialistic individualism accompanying the explosion and concentration of capital are a threat to the well being of the majority of the world's peoples and cultures and to the ecological integrity of our planet. The war in Iraq has highlighted the extreme danger posed when processes of power consolidation are embodied in a single ideology driven superpower that evokes in response an equally virulent and violent form of religious fundamentalism. The resulting conjecture of relentless neo-liberalism, virulent religious and ideological fundamentalism, aggressive militarism and resurgent racism poses particular dangers for women and for people of colour worldwide, and calls for clearer integration, in the work of the emerging movement for global justice, of an analysis of the sexism and racism underlying these processes and forces.

Peggy Antrobus, (2004:3)

Globalisation is, in fact, the ultimate enclosure – of our minds, our hearts, our imaginations and our resources.

Vandana Shiva, (2005:30)

Internationalising my practice - introduction

The World March of Women in the year 2000 was a global campaign aimed at ending violence against women and promoting equality between men and women. After many activities worldwide, on the 17th October millions of signed postcards supporting these aims from all around the world were presented to Kofi Annan of the United Nations after a major rally in New York City. Earlier on in the year, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in Australia took on the responsibility for organising campaigns in each state of Australia and in WA, a small group of us formed a collective to organise the West Australian section. We put out a call through our networks for women interested in joining the organising collective, to be run along feminist lines. A number of feminist social work students joined the group as part of their community development project and rather than a march, we organised a major women's day of activities. While there were various lead up activities to raise awareness and funds, on the day the postcards were delivered in New York we celebrated, along with a diverse array of women and women's organisations in a carnival of all that is woman at the beautiful and historic setting of the Fremantle Arts Centre. While initially I had felt a huge burden of responsibility for this day, due to the diverse and creative talent of the collective, we organised a full program of activities in consultation with as many diverse women's groups we could find. As an event it was a huge success with a program of activities that ranged from forums on domestic violence to feminist drummers; from women's indigenous art to the women's trade union choir; from belly dancing to speakers on women and globalisation from many ethnic and pacifist groups. There were stalls from women's service organisations and food prepared by various ethnic groups, all of which contributed to an informative and entertaining day and evening – and hopefully a reinvigorated localised women's network. At the end of the evening as quiet once again descended on the site that was for many years an asylum for women, I sat alone at the base of the walls and fancied I could hear the applause of the women once incarcerated in that place from the windows above. There were two things that struck me as remarkable about the day. Firstly, the preparedness of local women to put aside their differences and the parochial politics of the women's movement to cooperate and share their experiences, knowing they were connecting with women all around the world. Secondly, at a much more immediate level for me, was the amazing energy that the next generation of feminist social workers were able to galvanise when working as part of a collective.

Like many of my colleagues in this study, in the current climate I had questioned the capacity of students for social, let alone feminist activism. This group of (mostly young) women worked so hard at being part of a collective, taking responsibility for various aspects of the campaign and being prepared to reach beyond their initial levels of personal challenge in working collectively to reflect critically on what they could give at an individual level and achieve as part of a cooperative effort. Through the process, not only did they utilise and expand their social work knowledge and skills in constructive and creative engagement with the task at hand, they became much more aware of the plight of women in increasingly globalised economies worldwide and of the power of feminist activism at the policy level. The realisation that they were part of a global women's movement and that their talents could make a difference, was as inspiring for those young women, the next generation of feminist social workers, as it was satisfying for me to realise that we are in fact leaving feminism in good hands.

The task ahead is not easy however as the larger picture is grim, especially for some groups of marginalised women.

FRAME ONE: CURRENT POLICY CONTEXT

Up against it, the globalised economy: triumph of the right or a path to change?

The globalised woman

When we look at how globalisation has played out in a number of newly industrialising countries, it is plain to see that women and children disproportionately bear the brunt of both poverty and violence at every level. At the turn of the century the UN estimates that of the billion or more of the world's population who lived in extreme poverty 70% were women (UN, 1999). The contrast between the realities of the rich of the world (most of whom are men) and the poorest of the poor (most of whom are women) could not be more marked. Undoubtedly some women have benefited from the globalised economy, most often those with existing wealth and education. While a very few women have gained from the transition to free market economics in their respective countries, by and large choices for women are decreasing across all countries where macroeconomic frameworks have emphasised the neo-liberal agenda (Antrobus, 2004; Shiva, 2001). In newly industrialising countries which have never had the protective buffer of a comprehensive welfare state (George, 2006), for many poorer women the choices have become quite stark, even for those who have had the 'privilege' of education. Increasingly women, especially women living in the two third's world, selling their labour under conditions of capitalist globalisation face very low wages, hunger, health risks, potential homelessness, sexual exploitation in its various guises, few social benefits and little freedom of organisation (Hoogvelt, 2001; Rasmussen, 1998; van der Gaag, 2004). From young women sold into sexual slavery in Eastern European and South East Asian countries through to loss of land that indigenous women in Australia experience; from women in Afghanistan still fighting to claim the right to work in public to the erosion of industrial gains that the women's movement has fought for over the past thirty years in industrialised countries; from being commodified as an 'export' as a housemaid from Sri Lanka in the middle East to employment in income generating projects funded by well meaning aid agencies making crafts for the international market, the patriarchal logic that accompanies globalism is evident

(Dillon, 2000). Arguably in moving forward it is important that this patriarchal logic is understood for as Shiva argues –

Gender analysis of globalisation cannot limit itself to ‘the impact on women’. It needs to take into account the patriarchal basis of the paradigms, models, processes, policies and projects advanced by these global institutions. It needs to take into account how women’s concerns, priorities and perceptions are excluded in defining the economy and excluded from the process of defining economic problems and proposing and implementing solutions (Shiva, 2005:132).

So where are we headed? The spread of DOS capital in the 21st century

Capitalism has always had globalising tendencies and as such is not a new phenomenon. Available technology and the internal regulation of money and capital have historically limited the extent of ability to obtain new markets. Certainly the colonisation of new lands and peoples by powerful others for the extraction of raw materials, exploitation of resources and creation of new markets has been seen as necessary to the notion of progress, especially since the industrial revolution. Since the 1970s however computer technology has developed at an unprecedented rate and allowed the communication and flexibility that capital needed to expand into every corner of the globe (Burkett, 1998; Held et al, 1999). This growth of technology accelerated dramatically during the 1990s such that perhaps the most significant factor in the spread of the market economy became globalisation of technology and communications. The world of fast communication in the 1990s effectively caused a revolution like no other in the history of humanity. The potential for communication of limitless information via the internet bypassed government censorship and regulation, the only limitations to transferral and receipt of this information were those of access and education (Hoogevelt, 2001; Scholte, 2001). While television and radio took the Western world behind the iron curtain and to China in the 70s and 80s, and was a key factor in events that precipitated the fall of the iron curtain, the internet however reached a much wider audience through the nineties and conveyed a much greater choice of uncensored information to those who could access it (ibid. Most importantly, this technology also allowed rapid transfer of capital and finance from one location to another, with serious ramifications for labour forces in many countries. As we move into the new millennium, rapid communication via the internet and Web have broken down barriers that isolate populations socially,

economically and politically such that various countries tend to be ‘absorbed’ and ultimately there is a tendency to cultural homogenisation (Bauman, 1998; Brecher & Costello, 1998; Khor, 2000; Leonard, 1997).

In the 1990s, the breakdown of economic barriers within and between nation states associated with economic globalisation proceeded at a rate that produced dramatic economic changes which had major social, cultural and environmental effects. Of particular significance for this thesis is that economic globalisation (globalism) (Bauman, 1998) has impacted upon political decision-making processes in sovereign states. This process, alongside the growth of political ideologies that support it, has had a profound effect on social policy at all levels and, as suggested above, impacted most seriously upon women everywhere.

Loss of sovereignty of nation states

One of the most significant changes to occur with the expansion of markets and technology through the nineties and into the new century is that the political power of nation states has been seriously eroded in some areas. Under free trade and a global financial system where decisions are made in other parts of the world and where information technology means decisions are made very quickly, national boundaries are increasingly becoming irrelevant (Fenna, 2004, Khor 2000; Scholte, 2000). Although it may be argued that the power of governments in capitalist economies has always been limited, a number of writers suggest that the nation state has lost much of its control over financial institutions, and, perhaps most importantly over economic and monetary policy (Antrobus, 2004; Bauman, 1998; Leonard, 1997). In addition national policies and policy-making mechanisms which have traditionally been the province of nation states have come under the influence of either international agencies, or are increasingly controlled by large multi-national corporations and driven by the needs of international finance. This in turn has significantly narrowed the ability of governments and indeed of the general populace to influence policy development or to exercise choice in areas that affect their lives (Bauman, 1998; Khor, 2000). The financial openness of economies has had serious implications for welfare states which have been, according to Mishra (1999) among others, structurally dependent on a Keynesian closed economy. Again the spread of this shift in policy making has been uneven. On the face of it countries of the

industrialised North with democratic political processes and a history of wealth redistribution via the mechanism of the welfare state have been better placed to determine and control the policy decision making process than those of the industrialising South. Here organisations like the WTO and the IMF acting in the interests of international capital are now effectively able to hold political leaders to ransom in economic affairs. In those countries where there has never been a welfare state there is no longer any buffer to the worst effects of free market economics (George, 2006; Singer, 2002). None the less decision making has been significantly curtailed within political processes in all countries. As such political power and notions of self determination have been largely usurped by the control of financial institutions and transnational companies over resources and the technology that accompanies it (Baumann, 1998; Fenna, 2004; George, 2006; Khor, 2000; Scholte, 2000).

In this scenario, governments more often than not, find themselves in the contradictory situation of trying to regulate the activities of transnational capital in what is perceived as the national interest. However at the same time trying to create a climate where investment will be encouraged and maintained to ensure the stability of their respective economies (Beck, 2000; Khor, 2000; Leonard, 1997). The role of the state in supporting the development of capital means increasingly that revenue from taxation tends to go to defence systems and to increased social control rather than to redistribution of wealth in the interests of the broader population. Although spending on income maintenance has increased in most OECD countries (Fenna, 2005; Jamrozik, 2005), arguably tightening of guidelines for eligibility also places this spending in the realm of social control. Services are likely to move more towards privatised and user pays systems and while for the general populace there may be the same taxation levels or slightly more (via flat taxes like the GST), generally there is likely to be a shift of taxation from progressive to regressive. In other words in terms of government provision the general public are quite likely to get less back for their taxation dollar and where they do there is less flexibility in terms of eligibility and increased surveillance. This is likely to impact most significantly on those on lower incomes, most of whom are women. Hence since the nineties, national governments everywhere and of every persuasion tend to perform a balancing act to a tune largely determined by international capital. In this scenario governments find themselves in the

unenviable situation of being compelled to simultaneously develop rules that work in favour of transnational companies, while at the same time dealing with the social and environmental consequences that are the fallout of economic globalisation, all the while trying to maintain electoral popularity (Antrobus, 2004; Fenna, 2004; Khor, 2000; Penna & O'Brien, 1998).

The Third Way

The Australian government is no exception to this. At point of writing the conservative Howard led coalition government has just been removed from office after eleven years. The incoming Labor government will be unlikely to act much differently in terms of setting the rules of the game for international capital however. The policy platform of Labor suggests that in achieving government they may be marginally more concerned with the impact that those rules have on various population groups. In my view, whilst governments may well be constrained by the factors outlined above, national social policy in this scenario is likely to be increasingly influenced by what is popularly known as 'The Third Way' (Fenna, 2004; Latham, 1998). This political ideology represents a revised form of the social democratic position articulated most clearly by Giddens (1994, 1999) and which proved popular with the Blair government in Britain.

In the tradition of reform liberalism, the third way attempts to strike a balance between proposals to reduce government and forestalling the worst excesses of the free market economy, while still ensuring competitiveness and wealth creation as policy priorities. One of the key goals of this perspective is the strengthening of civil society and hence an emphasis on education and training and community development to ensure that an excluded underclass does not develop (Fenna, 2004; Putnam, 2000). In arguing the case for an expanded and well resourced health service and improving the quality of and access to public education, Giddens argued that reform of the welfare state in the spirit of the 'third way' –

should not reduce it to a safety net. Only a welfare system that benefits most of the population will generate a common morality of citizenship. Where welfare...is targeted largely at the poor...the results are divisive. (Giddens, cited in Fenna, 2004:66)

At this point I have been a part of the welfare industry long enough to have a distinct feeling of déjà vu about such proposals, but I feel in the Australian context they may

well represent a more hopeful picture for social policy than current trends, albeit far from the notions of wealth redistribution, collectivity and inclusive citizenship that historically have comprised the socially just ideals of participatory social democracy. The reform nature of such proposals in my view also masks the further erosion of the commons increasingly placing in private (and distant) hands the resources and environment that sustain human well being.

Social Policy in the complexity of a globalised context

Arguably, the notion of Social Policy in this scenario is problematic. I have argued elsewhere that in many ways social policy in industrialised countries is stuck in a Keynesian time warp that assumes sovereignty of nation states, hence in social policy there remains an emphasis on parochial social planning (Dillon, 2000). In a globalised environment this limits the capacity of the field to achieve aims that were originally based on notions inherently tied up with localised frameworks of social justice and redistribution of wealth. It is my view that ideologically in a climate dominated by the political right, social policy has been progressively taken away from social commentators and placed in the hands of professional bureaucrats and economists with (so called) rationalist agendas that largely disregard the social, structural and certainly the environmental. Increasingly the anti-collectivist (rise of individualism) ideology which accompanies free market rhetoric means that the social is invariably subsumed under economics in political discourse and also hegemonically through the production of a culture of individualist consumerism. At time of writing, much hot air is circulating about the impacts of global warming. Very little of the hubris however is addressed to the limits of growth vis pre-emptive models of ecology as part of a triple bottom line approach to policy which incorporates the social and environmental alongside the economic as guidelines for balanced policy, nor indeed is there much discussion of the global nature of these issues.

Challenges to social sustainability

I suggest that it is no accident that moves to the right in populist discourse support increasing individualism and personal responsibility and shy away from structuralist explanations. While the rhetoric from policy makers is about diversity, there are clear boundaries and contradictions which beg questions around the likelihood of social

sustainability. Increasing complexity, at the social level, is juxtaposed against the rhetorical search for simplicity that the cultural turn to the right brings. Hence a rise in calls for traditional ‘family’ values and the increasing popularity of fundamentalist religions as notions of social justice disappear as part and parcel of increasingly outmoded ideas of collectivity. In a time of increasing diversity, this search for simplicity is resulting in polarisation between disparate groups and as such is socially divisive and often destructive. All of which has particular impact on women at every level, as historically more vulnerable to economic disadvantage than men and also as traditional ‘keepers’ of community and of culture.

Added to this I argue that although there has been increasing awareness of environmental issues in recent years, the paradigm of development that assumes limitless growth and continues to subsume the environmental under the economic (in effect devouring the hand that feeds), remains inherently contradictory and is ultimately fatally flawed. The global market is essentially ‘life-blind’, (McMurty, 2007) in its emphasis on the profitable at the expense of the environment and public health and welfare in its increasing predation of the global commons in the interests of the very few. Social and environmental sustainability in my view are inseparable when one considers the distribution of both social and environmental costs of unregulated development. As McMurty claims ‘Money grows by consuming human and natural resources as part of its feeding cycle...the ‘life capital’ of society is eroded as private capital accumulates’ (McMurty, 2007:34). Further Shiva argues the inseparability of notions of social justice, community ownership and ecology suggesting –

Restraint in resource use and living within nature’s limits are preconditions for social justice...the commons are where justice and sustainability converge, where ecology and equity meet.....the breakdown of community with the associated erosion of concepts of joint ownership and responsibility can trigger the degradation of common resources. What has been called the tragedy of the commons is in fact the tragedy of privatisation (Shiva, 2005:50).

In an increasingly globalised environment all of this I suggest, is an increasing difficult terrain for localised/national social policy to negotiate.

Social work in this scenario

In this climate, it is my observation that social work has also become largely separated from social policy. While social workers (in the Australian context at least) still study social policy as part of their education, increasingly few social workers work in positions where they have opportunities to influence policy in more than a tokenistic way. Added to this, decreases to funding for universities have led to funding cuts to social work schools with subsequent decreases in class time against higher numbers of students in tutorials and workshops. This combined with market led demands has resulted in an educational culture in universities such that concern with mechanics and process is increasingly overtaking critical debate over social issues. As can be seen from the women's narrative, while social work academics in universities struggle to keep critical debate alive, the reality is a narrowing focus in the curriculum as the market for social work graduates largely emphasises an economic rationalist agenda. With notable exceptions, (as in the young women who were a part of the WMW collective mentioned above), by and large social work students no longer generally see themselves as activists and are inclined to question any engagement with the macro. In my view this may well reflect the dominant individualist discourse, but may also reflect the more limited access to higher education that mature age activists experience. Once again social work graduates are becoming the 'soft cops' of the social system whose task it is to ensure the conformity of those 'deviants' who ultimately are the losers in the global economic climate. It is social workers who administer tightened eligibility for income and services and the increased surveillance that now accompanies claims on welfare systems. While the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) engages with the rhetoric of international activism and human rights (see IFSW website), at the local level, social work graduates increasingly have very little room for professional autonomy or the exercise of political voice that challenges the system on issues of concern, even if they are so inclined. Where there is radical activism, it is likely to be in the area of international development and in campaigns for human rights rather than in localised campaigns. All this I suggest is compounded by a culture within the social work profession, certainly in Australia, that identifies social work as 'casework' or individual work/counselling. Alongside an increasing disengagement with social policy, it is my observation that social work graduates are less and less likely to be engaged in

community development or research. All of these areas remain a part of most curricula in social work courses in this country at least, and they are areas of expertise that social workers do well. Such skills however are increasingly undervalued or utilised in a climate where an uncritical concern with free market economics has become the arbiter of all that is 'professional'.

Feminism, the women's movement and social policy

There can be little doubt that over the previous three decades there have been significant legislative gains and women, at least in Western industrialised countries in the public sphere are doing things their grandmothers never dreamed of. In the public sphere women have become much more visible in society than previous generations. While educational opportunities have also opened significantly for women, only some women however make it to the top of their chosen professions, still disproportionately so to men. In Australia while women have increased their representation in both state and federal parliaments exponentially over the past decade (Summers, 2003), curiously this has made little difference to women's lives overall. Thus political representation does not seem to be the guarantor of equality that classic liberalism would have us believe. Indeed, in the minds of the Australian population at large, women's formal equality has been achieved and there the matter rests. While there are marked differences between women, in the Australian context women as a group remain far from equal and the situation is becoming worse (Summers, 2003; Whitehouse, 2004). What is happening in other countries has been alluded to above, but in Australia in the first decade of the 21st century for women however it is worth noting that –

- the proportion of women in full time work has not increased in over thirty years (Summers, 2003);
- more women work part time or casually than at any time in the past and more than any other country in the industrialised world this is not from choice largely, but because of lack of childcare and other workplace support (Brennan, 2006);
- as a consequence, many women (myself included as casual lecturer and part time PhD student!) still do not often earn enough to keep themselves;

- women still earn less than men they did over a decade ago, the average earnings in May 2002 were close to \$300 per week less than men's (see ABS website). At point of writing updated statistics were not yet available;
- more women live on the economic margins because of increases in divorce, single parenting, and lack of superannuation or ineligibility for aged pensions, than ever before (Whitehouse, 2004);
- many services once available to women are no longer easily accessed, eg shortfall of (affordable) childcare places, decreasing funds for women's health centres (Brennan, 2006; Whitehouse, 2004);
- cost of services has increased often beyond ability to pay;
- sexual and domestic violence against women continues and ranges from sexual harassment in the workplace to homicide (Summers, 2003; Whitehouse, 2004);
- while women are more visible in the public sphere, 30 years after the second wave of feminism began, the private realm remains the province of women with only a very few men prepared to fully share the caring roles of the domestic sphere. As a result women's workloads have in many instances doubled when domestic and caring responsibilities are factored in, while men's have remained relatively unchanged for two decades (Brennan, 2006; Whitehouse, 2004);
- aboriginal women remain statistically the most disadvantaged group in Australia on every indicator with immigrant women from non-English speaking backgrounds the second most disadvantaged group (Whitehouse, 2004);
- while women's representation in parliament has increased, representation in political leadership, in executive positions in government and the judiciary remains marginal and arguably tokenistic (Sawer, 2003; Yeatman, 1998). Similarly women are only marginally represented in boardrooms or executive positions in major companies, although this has increased over recent years it is possible to count women CEOs in Australia on little more than one hand (Whitehouse, 2004).

Alarming as all this is, it does not make the news at night nor is any longer the subject of ongoing debate in media or parliament (or much in social work courses for that matter). In the absence of a strong women's movement that collectively challenges such practices, patriarchal attitudes to women are still very much alive. These attitudes vary from women being increasingly treated as sex objects in the media and at sporting events to the outright misogyny that greets any women who challenges patriarchal ways of doing things (vis the venomous response to Germaine Greer's criticism of Australian icon Steve Irwin after his death whilst reportedly 'filming' a stingray). (see Age Newspaper Friday, 8th September 2006; cracker.com.au 8th/10th September 2006; Guardian Newspaper Tuesday, 5th September 2006)

Some feminist authors have argued that the discourse surrounding changes to the welfare state is highly gendered. The gendered discourse according to Marian Sawer (1996) is exemplified in the use of masculine metaphors (nightwatchman – protecting property) to describe minimalist state intervention and female metaphors (nanny state) to describe the ('over' protective) social liberal state. According to Sawer, identifying the welfare state as 'female' is 'sufficient to mark it as inferior, indulgent and irrational compared to masculine versions of the state' (Sawer, 1996:129). Thus trivialising liberal democratic visions of a caring state and paving the way (metaphorically) for a more patriarchal revisioning of an independent, competitive and self reliant discourse in social policy. It's an interesting metaphor and while I am not convinced about the simplicity/reductionism in the point, there can be little doubt that patriarchal reasoning increasingly dominates the logic of state intervention in the 21st century. As such in my view it bears witness to a weakened women's movement that has succumbed in some measure to increasingly individualised understandings.

But why has the women's movement and feminism become so fragmented and ineffectual at the level of policy? There are differing levels of analysis and these are reflected in the participant's narrative throughout this thesis. It seems that apart from the ideological attack from the right however, that criticisms in the 90s of 'white western feminism', while needing to be taken on board have left us without a collective platform. Indeed, there is no longer a perception of a single voice of feminism, replaced by a general understanding of the need to incorporate diversity.

However I suggest that an emphasis on uncritical post-modernism in social science may have left feminism alongside other social movements weakened by a nihilistic over emphasis on the sacredness of the subjective. When taken up within an individualist and conservative right wing political climate, alongside a concerted backlash against feminism, the outcome is that women's comparative disadvantage is largely off the discussion agenda in policy and importantly, in universities. As a result young women graduates are increasingly unlikely to have encountered feminist analysis or where they have are unlikely to take it seriously because of the dominance of antifeminist culture.

Further, increasing individualism often translates into workplaces of isolation – professionals largely work as individuals, and it seems to me, team approaches to workplace relations are breaking down, especially in universities and in social services. In social work, my observations from field education are that the work itself is increasingly with individuals and workloads in case work appear to have increased dramatically over recent years. In pressurised environments relationships between workers who may well have similar outlooks on issues of social issues/justice, previously the basis of solidarity can break down very easily. In universities, increasing workloads mean it becomes easier to isolate academics. Antifeminist and backlash rhetoric and sexist practices are hard to identify and argue against as individuals. In a meritocracy women also achieve in their careers as individuals, perhaps losing important networks along the way and possibly being coopted into the patriarchal logic of the system. Increasingly as part of a corporate agenda, and as reflected by comments from participants, networking is liable to be more about feminist leadership in management, so again, this particular focus on women becomes part of a co-optive process. As can be sensed from the responses in this study, overall women are becoming increasingly tired from overwork combined with burdens of career and families/caring roles combined. In a conservative social and political environment, activist feminists are no longer getting the jobs where they can make a difference – or even bothering to apply (Summers, 2003) when they realise that 'government apologist' is one of the informal and unspoken selection criteria. As reflected in this study, there is a lot of disillusion within the women's movement itself as important networks dissolve and women increasingly feel marginalised and

alienated willing to name, but perhaps not challenge power issues between women and issues of inclusion/exclusion on bases of class and ethnicity in particular. In this environment it is little wonder that feminists increasingly work locally and resist becoming part of wider movements.

A depressing outlook certainly, despite which many of the women in the study remained optimistic for the future in this complex and challenging environment and their views on what needs to change are outlined in the next section.

FRAME TWO: WOMEN'S VOICES

How women saw the future of social policy and the potential of the women's movement to have an impact.

Social Policy

By the end of the nineties women in the study had generally become quite cynical about the adequacy of social policy in its current form to address the multiplicity of social concerns with which they identified. As social workers and/or social work academics they increasingly felt isolated and alienated from the policy process and in a rapidly conservatising context, were pessimistic about their capacities to influence change. At the same time however, and paradoxically perhaps, most of the women held hope for the possibility of social change and for the role of a reinvigorated women's movement and social work as catalysts for that change. Equally, women expressed concern about the limitations of feminism in an increasingly globalised and diverse world and shared their thoughts on what needed to change for feminism to have a significant impact on social policy agendas of the future.

Broad contextual concerns

Reflecting the concern of the shift of focus in policy from the social to the economic, there was some pessimism expressed about the directions of social policy in general, while at the same time hoping for positive change in terms of social justice agendas. Jill felt 'pessimistic, while feeling this way (I) hope to be proved wrong'. Jill's hopes were for 'widespread opposition to continuing disadvantage' and to the 'widening gap in socio economic conditions'. Ruth similarly put her pessimism down to developments in the political context stating 'I don't think there's much future for progressive social policy with the emergence of third way thinking and New Labor philosophies'. Whereas Pen thought the context was 'pretty challenging' and that perhaps 'things will get worse before they get better'. Jane too saw 'a lot of tensions in social policy' particularly in relation to the 'ongoing role of the welfare state and the role that government, business, the market and the community will play'.

Policy priorities

Other respondents outlined the urgency of the task of social work in reclaiming social policy and highlighted the global scope of policy issues. Linda for instance spoke of the ‘major changes’ that are happening in public policy in Australia and other countries. Of the importance of social policy to social work in this context she wrote,

I see the future of social policy as absolutely critical to the future of social work. Social policy is critical as a tool in understanding and responding to macro changes vis globalisation, corporatisation etc. I believe (however) there is a danger that social work will try to cope with these changes by just trying to survive and help others survive at the grass roots level.

Bridget also hoped for ‘some signs of reaction against economic rationalism’, citing issues such as renewed support for a social wage and better services as well as worker safety and fair taxation as key issues in point. Marli wrote of sometimes ‘feeling overwhelmed’ by ‘the amount we are now expected to understand in the global era’, but pointed to the need to engage with international social movements, ‘if the structures can be strengthened’. Marli outlined the imperative for ‘reclaiming a welfare state’, given the current situation which ‘has dramatically moved from rights to conditionality’. She also wrote of the casualisation of labour and un(der)employment as continuing problems associated with automation; of the increasing difficulty for young people in establishing themselves in housing and ‘the stability necessary for family life’. She expressed concerns at the extent to which the conservative government had ‘sold off the state’ and of how this was a ‘frightening’ scenario for any ideal of a reclaimed welfare state. Marli also saw social alienation expressed in drug use and gambling as signs of ‘society having lost its social purpose and its soul’. Added to this she saw that environmental concerns were linked in with the social vis –

increasing costs, crowding and pollution in large Australian cities, the absence of decentralisation policies, the absence of job creation and economic infrastructure development and the absence of sustainable environmental and economic policies is worrisome.

As well as expressing her concerns about unemployment, to this list Beth added aged care policy as ‘a growing area, but one in which few social work students are

interested'. Beth also was concerned that refugees and race relations were an increasing concern 'which needs to be addressed'.

Women and social policy - issues and agendas

While outlining urgent policy agendas at a general level however, it was the perceived decreasing impact of feminism at the policy level that was expressed as significantly worrying by most participants. Madonna commented that even though 'we've still got women of our generation who would want to influence policy, from where I sit there seems to be no overt articulation of women's policy or even feminist theory', this despite the fact that women had moved into the mainstream in fairly powerful positions. Madonna was not certain whether feminism had lost its focus as a result of the dominance of the economic discourse over the social, or whether it was simply 'assumed that feminism was now just so much integrated and a part of everything that the focus had disappeared and now is totally diminished'. The reality is probably a bit of both.

Many participants considered that while some things had changed for women, in many instances in a conservative context, hard won gains were well in retreat. Arguing that feminism still had a major contribution to make, Anne was 'not at all of the view that these issues in Australia, let alone the rest of the world, have at all been resolved in terms of gender or structural inequality in relation to gender'. Antoinette too remarked that in general 'she hoped for a third wave feminist movement, as people realised that second wave feminism has not achieved equality for women'. While Jill considered that feminism still continued to have an impact, as evidenced by young women who 'feel that they have more choices to shape their futures in non-traditional ways' such as alternatives to marriage or range of career choices, by and large however, Jill was of the view 'that little has changed' for most women.

Pen also didn't 'see much evidence of feminism advancing its agenda in the face of growing trends in capital consolidation'. Considering the specific impact of increasing privatisation on women, Pen commented –

User pays is impacting – it is okay for those who can afford (it), but I wonder what is happening to those who can't. Contract and tendering practices may be undermining the idea of importance of process. I have a soft spot for childcare and I worry about the quality or lack of on students and low income workers who can't afford. Come to think of it, it is pretty tough for middle class women as well. If you ask me some major rethinking needs to happen and that may take some time as some times these things tend to evolve.

Ruth also considered that the increase in managerialist and market based thinking 'can only act against women's interests'. Citing challenges to abortion law and child care and the replacement of women's studies courses with gender studies, (the 'poor men approach'), among other issues, Ruth considered feminism to now be 'at risk'. As she pointed out 'the most overt feminism seems to be consistent with a liberal feminist discourse and the more radical forms have been discredited yet again'. In more reflective vein Ruth offered the following incisive overview of where she felt the women's movement is at –

As an older feminist, a mother and teacher, I feel concerned that much that was achieved in practice and theory development is either taken for granted or rejected. Little has changed in terms of women's representation and participation in positions of power, and even worse, little has changed in the way the structures of power operate. Certainly my life is much richer than my mother and grandmother experienced, but it comes at a cost. Women seem to be still faced with a need to work harder and better to be accorded equal respect in the workplace and as citizens.

Beth, Marli and Zenobia all pointed out that backlash against feminism was a strong and persistent reality to contend with. While arguing that 'feminism and equality are issues that need to be kept alive, otherwise there is always a danger of regression', Beth had a sense that increasingly 'feminism is (seen as) a spent force and doesn't count anymore'. At the same time she highlighted women's issues such as child prostitution, women in poverty and as drug users and abuse of elderly women as needing to be kept 'in the limelight'. Referring to past collective achievements as an ongoing vision for the future, Beth simply remarked 'women are a powerful force when they work together'.

Bridget recalled the gradual increase in women politicians over the years, but expressed disappointment at the lack of feminist representation within government bureaucracies asking, 'Where have all the femocrats gone?' Bridget also observed a generation gap between young feminists and 'old timers, like me', commenting that

the issues were different now for young women who ‘assume (erroneously) that all the fights have been won’. Bridget also expressed concern about increasingly ‘limited challenges to the structural/cultural forces that sustain and perpetuate male violence’, and the ‘problem of boys, (and the need for ongoing) challenges to traditional masculinity in the information age’.

Lilith spoke of her survival within the system despite having at times ‘quite radical theories’ and being ‘quite openly lesbian’, but she too felt that the women’s movement was not only going backwards but moving into apologist mode. In her own (absolutely unapologetic) words –

I still believe that – I get worried when we go to meetings and conferences when we have to almost apologise for talking about feminism. I get worried when we have to talk about gender, I feel like we are going backwards when we have to constantly talk about men when we talk about women because we might not be egalitarian enough. I quite frankly don’t give a stuff about what men are doing, except in as much as they are oppressing me. I get fed up in an institution where in assisting women I get constantly challenged on what we are doing for men and have to say that’s not what we are talking about. I get really pissed off when I look at social work as a profession and see that despite the fact that it has a female history it is still controlled by men. And that when there are jobs that go because they tow the line and because they do what is required in a more clear fashion they get the promotions, or that because of the kinds of theories and ways you have to compromise, women aren’t just prepared to do that. I get pissed off when I look at small schools of Social Work and see that basically the women are the housewives of the social work schools. They do the field ed, they do the hard yakka, they do the administration, they keep the thing running. And I think what are we doing? We’re just modelling bad practice, and so I get really worried about that.

Caring

Caretaking in Lilith’s view was something that social workers and social work academics took on uncritically. As such ‘caretaking’ was still an assumed role even for professional, educated and feminist women. In Lilith’s example women social work academics maintained a disproportionate role in field education and administration. However, a number of other respondents also considered that women’s role in caring per se had remained largely unchanged despite feminist led advances in other spheres. Millie considered that in general ‘feminism still had a long way to go in impacting on social policy’, and cited disability and aged care as examples of how ‘women are still cast as carers’ and therefore still ‘contribute disproportionately’ to what essentially remained the province of the domestic sphere.

Anne also expressed concern about the largely unchallenged role of women in caring and argued for a –

very major role for feminist theory and the women's movement to play in social policy relating to a whole range of issues related to caring (however that's defined) and the state's attempt to move caring back onto the private sector, ie back onto women – unpaid. There's absolutely no difference as far as I can see over those three decades for professions seen to be dominated by women and their status and value in society – nursing, social work and so on.

Clearly, these women felt that at many levels women's caretaking role remained a disappointing given, despite 30 years of sustained critique of this role by feminist writers. Neither had much changed in terms of women's assumed dependency on men, especially when rendered dependent by care-taking responsibilities. Although a specific federal allowance for carers of disabled people had been introduced in recent years, this is means tested according to partner's income and does not adequately recognise the time and energy involved in the caring process nor indeed does it take account of the amount of funding saved by the state through care in this 'informal' sector.

Solidarity wearing thin - oppression of women by women

Of concern was the perception among some respondents of the breakdown of relationships between women leading to a lack of solidarity – at best and at worst feelings of marginalisation and 'othering'. For Zenobia the breakdown in collectivity among women was a major issue largely attributed to context and the increasing expectations on women in the public sphere. Making the links between her own situation and the current context Zenobia asserted –

The individualist nature of society has meant that women don't seem to have time or inclination to be with others or to do things that will advantage each other. I am under the strictest instructions from my boss (a woman) that I am not to be 'involved' in anything so as to finish my PhD – as if my involvement is somehow unimportant in my life. The time factor I readily acknowledge, but for her when I say that things I engage with are my contribution to society she looks at me rather blankly and says she thinks I have done enough".

This begs the question as to the extent to which women taking on leadership positions may readily adopt hierarchal and patriarchal understandings, either consciously or

unconsciously. These sentiments were echoed by both Linda and Marion who both expressed concerns about the exclusivity of feminism as they knew it. Linda felt that as certain groups benefited from the achievements of feminism and entered management positions, the women concerned showed little concern for those who had not similarly benefited, as Linda explained ‘I have seen minimal levels of sisterhood – in fact I have seen women’s oppression of other women’. Marion was more explicit about her concerns commenting –

I have no optimism for feminism as I have experienced it because most of its issues are rhetoric and the practices continue to be oppressive. I don’t think for example that feminism has really addressed or acknowledged the competitiveness between women as somehow if you are a feminist you are cooperative and inclusive rather than acknowledging personal ambition and the unspoken ways (fair or foul) of ‘getting there’. Rhetoric alone does little to address oppressive practices between women – how can we hope to look at oppression of women by men? Only some women have benefited and it seems it is those who play the same games that men are purported to engage with – and they don’t just play such power games with men, they use them against their rhetorical sisters.

Ellen also warned of the elitism of feminism arguing that ‘it is clear that for some groups in Australia and internationally, women remain disadvantaged and oppressed’, and that as feminism has largely been relevant only to professional women and those who are less oppressed, ‘questions about feminism may become a luxury, (as) how to survive may be the only question for the really oppressed’. To Ellen this suggested that –

in social policy we have to move ‘beyond feminism’ to a more holistic approach to poverty, discrimination, domestic violence and in built biases which influence the survival of women, their families and whole communities.

Diversity

The above comments are interesting given that a constant theme coming through from many respondents was the need for feminism to be more inclusive and to recognise diversity, and in doing so, reframe feminism in a more positive contemporary light. Jane summed up her view which in many ways mirrored those of other respondents.

In relation to the impact of feminism on current debates, I think it will continue to have a critical role in areas such as masculinity issues, working with women who are experiencing violence as well as highlighting the needs of potentially marginalised women such as indigenous women. I think it will be important for feminists to continue to acknowledge the diversity of women’s experiences, but at the same time not lose sight of the strengths in sisterhood and collective action. So (it’s) really

trying to work out how best to represent this tension and at the same time not alienate marginalised women.

In similar vein Marli pointed out –

The important issues for women now are those women experiencing multiple disadvantage in order to ensure that the middle and upper middle class do not reap all the benefits of gender reforms. For example, indigenous women, immigrant and refugee women and women who cannot get refugee status, and women with disabilities. Poor women continue to be trapped in poverty, as inequality continues to increase – within as well as between countries.

Anne also felt that in some ways the old criticism of the seventies/eighties that feminist theory was often specific to ‘Anglo-middle class women’ still held some truth. Anne suggested –

We still haven’t found ways of thinking that are inclusive of Islamic women for example, who wish to maintain their Islamic beliefs and practices and so forth and how does that sit with the feminist movement in Australia and social policy and so forth. So I think there’s lots of work to be done to include people who haven’t been included. (We) need to look at rather more diverse kinds of feminism in an increasingly globalised environment.

Pearl also identified Islamist beliefs pertaining to women as a challenge the feminist movement must meet, claiming that white western feminism simply does not understand the complexity of the issues. Pearl felt that in a context of globalisation and internationalisation that feminism needed to remain relevant by embracing a broader conception of women and ‘women’s roles, women’s place and women’s capacity to change the world and to be a part of the world’. Failure to change she warned would mean that feminism would simply ‘work itself out of existence and just lose credibility entirely’. Currently however –

I guess part of the critique of feminism that it is perhaps getting a bit elderly and a bit irrelevant, but probably still there is the ethno centric, white middle class nature of feminist analysis as still the dominant paradigm in feminism.

To address this situation in Pearl’s view, feminism needed to position itself in relation to the sorts of forces that are driven by women, but who are, in the eyes of western feminism, the –

perpetrators of those forms of what we might read as oppression, but (authors of practices which) are often disclaimed as oppression (by those women) and claimed to be a liberatory process.

Utilising specific examples from Islam to make her point about the complexity of the issues at stake Pearl continued –

I'm sure people are writing reams on this, but I haven't thought it through entirely for myself. But the whole issue of how feminism copes with the complex nature of women's positioning with veiled women and Afghani women (for example) covered head to toe – and female genital mutilation as one of those issues.I don't think we understand that, I don't either..... Female, genital mutilation I can understand as women enacting it on behalf of patriarchy, but covering up? I'm not sure if it is the same thing or different. Whether its patriarchy or not, I don't feel I understand it, but think that feminist analysis has got to be able to speak to those sort of issues and not be into an 'othering' sort of role of saying this is all terrible stuff *for* women. It may be, but it may not be and it's not either/or, it's so complex.

Stretching the theme a little further but with examples from statutory practice, Pearl also expressed concern as to how feminism had by passed women clients of child protection services adding –

I don't think we are yet all that good at empowering women who are child protection clients, or the mothers of. I think there are very disempowered women in our own communities who are not well served by feminists or feminist thinking.

Hence the challenge as far as Pearl was concerned was for feminism to be more relevant and to encompass the diversity 'somehow'.

The 'somehow' that Pearl talked about was expanded upon by Ellen who, reflecting upon her history of working for many years with diverse cultures offered the following pointers to reflective and inclusive practice –

During the 1950s and 1960s, cultural and social contexts shaped my approach to professional social work practice. I worked with immigrants, 'New Australians' and others and found the moral and professional certainties I had learned in my social work courses were just not applicable. This early experience encouraged me to remain a perpetual student, somewhat sceptical of the theoretical fashions of each period. Each new situation and cultural context has made me revise and review my thinking. Many of the lessons from the 1950s and 1960s are still relevant today and I find that we are still confronting stereotypical thinking in our own practice, just as we did fifty years ago. The difference is that now there seems to be more room for different viewpoints and a greater willingness in the Social Work profession to admit that we do not have all the answers. Hopefully this is a sign of our real maturity as a profession.

In terms of strategies for capturing the diversity and understanding the ‘multidimensionality of reality’, Imogen speculated on the use of multimedia in teaching to ‘enable that sort of stuff to come to the fore, whereas black and white text really is a killer because it is so one dimensional – either/or’. Use of technology such as power point to enable visual presentations in Imogen’s view ‘really allowed some of these tensions to be explored’. Picking up on this point Athena considered it important not to try and ‘say everything in one space’, and likened the process of considering ideas to a spotlight shifting focus from one area to the next, in this way the challenge in working with diversity becomes how to –

present ideas and practices in ways that are interconnected, but (knowing) you don’t have to be everything to everybody all the time, but you can still be connected. So how can you honour your connectedness while focussing on one aspect, but in the next minute the spotlight goes from that aspect to another aspect. But all of it is like part of the stage – the spotlight goes from one bit, and other bits are in dusky mood lighting and some ideas might be in blackness. But those ideas in blackness are never not visible...

Optimism for the future

Despite a certain ambivalence about feminism per se and a feeling that the women’s movement was being somewhat left behind in the critique of the impact the current political and global context is having on women, many respondents were hopeful for the future. Much of this hope was focussed on emerging social movements and the social agenda of reclaiming the social over the economic. As Zenobia remarked on her hopes, ‘We have to insist that economic and social policy are the two sides of the one coin – one must inform the other’. Sin on the other hand was optimistic that ‘there is beginning to be a re-emergence in feminism and other identity politics and (I) see more political activity taking hold as the world continues to get meaner and crueler and capitalism runs rampant’. Pen said she ‘would like to see feminism engage more with the sort of work that Marilyn Waring (1999) was carrying out in New Zealand, the concerns she raised are even more visible today, ie: the intangible is being discounted in a big way’. Lilith similarly questioned whether she ‘still wanted to be a part of this or is it time to go back to the reflective on the edge’. For Lilith the context felt ‘like going full circle – where it is almost time for alternative structures’. Anne also saw a role for feminism in developing alternatives, as she concluded –

Whilst ever there's a push from the state, as I think there is pretty well internationally, to move things like care of the elderly or care of people with disability back into the 'family, meaning back to women, feminist theory and the feminist movement has a role in developing alternatives. Not just saying 'don't do that it's bad for women', but actually coming up with alternatives that are going to be appropriate and positive for all the parties/stakeholders. I'm not sure how much we have done that.

For other respondents social work and the feminism of the future was about engaging constructively with current issues and building and strengthening the links with wider movements for change. While this might prove challenging in a world characterised by rapid technology and increasing violence/marginalisation of those seen as 'other', the imperative was for social work to increase its involvement with those movements as part of its ethic of social responsibility. As Marli surmised –

It's hard to know what 'rebuilding the community infrastructure' might actually mean, in a society whose cultural composition is now very diverse and whose people, therefore, have links across the world. Yet we cannot turn globalisation back. Feminism, therefore, must concentrate on the diversity of women, and on poor women and indigenous women. Housing and secure income matter. Human rights are a major agenda. Ethical reproductive practices and guidelines (to limit the rush of scientific so-called developments) are important. All of these are, on a global scale, astounding problems. I guess it is the responsibility of women's movements in the more peaceful and well off countries, such as Australia, to strengthen international structures and processes to support women's struggles for basic life and safety in war-torn parts of the world.

To Jez also, who saw the women's movement as 'so fragmented' the enormity of world events such as Sept 11, provided an opportunity to 'regroup' around issues of violence and challenging the conditions that lead to structural violence.

I think we've got to take the opportunities as they come along in terms of ensuring that we keep some aspects of that (the women's movement) alive. I don't want war and I think there are other ways of dealing with conflict other than actually killing whole piles of people – of massacring people; yes, women and children who are starving, who are disadvantaged, like, it's just so inhumane – it's an act of terrorism really. We talk about one act, but maybe there is some opportunity there for doing something which can have broader effects.

In similar vein, Madonna expressed her cause for optimism and a role for social work in this process –

Uncertainty has also created opportunities for us to shape our own future. I think social work is able to have a greater role in shaping institutions, policy and in social change. Two things are therefore essential in defining social work and social policy in the future, the international perspective and the way we use technology.

And finally again to Zenobia for whom the way forward was in empowering social workers as lobbyists, in her own inspiring words –

We have to be at the barricades again – be outspoken and lay claim to that which we know to be true. That we cease as a society forcing the wedge between what happens for boys and girls as if you can only advantage one over the other. That the feminist debates of the 70s, 80s 90s be reignited so that once again we go forward with fire in our bellies. (That we) expose the current political debates as the sham they really are – boys with their toys. Attacking with humour might provide some well earned relief. (As social workers) taking back our position as the section of society that continues to debate and seek understanding in the broadest, most inclusive manner.

Thus, while clearly outlining the challenges that face social work, social policy, feminism and the women's movement, my colleagues and I remain generally optimistic for the future with constructive suggestions on strategies for reclaiming and reinvigorating social justice agendas for the future.

FRAME THREE: CONCLUSION

The movement can also be understood as a patchwork quilt, full of colour and different patterns, discontinuous and defying description, but none the less an identifiable entity made up of units that have their own integrity. A quilt, an art form peculiarly developed by women, uses whatever material is available to make something both beautiful and functional. It represents ingenuity, creativity, caring and comfort. A global women's movement can have no better symbol as it seeks to create a world in which people might find beauty, comfort and security.

(Peggy Antrobus, 2004:23)

Gender inequality is a far-reaching societal impairment, not merely a special deprivation of women. That social understanding is urgent as well as momentous.

(Amartya Sen, 2005)

There is no single or linear truth represented in this thesis, rather the analogy of the women's movement as a patchwork quilt outlined above by Peggy Antrobus, can also be applied here. Set against a backdrop of the social, political and economic context of each of the three decades of the last century and woven together with threads of analysis coloured with political economy and feminist critique, each woman's story in all its richness and diversity is woven together with those of their colleagues to form an intricate and multi-layered tapestry that in four parts makes the complex whole. While there are consistencies, in the main the narrative contained within is notable in both its diversity of experience and for that experience to frequently sit in juxtaposition to the mainstream, or indeed to the experience of colleagues. Like the patchwork quilt the perspective differs according to whether one is standing close or viewing from afar, each viewer will focus in on differing elements and have a differing interpretation of the complexity within.

The thesis

In this thesis I have utilised a feminist herstorical materialist standpoint as developed by Smith (1991) and expanded upon by other feminist researchers (Harding, 1987;

Naples, 2003) to explore the way 24 of my women colleagues working in social work and welfare education in Australia experienced changes in the social policy context over the final three decades of the twentieth century. The underlying assumptions which have informed the research methodology are of knowing the world from within and that the starting point of research is experience and actualities of the everyday world, in this instance of women's experience as the place where enquiry begins. Hence the thesis is *Feminist* - in that I have focussed attention on the women's experience and their naming of the world which includes the intersection of the personal with the political; in location of myself in the research as a member of the group concerned and in acknowledging that the analysis does not separate or objectify the experience of the women involved. It is *Herstorical* - as the thesis essentially is a chronology of change over a thirty year time span as told from the position of the women in the study, and it is *Materialist* - as the experiences are set against the backdrop of a political economy critique of the changing political, social and economic conditions that together make up the social policy context over those three decades.

Method revisited

Through the use of on line questionnaire and interview I asked women colleagues in Australian universities to share their experiences of policy context, theory which informed their practice and how they felt that feminism and the women's movement had impacted upon their lives in the 1970s, 80s and 90s respectively. My final question concerned their hopes for the future. While the responses were highly diverse in length and content and as such difficult to summarise, with the hope of avoiding essentialism (and as such remaining true to my methodological integrity), there are some consistencies of thought that have carried through that are worth recapping by way of summary and conclusion.

Findings

The final three decades of the twentieth century were a period of great change socio-politically and economically, in Australia as indeed in much of the industrialised world. Through the seventies the rationale behind the welfare state was that of Keynesianism/collectivism which even under conservative governments had been the

dominant economic discourse in most Western countries since the early fifties. For the women in the study the seventies by and large was perceived as a time of change and hope for the future. While this was in many respects a carryover from the social movements that had burgeoned elsewhere in the world, especially the UK and the USA, it had played out in Australia in resistance to the war in Vietnam at the turn of the decade. People power on the streets led swiftly to a cultural rethink that ultimately resulted in a change of government at federal level that represented a shift from a long entrenched old style conservatism to more social democratic understandings vis the election of the Whitlam government in 1972. While this government was in power for only three years, the women in the study remember this time as ripe with possibility for change in welfare provision and social policy and particularly notable for the way in which the government was summarily dismissed in 1975.

The seventies was also a time when the theory base of social work in Australia moved from clinically based focus on individuals to an engagement with structural and socialist explanations for social disadvantage emanating mostly from the radical school of the UK. The emergence of these theories combined with the opportunities for social workers to be employed in creative and interesting community based programs initiated through the Australian Assistance Plan and other community based organisations was reported by most of the women in the study as a time of challenging but positive change in social work. It is notable that it was also a time when social workers were encouraged to contribute to social policy and indeed many reports and suggestions for change were initiated by social workers at the time, including the women in this study.

There is a sense from the women's recollections of energy and optimism for the future, often expressed in social activism and through membership of leftist political parties, a number having joined the Australian Labor party, seeing it at the time as a vehicle for social reform. This optimism continued through the seventies even though the latter half of the decade was dominated by austerity in federal spending after the return of a conservative coalition government. While some of the women had started to engage with feminism by the end of the decade and a very few were active in the

women's movement, for most feminism was a star on the horizon at that point and the personal and the political for many frustratingly separate.

As they moved into the corporatist eighties and generally from social work and welfare practice to education, the women engaged more closely with feminism and by the end of that decade, most were at the forefront of the women's movement in one way or another. Through the eighties the activism had shifted from class based politics to a broad engagement with service delivery, generally focussed on developing services for women or in lobbying for legislative change to ensure equality of opportunity. As the 80s progressed and liberal feminism found expression through legislation and the development of women's services, most of the participants had incorporated feminism and gender analysis into their teaching and feminism was beginning to impact on their lives, especially for those who were raising children. Activism through the eighties was more closely linked with policy development based in advocacy, service delivery and localised community development than on membership of political parties, although most women reported consciously fostering solid networks and connections to build political lobbying power for their particular cause. Over the eighties there was also a general increase of consciousness of the importance of building strong power bases, whether that was as members of advisory boards or committees of management for services such as refuges or domestic violence or as part of the union movement and political parties. The 80s was the decade of important legislative gains for women and the women in the study were a vital part of that process. It was also a decade when the women felt that there was reward for the effort put in. There were many achievements in this decade, in the workplace, in the community and in education as each woman gained credibility and tenure and their contributions to the community and in education were recognised. It was also the decade for higher study with most of the women undertaking master's programs and a few going on to achieve PhDs. Interestingly, most of the research undertaken at this stage focussed on women, with those participants reporting that the engagement with feminist theory undertaken at that point made a significant impact on their consciousness and ultimately on the direction in their lives.

Through the eighties, despite growing conservatism in the welfare system, the women were generally buoyed by the broadening scope of feminism which sat alongside or overtook structural explanations for disadvantage in their theory base and in their teaching. The relationship of the women to policy and the policy context became more complex through the 80s however. Most of the women were involved with community based committees and in lobbying efforts for funding for specific services, successfully in many cases. The Accord of the Hawke government through the eighties had resulted in more elitist decision making at the government level and the welfare lobby, where it was consulted, became increasingly marginalised. At the same time the increasing focus on the economy over the social paved the way for the entry of free market ideology into economics during the next decade. Hence, while services for women were increased or remained relatively untouched there was a subtle but perceptible shift in thinking about welfare in general wherein notions of social democratic and preventative approaches to welfare reverted to targeted and residual forms.

This shift in thinking escalated during the nineties with the increasing dominance of free market economics. Where it was still in use, the term social justice became problematic and relative in a dominant economic discourse where ideas of social justice and redistribution of wealth had largely become terms of disparagement. In Australia through the early nineties, welfare services were increasingly contracted out to non government agencies. Funding to universities became more restrictive and an entrepreneurial approach to education was encouraged. While at the legislative level there were some advances for marginalised groups under the Keating Labor government, most notably in land rights legislation for indigenous people, there were few new advances for women. In fact, when the conservative Howard government came to power in 1996, important gains that had occurred for women came under attack or were reversed. In a climate where funding cuts to higher education proceeded at an alarming rate, women in this study came under increasing pressure in the workplace. Higher class numbers and increased contact hours combined with pressure to complete PhDs and apply for research grants to fund the schools in which they were teaching resulted in increased stress and in some cases health problems such as depression and burnout. Contact hours with students were reduced and this,

the women believed had a marked impact on the quality of social work and welfare education.

As the welfare system as they had known it started to crumble before them, there was a sense through the nineties of weariness and increasing disillusion - a losing of the way accompanied by a questioning of what all their hard work had actually been about. There was also a sense of retreat from activism informed by feminism alongside a growing disconnection from collegial ways of working. While, this may reflect the increasing busyness of their lives, it also may reflect the growing culture of competitiveness and individualism that had found its way into university systems through the political culture of the nineties. Women academics in social work also increasingly bore the brunt of backlash against feminism fuelled by the perception of growing conservatism among students and attitudes among many students of disengagement with anything but an instrumental approach to social work practice.

In this environment social policy, while still taught in social work schools also became increasingly instrumental and dislocated from social activism. Indeed as the Howard regime had dismantled or replaced most of the social policy advisory boards and committees, social work, while still located within a narrowing social policy context, had very little scope of influence at the political level. Much to the frustration of the women in the study, while small pockets of resistance remained, social work as a profession became once again working with individuals within increasingly narrow frameworks of understanding, largely centred on administration of conservative government policy.

In this climate the women in the study moved in varying degrees to explanations of power and disadvantage based in post structural or post modern understandings. For some this meant a shift away from feminism and a view that structural explanations for poverty and disadvantage based in modernist understandings were outmoded, largely irrelevant and not taking adequate account of diversity. Others tried to engage the tension between critical approaches and post modern explanations, especially in a climate of increasing economic globalism where decisions which affect people's lives were increasingly likely to be made outside of localised or national policy process.

Much of this critical postmodernism found its roots in post-colonialism and anti-racist literature in conjunction with feminism and revamped critical theory. Alongside this the women had become largely disengaged from what they saw as a fragmented women's movement. While still engaged in what they saw as activism, particularly in working with women, for many the engagement with feminism became more cautious and critical emphasising a lack of diversity and acceptance of difference. Certainly the majority of participants pointed to the need for new models of feminism that were more inclusive and less centred on the experience of white educated women.

Despite feeling disillusioned and having a sense of losing direction in their social activism, many of the women were optimistic for change as they moved into the 21st century. Optimism for the future centred on social work re-engaging with broader social movements and in taking a lead in social policy development. In an increasingly globalised world participants clearly identified the multiplicity of problems that social policy needed to address. From increasing structural inequality, to the tensions on the role of government in an increasingly privatised free market agenda; from women's relatively unchanged role in caring over three decades to the impact of environmental costs among other concerns, the women in the study had constructive suggestions about a reinvigorated role of social work in social policy.

Central to this role was the importance of social work in reclaiming social policy and in doing so to relentlessly make the case for reclaiming the social alongside the economic. To achieve this it was suggested that social workers need to understand and be involved in influencing macro changes via increased engagement with international social movements and in strengthening international structures aimed at challenging the dominance of the market agenda.

Of key importance for participants was the role of feminism in social policy. Noting that despite increases in women's political power base (in industrialised countries at least) over the past decade, the women largely agreed that feminism seemed to have lost its focus in social policy and inequality was still far from achieved. Many respondents believed that little had changed for women generally, despite three decades of second wave feminism. This was seen to be the case especially in terms of

the social expectation of women's care-taking role which it was felt had regressed under neo-liberal and privatisation policy agendas. It was noted that in mainstream discourse there seemed to be an assumption of integration and that increasingly mention of women's persistent inequality was liable to be met with varying levels of backlash and resentment. This combined with a breakdown in solidarity within the women's movement itself it was suggested, left a weakened position for feminism in social policy. A persistent concern was the perception of feminism as dealing with only one seat of oppression, seen as elitist, dominated by the needs of white, western, educated professional women and lacking in relevance to the varied needs of disadvantaged women, especially in a globalised environment.

Despite these concerns, invariably the women in the study sought to keep the ideals of sisterhood and women's equality alive via a reinvigorated, diverse and relevant women's movement. In this there was agreement that social work had a key role to play in addressing the divisiveness between women based in levels of education and in differing professions (class), culture, racism and religious belief.

Challenges Ahead

The stories within as they sit alongside analysis of context are part of a much larger story, in many ways the women's experiences contained in this thesis mirror what has happened to feminism and the women's movement, especially in industrialised countries of the economic north over the last three decades of the twentieth century. The suggestions for moving forward in a globalised environment as part of a reinvigorated engagement with the women's movement and as part of a broader and diverse social justice movement are as laudable as they present many challenges. Notable in these challenges can be included the need for engaging with diversity while at the same time encouraging solidarity and clarity of socially just agendas.

Moving forward will also require some resolving of tensions between women and within women's movements between those whose focus is identity politics and those who engage with feminism as part of a wider social struggle requiring us to 'pay attention to the politics of redistribution no less than to the politics of recognition' (Antrobus, 2004:141). It will also require bridging divides and exclusions within

women's movements based in class, race and culture as well as the divides between the beneficiaries of globalism and those excluded while remaining aware of the potential for compromise and cooption. In this the need for sensitivity based in critical self awareness and reflection on privilege will be crucial. Most importantly however is understanding and acknowledging the role of the state and its major role in distributive justice through social policy. Social policy however urgently needs a theoretical base that broadens it beyond Keynesian ideas assuming limitless growth of national economies. Alongside economic sustainability, social policy for the future must be informed by ideas of social and environmental sustainability, of diversity, of notions of collectivity. Fundamental to this project are understandings of the gendered nature of distribution of wealth and of social and environmental costs, all of this in an increasingly international and globalised environment.

The women in this study

This thesis set out to explore the changing experiences of 25 women in welfare education over a thirty year period of social change in Australia. Over that period of time these women along with many other female academic colleagues have created a unique herstory of welfare education in the Australian context. As such they are a significant group who have been and continue to be key players in social work, social policy and social work and welfare education over that period of time. Over the time frame the thesis explores, they have experienced being students, social workers, activists, agitators, policy makers, parents, carers and lovers and are now mostly in leadership positions within their respective universities or positions of influence in the field. They have lived through a complex period of dramatic change in Australian welfare history and in sharing their thoughts with us in this thesis have showed us that social work still has a key role to play in leadership of movements for social and gender justice. The tools of leadership that will be required as we move forward in ensuring global distributive justice will require skills in analysis, critical reflection, theory building, research, networking, community development, advocacy, understanding of grass roots movements as points of resistance, communication skills, facilitation (rather than directing), the understanding of the political nature of the personal alongside a gendered awareness and critique and the capacity to make links to global movements that are wider than social work and social policy.

Over the course of thirty years these women experienced many achievements. All through this period of time they have retained the connection between social work practice, social policy, social justice and, although ambivalent at times, with feminism. Importantly, this thesis reveals the vexed relationship that this group of women has with patriarchy at all levels, both public and private. At the institutional level in their universities and workplaces; at the points of service delivery and in development of social policy; in their professional engagement with students, service users, relationships with other staff; with each other and in their personal lives, the women in this study have consistently engaged, resisted, challenged, rejected or struggled with the gendered relations of ruling (Smith, 1990). Indeed it is these multidimensional layers of experience that make up the fabric of the complex tapestry alluded to above and which is yet only part of a larger tapestry that represents wider movements for social change. The women in this study have consistently provided leadership in all of the theory and skill bases outlined as necessary tools for social change, through their activism, their practice, through their research and policy work with committees and various organisations, through their development of theory, through their feminism and importantly in this instance, through their teaching. The skills and knowledge that they pass on to the next generation of social work and welfare students will help build leadership within social movements. This has and will not be without some personal cost against the changing backdrop of a socio political context that places ever increasing emphasis on the economic at the expense of the social. During the course of writing this thesis one of our participants died suddenly still in her prime, a significant loss to social work education, women's services and the welfare and policy field in general, and both a shock and wake up call to this group of women in particular. For those of us who remain we continue to stand strong, relatively optimistic for our collective future – our idealism tempered, our energy somewhat dissipated and our creativity tested to the limits at times - but not yet extinguished, for in the words of that most inspirational activist and educator bell hooks –

Our search leads us back to where it all began, to that moment when an individual woman....who may have thought she was all alone, began a feminist uprising, began to name her practice, indeed began to formulate theory from lived experience (1995:75).

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**Division of Social Sciences, Humanities and Education
School of Social Inquiry**



Appendix 1

Dear Woman in Welfare Education,

Recently, I contacted you asking if you would consider participating in my PhD study on Women and Welfare in Australia. I hope you have considered this and will be willing to participate in whichever way you can.

I have attached two forms:

- a) Consent form. (As per university requirements),
- b) An open ended questionnaire that you **may** wish to use to guide you in providing the information. (separate document)

As mentioned in my previous letter, any comments/contributions you wish to make about the respective time periods would be of value, even if just a word, a paragraph or as much as a page! If it stifles your creative response, please feel free **not** to use the questionnaire. **This is not meant to be a time consuming and arduous historical task, please contribute as your time, energy and inclination allows.** It should take no more than an hour at the most to complete the form, although feedback from my test questionnaire is that it does require some 'thinking about'. I am seeking 'headline' memories – those that first come to mind which could be anything from a few lines of recollection to stream of consciousness. Your narrative is intended to add richness to analysis and bring respective chapters to life, rather than be incorporated verbatim.

Should you have any queries in relation to this project please contact me on 03) 62231916 (I am currently on study leave in Hobart), or contact my supervisor, Associate Professor Trish Harris at Murdoch University on 08) 93602252. We are both happy to discuss with you any queries or concerns you may have.

Thank you for your time and attention and (hopefully!) participation. If you are willing to take part in the study, could you please read and 'sign' the attached consent letter, (including suggested pseudonym), fill out the questionnaire **or** write recollections/comments on the time periods as you see fit and return by email to Jo.Dillon@curtin.edu.au. I am happy to post hard copy of these forms if necessary. The consent form can also be printed and signed and sent to me at 47 D'Arcy St., South Hobart, Tas. 7004, if you prefer.

I appreciate that workloads for many of you are very heavy at this point in time, however I am hoping that the arrival of this questionnaire coincides with the forthcoming teaching break for many of you and that this will allow some time for reflective response. I am hoping to receive all responses by mid – late July if possible.

Yours sincerely,

Jo Dillon,
PhD Candidate, Murdoch University.
PERTH,
20.6.2001

**Division of Social Sciences, Humanities and Education
School of Social Inquiry**



**MURDOCH
UNIVERSITY**
PERTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

CONSENT LETTER:

I have read the information provided to me by Jo Dillon, PhD candidate at Murdoch University in relation to collection of data for her PhD thesis and I agree to take part in this activity.

I understand that all information provided will be treated as confidential and will not be released by the investigator, unless required to do so by law.

I agree that research data gathered for this study may be published provided my name or other identifying information is not used.

I understand that this consent may be withdrawn at any time.

Signatures:

Participant,
Date:

Investigator: Jo Dillon
Date: June 20, 2001

My suggested pseudonym is

Appendix 2

Dear Colleague/Woman in Welfare Education,

I am in the process of sending out to women academics in social work a letter asking for help with data for my PhD thesis. The thesis is essentially a chronology of women in welfare and social policy in Australia from the 1970's through to the present from the perspective of women currently working in welfare academe. I would very much appreciate it if you could pass the letter and questionnaire on to as many women colleagues as possible. As the data requires some recollection of the political and social context of the 1970's I feel that this probably requires participants to be over 40 years of age, although not exclusively so. I am aware that social work academe is pressured and the questionnaire is designed for participants to contribute as little or as much as they are able. I hope to provide feedback to participants through presentation at either the WIWE or AASWWE conference in September.

I am providing formatted questionnaire via email and expect to receive most responses via this medium as well. I am also happy to provide hard copy and SAE envelope. Please let me know which is the preferred option.

I look forward to your assistance and responses!

Yours sincerely,

Jo Dillon,
PhD candidate,
Murdoch University.

Appendix 3

OPEN ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE:

This study is a chronology of women and welfare in Australia over three decades spanning the 1970s, 80s and 90s from the perspective of women working or studying in social work/social policy at the time and currently teaching within welfare academe. As a participant in this study would you please provide comment/reflection on -

- ◆ What you were doing at the time; (working, studying, parenting etc.)
- ◆ Your recollections of the political and socio-economic context, and the impact this had on the above;
- ◆ Major theories influencing your life/practice/teaching at the time/over time;
- ◆ The impact of the women's movement/feminist theory on your practice and teaching.

for **each** of the three decades above.

It would be much appreciated if you could also write a short paragraph reflecting on what you feel the future holds for social policy and the impact of feminism on current debates.

If you are willing to share any shifts in thinking, reflections on critical moments or how major events in the socio-political context have influenced your thinking this would be most helpful.

For your convenience I attach formatted pages for each of the respective decades concerned. Should you wish to utilise this, please fill and return by email to Jo.Dillon@curtin.edu.au. I am happy to send format in hardcopy by post if preferred. Alternatively if you prefer, simply write comments on above as you see fit. Whichever means you chose, please do not forget to supply a pseudonym and do not hesitate to contact me with any query or concern.

Thank you for the investment of your time, I hope you enjoy the task!

Jo Dillon

PSEUDONYM?:

DECADE 1970-80:

- 1) What are your major recollections of the 1970s? What were you doing and how do you feel political and socio-economic trends of the time may have shaped or impacted upon your thinking and activities?
- 2) What major theories influenced your practice and work during this period and what shifts in thinking may have occurred over time?
- 3) How did the women's movement/feminist theory impact on your life/work over this decade?

Critical moments? Impact of Major Events?

DECADE 1980 – 1990

- 4) What are your major recollections of the 1980s? What were you doing at this time? How do you feel the political and socio economic context may have impacted upon or shaped your thinking and activities?
- 5) What major theories influenced your thinking at the time and what shifts in thinking may have occurred over the decade?
- 6) How did the women's movement/feminist theory impact on your life/work and/or teaching at this time?

- 5) What major theories influenced your thinking at the time and what shifts in thinking may have occurred over the decade?

- 6) How did the women's movement/feminist theory impact on your life/work and/or teaching at this time?

Critical moments? Impact of Major Events?

10) What do you see the future holds for social policy and how do you perceive the impact of feminism on current debates?

11) Other Comments?

End of questions