GENDER AND ECONOMIC ACTIVISM IN
THE DIVERSE ECONOMY

Megan Clement-Couzner
BA (Hons), Australian National University

Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Institute for Culture and Society
Western Sydney University

2016
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was largely undertaken on the land of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation in what is now known as Sydney, Australia. I also conducted fieldwork on Darug land in Parramatta, and Bediagal land in Bankstown. These people are the first owners of land where I now live and work, and their struggles for sovereignty, and against the impacts of colonisation, are ongoing.

I would like to express my gratitude to Western Sydney University, in particular the Institute for Culture and Society (ICS), for their support of this doctoral project, including a generous scholarship.

I acknowledge and thank the organisations and individual participants with whom I conducted fieldwork and interviews for this dissertation. I hope I honour their contributions to my research and to their communities and economies.

My greatest thanks go to Professor Katherine Gibson, for kind and insightful supervisory practice, breadth and depth of knowledge, inspiration, unflagging enthusiasm, and patience. These qualities made everything possible, even when it felt daunting or impossible. I also wish to thank Dr Stephen Healy for his insightful and generous reading of drafts, Professor Greg Noble of ICS, Professor Allison Weir of Australian Catholic University, and the Community Economies Research Collective of Sydney.

Finally I give thanks to my mum, Anne, and to Katie, without whom this thesis may never have been started, or completed.
STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICATION

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not previously submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

M Clement-Couzner
# Brief Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Abbreviations</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One</td>
<td>A feminist politics of economic activism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two</td>
<td>Feminist economic discourse and social change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three</td>
<td>Affirmative and transformative strands within Australian feminist activism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four</td>
<td>Activist research: a methodology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five</td>
<td>Transforming <em>resentment?</em> Feminist economic activism by the Australian Services Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Six</td>
<td>Affirming worker identities? Feminist economic activism by Asian Women at Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Seven</td>
<td>Enterprising women? Feminist economic activism by Fitted for Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Eight</td>
<td>Feminist activism in the diverse economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Table of Contents

Brief contents.................................................................................................................................................. i
List of figures..................................................................................................................................................... v
List of abbreviations ......................................................................................................................................... vi
Abstract............................................................................................................................................................. vii
Introduction | She works hard for the money? Economic activism, women and crisis in the left................................. 1
  Approach and Methodology ........................................................................................................................... 11
  A new feminist economic politics for the left: Thesis overview ................................................................. 13
  Conclusion ....................................................................................................................................................... 15
Chapter One | A feminist politics of economic activism ...................................................................................... 16
  Introduction .................................................................................................................................................... 16
  Redistribution and recognition: Nancy Fraser and the economy/ culture rift ............................................... 18
  Ties that binary: should recognition/ culture and redistribution/ economy be considered separately? .......... 23
  Deconstructing the economic? ...................................................................................................................... 30
  *Ressentiment*: A deconstruction of economic identity ............................................................................. 36
  Conclusion ....................................................................................................................................................... 37
Chapter Two | Feminist economic discourse and social change ............................................................................ 39
  Introduction .................................................................................................................................................... 39
  A new set of scales: Waring, Folbre and a politics of the whole economy ................................................. 42
  Beyond shifting scales: Economic diversity and living well ........................................................................... 48
  Conclusion ....................................................................................................................................................... 57
Chapter Three | Affirmative and transformative strands within Australian feminist activism .............................. 59
  Introduction .................................................................................................................................................... 59
  "Socialist-feminist praxis" ............................................................................................................................. 60
  Identifying transformation and affirmation in feminist economic activism .............................................. 61
  Australian feminist economic activism in the last decade ............................................................................. 66
  Equal pay history in Australia: reading for transformative and affirmative strands ................................... 69
  Australian feminist activism in the diverse economy .................................................................................... 73
  Conclusion ....................................................................................................................................................... 75
Chapter Four | Activist research: a methodology ................................................................................................. 77
  Introduction .................................................................................................................................................... 77
  Reading for difference .................................................................................................................................... 78
  Case study method ...................................................................................................................................... 80
Investing in activism: participant observation ................................................................. 85
Interviewing .................................................................................................................... 88
Feminist ethnographic research and self-reflexivity .................................................... 91
Discursive representations of economy and gender .................................................... 93
Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 95
Chapter Five | Transforming ressentiment? Feminist economic activism by the
Australian Services Union ............................................................................................ 96
Introduction ................................................................................................................ 96
What and who is the ASU? ......................................................................................... 96
Activism for redistribution and recognition ................................................................ 102
Equal pay: ressentiment, hope and gender identity .................................................. 103
Representations of economy in the ASU equal pay case ............................................ 108
Affirming gender, transforming work? Feminist economic activism for equal pay . 120
Conclusion ................................................................................................................ 122
Chapter Six | Affirming worker identities? Feminist economic activism by Asian
Women at Work ........................................................................................................... 124
Introduction ................................................................................................................ 124
Recognising Asian women at work in Australia ......................................................... 124
Researching with Asian Women at Work .................................................................... 129
Representing economy, intervening in inequality ..................................................... 130
Vision: Diversity in the labour movement .................................................................. 137
Practices of activism: clothing outworkers campaign and economic subjectivities... 138
Affirming and transforming work and gender ............................................................ 144
Conclusion ................................................................................................................ 146
Chapter Seven | Enterprising women? Feminist economic activism by Fitted for
Work ............................................................................................................................... 147
Introduction ................................................................................................................ 147
Researching with Fitted for Work .............................................................................. 148
Fitted for who, fitted for what? .................................................................................. 149
What’s the economic problem represented to be? .................................................... 155
Fitted for Work: Transforming enterprise .................................................................. 158
Conclusion ................................................................................................................ 167
Chapter Eight | Feminist activism in the diverse economy ............................................. 169
Introduction ................................................................................................................ 169
Equal pay activism in the diverse economy ............................................................... 170
Asian Women at Work in the Diverse Economy ....................................................... 179
Fitted for Work in the diverse economy .................................................................... 182
Surviving well, transforming economy: insights from three cases ............................ 185
### List of figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 0.1</td>
<td>Diverse economies. Source: Gibson-Graham 1996: xiii</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1.1</td>
<td>Affirmation and transformation, source: Fraser 1997: 27</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1.2</td>
<td>Affirmation and transformation applied to economic and gender inequality, with deconstruction of economy, source: modified from Fraser 1997: 27</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.1</td>
<td>Pietila’s holistic economy, source: Pietila 2002: 13</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.2</td>
<td>Capitalism’s Excluded Others, source: Community Economies Collective</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.3</td>
<td>Diverse economies iceberg diagram, source: Community Economies Collective 2001, drawn by Ken Byrne</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.4</td>
<td>Source: Association for Size Diversity and Health</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.1</td>
<td>Transformative (T) and Affirmative (A) Australian feminist activism in the diverse economy, source: modified from Gibson-Graham 1996: xiii</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.1</td>
<td>Criteria for casing potential organisations</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.1</td>
<td>Several participants leading an equal pay march in Sydney, source: Australian Broadcasting Corporation News 2011</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.2</td>
<td>Final equal remuneration percentage increase ordered (Fair Work Commission Equal Remuneration Order 2011)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.3</td>
<td>The Sydney Morning Herald headline, Friday November 20 2010, source: author photo</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.4</td>
<td>Affirmation and transformation in the ASU equal pay campaign, with deconstruction of economy, source: modified from Fraser 1997: 27</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.1</td>
<td>‘About Us’ page, source: Asian Women at Work website</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.2</td>
<td>Images from AWatW and Fisheries NSW day trip in 2013, source: fieldwork 2011</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.3</td>
<td>Affirmation and transformation in AWatW, with deconstruction of economy, source: modified from Fraser 1997: 27</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7.1</td>
<td>Dear Gladys website screen shot, source: Dear Gladys</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7.2</td>
<td>Dear Gladys website screen shot, source: Dear Gladys</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7.3</td>
<td>Affirmation and transformation in Fitted for Work, with deconstruction of economy, source: modified from Fraser 1997: 27</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8.1</td>
<td>ASU equal pay campaign Transformative (T) and Affirmative (A) feminist economic activism in the diverse economy, source: modified from Gibson-Graham 1996: xiii</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8.2</td>
<td>Iceberg diagram: paid and unpaid labour in the SACS sector, source: modified from Community Economies Collective 2001, originally drawn by Ken Byrne</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8.3</td>
<td>Asian Women at Work: Transformative (T) and Affirmative (A) feminist economic activism in the diverse economy, source: modified from Gibson-Graham 1996: xiii</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8.4</td>
<td>Fitted for Work: Transformative (T) and Affirmative (A) feminist economic activism in the diverse economy, source: modified from Gibson-Graham 2006: 63</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACOSS</td>
<td>Australian Council of Social Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACTU</td>
<td>Australian Council of Trade Unions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFEI</td>
<td>Australian Federation of Employers and Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGM</td>
<td>Annual General Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASU</td>
<td>Australian Services Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AWatW</td>
<td>Asian Women at Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMI</td>
<td>Body Mass Index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DTI</td>
<td>Department of Trade and Investment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FFW</td>
<td>Fitted for Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPI</td>
<td>Genuine Progress Indicators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAES</td>
<td>Health At Any Size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDI</td>
<td>Human Development Index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEW</td>
<td>Household Economic Wellbeing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSA</td>
<td>Job Services Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP</td>
<td>Member of Parliament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QIRC</td>
<td>Queensland Industrial Relations Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SACS</td>
<td>Social and Community Services Sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>Socio-economic Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>Social Enterprise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TANF</td>
<td>Temporary Aid for Needy Families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TTW</td>
<td>Transition to Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNSNA</td>
<td>United Nations System of National Accounts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USC</td>
<td>United States Census Bureau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEL</td>
<td>Women’s Electoral Lobby</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

vi
Abstract

This thesis examines three cases of activism around gender and work inequality in contemporary Australia. Gendered economic inequality remains ubiquitous, despite decades of work from feminists and leftists to address it. This thesis suggests that while feminist theorists have successfully deconstructed gender and sex, when these same feminists look for a transformative politics of economy, they have little to offer beyond a discredited model of socialism. A transformative politics of gender and economy is deeply needed and we can look to fruitful practices and identifications in already existing feminist work activism for leads.

In this thesis I draw together two previously separate areas of feminist theory - Nancy Fraser’s political theory and J.K. Gibson-Graham’s economic theory. I reinvigorate Fraser’s conception of left movements for redistribution and recognition, and join her in her call for a transformative politics of gender and economy rather than action that affirms gender roles and welfare state responses to inequality. I argue for a genuinely deconstructed and transformed notion of diverse economies, as a way forward to transform gender and economic inequality. Gibson-Graham’s reading of economies as diverse opens up multiple possibilities for reperforming the kinds of economies – labour, transactions and enterprises - that facilitate surviving well, and helps move away from an unwitting capitalocentrism in left feminist activism.

This argument is developed through analysis of three cases of economic activism in which I undertook participant observation: the Australian Services Union equal pay campaign for community workers, Asian Women at Work, a community organisation in the multicultural, low socio-economic area of Western Sydney, and Fitted for Work, an organisation seeking to fund its support of unemployed women through social enterprise. I show how activists in these cases of feminist work activism understand economy and economic inequality, and how they view their economic identities, practices and activism. My observations, interviews, and discourse analysis show that the attachment to worker and other politicised identities often prevents exploration of fertile opportunities for economic change, and may even assist to maintain capitalist dominance, but that there are other practices and non-capitalist identifications already existing in feminist work activism in Sydney that could be built upon. This thesis argues for an everyday
language of economic wellbeing that is largely missing from the left feminist movements looked at in this research. It opens up important opportunities for increasing the effectiveness of feminist activism and critiques of work that address themselves to the deeply entrenched problems of gender and economic inequality.
The ubiquitous ‘crisis of the left’ seemed to have taken hold in Sydney, Australia, long before I became active as a unionist and feminist here in 2008. Many writers and commentators had noted this decline or crisis, and they cited research to match: Pusey had shown the pervasiveness of neoliberal economics taught in universities and used by bureaucrats (1991, 2003); and there had been a long and steady decline in trade union membership (Barnes 2007; ABS 2003: 39; ABS 1999: 42), despite recent stabilization (Bailey and Peetz 2012) prior to another plummet (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2015). Income inequality had increased (Australian Council of Social Service 2015: 18-21), while wealth concentration at the top had increased (ABS 2015). In recent years declarations of the death of left movements have abounded, both from within the movements themselves and from without.

Women’s movement activists in Australia had a long and sometimes uncomfortable association with union and other left movements. Movements for gender and economic equality in Australia had been deeply interconnected. Women in Australia make up the majority of those living with low incomes (ABS 2015) and fights for equal pay and affirmative action have been long and hard won (see Sawer and Radford 2008; Eisenstein 1989). Feminists had also fought hard for the valuing of unpaid labour and redistribution via welfare for single parents (Levi and Singleton 1991). Australia has historically had one of the most deeply gender segregated workforces in the OECD. Consequently there had been strong women’s representation in some key unions, particularly those representing hospitality workers, nurses, teachers, and community workers. Yet despite all this, at the start of the 21st Century, feminist work for economic equality had seemed to be in the grips of some sort of abeyance, along with other parts of the left: the gender pay gap, after years of shrinking, had stalled and then widened; feminist institution building appeared to have slowed or stopped (Ho 2008; Sawer and Grey 2008), and a number of pronouncements both of the death or end of feminism along with the end of socialism had been made.

Yet unlike some other social justice issues, such as climate change driven by fossil fuels and a growth economy, or the failure of left movements to bring about
revolution or lasting social democracy, it might seem hard to argue that gender inequality is a ‘crisis’. It has not been a crisis for a long time. While individual women may be in crisis due to the prevalence of economic inequality, domestic and intimate partner abuse, reversal of reproductive rights, the disproportionate impact of climate change on women, and innumerable other issues, gender inequality seems as old as time itself. Sexism and misogyny embody new iterations, yet the statistics remain crushingly, horribly constant. What this suggests to me is that crisis is not argued or given but socially and culturally constructed. I do not mean to suggest that ‘crisis’ is not powerful, or that the effects and affects are not real; quite the opposite. What I suggest is that crisis perhaps requires a critical mass or consensus. Gender inequality is not, then, a crisis, but a problem. A problem of equality, fairness, oppression, justice – one could argue for any or all of these words, however, I do not need to introduce theory (just yet) to know that a deeply felt, difficult and lived problem of gendered power imbalance exists.

Like many other activists before and after me, I had filtered from a student unionist ‘blooding’ in Newcastle to a job in a trade union, and so this apparent problem concerned me deeply. My union organiser role, and my involvement with feminist community organizing in Sydney over several years, left me with some lasting impressions and percolating questions about the connection between, and future of, these movements. I considered myself a part of both of them, as well as part of a broader tradition of feminism and activism for economic equality around the world, and I wanted to know how we could best think about gender and economic equality, if indeed it was equality we were seeking.

It was clear to me that paid work was still a major area of left-wing activism and organizing, as well as containing much of the history and cultural traditions of left movements. It was also a site of feminist activism. Yet as Gibson-Graham had identified in the 1990s, the union movement seemed hamstrung by having lost many battles, such as the deregulation of sector wide bargaining in the early 1990s (Gibson-Graham 1999; Bennett 1994). ‘We’, the union movement, knew how to organize in certain ways. We knew how to rally and even to win a workplace and an industry campaign. The narratives around inevitable political shifts to the right, however, had taken hold with a vengeance. It seemed to me that in the rubble of a
discredited state socialism and successful attacks on unions and the welfare state, the left imaginary in Sydney was, understandably, foundering.

I noted a lack of conversation about economic forms and (political) economic goals, beyond a general recourse to state facilitated redistribution, in both the feminist and union movements. This was, of course, not universal. Some people and groups spoke of alternative enterprise forms or arrangements different to the status quo: active socialist organisations explicitly called for enterprise nationalization and expanding public services; Trades Hall NSW ran a campaign opposing electricity privatization in 2012-2015; and various unions still had mutual societies or credit unions. On the academic side, industrial relations literature, whilst mostly focused on enterprise and public sector bargaining, or industry experiences, included some academics interested in worker democracy (for example, Lansbury 2009), as did the sub disciplines of organisational studies, business and labour history (e.g. Balnave and Patmore 2012). Yet on the whole I noted that in the left and feminist movements I was associated with, discussion of economic futures and our potential impact on them was limited and somewhat unsatisfying; and other left projects, where we critiqued conservative programs and blamed these on a vaguely defined and all encompassing neoliberalism or capitalism, were also unedifying. Our language for equitable economic alternatives had been stunted. Despite this seeming lack of ideas however, unionist feminist activists were successfully campaigning and organizing.

I was convinced that much of the work activism I was familiar with was performed by people doing important, useful change-making of their local communities and economies, and thus I wanted to know how they would think about and express this contradiction, if indeed they saw it as such. In light of the fact that much language to express and explore non-capitalist alternatives was lacking or stunted, I also wished to explore how activists articulated their visions, practices and understandings of gender and economic inequality and activism. First though, how had other feminist thinkers engaged these issues? What thinking tools were available to me to inform my questions?

◆

Coming upon the work of Gibson-Graham, I suddenly found I had some language to express and explore this issue. Theorisation of post-structural approaches to
The economy has at least partly been focused on existing alternatives to modern capitalism (for example see Gibson-Graham 2006: 101; Cameron and Gibson-Graham 2003: 153-155). It has aimed to provide a theory that supports and promotes new social movements for economic justice and diversity. The framework of diverse economies captured a more inclusive understanding of economic forms that was able to explore both enterprise and non-enterprise spaces. Drawing on the queer theory of the last several decades, it asked why certain forms signified certain relations. For example, does an enterprise necessarily equate with exploitation? How could these relations be reconfigured, for example through economic democracy, or gift economies? This seemed to me a fruitful path for studying a range of feminist work activisms I could see in Sydney, and exploring future possibilities more fully.

Gibson-Graham asked, 20 years ago, why it might seem problematic to call the USA a heterosexual nation, or a Christian one, but not to call it capitalist. I wondered the same of the Australian context, when as stated above, some of the best work activism I could see was in non-capitalist fields. Why, I thought, was the interesting social science of the last half century deconstructing gender and race, forcing questions of compulsory heterosexuality and the constructions of whiteness and otherness, yet much of the social science of economic inequality assumed not only a dominant but sometimes an unassailable neoliberal capitalism? Clearly, it was not that no one had done this thinking. Along with Gibson-Graham, others such as Callon (1998), Resnick and Wolff (1987), MacKenzie, Muniesa, and Siu (2008) and De Martino (1991; 1997), to name a few, had begun to question the universality of capitalist markets, the performativity of neoliberal economic thinking, and the ‘truth’ of capitalist hegemony. Much earlier, people like Karl Polanyi (1944) had explored the specificity and historical context of market capitalism, and later, feminists Marilyn Waring (1997; 1999) and Nancy Folbre (1986; 1994; 2000) had highlighted the uncounted and unpaid work that constituted a huge amount of value and reproductive labour.

Thus what I wished to do was to explore the economic thinking in feminist movements I felt myself to be part of in Sydney. All over the world there is a long, celebrated and intertwined history of women and work activism, from the early presence of a women’s guild in the British cooperative movement, the 1912 bread and roses strike in the USA, to the moment when Zelda D’Aprano chained herself
to the Commonwealth Building in Melbourne, Australia in protest at a lack of equal pay in 1969. While I was conscious of the supposed split between identity and redistributive politics in the modern left, and aware that this was something talked about in my community, it was my experience that in practice feminism and, in particular, a politics of work, were intertwined in multiple and consistent ways. While I worked for a trade union, there were strong women’s networks, and a focus on equal pay, gender pay gaps and maternity leave. Admittedly in this context gender was often used as a synonym for cisgender women, and thus sometimes the practices were heteronormative, but the feminists of my acquaintance did not appear to experience the conflict between identity and economics discussed by theorists such as Nancy Fraser. In fact, often female-dominated areas of the union movement drew on feminist academics for data and arguments with which to make their claims, and vice versa (see, for example Elton et. al. 2007). This relationship was not always comfortable and the arguments were not always convenient, but the claims made by academics and unions often mutually reinforced each other.

I experienced, in the union movement, a cleaving to a worker identity that was hostile to the idea of enterprise. I surmised at the time that it seemed inherently exploitative to those whose experiences were as employees. There was little discussion of the possibility of economic democracy through cooperatives or social enterprise. On one occasion a union organizer, in what later became a fieldwork site for this research, noted dismissively that there were ‘not many co-ops around anymore’. Feeling under attack by the lowering rates of union membership and the reduction of the welfare state, amongst organisers there was a posture hostile to exploring forms of livelihood beyond waged work, almost a belief that this was impossible. Yet, I also experienced a paradox. Many of the feminist work activists I knew were engaged in non-capitalist forms of livelihood, in particular paid community work, but also much that was in addition to waged work. This included things like community building, growing and sharing food together, finding paid work for each other, supplying various needs, even exploring co-operative possibilities.

---

1 Cisgender refers to an experience of gender that aligns with that which one was assigned at birth. See Diamond 2015 for news of the term being added to the Oxford English
What framework could help me think about the complexity of this paradox? I wished to explore this crack in what often seemed both an inescapable capitalism and a heteronormative gender order and to question and explore Gibson-Graham’s notions of capitalocentric thinking, diverse economy and community economies in my own context. Capitalocentrism seemed particularly strange to me in the space of feminist unionism and feminist work on economic inequality. Much of the female dominated work that was the focus of feminist analysis and activism was in either government funded or not-for-profit sectors such as the community sector, or indeed, was in unpaid parts of the economy. So why was it talked about in ways that assumed a capitalist or neoliberal frame? Why did I suspect that most of the people I knew doing activism on work would not see said work as economic? This research explores capitalocentrism amongst feminist work activists in Sydney. It asks to what extent diversity of economic forms is present in the practices and underlying assumptions of the feminist and work movement, and, to the extent that this diversity is present, asks what might flow from conceptualizing these economies and activisms within a diverse economies framework?

The term economic activism is used varyingly across the social sciences. A literature search reveals three distinct uses of the term: government activism at an international level on trade deals such as free trade agreements (e.g. Shoch 1998); business lobbying of government such as that by employer or industry associations (e.g. Bell 2006); and community approaches to economic change such as non-profit or social enterprises (e.g. Gibson, Law and McKay 2001). All three of these uses refer to attempts by interest groups or the state to change ‘the economy’. However, the term economy itself is worth examining. A definition of economics as the study of economy, “a system for organising the production of goods and services, the distribution of income and wealth, and the exchange of commodities” seems reasonable (Stilwell 2004: 388). However, Gibson-Graham set the task of imagining ‘the economy’ differently, arguing that by naturalising certain forms – waged labour, commodity markets, and capitalist enterprises – they have come to be seen as the only legitimate ways of working, exchanging and organising business. This naturalisation means the historical and political contingency of said forms is hidden (Gibson-Graham 2006: 54). ‘The economy’ they argue, is not (necessarily) a discrete, final entity or system, as Stilwell’s
definition might suggest, nor is capitalism its natural or dominant form. They, and I, attempt to challenge this discourse by acknowledging the multiplicities of exchanges, priorities, temporalities, spaces (both geographic and increasingly online), power dynamics and so forth by seeing economies as diverse.

Diverse economies analysis, as conceptualised by J.K. Gibson-Graham, disrupts the hegemony of capitalism, a hegemony symbolically cemented by the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the ‘end of history’ as described above. A theory of economic diversity disrupts this hegemony not through some new totalising alternative system, as with communism or socialism, but through a post-structural turn which sees changing understanding as changing the world (Gibson-Graham 2006; Law and Urry 2004: 391). The main act of changing understandings is to see the three major categories of economic activity, as having both traditional economic definitions and alternative, and having non-market, unpaid, and non-capitalist varieties also. Table 0.1 below, showing diversity of transactions, labour and enterprise, with examples in each category, demonstrates this. This table is from Gibson-Graham’s earlier book, *A Post-capitalist Politics* (1999). Later, the authors expanded the table to include property and finance; however, I have focused on the original three sets of practices, as they are most relevant to the activism of my case study organisations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transactions</th>
<th>Labor</th>
<th>Enterprise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MARKET</strong></td>
<td><strong>WAGE</strong></td>
<td><strong>CAPITALIST</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ALTERNATIVE MARKET</strong></td>
<td><strong>ALTERNATIVE PAID</strong></td>
<td><strong>ALTERNATIVE CAPITALIST</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sale of public goods</td>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>State enterprise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical ‘fair-trade’ markets</td>
<td>Cooperative</td>
<td>Green capitalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local trading systems</td>
<td>Indentured</td>
<td>Socially responsible firm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative currencies</td>
<td>Reciprocal labor</td>
<td>Non-profit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underground market</td>
<td>In kind</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-op exchange</td>
<td>Work for welfare</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal market</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NON-MARKET</strong></td>
<td><strong>UNPAID</strong></td>
<td><strong>NON-CAPITALIST</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household flows</td>
<td>Household</td>
<td>Communal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gift giving</td>
<td>Family care</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous exchange</td>
<td>Neighborhood work</td>
<td>Feudal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State allocations</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>Slave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State appropriations</td>
<td>Self-provisioning labor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gleaning</td>
<td>Slave labor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunting, fishing, gathering</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft, poaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We can open up space for new heterogenous economic activity by theorising the economy as diverse. However, we can also look to activities in our communities right now as “an existing economic world waiting to be selectively (re)performed” (Gibson-Graham 2008: 618). This brings me to the term ‘community economies’, the normative move to match the deconstructive move of the diverse economy. To quote Gibson-Graham again, “unlike the structurally defined Economy with its regularities and lawful relationships, the community economy is an acknowledged space of social dependency and self-formation (2006: 166). Gibson-Graham propose ethical co-ordinates to navigate economic practices and construction (1999: 81). To do so they draw on Jean-Luc Nancy’s concept of community as “being-with”, and expand it to include economic interdependence, and also on Marx’s concepts of class, particularly necessary and surplus labour. The co-ordinates I refer to identify ethical decision-making for community economies around the following:

- what is necessary to personal and social survival;
- how social surplus is appropriated and distributed;
- whether and how social surplus is to be produced and consumed; and
- how a commons is produced and sustained (Gibson-Graham 2006: 88).

Negotiations around these questions form the basis for deliberate community economies.

This conception of diverse and community economies leads to the meaning of economic activism used in my research, as action/s that attempt to exert influence on economies in all their iterations, whether by challenging the naturalisation of accepted economic forms or by pushing the boundaries of said forms. The term economic activism is rarely applied to workplace or industrial action and indeed, given waged labour is a normalised mode of work, one might ask why it should be. Industrial relations, of course, has its own long and fruitful academic history, with a focus on the role of the state in mediating employee and union conflict (for a recent contribution and overview see Todd 2015). However, waged labour occurs in many non-capitalist organisations that also perform a variety of paid and
unpaid work and engage in a variety of forms of exchange and distribution. I do not focus exclusively on the conflict between employers and employees, but ask a different question about the economic discourses at play in work activism, informed by a notion and experience of capitalocentrism.

I argue that like reading for queer openings in heterosexual relations to destabilise heterosexism and gender norms that lead to sexism, we might also read alternative practices and thinking in naturalised and legitimated parts of economies, in this case, waged work. Here I draw on Butler’s approach, in which she argues that queer gender performances that apparently imitate heterosexual gender roles, are not in fact wholly derivative but instead are more usefully conceptualised as messing with the script; they do not take place outside of heterosexual dominance, but inside it and at the same time call into question the necessity or prioritisation of said dominant mode (1990). Similarly, I suggest that waged labour in non-capitalist sites, and other naturalised economic activity, might still be sites of subversion. To put it another way, waged labour in non-capitalist sites is more productively conceptualised as messing with the capitalocentric script, than as imitating capitalist enterprises. Using the above argument, I look at places of economic activism on work as sites for diverse economies analysis. I also use the term change-making somewhat interchangeably with the term activism.

I further limit my research to organisations with a gendered focus. As Cameron and Gibson-Graham have identified, there have been many attempts to ‘feminise the economy’ from varied political perspectives (2003: 147-149). This research aims for a deep exploration of the links and differences between some current and diverse economic activism on work and gender. Existing research has not been as much engaged in studying links and divergences between traditional forms of economic activism, such as pay equity or wage justice campaigns, and more diverse forms such as social enterprise or community based organising. This research attempts to address that gap.

Organisations with a gendered focus are also implicated in what is often called identity politics, and I use the term regularly in this thesis. The term came into common parlance in the 1970s and tends to refer to political activity cohered around a group’s race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, religion, disabilities, sexual
orientation, or other identity markers, and I use it thus. In this thesis I analyse organisations and participants who identify themselves variously as ‘Asian’, ‘women’, ‘workers’, ‘a total capitalist’, ‘unionist’, as well as in many other ways I do not deal with in this research.

I suggest that what we refer to as ‘identity’ can be both constraining but also a source of sustenance; I now outline two different readings from which I draw this view. While Kauffman argued in 1990 that the early origins of the term ‘identity’ were with the class-consciousness Marx wished to generate, in the context of left wing social movements it is more commonly used in connection to the groups listed above. Foucault (1982) and Butler (1990), amongst others, see identity as a function of social norms forced onto the individual, a product of discipline and even violence. However, Weir argues for reconciliation between Michel Foucault’s conception of identity as a phenomenon of modernity and the individualised results of regimes of power, and Charles Taylor’s conception of identity as a context dependent search for authenticity (2009). For Foucault, Weir suggests that identity is a “source of oppressive constraint” (cited in Weir 2009: 534) whereas for Taylor identity gives meaning and the pursuit of self-knowledge is essential to a good life. Weir argues that while the “development of freedom requires a quest for authenticity” and self knowledge, this self knowledge “requires a continual critique of one’s own positions in relations of power” (2013: 23-25).

This approach is fruitful in that it acknowledges both the formative and subjugating power of social discourses and also the sustaining aspects of identities, which seems to me to be key to the formation and maintenance of political or activist groups formed around identities. Weir suggests that while Taylor tends to have a benign view of the effects of community (2009: 541), Foucault’s position supplies much needed critiques of the oppressive ways that identity is part of hierarchical social categories thrust upon us through regimes of power, not just in terms of categories such as black/brown/white, woman/man/freak, old/young etc., but in terms of defining characteristics such as dis/honesty, un/loving, good worker/ lazy, in/independent and so on. By shaping subjects to these binary values, control is exerted, for example via ‘work ethics’ as an essential good which encourages economic contribution in particular ways that serve some interests more than others. A search for authenticity, for Foucault, means accepting an
‘essential truth of the self’ that is in fact subject to and created by discursive regimes of power. However, as Weir points out, resistant identities are a result of self-interpretation in terms of resistant or subjugated knowledges such as feminism. This lends credence to her point that people seek both authentic identities while analysing power relations. We (re)negotiate “among multiple and conflicting identities” (2009: 545) and recreate them as meaningful as well as potentially understanding them as oppressive (2009: 546). With this understanding of identity, I acknowledge identity politics’ capacity for sustaining communities and also for sustaining defensive postures, something that becomes important later in this thesis.

**Approach and Methodology**

My approach is grounded in the view that social science also enacts the realities it seeks to explore. Law and Urry, discussing this epistemological stance, suggest that an ever-more complex world is resistant to a linear or singular reality, and that social science produces multiple realities, whilst also being produced by the social (2004: 399-400). Citing Haraway, they dramatically suggest that in a performative research there is “no innocence” (in Law and Urry 2004: 397). Spivak, with similar concerns about academic research into the vulnerable or ‘subaltern’ groups, questions whether the academic can ever really give voice to such groups they research, and therefore render the mechanism of oppression, or whether they will always be ‘rendering the individual’ (Foucault cited in Spivak 1988: 28). This concern with positionality is important to my research and I have attempted to take a reflexive stance on the constitution of power, rather than risk positionality becoming a mere statement of fact (‘a white woman, from a working class background...’).

With these issues in mind, I undertook this research with a case based methodology, which has a long history in the social sciences (Ragin 1992; Platt 1992). I knew of multiple cases where people were focused on economic participation and development, doing economic participation and activism, and doing it with vigour, breadth and passion. I looked at three case studies of economic activism on work issues, in which I undertook participant observation and discourse analysis of interviews and texts to discover how these organisations
were working for economic change and what they saw as possibilities for and limits to economic change.

**Case Study Approach**

I have taken a case study approach to this research, with the aim to gain deep knowledge. I argue that context-rich case studies are important for developing ideas, and potentially, new understandings. I selected my cases for both theoretical and practical considerations. In particular I was looking for organisations that differed from each other in significant ways, the reasons for which I will discuss in chapter two, on methods. I outline the cases I selected briefly below.

**The ASU Equal Pay Campaign**

The Australian Services Union (ASU) ran the first successful national equal pay case under Australia’s new industrial legislation, the *Fair Work Act* (2009). They ran their campaign in the social and community sector across Australia. The ASU were also successful in campaigning to have the government fund the outcome of this case (ASU 2012). They achieved the equal remuneration order in a female dominated sector with a history of volunteerism, low pay, and dominated by not-for-profit organisations. This followed on from their successful Queensland case in which the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission (QIRC) ordered wage increases between 18 and 37 per cent, phased in over three years starting from July 2009 (ASU 2009). This case continued a long tradition of activism for equal pay and pay equity by the women’s and union movements in female-dominated industries (Sawer and Radford 2008: 193-195). The Australian Services Union had an explicit goal of altering economic relationships in favour of its members, raising their wages and expanding the industries that they work in (ASU 2010b).

**Asian Women at Work**

Asian Women at Work (AWatW) is a community organisation that aims to “empower Asian migrant women workers who experience... exploitation in our Australian society” (AWatW 2007). They engage in a range of outreach and education projects including workplace outreach and information, referral and casework (AWatW 2007). They mobilise a huge amount of volunteer labour for
the purposes of free community education, skill-sharing, leisure and community
development. They also lobby on industrial relations issues, run vocational
training programs and run activist networking activities. Their work is planned
and carried out through ethnic community and geographical groupings, with
written material produced in a variety of community languages, and workshops
and social events conducted by community workers of a variety of ethnic
backgrounds (AWatW 2009). They have a large membership of over 1300 women
in Sydney (AWatW 2009).

**Fitted for Work**

Fitted for Work is a social enterprise based in Melbourne, and they also run a
program in Parramatta, Sydney. Fitted for Work (FFW) helps unemployed women
get work and interview appropriate clothing at no cost while they are looking for a
job. As well as clothing, they provide interview practice, resume assistance and
longer term Transition to Work programs. As of 2012 they had assisted 2000
women and were aiming to reach 5000 women by 2015 (FFW 2012). The
organisation is funded through trusts and foundations, donations, and their not-
for-profit business (FFW 2012). The business is a vintage and modern clothing
store called Dear Gladys. Dear Gladys is one of the major ways through which
Fitted for Work funds their support program for unemployed women, providing
25-30 per cent of the organisation’s income.

**A new feminist economic politics for the left:**

**Thesis overview**

In Chapter One, I sketch a feminist politics of social change. I outline the crisis of
the left in greater detail, then explore identity and identity politics with particular
reference to the notion of *ressentiment* and wounded attachments. I then explore
understandings of injustice of identity/ recognition and economic redistribution. I
look at the connection between issues of culture/ economy, including whether or
not these can be considered separate issues, even conceptually. I then look at
affirming versus transforming identities and economic practices, and the
implications of this for a feminist politics of economic change. This chapter helps
me to frame the research questions that motivate this thesis, and to ask what
discourse(s) of political change inform feminist activism, in the context of the
Australian cases to be studied. Does feminist activism affirm binary gender identity or transform/ queer it?

The subjects of my research are not purely engaged in social change, but also in economic change. Thus in Chapter Two I outline feminist economic discourse(s), introducing several feminist revisionings of economy in relation to living well. I start with a discussion of ideas and practices of valuing unpaid labour and traditionally feminized work, which I refer to as ‘counting in’ or a ‘politics of the whole’. I look to feminist political economists who have attempted a more inclusive view of economy. One group have taken into account often invisible, feminised labour, much of which is unpaid. This intervention has served to demasculinise understandings of economy, and includes analysis of much labour that otherwise would not be counted in traditional definitions of economy. I then discuss both diverse and community economies frameworks, the first of which see economies as a diverse mish-mash of practices often obscured by hegemonic capitalist discourses, and the second of which is about reimagining and practicing economy as a site of ethical negotiation. The questions arising from this chapter are firstly, what are the discourses of economy that inform feminist work activism in the context of the Australian cases to be studied in this thesis? Secondly, how is the economy and economic change understood? Finally, does feminist economic activism affirm the economy as capitalist or does it transform/ queer the economy?

I then move to Chapter Three, where I examine feminist economic activism in the Australian context, giving both a genealogy and a selective overview of feminist activism in relation to work. I analyse both the history of institutional and protest activism in Australia as well as looking at whether activisms are transformative/ deconstructing or queering gender and economic norms or affirmative/ confirming of identity tropes and economic structures. Chapter Three asks whether feminist economic activism challenges/ transforms economic norms?

In Chapter Four I describe and discuss my activist methodology and methods for addressing the questions arising from the previous chapters in relation to the case studies in Sydney. I outline my practice of seeing difference or diversity of cases of work activism; feminist ethnography and case study research; participant observation and interviewing; and discourse analysis.
Chapters Five, Six and Seven build a picture of the material gathered from the Australian Services Union, Asian Women at Work and Fitted For Work, respectively. I give an in depth description of each case, and then analyse with regard to the questions raised in the above chapter outlines. In particular, I look at the transformative and affirmative aspects of each case; the identities, *ressentiment* and wounded attachments implicit in each; the understandings of economy and economic change present in each case; and the diversity of economic practices in each.

In Chapter Eight, I expand upon the diverse economies analysis opened up in each of the previous case study chapters, using this as an opening to ask what ethical negotiations are taking place around gender and work in each organisation in order to attempt to live well/better. I attempt a queer reading of gender and economic practices in my case study organisations.

**Conclusion**

Discomfort, conflict, tension and strange bedfellows form the landscape of this thesis. Identity and deconstruction, recognition and redistribution, freedom and equality, gender and economic inequality, and defensiveness and possibility are the oppositions and background tensions of this work. All appear at various points along the path I take. My focus on gender and economic inequality, and the organisations and activists that seek to address these intersecting issues, have led me to analyse the three cases described in the light of significant unfinished debates regarding the future of the ‘left’. What are the possibilities for responding to the intersecting injustices of economic and gender inequalities? What are people doing to address these issues, however imperfectly, in the present? It is my hope that this thesis provides some insight in response to these questions.
Chapter One | A feminist politics of economic activism

Introduction

In this chapter I turn to feminist theorists who have contributed to debate and discussion of the division between a recognition politics of feminist, queer and anti-racism movements, and an economic politics of the union and social wage movements. In the 1990s the direction of ‘the left’ was under scrutiny for academics and activists alike. I discuss a small part of the web of thinkers who grappled with the seemingly intractable problems of gender and economic inequality in the political context of the minority world in the late 20th and early 21st Century, and explore some of the conflicting themes of identity, recognition and redistribution that inform my research. I have returned to the debates about the compatibility of economic (or class or redistributive) and cultural (or identity or recognition) politics because they were, in my experience, anything but closed; rather, uneasy truces had been made. I reopen these debates of the nineties – the ‘identity wars’ – not merely to rehash them, but to see what I can take from them for my project of rethinking left feminist activism, including examining our (lack of) direction regarding economic forms and processes for seeking more economic equality in the here and now.

In these debates, some feminists, such as Nancy Fraser, suggested that a politics of recognition had become the prevalent organising basis of the left at the expense of political economy. Queer, women’s and anti-racist movements grew in prominence at the same time as labour movement power declined. On the other hand, theorists including Judith Butler and Iris Marion Young suggested that the reasons for the rise of these movements was the inability of left redistributive politics to come to terms with intersections of oppression. Feminists entered into these discussions against a backdrop of neoliberal hegemony and a conservative turn in politics. Culture wars theorists have also described the riven nature of broader leftist politics at this time, and the contradictions of working class foundations with new social justice concerns, of which feminism was a key part (McKnight 2005). In the 1990s and early 2000s, economic and social politics in the Western world had moved to the right. It was at the same time as this shift to the right in economic politics, that class-based left social movements appeared to have
been eclipsed by movements based on a politics of identity or recognition that had gained traction in the 1960s and 1970s.\(^2\) There appeared to be a “collapse” of belief in a set of ideals that had motivated left utopian revisionings of society since the Industrial Revolution (Fraser 1997: 1-2).

The global political context of the economy/culture split in the left was the dismantling of socialism in Russia, Germany, and other countries in Eastern Europe, as well as economic deregulation in social democratic countries like Australia and the United Kingdom. These moves set the stage for greater confidence on the right of politics. In the US, Francis Fukuyama’s famed statement that the fall of the Berlin Wall represented “the end of history” is emblematic of the period, to the point of cliché (1989; 1992). Theorists allied with the political left, such as Hunter (1994; 1996) and Hunter and Wolfe (2006) in the US, Macintyre and Clark (2003), McKnight (2005) and George and Huynh (2009) in Australia, have assessed these events as representing a period of successful offence on the part of conservative political forces in both countries, and termed them the culture wars. The culture wars are one narrative of the international environment of lost faith in socialism as an emancipatory possibility and project.

The flip side of this narrative of left crisis and division is one of success on the part of conservative political forces in the US and Australia. The promulgation of neoliberal economics in the Australian context is well documented (Pusey 1991). There was also some evidence of a rise in conservative religious activism over issues like abortion in Australia, despite a consistently pro-choice public opinion (Cannold 2000). Hunter (1994; 1996) and George and Huynh (2009) describe a shifting of the political centre that has led to a widespread dominance of the economic politics of neoliberalism and an increasingly socially conservative agenda, the latter being particularly notable in the US (George 2009: 33). Though there have been some exceptions to this, such as in the period after the 2008-2009 global financial crisis (GFC), in the years after the GFC, Australian political debate reverted to a focus on budget surplus and ‘paying down the debt’ incurred by the Labor Government’s economic stimulus package, an indicator that this was not a deep return of a Keynesian consensus. This reconfirms the extent to which

\(^2\) The exception seems to be the environment movement, which falls outside the scope of this debate.
neoliberal economics have become dominant in Australia, and the context in which left activists in Australia seek paths to economic equality, if indeed they still do.

It is against this background that I look to Nancy Fraser’s work. Fraser argues for a new formulation of issues that will resolve the conflict within the left between recognition and redistribution. Her work is built on a premise of left crisis; a crisis, I suggest, that has never really lifted. Fraser’s thesis is that advanced capitalist economies around the world, and particularly the United States (US), have entered a condition or period of ‘postsocialism’. She articulates this condition as having three parts: an absence of a “credible emancipatory project” to compete with capitalist ideology; a “general decoupling” of the social politics of redistribution and the identity politics of recognition; and a “decentring of claims for equality” in the face of reinvigorated liberalism of the market (Fraser 1997: 1-4). Fraser contextualises the ‘postsocialist’ condition by arguing that ‘the Left’, post-1989 and the fall of the Berlin wall, faced the “increased delegitimation... of socialism” (Fraser 1997: 8). In articulating this mood and historical context, Fraser grafts together a productive analysis of deconstructive gender politics with a potentially transformative economic politics.

I build on Fraser’s analysis in order to develop a political framework for feminist economic activism. In order to do this, I first explain the culture/ economy rift and Fraser’s formulation of this division and proposals for the most compatible kinds of economic and feminist activism. I then explore whether it is indeed useful to analyse inequalities of gender and distribution at all. Following from this discussion, I argue for a deconstructive approach to economic politics as well as to gender politics, and suggest that one theorist who takes us somewhat further in this direction is Wendy Brown.

**Redistribution and recognition: Nancy Fraser and the economy/ culture rift**

In this section I outline a feminist approach to the internal rift over identity/ recognition, and economy/ redistribution, for the political left. Division within left movements over these so-called identity and class-based issues was certainly a reality of my experience as an activist in Sydney. Dismissal as a bourgeois feminist by colleagues from the union movement was part of my and many other activist
feminists’ experience, whether they were unionists or not; similarly I knew unionists who had found themselves dismissed as ‘Trots’ and ‘Luddites’ even if they themselves held progressive gender and race politics. At various points, like most feminist unionists I know, I had been subject to all these supposed insults. The origins of this division seemed self-evident to me: declaring allegiance to one category (either woman or working class) often meant ignoring multiple other intersections of oppression; and strategies that solved the problem of one oppression sometimes exacerbated another. Was the left to keep muddling along, I wondered, sometimes fighting a common enemy, but frequently fighting each other?

In search of a framework through which to understand this quandary, I turned to feminist thinkers who, faced with the emergence of identity-based social movements, wrestled with the logical inconsistencies between a politics of equality (through social emancipation and recognition) and a politics of difference (through recognition of varied identities). Nancy Fraser led a debate in the late 1990s about the recognition and redistribution rift that she insists is a part of the ‘postsocialist’ condition. She offers a justice framework to analyse this rift between social movements focussed on identity and those focused on redistribution. The problem that she insists upon in her book *Justice Interruptus* (1997) is the incompatibility of the two different types of justice – one that valorises difference and another equality - pursued by those on the left of politics.

Fraser asserts that the economic question of distribution remains vital in a context of dominant capitalism, but that it has been displaced by recognition in left politics. She presents the politics of identity as revolving around questions of recognition, typically associated with issues of gender, race, nationality, and sexuality. She contends that the recognition paradigm of justice seeks to valorise difference and disturb the hidden particularities (male, white, heterosexual) of universal goals of ‘equality’ (Fraser 1997: 16). The redistribution paradigm of justice, on the other hand, aims to rectify the ‘structures’ that contribute to economic inequality (Fraser 1997: 16). Her point about the displacement of class politics is supported by the decline of labour or class-based movements, as evidenced by weakening trade union membership in most developed economies, and the corresponding rise of precarious employment (Vosko 2009). She attempts to take on the task of “interrogating the distinction between culture and economy... [and]
understanding how both work together to produce injustices” (1997: 3). Finally she asks how, if at all, it is possible to integrate the two disparate types of justice and in what way a left-wing vision of this reconciliation can be articulated and pursued.

Rather than continuing down the riven path in which politics of recognition and redistribution are considered irreconcilable, Fraser grapples with the varied possibilities for combining strategies to address the problems of recognition and redistribution. She discusses the various combinations of responses to both economic and cultural politics by posing two ideal-type political solutions, which are shown in Figure 1.1 below. The first set of strategies she calls affirmative and the second transformative. Affirmation refers to policies, such as the liberal welfare state or multiculturalism, that attempt to address the symptoms of “social arrangements” without changing the “underlying framework that generates them” (Fraser 1997: 23). Transformation, conversely, refers to remedies that seek to address the underlying “generative framework” of such issues (23). Emphasising that the difference is not gradual versus revolutionary change, Fraser argues that transformation and affirmation are the idealised versions of policies and politics already at play in various forms (23).

In Figure 1.1, we have the various combinations of affirmative or transformative strategies to redistribution and recognition. Each combination has an example of a policy/ political approach that reflects the approach. In the top left square is the
strategy of affirmation applied to redistribution. The political approach of affirmative remedy for redistribution is the welfare state. The welfare state aims to deal with the outcome of injustice of distribution, for example by using taxes to reappropriate wealth and benefits to redistribute it (Fraser 1997: 24).

The combination of affirmation and recognition is shown in the lower left cell of Figure 1.1, with the example given of mainstream multiculturalism, where an official ‘melting pot’ narrative attempts to valorise different ethnic groups. One could also give the example of sexual identity politics. An affirmative approach to recognition aims to support group difference and valorise this difference, with what Fraser calls ‘surface reallocations of respect’. The affirmative link between this type of politics or practise and the welfare state is that they both aim to deal with the outcomes of injustice, for example by revaluing ethnic identities, aiming for legal reform on issues like same-sex unions (rather than a genderless approach to marriage), or using taxes to address maldistribution (Fraser 1997: 24).

Next there is the strategy of transformation applied to redistribution, and shown at the top right of Figure 1.1. The policy example given for this combination is socialism, because Fraser proposes that a transformative approach to redistribution would involve transformation of the relations of production. She also claims that this approach would address some of the economic outcomes of misrecognition of marginalised groups, for example, the underpayment of women.

Finally, at the bottom right of Figure 1.1, we have the combination of recognition and transformation. The policy approach that fits this pairing is deconstruction. Deconstruction is a strategy typified by a queer politics that aims to show the constructed nature of all gender and sexual identities (Fraser 1997: 24-25). Deconstructive approaches to gender, race, and other ‘identity’ politics use queering techniques of breaking down binaries and thus creating possibilities for multiplicities of potential identifications or subject positions.

Using the four-way matrix of Figure 1.1 above, she examines the possibilities of addressing the two types of justice, recognition and redistribution, together by reference to affirmative and transformative remedies. She uses her two major examples of redistributive politics, the welfare state and socialism, to contrast with the major remedies for ethnic or racial injustice, mainstream multiculturalism and deconstruction.
Now that we have examined the potential combination of strategies to address the redistribution or recognition, Fraser also examines the potential combinations of redistributive and recognition politics, and how they impact each other. We can now read Figure 1.1 downwards and diagonally. She explores the underlying logic of each combination of approach to redistribution on recognition, and vice versa. The welfare state combined with mainstream multiculturalism seems promising (see both cells in left column of Figure 1.1). Both make surface reallocations, of respect and redistribution. However, Fraser has a strong critique of affirmative approaches to issues of redistribution and recognition.

She explains this by showing that the welfare state makes a poor match with deconstruction (Figure 1.1, top left and bottom right cells, read diagonally). Fraser argues that the liberal welfare state “tends to promote group differentiation”, by using difference to address symptomatic maldistribution of capitalism, which attempts to “destabilise” group differentiation (1997: 28-29). The welfare state ironically makes difference more problematic as it makes surface level redistribution to disadvantaged groups. She argues that for differentiations such as gender and race, in which both injustice of recognition and redistribution play a part in oppression, “affirmative redistribution fails to engage the deep level at which the economy is gendered” or racialised (Fraser 1997: 29). The reason for this is that in addressing outcomes and therefore continually reallocating resources, liberal welfare provisions perform a scenario in which these identities are easily scapegoated as constantly wanting for resources, or as “insatiable” (Fraser 1997: 29). When the mainstream revaluing of multicultural or women’s identities is added to this affirmative redistributive strategy, there is a play off between the strategies that heighten rather than allay gender or racial conflict. Thus she argues, “an approach aimed at redressing injustices of distribution can end up fuelling backlash injustices of recognition” (Fraser 1997: 29).

Another combination appears particularly unpromising, socialism combined with mainstream multiculturalism. Fraser suggests that the differentiating politics of mainstream multiculturalism, or revaluing, are not suited to the “transformative redistribution politics of socialism” (Fraser 1997: 28). Surface reallocations of respect would heighten formally recognised difference while socialism would attempt to deescalate class difference.
I am interested in one of the pairings that does look like a promising match: socialism with deconstruction. Given my concern with the seemingly conflicting politics of class and feminist activisms, I was heartened by a framework that suggested that the transformative remedies of transformation of economy and reconstruction of identity were compatible. The goals of deconstructive feminism are the displacement of “hierarchical gender dichotomies” by “multiple intersecting differences,” and this resists the “sedimentation of gender difference that occurs in an unjustly gendered political economy” (Fraser 1997: 30). Deconstructive remedies to problems of recognition attempt to change the subject positions of entire populations rather than one particular group. This can be understood with reference to Marx and Engels, who wrote that the aim of socialism was to do away with the working class and all classes (2011: 92). Fraser suggests that this is also the most favourable scenario with regard to race, for similar reasons.

Two questions arise for this thesis from the above discussion of Fraser’s theory. Firstly, is it necessary to conceptually separate economy/ redistribution and culture/ recognition as Fraser does? Or is it an unnecessary folding in of issues which then has to be reopened through recourse to a complex schema?

Secondly, I question why deconstruction is the tool of choice for recognition, when redistribution is dealt with by a relatively unreconstructed vision of socialism?

**Ties that binary: should recognition/ culture and redistribution/ economy be considered separately?**

In this section I discuss the two major critiques of Fraser’s response to the left wing rift. Firstly, I look to socialist feminist and queer analyses of the interwoven discourses of gender and class. Secondly, I outline critiques by Judith Butler and Iris Marion Young, who argue that Fraser’s duality is unnecessarily obscuring and minimising of genuine struggles of identity. I also discuss work by Axel Honneth, who argues that all struggles of injustice are struggles of recognition. I then discuss the extent to which Fraser takes a deconstructive strategy and her concern that deconstruction can lead to a political position that denies human agency. Finally, I show why I continue with a conceptual distinction between recognition and
redistribution in this thesis, a version of Fraser’s schema, even in light of these critiques.

**Socialist feminism and queer theory/ activism**

Both socialist feminist and queer analyses of gender and class suggest these two areas of inequality must be considered together. For example, socialist feminists such as Mitchell (1971) and Delphy (1984), have argued that the nuclear family is implicated in the reproduction of binary gender, gender roles, and capitalist forms of economy, and that economy, class and gender are inextricably interwoven. Socialist feminists have argued that gender and class are neither materially nor conceptually separate. Market forces, argued Mitchell, reproduce gender roles and the nuclear family (1971). The nuclear family, they argued, is the place where labour reproduces itself and is therefore the cornerstone of capitalism. If the family is the cornerstone of a liberal market, a movement that challenges the premise of gender roles and sex as natural and given – feminism - is challenging the very foundations of capitalism and is thus itself an economic movement.

Queer theorists have also made this argument, largely by drawing on the insights of these socialist feminists, stating: “Essential to the socialist feminist position of the time was precisely the view that the family is not a natural given... as a specific social arrangement of kin functions, it remained historically contingent and, in principle, transformable” (Butler 1998: 40). A central aspect of queer theory has been to denaturalise the nuclear family, and question whether heterosexual relations are socially or sexually ‘necessary’ at all. When debating with Fraser about the efficacy of an economy/culture dualism, Butler drew heavily on socialist feminist theory and argued that denaturalising the nuclear family is a key reason why queer theory is economic, and vice versa. To think further about the consequences of this we might consider the liberating possibilities of communal living or same-sex relationships. One offers opportunities for collective housework and child care, another the possibility of following attraction and desire rather than conforming to social norms. Yet both of these possible relationship forms are made challenging in a society that deems them deviant. Why are they deemed deviant? At least part of the reason stems from the form that market capitalism takes, requiring that workers be reproduced, according to socialist feminism. A nuclear family form, marriage and monogamy goes some way to guaranteeing this
process so that there is both a ready labour supply for the capital accumulation cycle and less confusion over the inheritance of property. If a woman has multiple partners, property may become split, and it is less easy for a patriarch to determine his progeny (Mitchell 1971: 110). Mitchell also notes that neither monogamy nor sexual freedom is inherently generative of equality; under the system described above, monogamy brings some levelling of power to marriage.

Though I accept that gender dynamics are economic and vice versa, I suggest that the socialist and queer arguments made above essentialise the extent to which the nuclear family form and capitalism are necessary to each other. Labour – work – is not a purely capitalist phenomenon. Similarly, heterosexual and monogamous coupling and parenting are also part of non-capitalist sites of production. Conversely, non-heterosexual reproduction can contribute to capitalist practices. Jenny Cameron’s work is instructive when she shows the nuances and differentiations involved in domestic life and represents the “domesticated wife and mother as [potentially] independent and authoritative” (2000, my addition). In showing this, she reminds us that heterosexual domestic life is not essentially exploitative.

Fraser’s claim that the economic and cultural are conceptually separable, yet impact and sometimes constitute each other, acknowledges both the ongoing political concerns of, and divisions within, left movements. The recognition and redistribution categorisation can be applied usefully to divisions within movements where both issues are at play, for example in the case of same-sex couples. Taxation benefits, rights to inheritance, employment discrimination, property ownership, even being able to name one’s partner as next of kin or ‘emergency contact’ are all material, economic areas where equal rights are important and where heterosexism may be sedimented. Conversely, equal marriage itself might be considered more of a recognition issue, as could representation in media. Cultural and community acceptance of queer realities and lives is an essential element of addressing the homophobia that same-sex couples face.

While culture and economy may mutually constitute each other, in my experience of social movements, tensions between issues of recognition and redistribution persist. By choosing to analyse injustices or inequalities from the perspectives of
recognition and redistribution, in relation to each other, insights can be gained as to the effects of various strategies. An affirmative-redistributive solution may see special concessions for homosexual couples such as funding for advocacy, tax breaks and civil unions; however these economic remedies further sediment the identities of same-sex attracted people as inferior, wanting and other. A deconstructive-transformative approach would encourage strategies such as gender-neutralising tax, inheritance and property laws, and similarly making marriage laws gender neutral. While this may not have the immediate benefits of tax concessions or funding, in the longer term these strategies are more likely to normalise queer relationships and queer normalised relationships, leading to greater equality despite difference. This analysis has the potential to separate out the issues in order to consider them more clearly, whilst still acknowledging their interrelatedness. Thus I find it useful to persist with Fraser's categorisation of redistribution and recognition, while knowing that this in itself is merely one thinking technique to address problems of gender and economic inequality.

**Obscuring identity?**

While I see great value in analysing these problems and social movements related to gender and economic inequality, other feminist theorists have expressed concern that a focus on the dual injustices of recognition and redistribution actually sidelines the inequities of ‘culture’, be they gender, race or queerness.

These critiques argue that Fraser is making the mistake of the “old left” by categorising so called ‘identity oppressions’ separately and characterising gender and race-based claims as founded on recognition. Butler argues that a political desire for a unitary politics is what is actually divisive. In this she casts Fraser in with the “old left”. This fits with one of Butler’s major theses, her argument that violence occurs when universal or binary claims are made to the exclusion of the validity or even existence of others (1998: 38; 1999: viii). For Butler, Fraser’s dual formulation of justice and social movements, in which she supports so called cultural movements but returns to the culture/ economy duality, equates to a prioritization of the economic through a disparaging of the “merely cultural” and a denial of the intertwining of the two (Butler 1998: 38-40). She claims that theorists such as Fraser erase the importance of sexual struggles in an attempt to view such
struggles as cultural (1998: 38-40). Not only that, but Fraser’s dualistic formulation is an example of normative violence.

In order to avoid this problem of universalising identified by Butler, Iris Marion Young suggests that rather than distinguish recognition and redistribution to begin with, and then distinguish between affirmative and transformative modes of each, it is better to distinguish these aspects of injustice initially. To do this she proposes a more nuanced categorization of the injustice of social institutions in terms of their:

1. distribution of resources
2. division of labour,
3. organisation of decision-making power,

While this seem to be a step forward, many of Young’s categories could perhaps be considered under the broader categories of redistribution and recognition. For example, division of resources and labour could be categorised in redistribution, and decision-making power and cultural meanings in recognition.

The crux of Young’s argument seems to be that different problems require different analysis, and that binary thinking does not suffice. She claims that what Fraser calls 'perspectival dualism' is in fact dichotomised thinking that oversimplifies the problems of recognition and ignores the connection between economy and culture (Fraser 1998: 128; Young 1997). The post-structural insight that language and the production of meaning are the building blocks of institutions, human action and change, mean that rather than a perspectival dualism, Young accuses Fraser of prioritizing the economic in a similar way to other members of the New Left who have decried the rise of women’s, civil rights, and queer movements (Young 1997). She infers that this redistribution/recognition dualism in fact continues the logic that produced liberal market ideals and thus subsumed "society" to the economic. Arguably this dualistic thinking has also led to some of the more economistic brands of Marxism, which have focused solely on economic shifts at the macro level, at the expense of micro level community economic reform. For example, Resnick and Wolff have pointed out in the instance of the USSR, the failure of the state to support reform at the community
level meant that people’s values and subjectivities did not support the shifts of economic and socio-political power at the macro level (2002). The division in thinking between the social and the economic meant that change was hamstrung in one of the most influential locations, people’s homes (Resnick and Wolff 2002). Similarly, Young sees Fraser’s schema as a type of economism that potentially fails to address other social conflicts, as in the case outlined by Resnick and Wolff.

Instead of universalising, as she suggests Fraser does, Young recommends analysis of specific struggles by drawing inspiration from the "best of what is called cultural studies" (1998: 154) She argues that “best of” theorists, such as Stuart Hall (1998, 2002), have shown that economics is implicitly cultural, and culture is economic. Like Butler, Young views these categories as constituted by their other. Young states:

> Political economy, as Marxists think of it, is through and through cultural without ceasing to be material, and... [W]hat students of literature and art call ‘culture’ is economic, not as base to superstructure, but in its production, distribution and effects, including effects on reproducing class relations. Political economy is cultural, and culture is economic (1998: 154).

This ongoing concern about economic analysis subsuming other struggles has been echoed in other critiques of Fraser’s work.

Axel Honneth goes so far as to say that all struggles of injustice are better thought of as struggles for recognition. Going even further than either Young or Butler, Axel Honneth critiques Fraser’s work from the perspective that recognition should be the primary way of thinking about injustice. Where Honneth and Butler seem to diverge however is in Honneth’s proposition that “demands for material redistribution arise” from two sources: equality before the law and recognition of individual achievements (2001: 53). Honneth is saying that in a democratically oriented society, redistribution comes via recognition. When legal equality is granted, for example the equal pay decisions of 1969 and 1972 in Australia, which will be discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis, redistribution can result (in this case the income gap closed steadily for a period of around 20 years). When people are understood as having equal worth, it becomes reasonable to expect that their achievements and work will be valued fairly, for example in the case of equal worth (as opposed to equal pay) arguments for increasing wages in female-dominated sectors such as child care or community services. With these two steps, Honneth attempts to show that Fraser’s epochal argument is incorrect or at best a
selective reading, and that redistributive claims are most often a demand for recognition and also achieved through recognition.

The claim that redistribution is actually about recognition is one of the major popular narratives regarding gender and economic inequality today. In an argument that will be familiar to activists and academics alike, Honneth suggests that distribution is a result of the value placed on certain groups and activities. Value, or the worth of a good or service or practice, is a notion that political economists have struggled to define. In a market based wage system, major means of distribution and the monetary representation of the worth of labour, are determined by complex interactions of the domestic labour market, state regulation (such as minimum wages, bargaining frameworks and awards), historic development of industries based on gender and race, union power and international markets for goods and services. Honneth argues that, rather than a distinct problem of distribution, value is actually a reflection of different types of social recognition. Here he refers specifically to socially necessary labour and argues that care work and activities done in the home, are ‘socially necessary,’ but are not accounted for by Marx (Honneth 2003: 54). Honneth suggests that:

struggles over distribution... are themselves locked into a struggle for recognition. The latter represents a conflict over the institutionalized hierarchy of values that govern which social groups, on the basis of their status and their esteem, have legitimate claim to a particular amount of material goods” Honneth (2003: 54).

I accept that recognition is a major part of redistributive struggles, but I argue that recognition does not account for the relative, but still deeply felt aspects of deprivation that can result from economic inequality. I suggest that recognition politics fails to deal with the very material and ethical problems of distribution and creation of resources, the ‘stuff’ of economy. Thus I conclude, contra Honneth, that recognition is not an adequate framework through which to analyse problems of gender and economic inequality together.

◆

I contend that considering both recognition and redistribution injustices, and affirmative and transformative remedies, is one way of organising thinking that helps to potentially overcome an ongoing tension within movements over priorities. A key concern regarding any analysis of both redistribution and recognition is that it will prioritise economic or class concerns over other
inequities such as race or gender. I maintain that Fraser’s conceptual division between redistribution and recognition enables her to make a useful point regarding the potential congruence of transformative economic moves and deconstruction of identities, even while I accept, with socialist feminists and queer theorists, that the cultural and economic are not just intertwined but mutually constituting.

This mutual constitution of social movements themselves is why an analysis that charts the potential effects of strategies to redress gender and economic injustice is valuable. It enables an analysis of social movement trajectories and impacts not just on left movements split from each other (for example, women’s movement split from the trade union movement) but of the splits within movements, something that is crucial in a context where women’s and redistributive movements are deeply interlinked but tensions remain. Fraser states that her perspectival dualism insists on always analysing issues from the perspective of both redistribution and recognition, acknowledging that what appears as an economic issue will "always already" be cultural, and vice versa, though not necessarily to the same extent (2003: 62). This use of a dualism with acknowledgement that it is limited and conceptual rather than all encompassing seems to me to address the main concerns raised by Butler and Young whilst maintaining the utility of analysis for a persistent problem - the de-politicisation of the economic. Thus I suggest that the intertwining of the cultural and economic need not dispense with the more useful insight of Fraser’s schema, that is, her suggestions that a deconstructive or queering approach to identity matches well with a transformative approach to economy.

**Deconstructing the economic?**

After arguing for a dual analysis of recognition/ gender and redistributive/ economic politics, I now ask to what extent the main theorist of this model, Fraser, deconstructs (and thus, opens possibilities to reconstruct) the economic. To open this discussion, I first outline the politics of deconstruction mobilised in this thesis.

**A post-structural politics**

While Fraser avows her use of deconstruction for problems of recognition, she does not apply this thinking technique to a politics of redistribution. In this section
I interrogate this choice and ask whether deconstruction could potentially be a thinking tool to transform economic politics. Fraser suggests that deconstructionists such as Butler deny the possibility of human agency, and thus erode their own ability to make normative claims, by attributing all social outcomes to environment or context. She claims to draw on a more limited version of deconstruction to attend to problems of recognition. By showing the use of this thinking technique for a political conception of activism, I rehabilitate its use in her wider schema as a strategy to transform economic politics.

Deconstruction of gender and sexual binaries has been a hallmark of ‘gender studies’ in recent decades, perhaps typified by the work of Judith Butler (1990; 1993) and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990). In deconstructing the characteristics often deemed necessary to constitute a subject as male, female, heterosexual or homosexual, these theorists question the foundations of the human subject and of social relations. Deconstructions of social ‘facts’ such as gender have implications for the possibilities of lived lives. Those who deviate from socially prescribed characteristics are often at risk of harm, exclusion, or death (Chambers and Carver 2008: 76-77). If what are considered acceptable characteristics of race, gender and sex can be deconstructed and more iterations safely proliferate, then that risk is lessened.

Judith Butler’s deconstruction of the norms that enforce and perpetuate gender and sex – normative violence – is political because it opens greater space for queer lives. More recent interpretations have argued that her work is deeply political in its approach to power and agency (Chambers and Carver 2008). Butler argues that regulatory social norms such as gender and race are based on powerful social practices and that they are enacted every day through complex systems of language and meaning, performativity and citation, whilst being socially and historically contingent (Chambers and Carver 2008: 6-10). This insight has been expanded in the gender studies area to transgender lives (for example Serano 2007 and 2013), and can also be used to examine the predominance of capitalocentrism in politics and economy.

Butler’s conception of power and norms – that which she seeks to deconstruct - is useful for understanding both change and stagnation in totalising social ‘structures’ such as gender, class and also capitalism (Swanson 2007). Reiteration is
the concept she uses to explain the broader shape of performativity as “ritualised production,” the idea that social categories such as gender or race must be constantly reaffirmed by human subjects to maintain their status as naturalising discourses (Butler 1993: 95). In other words, in order to continue as such, structures must be continuously cited and re-performed, which means they are both constantly reinforced but also constantly at risk of change (Butler cited in Swanson 2007: 9). A process of constant potential for change in social norms and institutions, however small, underlies Butler’s conception of reiteration (Butler 1993: 95). This is despite critics, including Fraser, arguing that her work erases the subject and human agency and thus lacks the normative foundations of political theory.

This concept of reiteration extends beyond gender and sex norms to economic norms. Swanson argues that reiteration is important for understanding resistance to social structures, political change and also ‘sedimentation’ or stagnation of norms. Particularly, she argues that the idea provides a useful tool with which to understand resistance to the deeply sedimented institutions of capitalism, which are often perceived as static and homogenous, even within post-structural theory (for example Laclau and Mouffe cited in Swanson 2007: 4). In Butler’s conception of politics, and Swanson’s reiteration, the subject is conceptualised as totally historically and socially constituted (Butler 1995). However, given these structures are also contingent, the individual and collective can resist at any time. The subject is intensely vulnerable to the disciplining function of normative violence and the ‘weight’ or power of sedimentation, and this contingency and vulnerability helps explain the difficulty of resistance (Butler 1993: 95). Swanson insists that, given this power, agency can only result in change if it is collective (Swanson 2007: 18).

A deconstructive approach can in fact enable a collective politics that relies on agency in the individual. Rather than reducing the importance of agency, as Fraser claims, Butler constitutes the subject as both more and less responsible for change: if reiteration is the means through which norms are continued, then they are vulnerable at every reiteration. So while norms constrain agency, they cannot totally determine its outcomes (Butler 1993: 95). This non-voluntaristic conception of agency, Swanson argues, is particularly important in relation to resistance to the
powerfully naturalising discourses of capitalist markets, and therefore of class exploitation (2007: 19). Thus, contrary to Fraser’s concern that deconstructive strategies can erode human agency, agency and its difficulties are very much part of Butler’s work. A gap in Fraser’s work is that it does not adequately deconstruct economy, or questions of redistribution, despite her avowed transformative approach to economies, perhaps because of her concerns with the results of deconstructive politics.

**Deconstructing Fraser’s ‘socialism’**

A deconstructive approach to economy leads me to question the transformative economic aspect of Fraser’s schema. As I explain further in Chapter Two, if culture and economics are necessarily intertwined, and culture is by definition specific and diverse, economies must also be diverse, embedded, and specific. Fraser’s analysis systematically presents two alternative kinds of economic or redistributive policy, which she calls the liberal welfare state and socialism. She describes socialism as a remedy that would “transform the underlying political economic structure... restructuring the relations of production”, in contrast to the liberal welfare state which makes constant end-state reallocations (Fraser 1997: 25). However, Fraser also notes that this is differently played out in the varieties of socialism currently in existence, as “virtually no one” remains standing in defence of pure state-run economies, and there is not a programmatic view of the place of state-based ownership in socialist thinking (37). Therefore, there is no “precise content” to her socialist program (37).

There is however, content to the redistributive politics of state based programs she makes reference to on numerous occasions, in both her critiques of the fallibility of the liberal welfare state of the United States (Fraser and Gordon 1997: 121) and in her critique of Young’s *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1997: 189). In a 1993 article that seems somewhat eerie on the eve of another Clinton run for the US Presidency, entitled *Clintonism, Welfare and the Anti-Social Wage*, Fraser articulates some of the tenets of what she believes needs to occur to counter the previous iteration of ‘Clintonism’. With respect to a social wage, public goods, visibilising the contributions of unrecognised labour and the dependence of those typically considered ‘independent’, reclamation of entitlement to public provision as a right, and promotion of social responsibility to the detriment of both individual and
mutual responsibility. While in the concept of social wage, Fraser mentions “the human need to participate in the making of culture and in other socially valued and recognized activities that are conducive to self-development”, but she does not mention any need to participate in production or procurement of those things we might consider necessary to survival. Perhaps we could expand here and say that people have a need to participate in work and production, as well as leisure and cultural creation (which are also economic).

Therefore, Fraser’s writing on socialism and the welfare state infers that the socialism she discusses is one of state redistribution of income or profit through state-ownership or taxation. I concur with Fraser that the scale and increased dominance of neoliberal markets and thinking requires a programmatic response. But is there room in such a response for thinking differently about economic practices, in a way that goes beyond the typically represented binary of state ownership and redistribution versus capitalist enterprise? Is state control the only alternative that fits into Fraser’s schema? Why does Fraser limit socialism to state ownership, redistribution and taxation? Might not a broad conception of socialism be compatible with redistribution of ownership and income, or co-operative ownership of production, to workers and communities themselves? Where might the practices of family and community production and consumption, unionism, community controlled services, commoning, and social enterprises with multiple outcomes in their bottom line, fit into her schema? These ideas are taken from Gibson-Graham’s (1999, 2006) community economies framework, expanded upon by Gibson, Cameron and Healy in 2015. Fraser’s focus is not on the details of a proposed democratic socialist, or redistributive program. I suggest that the deconstruction of economy promised in Fraser’s work could be expanded and perhaps rehabilitated with a deconstructive politics of a diverse economy (Gibson-Graham 1999).

There is nothing in Fraser’s work that suggests an opposition to community ownership or production, though these are not mentioned, and I argue that her deconstruction of the economic is incomplete and could be expanded. In Figure 1.2 below, I modify her original diagram to include deconstruction as a strategy for economic transformation as well as transformation of identities.
| A politics of (re)distribution to address economic inequality | Liberal welfare state leads to surface redistribution of resources to existing identity groups, such as maternity leave; further embeds group differentiation and further sediments misrecognition/ difference | Deconstruction of relations of production, transaction, enterprise, and labour, blurs/ queers distinctions between formal and informal economy, blurs group differentiation |
| A politics of recognition to address gender inequality | Identity focused feminism leads to surface redistribution of respect such as valuing women as sisters, daughters etc., furthers group difference, politics of gender also economic | Deconstruction of relations of recognition and destabilisation or queering of group differentiation, deconstruction of economic identity, which is also gendered |

Figure 1.2: Affirmation and transformation applied to economic and gender inequality, with deconstruction of economy, source: modified from Fraser 1997: 27

I suspect that community control of services, and social enterprises, or organisations that create and distribute profit with social goals in mind, also fit into Fraser’s framework. Similarly, while Fraser does not explicitly discuss the politics of community production, unionism, community controlled services, commoning, and social enterprises, she does state that there is an imperative to challenge “technocratic understandings of the welfare state” and to expand upon “democratic, participatory alternatives.”

Fraser’s insight that restructured economic relations are compatible with deconstructive approaches to race and gender is valuable for my thesis, even though she does not apply deconstruction to economic relations. What she does do well is make space for deconstructive gender or race analyses, which are often presented as taking away from a more ‘universal’ class analysis, in a left redistributive politics. Thus, while mention of diverse non-capitalist activities is absent from her descriptions of transformative restructuring of economy, I aim to rethink her schema to include such activities. Firstly, however, I look to another theorist of the period whose deconstruction of worker identity proves a useful addition to Fraser’s uncompleted economic deconstruction.
**Ressentiment: A Deconstruction of Economic Identity**

Wendy Brown offers insights into the conflict between a politics of identity and redistribution with her analysis of the emotions of political identity under liberalism. Unlike Fraser, Brown allows that her deconstructive analysis can apply to economic identities as well as to gender, race and other ‘cultural identities’. Brown claims that the seeds of injury created by liberalism produce ressentiment (resentment) within the political psyche of liberal democratic society, leading to this recognition/ redistribution rift. She argues quite simply in her book *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (1996) that the tenet of freedom under liberalism hampers the tenet of equality and vice versa. This leads to multiple conflicts and turns emotions.

The rift between identity and redistribution can partly be explained and theorised by the emotions engendered by the conflicts inherent in liberalism. State redistribution weakens the freedom of the rich and privileged, leading to resentment against those the welfare state benefits, and resulting in reactions such as anti-statism, racism, and neo-conservatism. On the other hand, a commitment to freedom weakens the promise of the welfare state to curtail disadvantage and level the playing field of the market, breeding resentment of the wealthy, of capital and of enterprise (Brown 1993: 400). Brown argues that conditions of late modernism, including disciplinary and capitalist “power of extraordinary proportions” leads to a subject that “seethes with ressentiment” (1993: 402). The term, first used by Nietzsche, explains the psychic results of the internal contradiction between liberalism’s commitment to equality and to freedom. Brown states:

> It is the tension between the promises of individualistic liberty and the requisites of equality that yields ressentiment in one of two directions, depending on how the paradox is brokered (1993: 400).

As both reaction to and product of this impasse, politicised identities are created from resentment:

> In its emergence as a protest against marginalization or subordination, politicized identity thus becomes attached to its own exclusion both because it is premised on this exclusion for its very existence as identity and because the formation of identity at the site of exclusion, as exclusion, augments or “alters the direction of the suffering” entailed in subordination or marginalization by finding a site of blame for it (1993: 406).
Ressentiment thus breeds an emotion that numbs the hurt, and finds a culprit responsible for the suffering and a target for revenge, but it also creates an identity attached to said numbing, targeting and conviction (Brown 1993: 401).

I argue that the defensive posture of some social movements – most notably in this thesis, parts of the union movement – can be identified as ressentiment. Through the construction of the worker mode of livelihood, a wound forms, as per Brown’s interpretation of Nietzsche’s concept of ressentiment. This wound is inflicted in part by the freedom that liberalism promises to those with capital, who employ others to create more capital. It is inflicted on those dependent on employment for income by industry and the state. A dependency on employment and on capital and the state, as well as various kinds of exploitation such as poverty, workplace injury and death, child labour, and the gender pay gap, might be seen as the characteristics of the wound. This results in consequent wounded attachment to the identity of worker.

Unions have fought, often effectively, for recognition of these wounds through appeal to the state for regulation. This can be seen as appealing to liberalism’s equality tenet. This wounded position and need for recompense also puts unions in a position of defending the industrial model of the 20th Century, despite earlier attempts to replace it. This is a model that has resulted in concentration of capital in the hands of a few and has led to a growth economy. While wounded attachments can be seen in those movements, such as gender and race, most often associated with identity politics, they can also be seen in the economic identity of worker, and of capitalist. I suggest that the worker identity might become more subject to ressentiment as class politics are eroded. However, this analysis of wounded attachments, while allowing for a deconstruction of economic identity and speaking to the defensiveness of these identities, also does not deconstruct economic relations. This leads me to look to other feminist theorists who have worked specifically on deconstructing economy and economic inequality.

Conclusion

The spectres of left crisis, neoliberal dominance and the seemingly intractable problem of gender inequality are the backdrops to this thesis. These were problems and moments I experienced viscerally in my own engagement with both the feminist and union movements. In response, I have looked to analyses of the
crisis of class politics, and of the rise of identity-based social movements. While these debates took place in the tail end of the 20th Century, I argue that at a movement level they are far from resolved.

In my re-opening of this debate, I have drawn on Nancy Fraser’s attempt to rethink a feminist politics of social change in regard to gender and economic inequality. Breaking social movement claims into conceptual categories of redistribution and recognition acknowledges existing splits within social movements that activists on the ground work with every day, whilst also acknowledging the intertwined and interdependent nature of those categories. Classifying remedies into affirmative and transformative ideal-types shows which remedies are likely to exacerbate the injustice of redistribution or economy, and recognition or identity and thus offers up the most compatible remedies for a more inclusive approach to social change. Thus I ask of my case studies of feminist economic activism: do they affirm the gender binary, or do they transform/ queer gender identity? Are the cases engaged in transformative or affirmative economic activism and how does this impact the gender politics of their approach?

The insights of a deconstructive approach to gender politics are instructive for reinvigorating analysis of economic inequality. Fraser has not engaged in a deeply deconstructive politics of economy – in fact she calls for what seems like an unreconstructed socialism. I argue for a further deconstruction of economy than that which Fraser provides. Brown’s use of the concept of ressentiment offers some further acknowledgement and deconstruction of economic identity, and gives insight into the defensive postures sometimes associated with modern social movements. However, a more in depth deconstruction of economy is required, in order to move toward a transformative, deeply differentiated vision of economy, starting with work, but also including enterprise and transaction. For this I look to another group of thinkers, and I bring them to bear on my project in the following chapter.
Chapter Two | Feminist economic discourse and social change

Introduction

Thinking about gender and economic activism in a prevailing atmosphere of left melancholy and uncertainty had left me hungry and unsatisfied. In attempting to find a more satiating critique, I looked to those activists and thinkers challenging the traditional measures of economy. I found feminist strategies for the counting of unpaid work, re-evaluation of the definitions of self-interest and value, and acknowledgement and valorisation of varying kinds of unpaid labour. I also found those who questioned the underlying assumptions of the unpaid/paid, formal/informal, care work/regular work binaries. They questioned the overarching binary that led to the need to acknowledge these halves of the supposed whole.

In this chapter I apply techniques developed by feminist queer theory to economic discourses. I build on the previous chapter by applying the categorization of social movements I elucidated there; outlining what strategies might lead to potentially transformative change. I review some feminist critiques that have destabilised the definitions of wellbeing that have shaped economic policy around the world.

As part of my application of feminist political theory to feminist economic discourse, in this chapter I use an extended metaphor of body politics to think through the dominant representations of economy, and feminist critiques of these representations. Just as feminist critiques of diet and body have often focused on wellbeing, I also think about the type of economies that foster the wellbeing of communities. To encourage this dual process, I use the notion of economic wellbeing – what it means to live well - as a linchpin in this chapter to explore how competing frameworks think about gender and economic change.
Weighing in: Measures of Economic Health and Wellbeing

Convincing the anorexic to participate in family therapy and negotiating with the downsized workforce to stem wages growth and introduce a new work culture are both attempts to foster the conditions under which the essential life forces, calories and capital, might restore the body to its natural state of health (Gibson-Graham 2006b: 95).

The human body is pinched and pulled by many different measures of health and beauty, such as the hip-to-waist ratio, the favoured size for models of a 34-24-34 inch bust-waist-hip, and the more recently popularised Body Mass Index (BMI). Similarly, indices of economic health have long-established measures and meanings, and I aim to outline some of them in this chapter. The meaning of economic health itself is contested, and even amongst mainstream economists, wellbeing is a sticky concept if we dig a little below the surface. Money income is one definition, total household wealth and public consumption another. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) remains in common usage for the perceived health of national economies, and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) measures Household Economic Wellbeing (HEW). The United States Census Bureau (USCB) gives a multi-statistical approach that accounts for “extended measures of wellbeing” in a household. None of these measures gives an adequate picture of economic flows. While flesh spills over the constricting measuring tape, bone density, nutrition, stress levels, all key markers of wellbeing, may go unchecked.

The measures of economic wellbeing, like BMI or hip-waist, can give us kernels of potentially useful information, however, they also render much of the economic life of many communities invisible. In a market society, money income is important and lack of money can cause infinite amounts of stress and leave people vulnerable in many ways. Total household wealth and public consumption might demonstrate the problems for single parents by showing the difference between single and double income households, or single income households where child care must be paid for (Wolff, Zacharias and Caner 2005). Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is a national average, but this commonly-used statistic does not account for wealth distribution or environmental costs (see for example, Jacobs 1991; 2012). The ABS HEW is also calculated as an average, ignoring distribution and mode, and measures households as a whole, reflective of the fact that the nuclear family
remains the traditional social unit. The USCB measures for dynamic wellbeing, examining “changes over time in poverty and in participation in major means-tested government programs such as Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, and Supplemental Security Income,” and using measures other than income or earnings (USCB 2004). The extended measures of wellbeing examine day-to-day questions such as housing conditions and possession of durable goods such as appliances, but also covers expectation of access to family, friend and community support when needed (USCB 2004). Clearly, quantitative measures of economic wellbeing are more than capable of going beyond averages and income. However, while they can even show “dynamic” wellbeing or change over time, these statistics do not show the contribution of unpaid work outside the formal measure of welfare benefits.

As with feminist critiques of body measurements (see Broom and Warin 2011: 455-457), feminists have loosened the measuring tape with alternative proposals to tallying economic wellbeing. Like the women they write about, they have worked hard to redress the inadequacies of economic measurements and institutions in dealing with questions and problems of gender and gender inequality. As Marilyn Waring argues, the Human Development Index (or HDI) is one alternative that comes close to valuing a broad range of monetary and non-monetary contributions. In Nova Scotia, Canada, Waring’s propositions regarding wellbeing have been taken on in the Genuine Progress Indicators (GPI), an alternative to the GDP that has twenty components, not all of which must have a monetary figure attached to them. The GPIs include environmental factors, measure economic activities that are detrimental to wellbeing and “include statistics on unpaid work, divided into voluntary and community work, unpaid housework and parenting, and the value of unpaid overtime and underemployment” (Waring 2004: 39).

However, such progress in broadening understandings of economic wellbeing has not been final or safe from backlash. The Genuine Progress Indicators have been taken up in Finland (where it has been supported by Statistics Finland), and to a lesser degree in the USA. In Australia, however, the last study was conducted in 2000 by left wing think tank the Australia Institute, and the GPI has not gained government or ABS support. In 2010 in Canada, the Conservative Party eliminated the section on unpaid work from the Census (Zerbisias 2010), and in Australia early in 2013, the time-use survey run by the ABS called Work, Life and Family
Survey was cut (Macdonald 2013). Both Waring and Folbre have popularised the idea that mainstream measures such as GDP or money income, inspired by neo/classical economic theory, do not take into account the value of care. Their work has produced significant ripples of progress in measurement, but remains a non-dominant discourse in the field of economics.

**A new set of scales: Waring, Folbre and a politics of the whole economy**

Marilyn Waring (1988, 1997, 2004) and Nancy Folbre (1994, 2000) are two of the most incisive feminist voices contesting dominant approaches to political economy at the tail end of the 20th Century. Waring argued for an inclusion of unpaid work in national accounting measures, most famously through her study of the UN system of national accounts and the value of unpaid work done largely by the world’s women. Folbre on the other hand has argued for an understanding of care as a social responsibility. Both have played the wholesome, slow-food chefs of the economic world, cautioning against fast hits of calories, and championing the importance of understanding our diets.

Feminist thinking about the concerns of gender and political economy as exemplified by Waring and Folbre have motivated some reforms of economic structures, as will be shown below and in Chapter Three on feminist economic activism in Australia. I suggest here, however, that a dominant heterosexism is still imbued in the logic of placing feminized unpaid work in a binary with the market. In leaving this binary in tact, these feminist representations recommend symptomatic address of the inequalities generated by this binary through a valuing of feminised labour. I suggest, drawing on Cameron and Gibson-Graham, that we might go further in identifying common struggles in/between the binary frame such as class struggle in/outside household or enterprise.

In this section I look to Marilyn Waring and Nancy Folbre’s challenge to the assumptions of both left and right wing political economy. Just as Andrea Dworkin (1974) and Naomi Wolf (2000) challenged the body modifications and mythologies of beauty so important to the subjection of women, Waring and Folbre’s work has challenged the lack of inclusion of feminised unpaid labour in modern economics. Drawing on the insights of feminists such as Carol Pateman (1988) who had contested the notion that the private was not part of the political,
Waring and later Folbre pointed out that an emphasis on markets and production on both sides of the political spectrum, ignored the vital contribution of the private sphere - dominated by and associated with women - to what was typically considered economy. Their work presents touchstone analyses of the ways in which care work is undervalued by the market or not valued at all, and why this is so. I outline their strategies below.

Marilyn Waring’s contribution to the debate rests on her analyses of the absence of household, and other unpaid labour, from the major international accounting systems that measure economic production, challenging the narrative in which accounting invisibilizes labour performed outside of market/s. Most work done by women globally is unpaid and outside the accounting definitions of the formal economy and measures of economic success such as GDP. Much of it is grimy, grubby, backbreaking work; work with bodies (animal and human) and bodily fluids, dung, dirt, and carrying of water (Waring 1988). Waring thus describes herself as writing about “shit work” (1997: 44). In her book dealing with the United Nations System of National Accounts (UNSNA), If Women Counted, Waring states:

> every time I see a mother with an infant, I know that I am seeing a woman at work. I know that work is not leisure and it is not sleep, and it may well be enjoyable. I know that money payment is not necessary for work to be done (1988: 21).

Invisible to accounting measures, ‘shit work’ attracts minimal government support and has limited legitimacy as work.

From the premise that this unpaid ‘shit work’ is invisible to national accounts, Waring’s work exposes the impacts of economic inequality based on gender. Her analysis of the UNSNA, which informs GDP calculations, shows that work performed by women in unpaid capacities goes unmeasured and therefore, she argues, economically unvalued. Waring argues that this is the very work that sustains families and communities and reproduces labour (children). At the same time this reproductive work is seen as an extension of women’s physiology, and thus natural and without possibility for change or analysis (Waring 1988: 15-18). She describes the typical day of a woman in a developing country, noting which activities are productive according to UNSNA:

> The woman goes to collect water. She uses some to wash dishes from the family evening meal (unproductive work) and the pots in which she previously cooked a little food for sale (informal work). Next, she goes to the nearby grove to collect bark for dye for materials to be woven for sale (informal work), which she mixes
with half a bucket of water (informal work). She also collects some roots and leaves to make a herbal medicine for her child (inactivity). She uses the other half of the bucket of water to make this concoction (inactivity). She will also collect some dry wood to build the fire to boil the water to make both the medicine and the dye (active and inactive labour). All this time she will carry the baby on her back (inactive work) (Waring 2004: 38).

Child-rearing, breast feeding, and housework remain absent from national accounts twenty-five years after Waring published her groundbreaking study of the United Nations System of National Accounts (UNSNA), the accounting system that measures the wealth, debt and productivity of nation states around the world. Waring argues that this absence demonstrates the fraternal interests of international accounting measures (1988: 79). Just as feminists have argued that weight is not a sole indicator of wellbeing, so too Waring argues that measurement does not have to leave women’s unpaid work in the realm of the invisible. While Waring begins to argue that the naturalisation of women’s reproductive roles is harmful to economic wellbeing, in focusing on this unpaid work she also emphasises its status as the ‘other’ to the formal economy.

Implicit in Waring’s argument is the suggestion that work done by women, much of which is caring work, contributes to wellbeing and that wellbeing could be better understood and improved if women were, in fact, counted. The implicit argument is that wellbeing will be more likely when one’s contribution is valued. Of the various attempts to address the absences of the UNSNA, Waring favours the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI). The HDI, Waring argues, comes close to approximations of gender and work data “for the purpose of policy making” (Waring 2003: 39; Folbre 2001: 73-74). I suggest that while this strategy is useful for making visible and attempting to value feminised work, it is in itself insufficient for challenging the hegemonic binary thinking of capitalism and neoliberalism, as it represents the economy as a whole in which a binary is still present.

However, some of Waring’s proposals do seem deconstructive in nature. One proposal Waring makes for making economic measures less discriminatory is that the definition of unemployment would change dramatically. If one was not employed in the formal economy but self-producing or caring, and this work was counted as producing something of value, then the definition of unemployment according to UNSNA would become patently inadequate (Waring 2004). Those charged with administering the UNSNA have expressed concerns that such a
definition would mean the measure being overwhelmed by non-monetary values. However, for Waring this is a welcome prospect. If governments recognise non-monetary contributions to livelihood, policy may look significantly different: home industries might receive support, agricultural policy might support subsistence farming, community centres might be seen as providing valuable services that should be paid accordingly. In this hypothetical situation, a notion of economic wellbeing starts to look much more inclusive of home and women. The market and monetary economy might be seen more as a support to other means of livelihood (such as home production), rather than the other way around.

Waring believes that an adequate representation of the economy, one that would be of more use to policymakers, is the three sphere model shown at Figure 2.1. Developed by Pietila (cited in Waring 1988: 244; see also Pietila 2002), the diagram shows three circles in which the free economy is the voluntary unpaid and household economy, the protected sector is “the home market as well as public services... protected and guided by official and legislative means,” and the fettered economy is export and international trade (1988: 243).

Figure 2.1 Pietila’s holistic economy, source: Pietila 2002: 13
This three-sphere model, Waring suggests, more adequately represents the economy as experienced by all and as is useful for policy makers. This model, with its porous boundaries, decentres and deprioritises capitalist production, and centres the feminised and often deprivatised space of unpaid or informal work.

◆

For Nancy Folbre, it is an invisible heart, rather than Adam Smith’s invisible hand that primes the body economic. She insists that in addition to the cheap nutrients of the junk food market economy, it is the nutrients of the home kitchen, care and reproduction that are primary for a functioning society and economy. However, these elements are obscured by the individualistic definition of self-interest encouraged by mainstream economics. Folbre argues that people can and do perceive their interest as collective rather than individual. Indeed many women do, which at least partially explains their ‘irrational’ behaviour in prioritising care.

Complementing Waring, Folbre is critical of the capacities of both classical liberal and Marxist theory to explain the connections between gender and caring labour. Rather like the individual diet plan (perhaps South Beach or a liver cleanse), liberalism, with its focus on freedom, tells us how individuals might pursue economically rational preferences: “some theory of purposeful choice lies at the heart of any claim that individuals can challenge the constraints of their culture and context” (1994: 27). However, liberal theories fail to account for collective ‘self-interest’, as in the case of women and care work. Alternatively, Folbre argues that Marxist and socialist feminism have a useful analysis of power, but this is limited by an economism that shields from view many aspects of social and creative life, perhaps somewhat like the top-down approach to obesity of regulating advertising by junk food companies (1994: 29-35). An intertwining of these theories is necessary for an analysis of gender relations and the importance of the invisible heart. Groups, Folbre goes on, face fractured possibilities and responsibilities that they have to negotiate to achieve their perceived interest. She argues that men, with certain given structures of constraint, typically use their collective actions to ensure a lesser responsibility for reproduction and care (1994: 74-78, 91). Instead, as in the formal economy, these responsibilities are determined by a complex power play.
Folbre is arguing that women find themselves in a situation where their view of the collective interest (social responsibility and care) conflicts with their individual capacities for financial gain, and where they lose out on the individual front due to men’s group capacity to focus on their individual interest, thereby gaining economic power in the game of life. This is how Folbre, like Waring, reaches the conclusion that care is or should be a social responsibility, something that must be quite literally taken into account for a sustainable economy. This power play, Folbre continues, comes with a distinct economic cost to those groups (largely women) who ‘choose’ to act ‘responsibly’ or in other words, collectively.

Care, then, should be a social responsibility. For it to become so, however, we must find new ways to divvy care up, like public kitchens. Folbre’s theory about reproduction also rests on the point that “however important the ideals of meritocracy, democracy and equal opportunity may be, they do not provide guidelines that specify our responsibilities to dependents, to future generations or to other species” (Folbre 1994: 88). In other words, these ideas that are so important to political culture (of the West) do not address the feminised responsibility of child care and social reproduction. Care must be quite literally taken into account for a sustainable economy. Folbre is thus critical of popular notions of gender equality on both sides of politics.

One solution Folbre proffers is an index of household production, the Dolly Jones Index (2001: 66). She does not stop there, but proposes multiple indexes: following populist Jim Hightower, she supports a Doug Jones Index for the working class man (2001: 64) and the Wa Jones index to measure workplace harmony (2001: 77-79). She has also, with Tamara Ohler, proposed improvements to the PAR index, a relative wealth measure (2006). While one group in society (women) should not be constrained to do the bulk of caring work, nonetheless the work needs to be done for the health and wellbeing of any population. Hence the idea that for the economy to be a whole picture, care work must be valued. These kinds of measures, while lacking traction at an inter/national level, have proven useful to feminists time and again, as will be further explored in Chapter Three.

Waring and Folbre’s innovative focus on the unrepresented and uncounted ‘half’ of the economy shows much of the work and transactions typically ignored by formal definitions of economy. It also makes visible such work as work, rather
than simply the innate domain of women and thus goes some way to
denaturalising the typically gendered division of labour, making it available as the
object of political decision making. However, it also leaves the representation of
halves – paid and unpaid – largely intact, meaning the unpaid half is "locked in the
subordinate, under/ devalued position vis a vis the ‘core’ economy" (Cameron and
Gibson-Graham 2003: 151). Additionally, the focus on gendered labour fails, to
some extent to consider other areas such as enterprise, which are both gendered
and assumed capitalistic.

**Beyond shifting scales: Economic diversity and living well**

In this section I discuss what I consider a more transformative approach to
political economy, that is, economic diversity and community economies. I make
the argument that by de-essentialising economies, we can not only attempt to
break down binaries that position feminised labour as subordinate to capitalism,
but also question the symbolic sedimenting of particular economic relations, for
example, enterprise as always capitalist, or non-market economic exchange as
always subsumed into a ‘community’ or ‘non-economic’ space. This essentialising,
I argue, has the effect of masking many informal economic practices, and also
disguising the diversity that exists within formal economic exchanges. Below I first
discuss the deconstructing of capitalism through what is known as diverse
economies theory, and then the normative and ethical moves known as
community economies.

Judith Butler infamously argued that the dominant thinking in feminist literary
theory was homophobic, and that this had implications for the life possibilities
imagined by said theory, as well as the exclusion of the queer other (1990). Julia
Serano questioned the dominant assumption that only cis women experience
sexism, calling femininity in all its forms a whipping girl for history (2007). These
thinkers facilitated the shift from a discussion of sexism toward feminised bodies
as experienced by straight cis gendered women, to a discussion of the intersections
of sexism and heterosexism, the way that heterosexual assumptions and gender
binaries are not only mutually reinforcing but constitutive of each other. Gibson-
Graham have argued that the dominant political economy, including left-leaning
and feminist thinking, excludes certain possibilities for change by its very terms of
reference, exposing a certain economic queerphobia in the texts and ideas. They suggest that there is a language of acceptable anti-capitalism in this literature that fails to engage in current possibilities for change and resists new thinking. Similarly, alongside Gibson-Graham, I argue for an analysis of economies as diverse, in the hope that we might see the range of possibilities that exist, despite the difficulty and necessary incompleteness in doing so.

I draw on post-structuralist thinking and anti-essentialist strains of Marxism, with a growing body of work collectively known as ‘community economies’ literature. Theorists in this area have focused on intersections between class and other social issues and movements such as feminism, diversity within economies and economic experience, the building of community economies, and anti-deterministic accounts of economics and social change (see Gibson-Graham 1999, 2006; Gibson-Graham, Resnick and Wolff 2000; Resnick and Wolff 1992). This body of theory extends Althusser’s concept of overdetermination, in concert with resistance to determinism within social theory. Proponents of this concept argue that all phenomena are constituted by their environment; that no one phenomenon or social issue (such as class, gender or race, or any number more) can be objectively or quantifiably ‘ranked’ above another (Resnick and Wolff 1992: 138). Just as the subject is historically and socially contingent, so too are social ‘structures’ and phenomena. This leads to an attempt both to simplify descriptors of social phenomena such as class, and then look at many intersections with other social phenomena, rather than assign an essential or given priority (Gibson-Graham, Resnick and Wolff 2000: 10). This ontological reframing in post-structuralist approaches to economics and class also has the effect of repoliticising economy, and thus making more space for the growth of non-capitalist forms and subjectivities.

In this body of literature there is both a continuation of a tradition of class and economic analysis with an unhinging from a fixed view of reality. Marxism, it is argued, recognises the historical and social contingency of the subject and social norms, whereas liberalism tends to over-emphasise human agency and choice (Swanson 2007: 15). Further, whilst criticising classical or modernist theories, particularly Marxism for using “privileged concepts” which represent an “ultimate reality from which all other realities issue”, these thinkers do not reject the use of concepts such as class, but rather argue that understanding their contingency is a
strengthening of the conceptual usefulness of such concepts (Graham 1988: 62). Graham argues rather that class is a “social process constituted as a focal theoretical category within one of many competing discourses...” and that therefore it is possible to “put forward Marxism’s unique and specific character as the grounds of its appeal” (Graham 1988: 62-64).

The image ‘Capitalism’s Excluded Others’, shown at Figure 2.2 below, depicts non-capitalist economic activities and the deconstruction of economy. For example, community, neighbourhood or family self-provisioning and sharing, black markets, consumer and producer co-operatives, and the renaissance of farmer's markets, are all represented in the image as instances of non-capitalist community economic activity, outside the centre, or nucleus of market capitalist activities and forms. Capitalism’s excluded others can include emerging types of exchange, production and enterprise such as cooperatives and social enterprise. The highlighting of these sites of exchange, production, and enterprise along with household production, surplus sharing, and gift giving, troubles the binary between household and formal economy, or private and public. Clearly, while typically unpaid feminised labour such as reproduction is excluded from the formal economy, it is not one half to a whole economy. The representation here is more of a queering approach that sees social entrepreneurs and co-operators in a similarly devalued position.

**Figure 2.2 Capitalism’s Excluded Others, source: Community Economies Collective**
This work on anti-essentialist conceptions of economy has led to a project of diversifying understandings of what economy is through the ontology of overdetermination, but also a project of thinking about what economies can be, using the term community economies. Importantly, economic diversity, like queer theory, is an analytic tool, not an end in itself. Not all non-capitalist possibilities are desirable. Slavery, for example, is non-capitalist. Command economies under fascism, barter and exchange in wartime conditions, feudalism, all of these also fit into this non-capitalist category. These forms of economy, while they still exist, have been defeated and derided by libertarian and left-wing traditions with good reason. Gibson-Graham argue that the economy, like all things human, is about living together, or following their use of Jean Luc Nancy's work, "being in common" (Nancy cited in Gibson-Graham 2006: 81-84). They have examined varying forms of economic practices with the explicit goal of creating a language of diversity that does not foreclose forms outside of, or within capitalism, and actively seeks out alternatives (2006). They call this the "commerce of being together" and suggest the following "co-ordinates" or guidelines for assessing the politics of said commerce:

- what is necessary to personal and social survival; how social surplus is appropriated and distributed; whether and how social surplus is to be produced and consumed; and how a commons is produced and sustained (2006: 88).

Gibson-Graham insist that necessity is politically and ethically determined, not a given. Decisions, such as what a living wage might mean, take place in a political and social context and are "sometimes explicitly but more likely only implicitly debated" (Gibson-Graham 2006: 89). This political determination will differ across economic forms, for example in the cases of self-employment, corporate employment and worker co-ops, as the decision-making processes are different in each case.

In opening space to think about economic forms outside of the unpaid/ paid market/ home binaries, we open space for diverse and possibly more ethical economic practices, and also think more about the possibilities for those already in existence. In community economies literature this has involved varied research activities including: re-examination of the successful Basque co-operative company Mondragon; and various community action research projects, undertaken to understand and develop communities previously considered to be
economically depressed and failing. In such projects the aim is to seek and develop community economy potential (2006: 131-134). In discussing Mondragon the authors grapple with concerns of the early labour movement regarding co-operatives of workers, including whether or not workers could be relied upon to make decisions beyond their own narrowly defined self-interest (Webb and Webb 1921). The community economy projects presented in A Postcapitalist Politics look at the potential for different forms of economic action and participation (Gibson-Graham 2006: 148-151). This research is a primary example of the potential of post-structural approaches to economics to both understand and see new potential in community economies and economic activism.

While numerous actors on the left profess to want alternatives to a dominant and destructive capitalism, the sense of possibility to create or amplify said alternatives is often lacking whilst we battle in the moment. A dominance and naturalisation of capitalism has led to a concentration of meaning and eliding of differences both within capitalist activities and in non-capitalist forms and activities. This dismissal of difference was exacerbated with the demise of socialism as an existing alternative. Theorists including J.K. Gibson-Graham have attempted to promote a disidentification with capitalism by bringing economy back into the realm of the contestable and political. This mirrors attempts by queer theorists such as Judith Butler to foster a disidentification with a dominant heterosexuality and the supporting binary gender code (Gibson-Graham 2006: 54 and Butler 1993: 3).

Gibson-Graham has proposed a framework of diverse economies as an analytical tool, and community economy as a new signifier or ethical tool. The diverse economy analysis can be represented in a number of ways, including in the iceberg diagram in Figure 2.3 below. The diagram shows wage labour, marketable products and capitalist firms above the waterline, indicating that they are more visible and valorised as economic activity. However, below the waterline we see a number of sites of work, production and exchange that may not be counted in mainstream representations of economy but are nonetheless sources of livelihood and surplus.
Figure 2.3 Diverse economies iceberg diagram, source: Community Economies Collective 2001, drawn by Ken Byrne

Cameron and Gibson-Graham have referred to Waring and Folbre's approach, discussed above, as “adding on,” “counting in” and a “politics of the whole” (2003: 149), meaning they try to create a more complete representation of economy. Cameron and Gibson-Graham argue that while it is an important conceptual challenge to traditional political economy, it is also a limiting strategy in challenging capitalism because the actions suggested, such as the creation of a Dolly Jones Index, maintain a dualistic and masculine vision of the economy. In attempting to bring to light women’s economic practices on the same terms as more masculine cultural practices, a binary is created, in which the feminine or other of the economy, the household and non-economic practices, is forever less, inadequate or wanting (Cameron and Gibson-Graham 2003: 150-151). I suggest this is how Waring’s three-sphere model operates, implicitly indicating that the three parts of household/ care economy, state, and capital make up the whole economy, and that each is valuable. However, with Cameron and Gibson-Graham, I question the transformative potential of this move.
While I do contrast Gibson-Graham’s diverse economies approach to Waring and Folbre’s here, there are also productive resonances between them. With Waring, Gibson-Graham has demonstrated the violence of not seeing the economy as a space for political contestation. A language of mainstream economics that is capitalocentric, anti-participatory and anti-democratic means there is little space in the public imaginary for contesting the broad shape of ‘the’ economy. Food sharing, for example, is not seen as contributing to economic wellbeing in any widely used official measure. All three theorists are similarly insistent that the terms of the debate are a key to successful feminist change. Further, they all have a focus on practical theory for practical change. Folbre and Waring analyse the invisibility of the household and care economies. Gibson-Graham make the point that language and discourse determine what can and cannot be said or imagined with regard to non-capitalist alternatives.

These approaches can also be considered through the lens of Fraser’s affirmative and transformative categories. Both of these approaches seem to resonate with Michel Foucault’s point that knowledge and power work together as discourse (Foucault 1979). There can be no power over population, or biopower, without a relevant authoritative discipline. Knowledge generates, informs and advances power in various fields (Jose 1998). Foucault’s classic example was medicine, an area also taken up by feminists, but this analysis equally applies to bodies (Butler 1993) and economics (Callon 1998; Butler 2010). Power is not simply about control over resources or legitimate use of violence, though these remain important in ways that cannot be overstated, but about validation of discourses. Putting it another way, power and knowledge are mutually reinforcing resources. Waring, Folbre, and Gibson-Graham are all advocates of increased possibilities for more inclusive economies. However, where Waring and Folbre seek for the most part to expand an empirical system of representing economic activity in what may be considered an affirmative move, Gibson-Graham and Cameron seek first to deconstruct our understanding of the various aspects of economy and what system this signifies, and then to reconstruct with a more ethical set of considerations.

Looking to feminist approaches to the disciplining and production of bodies in the last twenty years can draw out these resonances and distinctions. Adding on or counting in (the HDI and Dolly Jones) is comparable, perhaps, to the promotion of BMI as a healthy guide to the results of diet. They are measures that allow that
wellness can come in a range of body weights and shapes, whilst still indicating that there are ideal body sizes and that these fall along gender lines. We might usefully compare the community economies approach to the Health at Every Size (HAES) movement, which promotes healthy eating and exercise no matter what peoples’ size. The Association for Size Diversity and Health (ASDH) states that they operate on four principles, which are as follows:

1. Accepting and respecting the diversity of body shapes and sizes.
2. Recognizing that health and wellbeing are multi-dimensional and that they include physical, social, spiritual, occupational, emotional, and intellectual aspects.
3. Promoting all aspects of health and wellbeing for people of all sizes.
4. Promoting eating in a manner which balances individual nutritional needs, hunger, satiety, appetite, and pleasure.
5. Promoting individually appropriate, enjoyable, life-enhancing physical activity, rather than exercise that is focused on a goal of weight loss (ASDH 2003).

These principles mean that while health and wellbeing are the desired goals, the road map is flexible and not prescribed. Health may look many different ways, as ASDH attempt to represent in the image shown at Figure 2.4, but the key factor is that one is as well as they can be and that health, as differentiated from weight, is the key to understanding bodies. Medical expertise can and should be used, such as measurements for cholesterol and diabetes, but they should be used with the holistic health definition HAES rather than a weight goal that does not assure the health of the people to whom it is applied. This approach to health may well be revolutionary, and reminds us that bodies and their re/presentations are always sites of political contestation (Butler 1993). Similarly, the community economies approach calls for an analysis of the hows and whys of surplus distribution, production and their effects, as opposed to the end product of GDP or even HDI. Measures, while potentially useful, are always the result of a political choice.
These two approaches have implications for how I analyse feminist activism on work in non-capitalist areas of economy. The analytics of Waring and Folbre’s work has advanced feminist claims, successfully in some cases. However, to analyse the non-capitalist possibilities that currently exist and have existed through history, including diverse and perhaps democratic economic possibilities, an additional approach is needed. Simple examples may include common fields, self-provisioning, consumer or producer co-operatives, local exchange trading systems (LETS), and criminalised labour such as sex-work. These systems of exchange may be small scale, yet they exist and persist, and have their own histories that have until recently remained largely hidden in the political economy of the left. The smaller scale of these sites and the highlighting of them as non-capitalist, serves to point out that all economic activity, be it the investments of a large corporation, economists counting some activities and not others, or the self-provisioning of a local community garden collective, is the site of political decision-making. However, as part of community economies researchers’ aim to see diversity as well as traditional forms of capitalism, this literature has not focused on the more traditional or mainstream forms of economic activism such as women’s fight for pay equity, or trade union struggles for fair wages. I argue that...
there is value at looking at the links and differences in political and economic ideas within diverse forms of feminist activism for economic justice. Hence from this discussion, I ask whether feminist economic activism affirms the identity of the economy as capitalist or whether it transforms/ queers the economy?

**Conclusion**

Waring and Folbre’s work is fruitful in analysing the changes pursued by feminist activists in terms of valuing care and women’s unpaid and/ or underpaid work. However, the diverse economies framework is productive in seeing the non-capitalist possibilities of social enterprise, and the non-capitalist aspects of all economic activity. Gibson-Graham’s work argues that mainstream economic imaginings, like the meanings assigned to the white male heterosexual body, can be broken down, questioned, deconstructed. One way to do this is to emphasise the non-capitalist activities that make up our economies, and attempt to envision them as something other than ‘other’. Like feminist approaches to feminised others, they attempt to turn non-capitalist activity from object to subject. The diverse economies framework sees non-capitalist practices as not merely completing an incomplete picture of economy, but as economic ends in themselves, economic subjects to be explored and granted space on their own terms. While this discourse informs *my* understanding of economic change, later in this thesis I ask what discourse of economy informs my participants’ activism and how they understand economic change.

In this chapter I have argued for de-coupling enterprise, exchange and finance from capitalism, and the household from both heterosexuality and heterosexuality from capitalism, similarly to the ways that feminist activists have argued to decouple weight and feminised appearance from overall health. This approach has led me to weave a metaphor of economy as body through this chapter, to further explore the way that feminist insights could help me present a new analysis of the body economic. I have looked to two sets of feminist scholars who have theorised economy and economic wellbeing, and argued that Folbre and Waring’s work is focused on completing what they regard as the partial representations of economy propounded by mainstream economics (filling in the gaps in and between liberalism and Marxist theory) through recognition of the importance of uncounted economic activities in the ‘private’ sphere. Waring and
Folbre pose arguments that are reflected in the claims and change making of many arguments for gender and economic inequality in Australia and elsewhere, however, I have shown that their approach is not necessarily transformative of economy or identity. I explore this further in the following chapter, and also read Australian feminist activism for transformational approaches to economy.
Chapter Three | Affirmative and Transformative Strands within Australian Feminist Activism

Introduction
Australian feminists have a history of engaging with social and often economic issues, from attempts to change public policy around motherhood in the 1910s to feminist bureaucrats working on affirmative action in the 1970s and 1980s, and more recent developments on any number of issues such as sewing outwork laws, reproductive health, and the refuge movement. In this chapter, I review the literature on feminist activism on economic issues in Australia. In doing so, I ask whether the examples cited by the literature are affirmative or transformative in their strategies, according to Nancy Fraser’s schema. I look at this distinction in order to ascertain potential openings for a transformative diverse and/or community economies analysis that might queer or transform economic norms and challenge capitalocentrism.

Australia has a particular history of institutionalized feminism that in this context has been less of a ‘protest’ movement than comparable social movements. Thus feminist activism in the Australian feminist movement has a broader meaning, one that includes institution building and maintenance. This definition has influenced my choice of cases for this research, and conversely has influenced the cases that were available to me. In this thesis I use the terms activist and activism to discuss participants in my research, despite the fact that not all may identify in this way. This is a somewhat loaded choice, and it is a choice I make with caveat.

First though, some history: the term activism is generally associated with street protest and the organising of public demonstration in social movement literature (see for example Melucci 1980, 1985; Whittier 1997; Madison 2008). However, in feminist literature and in Australian feminist literature in particular, this definition is troubled or contested. Leading scholars of feminist social movements argue that in Australia at least, feminists have both built and entered organisations as a way of furthering their agendas and securing their gains and that this type of activity has occurred at the same time as peak activity in more traditional ‘protest’ movement (Sawer and Madison 2013: x-xvi). Thus, feminist or women’s movement activism can be seen not just as protest but also as organisation building and as
work within bureaucracies and political parties.

The participants in this study are organisation builders and maintainers. They fall into this broad category of feminist activists – volunteers, staff and members of organisations. They wish to make change on particular issues through their organisations, such as improving the position of migrant women workers, or in the case of the Australian Services Union and Fitted For Work, to bring about change using the organisation as a driver of activity and power. While I explore this further in later chapters, most participants gave answers that showed their commitment to their organisation.

“Socialist-feminist praxis”

Australia’s history of feminism, and feminist institution building, is also a history of economic activism. Authors such as Eisenstein (1990), Ho (2008), Levi and Singleton (1991), and Sawer and Radford (2008) have described this in depth, addressing femocrat incursions into government, women’s movement social policy influence, migrant women’s activism and the macro economic focus of the Women’s Electoral Lobby (WEL). Femocrats attempted to address economic issues like equal access to work and associated benefits by successfully promoting affirmative action and removal of employment clauses that meant women teachers were less likely to be made permanent or considered for promotion. Migrant women’s activists addressed issues like language barriers which prevented engagement with mainstream Australian economies and limited work opportunities, as well as addressing the industrial conditions of migrant women dominated industries. WEL addressed issues like taxation and childcare, which prevented women employees and business women alike from fair engagement in Australian economic relations. All of these activities can be seen as economic activism.

Activism by feminists on economic issues was prominent Australia in the 1980s. The feminist movement in Australia experienced a period of institutionalisation during the late 1970s, 80s, and into the 1990s. Part of this process was the building of ‘femocracy’ or to use a term I prefer, femocrat incursions. The term femocrat was coined specifically to describe women who were tackling the bureaucracies and political parties of Australian politics. Hester Eisenstein wrote about this
process from lived experience and described the wine soaked lunches and political wheeling and dealing of the time. She wrote:

Australian feminists appear to me to operate on the basis of a socialist- feminist praxis linked to the politics of the welfare state. This gives rise to campaigns and objectives that center upon the protection of the economic rights of women as workers and as mothers, whether or not they work outside of the home. Thus feminists have focused upon issues such as welfare rights; child support payments; protection of women through extending union coverage (Eisenstein 1990: 53).

Eisenstein’s linking of “socialist-feminist practice... to the politics of the welfare state” is a succinct description of the dominant Australian experience and response to issues like equal pay and feminist campaigns on equal employment opportunities and superannuation (1990: 53). Every movement chooses strategy dependent on its context, and Australian feminists have been adept at taking advantage of state welfare and industrial policies and extending these to women. She states that the American feminist context conditioned her to more rights-based campaigning than was common in Australia until this time. Interestingly, the language of the prominent “Your Rights at Work” campaign of the mid 2000s adopted this rights-based approach, which had always been absent from Australian industrial politics. The fortunes of feminism and the femocrats were very much linked to the Labor party, which was out of office federally from 1996 to 2007, and in NSW from 1988 to 1995. This level of focus by the femocrats achieved some progressive economic outcomes in the 1970s and 1980s. Though the femocrats described by Eisenstein (1990), Sawer (1990) and Yeatman (1990) fell from influence in the 1990s as the Labor party lost power, their influence is undoubtedly still felt in social policy and is also undoubtedly economic in nature.

**IDENTIFYING TRANSFORMATION AND AFFIRMATION IN FEMINIST ECONOMIC ACTIVISM**

In order to show what feminist moves and strategies in Australia might have transformative potential, by deconstructing identities and changing the dynamics of economy, I analyse a number of feminist campaigns. The examples of feminist activism described above fall into both categories. To reiterate, in Fraser’s terminology, an affirmative remedy to injustice is one in which end-state redistributions are made that tend to affirm difference, whereas in a transformative remedy, the system is changed so that reallocations do not need to take place (Fraser 1997). Transformative remedies tend to fit with a deconstructive
approach to identities because they break down and destigmatise devalued identities. I argue in this thesis that it is not necessary to distinguish whether these claims are about recognition or redistribution, as they are clearly both. However, the question of whether they are ‘affirmative’ or ‘transformative’ is of interest.

Eisenstein describes the achievements that femocrats, including herself, made on the issue of equal employment opportunity (EEO) policy (1989-90). One major achievement of femocrat driven EEO machinery was the successful addressing of casualization of female teachers in NSW. Removing the necessity to pledge readiness to serve anywhere in the state as a requirement for permanency, was a coup for the femocrats. Many women had refused to sign due to domestic commitments, meaning they could not access superannuation, promotions, and job security. By removing this clause from the permanency requirements, many casual teachers, eighty percent of them women, became permanent (Eisenstein 1990: 64). Eisenstein also describes the costs and lessons of such a strategy, which were that femocrats experienced mixed loyalties between the bureaucracies they served and the politics they espoused, and this had practical implications for the types of power they wielded (Eisenstein 1990: 68). She notes how EEO was seen as reformist by parts of the feminist movement, despite the very real economic gains it presented to women (Eisenstein 1990: 69). Viewed through the lens of Fraser’s affirmative versus transformative schema (1997), Eisenstein’s description of the removal of the requirement for permanent teachers to serve anywhere addressed gender and economic inequity. The policy solution moves from one exclusionary universal rule to another, more inclusive rule that transformed the assumed attributes of a permanent teacher. Rather than emphasising difference between men and women, it affirmed the teacher identity and transformed permanent and part time teaching work as diversely gendered. While Eisenstein describes institutional resistance to this change due to its benefit to women, it nonetheless was a policy that applied to both genders.

The women’s movement had been impacting policy in Australia for some time prior to the femocrat incursions. Levi and Singleton use the idea of a social policy bargain, an extension of the idea of a social contract, to explore the ways the women’s movement transformed social and economic policy in Australia (1991: 627-631). Most interestingly, they point out that this influence was happening
before the 1970s in various guises. They note, for example, that the period of 1890-1910 “stands out as a beacon of progressive and innovative policies. Consequently, Australia earned the reputation of a “workingman's paradise”” (Levi and Singleton 1991: 632). In this period the state made payments to white (i.e. non-Aboriginal and Asian) mothers, beginning in 1912. A payment to mothers, rather than parents, and also only to white mothers, is an example of an affirmative measure of redistribution. Whilst recognizing the costs of reproduction, and whilst doing so from a perspective of social equality, this practice nonetheless sediments the identities of women as mothers and primary caregivers and of only white women as worthy of assistance by making end-state transfers to them. Asian and Aboriginal women were excluded from the same benefit, and men were affirmed as non-primary caregivers.

Australia has a history of organization-building by migrant women and women from minority ethnic backgrounds. Migrant women’s activism is not typically seen as a key part of feminism, but Ho argues that it belongs in this cannon and history. She points out that migrant women worked more than their Australian born counterparts. In 1973, 48 per cent of married women from NESBs were in work compared to 36 per cent of Australian born married women (Alcorso cited in Ho 2008: 777). This was higher, around 60 per cent for Yugoslav, Italian, Greek and Turkish women (Alcorso cited in Ho 2008: 777). Nonetheless, the activism Ho describes was separate from trade unionism at the time. This does not mean Australian migrant women were not unionised – they had a presence in many of the most highly unionised industries in Australia, for example manufacturing, however, the union movement did not address their issues. Ho states that nor “were migrant women’s issues well recognized by the Anglo-dominated, largely middle class Australian feminist movement” (Ho 2008: 778).

In the 1980s migrant women began to establish their own organisations, separate from ethnic associations and the ‘mainstream’ women’s movement. Examples include the Immigrant Women's Speakout, established in 1985, and the Association for NESB Women of Australia (ANESBWA) in 1987 (Immigrant Women’s Speakout 2001; Ho 2008). These groups focused on issues such as downward occupational mobility i.e. lack of employment prospects and/ or lack of recognition of degrees. Migrant women have indicated they see women’s roles in
Australia as very feminised, more so than expected and that their time here, without recognition of overseas-gained skills, has led them to exist in more feminised spheres (Ho 2008 780). At the time of writing, Ho suggested there was comparatively little activism, and no significant new initiatives. She argued this was partially due to the Australian women’s movement’s traditional overdependence on the state, as well as a profoundly conservative political climate for the majority of the first decade of the 2000s (2008: 781-782). On the surface these organisations appear to have pursued an affirmative approach consistent with end-state redistribution, in particular when the organisations sought government funding, as with Immigrant Women’s Speakout. However, in some cases the organisations themselves argued for transformational approaches to various injustices.

Campaigns run by Immigrant Women’s Speakout for freely available translation services may initially seem to emphasise difference. For example in a submission on family violence law in New South Wales (NSW), the organisation recommends: “that all Family Relationship Centres have access to free interpreting services and are required to ensure that NESB clients are provided with interpreting services as needed in their funding agreement” (Immigrant Women’s Speakout 2005: 6). However, the organisation broadly frames this as providing access to services that the rest of residents and citizens of Australia can access, their goal being to assist migrant women to “achieve equal participation in society” (Immigrant Women’s Speakout). Thus the goal of providing the same levels of access to information could be construed as deconstructing difference.

The Women’s Electoral Lobby’s (WEL) work on economic issues in the 1970s and 1980s was prolific on macroeconomic issues, playing a critical role in the 1972 federal election that ended 23 years of conservative government in Australia (Levi and Singleton 1991: 638), and later addressing tax via several women experts on the subject. Frances Davies made a presentation as a spokeswoman for WEL in 1983 which emphasised spending on services rather than tax cuts and insisted on an individual, not family, unit of account (Sawer and Radford 2008: 192). WEL also attempted to address the perception that community service jobs were make-work, pointing to the multiplier effect. WEL initiated two women and tax conferences in this period. Additionally they advocated successfully for a national superannuation scheme rather than an occupationally based scheme that
discriminated against women. They effectively prosecuted the case for measures to address poverty of sole parents and welfare recipients such as higher income threshold for welfare support (Sawer and Radford 2008: 192).

WEL was established with the intent of representing and forwarding the interests of Australian women. While the organisation aimed to represent women of all backgrounds, they were largely though not solely led by white women. However, as with Immigrant Women Speakout above, some of their advocacy could be considered transformative. This is the case with WEL’s position on tax reform. When Frances Davies emphasised spending on services instead of tax cuts and argued for individual rather than family units of account for taxation, she was arguing firstly for spending that would benefit the majority of Australians, rather than just those in the workforce, and secondly for a tax unit that would treat everyone equally rather than privilege a single wage family unit.

In addition to this effort on the tax front, WEL’s representations on equal pay helped lead to some of the most important legal decisions on women’s pay rates in Australian history in 1973. WEL made equal pay representations to the then Industrial Relations Commission via Edna Ryan, who had long been a prominent unionist but did not declare herself a feminist until the late 1960s (Sawer and Radford 2008). Ryan was responsible for WEL showing the exact numbers of women supporting families, via unpublished data from the Commonwealth statistician, which was a turning point in the case that ruled for equal pay for work of equal value (Sawer 2004: 5). This data helped win the 1973 decision on equal pay for work of equal value, and brought WEL much media attention. The reason for showing this data was that it disproved the notion that working women were only supporting themselves whereas men’s wages needed to be higher so that they could support dependents. The argument that the law should not discriminate against working women could be considered deconstructive in the sense that it reframes a worker as being of either gender.

The weakening of WEL in the 1990s and 2000s meant that a major feminist voice on the economic issues of the day was in decline. As with the peaking and institutionalisation of migrant women’s activism in the 1980s and lack of movement-building in more recent decades (Ho 2008), the women’s movement saw little in the way of organisation-building in Australia in the 1990s and the first
decade of the 2000s. However, given the changes in modes of communication and organising precipitated by the Internet and social media, people like Frances Shaw (2012) suggested that this period was one of change rather than abeyance. She uses the example of debates that developed in the Australian blogosphere in 2009. A popular male blogger from a politics blog known as *Pollytics* identified the ‘lack of big female political bloggers’, while also mentioning a number of feminist blogs that ‘touch[ed] on politics occasionally’ and defining politics as ‘the same issue space as the political mainstream media’ (Possum Comitatus 2009). A number of active feminist bloggers at the time responded by questioning this narrow definition of politics as well as rejecting the conclusion that they only touched on politics ‘occasionally’ despite their explicitly feminist blogs which they regarded as political (for example, Laurelhed 2009). Shaw concluded that the audience of mainstream ‘political’ blogs were being required to share in conservative definitions of politics and that it was to some extent unsurprising that most women who blog about politics and feminism are not seen as political (Shaw 2012: 46). Shaw questioned blogging norms, asking whose power is invoked by said norms and who is marginalized (Shaw 2012). Similarly, many women organizing on economic issues are not seen – and in this case, indeed, may not see themselves – as economic actors or activists.

**Australian Feminist Economic Activism in the Last Decade**

There has been a noticeable decline in mobilisation of economic expertise by feminist organisations in the last decade, as there has been a slowing of feminist institution building. Though feminists were enrolled in the Australian Services Union equal pay case, such as the evidence provided by Siobahn Austen (2010) and Gabrielle Meagher (2010) (shown further in Chapter Five), women’s movement organising of its own accord on these issues appears to have been less. The recent book edited by Sawer and Maddison called ‘The Women’s Movement in Protest, Institutions and the Internet: Australia in transnational perspective’ evidences this (2013). Sawer’s chapter on finding the feminist movement does not speak to where it can be found in terms of economic issues, though it does speak to institutionalisation, which inevitably involves resourcing. The book, in contrast to Sawer’s historical work on femocrats (1990) and WEL (Sawer and Radford 2008), seems somewhat bereft of depictions of women’s movement activism on
macroeconomic issues, with the significant exception of equal pay. With Sawer and Gibson-Graham, I suggest that we must cast our net widely to find this economic activism, and while I have looked at mainstream and well-documented cases of feminist activism, I also include a social enterprise in my work, less likely to be considered a site of ‘activism’.

As I note in the introduction to this chapter, although activism is seen as being particularly tied to protest in some social movement literature, this description does not suffice for the Australian feminist movement. Activism exists in and through organisational spaces also. Thus it may be more useful to think of activism as a practical term denoting attempts to make social and political change. In this sense, all the participants in this study are activists. However, the exception and caveat on this claim may be that the Work for the Dole participants placed with Fitted for Work, do not work voluntarily. Additionally, I have shown here that the women’s movement in Australia has a history of engaging with economic issues, and work in particular, though this is perhaps less visible and established in recent times. My cases, however, represent an exception to this trend. They involve an ongoing and in one case new contribution to feminist economic activism, from which I hope to draw inspiration, ideas and knowledge.

When the Labor Party came back to power on a platform of worker’s rights in 2007, a number of changes took place. Firstly, parts of the union movement followed up the Your Rights at Work campaign with the initially successful Mum’s Rights at Work campaign which demanded six months paid maternity leave (Muir 2008: 62). I attended events for this campaign and noted that the amount of leave being called for was connected to the World Health Organisations’ recommendation that women should breastfeed for six months. The demands of this campaign were subsequently largely adopted as policy of the then federal Labor government. In 2009 they granted 18 weeks paid maternity leave to new working mothers, to begin in 2011. Eighteen weeks paid leave for primary carer then became a policy of the Liberal party.

Maternity leave campaigns such as Mum’s Rights at Work appear to fall into Fraser’s affirmative category. This is because they specify maternity leave, conceptually and materially tied to the birth parent. In recognising the physical burden that birth mothers face, maternity leave specifies that it is they who can
take advantage of this paid leave. Sharon Burrow, then secretary of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, stated this would lead to “[b]etter health, because the first weeks are a critical time for recovery from birth and for the bonding between mother and child. But without paid leave, many mothers are forced to return to work too early” (2010). While recognising this physical toll, maternity leave’s specifics do not open the possibility for fathers or another partner to take on the role of primary caregiver (for example, the non birth mother in a same sex relationship) nor does this policy acknowledge the possibility that trans fathers may be birth parents.

A transformative approach to paid leave to allow people to care for their new children (adopted or biological) would be to legislate for parental leave, in which either partner could take the leave, or both could take a portion of the leave allowed to new parents. Somewhat surprisingly, given a previous statement from Liberal Prime Minister Tony Abbott that maternity leave would only be introduced “over this government’s dead body” when he was Workplace Relations Minister in 2002, the Liberal party’s paid parental leave scheme, announced in the lead up to the federal election in 2013, is transformative in terms of gender, allowing the primary care giver up to 18 weeks leave at minimum wage (Fair Work Ombudsman). This creates the possibility for the higher wage earner (whether the birth parent or not) to take leave. While this would not deal specifically with the physical toll on the birth parent, it does have the possibility to do so, whilst also creating the possibility for changing the gendered dynamics of caregiving.

A second major change that followed the Your Rights at Work campaign and subsequent election of the Labor Party was that the new Labor Government introduced different workplace laws, including new equal pay provisions. The ASU took the first equal pay case under these new laws to the industrial commission, FairWork Australia. They eventually won this case in late 2012, gaining an Equal Remuneration Order (ERO) from the commission. The ERO meant that employers were ordered to pay increased rates to correct the 30 per cent gap between community workers and public servants doing similar work over the period of 2013-2020. This sets the context for my case study in Chapter Five, and to further explore this context, I now look briefly at the history of equal pay
campaigning and decisions in Australia and analyse this history from the perspective of the transformative and affirmative schema.

**Equal pay history in Australia: reading for transformative and affirmative strands**

Equal pay wins in Australia removed direct discrimination and can be classified as transformative. Feminists initially made claims for equal pay by arguing that women should be paid the same as men, i.e. equal pay for equal work. In 1969 the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission handed down the first equal pay for equal work decision, which meant that employers employing men and women to do the very same job could not legally pay a different rate to women. Due to the heavy sex-segregation of the work force, however, this resulted in pay increases for only around 18 per cent of women nationally. Soon after, a 1972 decision resulted in a new equal pay principle, equal pay for work of equal value. Women doing similar work to men, but perhaps under a different title (for example laundry attendant and laundress), gained access to the same pay rates, and nationally there were overall increases in women’s earnings of around 30 per cent. Then, in the third of three landmark equal pay decisions of the period, in 1974 women achieved the amendment of the Conciliation and Arbitration Act, which was changed to read ‘adult’ rather than ‘male’ minimum wage (Sawer and Radford 2008: 195). This meant that the formal, legal gendered categorization of employment was over in Australia.

Despite the earlier gains made in the late 1960s and 1970s, between 1974 and 2011 no legal progress was made toward equal pay at the federal level, and feminists and unionists focused on state jurisdictions. This was perhaps due to the requirement in the federal arena for a male comparator, when in some cases, no suitable comparator was available. While there were 16 attempts to utilise the federal equal pay principles for the revaluing of women’s work, these were uniformly unsuccessful (Barnard 2008: 26-27). A notable example of these failed cases include the Industrial Relations Commission rejection of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) claim for a comparable worth reassessment of nurses’ work in the mid 1980s (Pocock 1999: 281-282). During this period it was in the State jurisdiction that equal pay gains were made, and some of these gains were very significant.
The NSW *Industrial Relations Act* 1996 moved to a concept of pay equity rather than equal pay. This emphasized comparable rather than equal value, which meant that different types of female dominated and male dominated work could be compared. Further, as discussed above, the NSW Pay Equity Inquiry in 1998 found that the undervaluation of women’s work was such that male comparator industries should not be required in determining a case of pay inequity, setting up a precedent for the type of case we saw with the ASU equal pay campaign (NSW Department of Industrial Relations 1998). These changes set a standard for other State jurisdictions, and were adopted and carried further in Queensland.

These shifts in definition and target for equal pay campaigns in part reflect both the discursive shifts of feminism over the period, and the legal progress made. As stated above, initial equal pay campaigns saw feminists argue for the same legal status as men, and seek to remove gendered legislation such as male and female minimum wages. Later, women unionists strategically sought to have wages in particular industries reclassified on the basis that they were low due to more subtle feminised histories and ‘undervaluation’, meaning they were valued less than similar work if it were male dominated. One prominent example of this was the comparison of hairdressers and mechanics made in the NSW pay equity inquiry of 1997-1998 (NSW Department of Industrial Relations). Despite similar skill levels (apprenticeship), training (trade certificates) and working environments (small shops), hairdressers were paid significantly less than mechanics at the time. Hairdressers’ wages were then ‘pegged’ to the mechanics award to reflect this. The union strategy of affirming feminised work identities in order, indirectly, to raise pay rates, had the effect of both reifying or affirming, and destabilizing or deconstructing gendered economic discourses. On the one hand, hairdressers got a significant pay rise from the inquiry referred to above, money in their pay packets that would make a material difference in their lives, and reduce their economic inequality. On the other hand, the arguments and efforts put into showing the feminized nature of the work both exposed and reaffirmed its feminized status.

In 2006 the federal Liberal government’s *Workplace Relations Amendment (WorkChoices) Act* dramatically changed workplace relations in Australia. It reduced the coverage of the pay equity provisions at an Australian State level, and
curtailed the effectiveness of State industrial responses to pay equity (Queensland Industrial Relations Commission). Nonetheless, Queensland saw three successful equal pay cases for dental assistants, children’s services workers (Queensland Government 2009: 16), and community workers. This case granted workers “wage increases of between 18% and 37% phased in over a three-year period starting in July 2009” due to the Commission’s conclusion that undervaluation based on gender had depressed wages in that industry (Australian Services Union 2009). At the time, the success of pay equity cases in Queensland provided a stark comparison to their failure in the federal jurisdiction.

We can also assess broader economic policies impacting equal pay as transformative or affirmative. Even prior to the introduction of WorkChoices in 2006, pay equity gains were beginning to be eroded by the deregulation of the Australian labour market, and the ineffectiveness of the then federal equal pay provision. The move from industry to enterprise bargaining by the federal Labor government in 1991 was to have a significant effect on women in the paid labour force, and was opposed by women’s organisations at the time (Smith 2003: 90). The National Wage Case of the same year saw arguments largely focused on the segmentation of women in poorly organised and low paid work with little bargaining power. It also focused on the issue of productivity bargaining, problematic for women concentrated in white-collar and pink collar work, like community work, where there has historically been difficulties measuring such gains (Smith 2003: 90). This reform divided workers further within their industries, encouraging the reification of identities around productivity and industry, and reducing bargaining power on the part of employees.

Much has been written about the effect of the move to enterprise bargaining on the gender pay gap. Whitehouse and Frino explain that women were concentrated, to their disadvantage, in low-paid award-only sectors with low rates of unionisation (2003: 594). Higher pay outcomes were consistently achieved in male-dominated enterprise agreements, and where before, those with better bargaining power may have pulled wages in the industry up, with enterprise bargaining the effect was more isolated (Whitehouse and Frino 2003: 593). For example, although proponents of industrial deregulation argued that penalty-rate (higher pay rates at the weekend and for shift work) reduction measures would be associated with
higher wage increases, instead penalty rates were largely reduced in poorly paid female-dominated agreements (Whitehouse and Frino 2003: 594). Men were more likely to be represented in agreements that had benefits such as overtime payments and ordinary working hours (Whitehouse and Frino 2003: 588). The gender pay gap began to plateau in the early 1990s, after a long period of decrease after 1972.

As the ‘low hanging fruit’ of legal equality has been picked, feminists needed to make more complex arguments about gendering of certain professions, and the consequent impact, in order to make further pay equity gains. The concept of equal pay has changed since women in Australia first demanded “the rate for the job”, i.e. to be paid the same rate as men for the same job (Ryan 1984). Twenty-five years later, the Fair Work Act 2009 defined pay equity as “equal remuneration for work of equal or comparable value” (Subsection 302(2)). The Fair Work Act did not require a male comparator profession as previous legislation had. This meant that historically feminized industries such as child care, that are without an obvious male-dominated comparison, can still make claims for increases to their award wages on the basis of gendered undervaluation. The question of whether this is transformative from a redistribution perspective, or deconstructive from a recognition perspective is complex. I suggest that it is transformative to some extent from a redistributive perspective because of the redirection of greater resources to employees, although it does not challenge the employee-employer relationship. However, from a perspective of recognition the question is more complex.

In this section I have shown something of the history of equal pay in Australia whilst also highlighting the transformative, deconstructive, and/ or affirmative or reifying effects of that history on both redistribution and recognition or identity. I have suggested that equal pay campaigns, whilst having some transformative effects on economic resources, can either affirm or challenge the feminization of care work, or potentially do both. Whilst winning equal pay campaigns shifts resources and thus challenges the low earning capacity typically associated with feminized work, they can also build the feminized identity and affirm the feminization of caring roles. This bears consideration if future campaigns wish to challenge gendered working identities and is a question I consider further in my
case study chapters: is contemporary economic activism in Australia transforming and deconstructing economic discourses and identities?

**Australian Feminist Activism in the Diverse Economy**

To start to answer the question of whether economic activism is transforming and deconstructing economic norms and identities, I place the feminist economic activist strategies I have discussed in this chapter in a diverse economies framework. In addition to this, I also reiterate whether they are affirmative or transformative, meaning whether they affirm maldistribution of resources and/or respect, or transform underlying power dynamics. This analysis shows firstly, where Australian feminists have focused their efforts in relation to the diverse economy model, and will also show whether the activism described in this chapter has been largely transformative or affirmative.

The Australian feminist economic activism discussed in this chapter has focused on influencing labour and transactional areas of economy. Labour and transactions are two of the three areas of economy in the diverse economies table I first discussed in the Introduction to this thesis (Figure 0.1). Feminists calling for more universal government-funded services rather than tax breaks, for example, would fit into the alternative-market transactions area of the diverse economy. Campaigns for maternity leave focus on alternatively paid (non-wage) labour. Campaigns to raise the income thresholds for welfare payments to sole parents fits into both transactional and labour areas of the diverse economy. This is laid out in Figure 3.1, where I have placed the different activist campaigns discussed in this chapter in the three diverse economies fields. Feminist activism in Australia is economic, and it mostly focuses on transactions in the alternative and non-market areas, and labour, both market, alternative-market and unpaid.

In this table (Figure 3.1), I have also categorised the activism as transformative or affirmative. The transformative or affirmative strategy is marked with the notation of an (A) or (T) and a note if this refers to one aspect but not another, for example, is affirmative regarding redistribution but not gender. The labour activism is roughly evenly split between affirmative and transformative in nature, meaning it sometimes affirms gender maldistribution or inequality based on identity categories or maldistribution, and sometimes transforms or disassembles
the maldistribution or identity. For example, removing the requirement for permanent government teachers in NSW to be ready to serve anywhere in the state, meant many more women teachers were able to accept permanent rather than contract or casual employment. Rather than removing the requirement for women, the barrier was simply removed altogether, for both men and women, making the change transformative of gender and work norms. Direct affirmative action on the other hand, with quotas for a certain number of women or men to be employed, affirms the maldistribution of respect for women by confirming their status as needy or inadequate. Unlike activism on labour, activism on transactions (services) was mostly transformative in nature, with the exception of state funding for migrant women’s organisations. A transformative example is, again, more universal government-funded services, rather than tax breaks, which would affirm the identity of worker. Therefore, the majority of feminist activist strategies on transactions (including social services) and work that I have covered here are transformative in nature.

Enterprise was the area of the diverse economy that none of the feminist activism touched on. While the NSW Department of Education is an alternative enterprise in the diverse economy framework, the activism directed to this department seemed to be more about the working conditions there. This leads me to a concluding question and observation. Firstly, is enterprise not an area of economy that feminist activists in Australia address, and if not, why? Secondly, diversifying or queering the enterprise may be an area for further exploration by feminist activists in Australia.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transactions</th>
<th>Labour</th>
<th>Enterprise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Market</strong></td>
<td><strong>Wage</strong></td>
<td><strong>Capitalist</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Removing requirement for government teachers to serve anywhere (\rightarrow) more permanent female teachers (T)</td>
<td>Direct affirmative action in government departments (A)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct affirmative action in government departments (A)</td>
<td>Equal pay campaigns to remove male and female wages (T)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal pay campaigns to increase wages for feminised jobs (A, T)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alternative market</strong></td>
<td><strong>Alternative paid</strong></td>
<td><strong>Alternative capitalist</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding for universal services not tax cuts (T)</td>
<td>Maternity leave payments (A)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxing individual not family (T)</td>
<td>Parental leave payments (T for gender, A for redistribution, as recipients must show they have been in paid work)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State funding for migrant women’s organisations (A)</td>
<td>State payments to white mothers (A)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government funded translation and interpreting services for NESB women (T)</td>
<td>Higher earnings welfare thresholds for sole parents (T)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-market</strong></td>
<td><strong>Unpaid</strong></td>
<td><strong>Non-capitalist</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher earnings welfare thresholds for sole parents (T)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 3.1** Transformative (T) and Affirmative (A) Australian feminist activism in the diverse economy, source: modified from Gibson-Graham 1996: xiii

**Conclusion**

This chapter provided the reader with a short and selective history of Australian feminist activism, activism that is often also economic activism. Feminists in Australia have been particularly, though not solely, focused on work, both paid and unpaid – from payments to mothers, to working conditions and equal pay campaigning. Another major focus has been social services. Feminist economic activism has often transformed the economy; at other times it has affirmed gender difference or economic disadvantage. The strategies of this feminist economic activism, as I have shown, can both reify and disrupt gendered and economic identities, leading me to question how current feminist campaigns transform or affirm both economic discourses and gendered identities. In the following chapter,
I explain my methods for researching in and with my chosen case studies of feminist economic activism in Sydney.
Chapter Four | Activist research: a methodology

Introduction

With this research, I aimed to discover how activists working at the intersection of gender and economic inequality in Australia were situating themselves in relation to economic and gender discourses, and how they were transforming, queering or affirming these discourses themselves. In order to answer this question, my research asked what discourse of economy informed this activist work; whether activists affirmed the economy as capitalist, or queered/ transformed economy; and what this meant for a politics of gender and economic equality in Sydney, Australia. I looked to three organisations to see how women were enacting social change on gender and economic inequality and what this could tell me about possibilities for future change. The three organisations that my research focused on were working on paid employment and gender equality. This chapter outlines the methods I used to approach and answer these questions.

I was aiming for a deep understanding of the three case study organisations and the activists within them. As Conradson states, and Swanson also notes, organisations ‘emerge through social practices’ (Conradson, 2003: 1975; Swanson 2007) and thus are, to some extent, products of my activist participants. I aimed to use this deep understanding to produce insights into the way activists conceived and practiced economic and work discourses. As Williams stated regarding her case study of three organisations practicing care in the city:

[they might help inform new ways of being/thinking/doing urban life that reflect care-full urban justice and shift ordinary habits and routines from reproducing injustice/carelessness. The practice of reading for difference rather than dominance can assist in making commons visible in cities where the dominant story is one of injustice (2013: 34).

Similarly, I used a practice of reading for difference (see Gibson-Graham 2006: xxxi) within left feminist organisations to explore possibilities for change that were not part of a current dominant conversation. Below I discuss how I approached reading for difference, feminist ethnography, case study method and selection, the cases themselves, discourse analysis, and observation and interviewing techniques.
Reading for difference

The question of how I might take a fresh look at feminist economic activism in Sydney led me to examine the history of feminist activism on economic issues in Australia that I reviewed in Chapter Three. While not a comprehensive review, I took some prominent campaigns, and examined them with a diverse economies and affirmative/transformative lens to ask: what areas of the diverse economy are feminist activists focused on? And are they transforming or affirming gender binaries and capitalocentrism? A similar approach informed the selection of my case studies. However, beyond simply analysing past events, case selection gave me the opportunity to be purposive in my selection and to play some role in amplifying certain activisms.

In my research into possible case studies I looked for both diverse practices and diverse cases of activism at the intersection of gender and economic issues to provide grist for my research mill (Cameron 1998: 101). This was informed by diverse economies theory, which encourages a reading of economies as sites of varied and numerous practices. It is a way of seeing economies as larger and more complex, as well as more open to change, than simply the legitimate and prominent forms that might be presented on the market segment at the end of news hour (Gibson-Graham 2006: 8). This approach invites a conception of activism and non-dominant discourses that asks what is possible as well as asking what is. Gibson-Graham (2008: 615) argues that “[t]he strategy of making difference visible does not automatically produce new ways forward, but it can generate new possibilities and different strategies.” Diverse economies draw on developments in feminist and queer theorizing, which encourage the practice of seeing difference and the breakdown of assumed homogeneity as a strategy to make space for different (economic) identities, practices and lives.

I drew inspiration from feminist and queer theorizing that looks for diversity rather than sameness within cultures, and contributes to a politics of possibility. This feminist and queer theorising is partially responsible for inspiring Gibson-Graham and community economies theorists’ shift away from hegemonic or strong economic theory. Feminists have attempted to break down assumptions about biologically given gender roles, by making visible, for example, women in non-stereotypical positions and situations, by questioning the logic and effects of
gender roles (see for example, feminist historians of war such as Marilyn Lake, 1987; 2010). Similarly, queer theorists have similarly documented often-hidden queer histories, but have questioned the underlying assumptions about sex and heterosexuality that naturalise binary thinking on sexual and gender identity and relationships (Sedgwick 1991). Gibson-Graham give the example of Sharon Marcus, whose work analyses a social ‘rape script’ that posits women’s bodies as permeable, vulnerable and receptive, and men’s bodies as weapons (cited in Gibson-Graham 1996: 122-135; Marcus 1992). One aspect of Marcus’ work cites the experiences of women who escaped from or challenged sexual violence and how they did so (Bart and O’Brien cited in Marcus 1992: 395-396). While it is important, she argues, to acknowledge the ‘big picture’ of sexual assault statistics, it is similarly important to look at ways in which women resist and challenge what might otherwise be seen as a fait accompli. Gibson-Graham takes inspiration from this to develop a critique of the ‘capitalism script’ and the seemingly impenetrable field of economics.

Inspired to read for economic difference in women’s economic activism, I sought out diverse cases (as discussed below). Reading for economic difference through women’s economic activism means looking not only at ‘usual’, capitalist workplaces or organisations, or even merely incorporating the home, a recognized sphere of feminized economic activity, into analysis. Though capitalist workplaces and the home are part of theorizing in a diverse economies framework, they are also more recognized and documented sites of economic activity, both in diverse economies literature and in other literatures (see, for example, Fraad 1994; Dixon 2010; Wright 2014; Bianchi, Folbre and Wolf 2012). What I aimed to do was look at work that disturbed this binary and in doing so, sought to address gendered economic inequality.

Where people were trying to make economic change, economic difference seemed likely, though not automatically, to follow. Although feminism is institutionalized in Australia, it still tends to be going against a dominant culture. For example, the femocrats discussed in Chapter Three may have been part of the state, and therefore part of a ‘dominant’ culture, however, they were pushing against and challenging norms and practices in this culture. They were a subversive part of mainstream or dominant culture. All of the cases in this thesis challenged dominant culture in their various contexts. AWatW is an example of practicing anti-racist feminism in the white dominated feminist and union movements; the
ASU is a self-declared feminist union in the male dominated Australian trade union movement, and Fitted for Work is a women-run enterprise in the male dominated social enterprise space. FFW is also a different model of community organization, unlike many others that typically rely on government grants in Australia. All three organisations were practicing economy differently from mainstream capitalist economies and narratives, and all were generating livelihoods, value and work.

**Case study method**

I chose to use a case study method as it allowed for in depth analysis of some of the practices and discourses of Australian feminist economic activism. Case study research has a long history in the social sciences (Ragin 1992; Platt 1992), but it is a contentious history. Context-rich case studies were important for my understanding of the economic discourses at play in feminist activism, and for developing new or under-developed possibilities for economic change making. Flyvbjerg posits that for social science to “matter”, it must be judged on the import of praxis and empirical knowledge (2001). Rather than attempting to justify case studies as a scientific method, Flyvbjerg insists that context is the key to social science, and that it is this context-dependency that differentiates social from natural sciences (2001: 40). The point of social science is often deep and rich knowledge, not predictive or universal, but generative.

In deciding what a useful approach might be to questions of gender and economic inequality, I wanted to engage ideas that were informed by and malleable to the experience of people engaged in activism; praxis. Flyvbjerg suggests that “social science that matters” will be phronetic: an Aristotelian concept that translates roughly as ethics: “[d]eliberation about values with reference to praxis. Pragmatic, variable, context dependent. Oriented toward action. Based on practical value-rationality” (2001: 57). Examples and cases are the means of this praxis. Phronesis involves an emphasis on the particular, and on the relationship of the particular to the general (Flyvbjerg 2001: 57).

Thus, my selection of cases was purposive and critical. Flyvbjerg discusses case sampling and its various forms, and labels the two categories random selection and information-oriented selection. Of the information-oriented selection, there are four ways of casing, and my research falls into the maximum variation sub-
category. Information-oriented cases are selected to gain the best possible information, and are chosen with expectation about the information to be gleaned. Maximum variation cases are often selected “to obtain information about the significance of various circumstances for case process and outcome; eg., three to four cases that are very different on one dimension: size, form of organisation, location, budget etc.” (Flyvbjerg 2001: 79).

**Case study selection**

My process of casing was driven by both theoretical and practical considerations. I looked for organisations that differed from each other in significant ways. My selection was about finding and reiterating diverse economies. When it comes to ideas about gender and economic inequality, in Australia the labour movement is perhaps the most obvious place to turn. Yet I wanted to see what more I could learn, not only from the union movement. Retrospectively, I see that this inclination was also informed by Marian Sawer’s notion that the Australian women’s movement can be found in unusual places (2013). Yet the labour movement was also an active and important part of feminist campaigning for economic change. Thus I selected cases both within and associated with, but also from outside the union movement.

In looking for potential organisations to work with, I asked myself a number of questions that developed into criteria. I asked if the organisations were located in a place where I could spend a significant period of time undertaking observation, and if the organisation was an NGO or activist group. I asked whether their focus was primarily on economic issues such as work, wages, financial independence for individuals or communities, creating wealth, or exchange of goods and services. Additionally I asked if the organisation had a feminist or women’s focus, and when I had found a number of organisations fitting these criteria, I set about finding out if they were willing to work with me as a researcher. The criteria are listed on the left side of the table at Figure 4.1 below.

To find organisations that fitted my criteria, I initially relied on my knowledge of the labour and women’s movement in Sydney. I also undertook Internet searches for co-operatives, social enterprises, and other feminist initiatives on economic inequality. It is usual for researchers to find case study organisations through word of mouth or links with other case studies (Bradshaw and Stratford 2005). I
asked another academic colleague, who ran a social enterprise program at Parramatta City Council in Sydney’s West, about women’s initiatives in the program, and was put in touch with three social enterprises. This was how I found my third case study, Fitted for Work, based in Parramatta.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria for casing potential organisations</th>
<th>ASU Equal Pay Case</th>
<th>Asian Women at Work</th>
<th>F Collective</th>
<th>Palace Housing Co-op</th>
<th>Women’s Housing Company</th>
<th>Community Child Care Co-op</th>
<th>Palestinian Women’s Co-op</th>
<th>Fitted for Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geographically accessible?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politically independent of government?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged in economic activism?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender and/or feminist aspect informing the activism?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willing to engage with me as a researcher?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1: Criteria for casing potential organisations

With my initial Internet searches and knowledge of the field, I compiled a list of eight potential case studies, all of which are shown in the top row of Figure 4.1. I briefly outlined the cases I eventually selected and worked with for this research in the Introduction to this thesis; however, I also considered five other groups, outlined briefly below. F Collective is a small Sydney-based feminist activist collective, composed entirely of volunteers. I have undertaken activism with this collective, at varying levels of intensity, since 2009. In 2011 the collective was active in organising around equal pay, and in 2012-13 we campaigned on the closure of community services. However, I concluded F Collective’s activism on economic issues was not consistent enough to be sure it would be ongoing during my
research, and I was also concerned about the ethics of influencing the collective’s agenda in the interests of my research.

Palace Housing Co-op is a women’s housing cooperative based in Sydney’s Inner West area. I was aware of their existence through word-of-mouth, I found it difficult to make contact or find information online. The Women’s Housing Company, also Sydney-based was a more likely option, however I found it difficult to imagine how I would conduct participant observation. The Community Child Care Co-op also seemed like a good option, in line with my interests, however, I was similarly unsure how I would conduct my participant observation when I was not qualified to work with children. Finally, a Palestinian Women’s Co-op, found through the Parramatta City Council social enterprise program, was in their initial stages of developing a business plan to support themselves and send money back to families in Palestine. While I was very keen to work with the co-operators on their project, they did not think that they could provide me with a structured way to volunteer my time and skills.

This process of selecting cases based on organisations I was familiar with, and also through network contacts, had benefits and pitfalls. My familiarity with the campaigns and the language used meant it was easy to establish rapport in both the Union and the community organisation Asian Women at Work. However, it also meant that I perhaps did not look as far afield as I otherwise could have. I had initially wanted to look at a co-operative as this reflects a personal interest in democratic politics. I had trouble finding women’s co-operatives, which reflected what appeared to be a dearth of women in social enterprise or co-operatives in Sydney. Those I did consider were difficult to contact or did not feel they could commit to a research process.

What are the ethics of research that places such demands upon newly established groups, and so excludes them? I had committed myself to a process of participant observation as part of my suite of methods. The Palestinian women’s organisation was not sufficiently progressed in their business plan to accommodate a regular or structured volunteer offering from me. This raised questions about the way research works and my chosen method. It resulted in my support for more established groups with my time and effort, as they were able to accommodate my presence. However, it was more important to me politically to share my support
with struggling or less established groups. This is a remaining ethical concern about the methodology, and perhaps suggests a move on my part toward action-oriented research in future, in which I could potentially observe less passively and contribute more to the building and maintenance of organisations.

After making some initial contact conversations with five of the potential cases, I eventually settled on three. These are outlined and briefly introduced below.

**Cases**

**The Australian Services Union**

The Australian Services Union (ASU) ran an equal pay campaign that began in 2009 and was finally successful in the Commonwealth industrial commission known as Fair Work Australia in 2012. The campaign began with grassroots organising that was conducted at the same time as a case was run in Fair Work Australia. When I first began thinking about my study, I was aware of the ASU equal pay campaign through networks in the Union movement, and was following the case closely. Further, I had previously researched the Australian Parliament’s 2009 inquiry into equal pay and I felt familiar with the political territory of the campaign. This case led to the first Equal Remuneration Order (ERO) at a Federal level in Australia since 1972 and thus also presented an opportunity to reconsider the union movement’s economic politics at an historical moment for the union and women’s movements in Australia.

**Asian Women at Work**

I had previously been in contact with Asian Women at Work (AWatW) through a Unions NSW Women’s Conference in 2008, when I was working for a trade union myself. I was intrigued by AWatW’s ethnic and geographical (rather than industry, though the division is not this simple) approach to organising and had long wanted to work with them in a volunteer capacity. After volunteering as a teacher’s assistant at the University of Sydney for a refugee language program, I had gained some skills that I thought might be useful to the organisation, which frequently runs English classes. However, it turned out that it was my writing skills AWatW were more interested in utilising, as one of their case workers had trouble writing up detailed notes on her cases in English. I was asked to volunteer, initially
once a fortnight and then once every three weeks, to take case notes for a community worker, and redraft the casework form to a more useful version. In return I was offered the opportunity to attend AWatW events and gather my data this way. AWatW undertakes a combination of community development, education, advocacy, information sharing, and networking/referral to legal centres and the trade union movement. AWatW’s relationship to the labour movement and the state is thus more complex than that of the ASU. They are also more reliant on volunteer labour and have more disparate goals – education, advocacy, community building and community support, as opposed to organising, union building and advocacy.

Fitted for Work

Fitted for Work undertakes two major activities. Firstly, they fit and gift unemployed women with work-appropriate clothing for job interviews, and secondly, they run a social enterprise selling vintage and new clothing to fund their fitting service. The organisation was appealing to me because of these dual processes. Fitted for Work gets women aesthetically ready to work in the formal economy, while also creating a not-for-profit enterprise that funds this project. Fitted for Work is the organisation I came to differently to the other two cases in this research. I was not aware of the organisation before hearing of it through a colleague. At the time I was looking for a social enterprise or co-operative to add to my group of case studies, as this seemed, in Flyvberg’s terms, to provide maximum variation to the more clear-cut cases of left feminist activism.

Investing in activism: participant observation

I made the decision early on in my research design that I would undertake participant observation by volunteering time and skills where I could and ‘tagging along’ where I could not. This was for both political and practical reasons. I was determined that the organisations who were willing to help me with my research would get something in return, in the hope that the exchange would not cost them more than they received. Additionally, having been a long-term feminist activist myself, I was aware of the difficulty in resourcing and running such organisations, and wanted to make my time useful, if I could. Finally, and less altruistically, I was convinced that I would be a more astute observer and better interviewer if, as
Laurier puts it, I had ‘been involved in and tried to do and/or be a part of the things they [the researcher/s] are observing’ (2003: 135, my addition). This is also referred to as complementary and contextual understanding, which I explain further below. I was aware of Jupp’s statement, which acted as something of a warning:

although I began with observing ‘meetings’ and other explicitly ‘political’ occasions, I found that it was during the essentially everyday and ordinary activities and modes of socialising, that seemed to have the potential for distinctive and powerful effects (2008: 335).

With this in mind I negotiated to volunteer with AWatW once a fortnight and FFW once a week, and to ‘tag along’ with the ASU where I could. The ASU, being more financially resourced, had less need of a volunteer but were willing for me to go along with organizers to work site visits. I also attended special events, such as a fundraiser evening for FFW held at a fashion boutique in the up-market Sydney suburb of Paddington, and was invited to many functions, such as the AWatW Annual General Meeting (AGM) where I took notes on the sessions and had a friend come along and live tweet the event. I took field notes on each occasion I attended a case study organisation, sometimes in a note pad and later on an iPad I purchased for the purpose. I attempted initially to avoid paper by taking a laptop, but found it too obtrusive. All in all I took over 40 000 words worth of field notes. This presented a difficulty of becoming ‘lost in the data’ (Hughes 1996: 39), however, it also meant that particular observations or memories that later proved useful were more likely to be captured, such as the moment an ASU official discussed the lack of co-ops in Sydney, discussed in Chapter Five.

Many of my research observation activities would not be considered ‘essential’ to my thesis, but helped me form a deeper understanding of my cases. Robyn Kearns argues that although observation is often taken as a given, or taken for granted in research, it has complementary and contextual purposes (2010). However, this in part reflects how fundamental observation is to research. Complementary understanding means the “gathering of additional descriptive information before, during or after other more structured forms of data collection” (Kearns 2010: 242). Kearns notes that this could mean ‘hanging out’ in a site of research such as a neighbourhood, or that it could mean taking field notes about the site of research such as interviews (2010: 242). Contextual understanding on the other hand is about gaining “direct experience” of a “particular time and place” leading to “in-
depth interpretation” (Kearns 2010: 242). For example, in the ASU case my attendance at equal pay rallies or the open hearings at the Fair Work Australia commission could be described as complementary, whereas my ‘tag along’ to union meetings under formal arrangements with the ASU could be described as contextual.

However, the picture I built up of the organisations through observation was necessarily fractured as I attempted to balance observation with making myself useful to my case study organisations. At times I attended the organisations sporadically and as opportunity presented, to fit in with their busy schedules and changing needs. In the case of the ASU I visited work sites 10 times and for over 20 hours, during a period of a year. These sites varied from large public rallies to small workplaces of 4 people such as Bridges, to larger worksites of up to 100 staff in the building, to a team meeting at the Union itself. At AWatW I mostly took case notes and volunteered at events, ranging from an AGM to a Christmas party to a group grievance session in Cabramatta. The case notes were done for an older community worker who had good spoken English skills and less confident written English skills. I went in initially once a fortnight and thereon once every three weeks to volunteer my writing skills for case note recording. I did this by hand at first and later on a laptop or iPad. At FFW I attended every week, usually on Thursdays. At first I got to know the organisation, staff and volunteers, and undertook the same activities as them, doing sorting, ironing, cleaning and answering the phone. Then their community development officer asked me to undertake a ‘Volunteer Engagement Project,’ in which I would interview the volunteers and ask them about their experience at FFW and develop position descriptions.

My experience in every organisation was different in terms of the time spent observing, level of engagement and type of role undertaken. At the ASU it was more of an observer role. At AWatW and FFW my role was as a volunteer and observer. However, observation deepened my understanding of each organisation, albeit making me sometimes uncomfortably aware that this was only a partial and medium-depth view, filtered by my role as researcher and time constraints. For example, I noted in March 2012 that it was “so WEIRD being an observer in a trade union setting as I’m used to doing jobs...” As England states:
...we do not conduct fieldwork on the unmediated world of the researched, but on the world between ourselves and the researched. At the same time this ‘betweeness’ is shaped by the researchers’ biography, which filters the ‘data’ and our perceptions and interpretations of the fieldwork experience. (England 1984 86-87)

Williams also states: “At times being a volunteer was variously boring, difficult, tiring, stressful, scary, fun, sad or exciting because it was everyday” (2013: 93). My observation process was useful and informative, but as seems to be the nature of ethnography, it was also slow and sometimes mundane.

Implicit in my plan to conduct participant observation was the idea that I would be a participant, both in my own research and in the activities of my case study organisations. However partial such an approach may be, it was nonetheless crucial to my satisfaction that I had something more than a shallow understanding of the organisations and participants. This was particularly the case regarding the emotional element of my analysis.

In the Introduction to this research I discussed the sense of defensiveness I experienced in both the union and women’s movements in Sydney. This defensiveness toward outsiders (both human and ideological) was one that I sensed could lead to exclusion of new ideas and approaches. This posture of defensiveness led me to consider Wendy Brown’s work on wounded attachments, discussed in Chapter One, and Gibson-Graham’s work on emotions for a post-capitalist politics, discussed in Chapter Two. However, in order to gain a fuller picture of how this attachment to identities (particularly ‘woman’ and ‘worker’) played out in the organisations and participants whose emotions and discourses I was studying, it was imperative that I was present for more than simply a reading of texts or an hour long interview. However, textual analysis and interviews also contributed to my research.

**INTERVIEWING**

My research included interviewing as a major part of the methodology. Interviewing both complemented my observations and also enabled me to include participant’s ideas and experiences in my analysis. Feminist researchers often use interviewing as a methodology for these reasons. Reinharz notes that it is one of the major preferred methods amongst feminist researchers (Reinharz 1992: 18). Indeed, in the feminist methods book on “exemplary readings”, McCarl Neilsen’s text includes a majority of works (four of five) that have used interviewing
technique in some form (1990). If observation provides access to knowledge of what participants do, interviewing provides some level of access to knowledge of what the participants care about and why they might do certain things. Feminist methodologists have written about the reasons why qualitative methods such as interviewing are important for feminist research, some of which will be explored here. Additionally I explore the power dynamics of interviewing.

Reinharz argues that interviewing is popular with feminist researchers as it allows subjects to speak in their own voices (1992: 20). I saw these voices as complementing my gaze as an observer and leading to a more complete, though always partial picture. Reinharz suggests that this is a response to the “centuries of ignoring women’s voices altogether or having men speak for women” (1992: 19). The popular interview technique Reinharz is referring to is semi-structured or open-ended interviewing, rather than structured interviewing or survey questions. In semi-structured or open-ended interviewing, there is some level of free interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee (Reinharz 1992: 18).

Various researchers have stated that this makes for “intimate” knowledge rather than statistics or generalisations, “valuable reflections of reality” and a method which is suited to the socialised female caring role (Sexton, Andre and Charmaz cited in Reinharz 1992: 18-20). Further, there is a strain of thought that suggests that open interview techniques avoid controlling the participants and are therefore more democratic and participatory (Graham cited in Reinharz 1992: 20). While all of these reasons contributed to the choice of interviewing for my research, they did not mean that interviewing was unproblematic or without power dynamics. Some of these problems are further analysed below.

I interviewed the leaders of all my case study organisations, as well as union members, volunteers and some work for the dole participants. This included the NSW secretary of the ASU and both Assistant Secretaries of the organisation, the Co-Ordinator of AWatW, and the CEO of Fitted for Work. The question of power relations is described in feminist research and interviewing as the question of “studying up” or “down”. Studying up refers to studying people in positions of greater power than the researcher herself (Reinharz 1992: 42). This raises the question of the choice of research subjects and why women choose to study other women. The leader of each case study organisation had the power to halt my research with their organisation at any point, and in the case of the politically
sensitive ASU, this was somewhat more than a remote possibility. The question of how to negotiate that sensitivity was one that I addressed by attempting to demonstrate solidarity with the organisations involved.

There remain some questions of whether it may be more relevant to interview decision makers or bosses who have ‘power over’ the women concerned. However, the arguments that women have historically been silenced and under-represented by the academy, and that women researchers have solidarity or identify with the perceived struggles of their research subjects are convincing from a feminist perspective. Additionally, my research attempted to acknowledge the agency and possibility of activism. Hay (2010) also notes this problem and discusses it in terms of the ease of fitting into case study organisations, such as the fact that “dressing down” is less costly than “dressing up” and there may be problems of understanding or performing skilled technical work in studying up. The argument that women researchers should be “studying up”, seems to deny ordinary women agency in creating change. However, the argument that researchers should be conscious of this phenomenon and think about their reasons for studying various groups fits with a broader methodological goal of reflexivity regarding power relations.

I undertook semi-structured interviews for this research (see schedules at Appendix 2). Dunn recommends the semi-structured method in the initial stages of an interviewer’s career, as having a planned first few questions can ease the tension of interviewing (2010: 104). He recommends that these be thought out and practiced, as a poor response or lack of understanding of the first question can affect the mood and overall success of the interview. I planned my questions and practiced them on a friend who worked in community services. I also varied my questions in some interviews, to pursue a different focus, or allow an interviewee to ‘wander’ from the path if they seemed to be interested in talking about a particular topic.

I found it surprisingly easy to recruit participants at FFW, after having my poster up in the office for around a fortnight. I had established trust with my co-workers. No one I wanted to interview objected in the slightest and one young woman, a work for the dole volunteer, said “Nothin’ wrong with you, so I’ll do it.” I found this simultaneously surprising, relieving, pleasing, and sobering. This young
woman (in fact most of my interview participants) was not agreeing to be interviewed because of the research I was conducting. Instead it was her personal relationship with me that made her my willing participant. This reinforced for me the high levels of ethical behaviour required with regard to my interviewees. In interviews where the participant did not have an interest in the research but answered my questions out of trust in me, I felt that I had an even greater level of responsibility. In this circumstance there was no perceived benefit by the participant at all, not even the production of research they were interested in or proliferation of work they cared about. If I assumed that the work was ‘of benefit’ to these participants, I was assuming I knew better than they. Nonetheless, I persisted due to my view that analysis of the way we think about gender and economy, and about opportunities to make more community-based economies in the face of a totalising narrative about capitalism, was a valuable political act.

A note on anonymity
I have used pseudonyms for all of the participants in my research, in order to preserve their privacy. Some other identifying aspects such as age and place of residence have also been changed. I de-identified all subjects at the stage of transcribing interviews, as while the case study organisations discussed in this thesis are small communities, the political nature of the topics discussed in interviews meant privacy was a particularly important practice to adhere to.

Feminist ethnographic research and self-reflexivity
To explore the question of how activists were experiencing and re-shaping economic and work discourses, I opted for an ethnographic approach to case study method. Feminist ethnography ‘treats people as knowledgeable, situated agents from whom researchers can learn a great deal about how the world is lived’ (Cloke et al., 2005: 169). This means that as a method it was ideally suited to exploring the discourses activists were engaged with, the possibilities of people’s actions, as well as the way they experienced their multiple worlds and the discourses they were shaped by. Ethnographic research relies on participant observation and immersion in the everyday of the subject’s lives (Rudge 1996). This style of close observation and immersion was also one way of having the opportunity to give
something back to my case study organisations, which was particularly important to me in a context of activist research.

One of my case studies, Asian Women at Work (AWatW), is an organisation run primarily by and for women of a non-English speaking background. AWatW members are also largely from a lower socio-economic grouping. This means that although issues of racism and racial inequality are not the focus of the research, I conducted research in a cross-cultural environment. This was in part inspired by Christina Ho’s work, discussed in Chapter Three, which analyses migrant organisations as part of the women’s movement (2008). The history of academia in both colonial and cultural oppression means that cross-cultural research carries with it particular ethical concerns (Law and Urry 2004: 397). As Reinharz (1992) has noted, many feminist researchers who also identify with an anti-racist emancipatory tradition think that it is not possible to be a feminist without simultaneously challenging racial oppression, or to express another way, that feminism cannot claim to be emancipatory unless it challenges intersectional oppressions. In writing about women’s economic activism I was reconstituting it, renaming and reinforcing it, and drawing on the resources of the women who were doing it. However, I was also attempting not to reproduce colonialist research methods.

Post-colonial theorist Gayatri Spivak has expressed concern that when researching ‘sub-altern’ groups, academics may never be able to give voice to such groups (Spivak 1988: 28). This points to the importance of reflexivity in analysing power dynamics, rather than simply naming individual characteristics that might point to one’s subject position. Howitt and Stevens suggest that research can be ethical if it gives something of use in return to the community that is being studied (2010: 50-51). They suggest that researchers should ideally be prepared to have their research challenged, changed and at least partly directed by the communities with whom they are working. They also argue in favour of ongoing relationships, creation of tools that communities can use, and research that helps communities challenge power imbalances. In this way the research does not simply contribute to the career of the researcher but potentially to the community’s wellbeing and development.
Women from non-white communities have documented the ways that research into their cultures has been a curse. Barbara Nicholson has written of the damage of anthropology to Indigenous Australians, painting the history of Darwinian-inspired measuring and categorising of Indigenous people:

You’ve measured my head, indeed you preserved it in brine... you’ve delved into my uterus... so that other aspirants of your elevated state may draw on your findings and further explore the intricacies of me... and perpetuate the invasion (Nicholson cited in Howitt and Stevens 2010: 43-45).

Nicholson highlights the connection between this history and later research that may no longer hold to a ‘scientific’ racism but is nonetheless capable of perpetuating the damage of colonialism (Nicholson cited in Howitt and Stevens 2010: 43-45). This damage includes (mis)representation and objectification (Howitt and Stevens 2010: 46). As one feminist working on issues of anti-racism has written, “gender is not enough” (Reissman cited in Reinhartz 1992: 25-26).

Thus it was important to my methodological approach that the relationship be useful to AWatW as well as to me. I negotiated the volunteering aspect of my research carefully with AWatW so that it would be mutually beneficial and not burdensome for the organisation or activists. Given my desire to work against colonial research, the research method of participant observation through volunteer work became a tool for giving something back to the community from which I was drawing data and knowledge. My relationship with the Co-ordinator of AWatW is ongoing. While I no longer regularly volunteer with the organisation, I have offered to present a report on the research I undertook. I also stay in touch regarding various matters of interest including funding opportunities. In 2015 I nominated Diana and AWatW for an award from Western Sydney University for their work with women in the region. Diana won the Commended prize, meaning the organisation received a cheque for $500 from Western Sydney University.

DISCURSIVE REPRESENTATIONS OF ECONOMY AND GENDER

The feminist activist approach I have described, rooted in experience of gender inequality and desire to contribute to the researched cases, was one of three key methodological concerns that drove the conduct of my research, along with deconstruction discussed in Chapter Two, and discourse analysis. The questions I
have come to via my literature reviews in the previous three chapters, and which I ask of all of my case studies, are collated below. They are as follows:

- Firstly, does feminist economic activism affirm gender binaries, or does it transform or queer gender identities? And secondly, what is the discourse of political change that informs feminist economic activism, particularly in the context of the ASU, AWatW and FFW?
- What discourse/s of economy informs participants’ activism and how do they understand economic change?
- Does feminist economic activism as seen in the ASU, AWatW and FFW affirm the identity of the economy as capitalist or does it transform or queer the economy?
- And finally, is economic activism in the case studies outlined above transforming and deconstructing economic norms and identities?

My methodological concerns both drove these questions and the approach I took in addressing them.

I undertook a discourse analysis of each of my case studies, and this is largely inspired by the ‘what is the problem represented to be’ approach of Carol Bacchi (1999). Bacchi’s ground breaking work using discourse analysis in policy studies, saw her role as questioning the concepts that are embedded in the actors’ normative consensus and how this structured policy formation (Bacchi 1999: 33, my emphasis). This method is engaging with the idea that problems do not exist independently of actors. Bacchi’s post-empiricist and post-positivist work, drawing on developments in other areas of the social sciences, strikes at the idea that government policy can be value-neutral, instead reconceptualising it as value-laden and often ideologically driven, as discursive resources are used to establish authoritative understandings of issues (Fischer 2003: 9-14). In the Australian context, Carol Bacchi’s ‘What is the problem represented to be?’ method of looking at politics and policy has been applied to feminist issues such as affirmative action (Bacchi, 1999). Bacchi suggests that the way in which actors represent or shape problems is a crucial component of policy. This analysis of policy as a discourse in which both problems and solutions are created, leads to a deeper understanding of the way policy problems are represented, which in turn casts light on policy responses (Goodwin cited in Bacchi, 1999: 2). I used her
approach to look at the discourses used by activists, who are often attempting to influence policy or political discourse.

I took the spirit of this approach to government policy and applied it to the texts of the case study organisations I selected. This re-politicisation of policy has much in common with the approach of feminist economists who have attempted to open the space in which the problems and solutions of economy are created. Bacchi’s approach opens space for analysis of how structures of power and discourse include or preclude certain claims for policy response (Bacchi, 1999: 59). I recast Bacchi’s question as ‘what is the economy represented to be?’ when I looked at my case studies. Though the feminist activists were not policy makers, they were both constructing an economic problem and providing a response to that problem. I broadened my question somewhat in the ASU case to include, briefly, the government and employer approach in order to show the context in which the activists (in this case the Union) made their claims. However, textual analysis alone was not enough to inform my research, or answer my questions.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have laid out both the methodological approach I took to my case study research, and the methods I used to undertake that research. The guiding concern that drove my theoretical approach and through which I have analysed my case studies was the development of a feminist activist stance that was open to a variety of economic possibilities. In order to achieve this stance I set out to look for case study organisations broadly doing feminist economic activism, but with maximum variation of approaches. Thus I chose to work with a union, community organisation and social enterprise. Conducting my research using participant observation, volunteering and ethnography allowed for rich context and understanding of language, practice and emotion, interviewing for dialogue with participants, and discourse analysis allowed for problem deconstruction. Volunteering time and labour allowed me to give back to the case study organisations in ways that at least partially satisfied my desire to develop a feminist activist methodology. In the following chapter, the first of four discussions of my empirical research, I enact all of these techniques in my analysis of the Australian Services Union.
Chapter Five | Transforming ressentiment? Feminist economic activism by the Australian Services Union

Introduction

In this chapter I look at the Australian Services Union (ASU) and their historic equal pay case for community workers, which ran from 2009-2012. The ASU’s campaign presented a significant opportunity to interrogate understandings of economy in a female-dominated, explicitly feminist part of the trade union movement in Australia. It was an occasion when union activists in this feminised industry were thinking about and expressing economic discourses.

When I began my doctoral research in 2010, I was aware of the ASU equal pay campaign through networks in the union movement, and was following the case closely. As I had written an honours thesis on the Australian Parliament’s inquiry into equal pay, I was also familiar with the political territory of the campaign. If the case was successful, I knew it would be the first Equal Remuneration Order (ERO) made at a federal level in Australia since 1972, and I recognised the sense of history and possibility attached to such a moment for the union and women’s movements in Australia.

In this chapter I analyse the successful ASU equal pay campaign in the context of left crisis or ‘post-socialism’. First, I present the reader with a description of various facets of the ASU and my experience of field work there in detail. I show the tension between ressentiment and hope in the union, explore the affirmative and transformative elements of the activism, and how activists’ language of economy was present in campaign discourses. I look at how these discourses and language shaped the campaign, and textually analyse the economic discourses of the government and employer parties to the equal pay case, to which the union had to respond.

What and who is the ASU?

The Australian Services Union is “tens of thousands of workers who have banded together to protect and improve our wages and conditions and to have a voice about the things that impact on our lives” (ASU, 2011). They are a federated trade union made up of state-based branches that represent workers from social and
community services, and also from water and ports, airlines shipping and travel, and information technology sectors. They represent the seemingly disconnected collection of industries listed above due to Australian trade union amalgamations in the 1980s. Workers from each of these sectors pay fees to belong to the union, which vary based on income. The ASU itself employs numerous staff, divided into administration, organisers, leading organisers, industrial officers, two assistant secretaries and a branch secretary. In the workplace, the union has delegates (workers who act as a contact person for the union staff and members) and members. Governance of the union is democratic, with elections held for a large number of roles every four years.

I conducted my research in the social and community services (SACS) division of the union. Social and community services employees work “in policy and advocacy, in community development, in front line service delivery, with people with a disability, in domestic violence services, in refuges, group homes, homeless services, neighbourhood centres and community legal centres, with young people and people who are often the most marginalised in our communities” (ASU 2011). Community service workers I interviewed and observed for my research included youth workers, drug and alcohol counsellors, people providing day programs or group homes for people with disability, community legal workers, women’s refuge and rape crisis service workers, to name a few roles. In my feminist activist experience outside of my research, I was also familiar with other union workplaces involved in the campaign, including Asian Women at Work and the Liverpool Women’s Resource Centre. All of these workplaces provide subsidised or free goods and services to communities of people who were disadvantaged in terms of income, social status or capital. At the time of the case, the SACS sector had grown because Australian governments had outsourced services to the non-government sector.

My personal experience of working for a trade union in 2008 meant I had some idea of what to expect when I started fieldwork at the ASU in early 2011. I had negotiated to ‘tag along’ with organisers and attend some SACS team meetings as they conducted the day to day of the case. The basic goal of the SACS organisers at that stage was to continue to build union membership, engagement and support for the case in workplaces, and to engage allies such as public sector workers.
These actions were intended to build pressure on the federal Labor government to support the equal pay case.

The leadership of the Union conducted negotiations with government and other unions who were party to the case, and developed the organising, legal and political strategy. The industrial team instructed the barrister and solicitors engaged by the Union, and the SACS team of organisers visited workplaces daily and organised campaign events such as the march pictured below in Figure 5.1. Over the course of 2011 to early 2012, I attended a SACS team meeting at the ASU offices as well as seven different workplace union meetings and five other campaign events. I also attended four days of the Sydney-based FairWork Australia hearings for the case, where witnesses from both the ASU and employer’s associations gave evidence.

![Figure 5.1: Several participants leading an equal pay march in Sydney, source: Australian Broadcasting Corporation News 2011](image)

The ASU brought numerous feminist academic witnesses to present evidence in the case who were able to quantify the gender pay gap nationally and in the community sector; demonstrate the type and nature of the work in comparison to other work in other industries, and show the history of pay equity (Junor 2010; Meagher 2010; Austen 2010).
The changes in pay rates that were eventually achieved are significant, as can be seen from the table of percentage increases to the SACS award below in Figure 5.2. Figure 5.2 shows the overall percentage increase to the pay rates of the various ranks of the award from level 2 (lowest paid) to level 8 (highest paid). From the table we can see that the increases become more significant the higher up the pay scale the worker sits, so a manager level employee would see a 45 per cent increase in their wage rate between 2012-2020.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification in Schedules B and C of the Award</th>
<th>Final Equal Remuneration Payment Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social and community services employee level 2</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and community services employee level 3</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis accommodation employee level 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and community services employee level 4</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis accommodation employee level 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and community services employee level 5</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis accommodation employee level 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and community services employee level 6</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis accommodation employee level 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and community services employee level 7</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and community services employee level 8</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 5.2 Final equal remuneration percentage increase ordered (Fair Work Commission Equal Remuneration Order 2011)*

**Roberta and Lena’s story**

I invite the reader to share the story of Roberta and Lena, two activists in the ASU equal pay campaign.

Roberta and Lena work at Riverwood Community Centre (the Centre) and are members of the Australian Services Union. Roberta is the Director of the service, and has worked at the Centre for 32 years. She remembers when it was a small house and employed three workers.

Roberta told me: *in 1983 we came to this building and then, you know, it was smaller than what it is now because it’s been added on in many ways.*

The Centre now employs over 100 workers (Riverwood Community Centre 2014: 29, 40). It is near a public housing estate, and Roberta used to live on the estate, as did Lena. Lena, a
program manager, still lives in the area. Originally from Syria, she has four children who all go to school or work in the community.

Roberta tells me: *Lena, first of all, lived on the housing estate... And she came to this centre, and she volunteered and then she's moved on to paid employment, and she's done a - different bits of education, and is studying again at the present time... And I guess with Lena is the thing is that she's community.*

It seems that the Community Centre and the housing estate co-developed over the years.

Roberta recounts that the Centre was started in *about 1976... a committee was formed, and they called that committee the Voices of Riverwood... It was a committee of about 12 men back then - I beg your pardon, 10 men and two women.*

After some work, the organisation was funded: *Well, there's a process, and it takes three or four years to really get anything to happen - but I think it was the inner city regional council that this group then eventually went to, and they helped them put in a submission under the AAP [Australian Assistance Plan], and I believe they were the last group funded under the AAP, which was the Gough Whitlam Initiative, and it was about give community the money, and community knows what it needs, and it comes up from the ground and not down from the top, which these days I really love, but it's the complete opposite today, than - anyway. So they got funded. I think they got funded to the tune of about $105,000, I think it was, which was a fair bit of money going back 78/79.*

Roberta noted that since the first community worker was employed at the Centre, the trade union was important in the organisation. She joined when she was employed because the community worker employed before her was a member and a unionist.

At first the situation of workers in the community sector was very poor, according to Roberta: *Well, we didn't have an award at all, you know, and then we did all those different things. And I found that here in the workplace everybody was easy. We went on campaigns; we did stuff with the union. The management committee didn't say, "You can't do that" or you - so for me, union rights just were inherent in the whole place... I have tried to keep that going, even though sometimes today it's been a bit hard.*

This culture of unionism has meant that the Centre has been very active in the equal pay campaign. Lena is a new delegate and has been responsible for this: *I was nominated as a workplace delegate, which is like, you know... I guess we are responsible all up to take part in

---

3 A community organisation funding program initiated by the federal Labor Government in 1973 lead by Prime Minister Gough Whitlam (see Whitlam 1985: 363-364).
what's been happening, and also I've been nominated as an Equal Pay case ambassador, was part
of the delegation team. We went to Canberra. We saw politicians to talk about our equal pay case.
We've been rallying, dancing, yelling, screaming, all over for the past three years.

This has been a whole of Centre affair, with clients and management committee supporting staff. Lena says: during the rallies, Roberta always encouraged us to book a bus. So, we hired a bus, we encouraged the clients to come with us... We feel really valued because they come, and we try to make it maybe that we've got food to share on the bus - muffins, or something or other -- we sing songs, and we have posters or something, but they feel really valued too. They feel valued... and they feel valued because we need them, and normally they need us.

Roberta adds: And these are people that don't get hardly - not a lot of money, and we're talking about pay that's - even our pay now is more than what they get, but we're saying, "Look, we want more pay, and they're not saying, "No, you shouldn't have it", or, "No you're disgusting", or whatever.

The committee of management is also asked to support the campaign for funding for higher wages, as Lena explains: like, first of all we start with management committee, and if we want to go on this, you know, next week or week after there's a rally, and we want to be able to hire a bus and we're asking if you would accept the cost of the hire of the bus to come out of fundraising. Thus, the Centre pays the cost of the transport, rather than workers themselves or clients.

Roberta and Lena are convinced that their work and organisation is of great worth to their community. They note that government workers often ask for their help, and that community members and residents often come to the Centre as a first port of call.

Lena, gesturing to Roberta, says: She's seen so many government organisations contacting us, seeking advice from us. We work closely with them. We very grateful for their support; but, honestly, most of the times they're calling us, "Can you do this, can you do that?"; so, like, we're playing a big part in this community. Vulnerable families - they come to us, they don't go to the local Centrelinks⁴, they come to us.

Later, Lena also states that the driving motivations of their organisation are different to either the private sector or government; that NGOs are more flexible in their definitions and goals: non-government organisation - we do have better understanding. We feel like we're more connected to the community. We listen, we try to support them.

---

⁴ Centrelink is an agency of the Department of Human Services in Australia, responsible for delivery of social security payments and services.
Roberta agrees: I think there's a lack of flexibility within government and private services. For instance, private services have a bottom-line thing, you know, about economy really.

The support the Centre provide to government services raises the question of wages for Lena: Why do I get paid half of the wage for someone who works like - like, my colleague was working here, but she moved to [government job] - she was offered better money, she went to, let's say, to the local community service.

However, Roberta also states money hasn't ever been the driving force for me working here... And for me, my worry is because I'm older, is that when I leave, if we don't get something sorted, how are they going - they're never getting anyone for $64,000.

The Centre will not be able to hire someone, Roberta believes, who cares enough, can afford, will work the hours and is competent and will stick around and run a multi-million dollar organisation for $64,000.

Lena says that she thinks of seeking work elsewhere due to community sector pay rates: I look at, okay, my family will be better off. You know, it's a hard - like, you know, I've got children, I've got four children, I've got mortgage to pay.

It is hard, she explains, to bring a family up on a community services wage. She would be able to own her home, maybe help her kids in University with their debts, if she took a government job. This is the logic of common sense but it clearly hurts her when she says this.

Roberta and Lena also note the problems that low wages create in terms of staff leaving and being replaced, the problems of ‘turnover’. Says Lena: Those families, they don't have to repeat their stories so many times every time to a new worker.

Lena hoped this would change if they won the case.

**Activism for redistribution and recognition**

The ASU ran a campaign that focused specifically on the gendered understanding and valuing of labour in the community sector. As one ASU organiser put it, historically community workers have been thought of as “nice ladies doing nice work”. It is true that Roberta and Lena work at the Centre because they care; yet this does not preclude them having needs. Care by ‘nice ladies’, the organiser said, was part of the justification for community workers’ underpayment, underemployment, and the lack of professionalisation of the sector.
Feminised work is an area where recognition and redistribution are entwined. Feminist writers and academics have written about this caring, feminised paid and unpaid labour over many years (for a small number of examples, see Elson 1999; Folbre 2000; England 2005; Meagher 2006 and 2007; Adams and Sharp 2011). They have noted the tendency of women to do the vast majority of both paid and unpaid caring and reproductive labour (such as child rearing, nursing, community building and teaching, both formal and informal). Sometimes feminised work is not seen as work, and if it is paid, it tends to be paid at lower rates compared to male dominated industries. For the work to be seen as work, and to be seen as valuable, is a question of recognition. For it to be paid a ‘fair’ rate, if it is paid, is clearly a question of redistribution.

This low-paid work by “nice ladies” has sustained or supplemented livelihoods for many people outside of, or marginally attached to, formal economic domains: housing, service provision such as adult education, counselling and food delivery, and grant applications that secure funding, to name a few activities. Female volunteers and people outside the ‘formal’ economy have historically done the work of the community sector. They have performed the diverse range of activities not included in the mainstream conception of economy, not considered productive like work in capitalist enterprises, and yet also not considered a simple social good in the sense that entirely voluntary charity work or work in the home would be. The work of the community sector thus existed in a partially invisible space. However, as the sector has grown and become a site for the outsourcing of government services, it has also become a site of union economic politics, and the equal pay campaign has brought it to the fore and tried to gain recognition and redistribution for feminised work.

EQUAL PAY: RESENTIMENT, HOPE AND GENDER IDENTITY

The equal pay campaign created a mood of hope in both feminist and union circles, amongst union members like Lena and Roberta, and the broader movement. This was in marked contrast to the period of conservative Liberal party government in Australia from 1996-2007, which had deepened the sense of crisis on the part of left movements, and had also led to those movements feeling stifled and defensive. The election of the Labor party in 2007 resulted in a sense of
possibility, though many people were also exhausted and organisational resources depleted by the defensive campaigns of the preceding years. The 2007 election did not entirely displace a feeling of resentment.

I suggest that wounded attachments are in evidence in the equal pay case, particularly in relation to the identity positions of woman and worker. In Chapter One, I claimed that wounded attachments and political identities were partly a result of ressentiment. This resentment, according to Wendy Brown, is a result of the impossibility of reconciling liberalism’s two key promises: equality and freedom. However, in this chapter, I also show evidence of a posture of what I will refer to as hope, in reference to Wendy Brown’s question:

what if we sought to supplant the language of “I am” – with its defensive closure on identity, its insistence on the fixity of positions, its equation of social with moral positioning – with the language of “I want this for us” (1996: 75)?

The identity statement “I am” could be read as desire for equality and recognition. For example, “I am a woman care worker,” could be read and meant not simply as symbolising wounds of inequality but also as a desire for equality and justice. This positive claim situates these identities in context, and allows them to be de- and reconstructed, with a view to future possibilities for equality and recognition. If such identity claims are not final, this lends them potential compatibility with a deconstructive politics of identity and a transformative politics of economy.

This sense of ressentiment, defensiveness or grievance was not merely an abstract concept for me. I felt trepidation about approaching the ASU to conduct my research, partially because when working for a union myself, I found the union movement easily perceived attack. I was conscious of the need to build trust in my position as a researcher asking for access to a politically sensitive organisation. When I emailed the Secretary directly to request access to the Union, I explained that I was a trade unionist who had worked for a union in the past and that I was a current member of the National Tertiary Education Union. I also sent her an article I had published about the equal pay case on a then popular News Limited opinion site called ‘The Punch’ (see Appendix 1). I wrote the piece from the position of a younger feminist unionist, explaining why I cared about equal pay, for a wide audience. I was successful in establishing trust, and I was granted access the NSW branch of the ASU.
Dwindling union numbers in Australia in the last forty years help explain the resentment I perceived. In addition, a sense that a neoliberal conception of politics and economics has become the consensus, and thus unionists were on the outer, meant that their project of equality seemed further away than ever. However, my view is that the very existence of the ASU and the other organisations I study shows that neoliberalism is not a consensus; that there remain openings to change our lives and our economies. In this case a crack in the wall of new industrial legislation introduced by Labor was pulled at by the ASU, brick by brick, until they created a doorway of opportunity and change for community workers. The ASU embodied this conflict; a defensive posture of resentment toward society and government for the lack of equality and hopefulness for becoming a professionalised, well paid and equal work force.

This sense of growing resentment was articulated when, Mia, a participant, stated:

James, when I first started working here, he used to have this saying “No more Oliver at the table, “Please, sir, can I have some more.”” No more, like, more “Please, please, please.” No more just making do. These people, these workers, our members deserve something... a fundamental shift.

Similarly, Emma, the leader of the NSW ASU, noted that prior to the equal pay decision, the highest number of new SACS union members per month had been 180, whereas:

Ever since the decision, the Equal Pay decision... not one month we got less than 300 members... and I think a lot of other people joined after the decision because they wanted to be part of a strong union, because it was, like - like, “We won it”, and so it’s just become a lot easier for the organisers to sign up people, and people have just done it.

This statement captures both the defensiveness of fighting from an injured identity position, and the way that the ASU actively used their win to articulate a sense of future, of strength and of achievement.

I suggest that the injured position applies to representation and experience of gender in the ASU’s campaign as well. Prior to the equal pay campaign, the ASU ran campaigns centred on the caring nature of community work, such as a 2005 campaign called CARE (community, advocacy, respect, equity). The CARE campaign, according to the then assistant secretary of the ASU, James, was about:

creating a sense of identity amongst the workers because we felt they didn’t have any way in which they really identified... And that was really about us starting to
stake a place as being the third of the caring professions. So nurses, teachers and social community services workers.

James noted that there was some conflict in the union about the word care, perhaps because of the potentially patronising and feminised meaning of the word. Mia also reflected on the difficulty of speaking to male workers in the sector about equal pay because it was a concept so associated with women. The ‘injured identity’ is present in the figure of the ‘caring profession’, which is characterised as underpaid and feminised, and in the woman and worker identity. In this deliberate creation of a caring identity we can see the way that caring and equal pay become a sight of wounded gender attachments also.

ASU contended that the government could and should address gender pay inequity for workers in the sector and that not doing so was effectively enforcing a gender pay gap. They argued that the services that their SACS members provide are government priorities and therefore must be funded adequately in order not to perpetuate injustice. The ASU demonstrated the value and importance of the services themselves by having members write witness statements and arranging workplace inspections for the commissioners and counsel. I quote Edith, who coordinated the taking of ASU members’ witness statements, at length:

the whole thing about the SACS industry is that you've got these really highly skilled workers who do this amazing work, but people don't really understand what they do... because the services are being provided to really vulnerable members of society who in themselves are hidden.

So, you've got sort of things like empathy and understanding, building rapport and those sorts of things that don’t appear in job descriptions and don’t appear in classifications in awards and don’t appear in job evaluation tools because they’re not really – they haven't traditionally been valued using those tools, so basically, you have this sort of situation where – and then I guess, on another level, the workers who are really, really committed to their jobs, they also hide their skills, 'cause they're –it's part of - giving dignity to clients is not sort of saying, “Oh, here I am, I’m this highly skilled person who’s going to fix your problems.”

I had this real goal, I guess, of presenting this information in a way which people would really understand and empathise: “Look you know, what you've got is you've got a full bench of Fair Work Australia, you know, comprised of, you know, three men and two women. Some of those people are very, very conservative and would have never met a SACS work or never have needed one.” And I mean, I heard Emma describe it, “Wouldn’t know a SACS worker if they fell over one.”

And I mean, basically what we're trying to do is we're not only trying to teach them what we do, but we're trying to get them really engaged with that and really, really interesting...

The mechanics of the case were also an illumination and an education in the skills, services and lives of SACS workers and their clients for the Fair Work
Commissioners and legal counsel. Again we see that the process of the campaign and case valorizes the work of a female dominated industry and highlights the recognition of gender that goes along with redistribution in this case.

Outsourcing of work previously done by government to the community sector was another sight of resentment against inequality for the union. Emma, the Branch Secretary of the ASU, stated:

> We forever have talked about the injustice of the fact that our members do the same work that the government employees do, and get paid 30% less. And that's because of deliberate government strategies over the last 15 years of neoliberalism really, where they've outsourced the welfare jobs from government into our sector... and there's been some good - other reasons to do so - like de-institutionalising horrible institutions that obviously we'd support, but there has been very strong economic imperatives for them to do so. They've done so because they've been able to do it on the cheap by exploiting our members.

This critique of outsourcing is part of a narrative that posits workers as injured and disempowered by neoliberalism and needing recompense and protection from the state.

However, Emma also identifies some possibilities that outsourcing has opened in the community sector. These include deinstitutionalisation of disability care and the possibility of improving community sector wages whilst maintaining or improving community control of community services. While the ASU in part cleaves to the capitalocentric representation of workers as injured parties in capitalism, they also, by virtue of their membership of community workers, support economic alternatives to capitalism that provide community-controlled services by redistributing government funds.

On one occasion during my fieldwork with the ASU, I attended an event in Rozelle, Sydney, with Mia, a leading organiser from the ASU. As we left the office to attend the meeting, Mia explained that we were going to an interagency meeting of community services in Rozelle, and that she had been invited to speak about the equal pay case at the event. She explained she was willing to do so, but that she did not like interagency meetings because attendees were often not members, but rather small service bosses who wanted free industrial advice. Mia said she was going to try to get something out of them this time by getting them to call MPs about the equal pay campaign. Below is an extract from my field diary:
When we get to Rozelle and arrive at the meeting, which is held in a local church, there is an unfriendly woman chairing, and Mia announces she is unsure about what they want her to say but she is going to talk about what they are doing in the campaign. Mia is a compelling speaker, and I find myself reflecting that I would do anything she asked of me. She starts out by saying that “sitting around this table is a picture of inequality” because of the different pay to government and non-government sector workers. She says, however, that government workers who are members of their union are helping the cause and should also call their MPs. She discusses the value of what SACS workers do, using the example of Gail, an attendee who is a union member and activist from Rozelle Community Centre. Gail then speaks up: “That’s right”, she says, “my work is worth it.” Mia then talks about how it is union members running the case and how important it is to pin down the left wing members of the Labor party and encourage them to raise the issue with the Prime Minister and in the Cabinet. A Leichardt Council (local government) worker, a member of another union, expresses support and agrees to make the phone call to her local member.

This diary entry shows both the injured identity of the defensive community sector workers, and their desire to become equals by making a claim for future improvements, for growing their union, and engaging others in their movement. This could perhaps be said of many union and worker’s rights campaigns, as there is tension between the grievances experienced by workers as workers and unionists, and the need to express this to those outside the identity group, to express a desire to be or become more.

**Representations of economy in the ASU equal pay case**

In the following section of this chapter, I show the extent to which the ASU’s approach is affirmative in the sense of affirming the welfare state’s transfers to the feminised community sector, and where there are transformative moments or moves made by the ASU, using Fraser’s framework. I use a discourse analysis approach and place the representations of community organisations and their employees in a diverse economies framework.

To do the work of economic discourse analysis, I draw on Carol Bacchi’s (1999, 2009) work, as mentioned in Chapter Four. To reiterate, Bacchi (2009) uses a discursive approach to policy problems known in shorthand as ‘what is the problem represented to be?’ Here I recast that question as ‘what is the economy represented to be?’ Though the trade union activists are not policy makers, they
are both constructing an economic problem and providing a response to that problem. In doing so, they are both challenging and shaped by capitalocentric discourses but also mobilising non-capitalist discourses. I broaden my question somewhat here to include, briefly, the government and employer approach in order to show the context in which the activists (in this case the Union) make their claims.

**The ASU’s representation of economy: Transforming services, affirming capitalism?**

As I work part time in the community sector, I have received a number of pay rises due to the success of the equal pay case. Despite stating somewhat detachedly in the article I wrote (see Appendix 1) at the beginning of my research that:

> It is not fashionable for a member of Gen Y like myself to care about equal pay for women. So the Australian Services Union equal remuneration case currently before Fair Work Australia should perhaps hold no great interest for me, the case was never a dispassionate object of study. I felt keenly in favour of it and, more generally, of higher wages for women. I was simultaneously aware of the problems with organised labour and its limited goals of sharing in the spoils of profit rather than of ownership and production. However, the simplicity of the fact that many of the women working in the sector were unable to afford to ever buy a home or go on holiday, that they were often reliant on a partner’s wages and thus more likely to have to stay in unhappy or abusive relationships, was enough for me to support the case as an act of pragmatic feminism.

The ASU represented its members as undervalued and exploited by their low payment at work, and as subject to unfair outcomes of neoliberalism. When they initially brought their claim to Fair Work Australia in 2009, they had negotiated the support of the federal Labor government for a ‘test’ case of equal pay laws under the new industrial architecture of Labor’s *Fair Work Act 2009*. In return for the ASU supporting the referral of state industrial powers to the Commonwealth, the ASU and the Federal government signed a Heads of Agreement, declaring that the case would test both the veracity of the union’s equal pay claim and the new workplace law itself. This agreement, while significant, did not guarantee the Commonwealth to supporting any particular outcome in the case (ASU and Commonwealth Government of Australia 2009; ASU 2009b).
Throughout the period the ASU ran their case in FairWork Australia, they made sure that this was not just a legal case but also a political campaign based on gender. They focused on and amplified the feminised history and identity of their workers. The union leadership saw gender as the heart of the reason workers in the community sector were paid such low rates. They campaigned to convince members (and non-members, or potential members) that their pay was not only too low, but that this was because of the historical and ongoing prevalence of women in the sector. The ASU needed members to back the plan to run an equal pay case in order to maintain and build membership, to maintain unity in the organisation, and to garner support for their strategy of seeking an equal pay ruling to raise wages in the sector. Campaigning was one way to inoculate members against the inevitable push back from some employers, governments, politicians and media figures arguing that services would close if pay rates increased and that vulnerable people would suffer if the union won the case. This joint analysis, that unfair redistribution was because of a problem of recognition, demonstrates the intertwined nature of the two types of injustice.

The ASU positioned the problem of low pay in the female-dominated community sector as a part of an overall problem of fairness to women, not just an issue of work undervaluation. Pay inequality is one of numerous recognisable issues of sexist oppression of women, which also include reproductive rights, sexist stereotyping, and sexual assault. In positing the community workers’ equal pay case as part of a broader problem of gendered inequality, the union connected its campaign and its members’ struggle to a social movement (feminism or women’s liberation) in which there are long established demands and remedies for these issues, including legal and state-based remedies. Moreover, in emphasising the gender injustice, the ASU positioned community workers as part of the ongoing history of the women’s movement. This history has included strikes and campaigns in Australia and around the world, such as the bread and roses strike of 1912 in the United States, and the 1968 strike at the Ford factory in Dagenham, in the United Kingdom, both the subjects of popular songs, movies and histories (see for example, ‘Made in Dagenham’, directed by Nigel Cole, 2010).

The ASU represented community workers as underpaid, that is, not receiving ‘equal pay’ for work of ‘equal or comparable value’ on the basis of gender. They did so in response to the Fair Work Act pay equity provisions, which state:
(1) The FWC may make any order (an equal remuneration order) it considers appropriate to ensure that, for employees to whom the order will apply, there will be equal remuneration for work of equal or comparable value.

**Meaning of equal remuneration for work of equal or comparable value**

(2) Equal remuneration for work of equal or comparable value means equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal or comparable value (Parliament of Australia 2009).

The ASU made the argument that community workers are ‘undervalued’. While this word is not defined in the ASU’s application (2010a) or submissions, they quote a NSW judgment, stating:

The (NSW) legislation is directed to the comparison of value and not the identification of equivalent job content. Thus the word “comparable” indicates that the Commission is required to make assessments of comparisons of ‘value’ (Glynn J cited in ASU 2010b: 7, my addition).

The ASU then state:

From the outset pay equity provisions were not construed as requiring a male comparator to establish a case for undervaluation, or to establish the appropriate value of the work. In female dominated occupations and industries (ASU 2010b: 7, sic).

These statements show that in a comparison between two industries, where if one that is female dominated or has a feminised history and is found to have similar skills to the other, male-dominated occupation, but is lower paid, it could be considered undervalued. The NSW pay equity report gave a list of characteristics that could indicate undervaluation:

On the basis of the selected industries and occupations, it would seem that a profile which, prima facie, could indicate the possibility, or even the probability, of an undervaluation of work based on gender, would include the following elements:

- female dominated;
- female characterisation of work;
- often no work value exercise conducted by the Commission;
- inadequate application of equal pay principles;
- weak union;
- few union members;
- consent awards/agreements;
- large component of casual workers;
- lack of, or inadequate recognition of qualifications (including misalignment of qualifications);
- deprivation of access to training or career paths;
- small workplaces;
- new industry or occupation;
- service industry;
- home based occupations (NSW Government cited in ASU 2010b).
Australia still has a highly gender segregated labour market (Rawston 2012), and many industries women dominate are low paid and could be considered undervalued. The ASU is challenging the value of certain work that has a ‘female characterisation’. They later state: “The services delivered by employees involves caring work which has a female characterisation.” On this reading of low pay for workers in the community sector, the undervaluation and comparator model is a practical response. Again the entanglement of distribution and recognition in work value is difficult if not impossible to separate.

**Affirming or transforming? Capitalocentric or diverse?**

In early equal pay cases women needed to show that fairness involved exact equality to men in the form of the same pay for the same work. In order to establish these original equal pay provisions, feminist union activists represented women as the same as any other worker, performing the same amount of work as men in the same or similar roles with the same remuneration needs. This position could also be considered transformative in nature, as it puts women on an equal footing to men rather than receiving a percentage of a male wage for the same work. It deconstructs the difference between genders. Later, in order to access equal pay provisions for larger numbers of women, feminists and unionists have had to show that a sector was both female dominated and that the workers therein were low paid because of the specifically gendered nature of their work.

Though on one hand this more complex and difficult demonstration of sexism levels the playing field of earnings overall and thus could be thought of as transformative, it could be considered affirmative in the sense that rather than removing a direct discrimination between men and women, it favourably redistributes funding toward women to ameliorate sexism. Whilst showing, as one of the ASU’s academic witnesses does, that the work is as skilled as another more masculine dominated occupation, the feminised history of the work is also highlighted and valorised and the feminised identity of the industry reinforced (Junor 2010). This particularly shows the recognition aspect of the case, and also the difficulty that feminist unionists and workplace activists face in addressing issues of gender pay inequity. As well as the issue of gender pay inequity, there is the concern of inciting further resentment on the group through attempting to address it.
The Union’s approach affirmed a separate identity group of workers through end state redistribution. In seeking a ruling from the industrial commission Fair Work Australia on the basis of gender pay equity provisions in the *Fair Work Act*, and a guarantee that government would fund the increases, the Union was seeking state sponsored redistribution to the sector and to workers in the sector whose gender identity they had affirmed as ‘woman’. To reiterate, this is not a case of “affirmative bad” and “transformative good”, however, this tells us that perhaps the gender pay rulings risk fanning the flames of resentment against the group as needy for resources, as opposed to a more transformative approach which might level out pay rates more broadly.

However, it is possible to see some potentially transformative moments in the case. Firstly, gender pay equity rulings in Australia are a once-off resetting of an award, to bring it in line with a comparator industry, making the incitement to resentment similarly singular and also bringing the industry in line with what ‘everyone else’ (namely men) receives. Additionally, the award itself applies to anyone working in the sector, not only women. Finally, while the campaign does come broadly from a place of wounded attachment, as argued above, the ASU also set out to publicly and thoroughly convince the public of the collective reasons for these workers to be more valued, placing them, to some extent, in a place of future possibility rather than defensiveness.

Another transformative aspect of the campaign was the greater funding being transferred into a non-capitalist area of economy, the community sector, which involves diverse economic practices. The community sector often involves community control of resources. Diverse economic practices in the sector include non-profits, social enterprise, mobilisation of volunteer or alternatively remunerated labour, and alternative financing such as bequests or use of credit unions. In winning a campaign to transfer more resources to this sector through higher payment of wages, the ASU made a transformative economic move, and facilitated more diverse, non-capitalist economic activity.

J.K. Gibson-Graham argues that an attachment to working-class identity often provides a defense of the old ways of organizing economy or can prevent change from taking place. As Ozselcuk (2006) points out, in this way post-structural class analysis makes a similar point to Wendy Brown. The logic of this ‘workerism’
approach is that alternatives to capitalism are seen as ‘unrealistic'. In the ASU campaign, the ASU attempts to solidify gender and worker identities, and does transform them somewhat from a semi informal identity to a more working class identity. However, attachment to this identity also at times manifests in capitalocentrism.

The ASU represent the sector as enrolled in the neoliberal process of privatisation, and SACS workers as the victims of this process: “The private SACS Industry is a new industry which has emerged from a continuing and increasing tendency of Governments to outsource services to community groups” (ASU 2010b: 27). Emma, then the NSW branch secretary of the ASU, argued in our interview that the trend toward reducing government services and spending has meant that community workers do the same or similar work as public servants, but are being paid less, in a less regulated sector with poorer conditions:

The expectations, in terms of their education levels, their accountability, their liabilities - all of that's increased phenomenally over those 15 years as well. So I guess the injustice of the position has got worse and worse over that period of time. The process of privatisation, the ASU argues, is a process of cost saving by the government. By representing their low paid members as victims of this process, the ASU possibly affirm the economy as inevitably capitalist. However, as is discussed above, they have also embraced the outsourcing to non-government sector as providing opportunities for community control and deinstitutionalization.

Part of the undervaluation highlighted by the ASU was the incidence of part-time and casual employment in the community sector as both a characteristic of a female dominated industry and a contributor to undervaluation, an argument against gender essentialism. Feminists have argued that the undervaluation associated with part-time and casual work has been exacerbated by enterprise bargaining, the gendered effects of which are outlined in the work of Frino and Whitehouse, cited above. The ASU stated:

The industry has a large component of casual workers, or other forms of insecure employment such as short-term contracts. The charitable and community organisations that provide the services are almost entirely funded by government grants. Funding is typically provided on the basis of competitive tendering and often involves short-term grants. It is subject to performance criteria and regular review. The nature of the funding has contributed to the undervaluation of the work. That funding has contributed to the following features in the industry:

The expectations, in terms of their education levels, their accountability, their liabilities - all of that's increased phenomenally over those 15 years as well. So I guess the injustice of the position has got worse and worse over that period of time.
a significant proportion of employees in the industry are engaged on a part-time and/or casual basis (ASU 2010b: 23).

This is in contrast to employer organisations’ characterization of part-time and casual work in the sector. As will be explored below, employers argued that part-time and casual work is the choice of female employees and benefits them as much as employers. The ASU and feminist academics have represented underemployment as a function of short term funding or income cycles, and their members as victims of this, but they do not suggest it is due to biology or the ‘natural’ choice of women.

The ASU have represented their members as undervalued due to sexism and neoliberalism, the outcomes of which they argue are poverty and inequality. They have also represented the work their SACS members do as having great value to society. They propose the non-capitalist solution of greater government funding for the community services sector, and draw on both unionist and feminist histories of resistance. While attaching to an injured identity and positing women workers as victims, the solutions they proposed and won involved moving government to more non-capitalist spending. This is despite the limitations of their approach, which did not challenge workers’ position as locked in a capitalocentric employer-employee model, receiving shares of profits rather than ownership or control.

**The Australian Government: Essentialising economy**

Politically, the ASU had to convince governments to fund pay increases for community workers, in order that FairWork Australia’s commissioners would have justification and motivation to make an order for a significant pay increase. While the Commonwealth Labor government itself had introduced the new equal pay provisions in the Fair Work Act, the negotiations were protracted, and for some time there was no guarantee that any pay increases would be funded.

The government’s standpoint changed over time from reticence regarding the increases applied for, to commitment to equal pay. Their initial submissions in the case discussed fiscal responsibility, balancing the federal budget, and limited finance for social services, reflecting both a public discourse that values government budget surpluses and an overall drive to limit public spending. This reflects a broader struggle (both internal and external) faced by the Labor
government and party, with several layers of economic discourse. Firstly, a perception that Labor were ‘bad economic managers’, beholden to the trade union movement and other ‘special interest groups’; secondly, a notion that spending on social services or ‘welfare’ was bad for ‘the economy’ as it would lead to deficit; and thirdly that only one mode of economic management, a neoliberal approach, was legitimate.

Though the Labor government had entered into a Heads of Agreement with the ASU regarding support for the test case, the aspect of the Agreement they referred to in their submission stated that the ASU “acknowledged... that there could be significant budgetary impacts to state and territory governments and the Government if its application is successful and a wage increase is awarded” (Commonwealth Government 2010: 1.12). The Heads of Agreement also reiterated the Government’s commitment to “service delivery through the SACS and not-for-profit sectors,” contending that “this is the most efficient way to deliver services and ensures application of local knowledge and skills for effective service delivery” (Commonwealth Government 2010: 1.19).

**Budgetary restraint and expendable social services**

The Rudd government’s original submission to Fair Work Australia makes much more explicit commentary on an economic standpoint than that of the ASU. The submission was made in the wake of the global financial crisis, a difficult period for the Labor government in Australia. The Government under then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd had responded to the GFC by engaging in major stimulus spending, meaning the federal budget went into deficit for the first time in some years. However, they managed to navigate the GFC without Australia’s economy going into technical recession (Australian Treasury 2011).

This context is reflected in the following statement from the government’s initial submission to the equal pay case:

6.36 The focus of the fiscal strategy in future years will remain on returning the budget to surplus as soon as possible, including offsetting all new spending measures by reprioritising existing expenditure. In addition, once the budget returns to surplus, and while the economy is growing at or above trend, the Government will maintain expenditure restraint by retaining a 2 per cent annual cap on real spending growth, on average, until surpluses are at least 1 per cent of GDP (Commonwealth Government 2010).
They continue:

6.38 The Government’s fiscal strategy – which is aimed at ensuring fiscal sustainability and returning the budget to surplus – will influence the Government’s ability to support the sector in meeting additional wage costs. Any additional Commonwealth funding provided would likely come at the expense of other Commonwealth funded services (Commonwealth Government 2010).

This indicates that the government was prioritizing spending restraint, probably at the expense of wage increases to low paid workers. There is also an implicit threat in the final sentence above that any additional funding to the community sector would likely decrease funding for other government services. What might be defunded is left to the imagination but would likely include health, welfare payments, or immigrant settlement services.

The government is representing the economy as requiring constraint on government spending in the wake of a near recession. It is represented as a unified whole that is ‘managed’ by government, which can dispense or withhold funding. While other areas of government spending (such as defense) might be considered higher priorities or non-negotiable, social services are represented as a discrete and finite area of the budget, where increasing funding for one will involve decreasing funding for another. The Sydney Morning Herald headline from Friday November 20 2010 (pictured below, Figure 5.3) made much of the Labor government’s hesitance to fund equal pay. At the time the success of the case looked uncertain.
The government contended that the bench of Fair Work Australia should take into account the budgetary and ‘whole of economy’ impacts in its decision, clearly indicating that a large increase being awarded might have negative effects on other services and on wages in other sectors:

6.43 Although the impact of the proposed wage increase is likely to be negligible when taken in isolation, if similar increases were negotiated across other sectors, such as the aged care sector, the cumulative impact on aggregate wages and employment would become significant.

6.44 The Government anticipates that FWA will take into account the impacts on the SACS sector and broader economy in its consideration of this application...

6.48 The Government contends that it is important that FWA finds the right balance between equal remuneration for SACS employees and the broader implications of any wage increase in reaching its decision (Commonwealth Government 2010).

Again here, we see that social service areas of the budget are considered in competition with each other, rather than considered in the whole of budget context or as complementing and potentially enhancing productive social and economic outcomes.
Politicised pay rates lead to funding services

In November 2011, Labor Prime Minister Gillard, in a media flurry and to an audience of union members, of which I was a part, announced her support for the case, stating, “it is time you got equal pay” to cheers and applause (Thompson 2011). Many actions by members led to this moment. In the lead up to the 2010 Australian election, in which the Labor party narrowly managed to form government, MPs were asked by members of the ASU in their electorates to sign an ‘equal pay pledge’, which publicly committed them to support the pay increases in their party caucuses. This got mainstream media attention. In another example of grassroots member action, in May 2011, about ten members gathered in the then Minister for Human Services, Tanya Plibersek’s office in Chippendale, inner city Sydney, without an appointment, and did an ‘equal pay dance’, urging Tanya to come out and speak with them and to commit to represent their case to then Prime Minister Julia Gillard and Treasurer Wayne Swan.

The Labor government’s position, which changed over the course of the case, reflects their internal division and differing views on how to address equal pay. One view, and a dominant one in recent decades, has been to approach economics from the perspective of neoliberalism. In this vein, the Commonwealth Labor government initially attempted to paint this issue as one of basic sums in a contained sector ignored the possibilities of shifting funding from other areas or raising taxes. While the government avoided recession in the GFC, they paid a price in terms of public and media perception, and this context is reflected in the original submission, which argues that higher wages would mean less services for the vulnerable communities that ASU members serve, and also positions the community sector as in competition for funding with other social services such as aged care. The ASU win represents an effective counter to this logic.

The employers: Essentialising gender and work

Numerous employer and business groups submitted to the case, including the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industries (ACCI), the Australian Federation of Employers and Industries (AFEI), National Disability Services (NDS) and the Australian Industry Group (AIG). Employers advanced a number of arguments, including support for the Commonwealth’s position above; that the tribunal should take the needs of small and medium businesses into account.
(ACCI 2010: 11-12) and that many women wanted to work part time in the sector and that this reflected the needs of workers and services, for example stating that:

The applicants assert inadequacy of career paths within the sector with the public sector’s size and resources seen as preferable. The unavoidable fact is that the sector is not the public sector but made up of a diversity of numerous, mostly small organisations. The structure of the sector is not an indicator of undervaluation. Instead it reflects how its mostly small providers can operate the services they offer with over 80% of jobs involving direct care roles. The sector is typified by small, non-hierarchical organisations, few management layers and an emphasis on the provision of front line care (AFEI 2010: 44).

The AFEI argued that women want casual work, which gestures to a biological, essentialist view of gender and child rearing.

While the trade union movement has objected to the casualization of the sector, AFEI supported it. This is perhaps unsurprising; many gender equality arguments have been made about getting women into more and better paid work. Similarly, the case against equal pay measures was made through the argument that women want to work low status and casual or precarious labour. What seems to have been assumed on both sides is that casual work or full time work is either good or bad. Casual or part time work is paired with low wages and status.

Casual work is also a mark of feminisation. Both arguments for and against casualization happened in an environment where earning money via employment is still a means to independence, social connection and status. Similarly, arguments that suggest that women have a biological imperative to do less paid work, are made in an environment in which abortion is still illegal, child-care is expensive, childless women are derided and mothers are financially penalised. The employers challenging the case essentialised both gender and work. However when overconsumption, mental health and stress, and gender inequality are major concerns, continued the degrading and gendering of part-time or casual work, and insistence upon a standardised working week, might be issues worthy of political challenge by feminists and unionists alike.

**Affirming gender, transforming work? Feminist economic activism for equal pay**

In the ASU campaign for equal pay, economic discourses largely affirmed gender identity and both affirmed and transformed some aspects of economic identity. In figure 5.4 I have set out the campaign outcomes in this matrix of affirmation and
transformation of economic and gender identities. The feminised identity of care workers was affirmed through an industrial system that insists the feminisation of the sector be proved (see second row, second column of Figure 5.3). There are some caveats to this; over time if wages in the sector remain high, the identity of the sector may become less gendered. However, the ASU equal pay campaign itself emphasised the gendered identity of the work (see middle bottom cell in Figure 5.3), but resisted a biological justification for casualization (see right bottom cell, Figure 5.3). The campaign also did a number of things to transform economic identity. The transformative aspects were the success in increasing redistribution to a non-capitalist part of the economy (see first row, third column of Figure 5.3). The ASU were successful in convincing the government to take the political stance of increasing funding to an area of economy they had previously seen as ‘unproductive’. At the same time, the campaign also affirmed the importance of waged or formal labour in the sector (see the first row, second column of Figure 5.3). While the increased resources for the sector may lead to an increase in informal economic activity and transactions, the union emphasis remains squarely on formal wages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affirmation</th>
<th>Transformation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A politics of (re)distribution to address economic inequality</td>
<td>Affirming the importance of formal/wage labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increasing funding for non-capitalist area of economy; blurs/queers distinctions between capitalist and non-capitalist economy, and potentially increases community control of services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A politics of recognition to address gender inequality</td>
<td>Identity focused feminism leads to surface redistribution of respect such as valuing women as care workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resists biological essentialism regarding gender</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 5.4: Affirmation and transformation in the ASU equal pay campaign, with deconstruction of economy, source: modified from Fraser 1997: 27*

The ASU campaign politicised the economy by emphasising the importance of well-being for their workers. They explicitly argued that certain levels of income were necessary to fulfil the needs of workers. While the campaign’s arguments did not emphasise the economic, these are economic shifts for members that prioritise
their wellbeing and livelihoods, something which will be discussed further in Chapter Eight.

**Conclusion**

The success of the ASU equal pay case and campaign was a meaningful moment for many activists in the community sector, and for other unionist feminists supporting the campaign. When the equal remuneration order was announced, the feeling that justice had been done and effort rewarded was palpable. In this chapter I have attempted to offer the reader a deep understanding of the ASU and members’ position and context in the campaign.

I have drawn on interviews and field experiences to show that a posture of *ressentiment* was mixed with hope. Wounds created by the inequality of economic dependency and consequent attachment to the worker and woman identity fuelled the demands for reparation from the State and employers. Hopes were set on an improved set of condition for the identity groups. I suggest that whilst winning an historical moment of feminist unionism, the Union and equal pay strategies reinforced feminised identity tropes of gendered labour, but at the same time there are attempts to redefine these tropes in ways that are less constraining to gender and economic equality.

The Union sought an affirmative, or end-state remedy to gender inequality through the injection of more funds into the sector. This possibly put the sector in a position of recreating resentment toward its identity groups, women workers, due to the affirmative equal remuneration awarded to them. However, the ruling of Fair Work Australia itself applies to the whole sector rather than just the female workers, and the reallocation is a once off ruling that then becomes a permanent change to the industry award. The reallocation of funding to a feminised area of economy that is a site of many diverse economic practices is a transformative aspect of the case.

Officials of the union have tended to represent the community sector as bound to a worker/employer model. The government, on the other hand, argued through a lens of spending restraint that shifted their responsibilities toward the growth of ‘the economy’. This position is one mired in the language and ideas of capitalocentrism, however the government’s eventual agreement to fund the pay
increases valued non-capitalist sectors. Employers argued that part time and casual work was about ‘choice’ and the benefits of flexibility to employers as well as employees. They argued through a lens of the capitalist enterprise applied to social services, for keeping wages down and flexibility for employers high. Despite the equal pay case being a left-wing campaign about work, to some extent, all the organisations party to the case reiterated a capitalocentric position. In Chapter Eight I return to the community economic implications and possibilities of the campaign.
Chapter Six | Affirming worker identities? Feminist economic activism by Asian Women at Work

Introduction

Having attended many activist meetings over many years, I am not put off by a half full meeting, nor a busy one. I know that sometimes an issue draws a crowd and sometimes it is only the stalwarts who can make it, and sometimes just keeping things going is a victory. However, every Asian Women at Work event I have attended, over six years of association with them, has been packed with people.

Asian Women at Work offered the opportunity to explore the intersection of a number of issues that inform this thesis. These included feminist economic activism, identity-focused activism, and non-capitalist activities. In this chapter I explore Asian Women at Work, a community organisation based in Western Sydney that works with women in paid work from Asian migrant communities. I firstly orient this discussion by taking a look at who makes up the organisation and what they do, and then provide some context regarding how they are run, and their place in the community. I look at their views and practices on economy – both what they understand economy to be and what their transformative and affirmative interventions are. I discuss representations of economy in the organisation’s written material and online presence, and in my interviews with staff and volunteers. I also discuss the identities they inhabit and build – both for the activists themselves and for the economy.

Recognising Asian women at work in Australia

Asian Women at Work are a community group, founded in Western Sydney in 1993. Two women founded the organisation. One, named Lyn, had migrated from China and was working in a factory in Sydney. Like many other migrant women she had experienced downward mobility from her previous working life and bad working conditions (see Alcorso 1991; Storer 1976) and wanted to make a difference with other women in the same situation. The second founder, a white woman named Marg who was and remains an active member of the Uniting Church, had spent time in South Korea working for social justice with women workers there. She wanted to continue doing so when she returned to Sydney. With higher
numbers of people migrating to Australia from Asia after the end of the White Australia policy and the Vietnam war (Alcorso 1991), more Asian women were working in low paid or precarious jobs like factories and clothing outwork. These two women saw an opportunity to work with this community and improve their work and living conditions together. They started by handing out flyers for English classes at a train station in Sydney’s Inner West. Later, in 2002, a new coordinator, Diana joined the organisation, and remains with AWatW today. Diana had migrated from the Philippines to Australia. These three women have worked to sustain the organisation for the last 23 years.

Asian Women at Work organises around the identity categories of ‘Asian’ ‘migrant’ ‘women’ and ‘worker’. The organisation today describes itself as “a network of Asian migrant women workers that empowers, resources and assists women to stand up, speak out and take collective action” (Asian Women at Work 2014). They “empower migrant women in low paid and precarious employment” in order that they can “advocate for their rights and develop strategies that improve women’s lives, end exploitation in the workplace and home, obtain secure employment and enable them to understand and contribute to Australian society” (Asian Women at Work 2014). The use of the term ‘empower’ and the identification of ‘worker’ and ‘woman’ is prominent on their website, as shown in Figure 6.1. Asian Women at Work focuses on improving women’s working lives in a variety of ways. Their work responds to both their own experiences of disadvantage and exploitation, and to research that has shown that these experiences are widespread (e.g. Alcorso 1991, Storer 1976). They describe their ultimate work as “building communities” and they aim to do so through developing the networks and capacities of their members and target communities. The majority of AWatW members are Chinese or Vietnamese, and they organise most but not all of their activities on the basis of language. In organising around these multiple identity categories, Asian Women at Work are engaging in a politics of recognition and redistribution that seeks to address the disadvantages their members face, and have these disadvantages addressed at a systemic level.
AWaW have a broad reach that allows them to engage many people in their communities, however, they remain focused on their target group. They have a membership base of 2000, but also assist many people who are not members. They include members’ families for some of their projects, which allows them to reach thousands more people. The organisation applies for and receives government grant funding, mostly from the Department of Immigration and Border Protection and the Department of Social Services, and employs three paid staff (around one and a half full time equivalent), including a co-ordinator, three community workers, and an accounts officer. The majority of their work, therefore, is volunteer-led and organised. In practice, AWaW run social, educational, and support groups, providing opportunities for women to connect with each other, learn and develop leadership skills. They do this through a branch structure based in five areas of Western Sydney, an inland group of suburbs with an historically and currently high migrant population and low socio-economic status: Auburn, Bankstown, Cabramatta, Hurstville and Blacktown. A Management Committee made up of volunteers oversees the organisation. This combination of staff and heavy volunteer involvement means they are able to effectively gather and represent their identity groups.

Recognising the unmet needs of their community and providing opportunities for leisure and learning is a key way AWaW operates. The social, educational and
support groups that AWatW run include English classes, occupational groups (for example several aged care worker groups, and a horticultural worker group), groups for young mothers, leisure groups such as dancing and tai chi, and skills based groups such as permaculture, cooking, computer literacy, and study or retraining groups such as a group studying for a TAFE certificate in aged care. These groups are often suggested and started by members. While one of AWatW’s three community workers will help set up the group, and attend initially or sometimes ongoing, often a volunteer teacher will run the group, sharing a skill such as permaculture, or a volunteer group leader will be responsible for making sure the group meets regularly. The community development aspect of their work congeals their various identities by building relationships to each other and to the organisation.

Addressing the information and language barrier is another aspect of Asian Women at Work’s activism. AWatW provide a phone service on particular nights for Chinese and Vietnamese callers to get information and advice, and sometime referrals to other organisations that can help them. Thus people can call and talk in their first language. The advice the community workers offer is frequently about difficult work situations: harassment or bullying, underpayment, redundancies or lay offs, workplace rights and entitlements, and migration or visa issues. Usually, the community workers will provide some advice themselves and invite the caller to join an AWatW group. They may also offer suggestions of where the caller could go for more specific advice or help, such as a trade union, government hotline, a local service such as a family service or support group, or a mainstream women’s group. Industries common amongst members include beauty (hairdressing, nail industry and massage); horticulture and farming such as mushroom and flower cultivation or chicken farming; factory work such as packing or industrial sewing; clothing outwork, including for both large clothing chains and small designers, usually done from home and paid per piece; aged and child care; and cleaning (including industrial or professional cleaning and private home cleaning). Recognising the language and information needs of their communities also validates the worth of migrants’ first language, partially destigmatising its use.
Diana’s story

Below I present a story from Diana, the Co-Ordinator at AWatW, which reflects her relationship with the organisation and also some of the economic tensions in their activism.

Originally from the Philippines, Diana now lives in Sydney and has worked with Asian Women at Work since the early 2000s, when it was started as an outreach program for migrant women workers. Diana has been an activist all her adult life, and met her husband when they were both student activists in Hong Kong. She says:

Activism has been - I’ve never really worked in, like, anything else except in the movement, in the activist movement. I never really had - never experienced work outside the community, yeah. So, I don't know how to work - yeah, like, if I work in McDonald’s, I wouldn't know. I never had that. Because even in the Philippines - and I guess again it’s very different how we do it there. Like, most children they won’t have jobs.

When Diana moved to Australia, she worked for AidWatch and then Asian Women at Work. She was excited for the opportunity to work with women:

For me, I just really - the name ”Asian Women at Work” is like, you know, ”Oh, my God. This is my opportunity to work with women”, and I was doing this when I was in Hong Kong and, you know, my history as a student activist, so this is really something.

Diana and her husband made a decision early in their marriage that he would take corporate work. Diana’s husband’s work largely financially supports their family, with two children, while she is paid for twenty hours a week at AWatW but works much more.

This family compromise, in which Diana works half of her time unpaid, is reflective of the challenges of organising in the face of economic pressure. One of the main tensions Diana describes in her experience of AWatW is that between the empowering, community-building aspect of volunteering, and the constant lack of, and search for, cash resources.

While searching for grant or other funding is not a part of the mission or primary work of AWatW, it is the largely invisible work of keeping the organisation going. Reaching the main goals is made more difficult by the practicalities of such an organisation:

Like one of the things that I really want to do is to continue developing the leadership aspect of the women -- but sometimes it’s very, you know - like, looking for funding and also the reality that a lot of them are working odd hours, and how do you bring these women together and –Yeah.
Despite Diana’s willingness to self-exploit for AWatW, and the large base of volunteer labour, the organisation still clearly struggles with insecure funding and a lack of income. The community of AWatW is connected and interdependent but also collectively lacking in cash.

Diana notes also that this activism makes her a ‘Jill of all trades’. This hands-on approach reflects the experience of many activists. It also reflects a lack of funding, as AWatW cannot afford to pay a specialised media officer, campaign co-ordinator, and so on. Diana says:

*There's no boundaries in how we do it in the office sometimes... they can call me any time; they can bother me any time.*

Another perspective on this might be that AWatW are able to source things differently in ways that make use of networks and which build/ sustain social relations not characterised by a typical capitalist enterprise e.g. making food or a banner together at a working bee.

*Well, I think we are trying to build a community of migrant women who in the end believe in themselves, like, you know, that they have the power to do something about their situation...*

### Researching with Asian Women at Work

I first learned about Asian Women at Work by attending a Unions’ NSW women’s conference in 2008. I met Diana there, and though I remember little else about the conference, I held onto the flyer she gave me for three years because I was so impressed by her description of AWatW. AWatW are connected to the trade union and labour movement in NSW. They have worked in coalition with unions in various campaigns, including the Textile Clothing and Footwear Union, to campaign for better conditions for outworkers. AWatW often refer members to their various unions, particularly United Voice, the union for hospitality, cleaning and childcare industries, where many AWatW members are employed. AWatW also work with the Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union (AMWU), the union for factory workers, which has put more resources into unionising workers from non-English speaking backgrounds in the last decade.

Sometimes being close to an organisation or person one has admired from afar can dull the shine. While I learned about the experiences of AWatW members and the struggles of keeping the organisation going in my time there, I have
remained convinced of the value of the work they do. When I began to volunteer for AWatW, I became aware of the sheer depth of knowledge and experience of the members. One of the women I spent time with and later interviewed was an award-winning journalist from China. I also realised the difficulty AWatW leaders face in keeping their organisation afloat. The paid workers’ large amount of unpaid labour might be difficult to replicate, I saw, if any of them retired. The funding they received from government, though so unstable and cyclical, was essential to their organisational model – indeed, the model was based on it. Underlying the vibrancy of AWatW was this seemingly intractable problem of funding.

Despite the challenges migrant women face in the labour market and in the community sector funding model, Asian Women at Work appeared to me to have a thriving organisation, poor in cash but rich in other resources, that addressed itself in original ways to the economic issues faced by their members and constituent community. Despite the vulnerability of the membership, they did not appear to me to be downtrodden or defensive. Challenges and shortcomings notwithstanding, their activities were popular, always well attended, and involved a range of creative approaches to problems.

**Representing economy, intervening in inequality**

Here I explore understandings of the nature of economies that were evident in Asian Women at Work’s practices, materials, and in my interviews with staff and members. As in the previous chapter, I undertake a discourse analysis and assess the transformative or affirmative implications of AWatW’s economic demands and solutions using the inspiration of Carol Bacchi’s (1999) ‘what’s the problem represented to be?’ approach. I analyse Asian Women at Work’s representations of economy through their lobbying document *Women Raising Our Voices* (2010), their website material, and brochures. I also discuss the economic subjectivities and identities.

**Women raising our voices**

Asian Women at Work “is working to empower Asian migrant women workers who experience significant injustice and exploitation in our Australian society” (2014). As described above, Asian Women at Work attempt to meet this goal in
multiple ways, from empowering via community education on English, technology and leisure, to workplace advocacy and lobbying. Implicit in AWatW material is a critique of the ways that migrant women are isolated in Australia’s society and economic practices. As they state in *Women Raising Our Voices*:

> many women, too many women, are in similar situations to ourselves. Like a lot of migrant and refugee women, we work in precarious jobs that are low paid, have poor working conditions, and are insecure and irregular (AWatW 2010).

This statement makes a critique of the characteristics of the work Asian women migrants do; the fact that they must do this kind of work; and the regulation of the work. The characteristics of the work include long working hours and casual or informal modes of employment, the low payment by employers and businesses, and also conditions such as bullying, and unsafe work practices and environments. Being forced to take this kind of work could mean Asian migrant women’s skills are not recognised or the supports they receive on arrival to Australia are inadequate. Lack of employer regulation and responsibility by government means these circumstances can continue. AWatW believe that use of state power to regulate employers is inadequate and needs to be increased, in a protective fashion.

Asian Women at Work also believe there should be more and better funding for community organisations to empower and support Asian migrant women. *Women Raising Our Voices* states:

> The Government should provide funding for community groups working with migrant and refugee women workers to provide more education about their existing rights and how to access them. This should include outreach to migrant workers (AWatW 2010: 3).

Campaigns for government funding of community organisations founded on identity categories such as gender or race could be thought of as affirmative in the sense that they reaffirm the gender or racial category and call for redistribution of state revenue to the group on this basis. In affirming the categories of women and race and worker as requiring redistribution, according to Fraser’s schema this reinforces their identity category as requiring constant end-state redistribution.

A key theme of AWatW material is isolation and exacerbation of cultural barriers due to the demands of working for others. These materials show that many Asian women migrants do not know about their rights at work in an Australian context
and thus are more vulnerable to being exploited and victimized in the workplace:

A lack of knowledge about our rights as workers, language and cultural barriers and bosses who do not follow the law, contribute to a situation where many migrant and refugee women are underpaid, injured at work, receive incorrect leave entitlements, are unfairly dismissed, are bullied and harassed, and suffer from bad health as a result of their work (AWatW 2010: 4, emphasis in original).

This cultural isolation is enforced by the lack of recognition of many overseas qualifications: “[e]ven though we are hard working and bring many skills, qualifications, and experience to the workplace, much of the time these are not recognised in Australia (AWatW 2010: 2).” Here the economy is represented as both subject to government control, and a site of racism. Asian Women at Work’s activities combatting social isolation are largely community development work; however, recognition of compatible overseas qualifications would be a transformative move, deconstructing the low standing given to qualifications from majority nations and transforming the earning capacity of those who hold them.

While many of AWatW’s representations of work and economy focus on the power of government, other activities they highlight indicate a view that it is possible to intervene in and change economic practices through organising and outreach. This indicates a belief in a leftist tradition of collective action and strength. Asian Women at Work make the point that working long hours in the businesses of others’ is one of the key reasons for the above described isolation: “[m]any migrant women workers do not have the opportunity to access migrant, government and community organisations and information.” Long working hours are also implicitly critiqued when AWatW note that “[f]or many of us, our life is a constant juggle between work and family responsibilities, especially when we are also raising children as a migrant or refugee working mother (AWatW 2010: 5). To address this problem, they have developed “[a]n information package (in community languages) outlining community services, women’s rights and other relevant information... for distribution in factories, restaurants and other workplaces.” AWatW also “identify workplaces with a high number of Asian migrant women workers, and negotiate to visit those factories for lunchtime information sessions” (AWatW brochure, my additions). While some of the work described above is government funded, and some of the hours of labour involved in the production of such material would thus be paid, materially the information package also represents many hours of volunteer labour, resources in kind,
translation services and information gathering through conversations. AWatW try to address issues at a local as well as systemic level by encouraging members to take “five days for work, one day for family, one day for themselves”. However, Katrina, the community worker who made this comment, notes she rarely has time to do this herself.

Despite their can-do attitude and initiatives described above, AWatW make the underlying assessment that these problems are due to Asian migrants’ lack of resources and unrecognized skills making them desperate for work and money. They make this point boldly in the statement below:

> We accept bad treatment because we don't have a choice. We take any job we can because the alternative – no job and no income – is not an option for us and for our families. If we speak out or complain we might lose our jobs because there are many others desperate for work too, so we think it is better to keep quiet. We feel like disposable workers (AWatW 2010: 2).

This desperation and experience of having no choice indicates an understanding of economy and work as an exploitative trap for these women. It is an experience of powerlessness that requires redress and potentially, a more powerful actor to step in who has the power they lack.

Given this need for redress, the demands and remedies that AWatW pose in relation to their problems are almost uniformly asking for government regulation of capital:

> There needs to be greater regulation of workplaces and stricter enforcement of the laws. Government bodies should be proactive in their investigations, rather than waiting for complaints to come in.

Demands for increased or improved regulation include:

- occupational health and safety (OH&S);
- sexual harassment and bullying;
- family friendly working conditions;
- paid maternity leave entitlements that could be built up over employment in multiple jobs, for those in precarious or temporary employment;
- improved government recognition of overseas skills and qualifications;
- better information provision by government in community languages;
- and improved government service provision catered to migrants seeking work (AWatW 2010: 7-9).

Better recognition of overseas qualifications is a transformative move in that it
changes the economy to be more inclusive; maternity leave affirms the feminine gender of primary caregivers.

In their documentation, throughout, AWatW use case studies to illustrate their positions. For example, in demonstrating the problem of workplace sexual harassment, they use the story of Florence:

Florence is an international student who is paid cash in hand to work in an accounting office. Her manager touches her inappropriately sometimes. Florence learnt to say “Don't touch me” but he threatened to report her to immigration for accepting cash in hand work and violating the rules of her visa. He also said that he would tell her parents back in China that Florence lived with her boyfriend. Florence's friend and co-worker Julie knows what is going on and feels sorry for Florence, but she is worried that she will be fired or reported if she supports her in her complaint (AWatW 2010: 7).

The above list and story illustrate AWatW’s view that government should impose strict regulation on employers, in order to protect against the exploitation of workers who have little choice about being employees as opposed to cooperators, business owners or self provisioners, the jobs they accept, and few pathways to employment in more highly valued roles with better conditions. Improved workplace health and safety, laws against sexual harassment, family friendly working conditions and community language provision on the basis that the state must communicate with all citizens and residents could all be considered transformative stategies that could potentially deconstruct gender categories or worker identities. On the other hand paid maternity leave (as opposed to parental leave), and service provision catered to migrants could be thought of as affirmative in the sense that they affirm those identities and potentially confirm them as separate and inadequate – in effect they are end-state solutions to a system that does not include racially and gender diverse lives.

**Funding community work**

Community work in Australia is typically funded by a grants based system from both the state and federal governments, and AWatW gets the vast majority of its funding from these sources. While many valuable programs and policies have funded community organisations in Australia since the 1970s, such as the Australian Assistance Plan delivered under the Whitlam Labor Government (see Whitlam 1985: 363-364), the constant fight for short-term grant funding is a
common struggle of the community sector in Australia. Diana states that a large portion of her time is spent chasing money for the organisation:

we are under-resourced and understaffed; so, you know, sometimes you want to do more but can’t, you know? So a lot of my time in the office is spent talking to the staff or making phone calls to whatever is needed to be responded to, and a lot of it is about thinking - half of the time I’m thinking where to get money, yeah...

Diana also describes the process of applying for grants whilst spreading the grant to accommodate the overall mission of the organisation:

So, that’s settlement grants program, to look into the settlement needs of newly-arrived Asian women in a way, but we don’t just do the newly-arrived bit, but we extend it to be able to do our work. So, what I do is I meet regularly with the community workers. We have, like, a work plan for a year and we have very specific things to do there, yeah. So, for example, one of the specific things that we need to do is to do casework, 150 of them per year.

Government grants are an alternative, non-capitalist market controlled by government decisions about tenders and subsequent allocation of funding. The grants also facilitate, albeit inadequately in Diana’s view, much of the unpaid community building activity of the organisation.

Another major point of unpaid labour and service provision is AWatW’s activity with government bodies to perform community education. AWatW’s capacity to draw a crowd means that government agencies want to work with them to undertake community outreach activities. In my time undertaking participant observation and volunteering with AWatW I attended two community education events, an information session with the Australian Tax Office, and an excursion jointly organised by AWatW with the Department of Fisheries (pictured below in Figure 6.2). The Department of Fisheries, faced with several deaths and injuries amongst immigrant communities due to rock fishing, worked with AWatW to take busloads of women and their families out to the Royal National Park for skill building on safe rock fishing and understanding conditions and tides. These activities are all part of the rich diversity of economic activity that AWatW engage in. However, the only formally accounted parts of these activities are the payment of wages to workers to facilitate and the small amounts of funding granted by government for the events.
Community economy, transforming economy

AWatW, as described above, are heavily engaged in alternative provisioning for their community, despite their political demands being targeted at government and employers. The organization is full of examples of exchange of goods and services outside a capitalist mode. They mobilise volunteer resources, services in kind, and self provisioning, all with ethical concerns that do not include profit making. Examples of these non-capitalist activities include English classes provided free to members, leisure provision, translation (informal and more formal), advice, referral, and more. The self-provisioning does not tend to be detailed in AWatW’s public material. These activities are seen by AWatW as ‘community development’ rather than economic development and are therefore not detailed in the same lobbying documents. While these activities are identity affirming, they also do not always or necessarily require government funding and so do not seek public affirmation in the same way the other remedies might.

Like many community organisations, AWatW thrive on unpaid activity, yet this activity is not regarded by the organisation as economic. As I discussed in the
introduction, volunteers facilitate and teach groups, grow food together, share food at events and run the organisation through branches and committees. At the time of my research, Diana, the AWatW Co-Ordinator, was attempting to set up volunteer-run English classes, in order to guard against the vagaries of funding cuts and grant cycles. The non-capitalist aspects of AWatW’s work, while being a large part of what they do, are not seen as economic activity. This also perhaps leads to these activities receiving less focus in their funding and lobbying with government.

**Vision: Diversity in the labour movement**

Broadly, the labour movement is defined as the political organisation of workers in trade unions, sometimes combined with their political arm, the Australian Labor Party (ALP), which was formed in 1901. Various trade unions in Australia have also previously been associated with the Communist Party of Australia and the Democratic Labor Party (which represented anti-communist Catholic unionists), and currently, the Greens. Historically the labour movement was broader than trade unions and the ALP, and also included friendly societies, consumer and workers’ cooperatives, unions of unemployed people and women, and workers’ education associations (Green and Cromwell 1984). Friendly societies provided income insurance and banking services in the period prior to the welfare state and modern corporate insurance models. Friendly societies still exist in Australia, in the form of mutual banks and credit unions, often associated with unions, such as the Teachers’ Credit Union and Teachers’ Health Insurance.

In practice, AWatW are one of just a few organisations still in existence in Sydney who push the borders of the union movement beyond trade unions and political parties. Other organisations include Apheda, the trade union international development organisation, and the Sydney Alliance, a community organising effort of churches, civil society and the union movement (see Tattersall 2010, 2015). Still more organisations that fit in this group have closed in the last ten to twenty years. These closures include Working Women’s Centres (similar to AWatW, with a legal arm, for all women), Fair Wear, a fair trade clothing project aimed at creating an ethical relationship between clothing outworkers and consumers, and a number of labour co-operatives. AWatW’s ongoing connection to the union movement in Sydney, as well as their focus on gender and practices of community
building, shows that the varied traditions of unionism, feminism and collective community organising are all being drawn on and reiterated, but that this is currently a relatively isolated position.

While part of the labour movement, AWatW distinguishes itself from a union, both in their published material and in the way their leaders’ discuss their work. Their website states: “While a common element is their working situations, we are not only responding to their [migrant women’s] workplace issues, as unions do, but to the full range of issues in their lives” (AWatW 2014). Diana, in an interview with me, stated:

I think someone had asked us before, "Are you going to transform yourself into a union?” We said "No"... We have a different role from the unions in the community, yeah. You know, look, sometimes I - I mean, the unions, when it comes to the economy, I think they really have more power than us, of course, yeah.

This comment indicates a view that AWatW are not large or powerful enough to influence the ‘real’ economy. Instead Diana views AWatW as in the ‘community’ which is local and specific, and which AWatW can locally, specifically impact.

**Practices of activism: clothing outworkers campaign and economic subjectivities**

The task of “empowering, resourcing and assisting” migrant workers, involves practices of activism affected by the views of economy discussed above. In order to explore their activist practices, I discuss their campaigning and actions to improve the conditions of clothing outwork, and show that in contrast to what we might expect, like the ASU, some of the activism actually affirms the identity of the economy as capitalist and the identity of the activists as workers in a capitalist system.

**Bringing out worker identities?**

AWatW’s outwork campaign, in coalition with the Textiles Clothing and Footwear Union (TCFU) and other migrant organisations, aimed to improve the regulation of outwork, which is sewing work that is usually paid by piece and performed at home. The issues that outworkers face include those outlined in Women Raising Our Voices (2010). However, the industry is quite fundamentally different to many others because the work is performed from home, and thus work health and safety issues, including isolation, can be exacerbated.
Nonetheless, AWatW and the TCFU still used collective organising models to pressure bosses to change conditions, despite the difficulties of organising these individual workplaces. This campaign eventually succeeded in the form of legislative change at both the NSW and Federal level. Despite takeover of industrial law by the Commonwealth during the Howard period, the outwork laws survived (Rawling 2007). The outworkers were working in irregular conditions, and were seeking some of the benefits that traditionally male dominated and unionised industries have gained, such as work health and safety laws, job security, and better pay rates. The outworker campaign for regulation in line with other workplaces, is a transformative campaign that deconstructs assumptions about the home as a feminized space of unpaid labour and about ‘workers’ as people who work outside the home.

The outwork campaign was a process of building outworkers’ identity as workers, as well as changing the law and improving the work. Diana spoke about the outwork campaign experience:

Like, the outworkers who have been together for a long time campaigning for those laws, yeah, and the last bit of that was when they went to the ACTU Congress where, you know, this standing ovation for them. It was like, my God, and just seeing Vietnamese and Chinese women clenched fist. They never do this in China or in Vietnam, but you see them there and, you know, that's empowerment as a group, and realising that they've achieved something, yeah.

Here Diana talks about the achievement of improved laws, and about the recognition of that victory by the (traditionally white and male dominated) Australian union movement. This campaign involved a process of the outworkers developing identification as workers through discourses of workers rights and the benefits of unionism. Diana is articulating this identity as liberating compared to what the women have previously experienced when she remembers the Vietnamese and Chinese women clenching their fists in protest. Yet as discussed in Chapters One and Five, the worker identity comes with vulnerabilities and wounds that also produce a defensive posture.

The worker identity does have liberatory potential. In the outworker’s campaign a lobbying approach was coupled with grassroots collective activities to improve conditions. As Diana tells it:

They told stories, we developed scripts, and it was aired on Vietnamese Radio, yeah. And they had very good empowering exercises. Like, they will - we had an
exercise about calling their subcontract or the bosses, telling them - there's this group of outworkers in a room and then they would make a phone call and they will all talk to the boss. That was really powerful... The outcome - the boss rang the - texted the union and asked, “What do we need to do to become a good boss?”

This strategy of collective action helped reduce the exploitation being experienced. The laws that the outworkers achieved provided better rates and industrial protections for outworkers, and have translated, through further campaigning by an AWatW project called Fair Wear, to better industry standards. Not only has the AWatW action provided an opportunity for the outworkers to gain better conditions but the boss in this story can become the 'good boss' through their campaign. Although the _ressentiment_ of the worker position is visible in the anecdote above, the collective sense of hope and possibility for better can also be seen.

Outworkers have been successful in their efforts to change outwork laws, but their struggle is ongoing. For example, with one Australian fashion chain, Fair Wear works to make sure its supply chain is ‘clean’ and the company advertises their fair treatment of workers on their tags. Diana explains:

> Fair Wear continues to be a relevant, relevant in terms of making sure that the laws are really implemented and, you know, that there continues to be a critical voice. In a sense there is a system in place at the moment to monitor the supply chains and, you know, the good boss and bad boss. Like Lime5, Lime for example. It's one of those companies that has signed, you know, the... And you see the tags and everything.

However, the complexity of supply chains means that:

> Lime assumes that its supply chain is clean... And they've been working with the union to make sure of that, but we are discovering amongst our outworkers that it's not clean now.

Exploitation and inequality _amongst_ the outworkers as well as for outworkers as a group continues. Despite successful campaigning - there is no final fix to this problem in the current system, other than an ongoing vigilance and thus an ongoing formation of worker identity and its affects.

Asian women workers’ vulnerability also has implications for their identity positions in relation to economy. In the intervening years since improvements in the legislation, sewing work has largely moved off shore. While governments and industry promised some money for retraining and continuous projects about

5 Brand name has been changed.
working conditions in the industry, this has not necessarily been followed through. Katrina, a community worker at AWatW, says:

And I - I just don't understand. The Government put bigger amount of the money to the industry. And before the industry take little bit of money into the Fair Wear. But now they stop give to the fund for the Fair Wear. So where the bigger money go? This is money especially for the - because the industry change, help the worker.

This position of needing government recompense to salve the wound of the vulnerable worker subjectivity in a particularly vulnerable feminised industry is an inequality that calls to be remedied. It is also a defensive position from which the economic and subject positions of the worker struggling to find work, and vulnerable to the economy, are sedimented. This position, while remediing an inequality, compounds the role of the worker, in a relationship of power imbalance with the employer, as needing protection of the state.

Some AWatW members echoed concerns about offshoring of jobs that reflected concerns with the power of employers and subsequent desire to limit migration. As Ahn says:

When I heard many job cut off in the past, so I will - I can say it, and I very concerned about, you know, the situation in Australia now... That's what I really don't know - I really don't know in Australia. We have not enough jobs for people. And so many people here they don't have work to do, but I don't know why... my brother - my brother he work. He is electrician, and he work - he job in next to - his factory make the air condition but he tell me many job go to China and India.

This concern about offshoring was also mentioned by three out of the four other interviewees from AWatW and reflected very real anxieties about reduced and unstable employment and income, exacerbated by inadequate and punitive social security payments and conditions and limited alternative sources of income and employment. This reiterates the identity of AWatW members as workers, employed and dependent on wages, and therefore, on the stability or otherwise of businesses or services employing waged labour.

However, even in the face of these defensive struggles, AWatW are proactive and resourceful. In response to the movement of clothing work offshore, they have assisted women to move into the growing industry of human services, through training and networking amongst members. They host an Aged Care Certificate group in collaboration with a partner TAFE, and also help women who have been made redundant to find work. For example, one member obtained work at a local
Chinese aged care facility, and this led to several more members gaining work there. Often if a community worker knows of a member seeking a job and hears of work available, they will put the members in touch.

While AWatW have little control over the process of offshoring in the clothing industry, they responded to this process in a multitude of ways. Diana states that they have less economic power than the trade union movement. At the same time she also lists innumerable ways in which the organisation draws on and builds the strengths of the community – by lobbying of governments, collective approaches to bosses, telling stories, assisting people to find other work via their member network, giving advice on entitlements, maintaining and growing the member groups, and identifying other growing sources of employment. These responses also show some aspects of AWatW’s interventions into the economy.

**Economic subject positions: worker, not boss**

Asian Women at Work considered starting a social enterprise or cooperative when battling the poor conditions and instability of clothing outwork. For a time, the women of AWatW wanted to establish a non-profit clothing factory with a child care centre built in, good wages and conditions, regular work and professional development. Diana commented:

> Then we, Fair Wear, Asian Women at Work, and there was another person - we tried we explored this not-for-profit factory... Our big plan was like... there will be this factory where there will be outworkers, and attached to it is a childcare centre so they can put their children there, and it will be minded, and then there will be a training room where they can you know, they can upgrade their skills, et cetera. So that was the big whole plan and they will really be the one to run it. You know, it's a coop, yeah... [w]e really did a feasibility study, and all the thing and the viability, and we were just about to go into business plan...

The excitement of the co-operator or enterpriser position is captured in the term ‘big plan’. However, it is also possible to read cynicism in that term. ‘Big plans’ are hard to achieve, perhaps unrealistic. Although the possibility of being co-operators was enticing, there were hesitations and problems.

Risks and roadblocks presented themselves in the cooperative feasibility study. There were regulatory issues and risks:

> [B]ut it was too much... outworkers had to be employed for 38 hours yeah, assured of 38 hours even if you a week, yeah. So you cannot just employ them, it has to be you know, they have to be assured of that... Then again, you know, you have to ask do the outworkers really want to work in a factory when they can get the right
wages just by working from home, and for many outworkers they really prefer to work from home.

This comment reflects the lack of economic infrastructure around co-operative and social enterprise models. It also shows how sedimented and likely to be reiterated (Swanson 2007) the idea that work cannot be conducted from home is, even for an organisation that deconstructed this very assumption in relation to the outwork campaign. Some of the conditions of traditional employment, based on an assumption that people are able to leave their home and caring responsibilities, do not work well for AWatW members. Their concerns such as children or travel mean this is not convenient for them. Neither the economic regulations nor the gendered assumption that work should be away from home is supporting a new economic subjectivity for these workers.

As Swanson suggests, economic norms – and thus subjecthood - are not easily changed. A lack of enterprising knowledge is part of this. Diana stated: “So it's a bit like, ‘Oh my God, we need those bosses to work with us so we don't have to worry.'” Here Diana reflects that management of an enterprise, and risk to capital when you have little, is really very hard, and to some extent, outside her organisation’s financial capacity and skill set. In order for AWatW activists to manage their own economic lives differently, they would need skills and subjectivities that are not easily found in the industrial models of work that working class people have relied on for their livelihoods, or the activisms that have accompanied these models.

Additionally, these concerns were increased by the lack of capital on the part of the organisation. Diana stated:

And then you have to have capital. Yeah, yeah, just for us to be able to see how it works for a year, with assurance that you can pay, like, eight outworkers that you take on to work there, yeah. So it's a big undertaking.

The risk in putting forward the capital that AWatW and any potential co-operators would have to take, when they have very limited capital to begin with, also represents substantive barriers to creating alternative economic and income forms.

Diana was also concerned about the way working for oneself might change the nature of a person’s relationship to AWatW: “it's just that Asian Women at Work is about working women who are working for others, yeah,” although “[t]here might not be an issue being a boss if you pay whoever is working under you, or for
you, properly.” Clearly, for the leader of AWatW, work in this context means working for someone else. Both the power differential between a worker and a business owner, the identity of the organisation as a workers’ organisation, and the ethics of making an income for oneself, appear to be at stake. This makes the premise of ethical self-employment, as envisioned in the idea of the non-profit factory or the catering co-operative, a challenging one.

These concerns have arisen again more recently as some older members of AWatW with hospitality skills have expressed interest in building a catering social enterprise. This time it is both aforementioned management skills and additional concerns about the interests and ethics of enterprisers versus employees that have come to the fore. Diana states:

in Asian Women at Work there are women who, shall we say, retired from work because they might have had injury or, really, they’re just tired, you know, from after work, after years and years of being outworkers or factory workers. And they are now in the stage where they are exploring working from home in a different way. Like, they want to set up their own small coop like to do catering, for example... So this idea is in the community, you know, to then they feel they have more control of their time, and it's something that they've chosen, that they feel like they will be happy to do, yeah. But then suddenly they think like for Sunday, for June 17 [the AWatW AGM], we were having it catered and we were going to use the caterer from our network, but she said, because it's over 100 people, we were ordering over 100, and she said, "Oh maybe it's better if you go to the restaurant because I don't have the insurance to make sure that, you know, I'm covered if suddenly someone gets sick"... so how do we make things happen for these kind of women who are ready to transition into another kind of work (my addition).

However, some of the community workers had a different perception to Diana. Katrina stated that the catering group were working with a business plan and that the feeling in the group was positive. Kim-Ly, another AWatW community worker, stated that she did not feel there was a conflict in AWatW members employing others: “If they hired someone work for them, they follow the right. They the one exploited already. I don't think they do again with other woman.” While the rejection of social enterprise or co-operator identities might confirm the identity of the economy as capitalist, some openness to these non-capitalist identities remains amongst the group.

**Affirming and transforming work and gender**

The conflicted position of Asian Women at Work regarding the worker versus co-operator identity is reflective of their positions in the areas of economy, gender
and race. They straddle both affirmative and transformative activisms in all these areas, reflecting the difficult injustices they contend with. In Figure 6.2 I show the affirmative and transformative aspects of their work on economic, gender and racial inequality. AWatW affirm the position of waged labour as paramount, despite their significant unpaid organising, volunteering and skill-sharing. Waged labour is essential to their members. However, they have also transformed the boundaries of work by campaigning to get home sewing outworkers the same conditions as traditional workers. AWatW affirm gender identity by calling for state funding for their identity based organisation; yet through their campaigning they also transform the identity of the labour movement from white and male to inclusive of Asian women.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A politics of (re)distribution to address economic inequality</th>
<th>Affirmation</th>
<th>Transformation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affirming the importance of formal/wage labour</td>
<td>Transforming the private/public boundaries of work through outwork campaign</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Potentially transforming or queering the identity of enterprise as capitalist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A politics of recognition to address gender inequality</th>
<th>Affirmation</th>
<th>Transformation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affirming race and gender identities through state funding for identity-specific organisations</td>
<td>Transforming the race and gender identities of labour activism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirming gender through calls for maternity leave</td>
<td>Transforming racial inequality through recognition of overseas qualifications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirming gender through view that co-operative must be outside the home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6.3: Affirmation and transformation in AWatW, with deconstruction of economy, source: modified from Fraser 1997: 27

AWatW, with their large network of volunteers and community leaders and insistence that economy should include and protect vulnerable workers, are also focused on their community surviving well. As Diana says, they are aware of themselves as having a different role to a union in their community; in part because their goals are much broader, including helping their members include leisure and family time in their lives. Their interest in co-operative models also seems to stem from a sense of the importance of balancing the need to make money, and have some collective control over their working lives.
Conclusion

Asian Women at Work face a multitude of intersecting issues of inequality, which they do far more to address than might be assumed if looking only at their government funded capacity or accounting figures. In this chapter I have explored the representations of economy amongst workers and members of Asian Women at Work, both in terms of the way they see themselves as positioned in economy, and the way they see ‘the economy’ overall. I have shown that AWatW build an identity as workers amongst their members, in a left collectivist tradition. This economic subject or identity position has vulnerabilities, and AWatW have successfully campaigned to address many of these, for example through regulating piece or outwork done in the home. As I have discussed earlier in this thesis, this worker identity comes with certain injured positioning that leads to an often-defensive posture. Nonetheless this identity has to some extent been a source of value and community for Asian Women at Work’s members.

At the same time, I have looked at the transformative and affirmative aspects of Asian Women at Work’s political economic strategies and positions and found that some, such as outworker campaigns, confirm the worker identity of the activists and the capitalist identity of the economy. Many strategies AWatW pursue involve the state acting to protect workers and resource them. Some of these are affirmative, such as lobbying for funding for migrant groups, confirming an identity of migrants as needy or wanting. However, other strategies such as changing outworker laws that transform the definition of work by validating work from the home, transform the economy. I have also begun to show that AWatW enact alternative economies but may not see them this way; this will be further explored in Chapter Eight.
Chapter Seven | Enterprising women? Feminist economic activism by Fitted for Work

Introduction

Fitted for Work is my final case study in this thesis. Stepping outside the traditions of left collectivism, we travel to a social enterprise and not-for-profit based in Melbourne and also in Parramatta in Sydney’s West. Fitted for Work shares a focus on the unequal spoils of paid work with both Asian Women at Work and the Australian Services Union. Yet their perspective on these issues is decidedly different. Founded squarely in the not-for-profit space, their vision is financial independence for women and their mission is to help women experiencing disadvantage to get work and keep it (Fitted for Work 2015). Fitted for Work do not share the rights or collectivist focus of the other two case studies in this thesis. However, they do have a focus on the inequalities experienced by women in employment and the financial and personal struggles they face. Organisationally, they are themselves focused on financial independence, partially to be achieved through their social enterprise, retailer Dear Gladys.

In this chapter I again take the reader through an exploration of who is part of Fitted for Work, what they do, and the story of an individual participant from the organisation. I provide some context and detail regarding how they are run, their place in community, what their activities and practises look like and what my research with them entailed. I then analyse to what extent they affirm or transform economy. I discuss their representations and understandings of economy, and how their clients and they themselves are positioned economically, both through analysis of their promotional material and online presence, and in my interviews with staff and volunteers.

Given my interest in organisations in Sydney focused on inequality in gender and work, I decided to look at an organisation from the emerging field of social enterprise. Fitted for Work fits into a social enterprise category where all the profits are reappropriated by the organisation to its chosen programs and goals. I reasoned that Fitted for Work would add diversity to my research material, both interview and observation, due to their difference to models typically or traditionally used in trade union or community organisations in Australia, and that this would possibly bring to light different strategies for activist at the
intersection of gender and economic inequality. While the Australian Services Union funds itself through membership dues and the community organisation case study, Asian Women at Work, applies for grant funding from government, Fitted for Work has taken the route of attempting to source a profitable market and exploit it, not for profit, but for their mission.

**Researching with Fitted for Work**

I volunteered with Fitted for Work for over a year in their Sydney office. For the thirteen months, I helped once a week with the sorting and display of clothes, and completed a volunteer engagement project for the organisation, surveying the volunteers to find out about their experiences. I entered the organisation with some reservations about the effectiveness and the politics of the mission and the social enterprise model, born of my inability to divorce academic curiosity from my personal political concerns and convictions. I came to the case study with assumptions about both the limited nature of the mission of Fitted for Work, and its engagement with Work for the Dole, a process I saw as punitive and exploitative. I was concerned that getting women into formal work as an end goal, without addressing the injustices that tend to surround paid work such as low pay, the gender pay gap, casualization, poor conditions and low rates of unionisation, would be ineffective. However, given my interest in the alternative economic practices of Fitted for Work, I followed an instinct that interrogating my own assumptions regarding their mission and practice might prove intellectually and politically fruitful. Researching with Fitted for Work also gave me an opportunity to diversify my own practice as an observer. The challenge of going somewhere unfamiliar gave me a chance to look at my own practices and familiarities.

Fitted for Work’s Sydney office is located in a laneway behind a restaurant, a ten-minute walk from Parramatta station, away from the CBD, and close to the Parramatta River. The building is office-like, the walls painted a bluish-grey, with a reception area, but the back two rooms have been turned into a clothing boutique and a store and sorting-room for clothes. The women who came in were sometimes alone, sometimes with a Job Seeker Agency (JSA) officer or friend, occasionally with a child. Almost all seemed slightly shy and perhaps embarrassed, at least at first. Sometimes there were issues of sartorial expectations from JSAs that clashed with a client’s preference. On one occasion I was told to
dress a Muslim client in pants because her long skirt and head scarf, which looked professional and conservative to me, was apparently coming across as unprofessional to employers.

Though it was not my role to give clothing advice to clients, I occasionally filled in if no one else was able to do so. I love clothes, and aesthetics, and I often help my friends shop for clothing, so this was not a difficult task for me. What I found was that there was something intimate about the process of dressing another person. If there were no suitable clothes or shoes, which happened rarely, the disappointment was often palpable. Sending a woman into a dressing room with some clothing options, and asking her to come out to look in the mirror, turn around, and making more suggestions if an item did not fit or look quite ‘right’, meant I observed the women in an oddly vulnerable position; and, perhaps over-empathising, I sometimes felt vulnerable too. If a rapport was struck the process could be fun and lively; other times it was awkward or frustrating. This bore out Williams’ observation that volunteering fieldwork over a long period can be many conflicting things, because it is “everyday” (2013: 93).

Over the course of the year as my understanding of the organisation deepened; some concerns were allayed and other new ones arose. My trepidations were confirmed by meeting with Work for the Dole participants. I remained troubled that the Work for the Dole program involved forced, underpaid labour. Yet I was deeply impressed by both the depth of care with which the clients of Fitted for Work were treated by staff, volunteers and Work for the Dole participants, and the amount of informal livelihood building Fitted for Work facilitated. Later in this chapter I discuss some of the experiences of Work for the Dole participants and Fitted for Work employees’ motivations for creating a social enterprise, and motivations for running a business for a funding stream.

**Fitted for who, fitted for what?**

Fitted for Work (FFW) are a social enterprise with five branches in Melbourne, and one branch in Sydney. The management of the organisation is based in Melbourne. They aim to deliver work appropriate clothing to women seeking work, and they do this by gathering second hand clothes from women in business, and passing them on to job seeking women via a 'boutique', in which volunteers provide clothes, dressing advice, job-hunting tips and interview practice. The
‘women seeking work’ are a diverse group; all referred by JSAs via Centrelink. They may be “older women needing to return to the workforce after the death of a partner or divorce, women dealing with domestic violence, addictions, mental and physical health problems and women exiting prison... refugees or migrants and a significant number were young early school leavers and single mothers” (Fitted for Work 2015).

Fitted for Work is funded by trusts, donations, and their retail arm, Dear Gladys, with a very small portion of their funding coming from government. While the process of gathering clothes from one group and delivering them to another may sound simple and linear, in reality the organisation undertakes a mix of complex processes that overlap. These processes involve volunteers, corporate donors, paid staff, a small amount of government funding, a revenue-raising retail arm, several office locations, and relationships with government JSAs and other non-government organisations. Fitted for Work’s is modelled on a social enterprise in New York City called Bottomless Closet.

**AFFIRMING THE WELFARE STATE?**

Two Australian businesswomen from Melbourne founded Fitted for Work in 2005. They had just spent time in New York and saw a social enterprise called Bottomless Closet in action. Bottomless Closet “offers an innovative approach to workforce preparation for disadvantaged New York City women transitioning from unemployment and public assistance to work” (Bottomless Closet 2015). It was founded in 1996 by a group of women who read an article about the barriers facing women trying to break into the workforce, including lack of “appropriate interview clothing” (Bottomless Closet 2015). The founders were also responding to the *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act 1996*, which limited the amount of time people could access welfare payments (Bottomless Closet 2015; US Department of Health and Human Services 2014). The Australian women returned to Melbourne with the idea of setting up a similar organisation that would respond to the sartorial needs of women seeking work. The Bottomless Closet strategy does not aim to transform the economy, and in some ways, by working with what is, it affirms the welfare state. It also affirms gender binaries by confirming that paid work – labour typically performed outside the feminised
domain of home – is something women need special help attaining, whilst aiming to alter this feminised subject position of struggling to find work.

Some of Fitted for Work’s activities could be considered neutral regarding the welfare state. The social enterprise facilitates clothing drives amongst women already in the workforce, usually in larger companies, to pass on to women in need of interview wear. FFW have clothing, shoe and accessory donation drives in companies such as Macquarie Bank, NAB, and various other large corporate workplaces, as well as allowing people to drop items off to their offices in Parramatta in Sydney’s west or the CBD in Melbourne. They also solicit donations of unworn work wear from uniform and clothing companies to pass on to women seeking work, often in the form of bulk excess clothing stock. The clothing they seek and accept is clean, interview appropriate and in a range of styles suitable for various industries. For example, someone looking for a job in child care could need good quality jeans, whereas for a job in reception or administration, black or grey pants or business skirts would be preferred, and the organisation seeks and supplies all of these. In addition to clothes, FFW also seek donations of unopened stockings, toiletries and make up, accessories like scarves, handbags, belts, and jewellery. They fit their clients with everything they need for an interview, and their policy is to send a woman away from an outfitting appointment with two whole outfits. If she gets a job, she can come back and get another outfit as well. While collecting clothing and toiletries from some women and giving it to others might not be considered affirming of the welfare system, it does on initial examination seem to affirm the identity of unemployed women as needy.

Fitted for Work also recruits volunteers to provide their outfitting services to unemployed women, and they also use ‘Work for the Dole’ participants. The founders in Melbourne initially drew on their networks to recruit retired or semi-retired women to volunteer to provide advice to the often-younger job seekers. Volunteers are coached in colour matching, styling, hair and make up, and they use these skills to provide clients with a fitting in a quiet, friendly, clothing boutique style environment, where they have a large amount of clothes and shoes to choose from, private dressing rooms, large mirrors and lots of encouragement. In Sydney, the model of recruiting older women with work experience proved more difficult. When I was volunteering with the organisation in 2011 and 2012 I saw that there were a mix of older and younger volunteers. Staff members
mentioned to me in passing that the younger women were ‘Work for the Dole’ participants, though this was not mentioned to me formally when I approached the organisation about researching their work. I discuss the Work for the Dole participants’ experiences later in this chapter. FFW’s practice of accepting ‘Work for the Dole’ labour certainly seems to affirm the welfare state’s practice of requiring social security beneficiaries to work at below minimum wage rates.

People receiving unemployment benefits in Australia are subject to the Work for the Dole program, and it is compulsory for those who have been registered with a JSA and receive benefits for six months or more. The Australian Department of Employment, which governs welfare payments in Australia, states that “Work for the Dole places job seekers in activities where they can gain skills and experience that give back to the community and can help them find a job” (2016). Fitted for Work, as a not-for-profit, was able to register as a host organisation and gain more ‘volunteers’ in this way. However, although women doing Work for the Dole were still described by the staff as volunteers, they were not there on a voluntary basis.

Fitted for Work also recruits its clients through Centrelink and JSAs. The job-seeking women are referred to Fitted for Work through their JSAs, and most of them are formally unemployed, that is, receiving an unemployment benefit. People in Australia receiving government payments are subject to a variety of rules and conditions, including that they will apply for a certain number of jobs per fortnight and engage with a JSA, where their caseworker can in turn refer them to a number of support services. Fitted for Work is one of these support services, and this is the basic process through which it recruits women to use the outfitting service. Again this shows a rather hand-in-glove approach to the welfare system in Australia, a system that affirms the identity of unemployed people as wanting and deviant.

Fitted for Work has also developed a range of other services to deliver to women who are seeking work. They run a Transition to Work (TTW) program and a Staying Employed program, a partnership with Yarra Trams to recruit women to be tram drivers in Melbourne, and an advocacy project. The TTW program was being piloted in Sydney at the time I was volunteering there, and had been in place for some time in Melbourne. It consisted of job skills training and mentoring with a partner who is already successful in the workforce over a few months.
Similarly, the Staying Employed program provides mentorship, but this takes place over the first year of employment for women who have recently found work. Women in this program must also have been referred from a welfare program. Mentors from Fitted for Work’s business network are trained to support the newly employed women, and mentees and mentors then meet once a month. This program also has an outfitting component and online resources for the participants.

As I was finishing my time at Fitted for Work, the organisation was beginning an advocacy program as a future direction for the organisation. The CEO stated that there were problems and barriers women were facing that could not be solved on an individual level. While it was not clear at the time what political direction the advocacy would go in, Fitted for Work has since produced three research papers. Two papers were produced in partnership with the University of Melbourne on connecting migrant and refugee women with work (Fitted for Work 2012 a and b), and another, produced solely by Fitted for Work, provided a “snapshot of 2000 women” in “Australia’s employment landscape” (Fitted for Work 2012). This program has the potential to advocate for many different outcomes, however, the focus of the organisation suggests it will continue to push for affirmative welfare reform.

**Fitted for enterprise: Cara’s story**

FFW also runs a retail store, the ‘enterprise’ part of their social enterprise. The following is the story of Cara, Retail Manager for Dear Gladys.

Cara is not the typical social justice activist. She was, as she puts it:

*a total capitalist, loved to make money, a great saleswoman.*

She is the retail manager of Dear Gladys, the social enterprise arm of Fitted for Work. Fitted for Work and Dear Gladys share a bank account; Gladys is part of FFW, designed and managed to fund the activities of that enterprise. Cara was seconded from the Brotherhood of St Lawrence, where she was running the wholesale purchasing for their Hunter Gatherer vintage stores, to set up Dear Gladys for FFW. She is essential to the store and oversaw it from inception. She makes, selects and buys the clothing and accessories sold by the store, often making decisions that will affect the future of the store and the image it projects.
Cara tells me she comes from an affluent background in NZ, with lots of opportunity and business acumen. However, at some point she started to change her view that capitalism was the only way:

*then I guess once you start getting involved and hearing people’s stories, you can’t not put yourself in their shoes and as soon as you do that, it just changes your whole view.*

For Cara, it seems possible that the two capitalist and non-capitalist practices should exist at once. She does not express disapproval, exactly, of the processes she was previously involved in, but rather a newfound awareness that she cannot switch off. She has clearly benefited from capitalist systems and processes, and is quite conscious of this. However, she has concerns about the outcomes of these processes, both environmental and human:

*Mm-hm. I went to Dubai last year, last year or the year before with one of the companies that I was working for and after seeing... I would really like to see Gladys’s community take a bigger focus on recycling fashion and why not to buy things mass-produced in China from women who aren’t getting paid very much.*

Dear Gladys mirrors this tension in Cara. The Gladys store is in a gentrifying area of Melbourne, Caulfield, on a tramline with trendy coffee shops around. The store is a mid to high-end vintage store. Inside are racks of clothes, and display tables. The clothes are vintage, and include high quality wool and fur coats, and 1950s – 1970s dresses and skirts. The display tables have beautiful vintage hats, gloves, and bags. They also sell scarves and jewellery. The online store reflects this aesthetic, but also with newer stock mixed in from local designers. Cara explains:

*Well, part of the community building for Gladys is that we use local women, businesswomen and artists that produce products for us, so... we obviously buy their products, so that supports them that way and then obviously we get their brand out there and we talk about them so that builds their business in that sense.*

This local approach has also been reflected in craft workshops run in the store:

*For a while there we were running little sewing workshops and things like that. So, we had people go on and do that. And I had another lady who was like, “So, I’ve been making things after the class and selling them at the markets.”*

To the extent that volunteer work is solicited, Cara is conscious of it not being merely a source of cheap labour. She describes this in other social enterprises she has worked for:

*Come volunteer for us and unpack a box. You’re not really getting much out of it and we’re just using you as cheap labour.*
Despite this local trading emphasis and the social focus of Dear Gladys, people could easily come into the store and never realise they were entering a social enterprise that funds a women’s support service. It looks like one of the many upmarket vintage stores on Brunswick Street, a more popular area of inner Melbourne. Yet sometimes, says Cara, conversations take place with customers that open up ethical concerns regarding women who find themselves unemployed:

_Every day someone comes in and goes, “Oh, I've been shopping with you for ages. I never realised what you did and now I'm so excited about it.” And that's great._

Cara has also reflected on the difficulties the unemployed women who are in Transition to Work training face. She believes the Transition to Work participants found the environment of Dear Gladys intimidating for reasons of cultural capital:

_The issue that we have with front of house is that we have had some Transition to Work women go through that and the issue has been that it is an intimidating environment._

She explains that the less threatening environment of online retailing, which involves less social pressure, ameliorates this cultural barrier:

_Now that we have the online store, it's more of an opportunity... We're hoping at the moment we're about to set up an eBay store for Fitted For Work as well as the ecommerce store for Gladys and we're going to hopefully bring some of those women through and teach them about setting up their own eBay businesses and their own online businesses._

For Cara, Dear Gladys and FFW’s activities are not about economy, but about community:

_For me it's the confidence building and it's the opportunity and it's like we talked about having a good start in life with family. It's about having that support network and somebody to tell you that it's going to be okay. And so I guess, yeah, it's just... It's building a community and building a support network and letting people know that there's help and that there's options._

**What’s the economic problem represented to be?**

In this section I explore Fitted for Work’s understandings of economy, drawing on interview material from Cara and others, as well as their website, and annual reports. Cara’s story above foreshadows the tension between seeking to help unemployed women, and dealing with a punitive welfare state. As in the previous two chapters, I use a discourse analysis approach using Carol Bacchi’s (1999) ‘what’s the problem represented to be?’ technique. I also explore to what extent
Fitted for Work’s practices could be considered deconstructive and transformative, or affirmative.

Fitted for Work’s documentation, including annual reviews, website and brochures, focuses largely on numbers. This includes numbers of women dressed, numbers and monetary value of volunteer hours and clothing donations, numbers of referrals from Job Seeker Agencies, and value of in-kind and pro-bono work or services provided to Fitted for Work. The numbers presented reflect their view and practice of themselves as an enterprise; they are an organisation focused on the delivery of certain measurable services and to deliver this they must bring in money and in-kind resources. While they are not working toward profit, they are focused on the monetary value of their work.

They articulate this focus on monetary value by quantifying the outcomes that it enables: “[d]uring the year, support from trusts, foundations and the federal government allowed us to appoint our first CEO... as well as a small number of other staff.” Similarly they state:

11,000 volunteer hours valued at $25 per hour equals a contribution of $275,000 back to the community...

$180,000 worth of clothing donated to Fitted for Work Melbourne... (Fitted for Work 2008-09 Annual Review).

And in a later Annual Review:

$35,000 worth of donated goods to Fitted for Work Mornington Peninsula...

More than $140,500 worth of pro bono and in-kind services were provided to Fitted for Work in 2009-10 (2009-2010 Annual review).

In quantifying the in-kind work and the volunteer hours, FFW do what some feminist economists, such as Waring (1999), have attempted to encourage, and count feminised labour.

Fitted for Work also gave numbers to show the value and services they provide to women, for example:

180 agencies referred clients to Fitted for Work
Over 2,230 clients dressed and prepared for work nationally
45% increase in clients supported at Fitted for Work Melbourne compared to 2007-2008
250 volunteers supported Fitted for Work’s programs
4 visits to women’s prisons to prepare over 140 women to reengage with the community...

95% of the 48 referral agencies surveyed stated that Fitted for Work had a positive impact on their clients’ chances of landing a job

95% of the 48 referral agencies surveyed stated that the Fitted for Work boutique service added ‘some’ to a ‘significant’ impact on their clients and their job application process (2008-09 Annual Review).

Thus we see that Fitted for Work are not only demonstrating the value of the cashless resources they mobilise, they also attempt to demonstrate, by using consistent evaluation and metrics, the outcomes they achieve. In counting what are usually uncounted metrics, FFW represent these activities as part of their economic activity, and represent economy as broader than what is counted in common national accounting measures such as GDP.

FFW see paid employment as an unqualified good in the lives of women, a view articulated in a paper entitled ‘Snapshot of 2000 Women’ (2012). Employment is considered both the norm and the positive, whereas unemployment, underemployment, underutilisation and not being in the labour force are non-normative and negative. The unemployment and disadvantage experienced by women is presented with statistics to establish the problem. The problem they establish of unemployment and underemployment assumes that employment as a mode of livelihood is independent and welfare equates to dependence, and that the solution is women applying for and consequently gaining employment, particularly through the use of Fitted for Work services. Their presentation of women as a discrete group and of welfare as dependence and employment as independence affirms both the gender binary and the capitalist identity of economy; it also individualises the problem of unemployment.

However, unemployment in Australia has been between four and twelve per cent for almost four decades, and underemployment continues a steady trend upward (Mitchell 2016). It has been some time since an Australian government committed to full employment, which indicates that employment for all job-seeking women is unlikely under current government policy. While this is not a zero-sum game and more women employed would theoretically also lead to growth in GDP, and more availability of jobs, some economists argue that full employment is not possible without greater government spending and intervention (Mitchell 2016).
Additionally, the belief that employment by others is the solution to disadvantage might bear further questioning.

**Fitted for Work: Transforming enterprise**

Fitted for Work’s leaders define the organisation as a social enterprise, and as it is an organisation using this model to attempt to decrease gender inequality, it was of special interest to me. However, the term social enterprise is less prescriptive than it may initially seem, and can refer to many models. According to EMES, the international research network on “Social Enterprise concepts: social enterprise, social entrepreneurship, social economy, solidarity economy and social innovation”, the concept has been popularised since the 1990s (EMES 2015, emphasis in original). Social enterprise is a term that encompasses numerous economic forms, some of which have been in existence long before this recent period.

A popular definition of social enterprise comes from the United Kingdom’s (UK) Department of Trade and Investment (DTI), describing the term as:

> a business with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community, rather than being driven by the need to maximise profit for shareholders and owners (DTI 2002, p. 7).

In describing the varied purposes of social enterprises, Defourny and Nyssens (2010:2) state:

> the objective of work integration of vulnerable groups attracts much attention and policy measures but social enterprises may also be set up to foster for example local development, environmental activities, provision of social and personal services, ethical finance, fair trade, cultural creation, and international development.

The first definition clearly indicates that social objectives are the core of what defines a social enterprise. However, it does not say anything about social enterprise, or “other SE concepts” (EMES 2015), as places for economic citizenship or democracy, or redress of economic exclusion. EMES itself offers a third definition, stating that a social enterprise assumes the risk of business, but is subject to social and business criteria, such that stakeholders, even those without financial equity in the business, are able to participate in decisions (Defourny 2001 cited in Defourny and Nyssens 2010: 9-10). Both definitions, that of the UK DTI
and EMES network, show the contrasting potential criteria and standards by which a social enterprise might be measured.

Fitted for Work defines itself as a social enterprise, with then CEO Jennifer stating: “by definition we are one [a social enterprise], as in the whole organisation” (my addition). They fit into the first definition of social enterprise, in that there is a clear social objective where profits are reinvested into the mission or social programs of the organisation. However, governance of the organisation is undertaken by a board of five directors, chaired by prominent Victorian feminist Mary Crooks, plus three pro bono specialist advisors (Fitted for Work 2015). There are neither client nor volunteer representatives on the board. This management structure indicates an implicit focus on outcomes for rather than outcomes with unemployed women. Dey has argued that this type of non-participatory practice with ‘expert’ social entrepreneurs at the helm represents underprivileged people as passive and malleable (2006: 125). The language of Fitted for Work employees does not suggest such thinking, and the practices of the organisation are certainly focused on developing unemployed women’s competencies. However, the practices of not including those ‘practiced upon’ in decision making processes led me to question the exclusion of unemployed women from these valued skill sets of managing and decision making.

**TRANSFORMING ENTERPRISE INTO FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE?**

Then CEO of Fitted for Work, Jennifer, stated that: “if we’re talking about financial independence for women, the organisation itself wants financial independence.” The link between financial independence for clients and for the organisation as well, appeared to inform their outlook on funding and activities in my time there as a researcher and volunteer. There are numerous outcomes for Fitted for Work from the Dear Gladys business that Jennifer and other Fitted for Work participants described, including awareness raising and cultural shift, finance for the organisation, and business experience for the clients of Fitted for Work. In discussing these outcomes, interviewees indicated assumptions about the nature of the organisation, clients and goals. Here I look at these responses and the various economic positions they describe themselves and their clients as inhabiting. From relatively humble beginnings with fundraising in a local community, the organisation moved to open a retail clothing store in 2009.
Fitted for Work’s desire for financial independence has led them to generate their own income while growing delivery of their work, an approach that is outside the government-funded model of the community sector that is described in Chapters Five and Six. One of the key ways they do this is their retail project, Dear Gladys. Dear Gladys is the more ‘enterprising’ arm of their social enterprise, an online and bricks-and-mortar clothing store, from which Fitted for Work raises revenue. Initial start up capital was partially funded by a grant from Westpac Corporation. In 2011 Dear Gladys raised around 33 per cent of Fitted for Work’s revenue, and in 2012 this was a little less, about 25 per cent (Fitted for Work 2012 and 2013). According to Jennifer, CEO, this decline was commensurate with the broader retail downturn. This enterprising attitude to helping a vulnerable identity group (unemployed women) has the opposite effect to affirming the neediness of the group through welfare state redistribution. It is a move that transforms enterprise.

Freedom from government funding is a key reason for running the Dear Gladys store, according to interview participants from Fitted for Work. The concept of financial independence is used to mean independence from government funding. The CEO, Jennifer, states that government funding at the time of interview was “about two per cent”. Danika, who had taken leave without pay from her role at Macquarie Bank to act as a temporary fundraising and finance officer for Fitted for Work, discussed her concerns for the organisation if they were to take government funding: “seeing a grant application, thinking, "maybe we vaguely fall in that"; you get what I think people call ‘mission creep’. ” Further, she considers that running an enterprise to fund FFW helps with awareness raising:

Again, I think it’s just that opportunity to engage a broader audience. If you’re getting government funding, you’re not talking to anyone other than the kind of people that are already aware.

‘Mission creep’, or the idea that an organisation’s mission changes depending on the grants it can apply for, is something that also affects Asian Women at Work (AWatW), as discussed by Diana in the previous chapter. While AWatW are faithful to their mission of empowering migrant workers, Diana acknowledged this problem of changing their activities to suit the funding offered (for example, applying for funding focused on refugee settlement).

FFW did not have a strong sense that government should be funding more of their activities, unlike AWatW. As Danika says about the reasons for Dear Gladys:
So the idea that about 30 per cent of the funding - at least when I last looked - was coming from Dear Gladys. You know, the ability to make that higher, say 50 per cent, really leads a lot of independence.

The idea that the organisation should have control over the direction it takes its mission, and that to do this it must have an independent source of funding, is a key, if not the main, driver for their business enterprise. Their material also describes the initiation of the Dear Gladys social enterprise model that articulates this purpose as well:

During the year Fitted for Work finalised a social enterprise model. Called Dear Gladys, the retro vintage retail clothing outlet will provide clients with on the job training and provide Fitted for Work with a source of revenue from the clothes sold, revenue that will directly contribute to sustaining the organisation, as well as allowing it to offer better and increased services (Fitted for Work 2008-09 Annual Review).

The organisation is attempting to escape the grant cycle that plagues so many community organisations, including AWatW, and in so doing, they are challenging the presumed capitalist mode of enterprise.

Another outcome of FFW’s enterprise strategy is the oblique notion of awareness raising. Cara indicates that most of her customers are unaware of the issues facing unemployed women that Fitted for Work attempt to address:

we, or I, wanted, Gladys to be place where people would want to come and hang and talk to the staff and it was personal...

It's about building - hitting a different target audience and building a profile for the organisation really, like, just to a different group people that never, ever would have thought about it.

Yet Cara also indicates that sometimes disadvantage wears a different face than she expected: “[c]ertainly a lot these women are not what I would have thought necessarily thought of as being disadvantaged either, so.” The CEO, Jennifer, also comments on the importance of speaking to a wider audience: “it's about engagement with a broad number of stakeholders and Gladys attracts a particular demographic of stakeholder.” Indirectly, it is clear from Dear Gladys’ marketing that they hope awareness of the ‘feel good’ cause of Fitted for Work will keep customers coming back. They emblazon “shop guilt free and transform a woman’s life” on their retail website (see Figure 7.1). The phrase ‘guilt free’ indicates that money spent for a good cause does not require the so called retail guilt of frivolous spending. This is part of a wider discourse on ethical consumption, which has varied meanings (for an example see Barnett, Cloke Clarke and Malpass 2005; and
for a popular culture example see Morgan 2015). Funding the organisation through a social enterprise model is seen as fitting in with a movement on ethical consumption that raises awareness of issues through consumption, rather than through more traditional collective organising.

**Figure 7.1: Dear Gladys website screen shot, source: Dear Gladys**

The second image from Dear Gladys's website (Figure 7.2 below) communicates that they are a business with a cause, however customers of Dear Gladys are positioned as helpers, not beneficiaries. The marketing of the store takes place in a youthful way that taps into social media, fashion blogging, and a culture of supporting (and being seen to support) small independent designers. However, the message that customers can "shop guilt free" tells them that money spent with Dear Gladys is going somewhere good. “Transform a Woman’s Life,” shown in Figure 7.2, indicates that this is a business that will help women. Below the fold on the screen (not pictured), is the declaration that “this year with your help our free services will assist 4,000 women to get work. Thank you.” In this message, getting work is represented as possible with help, as an inherent good and something for shoppers to encourage. This reflects the earlier comment from Cara about disparity between the customers of the store and the clients of Fitted for Work. A sense of generosity and “doing good” is offered to the customer in exchange for their purchase, but they are not the needy or wounded party.
Fitted for Work’s positioning of their target group, women seeking work, as clients, creates a different dynamic to AWatW and the ASU, which are representative, to a large extent, of their communities. The primary identification that FFW seem to mobilise is ‘women’, and within the organisation there is a strong sense that they are motivated as women to help other women. While avoiding the wounded attachment to the worker identity, the emphasis on women in the disadvantaged or client position perhaps carries its own wounds, already in place but being reiterated by FFW. In Australia, overall women do less paid work than men; FFW quotes Prime Minister Julia Gillard’s Emily’s List oration as stating that Australia’s female workplace participation rate was at the time 60 per cent, one of the lowest in the OECD, and that this was a problem for both individual women and for Australia’s economic performance (Gillard cited in Fitted for Work 2015). Yet, as Brown argues, identities are often defined against what they do not have of white male privilege, in this case, women appear as needing special assistance with work, a traditionally male domain.

This leads to a discussion of the second way in which clients of FFW are positioned, as welfare recipient or beneficiary. This is an identity category loaded with negative assumptions, but in terms of wounding by liberal contradictions as proposed by Nietzsche and Brown, the problem is perhaps the lack of employment, and therefore livelihood and relative independence, in a society that promises equality. This source of wounding seems to powerfully explain FFW’s mantra of ‘financial independence’. For example Michelle, a Work for the Dole participant, states:

Figure 7.2: Dear Gladys website screen shot, source: Dear Gladys
And, like, when you're, like, on the dole, some people, like, put you down. They think, like, you're hopeless, you can't get a job. Yeah, my brothers, yeah. All of them. They're like, 'Oh, you're hopeless, we had a job at your age' blah, blah, blah.

FFW emphasises the benefits employment brings, such as regular income, life outside the home and social connections. While employment also causes restraints and wounds, these are hidden in FFW’s discourses, partly because the experience of their client group of unemployed women is mostly of the wounds of unemployment. For these women, who are not currently in paid employment, the disadvantages or restraints of work are less evident. FFW projects desire and hope in its aims for women receiving social security benefits to gain employment. At the same time, it is not critical of the employment landscape or the limitations of the employee position in the economy.

The final rationale for the retail store Dear Gladys was that it provided work experience and opportunities for unemployed women, clients of Fitted for Work, who are ‘placed’ in both the retail store and back of house duties, including stock management and online sales. This program is called Transition to Work (TTW) and FFW research participants discussed the connection between Dear Gladys and TTW in very different ways. While for Jennifer, CEO, it was simply a fact that part of Dear Gladys’ role was to provide work experience, for Cara, it was a more difficult purpose to fulfil because clients felt intimidated by the environment. She expands:

the feedback that we got from one young woman who worked there was she would have preferred to work... maybe have worked at the check-out at Target or somewhere like that.

Cara also describes that sometimes TTW participants would not turn up because they felt unhappy about the environment. While she is clearly sincere in wanting to help the women Fitted for Work services, she has experienced a cultural clash between the unemployed women and the target market of Dear Gladys. The women being guided into work were not necessarily being steered into trend-driven retail. Although clearly somewhat disillusioned that the TTW process had been difficult, Cara expressed both the hope and the plan that as the organisation learns online skills they may pass this on to clients of the TTW or other FFW program. eBay has a different market than the Dear Gladys online store, an aesthetic that is less specialised, as well as having different class markers, and Cara sees this as more useful to the TTW participants.
TRANSFORMING ENTERPRISE, AFFIRMING WELFARE AND GENDER BINARIES

In addition to the social enterprise arm of the organisation, Fitted for Work runs on a system of volunteers and unpaid labour to perform the task of outfitting and interview preparation. With this came particular representations of the economic position of volunteers and Work for the Dole participants, who were also referred to as volunteers. Danika explained this:

I’d say between the original model in Melbourne where, because the founders were able to encourage a lot of retired women to come and volunteer themselves, they’re in quite a different position from women who are themselves job seeking and so, yes, it’s very different. One of the things that came through, I remember, in one of the volunteers, though, to both, I guess is what I’m saying. I remember one volunteer and one client together speaking Arabic in Parramatta, and so that’s bonding in a different way and in a way that would not happen under the Melbourne model so much I wouldn’t envisage, so...

Danika clearly sees a benefit of having Work for the Dole volunteers due to their shared experience with Fitted for Work clients. However, she also mentions her view that the family-style environment initially created by the founders of the organisation, where retired women with work experience would help younger unemployed women, was of vital importance to the process of preparing the women for interviews.

This tension was clear for the two Work for the Dole participants I interviewed, who valued the organisation but, especially in one case, felt it held them back from employment. Michelle stated that:

They [her Centrelink case manager] just send you here, and they think this is helping. It’s sort of helping. I’m picking up skills, learning how to work in a work environment, but it’s still not really helping because, like, it would be better for us to go out there and look - explore and, like, give out resumes, but we’re mostly just sitting behind a computer, doing, like, emailing our resumes. It doesn’t really help (my addition).

And being here three days straight - I used to be four days straight, is not really helping because, like, it’s taking up my time when I could be out there looking.

In contrast, another, older Work for the Dole participant, Theresa, had a similar view to Danika that younger Work for the Dole volunteers as well as clients benefit:

And also I think it’s not only the client it is also [Work for the Dole] volunteers... but I find the young people come... and they think I can do [find work], because they also find out the client, the same thing too (my addition).
Michelle stated that she had no choice in where she did her Work for the Dole hours and she felt she was “rely[ing] on others.” She did not see herself as independent “because Centrelink came here... I would rather, like, go out and work and make my money - but it's just not happening right now.” While Fitted for Work are committed to their mission and thus need to source free labour, even when that proves difficult, it seems there are some potentially mixed consequences when they source large amounts of unpaid labour from women who are job seeking themselves. By utilising this forced labour, again we see they are affirming the welfare and Work for the Dole systems, as shown below in Figure 7.3.

Fitted for work also affirmed gender binaries. In discussing the ‘why’ of gender inequality in work life, the CEO of Fitted for Work gestured simply to the process of having children and periods out of work as the main driver:

And that's just a consequence of who they are, and biology, having babies and all the rest of it, which means that they experience that ability to get work and keep it differently to men.

Disadvantaged women to quite advantaged women will still experience things because of their gender and so people can actually kind of see that and then we’re able to talk to them about what they do around that.

Yet Jennifer is firm in her view despite biological and cultural restraints, her clients’ agency and potential for financial independence is high:

I don't think that there's anything inherent to women that means that they have less economic agency. I think that women absolutely do and you can see the growth in small businesses and the kind of move into alternative forms of income generation for women, So, I think my take-home message is actually women are very good at this and actually can work out ways to do it, but there are a whole lot of structural barriers that come to play in kind of gendered, you know, notions around gender that are unhelpful.

Recognising what Jennifer referred to as the “structural barriers” to women gaining and keeping work has led to the organisation developing an advocacy agenda. This is directed both at governments and at business, with a focus on what they argue are low employment participation rates for women, around 60 per cent in Australia (Fitted for Work 2015; World Bank 2013). This participation rate, however, appears to be relatively high compared to other developed economies (World Bank 2013). Jennifer also states a desire to improve practices of the corporate organisations Fitted for Work partner with: “recruitment strategies, retention for women, flexibility around hours and workplaces and things like that.” While affirming the gender binary in terms of biology, Jennifer does somewhat
challenge notions that women are less competent in the public realm of the workforce (also shown in figure 7.3 below).

Fitted for Work affirms the welfare state and worker identity, whilst transforming the enterprise into a non-capitalist mode. It also affirms the gender binary through presentation of women-specific solutions to unemployment. Fitted for Work’s affirmative and transformative strategies are outlined below in Figure 7.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A politics of (re)distribution to address economic inequality</th>
<th>Affirmation</th>
<th>Transformation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Affirming the importance of formal/wage labour</td>
<td>Transforming or queering the enterprise as non-capitalist through not-for-profit model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Affirming welfare state redistribution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A politics of recognition to address gender inequality</th>
<th>Affirmation</th>
<th>Transformation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Affirming gender identities through presentation of women-specific solutions to unemployment</td>
<td>Transforming notion that women are less competent in workplace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Affirming biological gender binary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 7.3: Affirmation and transformation in Fitted for Work, with deconstruction of economy, source: modified from Fraser 1997: 27*

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have given both a multi-layered description of Fitted for Work, and an analysis of the discourses regarding economy that permeate the organisational materials, practices and thinking of participants. The three key motivations for creating the Dear Gladys funding model are awareness raising regarding unemployment and disadvantage and the work of Fitted for Work; a funding stream; and a site through which to provide work experience for job seeking women. These motivations are underpinned by a desire to be financially independent of government, perhaps because of the political trend toward decreasing welfare payments and the insecure funding afforded to community services, as evidenced in the AWatW case.

FFW represents the economy as broader than financial exchange, as evidenced by their documentation of in-kind and donor resources along with financial incomings and outgoings. Despite this penchant for numbers, however, there are different views in the organisation as to whether its work counts as economic, again pointing toward a lack of people’s language of economy.
While the organisation affirms the welfare state and Work for the Dole program, it transforms the capitalocentric understanding of enterprise by funding its activities through Dear Gladys. This had difficulties and benefits for the Work for the Dole participants, who felt positively disposed toward FFW and the skills and experiences they gained there, but also felt this limited their capacity to seek work.
Chapter Eight | Feminist activism in the diverse economy

Introduction

In this final chapter, I situate the economic activism of the case studies within a diverse economies framework and discuss participants’ perceptions of economy. To reiterate, the diverse economies framework opens space to consider what is happening in our economies, not simply the formal economy of paid work, market transactions and financial market flows, but the complex and constantly unfolding network of formal exchanges and informal, unpaid work, gifted or in kind exchanges, and more. It is a way of thinking that situates the formal and informal, capitalist and non-capitalist, in relation to each other, without assuming an inevitable eclipse of the informal and non-capitalist practices. It is a deliberate strategy to firstly make non-capitalist practices visible, and then through a process of ethical negotiation, to amplify and expand non-capitalist practices that meet community needs.

Firstly, in this chapter I show that activism takes place in capitalist, alternative and informal areas of economy in all three case study organisations, all of which are focused in varying ways on paid work. A complex mish-mash of paid and unpaid labour, varied monetary and non-monetary transactions, and some enterprise activities are taking place. This is reflective of the landscape of economic diversity in wider contexts, however, in all cases shown here, the informal work is seen as deeply necessary. To show the varied webs of economic activism in each organisation, in each case I break their activities into a table of diverse economic practices and also note their transformative and affirmative actions. Even in the context of activism on paid work and the formal economy, economic activities are taking place that are informal. Deconstructing the economic activism in this way shows both areas of activity and gaps in feminist economic activism.

Secondly, I demonstrate that despite the breadth of economic activity and activism taking place, the language of economy that my participants used was narrow. Despite being activists or social entrepreneurs engaged in issues of economic equality, or a leftist tradition of work activism, an accessible, everyday language of economy and livelihoods was absent for my participants. This lack of economic vocabulary is no doubt in part due to the dominance of capitalist economic
narratives; however, it did not match with the diverse practices I experienced. Reconceptualising economic concerns as questions of surviving well allows me to show the activism of all cases and participants as economic activism. In all cases, the material needs of their communities as well as a sense of injustice or inequality were drivers of activism. Finally, I argue for a broader conception of economic transformation.

**Equal pay activism in the diverse economy**

The ASU had a strong vision for the SACS sector, which was encapsulated in their submissions and campaigning in the equal pay case. They envisioned a professionalised sector with well-paid workers and a stable workforce, delivering community services. I have mapped the economic activism in the SACS sector in the diverse economies diagram at Figure 8.1 below. The activism is divided into capitalist (top cells), alternative (middle cells), and non-market (bottom cells) activities in the areas of labour, transactions, and enterprise. I note which activities are transformative and which are affirmative with the T and A marker first used in Chapter Three, Figure 3.1.

Unsurprisingly, much of the ASU’s economic activism is in the column on labour in Figure 8.1. Even though the equal pay campaign was about the formal wage aspect of the sector (shown under ‘Wage’), a lot of labour in the sector still takes place as ‘Alternative paid’ or ‘Unpaid’. Much of the ASU’s activism, and non-labour related SACS economic activity is transactional. This is shown in the lower cells, i.e. non-market or alternative activity, such as competition for government grant funding (alternative market) and services provided for no payment to community members. Services may be universal, that is, available to everyone, such as in the case of Riverwood Community Centre, or specific, such as in the case of a women’s refuge. None of the ASU’s activity appeared to be enterprise related, as shown by the empty ‘Enterprise’ column.

The history of community work is one of unpaid labour, and the union movement has attempted to move paid workers away from the blurred line of work/volunteering to a place where community workers’ labour is valued monetarily, as shown in the first column of Figure 8.1 below. Some community work activities are now part of the formal economy, and many others remain in the informal economy, or below the waterline, to use the terminology of the
community economies diagram in Figure 2.3 and below in Figure 8.2. Formalising
the work through an award and then an equal pay case is a process of
transformation from unpaid labour to paid labour.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transactions</th>
<th>Labour</th>
<th>Enterprise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Market</td>
<td>Wage</td>
<td>Capitalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Union members are employees in SACS sector. They campaign for better wages and conditions on the basis of a feminised history of underpayment. Success in increasing wages due to equal pay win (A for gender, T for work, A for worker identity).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Market</td>
<td>Alternative Paid</td>
<td>Non-capitalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and community services are funded by Government grants (usually short term) in return for certain social outcomes. Union campaign means the grants will increase due to increased wages (T when services universal, or community governed). Community sector crowd funding and fundraisers, facilitating these services not the goal of campaign.</td>
<td>Some of this – travel vouchers, accommodation for volunteers etc. Not affected by campaign.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Market</td>
<td>Unpaid</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free services often given to community members based on criteria such as income. May increase with greater staff resources to facilitate (T when services universal, or community governed). Facilitation of volunteer or self-provisioning e.g. volunteer counseling, group therapy or support groups. Volume or quality of services may increase with greater staff resources to facilitate (T for work).</td>
<td>History of more unpaid labour in SACS sector, campaign leads to less of this. Governance - management committees and boards, not affected by campaign. Volunteering could increase with greater staff resources to facilitate (T for work).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 8.1 ASU equal pay campaign Transformative (T) and Affirmative (A) feminist economic activism in the diverse economy, source: modified from Gibson-Graham 1996: xiii*

Figure 8.2 below models the activities and labour in the SACS sector. Like the original community economies iceberg in Figure 2.3, but focused exclusively on work in the Social and Community Services sector, it represents the large amount of unpaid labour and the many activities facilitated by this unpaid labour, which, particularly in smaller organisations, often outstrips the amount of paid labour (ACOSS 2011: 39). At the top, above the waterline, sits the paid labour and activity
recognised in mainstream definitions of economy. Underneath the waterline sits the work and activity that this paid labour facilitates. Conversely, the unpaid labour has also facilitated the paid labour, for example in the case of Riverwood Community Centre, where volunteers eventually gained money to employ a staff member. The unpaid activity would not be considered in formal definitions of economy.

Figure 8.2 Iceberg diagram: paid and unpaid labour in the SACS sector, source: modified from Community Economies Collective 2001, originally drawn by Ken Byrne

The organisations in the community sector remain non-capitalist, despite the equal pay campaign further cementing community work into the waged, formal economy. This is why only waged labour is above the water line in Figure 8.2. The union has pursued the equal pay case path to attempt to value both the people who do community work, and the work itself, a feminised area of economy that
has historically been overlooked, or taken for granted. From the perspective of the ASU, this move from unpaid to paid labour increases the material living standards of members (predominantly women) who gain wage increases, better jobs and potentially more paid work. In demanding redistribution for vulnerable communities via government, community worker unionists were actioning non-capitalist forms of exchange and provisioning.

What the further formalisation of the sector, through the equal pay case, will mean for the informal economic activities in the sector is a question that arises from this discussion. The sector is relatively new, in part because feminists took steps to create previously unthought of services from the 1970s onwards such as refuges, and other social movements led to more services such as community legal services and disability advocacy. At the same time, religious charities and not-for-profits have also built a presence in the sector. While the sector has come from varied ‘Do-It-Yourself’ (DIY) traditions including religious charities and women’s refuges that were started by feminist volunteers, its formalisation represents a significant change.

I suggest that the equal pay campaign success does not have to mean an end to such economic DIY. Indeed the resources and stability of well-paid staff could facilitate further non-monetary exchanges and more community economic activity. For example, there could be an increase in the number of cases a community legal centre could take on, or a community centre might be able to hire more highly skilled workers to provide more services. A community organisation could even set up a new social enterprise as in the case of Fitted for Work. While this is not certain, it is possible. The consideration of the possibilities for greater non-capitalist activity in the sector is a point of analysis potentially obscured by capitalocentric thinking.

**What’s economy got to do with it?**

Despite the diverse economic activities of the equal pay campaign, and the activities the campaign may facilitate, there remained a narrow understanding of what economy was in the ASU. ASU officials seemed uniformly taken aback that I asked them about their interpretation of the term economy, and how they understood the equal pay case in terms of economy. Although many of their members worked with communities who were clearly of low socio-economic
status (SES), and the members were often low SES themselves, this was not seen by participants as an economic campaign. One official, named Emma, even laughed when I asked her a question about the term ‘economy’.

I came to anticipate this incredulous response to my questions and buffer them with reassurances. The participants’ shock was not entirely surprising to me, because the ASU submissions to Fair Work Australia, and their communications with their members, the media, and the general public, were not predicated in terms of economic arguments, but on industrial legal arguments about equal pay and work value. While the ASU legal team did at one point call a feminist economist before Fair Work Australia as an expert witness in the case (Austen 2010), it was the government and employer’s organisations whose submissions addressed budgets and macroeconomic arguments and costings (Commonwealth Government 2010, ACCI 2010, AFEI 2010). Thus, perhaps it seemed strange, or at least unexpected to the trade union official participants that I was asking about economy and their view of the case in relation to economy. I did so, however, with the sense that the case was part of addressing economic inequality and thus presented an opportunity to understand what representations of economy informed the trade union prosecuting the case.

Participants swiftly let me know that they were not economists but unionists, lawyers, organisers of people. This seemed to inform their hesitation to talk about ‘economy’. Initially, a number of the trade unionist participants gave quite mainstream definitions of economy. For example, when asked to tell me in her own words what the term economy meant, Emma stated:

E: I don’t know. Laughter.

M: I’m not asking for an expert opinion or anything, but --

E: Well, you won’t get one, so --I mean, the economy is, you know --

M: Whatever springs to your mind is fine.

E: Market of - you know, what happens in terms of, you know, exchange of goods and services.

Similarly, Janita stated:

M: can you just tell me what the term "economy" means to you?

J: No. Can’t.

M: Whatever springs to your mind.
J: -- I certainly don’t - yes, I guess kind of the economy is what we all participate in every day for buying, selling, living - just our existence relies on an economy.

Here we have images of a consumer driven economy, buying and selling in the formal market. There are initially no mentions of informal activity, no analysis of what might inform such markets, and no notion of an economy beyond markets.

This hesitation points to a lack of a ‘people's’, or popular, language of economy. Economics was seen by the union officials I interviewed as the domain of experts and politicians and not something that ordinary working people should have to worry about, although conversely, the language and power of (neoliberal) economic discourses were recognised as a thing to be contended with. As James, an ex political adviser who later became a union leader, put it:

an economy is essentially a total construct in which one has to live and operate on a daily basis. It's the ability, first of all, to be able to survive. It's the ability to be able to sustain oneself and others who might be connected with us, whether they’re dependent or otherwise, but it's also the ability to be able to engage socially in that entire construct. It's the ability to be able to influence in the longer term the nature of society as a whole. For me that’s what an economy is. An economy is not a dry inputs and outputs measure, though I’ve spent a good part of my life in government worrying about inputs and outputs.

This goes some way to explain the confusion and even exasperation that I sensed when asking about ‘economy’. However after some digging, it also became clear that the union officials had more to say on this subject.

I found that some of the officials had reflections that included a broader vision of economy, and one that included a power analysis of economic value. For example, Mia said:

I’d go further and say [economy is] about value and distribution of wealth and how we respect things and how we consider resources and be they financial or other (my addition)...

In this statement she gives an analysis of the power dynamics that inform monetary value. She then goes further, and explains that the community workers’ equal pay case illustrates a power struggle over economic value:

I think there's things that can't be... potentially can't be identified in a monetary way, but that doesn't mean that they're not valuable of their own. And the case is a good example of this, really, isn't it, that care work, the concept of care work has been undervalued and we – it's a great example. Now the value of that work has fundamentally changed and the monetary value of that work has fundamentally changed. And is that economy? Well, yeah, I suppose it is.
Here Mia makes an argument that winning the case has changed the monetary value of community work, through the intervention of the state, and connects this to an economic change.

Additionally ASU officials made comments about economic power and the positive difference that increased wages would make to members’ lives, wellbeing, and their capacity to effect economic choices. The union officials variously assessed this power in terms of capacity to procure housing and education, and to buy certain things that make life easier or better, such as a good quality car or a holiday, or not to have to rely on the social services that the workers themselves provide. One of the officials described this as being about class. For example, James states:

Like, economic power could be measured in purchasing power and ability to be able to shift, or it could be measured as the ability to be able to procure education. So, it just depends what the measure of economic power is, like... But I suppose in one way, we don’t need to worry too much about what the measure is because our aim is to do everything we can to ensure that the level of our members income is raised, the level of their education is raised, so that whatever way in which they choose to participate in that economy, you know, there’s more capacity there.

Janita also noted that one of the members and activists had been:

J: talking about "there's all these things I'd like to do. I'd like to one day buy a car, a new car, not a second-hand bomb, but as long as I'm on these wages, I'm never going to get to do that. I'd like to do these things with my grandchildren like I'd like to take them out, we'd like to go and do these things, but on this wage I'm not going be able to do that."

So, her participation in the economy has grown.

M: Yeah. Yeah. It's a huge - it is actually a huge shift.

J: Yes. Like Jenna gets to buy a car. It sounds small, but it's a really big deal.

The power analysis being made by the union officials is about purchasing power and the effects of poverty in limiting choices, experiences and overall quality of life. As Emma said, the workers in question would go from being “a sort of underclass” to “proper working class” because they would no longer be struggling to pay bills or having to work multiple jobs to meet their living expenses. So we see here that wages growth is viewed as positive in the context of relative poverty, and that wage growth for the sector is regarded as redressing economic inequality through redistribution.

Participants from the union also discussed the effects of what James called political power (as distinct from economic power which was mostly defined as
purchasing power), built democratically from the workplace, on economics and redistribution. They mentioned a number of results of this including distribution via government of more public funds to the community sector, and the capacity to make demands of government. Emma stated:

So, the reality is for us that we will never achieve significant improvements in our members income unless we can force political pressure to be applied in a way that causes government to deliver additional funds to the employers.

James also said:

it is that political power that does profoundly shape the economy and the political power our members have just exercised means that $8 billion that wouldn’t have gone into this part of the economy is going into it.

In arguing that distribution of more government funds to the community sector was due to political power, they also claimed greater capacity to make demands on the way government valued certain issues and vulnerable populations. Mia, arguing that community services are essential services said:

It's a responsibility of our community and our government is the mechanism by which we exercise our responsibilities, technically... funded by our governments, yeah, no question... I'm happy to blue about what is and isn't an essential service... However, you win some, you lose some and an essential service is an essential service and homelessness and domestic violence services and disability support services... Broadly speaking, the services provided by our sector and our membership are essential services.

This notion of political power exercised in economic decisions also fed into what the leader of the NSW ASU called a 'proper mix', that is, a mix of public and community or not-for-profit delivery of community services. Both Emma and James posited government funding of community services, whilst maintaining community control, as the preferred mode of delivery. Emma stated:

I do think that there is a value in community-managed organisations that are reflective of their community and responsive to their community and run by their community. I think that that's not a model that I'd say is private sector, because it's not it's community run; so, yes, the solution would be a proper mix of public sector. I do think a lot of jobs should still be done in the public sector, a proper mix of public sector and community sector organisations which are community based and community run.

This was in contrast to the way that Emma discussed wealth distribution and the funding of those services, where she was quite clear that government funding needed to be through taxation of the private sector. When asked for her views on what measures could make for fairer economies, she responded:
Tax the rich more-- basically. I mean, the - you know, better wealth distribution, especially given that in Australia... some people are doing very, very, very well, and that some people aren't, so there could be a much, much better distribution of wealth, and that would be the best thing that could happen.

Further to that, her view of how the trade union movement contributed to making fairer economies was explained thus:

the way that we redistribute wealth is either via the amount of profits that happen, so we are always after, you know, workers' share of those profits --if we're in the private sector. So in our private sector membership we are redistributing, but redistributing money that would have gone off to shareholders, into workers' hands.

In the community sector, although the relationship is less direct, Emma proposes that it is still a question of workers gaining a more reasonable share of taxation or government funds in the form of wages.

And in the case of the community sector or the public sector it's, you know, it's not quite the same, but it is the same really. It's about ensuring that, you know, still having the people that are actually, you know, doing the work that makes society work, getting you know, money for it.

While there is a notion of surplus from the private sector, this notion does not apply in the same way to the community sector because of the low funding and social, rather than monetary, outputs. As Janita puts it, when discussing why the ASU resisted the push from Government to pursue the productivity dividend of one per cent savings per year:

We would say "Well, where are we going to find one per cent in savings", you know, "We're not exactly stocked up on paper clips" like, we know that 80 per cent of funding received is spent on wages, and our wages are rubbish, like... You know, it's not overheads - there are hardly any overheads associated with SACS work.

While there may well be surpluses in the community sector of the non-monetary kind, and while the community sector is a distributor of surplus, there is little discussion of this when I ask about economy and the case in my interviews, because in the financial sense, the focus in campaigning has been on what is lacking, that is, cash. Mia discusses the intangibles of the work briefly, however the focus is on the lack of surplus, the politics is a politics of political demands and struggles over resources.

While the economic activities of the ASU’s equal pay campaign and the sector it represents are diverse, their economic language is narrow. For example, Emma, then NSW leader of the Australian Services Union (ASU), stated on the one hand that “I'm feminist and socialist and believe in economic equality and class struggle”
yet on the other hand, said of the equal pay case and campaign: “In terms of what that means... I guess, is a fairly - a dispersed thing. You know, a whole lot of women earning more, and I suppose, in the end, 150,000 people isn't going to make a massive impact on an economy.” This annexation of economy away from politics and society into the realm of the ‘real’ leads me to the view that a politics of diversity that recaptures economy as political (and therefore subject to change) is essential for successful left movements (Gibson-Graham 1999, 2006: 54). The diverse economies theorisation and community economies framing aims to challenge the naturalisation and hegemony of capitalism (Gibson-Graham 2006: 54).

It is also frequently capitalocentric. Indeed, while the campaign and members were very focused on what would allow them and their communities to survive well, from Jenna’s new car to more services from people experiencing homelessness, this was not typically conceptualised as economic. This highlights the need for a diverse language and understanding of economy and economic wellbeing.

**Asian Women at Work in the Diverse Economy**

Asian Women at Work’s vision is of an empowered community. Using the framework of the diverse economy I look at Asian Women at Work’s political demands and economic activism to improve women’s work lives as well as social, cultural and educational lives. If we think again of the iceberg diagram, it indicates that as with the ASU, AWatW’s activities straddle across the waterline, with some activities fitting into what is typically thought of as ‘economy’, and many other activities of exchange, service, and production falling under the waterline into what are typically considered non-economic activities. I map this more concretely in the diverse economies table below in Figure 8.3, which shows AWatW’s capitalist (top cells), alternative (middle cells), and non-market (bottom cells) activities in the areas of labour, transactions, and enterprise.

AWatW’s activism is across all three areas of the diverse economy – transactions, labour and enterprise. Their activism on transactions is for alternative market and non-market, including the promotion of fair trade clothing consumption by schools and other uniform consumers such as government employees (see left column, middle cell, Figure 8.3). They have campaigned for increased funding
from government to provide more and better services for their communities, which may be affirmative of race and gender, but transformative of service provision (see left column, bottom cell, Figure 8.3).

Like the ASU, AWatW has campaigned for better wages and conditions of paid labour. Their activist activities also centre on building a community through material provision and unpaid labour, although they do not see this as political work (see bottom cells of ‘Transactions’ and ‘Labour’ columns in Figure 8.3).

AWatW aim to influence capitalist clothing enterprises to go from ‘capitalist’ to ‘alternative capitalist’ with their Fair Wear campaign (top to middle cell in ‘Enterprise’ column in Figure 8.3). However, their interest in enterprise remained at the stage of ‘potentially transformative’ (see bottom right cell of Figure 8.3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transactions</th>
<th>Labour</th>
<th>Enterprise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Market</td>
<td>Wage</td>
<td>Capitalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Outworker campaign for increased wages and better conditions (T for work).</td>
<td>Lobby clothing companies to use fair trade labour in their supply chains with Fair Wear (T).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Campaigns for increasing minimum wages and formal payment (not cash in hand) (T for work).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative market</td>
<td>Alternative paid</td>
<td>Alternative capitalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote fair trade garment sales with Fair Wear (T).</td>
<td>Work with clothing companies to use fair trade labour in their supply chains with Fair Wear (T).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-market</td>
<td>Unpaid</td>
<td>Non-capitalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign for increased funding to provide many non-market services to their community (A for race and gender, T for transactions).</td>
<td>Constantly building volunteer base; much self-provisioning including classes, gardens, leisure (T).</td>
<td>Desire for co-operative (potentially T).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner with government to provide some free services to members (T for transactions).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 8.3 Asian Women at Work: Transformative (T) and Affirmative (A) feminist economic activism in the diverse economy, source: modified from Gibson-Graham 1996: xiii*
‘Shit! I switch off when I hear the word economy’

Despite being active on so many issues across economic politics, all AWatW participants indicated that they saw economy as outside their control and purview. While this again led me to the conclusion that a lack of people’s language of economy was at work, it also confirmed my view that despite their purpose of addressing economic exclusion and gender and race based inequality, AWatW members did not see their work as economic.

Diana, in her usual expressive and engaging way, laughed when I asked her how she understood the term economy:

Economy. Shit. Is that what others say?... I switch off when I hear the word 'economy' because it seems to be so massive, yeah, but I guess - I mean, but economy, I guess, for me is what really gives us the - it defines us, the way we live, the way we access resources, the way things - yeah - not distributed but - yeah, are allocated in the community. Like, this is where it draws a divide between, you know, the have - the rich and the poor and the middle-class and, you know, it defines your place in the community.”

Despite seeing this as something that determined her own and AWatW members’ place in the community, Diana simultaneously sees the idea of economy as being too big to engage with. She is certainly convinced her members will feel this way:

I think, the thing is our women are - they don't - they probably don't see the big picture about their contribution to the economy of this country, and that's because the motivation to work is to really be able to get money so that they can provide for their family, so that they can provide good education for their children, so they don't - probably don't care, like, you know, to find out more about - you know, they're in their own world.

Despite being in their own world, AWatW members are engaged in community leadership and development, thus indicating that they are active citizens. As well as being active social citizens, as I showed above, a diverse economies framework helps us see them as actively engaged in their economies in a multiplicity of ways. Yet economy is still seen as something outside one’s personal experience. Although their activism centres on community building through self provision, there was little, if any language describing this as economic.

Not only is the economy too massive to engage with, it is also an object of power and fear. Paid work, and the accompanying cash, means keeping life going, and the prospect of an unstable economy that interferes with this is worrying. As Kim-Ly, a Vietnamese community worker at AWatW, said to me in an animated tone:
K: I think the reason for the woman tried to keep the job because the economy some time up and down like this, and worry them. If lost job, no money to, like, pay the mortgage or even the living life very hard, you know.

M: Yeah. So, it’s kind of like the economy is out there and it’s something to be feared, is that --?

K: Yeah, yeah, fear -- them to.

Again, despite the work AWatW has done in securing members paid work, assisting with retraining as industries and labour demands change, there is still a sense that the economy is something outside any control or reason, not something that can be shaped, unlike the social or cultural realm.

Katrina expresses this similarly, but also acknowledges the power that AWatW have to change some areas of life connected to economy:

we very harder to - to change the economic. We can't change the big things, we just do some small things... to, you know, the - maybe we can change the - our workplace, or change the family, or change the - our community, and do something we can do... because the - many - many the barrier, it stop us --So now we - we had English class, and the woman.

These conversations show the extent to which economy is seen as outside the real of control of local communities, even those engaged with work, an ostensibly clear-cut economic issue. This points to a potential area for future research, in which ‘taking back the economy’ (Gibson, Cameron and Healy 2014) and highlighting and amplifying areas of self-provision, community exchange and production, could be a focus.

**Fitted for Work in the diverse economy**

Fitted for Work has a vision of financial independence that has driven them to create a different structure from much of the community sector and other areas of the women’s movement. Like both the ASU and AWatW, FFW’s activities also straddle across the waterline of the iceberg diagram, with many of their activities fitting under the waterline into what are not typically counted or thought of as economic activities, and others, such as paying wages, fitting into common definitions of economic activity. I discuss FFW’s varied economic practices below in Figure 8.4, and as before, map this in the diagram below, which shows capitalist (top cells), alternative (middle), and non-market (bottom cells) activities in the areas of transactions, labour, and enterprise.
Like AWatW, FFW’s activism spans the economic areas of transactions, labour and enterprise. They sought to make enterprise serve their not-for-profit goals, and also to get women into paid work by mobilising unpaid labour (see right and middle columns of Figure 8.4). In the transactions area, their activism was directed at promoting local products designed and produced by women.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transactions</th>
<th>Labour</th>
<th>Enterprise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Market</td>
<td>Wage</td>
<td>Capitalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aiming to get their clients paid work by fitting them with work appropriate clothing (A – gender).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Market</td>
<td>Alternative Paid</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some small Government and corporate grants (usually short term) in return for certain social outcomes.</td>
<td>Work for the Dole recipients classed by paid staff as ‘volunteers’, labour used to help other unemployed women.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crowd funding and fundraisers.</td>
<td>Lobbying for improved welfare payments (A).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selling vintage, locally produced items to fund their SE (T).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non- Market</th>
<th>Unpaid</th>
<th>Non- Capitalist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clothes often donated by women working for corporates, or by clothing companies with excess stock.</td>
<td>Volunteers mobilised to maintain organisation with limited funding.</td>
<td>Services provided for free to unemployed women based on referral from Job Seeker Agency via Centrelink (A – gender).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifts and bequests.</td>
<td>Arrange unpaid internships and work experience for unemployed clients (A).</td>
<td>Dear Gladys, the retail arm of Fitted for Work, is not-for-profit. While founders or managers cannot appropriate profit, they appropriate back to the work of the company (T-economic).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8.4 Fitted for Work: Transformative (T) and Affirmative (A) feminist economic activism in the diverse economy, source: modified from Gibson-Graham 2006: 63

We support women, not the economy

Again, despite the breadth of their activism, the responses of the FFW participants regarding the economy were narrow. When asked about their view on the term economy, my seven participants from FFW gave varied responses that showed some similarities and some differences from the trade union and community
organisation case studies. The shock and irritation in being asked to explain their view of the term economy was similar. For example, Jennifer exclaimed: “Oh, God. Do you mean like...? You don't mean a technical definition, do you?” She then went on to say, with some tension in her voice:

J: I mean, of course it's kind of balancing money in money out, all the rest of it, but it's also much more than that.

M: Yeah, you're obviously thinking of two somewhat contradictory...

J: Yes. That's right...notions around it, really. For me, though, it's what is missed out of that and is central in it is that kind of labour component and, yeah, the way people shape that and are shaped by the economy. Yeah. Sorry, I don't get any more articulate than that on that today.

Similarly, Cara, the previously “total capitalist” retail manager of Dear Gladys from the story above, gave a somewhat technical definition and then stalled entirely.

This tension in response to the term economy was demonstrated in interviews in all of the cases, despite it being clear that all participants were able to give some level of technical explanation (e.g. “flow and exchange of money”). Volunteers were also able to give an articulate response to my question of what the term economy meant, though in two out of three cases, this was somewhat more faltering.

In two of the interviews at FFW, it was stated quite plainly that the women did not see FFW’s activities as economic in any broad sense. Cara stated:

I don't think, and I'm sure Jennifer would agree, that we're here necessarily to support the economy as much as we are to support women... And I guess the community flow-on effect is more what I think about than the economical flow-on effect.

Michelle, a Work for the Dole participant, however, clearly stated that she saw her role in the economy as “to get a job”, and noted the connection of this to FFW’s mission. However, as noted in the previous chapter, she also expressed the view that working for welfare at FFW was preventing her from job seeking. Cara’s statement seems to indicate that she sees ‘economy’ as a big picture term that is out of her control and also is not as important to her as community. I surmise that again this might be partially to do with a lack of popular discourse around community economic development and sustainability. On the other hand, Michelle clearly identifies FFW’s work as economic in nature, but feels it does not benefit her as much as it could.
Surviving well, transforming economy: insights from three cases

The Australian Services Union, Asian Women at Work and Fitted for Work are attempting to change the gendered inequality of work in a variety of ways: rates of pay; participation (both in paid workforce economies and in volunteer organisational structures); democratic decision making; community building; social enterprise learning and financial independence. All three organisations are engaged in formal or capitalist activity (for example, in wage payments) and non-capitalist or informal activity (for example, facilitating unpaid labour), but are in a predominantly non-capitalist sector in which they try to influence the formal labour market.

All three cases were concerned with surviving well, in particular with:

- what is necessary to personal and social survival;
- how social surplus is appropriated and distributed;
- whether and how social surplus is to be produced and consumed (Gibson-Graham 2006: 88, emphasis in original).

Their activism centred around work; all saw work as necessary to survival. Diana stated that many Asian migrant women had to work for money, and therefore did not have time to attend free government-offered English classes. Work was considered a source of money for necessities, but also social life and structure (as stated by Danika from FFW) and for community workers, a source of meaning.

The view of work in all three cases is that it is work for an employer, rather than for oneself or with each other, that is necessary. Employment is also where the monetary surplus comes from and how it is distributed; the ASU and AWatW fought for a greater proportion of surplus from government and from private employers. The ASU focused on building union membership, believing that a unionised workforce has economic power to influence decision making at an industry level. They wished to have more power in negotiating the appropriation and distribution of surplus, and aimed to gain that power through collective action.

FFW, on the other hand, wanted to generate their own necessities and surplus in order to support unemployed women to find employment. AWatW were interested in forming a cooperative in order to have more control over their
working lives. This form of activism, even if nascent, falls into the non-capitalist enterprise area of feminist economic activism in the diverse economy. However, AWatW’s capacity to action their desire was in part hamstrung by a lack of economic language and skills. Another barrier was the lack of available economic identities and subject positions that could take them from ‘worker’ to ‘co-operator’ or ‘social entrepreneur’ whilst not losing the values of their ‘worker’ identity position.

As part of their focus on community development, AWatW distribute goods in addition to undertaking advocacy. These forms of provisioning are non-capitalist and reflect their goals of developing empowered communities. These activities both exist alongside and supplementary to capitalism, as AWatW also wishes to gain greater surplus from and withstand the pressure of capitalist employers (with varied degrees of success). However, the social enterprise goals of the organisation exist somewhere in between employment and non-monetary self-provisioning. AWatW members also express a desire to set and control their own working patterns and work together; the goals they expressed regarding enterprise were framed in terms of work.

Fitted for Work’s volunteers and staff, like AWatW, valued skill sharing. They also valued financial independence through the paid workforce or formal economy as sources of well-being, but with a less critical eye on working conditions than AWatW. Within their social enterprise they encouraged innovative small businesses owned by women, however this appeared as a distinct division between women being channelled into FFW as clients and those who were contractors or business partners.

The politics of each organisation, as described in their respective chapters, were both transformative and affirmative. In the case of the ASU, redistribution of greater funding to community controlled services fits easily within Nancy Fraser’s transformative notion of economy, socialism. AWatW and FFW’s social enterprise actions and plans were also transformative, because they hoped to produce necessary and surplus funds that could be community controlled and non-capitalist. In each case, unlike welfare state reallocations or redistributions, the distribution of surplus does not fan the flame of resentment toward a particular group. However, it is unclear whether these economic forms – social enterprise or
cooperative - would classify as transformative in Fraser’s original affirmative and transformative schema. A community economies analysis which includes community controlled production is a strategy that fits with a deconstructive politics of gender and race.

**Conclusion**

Using the diverse economies framework has enabled mapping of the three cases with regards to transactions, labour and enterprise, in the formal/ capitalist, alternative and informal/non-capitalist economic modes. This mapping has shown that all three organisations are also part of a network of significant informal economic activity and activism despite the focus of all three organisations on work in the formal economy. However, the language participants were able to use to describe their activism as economic was constrained to description of largely formal or capitalist practices.

Shifting the focus of economy to that which allows us to survive well, the community economies perspective shows that all the organisations were active on economic issues. At the ASU, surviving well is an outcome for the activist whose pay rise means she might be able to buy a car and take her grandchildren on outings, and go from ‘underclass’ to ‘proper working class’. At AWatW, having one day a week for oneself, engaging in self-provisioned leisure, and being able to have safe working conditions at home is about surviving well. At FFW, having access to the supports that make getting a job easier, and as an organisation not having to worry about government grant cycles, means surviving well. These are all economic activisms.

In all cases, there was a generalised view that economy was something outside of participants’ remit, control or interest. This was despite their chosen area of activism being paid work, an area where left wing movements have traditionally tried to influence economic practices and structures. This indicates not only a dominant capitalocentrism in the organisations, but a lack of language to take back the economy despite their diversity of economic activities and activism.

The ASU, AWatW and FFW were all engaged in transformative economic work in a non-capitalist area of economy. However, AWatW, from a left-wing tradition, found it hard to engage in co-operative building or social enterprise due in part to
the lack of economic language and left wing economic identities to support this. Economic transformation is a useful term that describes deep economic restructuring, which does not exacerbate resentment toward identity groups. However it should also include an expanded, reconstructed understanding of economy as shown here with the diverse economies framework.
**Conclusion**

The purpose of this thesis has been to rethink a feminist politics of economy. I wished to reconsider the tension within movements that sought to address gender and economic inequality, and to fulfil this purpose I drew together two previously separate areas of theory – Nancy Fraser’s political theory of redistribution and recognition and J.K. Gibson-Graham's diverse economies framework. I argued that Fraser’s theoretical conceptual division between concerns of recognition and redistribution addressed the experience within some social movements attempting to work on feminist economic issues. Further, her insight that deconstructive approaches to gender were compatible with transformative approaches to economy was one that could address this tension.

However, her approach to problems of economic inequality seemed lacking in substance beyond a discredited model of socialism. Therefore I sought further insight from feminist political economists who show what can be gained from a deconstructive approach to economy. J.K. Gibson-Graham’s diverse economy offers a framework that brakes down the capitalocentrism of much left wing thinking. For example, I re-examined the assumed clash between enterprise and worker politics.

To the extent that I have been able to complete this rethinking task, it has been in relation to real cases of feminist economic activism in Sydney, Australia. The feminist, leftist and unionist milieus I found myself a part of in Sydney at the start of this project seemed to me to have limited language to discuss economic equality, beyond old capitalist/worker binaries. The tensions within and between gender and race politics and economic politics also seemed unresolved. Yet I knew that many activists were successfully challenging gendered economic inequality. These activists were the inspiration for this research, and for looking again at the insights I could draw from redistribution/ recognition or culture/ economy debates of the late 1990s.

**Rethinking a feminist politics of economic activism**

In order to rethink this question of division between goals of gender equality and economic equality, I looked to two areas of theory: feminist political theory and
feminist political economy. In particular, in Chapter One I drew on Nancy Fraser’s conceptual framework of injustice, in which she distinguishes between redistribution (including economic inequality and class) and recognition (including cultural devaluation, and identity such as gender and race). I argued that her pairing of these types of injustice with affirmative strategies and transformative strategies showed a compatibility between deconstructive politics of gender and race, and transformative politics of economy.

This framework resonated for two reasons; it spoke to my experiences of division within union and feminist social movements, but also attempted to show which remedies did not exacerbate either problem. Finding strategies for redistribution and recognition which did the least harm to or even helped the intersecting problems of gender and economic inequality seemed a promising way to address the tensions of competing aims within social movements.

However, I also saw that Fraser appeared to offer little in the way of the transformation of economy that she claimed, beyond a somewhat empty gesturing to socialism, in which content or strategy was largely unspecified. I sought more of a deeply differentiated model of economic transformation than Fraser’s schema offered. While theorist Wendy Brown offered some further deconstruction of economic identity through insight into the wounded attachments of the worker position under liberalism, this did not fully address the lack of economic language and possibility I saw at play. I turned to feminist political economy for a deep deconstruction of gendered economic inequality.

In Chapter Two I introduced the work of feminist political economists who had deconstructed economy. Feminist economists have widened the definition of economy to include unpaid work, domestic and reproductive labour, and have argued these forms of work and production should be accounted for in mainstream definitions. Taking this deconstruction a step further, however, Gibson-Graham conceptualised the diverse economy, taking into account labour, transactions, and enterprise (and later property and finance), with capitalist or formal, alternative and unpaid or non-market approaches to each. In so doing, they decoupled the assumed links between enterprise and capitalism, and the household and heterosexuality, suggesting that an economy is a complex mish-
mash of resource and value flows. This led me to ask to what extent feminist economic activism was deconstructing and transforming economy and work.

This is a question I used as a jumping off point for Chapter Three. In that chapter I surveyed a brief history of Australian feminist economic activism, showing that feminist activism in Australia was often about economic issues, in particular work, both paid and unpaid. Another major focus was services or transactions but enterprise was largely untouched. I showed that the activism was often transformative using the deconstructive definitions above, but that sometimes it affirmed the capitalist identity of economy. Additionally, the activism sometimes affirmed gender identities, such as in maternity leave campaigns, but also at times disrupted gendered assumptions, as in the case of teachers challenging requirements for permanent employment. This chapter provided the historical and local political context for the selection of three case studies, and also foreshadowed the approach I would take to the cases later in the thesis.

The case studies I chose were three organisations focused largely on work and gender equality, as made sense in the Australian feminist context in which much activism had focused on work and services. I looked at a range of potential organisations and chose to work with the Australian Services Union equal pay campaign, community organisation Asian Women at Work, and social enterprise Fitted for Work. I selected the cases for their commitment to gender and economic equality, independence from government, their geographic accessibility and their capacity to have me observe their practices. However, I also selected them for their maximum difference from each other, to explore different areas of economic activity, including enterprise, union organising on paid work and community development.

My approach to exploring these issues in my case studies was based on deconstruction and discourse analysis. A suite of methods also complemented this primary approach, including participant observation through volunteering, ethnographical techniques including extensive field diaries, and semi structured interviews with participants. I asked the following questions of my case studies:

- Firstly, did feminist economic activism affirm gender binaries, or did it transform or queer gender identities? And secondly, what was the discourse of political change that informed feminist economic activism,
particularly in the context of the ASU, AWatW and FFW?

- What discourse/s of economy informed participants’ activism and how did they understand economic change?
- Did feminist economic activism as seen in the ASU, AWatW and FFW affirm the identity of the economy as capitalist or did it transform or queer the economy?
- And finally, was economic activism in the case studies transforming and deconstructing economic norms and identities?

**Feminist economic activism in practice**

I found that The Australian Services Union equal pay campaign, which won the first equal remuneration award at the federal level in Australia in many years, both affirmed and transformed gender identities. The strategies available to the Union meant that they had to seek a very specifically gendered solution of an equal remuneration order from the Fair Work Commission. They also emphasised their caring work by promoting their members as ‘angels’. However, the order that the Commission granted applied to all staff in the sector, meaning wages would increase and perhaps lead to less gender segregation overall. The campaign was a mix of gender binary affirmation and queering/ transformation.

The actors invested in the equal pay case, including the ASU, were describing and analysing community services through capitalocentric discourses. Despite representing employees from a non-capitalist sector, participants from the Australian Services Union represented the community services as being tied to a worker/employer model. Similarly, the government argued for spending restraint and growth of ‘the economy’. Employers argued for keeping wages down and employer discretion high.

This community sector equal pay case, run by the ASU, won an affirmative, end-state remedy to address low pay in their sector. While this may increase ressentiment toward women workers, the reallocation of funding toward a feminised, non-capitalist area of economy is potentially transformative. The Commission’s agreement to fund the equal pay increases valued this non-capitalist sector. Greater resources in the sector may facilitate even more non-capitalist activity. The flourishing (or otherwise) of non-capitalist transactions,
enterprise and work due to the case is a potential area for further diverse economies research in the community sector.

Like the ASU, Asian Women at Work, was also a worker-oriented organisation, however, in contrast to the union it was also heavily focused on community development and recognition of its community. I found that Asian Women at Work was not generally disruptive of gender binaries, but affirmed both gender and migrant identities. In their lobbying and activist practices, Asian Women at Work confirmed their worker identity and the State’s role in protecting workers from employers, thus also reiterating a capitalocentric discourse of economy and the *resentiment* of worker identity. However, there were also aspects of activism by AWatW that were transformative of economy and gender, for example, the improvement of outworker laws, which transform the definition of work by recognising work from the home, thus queering the economy and the private, feminised realm of the home. A number of AWatW participants in my research also expressed desires to start non-capitalist enterprises, which could potentially transform the capitalist identity of enterprise. This interest in worker co-operative activity would potentially upset the worker as employee identity of AWatW, and also offers a potential avenue for future research.

Fitted for Work was already troubling this definitional association of enterprise with capitalism. The not-for-profit social enterprise had both a retail arm, and services for women seeking employment including a work clothes fitting service, transition to work programs, and advocacy. Like AWatW, FFW’s activism was largely affirmative of the gender binary, as their service focused only on women. The economic discourse they articulated was focused on counting and quantifying their non-monetary contributions and achievements (such as number of clients who found work), indicating a view that these non-monetary achievements had economic benefits. While seeing this non-capitalist area of activity as beneficial, they also promoted employment of women workers in capitalist enterprises as an unqualified good.

Fitted for Work, whilst not necessarily transforming gender norms of recognition, was transforming enterprise by engaging in not-for-profit production and surplus distribution. In effect this challenges the capitalist identity of enterprise and also
the gendered identity of enterprise. Their challenge to economic norms was in a different area of the diverse economy than the ASU and AWatW’s major activities.

Finally, in Chapter Eight, I placed the activisms of the three cases in the diverse economy framework, showing their activism in the areas of transaction, enterprise and labour. The deconstruction of economic activism into the diverse economies framework, showed both the areas of activity and gaps or openings in the feminist economic activism of the case studies. While there was much activism in the area of labour, both paid and unpaid, there was little in the area of enterprise or paid transactions for the union, and only a small gesturing toward this for AWatW. In addition much – though not all – of the activism affirmed economy as capitalist. Nonetheless the activism of all three organisations bridged the formal and informal areas of their non-capitalist sector.

Yet despite this breadth of economic activity and activism that took place in my case studies, Chapter Eight also showed that the language of economy that my participants used was quite narrow. While there were moments and desires for a broader conception of economy, it was still largely seen to be about work and money. This indicates a major opportunity for action research exploring a broader understanding of economy, using a framework that incorporates a community economies approach to ethical decision-making about resources and production.

Like any research project, there were limitations and unanswered questions in my research. Whilst I intended to develop an analysis of the discourse of political change at play in my cases, this theme was superseded by my concerns with economic discourse; attempting to unearth latent transformational economic possibilities in left movements that seemed somewhat capitalocentric. Similarly, while I was able to explore understandings of economy and work with my participants, given their frequent reticence to discuss economy at all, uncovering a conception of economic change was sometimes too much of a stretch.

I see these unanswered questions as an indication of further work to be done in the co-development of a feminist politics of economic activism and diverse/community economies research. In keeping with the direction of this thesis, I am particularly keen to see how a feminist politics of economic activism might inform
a broad range of community economies projects. Perhaps such a politics may uncover already existing or nascent feminist politics within community economies. Perhaps it may lead community economies projects – such as enterprise, co-operatives, labour activism and transaction or government or community service provision - to become more inclusive of diverse gender representations, and to value typically feminised skills and characteristics rather than affirming gender binaries and devaluing feminised subjects. Conversely, I see potential for further research with explicitly feminist or women’s organisations that wish to develop community economies projects, whether that is explicit sourcing of resources through a social enterprise, or simply thinking more explicitly about the diverse economy they are part of and/ or community economy they wish to develop.

My concerns regarding the tension between gender and economic politics and lack of a left critique of economy that I had at the beginning of my post-graduate journey remain. However, in developing a political economic framework to think about these issues together, I hope that I am now better able to work with others in left feminist circles, by sharing my research and potentially applying it elsewhere.

The problems of gender and economic inequality persist. Continued collective work is necessary to address these issues and continuously reclaim and repoliticise economy.
APPENDICES

1. Opinion piece published in ‘The Punch’
2. Semi-structured interview schedules:
   a. Australian Services Union
   b. Asian Women at Work
   c. Fitted for Work
3. List of interviewees
Appendix 1: Opinion piece published in ‘The Punch’

I wrote the article below in early 2011. It was published on the (now defunct) News Limited opinion and news website, The Punch, which was founded in Australia in 2009 and shut down in 2013. Links that originally appeared in the article have been footnoted for hard copy reproduction.

The equal pay case is important for young women

It is not fashionable for a member of Gen Y like myself to care about equal pay for women. So the Australian Services Union equal remuneration case6 currently before Fair Work Australia should perhaps hold no great interest for me. Equal pay was won in 19697 and equal pay for work of equal value in 19728, long before I was born.

I am apparently of the post-feminist era, and most of my friends have been to university, perhaps even more of the women than the men. At 26, I have watched the boys I went to school with complete engineering and IT degrees and the girls finish teaching, social work or arts.

Perhaps this observation should not bother me. I do not doubt that my friends are excellent at their chosen professions. The problem I have with this scenario is the gap in their respective salaries.

Like most people, I can point to exceptions amongst my circle. Yet Australia still has one of the most gender segregated labour markets9 in the developed world. My friends that studied IT, engineering and social work reflect broader trends.

Those arguing the community worker’s case10 suggest that these workers, who often have arts or social work degrees, have been historically undervalued in the labour market because of their gender. Eighty seven per cent of them are women11.

What this means is that those people in the community sector trying to prevent youth suicide or help people with disabilities live with dignity are paid less than others in similar work with government or in industries such as mining or finance. That means that a social worker in the community sector could earn about $200 less per week12 than someone doing the same job in government. Moreover, it means that someone working in a traditionally male dominated industry, say a greens keeper, could earn more than any of them.

Australia has a history of placing lower value on ‘women’s work’, from the time of the Harvester Judgment in 1907 by Justice Henry Higgins. Women’s work was

---

valued at 54 per cent of a man’s. This was based on the assumption that men were supporting a family. Women, on this logic, were either married or single without children and hence needed less money to get by. Moreover they were less likely to be in unionized industries and hence to bargain for higher wages. These two factors have contributed to the low pay rate of community work today.

It is no longer 1907, but as argued by Associate Professor Anne Junor, a witness at Fair Work Australia today, community worker’s skills are often hidden and are largely under-recognised in job classifications and awards.

For this situation to change, Fair Work Australia have to find in favour of the applicants, the ASU and a raft of other unions, and against those defending, Employers First and a number of other employer organizations.

The community sector, serving many of the most disadvantaged people in our society, is largely dependent on the purse-strings of government. As such, more than just a favourable finding, both the Federal government and State governments will have to agree to fund the case. The Federal Labor government has already made rumblings in this direction. State Labor has not. The ASU has fired a canon in their direction, but their ability to sway the Liberal opposition is unclear.

What is clear is that while equal pay may not be fashionable, it is just as important for the young community workers of today as it was for the seamstresses of 1907 and the secretaries of the sixties.

---


14 http://www.orgmanagement.unsw.edu.au/nps/servlet/portalservice?GI_ID=Syste m.LoggedOutInheritableArea&maxWnd=_WhoAreWe_AnneJunor


Appendix 2: Semi-structured interview schedules

A. Australian Services Union

- What made you join the ASU?
- Had you been active with any other community, political or activist group before the ASU? If so, what sort of things did you do? And what were you and your group trying to achieve?
- Can you tell me briefly about your role with the equal pay campaign? And what sort of activism have you done with the ASU (e.g. strategy, negotiation, lobbied government, bargaining etc.)?
- Tell me what you think the ASU as a union are trying to achieve. What do you think they are trying to achieve in terms of fairness, work, wages?
- How does what you do fit with the goals of the ASU?
- How do the goals of ASU fit with your worldview/ ethics/ politics (e.g. public services, equal pay etc.)?
- And specifically for the equal pay campaign, what do you think the ASU is trying to achieve? E.g. in terms of pay; valuing particular types of work; government funding of services; social views of care work...
- What aspects of this are most important to you? Why?

◆

- In your own words, what do you think the term economy means? Probe: what comes to mind when you think about what an economy is?
- Tell me how you think women are represented/ positioned as economic agents? In the union movement/ IR/ the media? Probe: How does this differ from the way men are represented?
- How do the goals of the equal pay campaign/ the ASU challenge or change this position?
- How do you see what the equal pay campaign / the ASU does affecting local economies?
- Do you think that ASU can have any impact on the ‘economy’? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Are there other things you think activists or unions could do to have an impact on the economy?
Can you tell me about the messaging of the campaign and what the rationale was?

Can you tell me how you see the equal pay campaign changing the class position of the women who work in community organisations?

Question about emphasis on government not employer funding – how does the funding increase come about? Why is this important for society as well as (women) workers?
B. ASIAN WOMEN AT WORK

➢ How did you come to be involved with AWatW?
➢ Why do you stay involved with AWatW?
➢ Had you been active with any other community or activist group, either in your home country or here, before AWatW? If so, what sort of things did you do? And what were you and your group trying to achieve?
➢ What sort of things do you think AWatW as a group are trying to achieve? What do you think they are trying to achieve in terms of fairness, work, wages?
➢ Do you support these goals? If so, which ones? What would it mean to you if these goals were achieved?
➢ How do the goals of AWatW fit with your worldview/ politics/ values? Probe: public services, community, equal pay etc.
➢ What are some of the things you do with AWatW? And what sort of activism have you done with AWatW (e.g. lobbied government, Fair Wear, asked for workplace rights/ changes)?
➢ Do these all fit with the goals of the group?

◆

➢ In your own words, what do you think the term economy means? Probe: what comes to mind?
➢ How do you think women are represented/ positioned as part of the economy in your experience (social circle, community, family, media). Probe: How does this differ from the way men are represented?
➢ How do the goals of AWatW challenge or change these representations/ positions?
➢ How do you see what AWatW does as having an effect in the economy? Probe: at a local level.
➢ Are there other things you think activists could do to have an impact on the economy?
➢ What do you imagine if you imagine a fair economy? (e.g. Do you imagine being able to own your own business, create a business with community or family, have state legislate for better worker’s rights, or social services, or legislate for workers to have a say in the running and profit of companies)
- Can you tell me about how Fair Wear operated?
- What were the benefits of Fair Wear? What were the problems?
- Question about industrial outcomes of Fair Wear.
- I notice at AWatW there is a real emphasis on gathering and sharing (whether it's information, food, skills). Can you tell me about this?
- What are the barriers that AWatW face in participating in the economy? Probe: language, soft skills.
- What are their strengths?
- I notice there’s an emphasis on members telling their story at AWatW – why is this important?
- Do you think there are any conflicts in the organizational practices of AWatW and the goals of the organisation? If so, what are they?
C. FITTED FOR WORK

- Why did you initially want to work at FFW?
- Had you been active with any other community or activist group, either in your home country or here, before FFW? If so, what sort of things did you do? And what were you and your group trying to achieve?
- How do the goals of FFW fit with your worldview/ ethics/ politics (e.g. public services, equal pay etc.)?
- Was the organization what you expected in terms of what it actually does?
- What do you think FFW as a group are trying to achieve? What do you think they are trying to achieve in terms of fairness, work, wages?
- Do you support these goals? If so, which ones are most important to you?
- What are some of the things you do at FFW? How do they contribute (or not fit) to the goals of the group?

◆

- In your own words, what do you think the term economy means? Probe: what comes to mind when you think about what an economy is?
- Tell me how you think women are represented as economic actors in the media/ ‘common sense’/ your social circle or family. Probe: How does this differ from the way men are represented?
- How do the goals of FFW challenge or change these representations?
- How do you see what FFW does affecting the local economy?
- Do you think that FFW can have any impact on the ‘economy’? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Are there other things you think activists or NGOs could do to have an impact on the economy?

◆

- Can you tell me a bit about the process of aesthetic change that happens at FFW?
- People in the organisation talk a lot about the ‘moment of change’ during the dressing service – what is the importance of this? Probe: is it a moment or does it have a bigger impact? What are the limits of this ‘moment’?
- How important is the social enterprise to what FFW does?
Do you think there are any conflicts in the organizational practices of FFW and the goals of the organisation? If so, what are they?
### Appendix 3: List of interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name*</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Role in Organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>Australian Services Union</td>
<td>Union official</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia</td>
<td>Australian Services Union</td>
<td>Union official</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edith</td>
<td>Australian Services Union</td>
<td>Union official</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>Australian Services Union</td>
<td>Union official</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janita</td>
<td>Australian Services Union</td>
<td>Union official</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Australian Services Union</td>
<td>Union delegate and equal pay ambassador</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gail</td>
<td>Australian Services Union</td>
<td>Union delegate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natasha</td>
<td>Australian Services Union</td>
<td>Union delegate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberta and Lena (interviewed together)</td>
<td>Australian Services Union</td>
<td>Union member and union delegate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>Asian Women at Work</td>
<td>Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim-Ly</td>
<td>Asian Women at Work</td>
<td>Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katrina</td>
<td>Asian Women at Work</td>
<td>Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahn</td>
<td>Asian Women at Work</td>
<td>Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>Fitted for Work</td>
<td>Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cara</td>
<td>Fitted for Work</td>
<td>Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>Fitted for Work</td>
<td>Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danika</td>
<td>Fitted for Work</td>
<td>Staff; later volunteer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Fitted for Work</td>
<td>Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>Fitted for Work</td>
<td>Work for the Dole ‘Volunteer’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>Fitted for Work</td>
<td>Work for the Dole ‘Volunteer’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All names are pseudonyms.


Center for History and New Media. n.d. ‘Zotero Quick Start Guide’. 
http://zotero.org/support/quick_start_guide.


———. 1994. Who Pays for the Kids?


Press.

Frances, Shaw. 2012. 'The Politics of Blogs: Theories of Discursive Activism
Online'. Media International Australia, no. 142: 41–49.

Fraser, Nancy. 1993. ‘Clintonism, Welfare, and the Antisocial Wage: The
doi:10.1080/08935699308658040.


———. n.d. ‘Heterosexism, Misrecognition and Capitalism: A Response to Judith

Fraser, Nancy, and Linda Gordon. 1995. ‘A Genealogy of Dependency: Tracing a
Keyword of the U.S. Welfare State’. In Rethinking the Political: Gender,
Resistance, and the State, edited by Barbara Laslett, Johanna Brenner, and Yeşim

Fraser, Nancy, and Axel Honneth. 2003. Redistribution or Recognition? A


George, Jim. 2009. ‘The Neoconservatives and America’s Culture Wars’. In The
Culture Wars: Australian and American Politics in the 21st Century, edited by Jim

George, Jim, and Kim Huynh, eds. 2009. The Culture Wars: Australian and

Gibson-Graham, J.K. 1999. The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It). Minneapolis
and London: University of Minnesota Press.

———. 2006. A Postcapitalist Politics. Minneapolis and London: University of
Minnesota Press.


Post-Structuralist Vein’. In Class and Its Others, edited by J.K. Gibson-Graham,
Stephen A. Resnick, and Richard D. Wolff. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota
Press.

Gibson, Katherine, Amanda Cahill, and Dierdre McKay. 2010. ‘Rethinking the
Dynamics of Rural Transformation: Performing Different Development Pathways
in a Philippine Municipality.’ Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers.


Ho, Christina. 2008. 'Diversifying Feminism: Migrant Women’s Activism in Australia'. Signs 33 (4): 777–84.


NSW Department of Industrial Relations. 1998. ‘Pay Equity Inquiry Summary of Findings and Recommendations: Reference by the Minister for Industrial


Rudge, Trudy. 1996. '(Re)Writing Ethnography: The Unsettling Questions for Nursing Research Raised by Post-Structural Approaches to “the Field”'. Nursing Inquiry 3: 146-52.


