Ambiguity and the Archive: Feminist Historical Geographies of North East (UK) Mining Communities (1926-1931)

OLIVIA ROBINSON

Olivia Robinson

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Degree of Master of Arts (By Research) in Geography

Department of Geography 2023

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DEPARTMENT:	Geography
COLLEGE:	Collingwood
ADDRESS TO WHICH ALL CORRESPONDENCE SHOULD BE SENT:	233 Jesmond Road, Jesmond, Newcastle, NE2 1LA
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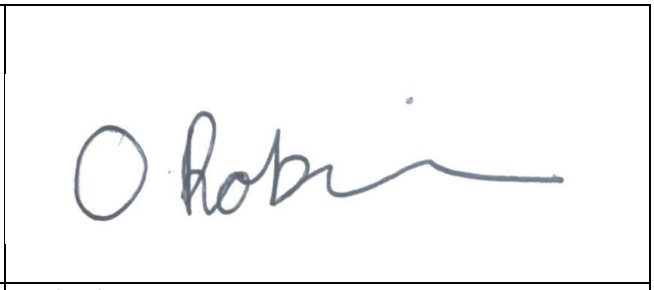
Signature:	
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Abstract

This thesis explores the ways in which ambiguity can provide space for the facilitation of understanding previously un- or under-acknowledged expressions of female agency for working-class women in mining communities, 1926-1931.

In this light, this research considers ambiguity as 2-fold: through the production of ambiguous spaces, which provide a space where social expectations and norms can be challenged and/or subverted and methodologically, through the impossibility of absolute knowledge production and the construction of historical material. This is particularly important when considering the histories of marginalised groups such as working-class women, who's voice - and therefore contribution - often has the potential to be under-represented within historical geography research (McDonagh, 2018).

By considering these concepts in relation to the lives of women in mining communities, using three sources from 1926-1931, new light is shed on the ways in which these women engaged with the presence of ambiguous spaces as a means of socio-political resistance to social expectations and norms in a variety of spaces. Namely, these are leisure spaces, newly emerging political spaces (and the interaction of these within the context of the domestic sphere) and the body. In doing so, a greater depth of the true extent and complexity of working-class female agency and autonomy is understood.

This thesis also offers suggestions regarding how feminist historical geography can employ 'ambiguity' as a methodological tool. Here, it argued that while some methodological challenges admittedly do arise from engagement with ambiguity, it also potentially offers alternative avenues to uncover otherwise hidden or overlooked histories which exist within the archive.

Acknowledgements

I would like thank my supervisors, Dr Rachel Colls and Prof. Louise Amoore for their ongoing help throughout this research. Their advice and feedback has been crucial at all stages. I'd also like to thank them for their support in my first conference attendance and presentation, which was an invaluable experience, and a lot of fun!

I'd like to also say a big thanks to Dr Ivan Markovic, who through various conversations really helped me to form my ideas, particularly with regards to thinking of alternative approaches to archival work, which has become a significant feature of this methodology.

Also, I'd like to thank the staff at Newcastle Public Library, whose expertise and guidance provided the key materials which form the core of this thesis, and without which this research would not have been possible.

Finally, my friends and family. Your continued support over the past year has truly been vital - so a massive thank you for that!

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Introduction

0.1 Introducing Ambiguity as both spatial and methodological

Ambiguity offers an ever present, but often under acknowledged space in almost all aspects of life (Sørensen, 2016). The simultaneous absence and presence which ambiguity provides is multifaceted, layered and complex (Anderson, 2009). At its very core, ambiguity provides a space which is constantly undefined, and therefore always has the potential to be contested, negotiated and reimagined. As such, there is arguably a latent power which resides within ambiguous spaces, which is realised through the facilitation of these negotiations. The power held within ambiguous spaces, or rather the potential they offer to empower or possibly disenfranchise others, makes them intrinsically political. In this regard they offer a space of potential resistance, compliance and contestation (Oesch, 2017). Of course, ambiguity is not limitless and is potentially contradictory; by its nature is simultaneously indefinable and yet is, at least to some degree, objectively describable. This is in part why ambiguity is so difficult to study - it is elusive and yet its very existence cannot be denied (Sørensen. 2016).

The existence of this ambiguity was exemplified within mining communities in the Northeast of England given their relatively strongly structured industrial economies, in tandem with a firm system of social reproduction and networks of social dynamics, resulting in a socio-political “uniqueness” (Strangleman, 2001). An individual’s sense of place in these kinds of environments was therefore strongly linked to not only a working-class identity, but also specifically what that meant in terms of gender and in a coal mining context (Hall, 2001). The realm of ambiguity which was produced as an observable space which could neither be easily categorised as paid-labour, masculine work or socially-reproductive, feminised work is clear within these communities. As Massey (2013:187) highlights,

> "'Communities' have internal structures. To take the most obvious example, I'm sure a woman's sense of place in a mining village - the spaces through which she normally moves, the meeting places, the connections outside - are different from a man's. Their 'sense of place' will be different."

While understanding that such well established socio-political networks are often built on gendered lines, as Massey later highlights, that is not to suggest absolute homogeneity either within or between mining communities either. Further, the "rigidity of the sexual division of labour in these [mining] regions" (p181) is reiterated, stressing the significance of the role of gender as fundamental to the structure and ultimately the identity of mining communities. This thesis suggests that in moments of social, political and/or economical exception (such as the 1926 General Strike and the 1928 general election), spaces of ambiguity were produced and subsequently engaged as means for women to assert autonomy, agency and to potentially even resist socially embedded expectations of identity. This is through engagement with space which neither aligns with either element of the well-defined socio-economic system of mining communities during the first half of the 20th Century. In many ways, this dichotomous system is produced by capitalism and the patriarchal institutions which are entrenched within these communities (p181). Gender therefore has an elementary role in the dynamics of these systems. In particular, the performative elements of gender expression (Butler, 2016) and the interplay between gender and alternative theories of resistance (Hughes, 2020) offer insights into new conceptions of the ways in which ambiguity and ambiguous spaces were engaged to provide less 'spectacular' (Butler, 2016) enactments of socio-political agency by women in these communities, at this time.

The ways in which these spaces of ambiguity are lived and experienced are even more significant when considering the 1920s were a time of huge social and political change, for women in particular. In 1918 certain women were granted the vote (depending on age and

property ownership), and in 1928 universal suffrage was finally granted to all adults over the age of 18 (UK Parliament, 2018). Rightfully, this essentially granted full citizenship to millions of working-class women, and guaranteed constitutionally enshrined political rights. However, it is also important to consider the ways in which many of these social expectations of women did not necessarily change in the same way, and/or were more subtle in the ways in which they were expressed.

Additionally, many point to the changes women experienced due to the influence of the First World War, such as a larger presence in paid employment which was usually reserved for men (Kent, 1988 and Grayzel, 2014:2). However, many women in mining communities did not experience these changes in the same way, given that mining was a protected occupation (Pattinson, 2016). This further presents mining communities as a noteworthy case study and further entrenches the unique social dynamics which they possess(ed) (Strangleman, 2001).

This research also focuses on the impacts of ambiguity as a concept in relation to methodological approaches. In this regard, inspiration is taken from previous work within feminist historical geography which works with ideas of partiality and 'the trace', in particular the work of McGeachan (2018) and Ogborn (2005). This research builds on these previous works by exploring ambiguity not merely as a marker of analytical uncertainty, but rather as an opportunity to investigate the multiple possibilities which are made feasible through the presence of ambiguity in the production of historical material (and knowledge production more broadly) (Matless, 1992). In addition, ambiguity is considered as significant *within* the material itself, such as through language and materiality for example. The methodology deployed in this project therefore engages with this core concept at various stages of the research process. From the initial theory of the production of history itself, to the discovery of appropriate material and finally to the practical approaches to analysis, ambiguity is continually layered and hence, is continually made more complex.

Engaging with ‘the undefinable’ both spatially and theoretically in these multiple ways is in keeping with the feminist historical geography framework which this research is built upon. By not explicitly acknowledging and focusing on the experiences of women, there is a risk that their contributions are effectively dismissed and/or overlooked (Rose and Ogborn, 1988). Much (though not all) research previously investigating the historical geographies of mining communities has been covered either from male or ‘gender neutral’ perspective. However, even ‘gender neutral’ studies do not necessarily do justice to the historical contributions of women; to not exclusively and deliberately attend to the input of women throughout history, there is a tendency that their agency and autonomy are masked by the established, politicised and gendered recorded accounts of history. It is therefore important to place women in history and geography as actors - they are not passive and this should be acknowledged (Moore, 2018). Hence, a wide range of feminist historical geography literature is engaged for this research, both theoretically and methodologically .

0.2 Research Questions

Due to the complex nature of investigating feminist historical geography, and the intertwined nature of data and methodology, the research questions for this project reflect this by combining analytical results with questions of methodology. They also reflect the different ways in which the notion of ambiguity is differentiated within this thesis. These are primarily spatially and methodologically.

1. **How did women understand and express their agency through, and despite, spatially bound gender expectations?**

   Specifically, what kind of actions did women take, why and when? How did these actions result in the negotiation of space, time and/or further agency?

2. **What was the significance of female agency with regards to the rest of the community?**

   Although often connected to the domestic sphere, how was female agency expressed and received by others in the community? Did this reception change depending on gender, social status or age?

3. **How do we unearth lost voices in the archive?**

   How do we question knowledge production and preservation to restore socio-political agency to those who have lost it? Understanding how we contemplate agency over time, and hierarchical systems of power will be key to this.

0.3 Thesis Structure

The first chapter of this thesis situates this research within existing theoretical frameworks. This begins by reviewing the current trends and key themes within feminist historical geography. Special attention is paid to approaches regarding how the sub-field tackles problems arising from feminist geography's broader task of establishing the gendered difference in lived experience (Sharp, 2007), given that many aspects of the everyday for women in particular are not present within the archive (McDonagh, 2018). It also establishes some of the challenges of working within this kind of framework, such as the necessity for some activities of women to be kept covert in the past (Moore, 2013), and wider issues of power dynamics and hierarchies facing feminist histo-geographical research pertaining to the production of historical material (McDonagh, 2018). Recognition of the importance of theories of intersectionality are also explained here. The literature review then moves to contextualise this background theory with reference to mining communities in the 1920s/30s, highlighting the significance of ambiguous spaces in these communities. These ambiguous spaces are then considered in relation to more contemporary geographical theories of resistance (Katz, 2001; Butler, 2016 and Hughes, 2020). The literature review ultimately reveals that the notion of ambiguous spaces has not been engaged with, within the context

of Northeast mining communities at this time. It is therefore suggested that a feminist historical geography framework can be deployed in order to investigate the ways in which contemporary theory can be applied within this context.

Chapter 2 involves a critical discussion of theories of knowledge production and power, with the work of Foucault (1972) playing a central role in this. Feminist geographical approaches to these theories are applied. The presence of ambiguity within these structures of powers is also addressed, as well the establishment and justification for considering archival material itself as 'ambiguous'. This chapter also explains how I tackled some of the practical obstacles in the development of this research, and how these challenges, in many ways, led to the methodological approach I took. This methodology however does also recognise that small-scale, in-depth analysis is in keeping with feminist historical geography approaches more broadly (McGeachan, et al., 2012). The chapter ends with an overview of the applied methods I used in my empirical analysis of all three sources.

Chapter 3 contains the results and analysis of all 3 pieces of material used in this research. Rather than analysing all of the material and then structuring this chapter thematically, each of the materials are analysed individually with the key themes for that section of analysis considered aligned to that material only. This perhaps unorthodox approach to analysis is justified because each of the materials used is significantly different to the others. Not only is the nature/presentation of the material itself wholly inconsistent (they are a political pamphlet, a local authority policy memo, and a photograph), but also the subject and content of the material is also significantly different (political propaganda, policy regarding women's access to contraception and a photograph of a women's football team). It would therefore be impossible to fairly compare empirical findings in a meaningful way. Instead, a concluding overview of the main themes established in all of the material is offered. Briefly, the primary themes which span all three materials are the expectations of women with regards to the domestic sphere and social-reproduction, and resistance, oftentimes in response to these

expectations. The role of ambiguity is highlighted here also. Nuances between and within each of the sources used are also discussed, with specifics regarding their significance established.

Concluding remarks then summarise the overall findings of the research, and demonstrate its significance within the broader sub-field.

Conducting the following research is important. The need to emplace women as active participants in history cannot be understated (Moore 2018 and Awcock, 2020). I argue that by engaging with the concept of ambiguity at various stages of the research process, a wide range of possibilities for previously hidden agencies can be revealed. This is especially important for working-class women, which is this focus of this thesis, because of entrenched modes of knowledge production and power dynamics within the historical record (McGeachan, 2018). Ultimately, these often lead to the under-representation of working-class women within historical-geography research (Rose and Ogborn, 1988), which this thesis seeks to go some way in addressing. Embracing ambiguity as both a spatially theoretical and methodological tool, as opposed to a challenge, offers a potentially novel way to restore the agency of those who have previously been denied it, through alternative means of historical geography research.

Chapter 1 - Literature Review

The following chapter aims to collate existing literature relevant to this research. Beginning with a development of a feminist approach to a historical geography framework, intersectionality is considered as a key aspect of this framework, the relevance of which is also discussed. This is followed by historical political context, in which intersectionality is highlighted as significant means to understand the importance of this context, and the practical implications for women at this time. An outline of appropriate theory and empirical research which touches on a breakdown of important spaces for women in mining communities during the 1920s is also explored. In particular, attention is given to the overlapping nature of physical and socio-political spaces and the inherent ambiguity which such overlapping spaces produce. Feminist histo-geographical theory is applied throughout, demonstrating the relationship between the presented empirical studies and the broader framework of the dissertation.

In keeping with the main investigative themes of this dissertation, this ambiguity is consequently explored through theories of resistance. These theories are situated in relation to the potential utilisation of ambiguity as facilitating resistances, with special attention paid to how this is of note in connection to gendered resistances. Examples of how this is relevant for the specifics of this research are also provided.

1.1 Feminist Historical Geographies

In line with historical geography's more general development of a 'political edge' (Cameron, 2014), engaging feminist geographical theory with historical research broadens scope to emplace women as active agents throughout history (Moore 2018 and McDonagh, 2019). As Sharp (2009:74) highlights:

> “Not only does cultural geography share with feminism a desire to challenge instrumental reason as the dominant form of knowledge, but also an understanding of the power of representation through which it has been possible to theorise the sex-gender distinction and thus the constructedness of ‘men’ and ‘women’ in different times and places.”

This allusion to the importance of historical research as a means to understand the importance of the ‘constructedness’ of gender as a mechanism for the exertion of power (and as potentially resistant) is significant for what follows, it also offers a lens to critically understand the knowledges which that construction produces. Exploring these past systematic inequalities in practice, and how they were instrumental in shaping the lived experiences of women is therefore fundamental to the practice of feminist historical geography. Though as Domosh and Morin (2003:257) point out, given that feminist historical geography ‘”rarely travels under its own name” a wider, more interdisciplinary approach should be deployed to attain a fuller understanding of the sub-field’s theory, methodologies and praxis. The rich and diverse nature of feminist historical research therefore offers a plethora of material, though (not too unlike the subjects it regularly studies), this material often requires creative and alternative approaches to uncover it.

A large part of the issues facing a gendered approach to historical geography is undoubtedly the inequalities in the production of historical material itself. The bias in historical record which tends to privilege wealthy, often male figures demands that feminist historical geography finds alternative means to explore the histories of those who have been previously neglected in research (Rose and Ogborn, 1998; McDonagh, 2018 and Awcock, 2020). By taking a gender-blind approach, the wealth of material relating to dominant male voices means that the agency of women is often overlooked. Instead, a conscious effort must be made to seek out and highlight the actions and voices of women, in order to demonstrate their active and important contributions throughout history (Rose and Ogborn,

1988). This task is made even more difficult given that feminist geography more generally has a strong basis in the everyday, lived experiences of marginalised groups, such as women (Bondi and Rose, 2003; Dyck, 2005; Sharp, 2009 and Rose, 2017). Historically, 'spectacular' events tend to be those which receive the greatest attention, as opposed to everyday and 'mundane' settings, and are therefore those which are most commonly recorded, making historical research of the everyday particularly challenging, and the study of the everyday of women harder still - though not impossible (McDonagh, 2018).

However, that is not to suggest the efforts of women in specifically political and/or 'spectacular' events has gone unrecognised (see Spence and Stephenson, 2007 and Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Thomlinson, 2018 regarding women's resistance to the 1984-85 Miners' Strike for example). Though even in this work, there is still a repeated emphasis on the performativity of gender, and how this is engaged as a political tool. For example during the Miners' Strike, women utilised their roles as the primary providers of care and maintainers of 'neighbourhood', to build political solidarity within their communities (Spence and Stephenson, 2007). In research of the everyday too, performativity is regularly highlighted as an important aspect of gender identity (Domosh, 1997). This is exemplified in the historical work of Moore (2013) for example, in the examination of deliberate presentation of certain gender characteristics and deliberate concealment of others with regards to abortion practices. Again, feminist historical research faces challenges in this respect, given that by definition almost, activity in such spaces is purposefully hidden and unrecorded (Moore, 2010).

1.1.2 'Women's' Spaces

In the past, the sub-discipline has perhaps overly concentrated efforts on investigating those issues and spaces seen as 'belonging' to women. These include a focus on domestic life (Domosh, 1998) and the reproductive sphere (Moore, 2013). It should be noted however, that these are (and continue to be) crucial spaces for understanding gender relations of the

past and hence, are still important in understanding the ways and spaces in which women's activities made themselves known. Feminist historical geography's role here then, is to critically assess the interactions between gender and (women's) spaces (Morin and Berg, 1999). In this regard, the development of feminist historical geography is not unusual in its initial, even logical, focus on these kinds of spaces given that it is a comparatively young feminist sub-field (Rose and Ogborn, 1988). The recognition also that the personal is inherently political and therefore the political inhabits intimate, private spaces (Sharp, 2007 and Hall, 2020) is also identified in such works and the significance of these histories on individuals and communities and the legacy of lingering inequalities should not be understated.

With a primary focus on the importance of gendered difference of experience, in practical terms often resulting in an assessment of the gendered inequalities of the past (though many of these inequalities persist today), the layering and intersectional nature of inequality has often been highlighted by feminist historical geographers (Awcock, 2020). Not only does feminist historical geography situate itself in studying the oppression of women, but also other marginalised groups such as the LGBT+ community (Stein, 2005; Nash and Gorman-Murray, 2014 and Podmore and Brown, 2015 for instance). It is impossible for feminist geographers to investigate gendered inequalities, without also considering the implications of sexuality, race and class etc - perhaps this is even more true for historical research where such layered identities are subject to delicate and (at times not so) nuanced historical context.

1.2 Intersectionality

From c.2000 the shift in historical geography more generally, but especially so within feminist historical geography, towards recognising the significance of mobilities throughout history exemplifies the need to appreciate the importance of intersectionality in historical research (McDonagh, 2018 and Awcock, 2020). For instance, while colonial life may have

offered some degree of relative freedom within academic spaces for women, it is no surprise that this freedom was still restricted to those in a position of class-based and racial privilege (Morin and Berg, 1999). In particular, much of the existing literature reflects on the lived experiences of British, upper-class white women residing in colonial India (Morin and Berg, 1999, Burton, 2003 and Stephen, 2005). There is also acknowledgement of privileged lives within a North American colonial context, for example the work of De Leeuw (2012), which perhaps challenges some of the prevalent arguments within the more Anglo-centric work, and highlights that many of these women in privileged positions did in fact utilise this in order to fight colonial control, and advocate for the rights of those individuals who had been colonised.

By not only acknowledging their position of relative privilege, De Leeuw (2012) calls attention to the ways these colonial women not only resisted colonial powers on behalf of oppressed citizens, but also how on occasion these women actively reflected on and assessed their own role in such systematic oppressions. Admittedly, part of the cause of this imbalance of focus on different demographics of women in these settings is due to the kinds and volume of material available to research. Those groups who have been systematically oppressed such as those who have been subjected to colonisation, the working-classes and women more broadly, for example often have been failed by those who write history and therefore often find an absence of their recorded histories (McGeachan, 2018:147). However, this alone does not justify the neglect or omission of these under-told stories, which still hold value academically, culturally and in some cases are personally significant to families and communities. To assess spatial inequalities through merely a gendered-only lens is therefore insufficient and a more holistic, fully intersectional approach must be adopted.

As Hopkins (2019:937) describes,

> “Intersectionality is an approach to research that focuses upon mutually constitutive forms of social oppression rather than on single axes of difference. Intersectionality is not only about multiple identities but is about relationality, social context, power relations, complexity, social justice and inequalities.”

By highlighting the importance of intersectional characteristics being constituent components of complex and unique individual identities, rather than merely independent characteristics ascribed to an individual, the significance of intersectionality on the lived experience of women can be more accurately assessed. That is, different intersectional characteristics are affective and relational to the others, and therefore their role in the experience of oppression and power is deeply intricate (Shields, 2008 and Severs at al., 2016). Throughout the social sciences - not least within human geography - arguably too much emphasis has been placed on understanding intersectional identities as “either/or" and “both/and”, leading to an underappreciation of the interactive, affective properties of these individual identities (Simien, 2007 and Valentine, 2007). By extension then, this oversimplification further over-simplifies not only the networks of power and oppression operating with or against these individuals, but also crucially the contextual *relationship* between individuals and networks of power (Collins and Bilge, 2020:197). Ultimately, while gender absolutely is a fundamental factor in the historical (and ongoing) oppression of women, there are convergent and layered identities which further reinforce modes of gender oppression (Samuels and Ross-Sheriff, 2008).

1.2.1 Intersectionality in a historical-political context

As a key dimension of feminist historical research, the importance of intersectionality must be considered in relation to this piece of work, then. Given that the 1920s was a time of significant political and social change for women (as discussed below), it is important to evaluate the main aspects of intersectional identities that are relevant for the women who

are the focus of this study. For this research, it would be impossible to ignore the importance of the expansion of female suffrage during the 1920s, and the relationship of this between gender and class.

1.2.2 Formalised Voting Rights

From 1918, The Representation of the People Act (RPA) allowed women in Britain, over the age of 30 *and* who owned or rented property to at least the value of £5 a year *or* was married to a man who did have these property rights, was eligible to vote. A decade later, in 1928, The Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act (RPEFA) changed this, to provide universal suffrage to all men and women over the age of 21, in Britain (UK Parliament, 2018). The introduction of The RPEFA effectively then provides a watershed moment between the time when a woman's class had a direct impact on her legal democratic rights, and a point where the legal implications of class were formally removed. The practical and social implications of gender, class and political autonomy are not quite as straightforward, however.

Prior to the introduction of the RPA The Labour Party advocated for universal suffrage, but stopped short of campaigning for female suffrage specifically. Instead, the party opted to take a stance which campaigned for universal voting rights across all genders and classes. This was due to fears within the party that campaigning specifically for female voting rights would lead to the emancipation of middle-class women only (effectively this did happen through the introduction of the RPA) and would therefore potentially increase the voter base of the middle-classes which would most likely vote Conservative (Rowan, 1982). While the RPA clearly was effective at providing greater political autonomy to some women, the majority of British women were still excluded from voting in general elections, and even this compromise on women's suffrage was met with deep opposition from both sides in parliament; "No strong objection was raised to the enfranchisement of the further two million men, but the provisions of the act relating to women were vigorously opposed." (Ogg,

1918:501). Arguably, the lack of political opposition to male suffrage regardless of class but vehement opposition to female suffrage purely based on class would suggest that opposition to the RPA was in fact almost entirely based on sexist views, rather than a classist or sexist-classist stance. However, as Ogg (1918) identifies, the main concerns between the two major parties at the time[3] were that newly politically empowered women would vote for the relatively young Labour Party, and therefore female suffrage of any kind would be a threat to the main parties' existing political status. This panic over the potential of what even a proportionally small number of women could do to the political status quo demonstrates the thinly veiled sexism and classism held by the political establishment at this time. The idea that a party which openly represented the working classes might gain political influence was so objectionable to most men in Westminster, that they would happily deny the vote to those women of their own socio-political status instead (Wrigley, 2018).

In the earlier decades of the 20th Century participation in formal politics (in this context, that is understood as, "The operation of the constitutional system of government and its publicly-defined institutions and procedures" as described by Painter and Jeffrey, (2009:7). This is useful to consider with regards to such activities as the formation of political parties, voting rights and the formation of legislation amongst other things) was often seen as a means to enact economic and social change through employment laws, pension rights etc., which directly impacted men overwhelmingly more than women. Ultimately this is because given there was a greater number of men employed than women at this time (Eustance and John, 2013:39), this kind of legislation directly impacted them more arguably more than women. However, there was little formal recognition of the wider implications of these decisions on women and families (Koven and Michel, 1990). By attempting to deny women the vote and then by restricting the demographics of female voters, the political establishment essentially not only denied women the vote, but also failed to recognise their role as economic

[3] At this time, the country was governed by a relatively weak coalition. There was a ruling Conservative majority headed by the Liberal's Lloyd George as Prime minister (Gottlieb and Toye, 2013:54).

contributors through unpaid labour and social reproduction (Cameron and Gibson-Graham, 2003). Further, in contradiction to the stance of the political establishment, women had already demonstrated for years their proficiency in shaping and influencing policy through organised political groups (Koven and Michel, 1990 and Moore, 2016).

For example, during the 1915 rent strikes in Glasgow, women within the Glasgow Women's Housing Association successfully petitioned the government for rent controls to pre-war rates. This fight in particular helps to highlight the political influence that working-class women wielded, despite not having constitutionally enshrined democratic rights (Griffin, 2018). Similarly, Sarah Reddish was a textile worker and prominent trade unionist in Lancashire, who despite having no formal voting rights or ability to stand for office as an MP for example, was very politically active. Not only did she regularly run for (and often win) positions in local office such as on local school boards etc, crucially she helped to found The Bolton School of Mothers and Babies Welcome. Eventually the programme expanded significantly, providing healthcare provisions to those who otherwise would not be afforded it due to their economic status (Moore, 2016). Not only does this demonstrate an important example of the role women played in their local communities with regards to social welfare, but the significance of this is further exemplified by local government eventually working in financial partnership with the programme (Moore, 2013). While this kind of political activism does not necessarily require formal democratic voting rights, it is clearly still political in its very nature, and in its advocation of the welfare of women and children, was acknowledged thence by political organisations such as the Local Authority. What is of particular note, is that Reddish herself stressed that it was the role of women as mothers and wives which made them essential to be elected as public figures with regards to social welfare and as Poor Law Guardians etc. She viewed women's roles in the domestic sphere as precisely what made them experts, and well equipped to understand the needs of working-class women and children; their presence as policy makers and influencers was, in her opinion, not only common sense but the most effective way to enact social change for working-class

women (Moore, 2016). Of course, election to office such as a government minister or even an MP was entirely impossible, considering neither the RPA or RPEFA had been passed yet.

The unwillingness of the government to realise the economic and broader socio-political contribution of women essentially further entrenched existing notions of unpaid labour within the home as a feminine space and responsibility, and the paid labour, economic activity outside of the home as the responsibility of men. This can be considered as the reassertion of 'traditional' gender roles as they were before WW1 (Kent, 1988). This is of particular note when considering the RPA's property ownership clause for women. Given that women who met this clause were by definition reasonably wealthy, this means that women who were not able to vote under the RPA, due to financial insufficiencies - working class women - had their identities as domestic housewives with little to no perceived political agency reinforced in ways middle and upper class women simply did not. Publicly, the government claimed they had conceded conditional votes for women, in recognition of their industrial and economic contributions during WW1. However, the reality was that the majority of women who had participated in paid labour during the war, were in fact excluded from voting in 1918 due to their economic status (Gottlieb and Toye, 2013:1). There has perhaps been an argument in the past that both the RPA and RPEFA were anomalies in the broader landscape of socio-political liberation of women, and that both were somewhat disconnected to the broader context of the development of better gender equality. The crux of the argument essentially being that these acts were simply to appease the political demands of women and prevent further political agitation (Neale, 1967). However, regardless of whether this was in fact the case or not, the introduction of these acts - in particular the RPA - signalled a shift towards greater, if not equal, rights for women which the government acknowledged absolutely could not be undone. While undoubtedly the inclusion of partial female suffrage within the RPA was the most controversial aspect of the bill, other controversial clauses of the bill such as formalising the first-past-the-post voting system are still implemented within the UK today

(Blackburn, 2011). This further demonstrates the political influence and lasting socio-political importance of the RPA.

The matter of historical record which documents the introduction of the RPA also highlights the ways in which 'spectacular' events are often privileged and are more well documented than the processes used in their development, for instance, particularly considering such Acts were passed in almost exclusively male spaces, such as parliament (McDonagh, 2018). There is therefore a clear need to seek-out and emplace women as political agents in the development of these laws, potentially through alternative means in order to fully appreciate the agency of women at this time, which is perhaps not fully demonstrated in such historical record (Rose and Ogborn, 1988; Moore, 2018 and McDonagh, 2018). Further to the existence of the act itself, but also considering the ways in which it is constructed in very legal, 'factual' ways further highlights the difficulties in attaining personal, affective stories and legacies often favoured by a feminist framework. Even more so within feminist historical geography, in light of the ways in which historical records are constructed, and if/how such histories and documents demand novel and alternative means of interpretation to uncover their meanings and impacts within these feminist frameworks (McDonagh, 2018).

Following the introduction of the RPA, many in the suffragette movement continued to fight for broader voting rights for women. However much of the campaign's focus was on overcoming the age restriction clause of the RPA, rather than the property ownership clause. This kind of campaigning focus essentially did not represent over two million working-class women over the age of 30, who did not meet the property ownership requirements of the RPA, leaving them underrepresented by the movement in the subsequent years (Muggeridge, 2018). That being said, it is important to acknowledge that campaigning for universal suffrage across gender and class was still active during this time. Both groups and individuals, such as Helen Crawfurd in Glasgow, openly and passionately held a communist stance and continued to campaign for universal suffrage (Griffin, 2018). Similarly, Reddish,

who was president of the Women's Cooperative Guild, campaigned for universal suffrage even before the First World War, in 1897 (Liddington, 1977).

As reviewed above, women were not merely politically active but also influential in affecting policy and the broader socio-political landscape at this time. Women who were formally politically engaged at this time possessed a complex political identity; essentially denied full citizenship and formal voting rights (Ward, 1995) and yet actively striving to amend this deliberate omission. The conflict of advocating for the rights of women, whilst themselves being systematically oppressed and with very limited legal mechanisms available to enact real change is therefore very much evident. The complex intersectional identities of women in relation to their political lives and activities must therefore be considered (Awcock, 2020).

1.3 Understanding the binary reality of everyday life

The following section considers the distinctive dynamics which exist(ed) within mining communities (Strangleman, 2001), and relates this to binary systems of socio-economic production. These dynamics are considered through the relationship between labour and economic production, and social-reproduction. The role of capital and as the 'instigator' of these dynamics is understood, but the agency of individuals to embed these systems further should also be noted (Herod, 1997). This section considers gender as one of the main defining features which characterises each section of these systems.

1.3.1 Moral Norms and expectations

This dissertation looks to situate the debates above, of gender relations, feminist historical geographies and intersectionality, within industrial working class settings. It does so to reveal a further possible silencing within archival approaches. To do so, the dissertation narrows its focus to mining communities as a site of gender relations, and distinctive formation of gender 'constructedness'. While some of these 'dualisms' have been observed in other more contemporary settings (Massey, 1995:109), for mining communities, the industry on which

they were built extended far beyond the spatial bounds of the pit itself, or the Workingmans' Club. Rather, the impact of mining reached far beyond this, into spaces of social reproduction, such as the home. Labour control regimes in Durham for example, touched all parts of everyday life, and all members of the community. From church, to school the influence of mines and their paternalistic owners was felt, and while sometimes welcomed, at times was often resisted by miners and their families (Martin, 2021).

Tasks such as child care, cleaning, laundry and meal preparation, all had to revolve around the shift patterns dictated by the mining industry (Parry, 2005 and Massey, 2013). For the most part, these socially reproductive tasks were carried out within the home, for the individuals who resided there (most commonly family members). This is in direct contrast with the paid labour element of these communities; men who would leave the home to work in the mine in exchange for a monetary income, as a means to financially provide for the individuals who reside within the home. There are many binary representations of the normative expectations of gender in mining communities at this time. Here, attention is drawn to the three most significant with regards to understanding everyday life: these are the politicisation of the female body; social reproduction and paid labour and recreation and leisure spaces.

The conflict between the existence of a brutal and often dangerous, 'dirty' industry and a sense of pride in mining community identity is key to the cultural 'uniqueness' (Strangleman, 2001) observed within such communities. How this often performative identity differs from the ascribed identity given by others, in relation to their industry is often significant, and not unusual when considering working class identities (Dicks, 2008). The significance of 'dirty' work is, perhaps ironically, one of the greatest sources of working class pride - the sense that hard, honest work is signified by someone who is willing to get their hands literally dirty and work in uncomfortable and oftentimes dangerous conditions (Slutskaya et al, 2016 and Pleasant, 2019). The idea that 'dirty', physical labour is also a source of specifically

masculine pride is also particularly relevant to hyper masculinized industries such as mining (Slutskaya et al., 2016 and Pleasant, 2019; see further Simpson and Simpson, 2018 for a comprehensive review from a sociological perspective).

Mary Douglas' (1966:44) theory that 'dirt' is simply matter out of place, can be clearly observed in practice within mining communities. While for the masculine dominated work in the public sphere 'dirt' is a signifier of hard work and pride, in the feminine dominated domestic sphere it is a source of great shame and disgust. The boundary construction between these two spheres, one 'outside', in which dirt is source of working-class masculine pride and the other, 'inside', where dirt is considered an offence to feminine morality therefore provides both a metaphorical and indeed literal line in which 'dirt' is ascribed very different cultural meanings, in a way which is perhaps otherwise not seen within other aspects of society (Pleasant, 2019). Indeed, after the steady introduction of Pithead Baths in the 1920s, following thirty years of struggle by the Miners' Welfare Committee, this separation of the mine as the site of 'dirtiness' was very much formalised when after the nationalisation of the industry in 1926, the provision of baths at work for miners made compulsory (Jencks, 1967 and Hughes, 1994:15). As Hughes (1994:15) describes, "They usually incorporated not only locker rooms, and showers but a canteen, a medical centre and a mortuary." The provision of spaces such as canteens separates these mining and domestic worlds even further; while at work and dirty, miners were able to engage with socially reproductive tasks (such as eating meals) which would have previously taken place in the domestic space. By creating these spaces within the workplace, not only were miners and their families safer because of improved hygiene practices (Williams, 1922), but it also further socially entrenched the idea that the mine was where dirt belonged, and the domestic space was clean and separate from that.

Particularly in mining communities, which were more often Catholic than not (MacRaild, 1999) (though that is not to suggest homogeneity within or between mining communities

(Massey, 2013:154)), domestic cleanliness was strongly linked to morality and pride - particularly in association with femininity. The performative element of gender, and gender identity with regards to social politics is self-evident in such communities (Domosh, 1997). Not only in terms of expectations and duties, but also by providing a potential means to resist these expectations through the removal of gender performativity (Butler, 2016). Although most social reproduction which women were responsible for was carried out within the domestic sphere, there was also a strong performative feature; it was important that others in the community could see how clean the home was, a responsibility which was passed from mother to daughter (Crook, 1982 and Hall, 2001). The pride in cleanliness was extracted from an understanding of social networks and based on a cultural consensus of moral beliefs. As such, in mining communities where the paid, masculine work was by definition 'dirty', and mining shifts were often rotated for 24 hours a day production, this was near continuous work for women (Crook, 1982 and Hall, 2001).

How well behaved a woman's children were, how clean her home was perceived to be and how organised her work throughout the week was, was deemed to be a direct reflection on the 'morality' of the family as a whole (Crook, 1982). Naturally, it follows then that women in these communities in the earlier part of the 20th Century could be deemed largely responsible for the moral standing of the family. Women can therefore be considered not only actors within this community dynamic of moral norms and expectations, but also as monitors and effectively gatekeepers of what was understood as acceptable moral norms within the home.

1.3.2 The body and 'moral' boundary construction

This boundary construction as discussed above is further extended within the home itself, to include the female body as a culturally politicised site. Amongst other things, this is due to a woman's ability to carry and produce children. Although medical advances made contraception not only more readily available during this time, due to lower costs and being

(at least theoretically) more accessible for married women, these services were primarily more available to the middle classes (Szreter and Fisher, 2010). The complex intersectional relationship between class and gender in this case reinforces the female body as a politicised site (Sharp, 2007). This is apparent through the direct correlation between economic status and gender, and the ability for women at this time to control their own reproductive health. Further, this also demonstrates the relationship between broader socio-political practices and the individual (Domosh, 1997 and Staeheli, 2001), in the context of healthcare provision for women in the 1920s.

This relationship can be established, in part, due to the characterisation of working-class female bodies fulfilled as primarily reproductively functional. Typically having larger families than those of middle and upper class women perpetuated the idea that working-class female bodies were merely reproductive entities with little autonomy or control (Brooke, 2006). The media, namely the growing film industry, furthered this notion by portraying glamorous film stars as desirable, sexual beings whose pursuit of idealised romance and jet-set lifestyle was unobtainable to the working-class woman, for example in the film *The Sheik* (Chow, 1999). The idea that middle-class female bodies did not have the need to have large families shaped the perception that the middle-class woman could enjoy sex, whereas for working-class women, sex was often perceived as a risky encounter which may result in unwanted pregnancy. The physical toll of multiple pregnancies and the financial burden of more children meant that working-class women often actively avoided sex, as opposed to the way it was framed as an enjoyable act for middle and upper-class women (Brooke, 2006). This both informed and was informed by the ways in which contraception and reproductive health was presented to women at this time (Szreter and Fisher, 2010).

The idea that women had a wifely duty to produce children undeniably has some - although not all - origin in the predominantly Catholic nature of some mining communities (MacRield, 1999). This is due to the Catholic idea that marital sex is primarily for procreation and

shouldn't be purely for recreation (Aresti, 2010:72). Therefore, for a woman to deliberately prevent pregnancy in any way had the potential for a degree of perceived religious immorality, which as touched on in the previous section above, would have been socially and culturally unacceptable within mining communities. Instead, in order to avoid pregnancy, the practice of partial or complete abstinence was fairly common (Frost, 2007). However, again to continue to use this as a method of avoiding pregnancy for a sustained amount of time was often seen as a dereliction of wifely duties from not only husbands, but also by the church itself as one of the primary purposes of marriage was viewed as a legitimate means for procreation (Aresti, 2010:72). Further, discussion around contraceptive methods between married couples was often in itself a taboo subject, with the responsibility for preventing pregnancy gradually shifting towards the wife and less frequent discussions occurring between couples as the marriage continued (Szreter and Fisher, 2010).

Of course, that which is openly discussed and accepted publicly, is not necessarily what is discussed in private or covertly. At the time, Britain had some of the most severe legal penalties for abortion in the world (Brooke, 2001). The Infant Life (Preservation) Act, 1929 (UK Parliament), specifically states:

> "Any person who, with intent to destroy the life of a child capable of being born alive, by any wilful act causes a child to die before it has an existence independent of its mother, shall be guilty of felony, to wit, of child destruction, and shall be liable on conviction thereof on indictment to penal servitude for life."
>
> (*Infant Life (Preservation) Act, 1929. Chapter 34.*)

This Act therefore essentially solidified the illegality of abortion in the UK, and the apparent seriousness of the 'crime' was consolidated by the potential punishment for those who carried out abortions being a maximum of life in prison. The Discussions of reproductive health such as contraception and abortion were therefore often, by necessity, unrecorded

throughout the early 20th century due to fears of legal and social repercussions (Moore, 2018). Despite this however, clearly these practices were still employed by women (Moore, 2013 and Moore, 2018). As Moore (2013:706) explains,

> "Women struggled to afford Racker's [a local herbalist] fees and pennyroyal [an abortifacient] was widely available, yet she was recommended by women to friends, family members and work colleagues. This is remarkable since there is very little existing evidence to suggest that women discussed sexual or reproductive matters with their peers, and women's ignorance of biology during the period in question has been well documented."

The particular reference to a small community in the North West of England during the early 20th Century highlights the difficulties in establishing how socially - and crucially openly - matters of reproductive health were discussed and accepted amongst working class women themselves. It also underlines the importance of women's communities in female reproductive education, which as Moore points out, was largely neglected by the state. The spatial significance of where these conversations took place is also significant. They not only occurred within the home, but also in the workplace - a space occupied by working class women in particular (Todd, 2004). The spaces in which these discussions occurred (and the fact that such discussions often needed to be covert in nature), means that often, these significant life events are not formally recorded (as Moore points out). Instead, in such circumstances, particular effort must be made to extrapolate evidence and potential meaning from trace and partial sources (Ogborn, 2005 and McGeachan, 2018).

The legacy of Victorian ideals and imaginaries of femininity also mean that these discussions and practices were almost exclusively female only spaces more generally. Interestingly, issues regarding postnatal care of mother and baby were only primarily discussed between women and female practitioners even in government clinics, well into the 1930s. Most of

these discussions took place in social spaces and not in medical settings (Wainwright, 2003). The lack of male inclusion in these matters, despite there being no legal implications to their practice (unlike abortion for example), therefore further suggests a social dimension to the need for them to be, on at least some level, hidden from male gaze as these are 'feminine' practices. Conversely however, matters of contraception and family planning were viewed as medical matters, for which largely middle-class, male doctors should give instruction. As Aleck Bourne, a prominent gynaecologist claimed, "[b]birth Control is a form of treatment, which should be taught and advised only by medical men for medical conditions." (Brooke, 2006:111). This firmly reasserts the power of (non)reproduction onto those of gender and class privilege. It also highlights that the wish of women to access contraception was in fact considered something only to be implemented as 'medically necessary', not just because a woman does not desire more children. Access must be considered a need, not a wish.

The issue of reproductive health is therefore dichotomous. There is the moral politicisation of women's bodies in these communities which acted as a physical site of moral boundary construction within the home and within their relationships with their husbands. Due to the strong religious connotations of 'the family' as a concept within these communities, pregnancy and child bearing also acts as yet another signifier of morality which was performed within these communities more broadly, and was largely moderated by women. Conversely however, there are (largely) undocumented practices which demonstrate not only well established networks of support for women in these matters, but provide evidence that such networks also helped women to greater body autonomy, in opposition to legal constraints.

1.3.3 Social/Economic Binary

This 'binary reality' of moral reversal (clean vs dirty, public sphere vs domestic sphere etc) is further reflected in the kinds of labour - specifically paid and unpaid - which is carried out

within the two spheres. Considering social reproduction as a form of unpaid labour compared to that of paid labour highlights that the division of labour within these households and communities more generally, is also very strongly split along male and female lines.

While undoubtedly men had greater economic independence during the first half of the 20th Century through legally enshrined property rights and, due to the patriarchal nature of the British legal system and cultural norms, greater earning potential (and responsibility to do so) (Siegel, 1993) this did not mean that women had no economic agency at all. Working class women, especially those who were yet to marry or widowed, were expected to find employment in some capacity, therefore arguably challenging previously established expectations of femininity within these communities. This is understood as a significant change to cultural attitudes towards female employment during the 1920s and 1930s (Todd, 2004). While this may be the case, it is also important to recognise that the majority of this employment was in domestic service and therefore still conformed to the expectations of a woman to be domestically reproductive within the work she carried out, even if it was still technically paid employment (Todd 2009 and Bingham, 2015). Although domestic employment was by far the most prominent form of employment for young women, it is also important to note that there was a growing number of working-class women entering white-colar employment too, such as office clerks (Todd, 2005). However, overall female employment rates remained steady at around 30% of the total workforce in the UK between 1901 and 1945 (Bourke, 1994:80). This is perhaps then indicative of a shift in the kinds of paid labour women were doing, rather than increase in the number of women entering employment overall.

Furthermore, just because she was single did not mean that a woman had necessarily greater economic freedom than a married woman. Despite *legally* not having a right to a single woman's wages in the same way her husband would if she were married, there was a strong degree of social expectation that (in particular, young) single women would directly

pass on her entire wages to her parents, and refer to them for access, which they would either grant or deny (Fowler, 2014:96). This evidently diminishes the potential economic power of young women at this time, though this shift towards greater female employment can still be considered as some degree of socio-economic progress.

While legal and socio-political restrictions inevitably limited the economic rights, and therefore economic power of women, the social capital that women enjoyed within mining communities at this time was arguably comparatively greater. By being responsible for policing the expectations of moral norms within communities women had the ability to collectively include or crucially, ostracise individuals for what were deemed as social transgressions (Crook, 1982).

However, this sense of community between women went beyond the 'realm of women' and of moral policing/socially reproductive tasks and responsibilities and enabled women to venture into social activities usually reserved for men. This is perhaps especially true for leisure activities, which while arguably socially reproductive in their own right, or at least facilitate social reproduction (Staikov, 1987) are also ambiguous - they neither neatly fall into unpaid labour or paid labour. It is also important to note that should these activities be framed as socially reproductive, there is also a distinct socio-economic dimension to this, which should not be overlooked (Cameron and Gibson-Graham, 2003).

1.3.4 Recreation and leisure

Although not able to enjoy the same degree of economic freedom as men, women in employment did commonly contribute financially to the family and therefore felt they had a right to a certain level of financial independence (Todd, 2005).

As a result, during the 1920s and 30s, it became not only more commonplace, but crucially more socially acceptable for women to attend the cinema not only with romantic partners,

but with other women as a purely social experience. The escapism of films, the relative affordability and widely accessible nature of cinemas not only made the cinema a popular leisure activity for women, but also demonstrated a level of 'glamour' and quality of life beyond that which they had previously witnessed on a daily basis, providing a new level of aspiration (Stead, 2016:10). Similarly, women were able to visit the local dance hall, often with other women as a social activity. This shift to women participating in leisure activities in spaces previously usually reserved for couples marked a significant difference between them and the previous generation; working-class women possessed greater financial independence than before. Increased economic power also furthered the autonomy of women as consumers in their own right, which afforded them greater socio-political power within these leisure spaces (Todd, 2005).

As a result, mainstream media in the UK and especially in North America were beginning to capitalise on increased female, working class consumer power by pushing narratives of a newly "materially classless" society, in which working women could possess the same commodities as upper class women (Giles, 2007:28). In reality however, most working class women in fact used disposable income on experiences such as the cinema and in other public spaces rather than on material products for themselves or the home (Rosenzweig, 1983:201). The use of disposable income to facilitate working class women more frequently occupying public spaces is arguably a demonstration of resistance to societal expectations of gender and class at this time. The fact that this was catalysed by female employment, and was done so with a frequent preference over material investments of the domestic, further evidence increased socio-economic assertiveness and agency of women.

Whilst activities such as going to the cinema and frequenting dance halls were particularly popular amongst groups of younger, unmarried women, predominantly male dominated spaces such as the local pub were largely unattended by women under twenty-five. While the vast majority of female patrons were over thirty-five, it is still important to acknowledge

that overall women were still very much in the minority of pub-goers (Langhamer, 2003). This may be in part due to the possibility of unwanted sexualisation of women (particularly unmarried women) in such hyper-masculanised spaces leading to many younger women actively avoiding them or prioritising activities deemed more likely to lead to finding a romantic partner (Kneale, 2021). It is important to also note here that there is a distinct class divide in leisure time spent drinking for women. Although working-class women were relatively unlikely to spend their leisure time in the local pub, middle-class women were much more likely to spend their free time in drinking establishments, though admittedly these tended to be hotel bars etc, rather than public houses (Langhamer, 2003). This is perhaps suggestive of further entrenchment of the strict binary of gender division seen in working-class communities at this time. A woman's sense of place in such communities was undoubtedly anchored in the ways in which these (regularly dichotomous) social systems were understood by herself and others, with gender playing a crucial part (Massey, 2013:154).

Another space previously almost exclusively dominated by men was direct participation in sport and with regards to the surrounding culture. Many individuals - especially men - in mining communities had a shared experience of what it meant to be 'northern working-class'; a shared geographically based support for the same football teams was considered a significant aspect of this masculine working-class identity (Metcalfe 1988, Russell, 1999 and Huggins, 2007).

Many men also actively participated in football through amateur teams, a good proportion of which were directly associated with Miners' Institutes (Metcalfe, 2005:157). However, despite coal mining being classified as a reserved occupation[4] during the First World War,

[4] Despite the introduction of conscription in 1916, most coal miners were exempt on the grounds of having a 'reserved occupation' (along with teachers, clergymen and some other industrial workers), meaning their continued work was deemed essential for the war effort, and day-to-day running of the

those who did still volunteer to fight were sufficient enough in numbers to leave not only a significant gap in the workforce, but also left a largely empty social space too which, in the absence of sufficient numbers of men, was often filled by women. Sport was often presented by munitions factories, in particular towards female employees as a means of physical and psychological restoration (Jenkel, 2021).

Despite remaining popular amongst women post-WW1, organised matches between women were officially banned on pitches linked to the FA in 1921 (similar bans were also implemented at the same time by other governing bodies throughout the rest of Britain) (Jenkel 2021 and Skillen et al., 2022). Technically, while this did not explicitly ban women from playing football in public spaces it can be considered as a direct attack on the *legitimacy* of women's football and by extension female participation in sport more widely (Skillen et al., 2022). Considering football was - and is still - considered to be a 'working-class sport', it is significant to note that by formally banning women from certain 'official' football spaces, the FA was effectively suppressing the assertion of a very specific kind of working-class identity by women at this time. Up until this point, this identity had almost exclusively been associated with the *male* worker who used football as a means of recreation (Jenkel, 2021). Through their participation in football, women were simultaneously asserting a working-class identity while rejecting notions of a feminine identity. However, arguably the ban was actually helpful to the sport in the subsequent years. The ban encouraged greater coordination between grass-roots clubs both nationally and internationally, at a rate which would take the men's sport decades to equal (Williams 2019).

1.3.5 Ambiguous spaces

The cultural and economic systems discussed above, while clearly consisting of two distinct elements, are nonetheless linked to each other and within this system, there is a notion of

country more generally. However, many miners still choose to volunteer to fight during WW1. Some were called back home however, in order to produce a sufficient amount of coal (Pattinson, 2016).

ambiguity. Similarly, within these two cultural and economic systems, the points at which their constituent elements meet are also inherently ambiguous spaces, neither neatly fitting into one element or the other. This ambiguous space therefore has the potential to be contested; available for negotiation between actors in either element of the system. Control of this space therefore further affords the prevailing actor greater socio-political power within the system as whole, and an opportunity to resist further control by the opposing actor (Willis, 1981). At least on some level, this ambiguous space is always present and control of this space is therefore always available for negotiation and has the potential to be contested by either party. Control for this space may therefore completely, or more likely, partially shift frequently between parties over time (Willis, 1981).

This ambiguity is layered. While there is certainly a physical space which is ambiguous such as recreational spaces like pubs, as discussed above, neither neatly aligning with a domestically reproductive role or as a space of paid labour (Staikov, 1987 and Hall et al., 1999) or certain areas within the home and body, there is also an intangible, political dynamic to obtaining control or occupation of these spaces.

In relation to this project, understanding that there is also a temporal element to ambiguity is also significant. An obvious example of this would be the 1926 General Strike. The disruption to the natural rhythm of routine within these communities threw both sides of this well established system (social reproduction and paid labour) into a relatively unfamiliar territory where paid labour ceased for nine days (Laybourn, 1993:74). While many striking occupations had their attempts to cease production and services thwarted by individuals, often those from the middle and upper classes ‘stepping in to cover’, mining was not one such occupation (Saltzman, 1994). Ultimately the strike was unsuccessful and while many aspects of general life were disrupted, the government still maintained significant control of the situation (Laybourn, 1993:74). However, the ambiguous space such a disruption provided - especially within mining communities - allowed those usually confined, to the

domestic sphere, space to negotiate greater freedoms and alternative roles within this nine day period and in some cases, beyond. In many mining communities, the General Strike offered an opportunity for women to part-take in more publicly socio-political activities, that would not have occurred without the influence of the strike:

> "'Politics' here is broadly defined as not just the interaction of women with the local political apparatus but also women playing out roles in public with the aim of influencing events. By examining women in active, assertive roles we resist the tendency to view working class women in the south Wales coalfield as victims. Lynn Sinclair has also argued that we should not see working-class women in Britain in depressed regions as 'quiescent, passive victims' but as much more complex identities. Equally, as Angela V. John has recognised, we cannot view these women as 'totally free agents, gradually and deliberately "modernising"'. (Bruley, 2007:86)

By recognising that such a 'crack' in the everyday fabric and customs within these communities enabled women to express greater individual and *collective* agency, highlights the importance of the temporal in such socio-economic systems. Again, not only did the General strike provide a time and space of ambiguity, but as recognised above, it further complicated the identity of the women themselves. Actively engaging in such a space, whilst an expression of female agency was surely to some degree empowering and arguably an act of resistance against the usual status quo, as the above highlights, the degree of deliberate engagement makes these women's identities as active political agents, in itself somewhat ambiguous.

1.4 Resistance

As is the focus of this dissertation, the ambiguity highlighted in the meeting of socio-political systems in mining communities provides an undefined space where resistances may occur. Some examples are touched on above, however the following section maps the ways in which resistance manifests in such spaces, through contemporary debates within theory and appropriate empirical examples.

As discussed by Paddison et al. (2002), often the linguistics and terminology used in the study of power and resistance within human geography implicitly creates a sense of their relationship as a binary one. By doing so, at times there is a failure by scholars to properly demonstrate the more complex relational nature of both. Subsequently, this does not sufficiently acknowledge those ideas and/or (non)actions which do not neatly fall into either category or cannot be seen as directly oppositional to the other. Concerns regarding the necessity for resistance to contain a performative element, with an existing understanding of what should be considered a 'resistant act' protect the idea that resistance is culturally and politically significant in opposing networks of power through specific use. However, again this can fail to fully comprehend the importance of the unspectacular performances of resistance, which can ultimately undermine the development of theories of resistance. As Hughes (2020) describes; "concerns that a multiplicity of potential points of resistance will make the term conceptually redundant have resulted in an a priori classification of resistant forms." Many of the entry points noted above, campaigns for suffrage, changing labour relations, the body, and leisure spaces, might be considered as sites of resistance, whereby women were able to challenge and contest the 'constructedness' of their societal position. Hughes' work is particularly insightful for pointing towards the potential for framing these acts, with varying intentions, as holding resistance potential.

1.4.1 Resistance and Performativity

As Butler (2016) highlights, often access to public space in order to be seen and 'perform' resistant acts in the first instance is often a hard fought battle. Almost by definition, those

who are resistant must be in some way ‘vulnerable’. How this ‘vulnerability’ is galvanised, is often performative in nature, and is employed to draw attention to the systematic inequalities it aims to resist;. “In such practices of non-violent resistance, we can come to understand bodily vulnerability as something that is actually marshalled or mobilised for the purposes of resistance” (Butler, 2016:17). Instead, the nature of ‘resistant acts’ must be considered to fall within the constraints of existing systems of power, and the circumstances of each individual. For example, the legal system, existing notions of class, race, gender, disability etc. These will, by definition, be unique to each individual (Hughes, 2020). There cannot therefore be a singular definition of ‘acts of resistance and solidarity’ and there is a need to understand that individual circumstances mean that the socio-political agency of an individual may be somewhat limited. For example those whose actions may be less publicly visible through their incarceration, choice, or media bias[5], for example (Mollet and Faria, 2018 and Hughes, 2020). Despite these apparent constraints, the remaining individual agency still allows these obstacles to be circumvented, at least somewhat (Hughes, 2020). Though the means through which resistance is expressed may vary from individual to individual, it is important to acknowledge that these acts are still significant as independent acts, in their own right. Though the agency of individuals may be potentially limited, ultimately these individuals possess some degree of agency nonetheless, and may express this agency through limited means, despite having to navigate existing systems of power and control (as mentioned above). In short, individual acts of resistance matter because not only do they at times come with the potential of great personal risk or cost (Routledge and Cumbers, 2013) but crucially, they are symbolic to the individuals enacting them (Hughes, 2020). In the Anglo-American context of the 1920s for example, flappers often used their clothes, make-up and hair as a means of expressive resistance. Flappers simultaneously embraced female sexuality

[5] ‘Media bias’ here refers to the well documented bias of mainstream media towards white, hetronormative, understandings of political resistance and solidarity leading to the under-representation of certain historically disadvantaged groups who do not fit this narrative, (for instance minority ethnic groups and members of the LGBT community) as well as those on the political left, particularly in the West (Binderkrantz, 2012).

through the use of rouged cheeks, lipstick and new styles of dancing often deemed to be somewhat sexual in nature, whilst also rejecting previous Victorian expectations of the female form through loose clothing. Some women went so far as to bind their chests in the pursuit of the rejection of the 'traditional' female figure (Pumphery, 1987 and Reinsch, 2012). This example of performative resistance is demonstrative of how individuals are able to exhibit agency, using the only means of viable expression available (Hughes, 2020). This example also highlights the complex and often contradictory ways in which resistance and identity are intertwined.

More specifically, when considering how this relates to working-class women during the beginning of the 20th Century, of course one must acknowledge the legal and constitutional restrictions which limited their abilities to express their opposition or unhappiness with the government through the voting system, the irony obviously being that much of their opposition to the government was in fact with regards to the lack of universal suffrage. Many women however did take "direct action" in this regard, and broke the law in deliberately performative and 'spectacular' ways. These illegal actions often resulted in incarceration of those enacting them (see Purvis, 1995 for details on window-breaking and other civil disobedience), which is of great personal sacrifice and therefore significant (Routledge and Cumbers, 2013). Emily Wilding Davidson famously, and tragically, lost her life in her attempt to pin a 'votes for women' badge on the King's Horse at the Epsom Derby in 1913. While in the past some have argued that Davison was somewhat naive, and did not intend to go to these extremes for her cause, more recently feminist historians have instead assessed that she was in fact aware of the potential consequences of her actions and nevertheless carried them out, paying the ultimate price for her militant resistance in doing so (Purvis, 2013).

While these instances are evidently overt acts of resistance to existing systems of power, and are clearly oppositional to that power, the importance of everyday, less 'spectacular' acts should also be appreciated. The significance of these can be considered in the

employment opportunities for working-class individuals of colour during the late 1800s and early 1900s for instance. Particularly in theatre and other performance industries, it has been observed that some performers would not perform in productions which they deemed to be a racist or prejudiced in nature. Further, some performers would not participate in productions unless they deemed that production to be anti-racist, for example stage adaptations of the 'anti-slavery' novel, Uncle Tom's Cabin (Bressy, 2010). Utilising the individual agency and autonomy they had over their own employment to support some productions and ignore others demonstrates these quieter, less formally organised, though still significant understandings of resistance (Hughes, 2020). The extent of the individual's agency is still however somewhat limited by the necessity to work, and work which that individual deems permissible was not always available (Bressy, 2010). The ability of these individuals to resist racist prejudices in employment was therefore somewhat restricted by their personal economic circumstances, as well as dominant discourses of race and culture at the time.

Such acts are therefore significant because of the meaning ascribed to them by those enacting them, whether that be in a public, semi-public or private sphere. There is then an intrinsically cultural element to these unspectacular, everyday acts; they must either utilise aspects of specific culture and perform it as an act of resistance in defiance of the expectation of power, or they must be performed in a way which opposes expected cultural norms, in order to be considered as significant resistant acts. This notion is particularly significant when considering interdisciplinary work such as in psychology (for example Wade, 1997) and in sociology (for example, Ryan, 2015) where everyday acts considered as demonstrations of 'resilience' are simultaneously also considered as acts of 'resistance', whilst still acknowledging a practical difference between the two terms. This is in contrast with certain aspects of geographical work, for example where Katz (2001) understands resilient acts such as survival strategies and everyday coping mechanisms not as explicitly resistant acts, which actively renegotiate the balance of power between individuals but rather they are a means to make everyday circumstances tolerable.

1.4.2 Resilience or Resistance?

Arguably however, even in geographical research the line between resilience and resistance is often blurred. For example, workplaces are inherently gendered spaces. Negotiation of these spaces through when, where and how these resistances are enacted therefore is also inherently based on gender and gender normative expectations. Perhaps ironically, due to implicit networks of power and oppression in such spaces, women must enact resistances in a more subtle way. For example through the removal of emotional labour and 'friendliness' to colleagues and clients - an expectation more heavily imposed on female staff than male (Redden, 2016). Such actions do not directly challenge power dynamics in the traditional sense of socio-political resistance (Hughes, 2020), but nevertheless are an active resistance to power and oppression in the workplace. Arguably, an increase in 'feminised labour', leads to an increase in 'feminised resistance', and demands recognition as such (Redden, 2016). Acts which can be considered primarily as demonstrations of resilience, such as an accelerated push for career progression and/or greater autonomy over their responsibilities in the workplace etc. can therefore be framed as both resilient *and* resistant. Such as the experience of Lorraine Spivak, who knew to raise a formal complaint against sexual harassment from her manager in the workplace would result in her employment being terminated, so instead focused on being promoted to shift manager in order to be able to plan her own shifts, and avoid being on shift with certain male colleagues (Mulroy, 1995:93). Although such examples are arguably under-represented throughout historical research generally, there is certainly an understanding that these actions occurred, though due to their nature were often undocumented and therefore individual instances are often difficult to verify.

Taking feminist geography's wider movement towards alternative ways of thinking of everyday spaces as generative of resistance and community building (Burke et al., 2017 and Huang and Ramdas, 2019 and Hughes, 2020), it is clear that the importance of 'community'

in studies of resistance is significant. Central to this concept is acknowledging spaces such as workplaces and other public spaces can act as dual sites of emotional resilience and community building, while undeniably acting as sites of political resistance too (Hughes et al., 2022). Throughout history, mining communities have demonstrated this - particularly amongst women in these communities. For instance, during the 1984-85 Miners' Strike community support groups were set up for women initially to support striking miners and their families through activities such as assembling food parcels and organising monetary collections. While primarily designed to provide practical help to those impacted by the strike, these groups eventually became vital to the emotional wellbeing and resilience of the women who participated in them (Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Thomlinson, 2018) and, simultaneously, were at their core also spaces generative of solidarity and political activism, both between the women themselves, and women's groups and the wider communities they served (Spence and Stephenson, 2007). The development of these socio-politically well defined, purposely organised groups can find their origins in socio-political networks within mining communities, which were established and utilised for political purposes by women much earlier than the 1980s. In Northumberland for example, even in the early 1900s, there was a community wide understanding, rooted in family tradition of women supporting striking miners. At the beginning of the 20th Century, women in the region began to deliberately intertwine their support for miners (especially during the 1926 general strike) and their fight for greater gender equality. Often, this was through some kind of engagement with the Labour Party, which regularly acted as a common denominator between the two causes. By the outbreak of the Second World War, generations of young women were introduced to local grass-roots politics by previous generations (Hall, 2001).

1.4.3 Community Building

While some of spaces made in this way had a physicality, and an identifiable location or presence such as the community groups of the 1984-85 strike, what is significant and distinctive (though perhaps not unique) within mining communities, is the often unspoken

and more abstract ‘sense’ of community and solidarity between women that these spaces generated (Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Thomlinson, 2018). Again, the evolution of this effectively female-only space clearly developed in part because of the “unique” cultural and socio-economic history of mining communities (Strangleman, 2001 and Massey, 2013). What is also key to note of these spaces however, is that this relationship is, to at least some degree, co-dependent. That is, the nature of female solidarity and community in these mining villages has not only been influenced by this unique social history, but in turn this ‘sense’ of the female community has also markedly influenced that very same unique social history over time. As Mercier and Gier (2007:998) suggest, women’s relationship with the mine was significantly different to that of men:

> “In Britain alone, where one out of every ten children was born to a mining family until 1927 – and miners had the largest families of any occupational group before the Second World War – infant and maternal mortality rates far exceeded the male rate of death from accidents in the mine. Rates of infant and maternal mortality in mining areas were higher than any other region of the United Kingdom. Mining women were burdened by their own powerlessness and fears of losing the primary breadwinner in a mining accident or to death by disease. Perhaps more than men, miners’ wives carried the mine in them. Mining, and sustaining mining families and communities, was hard physical and emotional work.”

This differential understanding of the impacts of mining between men and women go some way to explaining why this female-only sense of community developed. The responsibilities and expectations of women were different to that of their husbands, fathers, sons, brothers etc (Massey, 2013:154). The ever present danger of the mine posed different threats to women than men and therefore could only truly be understood by other women. All the while, arising from the particularities of the mining industry. Mercier and Gier (2007) also

emphasise the role women played in sustaining mining communities more broadly and explicitly acknowledge the importance of women in maintaining broader community cohesion, through understanding the special nature of female solidarity with regards to the mining industry.

Chapter 2 - Methodology

In line with the two main strands of ambiguity addressed in this research, this section will establish how ambiguity can be utilised as a methodological tool, in line with a feminist historical geography approach. Building on existing work which engages with the significance of trace and partiality (Ogborn, 2005 and McGeachan, 2018), the concept of ambiguity is offered as an alternative interpretation of the fractional nature of archives and historical record more broadly.

The use of ambiguity is employed in a way which is distinctively different to the way it is discussed within the literature review of this work. Here, ambiguity is considered in relation to the ways in which the production of knowledge can never be absolute or wholly certain (Matless, 1992). Additionally, the inherent ambiguity which is present within the materiality of the documents themselves is also taken into account. The space of ambiguity which this impossibility of knowledge certainty provides is the key principle used in this methodology.

This chapter begins by explaining the theory and basis for this methodology primarily through the work of Foucault (1972), in particular with regards to ideas on knowledge production. These concepts are applied within the context of feminist historical geographies, and the nature of power and authority in these processes are situated within the sub-field. The practical approaches to discovering relevant material is also discussed, and finally methodological theory regarding the specific materials used for this research and how this was implemented in practice is established.

2.1 Understanding knowledge production

At the heart of this research's methodology (and in fact the thesis more broadly) is the idea of the ways in which the concept of 'ambiguity' provides an often hidden, but ultimately open, space for the contestation of different power dynamics and hierarchies. The concept of

ambiguity must therefore be acknowledged as a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional phenomena which has both discursive properties and is itself affective (Oesch, 2017).

Much in the way ambiguity (arguably a kind of ‘unobtainable’’ knowledge) is produced, but is also itself affective, so too are all forms of ‘obtainable’ knowledge.’ As Foucault (1972:128) himself highlights, epistemological archives are essentially systems which are granted the power to “establish statements as events…as things". According to Foucauldian thought, the archive produces the accepted conditions that both informs and is informed by discourse - history itself is therefore a constructed narrative and the production of historical knowledge is therefore inherently a politically informed act (Stoller, 2002). With regards to this research then, all recorded material - and therefore all relevant constructed knowledge - must be acknowledged as a product of context and discourse, at the time it was initially produced. Further, this must be considered to extend to the ways in which it was then stored, organised and made accessible, and finally how current context influences my current understanding of the material. Equally, how the material itself is able to influence context and discourse, and to what degree.

The methodological implications of this complex phenomena therefore provide unique challenges; whilst understanding that the act of the construction of knowledge fundamentally demands the acknowledgement of subjective partiality (Haraway, 1988 and Stoller 2002 and Moore, 2010), being able to negotiate Foucauldian principles of the impossibility of perfect objective representation through knowledge preservation (Matless, 1992). Both aspects of this challenge, though in particular the latter, highlight the importance and potential power and authority which is held within the inevitably somewhat ambiguous nature of representation within archival studies.

Generally speaking, feminist methodologies both within and beyond geography tend to be focused on the implications of those who are empowered to produce knowledge, who

bestows this power, for what purpose and who may access these knowledges (Deitch, 2020:220). As Eichhorn (2010) highlights, archives provide a space where feminist interpretations of community and the academy, and theory and praxis can be confronted and addressed. Though while in the past, historical geography has perhaps been considered a hyper-masculaised sub-discipline with accepted universal narratives (Rose, 1993), the questioning of "objective truth" has begun to seep its way in, as in other subfields within geography, though there is progress still to be made in this regard. Domosh (1997) highlighted that feminist historical-geography was arguably best methodologically equipped to tackle this challenge and this has largely been addressed, though some methodological challenges, especially with regards to the absence of knowledge, still remain (Moore, 2018). This research aims to not only potentially address some of these lingering issues, but also to acknowledge that accepting the "unknowable" is valuable in its own right and still has academic merit and methodological validity, in keeping with a feminist framework.

2.1.1 Ambiguity and the archive

The archive is an inherently ambiguous space. The act of knowledge construction fundamentally demands the acknowledgement of subjective partiality; objectivity is not something which can ever truly be achieved due to the co-dependent relationship between discourse and epistemology (Haraway, 1988). 'Perfect' (in this instance that is understood as objective and therefore non-political) knowledge is never something which can therefore be achieved.

All archival data is recorded by a specific individual or organisation, for a specific purpose and no matter how thorough, will still ultimately be partial and therefore political (either deliberately or inadvertently) (Moore, 2010). The manner in which knowledge is preserved, be that through language, images or through tangible objects further complicates this challenge of constructing 'perfect' knowledge. No manner of knowledge preservation can provide an entire picture of that which it is attempting to represent; there are technological

limitations to the detail and accuracy of photographic information (Rose, 2011:7). This is particularly pertinent for research such as this, where broadly speaking photographic technology was relatively new and experimental, especially for the working classes at this time (Marien, 2006:205). Fine detail and colour may not be captured, meaning this data cannot be evaluated accurately and therefore deepens the notion of ambiguity within the archive. Furthermore, not only are there limitations to the information displayed within photographs spatially, regardless of when the photograph was taken, the information displayed within photographs are constructed with a specific purpose in mind and therefore are also politicised in one way or another, as well as being taken at a specific time, for a specific purpose. Additionally, this is also true for written documents - there are limitations to what linguistics can conjure in the imagination of the reader, and how this is truly representative of the information it is trying to convey. This is true regardless of whether the intention of the author is to make the information conveyed intentionally political or as 'perfect' and as objective as possible - the limitations of language ultimately still exist in either scenario, providing a degree of ambiguity within the data (Manoff, 2004).

Archival material itself can therefore be thought of as a space which is ambiguous. As these ambiguous spaces are by definition impossible to define or categorically analyse, they therefore always have the potential to be contested and can be seen as a site of negotiation between "prevailing forces" (Duncan, 1999) or as evidence of potential resistance to authoritative forces, by those who are oppressed. The unknowable nature of the 'truth' behind this ambiguity means that the evaluation of the negotiation for control within these spaces is ultimately somewhat down to the researcher. The necessity of this degree of interpretation is therefore simultaneously freeing *and* restrictive with regards to scope afforded to the researcher; they may explore and find new ways of understanding this ambiguity through alternative interpretation of the absence of certainty, and yet certainty in their findings is still ultimately restricted by the physical documented material which is provided to them. As with all historical research, finding a balance between these is key

(Baker, 1997), though perhaps even more so when researching the specifically 'unknowable', in this case ambiguous spaces. The role of researchers in projects such as this must thus be to act as the mediator of this negotiation between the "prevailing forces" and those who are systematically disenfranchised from control of the ambiguous spaces within archival material.

As discussed above, a degree of interpretation is required for this kind of research. Naturally, this kind of methodology has the potential to attract criticism from those with a determinist stance, however it is important to understand that using such a methodology can go some way in alleviating inequalities produced by certain archival materials (McDowell, 2016). This is of particular relevance to this research, as acknowledging the intersectional inequalities (for example gender and class) which are both produced and perpetuated by the material used during analysis, the researcher ('mediator') is able to consciously reinstate agency to those who have not been afforded it in the past.

By reconsidering archival material itself as an 'ambiguous space' of negotiation and contestation, the potential to accommodate this previously overlooked resistance and agency of women is appreciated. To fail to at the very least acknowledge these spaces as contested is therefore neglectful of the socio-political power of the individuals and organisations implicated.

2.2 'Finding' the archives

One somewhat unforeseen 'challenge' with regards to this research was gaining access to archival material itself. While there is no shortage of historical archives in the North East (Tyne and Wear Archives, Redhills Miners' Hall Durham, Durham Records office etc) for various reasons access to relevant material was not possible. Undeniably some of this was continued disruption from the Covid-19 pandemic contributing to staff illness and the unfortunate timing of refurbishment/relocation of several of the archives themselves. As a

result, alternative sources of material needed to be located. The principle source used for this research therefore consists of a book containing a selected gathering of material held by Tyne and Wear archives (‘*Wor Lass’,* Tyne and Wear Archives, 1987), as well as a photograph taken from another local history book (*‘Images of England: Around Burnopfield’,* Uren, 2000) .

While initially somewhat disheartening, this methodological ‘challenge’, in fact presented an opportunity for an alternative approach to research within historical geography. Historical geographies must negotiate the problem of fractional archives, with the understanding that some compromises must always be made (Baker, 1997). Historical geography has a long tradition of relatively small scale data collection and analysis (McGeachan et al., 2012), though this tends to have a more biographical focus on an *individual*, for instance (eg. see Lorimer, 2003 and De Leeuw, 2012). Even within feminist historical work with a British focus during the interwar years spotlights ‘micro-histories’ through the use of life writing (Holton, 2011). In this piece, Holton identifies the importance of using evidence such as diaries and personal notes to explore the history of women through their own words and experiences. In doing so, she advocates that this can go someway to negating the “gender-blindness' ' which, she argues, often perpetuates masculinism within historical research. Instead, she argues even relatively small sets of available data are more valuable in historical research to understand the experiences of women and that accepting these limitations still ultimately provides more perspective and understanding of women’s histories than to include more data, but provide a gender-blind approach.

Indeed, throughout feminist geography more broadly, the merits of using a similar small-scale approach have been acknowledged. However, generally speaking this has been implemented in a different way; intensive, relatively small-scale analysis has previously provided an opportunity to highlight specific issues and impacts on marginalised *groups*, within broader socio-political phenomena (Sharp, 2007) (for instance Dyck and McLaren,

2004 with regards to female refugees and Hall, 2023 on social reproduction and austerity). Given the somewhat enforced restrictions on data collection for this research, this methodological gap between feminist historical geography and the broader field of feminist geography more generally has presented an opportunity to be (somewhat) bridged.

Of course, that is not to say historical geography has not attended to marginalised groups before. Particularly, there is a large body of work pertaining to post-colonial and de-colonial historical geographies, and methodologically instrumental to developing this work is Duncan's (1999) theory of 'reading against the archival grain'. As this work demonstrates, gaps in the archive are just as (if not potentially more so) significant in indicating the potential agency and resistant acts of subjects who are not afforded the ability to record their own history and actions, as knowledge which is recorded. Admittedly, unlike the research carried out by Duncan, the primary issue with collecting research material for this project was not a lack of appropriate recorded material per se, but rather an issue in gaining access to it. Further, this research is wholly concerned with the everyday, lived experiences of women during the interwar years in the NE of England - an entirely different demographic. The kinds of material available were therefore also very different to the kinds of material which were originally used to develop this methodology. However, by acknowledging the potential significance of gaps within material itself, opens the possibility of utilising absence as a methodological tool, rather than a methodological problem. In particular, when used in conjunction with grass-roots and bottom-up instances of resistance.

Further, the work of Ogborn (2005) and McGeachan (2018), demonstrates the importance of understanding traces and absences to uncover previously untold lives and stories, which may have been neglected by other means of historical research. As McGeachan (2018) in particular highlights, though historical evidence which remains may be limited in volume, this is not necessarily the obstacle to research as it may first appear. Rather than approaching the absence of data as an absence of researchable answers, instead these absences can in

fact offer a world of possibilities, the nature of which are guided by the traces of data which are intact. Again however, this work generally tends to focus more on individual lives, rather than groups or communities of people. For this research then, these principles of simultaneous absence and presence must be adapted in order to be applied to archival material beyond life-writing and to a potential variety of sources such as images, pamphlets and official documents.

Building on this approach was particularly helpful for this research given the primary source of material was, on the face of it, a fairly limited set of resources. Given that these individual sources were compiled by a specific organisation, from specific places with an explicit purpose, I began to approach these resources, in particular the *Wor Lass* book, as a 'mini-archive'. While not a typical archive in the traditional sense, the resources within this book, I argue, still constitute an archive of sorts. The content was still either intentionally so or not, inherently political given that the collating organisation has a set of missions and aims for its public engagement (Tomassen, 2001 and Moore, 2010). In line with this view of approaching these resources as an alternative kind of archive, it is also important to recognise that the material itself, within these spaces are pre-organised by those who collate them. By organising the documents into predetermined sub-sections there is an assumed authority of those collating them (Hamilton, 2002:41) - not only the content, but by extension the meaning and significance of the content, had already been predetermined before I could access the material myself - such organisation has the potential to obscure alternative meanings and interpretations of material (Moore et al., 2016:161). A prime example of this, is the title of the section from which one the sources used in this research (the County Council of Durham. Birth Control - Memorandum 153 / M.C.W. Report Of County Durham Medical Officer.). The section is entitled "'Her most sacred responsibility'… Home and Family". Not only then is this source predetermined to be in relation to women's responsibilities within the home, but the importance of these responsibilities for women is already somewhat pre-decided, and emphasised through the use of the word 'most' on my

behalf. Further to this, use of the word ‘sacred’ also implies a moral and potentially religious dimension to this responsibility. In order to fully examine, as far as possible, this material without the influence of this assumed authority, I therefore needed to be conscious not only of this authority but also be potentially aware of the discourse influencing the material when the resource was first collated (1987), as well as the current cultural context which will ultimately have some influence on my evaluation of the sources (Haraway, 1988 and Stoller, 2002).

Yet another aspect of using resources such as these, this time in contrast to traditional archives however, is that these resources were portable and available for me to access freely,as I choose. Unlike travelling to an institutional archive, I was not reliant on gatekeepers to facilitate access to material. This was very much brought to my attention as a point of note during the preliminary stages of this research and further highlights the importance of the presence of ambiguity and interpretation at all stages of research. Even when approaching Tyne and Wear Archives (the organisation which collated the sources in *Wor Lass)* and initially explaining the parameters and aims of the research, the initial response I received was that they did not think they had any material which would be suitable. Evidently, this was not in fact the case, however interactions like this emphasise the role that ambiguity and linguistic interpretation can have in research. There is always the possibility that some material will not be found or made available for analysis. By definition then, the potential impact on results that this neglected material is unknowable. While there is no definitive way to account for or mitigate this, I argue that this further validates using a methodology which relies heavily on interpretation. While admittedly an argument could be made that using such a methodology implies a certain level of uncertainty in the results obtained, this is true for all archival research, where there can be no certainty that all relevant material was analysed.

Not only did not having a ‘portable’ archive mean my access to material was not restricted by gatekeepers, it also meant that I was able to access the material whenever and wherever suited me. Ultimately, this changed my relationship with the material. While arguably one of the impacts of studying life writing, for example, is it’s potential to become affective to the researcher themselves, a better sense of closeness with subjects, which is admittedly often hard to achieve especially when research is engaging with individuals and events no longer in living memory (McGeachan, 2018). The distance between the researcher and those who are being researched is often arguably what separates historical research from the rest of geographical research (Baker, 1997). However, by being able to view the material in my own home, for instance, I felt that the power dynamic had very much shifted from the perspective of me, the researcher, viewing these materials in an intellectual institution which brings its own inherent power dynamics, towards a much more humanised and much more familiar relationship. While perhaps not to the same degree as life writing, I certainly feel that this change in hierarchy helped to bridge the gap that is so often felt in historical research.

The justification for engaging with a variety of kinds of sources was admittedly an initially practical consideration, given the limited availability of sources as explained above. However, upon further examination, using an array of sources is beneficial to this kind of research. In doing so, it provides a variety of perspectives through the content of the material itself, which is equally as varied, and offers information pertaining to a multitude of aspects of women’s lives at this time. These include formal politics, recreational spaces and reproductive rights.

2.3 Practical Approaches to Analysis

Given that the materials used for this research vary significantly in their format (a photographic image, local authority memos and a pamphlet created by the Labour Party), a variety of methodological approaches were practically implemented. For the photograph, a

combination of approaches proposed by Gillian Rose in *Visual Methodologies* (2001). For the other two sources, discourse analysis techniques were implemented.

2.4 Discourse Analysis

For this research, the most appropriate application of the meaning of 'discourse' must refer to the linguistic and textual phrasing used within sources. That is, the ways in which issues and spaces are presented by representation through language, and the manner in which these representations influence the ways in which the world is interpreted and understood (Rose, 2001:136 Dittmer, 2010).

To understand how this textual interpretation of 'discourse' is derived, a broader understanding of social Discourse must first be understood. Discourse has the ability to not only influence culture, but also to effectively create it. In doing so, discourse is capable of conveying structural modes of power but is itself also a deeply powerful phenomenon. Our understanding of the world, and the meanings we ascribe to people, objects and occurrences - both big and small - are all dictated by our wider exposure to discourse (Gee, 2004:7 and Fairclough, 2013:231). This is in keeping with Foucauldian principles, which understands the knowledge as both informed by and as informing knowledge (Stoller, 2002), this way of understanding the wider social implications of Discourse must be considered when formulating a methodology for this kind of research.

By considering gender as an ideological structure, through which power is made manifest and social inequality is produced, critically analysing texts through the use of discourse analysis provides a means to explore potentially oppressive modes of power, through a gendered lens (Lazar, 2007).

2.4.1 Overtly Persuasive Texts

The implications of this in terms of textual discourse analysis must demand an understanding of the relationship between how language impacts the meanings we ascribe to social phenomena and spaces but also how those very same phenomena are able to influence discourse. Where some texts are purposefully persuasive, with a clear motive, for example material which is explicitly political in nature such as the “Why Women Should Vote Labour'' pamphlet used in this research, context for the kinds language used is perhaps more obvious, as there is a clear motivation to attempt to steer discourse (Dittmer, 2010). Using a textual analysis for this kind of material therefore demands a slightly different approach to material which, at first glance, may appear to be primarily ‘factual’ or ‘impartially informative’. Stylistic “tropes”, which Burke (2013) describes as devices often applied in literature which can hold some level of persuasive sway, are often deployed in such material. These include, but are not limited to; metaphors, similes and more generally, a deliberate employment of more imaginary spaces which are meant to disconnect both the material and the reader from the influence of the outside world. Such devices are perhaps substantially more easily identified when an explicitly persuasive purpose provides context for the material, and therefore should be examined critically in analysis. A challenge to their perceived (attempt to establish)authority is also necessary here (Van Dijk, 1993).

2.4.2 “Official” Documents

By contrast, when applying a textually analytical approach to material which is not so obviously intended to be politically persuasive, a slightly different technique must be deployed. Without wishing to repeat the main themes of knowledge production and discourse as detailed above, it is important to consider that even ‘factual’ material is a product of and produced by discourse (Stoller, 2002). Even material such as the memo regarding the provision of healthcare for women, used in this research is primarily ‘factually informative’ and instructional in nature, though some implicit politicisation is inherent in the content. At the most fundamental level, this can be considered through the perceived

requirement to create the document in the first instance, but also in the enactment of the suggested procedures outlined in the document (Fairclough, 2013:233).

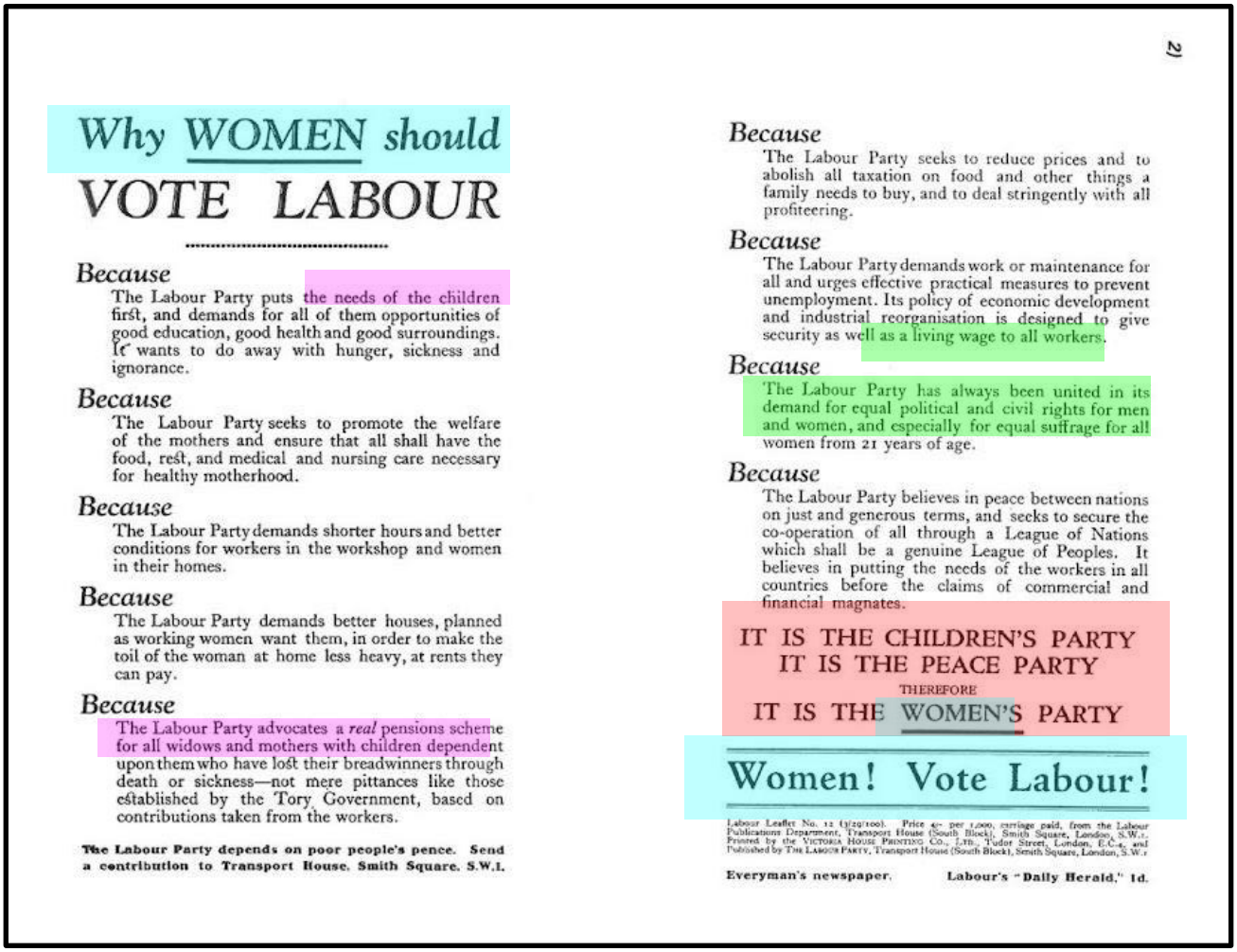
Even so much as the names ascribed to signify a particular group of people may seem straightforward enough, however can often possess the implicit power to include/exclude individuals. Common-use terminology and language can still imply discursive imaginaries and therefore are still capable of shaping ideas and influencing the stance of the reader, even in official and “independent” documents, for example. This is especially true when the document pertains to a particular group of individuals, who often are subject to an evolving language of acceptable terminology (Liasidou, 2008). This extends to women and mothers, especially when considering them within a historical context.

When considering such documents, there are more considerations to factor in. These are namely, the purpose of the document, its framing and the design of the document. These elements can then be used to frame the writer’s positionality (as well as those receiving the information) and interdiscursivity which is present (Scollon, 2008:99). As well as linguistic analysis, in documents such as this even things like headings, and the highlighting or underlining of phrases is significant and can substantially influence meaning. The relationship between the individual or organisation writing the document (the ‘principal’) and those whose job it is to interpret and enact what is communicated (the ‘interpreter’) is effectively what this kind of textual analysis is primarily concerned with (Scollon, 2008:101). In particular this methodology will establish the multiple ways in which the interpreter has the ability to influence real-world applications through the interpretation of language, and the possible ways this might have occurred. In addition it will acknowledge the ways in which this interpretation can be considered as resistant or amenable to the probable intentions of the principal. It further considers how the intentions of the principal may also be deliberately ambiguous and the impact of this on the practical application of policy, and the role of those whom the policy impacts.

There is of course overlap between these two nuanced approaches, and they should not be thought of as completely separate from one another. For the most part, it is in fact the context of the production of the literature which is the most important issue to consider as a difference during analysis and this should be reflected in the proposed results. The actual process of analysis is in fact relatively similar, with slight differences to approach as outlined above (and below).

Below follows how this approach to textual analysis was applied for the material used in this research. It outlines exactly how, step by step, analysis was conducted and provides selected examples which were eventually used in analysis and results.

2.4.3 Implementing this in practice (Textual discourse analysis - “Why Women Should Vote Labour)



2

Why WOMEN should VOTE LABOUR

Because

The Labour Party puts the needs of the children first, and demands for all of them opportunities of good education, good health and good surroundings. It wants to do away with hunger, sickness and ignorance.

Because

The Labour Party seeks to promote the welfare of the mothers and ensure that all shall have the food, rest, and medical and nursing care necessary for healthy motherhood.

Because

The Labour Party demands shorter hours and better conditions for workers in the workshop and women in their homes.

Because

The Labour Party demands better houses, planned as working women want them, in order to make the toil of the woman at home less heavy, at rents they can pay.

Because

The Labour Party advocates a *real* pensions scheme for all widows and mothers with children dependent upon them who have lost their breadwinners through death or sickness—not mere pittances like those established by the Tory Government, based on contributions taken from the workers.

The Labour Party depends on poor people's pence. Send a contribution to Transport House, Smith Square, S.W.1.

Because

The Labour Party seeks to reduce prices and to abolish all taxation on food and other things a family needs to buy, and to deal stringently with all profiteering.

Because

The Labour Party demands work or maintenance for all and urges effective practical measures to prevent unemployment. Its policy of economic development and industrial reorganisation is designed to give security as well as a living wage to all workers.

Because

The Labour Party has always been united in its demand for equal political and civil rights for men and women, and especially for equal suffrage for all women from 21 years of age.

Because

The Labour Party believes in peace between nations on just and generous terms, and seeks to secure the co-operation of all through a League of Nations which shall be a genuine League of Peoples. It believes in putting the needs of the workers in all countries before the claims of commercial and financial magnates.

IT IS THE CHILDREN'S PARTY
IT IS THE PEACE PARTY
THEREFORE
IT IS THE WOMEN'S PARTY

Women! Vote Labour!

Labour Leaflet No. 12 (3/29/100). Price 4/- per 1,000, carriage paid, from the Labour Publications Department, Transport House (South Block), Smith Square, London, S.W.1. Printed by the Victoria House Printing Co., Ltd., Tudor Street, London, E.C.4, and Published by The Labour Party, Transport House (South Block), Smith Square, London, S.W.1

Everyman's newspaper. **Labour's "Daily Herald." 1d.**

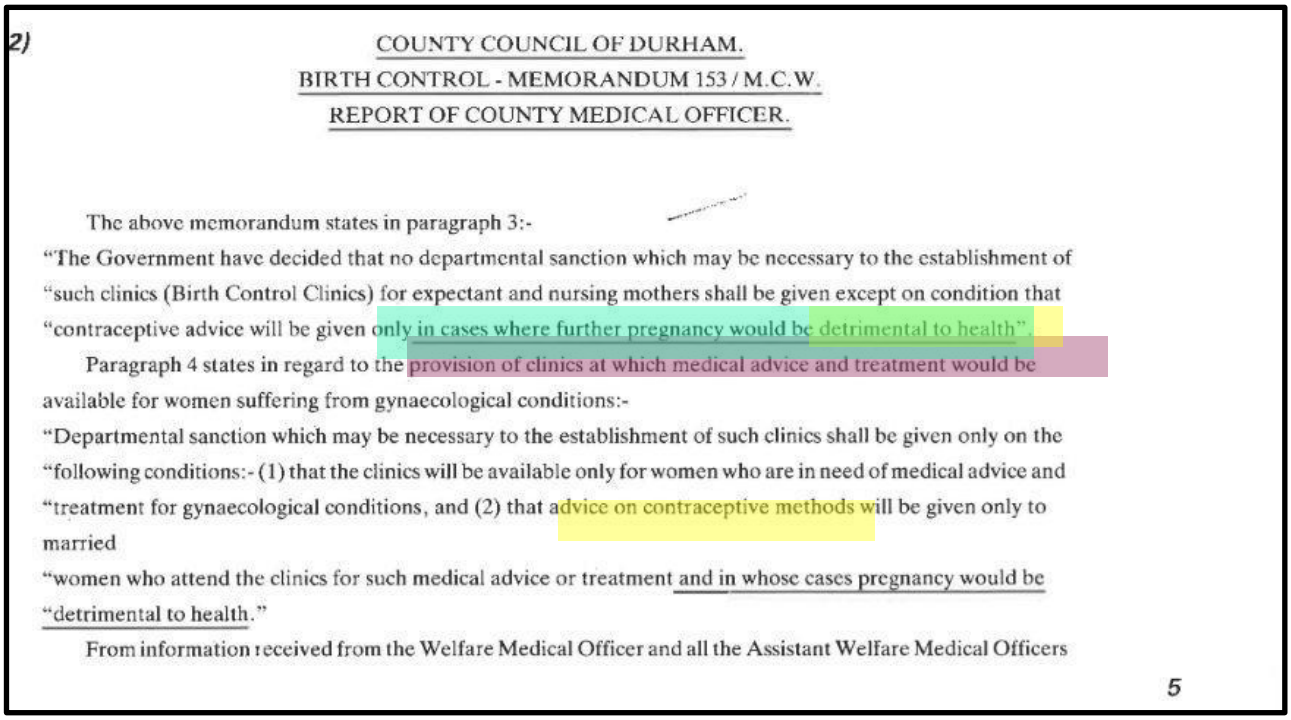
(Fig.1 “Why Women Should Vote Labour” (Tyne and Wear Archive Service, 1987:26) Coding process example.)

Above are chosen examples of the coding I implemented during analysis of this source. This demonstrates the second phase of coding. The first stage was relatively basic and consisted of scouring the document and highlighting any text which appeared significant or meaningful, as well as any structural elements which stood out, based on the methodological theories outlined in the previous section. These were then listed and emerging themes were tentatively considered.

What is shown in *Fig.1,* is the initial stages of the second phase of coding. This involved grouping the text together thematically. These themes eventually formed the basis of the themes discussed in the analysis of this source. Examples provided in *Fig.1* demonstrate how both the content of the document itself was coded, for example with purple demonstrating themes of female identity such as motherhood etc. were present, and also important structural elements, such as the placement of certain phrases at the start and end of the pamphlet. In this regard, any stylistic tropes (Burke, 2013) were picked out - including punctuation used to emphasise certain wording for example.

Following this, these key phrases and structural devices were reviewed back into relation with each other, with possible meanings and broader theoretical implications also taken into account.

2.4.4 Implementing this in practice (Textual discourse analysis - Birth Control - Memorandum 153 / M.C.W. Report Of County Durham Medical Officer)



2)

COUNTY COUNCIL OF DURHAM.
BIRTH CONTROL - MEMORANDUM 153 / M.C.W.
REPORT OF COUNTY MEDICAL OFFICER.

The above memorandum states in paragraph 3:-
"The Government have decided that no departmental sanction which may be necessary to the establishment of
"such clinics (Birth Control Clinics) for expectant and nursing mothers shall be given except on condition that
"contraceptive advice will be given only in cases where further pregnancy would be detrimental to health".
Paragraph 4 states in regard to the provision of clinics at which medical advice and treatment would be
available for women suffering from gynaecological conditions:-
"Departmental sanction which may be necessary to the establishment of such clinics shall be given only on the
"following conditions:- (1) that the clinics will be available only for women who are in need of medical advice and
"treatment for gynaecological conditions, and (2) that advice on contraceptive methods will be given only to
married
"women who attend the clinics for such medical advice or treatment and in whose cases pregnancy would be
"detrimental to health."
From information received from the Welfare Medical Officer and all the Assistant Welfare Medical Officers

5

(Fig. 2. County Council Birth Control Memo (Tyne and Wear Archive Service, 1987:5) Coding process example.)

Above is an extract from the coding process conducted on the contraceptive memo used in analysis for this research. As shown in burgundy, the specifics of the importance of the layout and structure in these kinds of materials is indicated (Scollon, 2008:101). While an "official" document, the interdiscursivity between social and institutional meanings, and the enabling of this through words which could possibly be considered as ambiguous is also demonstrated through the other examples highlighted.

The core themes which emerged from this coding went on to form the basis of the more in-depth analysis which was conducted for this source. Picking up on the nuances and subtle inter-connected nature of specific words and phrases naturally makes coding within these kinds of materials more complex, and so fairly rudimentary coding as demonstrated in *Fig. 2* served as a starting point, though more sophisticated methods were required in totality. In

this regard, potentially ambiguous phrases and words etc, where collated and any possible links of linguistic meaning were established. These were then further grouped according to the themes emerging, and potential possibilities and meanings of these links were explored. The implications of structural devices, such as underlining etc. were also considered. These then ultimately formed the basis of the analysis, which is discussed for this particular source.

2.5 Photographic Image Analysis

Historically, images have previously been considered as perhaps a more ostensibly objective form of analysis. However, while it is true that a photograph for instance is representative of the literal content which it represents, that content or the positionality of those who created it, are maybe present within it, or viewing it complicates this assumption (Rose, 2001:138 and Crang, 2010). Within the discipline of geography more broadly, this duality of photographs is considered as both evidentry and partial. There is a recognition of how this tension and ambiguity provides a space for alternative interpretations of seemingly evidenced 'facts' (Roberts, 2013).

Photographs are taken for a variety of reasons. These include (but are not limited to), memorialisation of an event, as a portrait, to advertise a product or service, political propaganda or to provide visual evidence of something etc. While an image may have a primary purpose, such as the memorialisation of an event, there may also be an intentional or coincidental secondary purpose. For example, the memorialisation of a charity event not only facilitates memories of the day itself, but is also able to conjure imaginaries of what is *not* provided within the image such as the social and political meanings of charity and volunteering for example. As Hetherington (2003:1934) describes:

> "Proximal knowledge is performative rather than representational. Its nonrepresentational quality is also context-specific, fragmentary, and often mundane. This contrasts with distal knowledge, which generally implies a

broad, detached understanding based on knowledge at a distance or on a concern for the big picture."

The requirement to acknowledge the broader social and political context of an image is especially necessary for this research, which considers ambiguity and the existence of fragments as a means to facilitate the negotiation of power. This negotiation must therefore occur in pre-existing hierarchies of power and so this context is key in order to ascribe potential meaning to these ambiguities. This is considered within the ambiguities of the image itself, such as blurriness, the scope of the image and the space which it can capture, and the temporal scale of the photograph. A photograph is a snap-shot in time and cannot provide immediate context of what happened immediately before or after the image was taken, unless another form of temporal context is also provided. This ambiguity within the image itself is employed in conjunction within a broader socio-political context. This provides, what I argue are reasonable suggestions for the ways in which both material ambiguity and ambiguity within the socio-political context provided space for the autonomy and socio-political resistance for the women pictured.

2.6 Implementing this in practice - Image Analysis

Analysis of the image used, primarily engages with Gillian Rose's (2001) work on practical techniques to approaching visual materials. The methodology used here takes a somewhat eclectic approach, taking inspiration from three main methods which Rose proposes. These are discourse analysis (II), 'the good-eye' and semiology. Each one of these approaches offers a different analytical focus, and by deploying them concurrently a broader, and often more detailed, exploration of the various meanings and effects produced by an image can be achieved (Rose, 2002:202).

2.6.1 Compositional Interpretation

While an application of semiological and discourse analysis based in Foucauldian thought (which Rose describes as discourse analysis (II)), are the primary processes used here, the role of 'the good-eye' is still important. Rose describes this approach as "compositional interpretation" (2001:33).

Of all of the elements offered by this technique, most relevant for this research is its engagement with the spatial organisation of a photograph, that is the ways in which the objects and subjects within the image are arranged. It is important to consider this both in terms of how the individuals/objects are arranged in relation to each other, but also how they are arranged in relation to the viewer (Rose, 2001:40). These positionings can convey an expression of power, resistance or indifference and should be considered as potential means of effective agency and as part of the function of the photograph (Hook and Glaveanu, 2013). The function of the photograph and the role it plays in conveying modes of power and agency are then used with reference to semiological ideas especially, to produce assessments on the representation of power and/or resistance within the photograph.

2.6.2 Semiotics

Aside from what semiotics as a technique can offer in terms of actual analysis or evaluation of an image, unlike approaches such as content analysis, it can be utilised even on a relatively small data set of images:

> "There is no concern among semiologists to find images that are statistically representative of a wider set of images…the discussion of particular images is often directed at exemplifying analytical points. Thus semiology often takes the form of detailed case studies, of relatively few images and the case study stands or falls on its analytical integrity and interest rather than on its applicability to a wide range of material." (Rose, 2002:73.)

Naturally, this requirement is ideal for this research which makes use of just one image. It is also in fitting with the feminist historical geography framework, which considers that small but in-depth analysis can still produce valid and academically meaningful contributions (McGeachan et al., 2012). The use of one image only, is not least in part due to the very limited availability of such images. Again, this is not unusual when adopting a feminist framework and speaks to some of the issues regarding women's inclusion throughout historical documentation as mentioned previously (McGeachan, 2018). What semiology provides then is the possibility of a detailed, thorough evaluation of the meanings represented by 'things' and how these meanings either contradict or comply with ideology (ie. the legitimation of social and (often political) inequality) (Rose, 2001:70). Establishing the existence of, and processes resulting in and from social difference is also key to adopting a feminist approach within geographical research. Implementation of semiotic analysis concurrently with discourse analysis (as elaborated on below) is therefore key when considering images in this kind of geographical work (Nash, 2018).

Engaging with a methodology with semiotic roots also provides what may be considered as a more 'straight-forward' way of deriving meaning from images. Meanings are communicated through visual representation, for example, a football shirt. While the 'signifer' (the actual shirt itself) is an item of clothing with practical uses such as to keep an individual warm, there are further inherent social implications of the shirt too. Semiotics is therefore helpful in understanding the relationship between social effects and meaning and vice-versa (Rose, 2001:74). Briefly, with regards to the example of the football shirt, the shirt is representative of the wearer's association with that team and therefore by extension, that team's ethos and wider cultural associations too. It also signifies the wearer as part of a wider community of fans and supporters, which has broader social connotations. These could be things such as the team itself but also of potentially hooliganism, football songs and regionality for instance (Giulianotti, and Armstrong, 2002).

Dyer (2008:99-100) calls for particular attention to be paid to the expressions and poses of individuals, as a means of non-verbal communication. As she does with regards to the presentation of those individuals too. How gender is represented (or contradicted) through the use of the feminine/masculine, down to details such as the connotations of hair as feminine and a signifier of beauty or fertility should also be considered (Rose, 2001:77).

Semiotics is useful as a methodology here as not only does it work well with detailed, but small scale, analysis objects and the expressions/poses of individuals are rarely limited to one meaning. For this research, that is beneficial as the uncertainty of the intended meaning, which is represented, is inherently ambiguous. Therefore, the way in which semiotics is able to provide multiple possible interpretations of what is being communicated by individuals and objects within an image is of great use here.

2.6.3 Discourse Analysis

Exploring images through discourse analysis shares many theoretical similarities with textual discourse analysis. Discourse must still be considered as powerful in setting certain social ‘rules’, for example notions of what constitutes the ‘feminine’ and the ‘masculine’ form and appearance are still co-dependent on one another. These ‘rules’ and discourses then have the potential to be resisted (Rose, 2001:137).

Perhaps more so than other kinds of images, photographs are perceived to present a kind of objective “truth”, due to their realism (Rose, 2001:138). However, photographs still provide a space for the contestation and negotiation of power. Intertextuality provides meaning to what is actually present within the photograph, through socially produced meanings in other texts and images (Rose, 2001:136), such as discourses of the masculine and feminine as mentioned previously. Evaluation of these meanings are crucial to understanding the ways in which dominant discourses are potentially produced by and resisted within the photograph used in this work.

This theoretical basis was then used in conjunction with a semiotic approach, in particular, to identify potential meaning in certain signifiers (such as a football shirt) (and to identify possible signifiers in the first instance). This approach also helps to understand the ways in which these meanings acted to channel, resist and convey dominant discursive power by providing evidence for an alternative discourse to be imagined. An understanding of the creation of social difference through discourse is imperative, then. Compositional interpretation is also helpful here, as by assessing the spatial composition of the image, discourse analysis can be deployed to further assess power dynamics within the photograph, as well as with regards to the viewer. Considering the discursive properties of spatial composition further enriches the analysis of power and resistance presented within the photograph.

2.6.4 Implementing this in Practice (Image Analysis - Lintz Women's Football Team, 1926)

What follows is an example of how this eclectic approach was implemented. While the photograph used is the same photograph which was used for analysis, the examples used below are by no means exhaustive and are to demonstrate examples of how my approach was used, rather than to display the full scope of the analysis which I conducted. This is mainly because to demonstrate the full analysis here would be almost impossible to show clearly, as in reality many copies of the image were used as much of the coding over-laps. In addition, not all of the elements of the photograph which were utalised within this research were/could be coded. For example, the technological limitations of the photograph itself (Rose, 2001:7), as well as some social and temporal contexts.

Initially, copies of the image were divided into 1cm grid squares, with each square of the grid assessed in relation to the three main analytical techniques offered in the previous section. Each square was then itself coded, and emerging themes between squares were matched together. At this stage the three approaches outlined above were set aside, having provided

the initial analysis required to make sense of the photograph, to break it down into more manageable sized pieces of analysiable data. The principle themes which were present within the photograph were then used to form the basis of the overall analysis of the photograph. This was then further related to the context of the materiality of the source itself, such as technological limitations, the scope of the photograph, the temporal limitations and context etc to form a more holistic, rounded evaluation of the data produced.

Chapter 3 - Analysis and Discussion

As Briefly mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, this research consists of small-scale analysis of three very different sources. This is consistent with a feminist historical approach (McGeachan, et al., 2012). In doing so, three alternative aspects of the lives of working-class women, who lived in mining communities at this time are considered. The analysis begins with a photograph of a women's football team in 1926, a pamphlet produced by the Labour Party in 1928, which was distributed in mining communities throughout the Northeast and finally, a memo regarding the provision of contraceptive advice for women which was produced by Durham County Council. Due to the vastly different nature of each of the sources, a direct comparison is not feasible. Instead, the main analytical themes of each source are discussed in relation to broader geographical theory, with a focus on feminist geographies and feminist historical geography in particular. Finally, an overview of the main themes present within all three sources is provided.

3.1 Lintz Women's Football Team Photograph (1926)

The village of Lintz was a considerably small mining community, on the far most north-westerly border of County Durham. Despite the opening of several coal mines in the vicinity of the village from 1855 onwards, giving rise to the development of recreational facilities and a Miners' Institute, the colliery was formally closed in 1929. The area in which the thriving mining community of Lintz once occupied is largely now green open space with virtually no remaining evidence of a relatively prosperous industrial history (Uren, 1997:77). During the 1926 General strike, women in the village formed a football team, as evidenced in the photograph (*Fig 4.)* below. As the 1926 General strike was initiated by miners, such as those who worked in Lintz, support for the strike was therefore particularly strong in areas like this (Campolieti, 2021). As addressed earlier in chapter 1 of this dissertation however, the FA formally banned women playing on association football pitches in 1921(Jenkel 2021 and

Skillen et al., 2022). The existence of the football team is therefore complex, and somewhat contradictory. The nature of this is discussed below, with ambiguity considered both spatially, with particular attention drawn to the facilitation of resistance, and methodologically in reference to the production and analysis of the photograph itself.

(Fig. 3 - Lintz Women's Football Team, 1926. (Uren, 1997:83))

Beyond the short caption provided, this image and the team more generally are not very well documented. Upon further research, the only other reference found regarding the team is a reference by Beamish Museum (2023): "Lintz Ladies Football team, 1926. Formed during the 1926 strike to raise funds for the children's boot fund and soup kitchens."

While clearly the information provided about not only the team itself, but also the formation and reception of the team is significantly limited, the little information provided does however still provide some important insights into the actions and efforts made by women in the formation of the team.

3.1.1 Creation of Women's Socio-political Spaces

Perhaps most obvious, is the initiative of these women to create an expressly female-only or at the very least, a predominantly female space - the presence of the male figure on the far-right of the photograph must be acknowledged, presumably their coach. Interesting to note of the male presence within the photograph, is that not only is he toward the very edge of the image, with the women clearly intended to be the focus for the viewer, he is also the only subject to not be participating in the pose adopted by the women, or to be dressed in a matching strip. Clearly, he is identifiable as somewhat 'an outsider' with regards to the players of the team. This 'outsider' status is not obviously hostile, but does very much emphasise the team spirit *between* the women, as a female occupied space. This is suggestive of a generative community building, where political engagement, solidarity and wider social dynamics converge to build greater socio-political resistance. As Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Thomlinson (2018) point out, this is especially significant for women in mining communities, not least in part due to the delicate and distinctive social dynamics which exist within them (Strangleman, 2001).

3.1.2 Embodied Resistance

Similarly, even the use of a matching football strip throughout the team itself is worthy of further attention. In consideration of the fact that only women who owned (or husbands owned) sufficient property and were over the age of 30 were entitled to vote, it is likely that many of the women photographed were still disenfranchised at this time (Muggeridge, 2018). Not only is this in part due to the ways property occupation/ownership rights were often linked to the employment of male family members in the mining industry through labour control regimes meaning property ownership was often quite complex, meaning that many miners did not own the homes they lived in (Martin, 2021), but also due to the age clause of the RPA. Although neither the photograph or limited background information of the team gives concrete proof of the ages of team members, and despite the relative low-quality and somewhat blurriness of the image, it is not unreasonable to suggest that at least some of the individuals appear to be under 30 years old. Therefore, regardless of their property owning

status, at least some of these women will probably have been unable to vote at this time. It goes without saying that this is a huge obstacle to political expression for them. By engaging with the team, and presenting themselves in a unified style, with a specifically political purpose, this offers these disenfranchised women an opportunity to navigate formal barriers to political participation. In doing so, while there may be limited documentary evidence of this, it is important to acknowledge that this action *did* still happen. This highlights the importance of following partial and fragmentary evidence as a means to acknowledge political agency of those who have been systematically ignored, even silenced within the archive (McDonagh, 2018 and Awcock, 2020).

Further, while the General Strike was primarily organised by the TUC, the majority of women in mining communities did not participate in paid employment, and instead primarily were involved with unpaid, socially reproductive activities (Hall, 2001). Without official paid employment, women in these communities were therefore unable to formally unionise, in ways male members of the community did. Arguably then, for women wanting to show support and solidarity with the strike, the creation of the women's football team offered a kind of 'union' of women within the village. Of course, this 'union' could not match anywhere near the size of national or even local trade unions, nor would it have the same legal status or recognition. I suggest then, that given these more flexible boundaries of this space, the use of a matching strip aids to help solidify this sense of camaraderie and solidarity. The visual nature of this signifier of a women's community space is particularly important; much like miners wore specific work clothes, appeared often covered in coal and were easily identifiable, the use of a football strip in this instance acts in much the same way. It identifies the wearer as belonging to a specific organisation, and by extension associates the wearer with the connotations of the viewer's understanding of that same organisation. In short, not only does the adoption of a team strip create a sense of community and solidarity between team players (Dart, 2020), it is also an outward and very public display of specific values. In this case, individuals wearing the strip openly supported the General Strike, and were not

only using but in fact formed female only spaces in order to do so, necessarily circumventing obstacles to forms of political expression which had otherwise been afforded to men (Awcock, 2020). The adoption of forms of resistance such as this, are demonstrative of the diverse ways in which resistance can develop, particularly with regards to those who have enforced limited means of agency (Hughes, 2020).

In addition to the use of a football strip, not only as a symbolic tool generative of community and solidarity potentially out of necessity due to a lack of more conventional avenues of socio-political expression and support/opposition, the significance of these spaces as formed and maintained as (almost) exclusively female should not be understated. As appreciated above, perhaps some of these spaces were initially predominantly female orientated as men had other outlets for socio-political expressions such as picketlines and trade unions more generally (Hughes, 2020). While women and families had been welcome on picket lines before (Gildart, 2007), there was also still a sense, especially within mining communities participating during the strike, that these should remain predominantly male occupied spaces (Burley, 2010:136). Essentially ring-fencing sites traditionally seen as typical spaces of resistance and political activism (such as picket lines) were therefore at best, partially gender neutral and at worst exclusionary. The creation of female only spaces, such as the football team, provided a space for women which was comfortable, safe and offered a place of emotional support and camaraderie during emotionally stressful times, such as the General Strike. The use of women's spaces in this way is not historically common within mining communities (Spence and Stephenson, 2007).

Community building has long been associated with the development of emotional resilience. This building of emotional resilience not only has the potential to increase social capital (and vice-versa) (Aldrich, 2017) but the building of emotional resilience should also be viewed as political work, within itself; emotional resilience as a form of political resistance, to strengthen solidarity and to prevent the strike breaking, for example (Spence and Stephenson, 2007).

The very act of forming such a group was therefore important as female only spaces have proven to be conducive to more open, free and comfortable discussions between women, particularly when discussing topics which are political in nature (Lewis et al., 2015). Such conversations are further generative of greater political engagement which is further generative of more open discussion, and so on. The fact that the team was created with an expressly political purpose - to support the general strike - may have acted as a catalyst in this respect. Considering that funds raised by the team were used in aid of the strike, it is probable that political discussions around the strike generally, but also personal discussions of micro-politics with regards to family members and others in the street and village were facilitated by female only spaces.

Beyond the adoption of a matching strip, all of the players in the photograph have also assumed very similar poses, and in doing so they portray yet another a very visual display of unity and cohesion. It could be suggested that this gesture of symbolic unity is reflective of the player's support for miners and the broader strike, this is still very much worth considering moving forward. However, I believe the main purpose of this pose is to highlight the strength of solidarity and unity between the players themselves, the impact of which undoubtedly, does extend to the wider mining community as discussed above. The way the photograph is staged overall, in terms of the player's poses, the organisation of the players and the view of the camera towards the team are all reflective of the way in which a photograph would be taken of a typical men's team. Again, I assert that this is potentially either a deliberate or otherwise attempt to echo the structure of previously dominated male spaces (discussed further below). The performative features of gender are here employed both as a form of political resistance to the wider context of the General Strike, but also in resistance to the gendered expectations of working-class women at this time (Butler, 2016). This is capitalised on both as a means of political expression, but also as a means of socio-political expression within their own community. The gender is purposefully politicised here, in a multi-faceted way both engaged in deliberate resistance and solidarity (Butler, 2016) at

a variety of scales (Awcock, 2020 and Hughes, 2020). While the formation of the team may have been a response to a lack of appropriate spaces for the socio-political organisation of women within these communities, as previously discussed, the reflection of the visible structure and expected appearance of a 'typical' male football team is feasibly a mechanism to legitimise the autonomy and authority of the women's team as an independent socio-political organisation.

3.1.3 Non-spectacular Solidarity

While not necessarily a 'spectacular' resistant event in the traditional sense, the formation of the Lintz team is arguably still a clear demonstration of political resistance (Hughes, 2020). Not only was the team founded with a specific political motivation, it was done so in direct opposition to existing systems of political power (Paddison et al., 2002), in this instance the government. The scale of this resistance should also be considered; both temporally and spatially. Although there is no record of when the team was disbanded, the village of Lintz effectively ceased to exist in 1929 (Uren, 1997:77). It follows then that it is reasonable to assume that at the very latest, this is when the team also disbanded (it is of course possible however that the team did in fact continue after this date). Regardless of when the team was disbanded, it is fair to assume that the team existed beyond the nine days of the general strike. Whilst often framed as reactionary responses, acts of resistance and solidarity can be thought of instead as opportunistic, reactionarily *organised* responses to external events, particularly when dominant powers (such as the government in this case) are deemed to be temporarily weakened. However, the acts themselves can be long and enduring (Sparke, 2008). In this sense, the political motivation to found the team at a time when the government was vulnerable is absolutely a demonstration of solidarity and resistance.

This simultaneous sense of community and purposeful resistance is brought to mind right down to the stance adopted by the majority of the women - folded arms, directly facing the camera, with steely expressions - conveying a sense of determined solidarity. Even in this

moment, when the image was captured, they stand together and yet appear to stand opposed to the viewer. Again, whilst not a 'spectacular' event in the same way that civil disobedience or martyrdom are demonstrations of great personal sacrifice (Routledge and Cumbers, 2013), it is fair to argue that given the, relatively speaking, uncommon use of photography by the working classes at this time (Marien, 2006:205) the creation of this photograph does in fact warrant a contextually spectacular event, though the act of taking the photograph itself does not come at any especially great personal sacrifice (Routledge and Cumbers, 2013). Although the action of posing for/taking a photograph is not in itself strictly *that* spectacular either, the fact that the team took this opportunity of having their photograph taken, to then adopt these poses and make a permanent record of them - in their strips too - I contend is a significant and arguably a spectacular event. There is also a certain level of performativity to this resistance (Nash, 2000). Not only is this a deliberate and purposeful permanent record of the team's resistance, the long-term record of a photograph further lends weight to the theory that resistance can be/is enduring and not limited to reactionary and short-term events (Sparke, 2008).

3.1.4 Identity, class and femininity

Traditionally, football has been (and often still is) viewed as a very masculine sport. Specifically, perhaps more so than any other sport in Britain, it has also been seen as a quintessentially working-class aspect of masculine identity (Metcalfe 1988, Russell, 1999 and Huggins, 2007). The choice of football, as these women's means to support the general strike is therefore quite remarkable.

Considering that the FA formally banned women playing on the organisation's pitches in 1921 (Jenkel, 2021), this attack on the legitimacy of women's role in the sport could well have driven the team to seek out another kind of fundraising activity, or even simply another sport to participate in. However, the very deliberate decision to engage with football in this way clearly demonstrates this team's intention to not only stand in solidarity with men (and

women) who were striking, and with each other as members of the team, but also a wider community of women who had previously enjoyed playing football and who now faced restrictions in doing so (Williams, 2019). Of course, these women lived across the country, and had never met the residents of Lintz. This act of solidarity and resistance therefore transcended spatial bounds of proximity and familiarity, and instead was part of a national expression of female agency and resistance. This is still valid to be considered as a resistance movement, even considering that these actions were not formally organised, but rather were sporadic (Morgan and Pulignano, 2020). Many aspects of the photograph, I believe, have been deliberately chosen by the women to reflect their male counterparts in certain ways, such as the pose adopted, the use of a strip etc. I contest that this is not only to legitimise the team as an independent socio-political organisation (as mentioned in the section above) but on an even more fundamental level, is an attempt to demonstrate the legitimacy of the women's team as a valid football team in its own right - one which is equivalent to a male team. This is in direct opposition to the FA's ban.

By banning women from playing football on their pitches, the FA effectively decreed that the organisation did not view football as compliant with imaginaries of femininity at this time (Skillen, et al., 2022). In contradiction to that assumption however, is the fact that the funds raised by this team were specifically used for the children's boot fund and soup kitchens for striking workers. Albeit indirectly, the caring for the wellbeing of children and preparation of food were therefore a direct result of the actions of the Lintz women. Moreover, these two things are very traditionally socially reproductive tasks, and therefore very much do in fact fit into the general definition of 1920s ideals of working-class femininity (Hall, 2001). Recreation and leisure activities, such as participation in sport, can also be considered as socially reproductive in their own right (Staikov, 1987). The use of football in this instance therefore presents a contradiction. While there is some distancing from socially reproductive tasks and a deliberate resistance to the FA's views on femininity and football, ultimately the women on the team did continue to contribute to social reproduction within the community. Hence, there

cannot reasonably be claimed to be an entire rejection of the feminine identity here. Arguably, this in itself is a display of resistance; by demonstrating that ideals of 'the feminine' and football can in fact co-exist, is in direct contradiction of the FA's ban.

Unfortunately, due to the lack of surviving documentation there is no way to know how men in the village, or indeed the region as a whole, viewed the formation of the Lintz team. Judging by the relaxed expression of the male figure on the right of the photograph he himself presumably supported the team. In addition, as Gibson-Graham (1994) point out, in many mining communities in Britain, female identity is often relegated as secondary to that of a working-class identity. Therefore, it is very possible that men in the local community would have welcomed the introduction of the team, particularly as its existence furthered the working-class cause, and strengthened working-class solidarity more broadly, irrespective of gender. I moreover suggest that in contradiction to Gibson-Graham (1994), the women of this team in fact very much encouraged this narrative of "working-class first, feminine second" at this time. This is evidenced through the choice of football in particular, in preference to other sports or activities. This was done in the knowledge that football's governing body in England viewed the sport as 'unfeminine' and given that football was/is a distinctly working-class sport (Skillen at al., 2022). I argue that the selection of football was done so precisely for its association with the working-classes. There is also the possibility that football was chosen, at least in part, due to the availability of facilities, but also because the strike itself was a working-class struggle and the appropriateness of engaging with a working-class sport may have also been considered.

This coexistence of identity, where feminine imaginaries are simultaneously accepted and rejected is further complicated when participation in the team is considered as "paid labour". Although presumably voluntary and recreational, how the team raised funds is not discussed in the evidence available. The most likely answer is that either players paid subsidiaries in order to play for the team, spectators paid to see the team play, or a combination of both. If either of the last two options were the case, then the team can be considered as providing a

service, for which a third party paid for. This then arguably constitutes paid labour. Given that many women in these communities did not regularly participate in paid employment, which was largely reserved for men (Todd, 2005), this adds another layer of ambiguity to how working-class women in mining communities negotiated their identities through spaces such as the Lintz team. Although not *strictly* paid work (ambiguous as is), the act of identifying as a working-class woman, and understanding what that specifically means in this context, but also being in (quasi)paid employment further entangles these women's identities. I further propose that it was precisely the disruption to the everyday routine and norms of employment which the general strike caused, which generated this ambiguous space allowing women within these communities to explore this liminal space between social reproduction and paid labour.

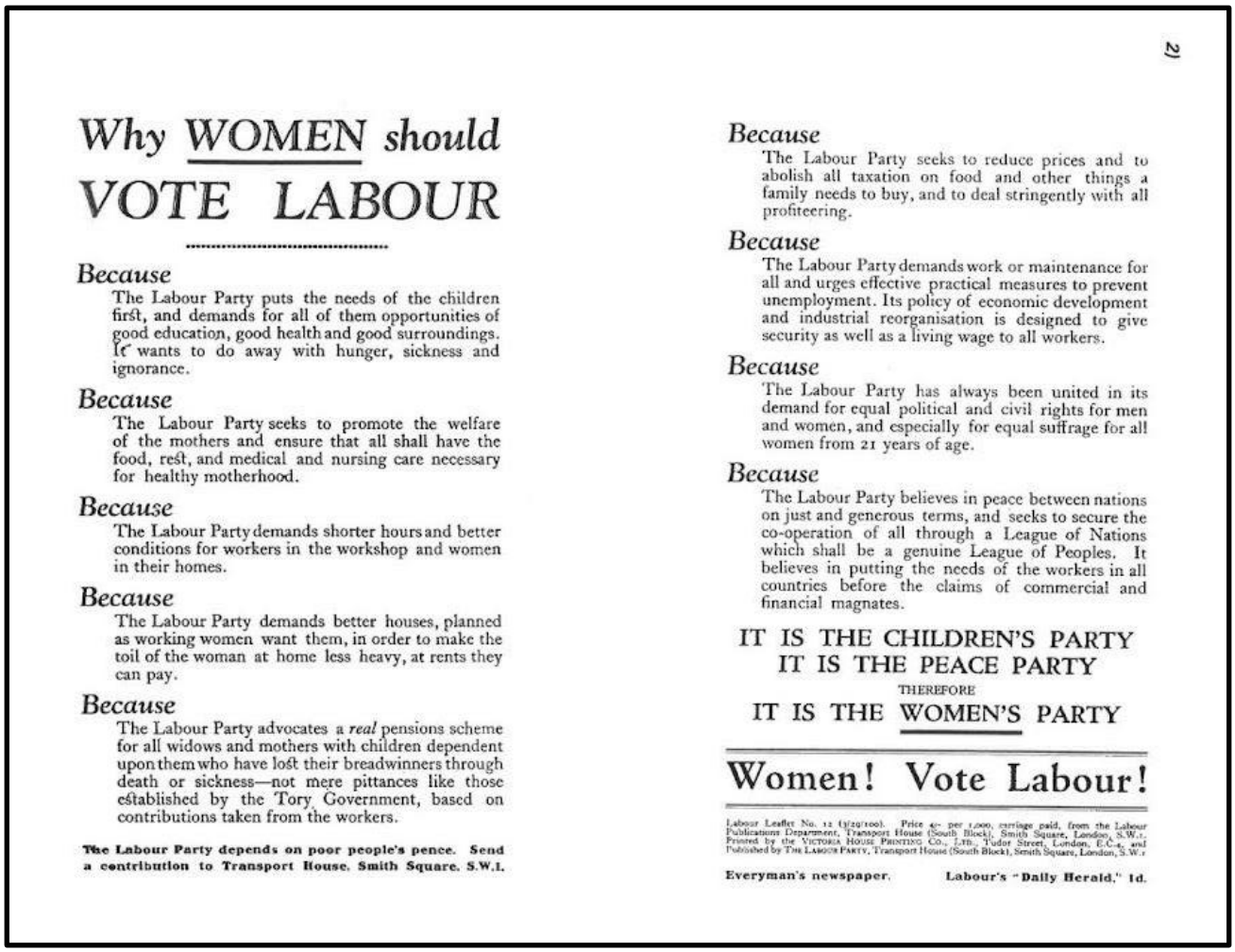
Similarly, the ambiguousness which recreational spaces provide by neither neatly fitting into either social reproduction or paid employment (Staikov, 1987) facilitated what could be considered minor "transgressions' ' and resistances to the expectations of feminine cleanliness and morality. Football can be muddy and at times, an aggressive sport. The provision of a recreational space made this somewhat more permissible for women; the 'dirtiness' was kept outside of the domestic space where it could be considered an offence to female morality and domesticity (Pleasant, 2019), but neither did women have to expressly cross intomining spaces, which were hypermasculinised (Massey, 2013) and were overtly "dirty" to experience this. By engaging with recreational spaces in this way, women were able to simultaneously maintain *and* transgress the moral boundary symbolised by cleanliness/dirtiness between the home and the pit (Crook, 1982). Furthermore, as seen in *Fig.4,* the strips which the players wore consisted of a loose fitting shirt and shorts. In everyday life, it is highly unlikely that this would have been deemed as acceptable, modest attire for these women (Nicholas, 2015:78). Yet again, the demands of this ambiguous space had provided an opportunity for these women to push the boundaries, and in many ways resist societal expectations in arguably a low risk environment. These recreational spaces

can be considered as relatively lower risk, than overt resistance and/or “transgressions' ' as such actions were more easily justifiable within these spaces. Getting muddy while playing football for example is almost inevitable and therefore in the instance of the women’s football team, excusable. Wearing loose, cool clothes is more practical and safer than other kinds of female clothing. I describe these spaces as “low risk”, but only in a relative sense. That is not to say these actions did not carry risk or were without opposition (see above with regards to the FA for example). Merely that the ambiguity of leisure spaces perhaps more readily facilitated these actions than in other spaces.

Overall, were it not for the break in the everyday rhythm and routine of life which the general strike brought about, this occurrence of female resistance would not have happened. This resistance was complex and multifaceted, spanning a range of those deemed to be in positions of oppressional power (Butler, 2016 and Hughes, 2020). These ranged from the government who were attempting to break the strike, to local men in the village who had specific ideas of working-class femininity. While not possible to pin down to a single event or individual, the formation and actions of the Lintz women’s football team were indisputably definable as acts of resistance (Hughes, 2020). The complex relational nature between these resistances and identity are self-evident, even in so much as the initial formation of the team itself. Not only did the creation of the team provide an inherently ambiguous space (Stairkov, 1987), facilitating socio-political and cultural boundary pushing, the creation of the team crucially provided a space for the expression of political agency by women in Lintz. This space became even more socio-politically important when considering female only spaces become inevitably generative of greater solidarity and resistance and have inescapable personal and necessarily emotional impacts (Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Thomlinson, 2018 and Morgan and Pulignano, 2020). Despite there being very little documentation on the team, and a photograph which is admittedly quite unclear and limited in places, by attending to multiple possibilities and implications of the evidence which is presented, a rounded and impartial view can be evaluated (McDonagh, 2018).

3.2 Why Women Should Vote Labour Pamphlet (1929)

Following the introduction of universal suffrage to all persons over the age of 21, the 1929 general election was the first major political voting event in which all working-class women were eligible to participate in (UK Parliament, 2018). This new demographic of voters were increasingly subject to political campaigning by major UK parties, including the still relatively young Labour Party. Below follows an analysis of a pamphlet which was distributed throughout the North East of England (Tyne and Wear Archive Service, 1988:26), specifically targeting working-class female voters (Fig.5) . The main themes explored here assess how the changing socio-economic status of women was capitalised on by the party as a means to encourage votes, and how the changing political and geopolitical landscape in the 1920s was related back to values which were typically considered to be “feminine” responsibilities. Considerations of how these themes potentially offer opportunities for resistance to the socio-economic status-quo, and towards some of the assumptions made within the pamphlet are also offered (Moore, 2018 and Awcock, 2020). Suggested reasons and interpretations of these themes through the use of selected language and organisation within the pamphlet are also provided. In particular, the section offers a critical reading of the possible openings (those more progressive possibilities suggested) as well as a more critical reading of the limits of this as a position statement (those more restricting and constrained positionings of women). As with the other sections, the chapter uses these archival fragments as an entry point for thinking critically about changing gender relations during this time. In doing so, the chapter extends the prior discussion of feminist historical geography as mapped out in the literature review, in particular, the importance of the politicisation of everyday spaces for women (Domosh, 1998 and Moore, 2018).



2

Why WOMEN should VOTE LABOUR

Because

The Labour Party puts the needs of the children first, and demands for all of them opportunities of good education, good health and good surroundings. It wants to do away with hunger, sickness and ignorance.

Because

The Labour Party seeks to promote the welfare of the mothers and ensure that all shall have the food, rest, and medical and nursing care necessary for healthy motherhood.

Because

The Labour Party demands shorter hours and better conditions for workers in the workshop and women in their homes.

Because

The Labour Party demands better houses, planned as working women want them, in order to make the toil of the woman at home less heavy, at rents they can pay.

Because

The Labour Party advocates a *real* pensions scheme for all widows and mothers with children dependent upon them who have lost their breadwinners through death or sickness—not mere pittances like those established by the Tory Government, based on contributions taken from the workers.

The Labour Party depends on poor people's pence. Send a contribution to Transport House, Smith Square, S.W.1.

Because

The Labour Party seeks to reduce prices and to abolish all taxation on food and other things a family needs to buy, and to deal stringently with all profiteering.

Because

The Labour Party demands work or maintenance for all and urges effective practical measures to prevent unemployment. Its policy of economic development and industrial reorganisation is designed to give security as well as a living wage to all workers.

Because

The Labour Party has always been united in its demand for equal political and civil rights for men and women, and especially for equal suffrage for all women from 21 years of age.

Because

The Labour Party believes in peace between nations on just and generous terms, and seeks to secure the co-operation of all through a League of Nations which shall be a genuine League of Peoples. It believes in putting the needs of the workers in all countries before the claims of commercial and financial magnates.

IT IS THE CHILDREN'S PARTY
IT IS THE PEACE PARTY
THEREFORE
IT IS THE WOMEN'S PARTY

Women! Vote Labour!

Labour Leaflet No. 12 (1/29/1100). Price 4/- per 1,000, carriage paid, from the Labour Publications Department, Transport House (South Block), Smith Square, London, S.W.1. Printed by the Victoria House Printing Co., Ltd., Tudor Street, London, E.C.4., and Published by The Labour Party, Transport House (South Block), Smith Square, London, S.W.1

Everyman's newspaper. **Labour's "Daily Herald." 1d.**

(*Fig.4 "Why Women Should Vote Labour" 1929.* (Tyne and Wear Archive Service, 1988:26))

3.2.1 "Blurring" of the socially reproductive/ economic binary

What is firstly important to note within the pamphlet is the way in which it both opens, and closes with an emphasis on "why women should vote labour" and "Women! Vote Labour!". This bookending of the pamphlet clearly not only very much acknowledges the new political autonomy of women, but by clearly canvassing for their vote, the Labour Party is recognising these female voters as significant. Prior to the 1929 election, despite the restrictions of RPA, the Labour Party still had four sitting female MPs (Society for the Study of Labour History, 2022). In doing so, recognising that only did the votes of women offer a potentially new voter base, but also the potential for women to offer the party established female voices in the

context of formal politics and offering greater political agency for women at this time. More broadly, the 1929 election was an opportunity to realise extension of the working-class vote, for whom Labour had positioned itself as an advocate in keeping with a socialist tradition (Thorpe, 2017:20). By identifying their audience specifically as women, the party is recognising that there is a difference in the lived experiences, responsibilities and therefore political priorities between men and women, which extended beyond that of just class. This was arguably in recognition of the fact that there were inherent differences between the lived experiences and often the responsibilities of men and women, especially in working-class communities. Despite a growing number of women entering paid labour, there was often still an expectation that women were still responsible for social reproduction within the home, more so than men (Todd, 2004). While the pamphlet somewhat recognises this fact, such recognition actually further perpetuates this discourse. The language used within the rest of the document does in fact highlight this difference more crudely, however it is important to recognise the subtle ways in which these social differences not only produce rhetoric, but that social discourse has, in this case, produced normalised ways of understanding that social difference.

The first paragraph in the pamphlet very clearly opens with an emphasis not just on the socially reproductive responsibilities of women, but has a focus on children, and specifically the caring of children. Not only are children presented as a woman's responsibility, but the Labour Party is suggesting that they can ease this responsibility by "doing away with hunger and sickness" and providing "opportunities of good education, good health and good surroundings". The implication here being that not only does it make common sense for working-class women to vote Labour, it is in fact the *responsibility* of the 'caring, dutiful' mother to do so. Even the reference to "surroundings", is suggestive of the domestic sphere being synonymous with women and children. The way the domestic sphere is framed as as politically significant, at least as a space where governmental policy can be influential, is suggestive of the acknowledgement of politicisation of everyday spaces (Domosh, 1988 and

Sharp, 2009) . In particular, this highlights the importance of this in relation to women who primarily occupied these spaces at this time (Todd, 2004).

These themes around the importance of “a caring mother” and a responsibility for the domestic being associated with women are reiterated throughout the pamphlet. The provision for care in motherhood follows. What is especially interesting here is welfare - both in terms of medical care and beyond, including food and rest etc. - is not covered with regards to all citizens, or even all women but rather expressly for mothers. Of course, this document predates the founding of the NHS significantly (NHS England, 2023) so most healthcare at this time was either privately financed by individuals or by charitable foundations (Koven and Michel, 1990 and Moore, 2016). Naturally then, it would seem to be a deliberate appeal to working-class women, who may struggle to afford adequate healthcare. The focus on mothers here could arguably be justified given that the pamphlet expressly and unapologetically is targeted at women and so an emphasis on mothering is understandable given this key demographic. However, there is certainly scope for the *general* healthcare of women, which is not gender-specific which is not provided. Nor is support for fathers etc. Even gender-specific healthcare, such as family planning or even reference to the care of women who have miscarried, or having issues conceiving for example is neglected. It is, of course, very possible that the reference to “*healthy* motherhood” could in fact encompass all of these things. Due to social norms regarding female morality, particularly within working-class communities, it is possible that this was employed as a kind of euphemism which covers these needs in a more contextually acceptable way. The performative nature of gender (Butler, 2016) in conjunction with the moral expectations of women in the first half of the 20th Century (Crook, 1982), would have required a masking of the formal acknowledgement of such practices (Moore, 2013), which this phrasing potentially represents.

Although references to the assumed requirement of women to fulfil a socially reproductive role are reiterated throughout the pamphlet, there are subtle references to a recognition that

this work is actually a form of labour, such as in the phrase, “Toil of the woman at home less heavy”. Obviously, use of “toil” implies a degree of difficult labour and hard work. This is perhaps an early recognition of the importance of unpaid labour carried out by women in the domestic sphere, not only in the physical reproduction of labour, but also in recognition of the often under-acknowledged economic contribution of this work to the wider economy (Cameron and Gibson-Graham, 2010). There is however, something to be said for the fact that there is a gradient of ease which the party is proposing here. “Less" inherently implies that this toil will not be entirely eased, nor is an explanation offered as to why. Again, the use of women specifically highlights that domestic work is primarily, if not entirely, considered the work of women. At no point throughout the pamphlet as a whole is this assumption questioned or directly challenged.

Nevertheless, while the gender roles within the home itself are not directly challenged, changing attitudes towards female employment and the realities for wrong-class women is very much a recurrent theme throughout the text. Within the small statement in which the “toil of women" is addressed, references to “working women" are made. There is certainly a sense throughout that women’s primary role is within the home, while acknowledging that there is an increase in women entering the paid workforce (Todd 2009). I argue that this is recognition of the blurring of the gendered social/economic binary following WW1, as discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. As Todd (2004) exemplifies, the interwar years were instrumental for young working-class women, in particular with regards to this merging distinction between paid employment and the importance of domestic work. Again, the acknowledgment of the the physical labour required for domestic work within the pamphlet does go some way to recognising development of not only a new kind of working-class femininity at this time through an emerging breakdown of the socio-economic status quo, but also a recognition that this shift was often welcomed by women (Todd, 2004).

There is also an implicit sense throughout that this increase in female participation within paid labour was born from necessity, but was not something which should be considered

desirable for a married woman (Bourke, 1994:103). Whereas, there is an expectation that women accept their main focus should be within the home (Crook, 1982). This is developed through (not so)subtle references, such as those mentioned above, but also through somewhat contradictory references to the death of “breadwinners''. Specifically, I refer here to the statement,

> “The Labour Party advocates a *real* pensions scheme for all widows and mothers with children dependent upon them who have lost their breadwinners through death or sickness - not the mere pittances like those established by the Tory Government, based on contributions from the workers.”

Despite apparent support for female workers as discussed previously, this statement does add weight to the suggestion that throughout the pamphlet, there is still the emphasis that men are the primary “breadwinners” and women primarily take on a socially reproductive role. Moreover, given that this material is targeted at the new female vote and so essentially is aimed at women over 21 years of age, there is an assumption here that women in this demographic will likely be married with children, which admittedly would not be unusual for working-class women this time (Brooke, 2006). What is distinctly missing from this statement however, is any attempt to establish financial support for women themselves, or a direct reference to women’s pensions. Rather than challenging the notion that men are those individuals who earn the greatest share of earnings (and have the right to assume this position), this in fact perpetuates the idea that, married, working-class women are financially dependent on their husbands/fathers etc. as their main role should be child-rearing (Bourke, 1994:51). As Bourke also highlights here, there is an expectation that married women shouldn’t be employed unless completely necessary, as this was seen as taking paid employment from single women and widows who had no other means of income, or other responsibilities (such as children, housework etc) which ‘should’ be occupying their time. So, while the Labour Party was undoubtedly reiterating this sentiment, the sentiment itself in many ways, was actually established and policed by working-class women themselves

(Crook, 1982). Arguably then, the Labour Party, who later go on to say that they have "always been united in its demand for equal political and civil rights for men and women", are in some ways supporting female autonomy here, by not challenging established systems of economic-moral codes. However, by not directly challenging this code, the party is also effectively supporting unequal working rights between women depending on marital status, not too unlike the RPA in 1918 with regards to voting rights for women depending on her economic status (Gottlieb, and Toye, 2013:1). Of course, the difference here is not legally binding, such as in the RPA, however the strong social moral codes policies by women in working-class communities was still capable of having significant repercussions for those impacted (Crook, 1982).

Within the statement, the woman - whose vote they are trying to attract - is actually removed from the proposition entirely. Not only does the statement focus on the importance of "breadwinners" and the female subject is reduced to merely "widows" or "mothers", but even then her entire being is reduced, once again, to her role in the care of her children. The attention brought to the dependent children of the mother/widow figure, highlights this. Consideration of her welfare post-loss of the "breadwinner" is neglected, and instead is focused entirely on the fact that her children are now dependent on her. Similar to the failure to establish any kind of recognition for women's pensions, or the opportunities for widows and mothers to (re)enter the workforce, this is actually potentially more dehumanising. Her entire identity as an individual, let alone a woman, is reduced to her dependence on male family members and her responsibility/ability to raise children. While the reduction of female working-class identity to that of simply a mother, is not uncommon in the pamphlet as a whole, there is (as mentioned above), in the statements previous to this one, there is at least some recognition of female autonomy.

In many ways, the relatively strict constraints on what the pamphlet considers as an acceptable female identity negates alternative forms of socio-political agency available to women, or even agency which they may have previously engaged prior to political

emancipation (Awcock, 2020 and Hughes, 2020). However, the pamphlet does recognise that perhaps these identities are more complex than simply a reproductive figure. This is through the acceptance of female employment (even if slightly reluctantly) and that women do still have autonomy *within* the home, with regards to rent levies and planning within the home. This final statement relating to pensions has the sense that it is the overarching sentiment, in part because it is the last statement read on the half of the page.

This is the last statement which may be what is held in the reader's mind, and not only maintains this discourse of women essentially living to bring up children (future workers and future mothers), but might be held as co-producing it, even more so than the previous statements. While the previous statements go someway to acknowledging the duality of working-class female identity at this time through social and economic crossovers, this statement firmly reasserts 'traditional' gender roles (Kent, 1988). Interestingly here also is the way in which the Labour Party is encouraging women to vote for them because of the indirect way in which Tory pension policy impacts them. All of the other arguments within the pamphlet either address the problems which directly face women, or have wider geo-political implications (as discussed further in the next section). I argue that this is an attempt to associate the then Tory government with a disruption to, perhaps even so far as an attack on, established ways of working-class life (Kent, 1988).

It also presents the Conservative Party as a threat to daily economic stability ("Not the mere pittances like those established by the Tory Government, based on contributions taken from the workers"), and as such an indirect threat to the well-being of children - a woman's most fundamental responsibility (Hall, 2001). Potentially then, this statement is less about reversing the previous statements and their quasi-references to female autonomy, but is in fact designed to politicise what was regarded as the most fundamental moral duty of a working-class woman, and instead implies that to *not* vote Labour is therefore a dereliction of this moral responsibility, for which women were so responsible (Hall, 2001). This calls back to the entrenched ways of viewing gender roles pre-First World War (Kent 1988). The attack

on the Tory Party specifically is also of interest; The National insurance Act, 1911 which provided financial help in times of sickness to wage earners, but notably not to those who were currently unemployed even if dependants of those who were employed, was actually introduced in 1911 by the Liberal Party (Thane, 2011).

As Thane explains, this aid was also relative to contributions made by workers during times of employment, not too dissimilar to the existing pension scheme mentioned by the pamphlet. The Liberal Party was significantly closer in ideology to Labour than the Conservative Party, and so the pamphlet's lack of attack on the Liberals is perhaps unexpected, given that the Liberals were the party most likely to split Labour's vote (Tanner, 2003:19). I argue that this is actually calling working-class female voters to not consider their identities as working-class women, but rather as part of the wider working-class as a whole (Gibson-Graham, 1994). By attacking the Conservative government in such a way, the Labour Party is emphasising how bad for working-class people (and their families) they are. It is effectively a call to fight the 'elites', in something which they believe transcends gender. The use of the pension scheme is nothing more than, I suggest, a means to achieve this. Despite the claim within the pamphlet about the party consistently being united in "demanding" equal rights for men and women, this was not always the reality. While many women did align themselves with the Labour movement, pre-female suffrage there was a consistent background tension between the patriarchal structure and leadership of the party, and the assertion by these women to their rights *as women* (Rowan, 1982). I argue then that this statement reignites those tensions, and in many ways legitimises them.

3.2.2 Gender "blindness" and domestic policy

From this point, the pamphlet moves away from an expressly gendered stance towards one which is more gender neutral in its approach. Although, as I will demonstrate, this approach is still utilised to try and appeal to women specifically. While women - as mothers, widows or any other 'defining feature' of female identity - are not addressed directly, references to

family and equality are used instead. As previously discussed, the synonymous way in which the identity of women and their responsibilities with regards to children are established throughout the pamphlet in many ways mean that these are still gendered calls for votes, towards women. By recognising the importance of these nuances however, and with understandings of how the role of working-class women was contextualised, this enables a better holistic assessment of the potential social and political autonomy of women, even within these relatively constrained ascribed identities (Rose and Ogborn, 1988; Bondi and Rose, 2003 and McDonagh, 2018).

The continuation of the emphasis of economic stability and provision persists. There follows a declaration that the Labour Party will reorganise industry and give a living wage to all workers. It is true that from 1926 the Labour Party had campaigned for a living wage for those in employment (Thompson, 2006:45) and in 1931 prominent left-wing figure James Maxton MP proposed the Living Wage Bill to parliament;

> "The object of this Bill is to establish a living wage for all wage earners. I am sorry that an object of such vital importance and such great scope should be left to the responsibility of a private Member. Indeed, I am somewhat surprised that this House of Commons has not previously dealt with this matter and settled it once and for all. I do not know why there has been this disinclination to tackle this problem, unless it be that it is a difficult one; but the fact that it is difficult does not take away from the necessity, and in these days certainly does not diminish the urgency."
>
> (HC Deb, February 1931)

While Maxton reasserts that the bill is intended to benefit all wage earners, which inherently implies that this should be regardless of gender of said wage earner, he also expresses disappointment in the lack of initiative by the Labour Party to propose the bill itself. He also highlights that in his opinion the requirement of such a bill has not reduced, and in fact is

perhaps more urgent now than previously. It is also important to note that this was read three years after the pamphlet in which the promise of an introduction of living wage was made. Further to this, despite having relatively strong support within the majority government Labour Party, the bill failed to pass. This perhaps reflects divisions between the Independent Labour Party (ILP) the future and political alignment within the larger Labour Party, which ultimately caused Maxton and others to break away (Cohen, 2001 and Griffin, 2018).

The inclusion of this statement within the pamphlet itself may well be characterised as a negotiation, given (not too unlike any of the other statements within the pamphlet) that there is no time scale as to when the party would intend to implement this policy, or mention of the mechanism and economic or political infrastructure it would use to do so. As with most of the statements within this document then, the certainty of intention to implement these policies might be questioned. This perhaps is an attempt to disguise the divisions within the Labour Party even at this relatively early stage, for fear it may cause unease amongst voters. It is also important to recognise that female political engagement was not limited to the likes of general elections. Many women had previously - and continued to - participate politically in a diverse number of ways (Moore, 2016 and Griffin, 2018). Even within these mobilizations, a homogeneity should not be assumed. The generalisation and arguably ambiguity of the pledge for equal wages could therefore be considered an attempt to bring together these various political factions under a generalised consensus of a common goal.

What is also noticeable, is while the statement itself and the proposed bill which followed are clearly not gender specific there is no mention of equal pay, or acknowledgement of the gender pay gap beyond this. Although the TUC did pass a resolution in 1888 to work for equal pay between genders for equal work (although the practical application of this is far more complex), this was not ratified by the British (Labour) Government until 1971 (Robinson and Wallace, 1974). Although then, the principle of proposing a living wage - in this context, essentially the introduction of a minimum wage - could be deemed as relatively progressive, in actuality this is not necessarily the case. By adopting a gender neutral

stance, the party is effectively dismissing the pay disparities of gender in occupations above that of minimum wage. Historically, this has been shown to undoubtedly impact female employees more and reinforce gender stereotypes, such as women becoming stay at home mothers in lieu of their partners, who are able to earn more in paid work (Seigel, 1993). This then further devalues the importance of unpaid reproductive labour within the economy and therefore essentially devalues this “feminised” work (Cameron and Gibson-Graham, 2010). It could of course be argued that within the context of 1928 the concept of a minimum wage in principle alone is fairly progressive, however as discussed above, the notion was actually introduced by the TUC in 1888 (Robinson and Wallace, 1974). The lack of inclination to implement this as policy following the election, as highlighted by Maxton, reinforces this idea that actually the party was either not as committed to economic equality as it portrayed in 1928 or lacked the practical mechanism to implement it as policy following election. This is particularly interesting given that no actual means of policy implementation are provided throughout the entire document.

I argue that these pledges are presented to women with the purpose of being broadly popular among female voters, and therefore are merely considered by the party as a means to attract votes. The lack of specifics and evidentiary lack of implementation, at least in this particular instance, demonstrate how the promises made in 1929 did not translate into real change for the women who believed them. This could be because despite the presence of nine female Labour MPs following the 1929 election (Society for the Study of Labour History, 2022), the lack of female representation in parliament - by women themselves or others - was largely sidelined in favour of ‘traditional’ Labour values which indirectly related to the protection of working-class, working men. The still relatively young party was keen to establish itself as the party of workers, who were largely male. Towards the second half of the decade, it has been noted that the party used more populist approaches in order to establish itself as a mainstream party (Rose, 1988).

Similar contradictions can be seen in the line “The Labour Party has always been united in…equal suffrage for all women from 21 years of age”. Technically, this is true in so much as until 1908 officially, the Labour Party refused to support any movement which was gender specific, instead only campaigning for universal suffrage for anyone over the age of 21 (Rowan, 1982). However, I argue that this statement is clearly intended to encourage the idea that the party in fact continuously campaigned for female suffrage as a specific endeavour. Naturally, if universal suffrage had been granted during this time then women too would have the vote, however this is an attempt by Labour to ignore this fact. While the ILP had consistently supported votes for women, it was not until 1912 that the broader Labour Party officially adopted this stance (Hannah, 2018:9). Not only does this highlight further divisions within the movement, it also demonstrates that the party must have been aware of these divisions but actively chose to ignore them in order to attract female votes in the 1928 election. Here, I suggest that this is in fact deliberately misleading and therefore is an attempt to curtail the ability for women to make an informed decision about their vote. In this regard, this arguably undermines female political autonomy (Burkell and Regan, 2019).

Not only is this somewhat ironic given the message it is trying to convey, but also implies that women should vote because of what Labour offered them in the past, almost out of gratitude or duty rather than what the party can offer them in the future. Again, I suggest that this undermines female political autonomy and plays to a different kind of moral obligation to that of familial responsibility. I argue that this actually perpetuates the notion that political parties, which were (and are) patriarchal institutions (Rowan, 1982), create a system of dependency where women feel obliged to show gratitude for being offered even the most basic of civil and political rights. This can be presented as a justification for female voters to vote for certain parties or candidates due to a sense of gendered moral obligation (Conroy et al., 2020). Perhaps it is understandable that the Labour Party would emphasise this point, given 1929 was the first election in which all women were eligible to vote (indeed, the first British election in which there was universal suffrage (UK Parliament, 2018)) and so it is not

as if the topic of past support for female suffrage was not a topic of contention in this election. However, to use a relatively significant amount of space on one side of paper to make this point again points towards a patronising position by the party. It suggests they do not believe that women know which parties have previously represented their interests, despite many women fighting for decades for the right to vote (Ward, 1995). Though of course, that is not to say parties do not have responsibility to help voters make informed decisions.

3.2.3 Peace and Ideals of the Feminine

The final statement and also the closing call for women to vote Labour quite suddenly make a move towards the idea of wider geopolitics and peace. Of course, just a decade after the end of the First World War discussion of the League of Nations and peace is not to be unexpected.

The final call for women to vote Labour however plays on the idea that women are peaceful (at least when compared to men). Yet again, there is the insinuation that in order to protect her children (yet again, as throughout, it is implied that as a woman not only must she be a mother, but her children should be essentially the only determinant in any political decision she makes). This is presented as a logical, matter-of-fact, series of events: “It is the children’s party. It is the peace party. Therefore, it is the women’s party.” It is the use of “therefore” which is significant here. Not only does this imply that children and emotional investment in childcare are irrefutably a woman’s responsibility, there is an inherent implication from the use of “peace” that women are naturally aligned with this position. This plays to the legacy of Victorian ideals of femininity of purity, amenability and, specifically, as non-confrontational (Karusseit, 2007). The clear link made between these ideals and the assumption that the Labour party is therefore the obvious choice for women perpetuates these values and homogenises female individual identity. Even within anti-war movements, this statement assumes that women are anti-war, purely on the basis of their responsibility to

their children and husbands as caregivers. This ignores the anti-war stance many women positioned themselves with for political reasons. A position of opposition to the first-world war on the basis of anti-imperialism and/or communist beliefs for example (Griffin, 2018). Again, this perpetuates the homogenisation of female identities and in doing so masks the ways in which women have expressed political agency throughout history (Rose and Ogborn, 1988; Awcock, 2020). If Labour is presented as the 'peace party' then this frames the Conservative Party as aggressive and potentially they are therefore perceived as war-driven, or at the very least are not as concerned with the maintenance of peace as the Labour Party. In effect then, the Conservatives are therefore considered as un-feminine as it does not conform to feminine ideals. Even further, it directly states that "It [the Labour Party] is the women's party", leaving no doubt in the reader's mind about the intention of this inference. This also dismisses the efforts of many suffragettes who carried out acts of civil disobedience and purposefully did not conform to these ideals for many years prior (Purvis, 1995). Considering this pamphlet is directly targeted at the new female vote, this is somewhat surprising and arguably minimises not only the struggle women faced in gaining the vote but arguably suppresses the agency that these women expressed through these acts.

Throughout the pamphlet, the two main arguments presented to working-class female voters are that Labour will make her life as a mother and wife financially more secure and that women morally owe it to both the party (for their past support of women) and their children to vote Labour. I suggest that the moral imperative which the document tries to present is the primary method employed here. If the policies presented provided any means by which the Labour Party intended to implement them if elected, this would suggest they were trying to appeal to the 'rational voter'. Instead however, no mechanism for policy implementation is presented, and the role of the working-class woman as a loving mother is repeatedly exploited throughout. This assumed emotional and moral duty of women is then itself presented as a rational argument, when in fact it reinforces stereotypes of the socially-reproductive, domestic, confirmative woman. This stance reiterates the need to recognise

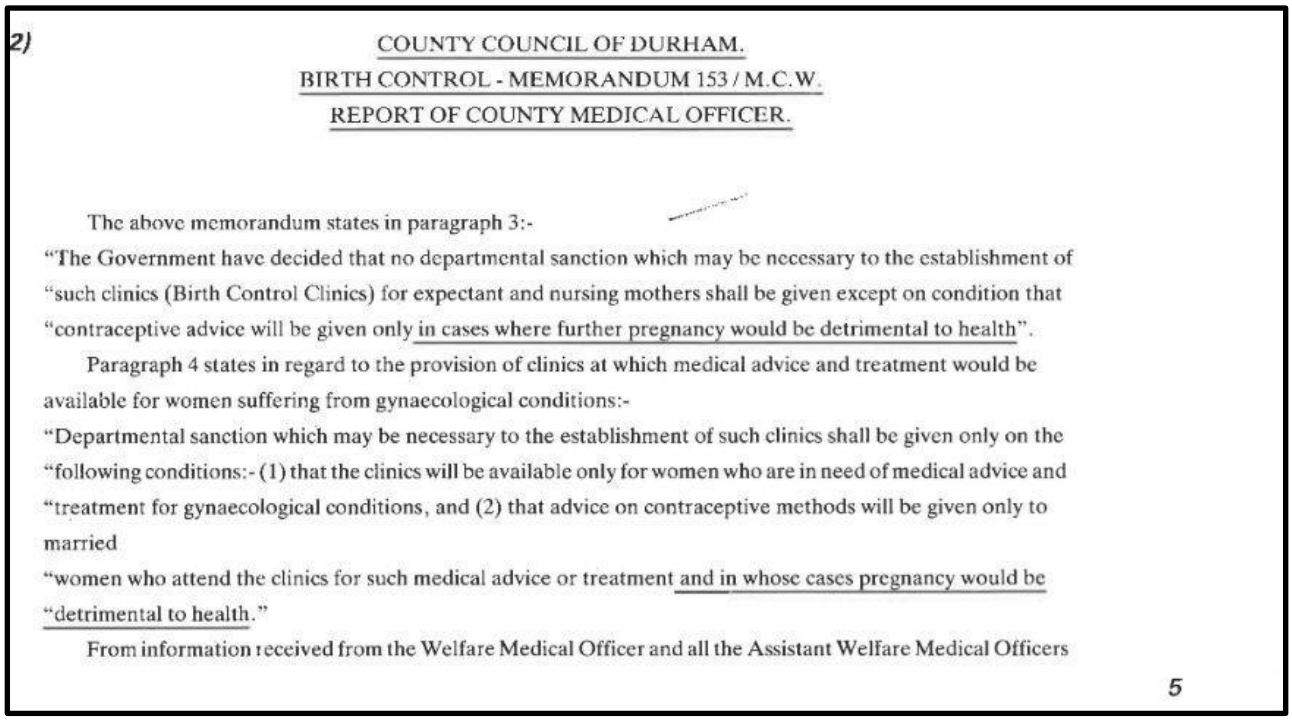
women as political agents, in a variety of spaces throughout history (Awcock, 2020). The socio-political importance of ‘women’s spaces’ such as the domestic sphere is recognised (Domosh, 1997), however the acknowledgement that women were not passive or immune to their politicisation is lacking (Rose and Ogborn, 1988 and McDonagh, 2018).

From where this focus on the domestic is clearly the case at the start of the pamphlet, it admittedly does become less obvious and engages with topic such as economics and geopolitics, although ultimately this is all then related back (in one way or another) to her duty to her family, in a very specific patriarchal, hegemonically discursive way. This is made very clear through the opening and final lines of the pamphlet, which definitively reassert these assumptions, as both the first and final things the reader sees. In doing so, as demonstrated above, I argue that this is not only patronising but actually curtails the agency and autonomy of women at this time. The pamphlet fails to recognise individual political identity and autonomy, which in turn results in the minimization of the reality and scale of female autonomy and agency (Awcock, 2020 and Hughes, 2020).

3.3 Contraceptive Memo (1931)

As discussed in the literature review section of this dissertation, at this time Britain had some of the most severe laws regarding abortion (Brooke, 2001). While not merely legally reprehensible, the social dynamics of mining communities at this time meant that such practices were often publicly frowned upon, but privately acknowledged and discussed between women, in those spaces which were often regarded as 'women's spaces' such as the home and female-dominated workplaces (Moore, 2013). In addition to these complex legal and social relationships concerning abortion, access to contraception was also subject to networks of legal and moral understandings.

In what follows here, a memo regarding the provision of access to clinics which could provide advice to working-class women in Durham is analysed. This is then considered in relation to the key theme of ambiguity, and how this provides scope for interpretation and resistance or compliance to policy, as well as the broader field of feminist historical geography. Of particular reference here is the ways in which the voices of women are/are not present in historical record, especially with regards to everyday spaces and practices (McDonagh, 2018). The main analytical themes discussed are the expectations of women with regards to contraception and childbaring at this time and the context of what constituted contraceptive healthcare provision.



2)

COUNTY COUNCIL OF DURHAM.
BIRTH CONTROL - MEMORANDUM 153 / M.C.W.
REPORT OF COUNTY MEDICAL OFFICER.

The above memorandum states in paragraph 3:-
"The Government have decided that no departmental sanction which may be necessary to the establishment of "such clinics (Birth Control Clinics) for expectant and nursing mothers shall be given except on condition that "contraceptive advice will be given only in cases where further pregnancy would be detrimental to health".

Paragraph 4 states in regard to the provision of clinics at which medical advice and treatment would be available for women suffering from gynaecological conditions:-
"Departmental sanction which may be necessary to the establishment of such clinics shall be given only on the "following conditions:- (1) that the clinics will be available only for women who are in need of medical advice and "treatment for gynaecological conditions, and (2) that advice on contraceptive methods will be given only to married
"women who attend the clinics for such medical advice or treatment and in whose cases pregnancy would be "detrimental to health."

From information received from the Welfare Medical Officer and all the Assistant Welfare Medical Officers

5

(Fig.5 - Extract from a Birth Control Memorandum, 1931. (Tyne and Wear Archive Service, 1988:5))

3.3.1 Expectations of women and reproductive healthcare

Strikingly, even within the first two lines of the memo, the boundaries of who is eligible for contraceptive advice is established, even prior to the conditions on which such advice should/can be given. It is made clear from the outset that contraceptive advice should only be given to "expectant and nursing mothers". By identifying this very specific demographic of women, an expectation that women must at least first have a child (or be carrying one) is established. The implication of this being that at the very least it is expected, almost as a duty, that a woman should produce children or perhaps even more than that, a woman should *desire* to produce children and contraception should only be used after this role/desire has been fulfilled. The prospect that a woman may not wish to have children at all is not considered. This is of note considering the ways in which working-class women's bodies, in particular, were considered. The imaginaries of working-class women having typically larger families, and oftentimes their bodies being viewed as having an almost purely reproductive purpose (Brooke, 2006) are reflected here. Essentially, in many ways the

decision to offer advice only to women who meet these prerequisites perpetuates these ideas, almost making it a self-fulfilling prophecy. The exclusion of women from these spaces who do not meet these requirements, develops more entrenched understandings of femininity and moral norms at this time (Moore, 2018).

More generally, it further entrenches the idea that women at this time were primarily involved in socially-reproductive roles, and reduces their identities as such. The exclusion of a clearly female voice, or even reference to the opinions of women which were potentially taken into account in the production of this policy is also noticeably absent. That does not mean that they did not have opinions on these matters or even that their opinions were not taken into consideration of course, merely that they are not recorded within this document. This once again renews the importance of actively emplacing women as socio-political agents throughout history, in the spaces in which they had potential influence (Rose and Ogborn, 1998; McDonagh, 2018 and Awcock, 2020). Given a definitively female voice is not directly heard through the document, a reading which acknowledges the context of this policy implementation is therefore crucial.

In addition to the requirements that women be either carrying a child or already have a child, the memo also states that advice should only be given to married women. This again continues the narrative of the legacy of Victorian ideals, where a socially acceptable woman, and her family more broadly, should follow the structure of a ‘traditional’ nuclear family. The expectation that contraceptives should only be used by married women, inherently implies that unmarried women should not be having sex in the eyes of the local authority. The paternalistic approach used by the local authority here, demonstrates the ways in which working-class female bodies were ultimately politicised during this time, even on a locally governmental level. The nature of this control is not questioned throughout the document. This is effectively a condemnation of premarital sex by the local authority, but very specifically it is a condemnation of *female* premarital sex. Of course, it is perhaps easier to

express this condemnation given that it is specifically women, not men who accessed these resources. However, there is also no mention - at all - throughout of contraceptive advice which may be accessed by men. This speaks to the ways in which working-class women in these communities (and specifically at this time) were often held primarily responsible for the moral upkeep of their families and by extension, the wider community (Crook, 1982). The politicisation of the female body in this way is yet another example of the ways in which policy and historical record of such policy excludes women from history as active agents, by not directly addressing the role of moral policing that women held, this effectively does not address their agency as such.

3.3.2 Language and the Production of Ambiguous Spaces

The memo then goes on to the specifics of when advice can be given. With regards to contraceptive advice specifically, this is outlined as “contraceptive advice will only be given in cases where further pregnancy would be detrimental to health” [underlining also in original document]. While initially this appears to arguably be quite a firm instruction on when guidance can be provided, closer analysis highlights that this is not necessarily the case. While the requirement of women seeking such help to have already experienced pregnancy is a given, the lack of clarification on the term “health” provides an opportunity for scope through interpretation. Firstly, there is no outline provided for the definition of “health”. Whether this is in reference to specifically physical health, and/or mental health is not specified. Nor does it directly reference who’s health should be considered; is it that of the mother, or the child for example. It also raises the potential for a more holistic approach to family health. There is the possibility here for this to be interpreted as an opportunity to consider the overall health of the family as a whole. By this, I mean the impact another child may have on the wellbeing of other children (and the parents) in the family . This could be in terms of physical and mental health, but also in terms of the financial health of the family, should another child be brought into it (Kemp et al., 2013). Arguably, this kind of approach could be thought of as progressive especially given the temporal social context, however I

argue that this is still a possibility given the relative scope for interpretation which is provided here, and considering that the possibility of publicly offering women access to contraceptives was considered relatively progressive within itself at this time (Szreter and Fisher, 2010).

I contest that the room for interpretation is purposefully provided in the ambiguous wording of this memo, to give space for both women and healthcare practitioners to issue contraceptive advice more freely. In part, this is because elsewhere in the memo, clinics for the "treatment of gynaecological conditions" are referenced, demonstrating a more specific outlining of the kinds of health conditions women faced. The deliberate vagueness of the general term "health" therefore, I argue, points to an intentional opening for interpretation. Due to the complex social dynamics within mining communities, open and direct conversations around contraception and abortion practices were necessarily covert amongst women themselves (Moore, 2013). In accordance with these dynamics, it may be that the local authority is reflecting these somewhat clandestine practices to facilitate greater access and acceptance of them, given their sensitive nature. If this is the case, this points to a more subtle, everyday form of resistance to formalised legal constraints at this time (Hughes, 2020) but also have the the potential to come at personal cost, should legal action be taken against those who take these positions, should they been deemed non permissible (Routledge and Cumber, 2013).

In addition to this ambiguity surrounding the terminology of 'health', an additional layer of ambiguity in terms of scale is offered through the use of 'detrimental'. Again, a clear definition of what constitutes a detriment, is not provided. The scale of the seriousness of the illness is therefore largely open to interpretation. Theoretically this could mean the health issue identified could last from a short period of illness, to a potential risk of life. In combination then, the range of ambiguity offered in this relatively short phrase is actually quite broad, both in terms of scenarios where the advice is applicable but also in terms of scale. Although not explicitly stated as such, I argue this perhaps is deliberate to extend the

demographic of women who are able to access such services. Even if not deliberate, regardless the wording does provide room for interpretation and therefore could be used in this way, even if this was not the primary intention. This then provides an opportunity for women and healthcare providers to engage with a kind of subverted resistance, which is not directly oppositional or in defiance of the instruction but instead, utilises openings as a means of working around the instruction to enact alternative forms of resistance (Paddison et al., 2002).

Interestingly, the exact nature of the kinds of advice, or kinds of contraceptive methods which will be offered are not referenced either. This adds yet another level of vagueness to the memo. While barrier contraceptive methods had become more commonplace by this time, the provision of such services for working-class women in particular was limited (Szreter and Fisher, 2010). It is obviously a possibility that that memo is in fact referring to the possibility of early stage pregnancy termination (abortion). Given that the memo continually restates throughout that this advice should only be given in cases where further pregnancy would be detrimental to health, it is possible that an exception to the strict laws on abortion in the UK (Brooke, 2001) could be made. Due to the sensitive nature of the practice, “contraceptive methods" may be employed as a euphemism to make the suggestion more palatable for individuals in this context. If this is the case, it also offers medical practitioners, and crucially women, an opportunity to potentially circumvent legal obstacles to reproductive rights, in a way which is not necessarily recorded or formally documented as such. By exploring this as a reasonable possibility, it perhaps offered a previously unrealised avenue of resistance by women (McDonagh, 2018 and Hughes, 2020). Recognising this potential resistance therefore reinstates the agency of these women at this time.

Despite noting that the request for clinics where women can discuss contraception and treatment for “gynaecological conditions”, it is noted that demand for contraceptive advice is lower than for the treatment of gynaecological conditions. In spite of this, in reference to

contraception, "in cases where further pregnancy would be detrimental to health" is repeatedly underlined to stress its importance. I assert that this is somewhat of a contradiction, given that as previously established, the phrase itself is fundamentally ambiguous. It is perhaps possible that this is an intentional attempt to mask the layers of ambiguity within the language used, in order to legitimise the possibilities it offers. Naturally, the alternative is that the author actually did not realise the number of ambiguities within the phrasing, and believes that the underlining of this message actually does reinforce the seriousness of the message they are trying to convey. Both of these possibilities are, I suggest, legitimate and reasonable. In many ways however, the author's intention is, to some extent, irrelevant. Regardless of the aim, the fact is there *are* multiple ambiguities present. Admittedly, some of these are unavoidable through the very nature of language (Haraway, 1988 and Stoller 2002 and Moore, 2010) though clearly in some instances here, this is not necessarily the case. This ambiguity produces a space of the uncertain, providing avenues for contestation of what have previously been considered as "established facts" (Eichorn, 2010).

The author of the memo concludes that specialist clinics to provide contraceptive support were not required and that provisions for this could be made within the pre-existing framework. While the exact nature of these 'existing sessions' is not provided, their existence by definition, provides an ambiguous space. These are not defined as clinics and are therefore suggestive of a less medical environment. The use of ambiguous but predominantly female occupied spaces to enable conversations of reproductive health has been evidenced before (Moore, 2013), however the official nature of the acknowledgement of the use of such spaces in this way, I contest, is suggestive of a perhaps more progressive approach to women's healthcare at this time. The provision of these spaces is what potentially facilitated such discussions (Moore, 2013). Further, as suggested above, the ambiguity created through the use of language potentially further facilitates this creation of

an ambiguous, almost liminal space; neither of the domestic sphere, and yet regarding a subject so (quite literally) intimately, fundamentally intertwined with social reproduction.

3.4 Overarching themes

Although the sources discussed above have vastly different purposes and forms of production, they all pertain to aspects of the lives of women in Northeast mining communities during the 1920s and 30s. The subjects covered are also significantly different, but do nevertheless highlight some consistent emerging themes which are present in all of the materials analysed. Primarily this is the expectations of working-class femininity and how ambiguous spaces facilitated the negotiation - even resistance of these expectations.

Throughout all of the sources, the expectations that working-class women should take primarily socially-reproductive roles is reiterated throughout. This is explicitly stated in the pamphlet and contraceptive memo, and is strongly implied through context of the football team photograph. What is notable however, is how all of these sources evidence the production of ambiguous spaces - the politicisation of the domestic sphere (Cameron and Gibson-Graham, 2003, Sharp, 2007 and Hall, 2020); the creation of spatial ambiguity through medical “sessions”; and through ambiguity of language (Manoff, 2004), and finally through the production of new leisure spaces for women (Staikov, 1987). The creation of an inherent ambiguity within these spaces provided an opportunity for these expectations and norms to be challenged. The blurring of moral, social and economic boundaries is clear throughout.

A key finding of this analysis demonstrated how not only was there scope for resistance within these ambiguous spaces, but crucially these resistances were enacted. In particular, theories of resistance which call to attention the importance of resistance in the face of enforced limited agency of individuals and groups can be applied here, such as the work of Hughes (2020). This highlights the importance of and crucially, the *possibility* of resistance

as non-spectacular but still potentially hugely significant, both for the individuals enacting them and the wider community. The performative nature of this resistance should not be under-stated either (Butler, 2016): while this is perhaps more obvious in the football team photograph for example, I argue that by acknowledging the interest in contraceptive services, the memo also recognises that some women were rejecting the gendered expectations of them as working-class women at this time. By declaring an interest in not wholly fulfilling their reproductive duty (Brooke, 2006), I contest that this is an alternative form of gendered performative resistance. As Butler (2016) highlights on p3 highlights, the body is a constant agent in everyday struggles of resistance.

Embodiment is also significant in all of the materials. Through expectations that women within this context were care-givers, mothers etc. but also through the use of football. Specifically, the body is made vulnerable, in one way or another, in all of the scenarios. Within the pamphlet for example, war is utilised as a means to engage women in their protective, care-giving roles. It suggests that women should use their new political power in order to protect their most important responsibilities - their husbands and children. In the memo, the body must first be made vulnerable (through the risk of ill health) before advice should be offered. Finally, through the creation of the women's football team, the body is made vulnerable through the very act of playing physical sport. In each case, vulnerability is engaged in a different way, but its presence is still noticeable nonetheless. In particular, in the first instance, vulnerability is engaged as a persuasive, political and moral tool (Brown et al., 2017). It is designed to call on the moral duty of these women - I argue that this is then open for them to resist this call or comply through their voting choices. In the second instance, bodily vulnerability must be established before resistance to social expectations can be enacted, or even considered as possible (Butler, 2016). Finally, through the playing of football, the act itself provides some potential of physical risk for the women (Routledge and Cumbers, 2013). As with the performative nature of the possibility of resistance exhibited in the memo, there is also a very clear element of gender performativity in the

creation of the football team, I argue that in both of these examples, there is also a significant risk of social repercussions for women (Routledge and Cumbers, 2013).

What is clear here, is that were it not for the existence of these three ambiguous spaces, these resistances would not be able to be enacted. Fundamentally, it is these spaces which provided opportunity and means for the development of resistances by women at this time, and vitally, within the socio-political context of mining communities. Arguably, these smaller-scale, more ‘mundane’ modes of resistance (Awcock 2020 and Hughes, 2020) are generated from larger, more ‘spectacular’ moments of exception - the 1926 general strike, the developing notion of female body-autonomy and reproductive rights, and the first general election where universal suffrage was established within the UK. It is these moments of ‘expectation’ which blur the boundaries and create a crack in the rhythms and expectations of everyday life, which foster and enable resistance to generate (Griffin and Martin, 2021).

Chapter 4 – Concluding Remarks

This thesis has demonstrated the ways in which women in mining communities exercised socio-political agency, often in the form of various resistances through the use of ambiguous spaces, which in themselves were often produced through moments of exception. An engagement with the ways in which embracing the ambiguous nature of historical material can restore recognition of this agency to marginalised groups and individuals has also been explored. This final section will summaries the findings of this research in relation to the three research questions outlined in the introduction.

4.1 How did women understand and express their agency through, and despite, spatially bound gender expectations?

As established through analysis of all three sources, working-class women in these communities had strongly imposed social expectations relating to both femininity and class. In many ways, these identities were adhered to and accepted by these women, though perhaps more indirectly than first appears to be the case. For example, the formation of the football team, which raised funds for soup kitchens and children's boot funds. Though not directly participating in socially-reproductive activities, the creation of this inherently ambiguous leisure space (Stairkov, 1987) facilitated socio-political resistance in conjunction with indirect social reproduction, complicating the relationship between identity, expectations and resistance.

This negotiated resistance occurs only because of, and through gendered expectations within North East mining communities at this time. The carving out these spaces by the women within these communities demonstrates their capabilities as political actors, both within their communities and beyond, revealing alternative forms of agency which were separate to those available to men.

Resistance has also been demonstrated to be both constrained and enabled by these expectations, also. Access to contraceptive advice was available only through the fulfilment of the expectation of women to bare and raise children. However, this thesis proposes that were it not for these conditions on gaining access to this advice, there is a possibility that this advice may not have been issued at all. The ambiguous nature of the language used, and the spaces produced as a result of this memo did nevertheless provide some space for autonomy, agency and specifically an opportunity for some resistance to these expectations of motherhood and femininity.

Through broader understandings of contextualised spatial socio-political dynamics (Strangleman, 2001), this resistance was not always in direct opposition to prevailing power hierarchies, but undoubtedly should still be considered as resistant acts (Paddison et al., 2002). By considering resistances as multiple and valid at a variety of scales (Hughes 2020), a clear recognition of the ways in which women resisted societal expectations of their feminine identities is demonstrated. Further, an acknowledgement that inevitably, some of these resistances *must* be enacted through and within existing articulations of power does not diminish their significance or necessarily their effectiveness (Hughes, 2020).

At a variety of scales and in various ways class, and in particular gender, was deliberately used in a performative manner to express agency and resistance (Butler, 2016). Certain aspects of these identities were deliberately exhibited, and others rejected: The performative way in which typically masculine pursuits such as football, and the associations of this such as a football strip were deployed, was in direct opposition to expectations of femininity at this time. Again, this highlights the complex relationship between identity and resistance. The very clear and specific rejection of outward expression of femininity was both opposed to community wide gendered expectations (Massey, 2013:187) and institutionally enforced restrictions of agency (Skillen et al., 2022) but solidarity in the prioritisation of a working-class identity and support of the 1926 strike demonstrates multiple residences at multiple

scales. These were, as this thesis suggests, intentional. Fundamentally, it was the understanding of these expectations which enabled gender and class to be utilised as a mode of resistance. Without these expectations, the expression of these particular kinds of resistance would not have been possible.

This can also been seen, albeit more subtlety, within the other two sources. In the memo, a woman had to demonstrate that she was married, and had record of baring a child in order to access contraceptives. In the Labour Party pamphlet, she is made to confront the expectations of her as a mother and as a socially-reproductive agent, and to consider the performative elements of this which are listed in the document. One way or another, the institution of the Labour Party considers her gender as performative in the tasks she carries out – as a woman within this historical context. The 1929 general election marked the first time all women could vote, granting them formalised political agency (Painter and Jeffery, 2009:7). This newfound power allowed women, to some extent, to either reject or embrace the party's representations of working-class femininity.

Many of the social expectations of women were spatially bound, particularly with regards to domestic responsibilities and the female body, perhaps within heavily gendered communities such those centred around coal mining more than others (Massey, 2013:181). These newly emerging spaces of ambiguity enabled these expectations to be challenged and negotiated, in ways which were perhaps previously not possible. These expectations of gender and class were simultaneously rejected and embraced to facilitate these expressions of agency.

4.2 What was the significance of female agency with regards to the rest of the community?

While clearly related to the question above, the research did also produce specific answers to this question. Community here must be considered as within the locale of specific mining communities, but also broader understandings of community too, such as across social

groups which transcend locality and share a particular defining social (or otherwise) characteristic (Massey, 2013:153).

With this in mind, it is important to consider that the County Council memo ‘officially’ took, what at first glance, appears to be relatively hardline stance on the provision of reproductive health. However as analysis has demonstrated, this was not necessarily the case. By considering the production of the memo as perhaps deliberately ambiguous, this would suggest that there was maybe in fact support for the expansion for the provision of such advice. Even if this was not deliberate, if this policy was interpreted this way by those implementing the policy, then this point still stands.

This is particularly relevant in the context of historic coal mining communities in North East England, where working-class solidarity and community building were central as a way of life. Mining communities were known for their strong, tightly-knit social networks, which were often deeply shaped by collective resistance and political activism. In such environments, women's roles were essential, not only in the home but in the community as a whole. The blurred boundaries between public and private spheres allowed for potentially greater female agency within these spaces. The provision of reproductive health services, or even the arguably ambiguous stance on it, had important implications for the autonomy and empowerment of women in these communities, both at the time and for beginning to shape a path of greater autonomy in the future. By navigating reproductive health policies and their interpretations, women were able to exert influence over critical aspects of their lives, in ways they could not do previously. In doing so, they further solidified their position as key actors within the social networks of their communities, as well as negotiating new positions as sources of labour reproduction, in the eyes of capitalist systems.

Furthermore, female-led football teams, like those that defied the FA ban, exemplified acts of resistance that transcended local boundaries and united women in collective political action.

This defiance resonates deeply with the broader ethos of solidarity that characterised mining communities, where shared struggles fostered a sense of unity.

Perhaps particularly so in mining communities, what is also significant is the ways in which community building through and with these ambiguous spaces developed, and the socio-political significance of this. While female-led community spaces have been described as important spaces of political education and simultaneous emotional support previously, and within mining areas especially (Spence and Stephenson, 2007 and Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Thomlinson, 2018) this thesis has demonstrated the importance of these communities in new contexts. Not only is this with regards to the difference in temporal context, but also by using three sources which pertain to very different aspects of women's lives this is extended. This research suggests that prior to the 1984-85 Miners' Strike) not only were there spaces which played a similar role for women in these communities, but the impact of these generative community spaces were far more reaching and socially embedded than considered in the 1984-85 context. Instead, this research suggests that alternative readings of feminine socio-political agency prior to the much discussed events of 1984-85 (Spence and Stephenson, 2007 and Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Thomlinson, 2018) points to a continuation and advance of female agency during the latter half of the 20th Century, not a beginning.

4.3 How do we unearth lost voices in the archive?

The ambiguous nature of archival sources offers a valuable opportunity to restore agency to voices missing or marginalised in the historical record, answering calls to do so from within feminist historical geography (Moore, 2010; McGeachan, 2018 and Awcock, 2020). Often, traditional historical record excludes, misrepresents or overlooks the experiences of women and other marginalised groups, leaving behind gaps in the official narrative (Moore, 2010 and McGeachan, 2018). By embracing the uncertainty and ambiguity inherent in these sources, we can begin to uncover and (re)construct alternative histories that have been

otherwise silenced. Rather than viewing ambiguity as a limitation, this approach treats it as a methodological strength, allowing for multiple interpretations that can cast light on the lives and actions of those previously excluded or neglected from archival research methodologies.

Archival ambiguity provides a means by which researchers can explore various potential readings of a source, such as photographs, leaflets, or policy documents, by considering what is absent or implied, rather than focusing solely on what is explicitly recorded in the archive. This approach is particularly important in feminist historical geography, as it challenges the idea that only concrete, well-documented evidence can validate historical experience. For women in mining communities, for instance, much of their labour and resistance may not have been formally recorded, due to their socio-economic position both as working-class women and because of the nuanced and special power dynamics that exist withing mining communities (Strangleman, 2001), but traces of their agency can be inferred from ambiguous or partial sources.

By building on existing work, such as the suggestion by McGeachan (2018) to work with traces as a means of access to lost or forgotten histories this research suggests that ambiguity allows for the possibility of multiple interpretations and the exploration of alternative histories from a single source. Working *with* the uncertainties which are inherent in ambiguity, rather than in the face of them, can allow for the exploration of more diverse but plausible narratives. In this sense, ambiguity not only highlights the gaps or silences in historical material but also provides a means to better understand broader and more complex accounts of marginalised groups, such as working-class women in mining communities.

4.4 Overall concluding remarks

The two ways in which ambiguity has been deployed within this research provide an alternative means to investigate the gendered experiences of women in mining communities

between 1926 and 1931. By engaging with ambiguity in both archival interpretation and through material sources themselves, this has revealed moments of individual and communal agency expressed through various modes of resistance. This resistance was not confined to a single form or moment but occurred across various scales - ranging from small, personal acts of defiance to collective actions - and through diverse methods, including both formal and informal expressions of “dissent” and negotiated power. The ability to recognise these varied expressions of agency, often hidden in historical documents, was made possible by approaching sources with an open, ambiguous lens that allowed for multiple interpretations of possibility.

Feminist historical geography has long engaged with alternative methods to uncover the lives and contributions of marginalized groups, particularly women (Ogborn, 2005; De Leeuw, 2012; McGeachan, 2018). These approaches have frequently emphasised the importance of alternative archival reading or considering incomplete, partial or alternative materials. However, this thesis argues that ambiguity offers a potential to not only build on these existing frameworks, but also to broaden and deepen understandings of the historical geographies of working-class women, specifically. By recognising that archival sources pertaining to marginalised groups are often scant, incomplete, contradictory, or biased, ambiguity provides the space to (re)construct histories that are more inclusive of women’s varied, complex and nuanced roles in mining communities.

This framework allows for a more flexible, dynamic approach to the historical record, one that acknowledges gaps and silences but seeks to fill them with plausible narratives based on the available leads. In doing so, the research has uncovered new aspects of women’s lived experiences that might otherwise have been overlooked. Rather than viewing the absence of clear, hard evidence as a barrier, ambiguity serves as a tool to potentially restore the agency of women whose stories have been systematically underrepresented in traditional accounts. This methodology adds to the understanding of how women in mining

communities navigated and resisted the social, economic, and political challenges of their time, contributing to broader discussions about working-class female agency in historical geography.

Looking ahead from this research, it is suggested that the role which ambiguity plays within archival research can be further explored to restore agency and refranchise those who may otherwise be silenced throughout the constructed narrative of history. In this light, engagement with feasible expressions of agency can be revealed within the *multiple possibilities* which acknowledging ambiguity facilitates, which may be particularly enlightening in research which engages with place-based historical research with a focus on post-colonial, anti-colonial, queer and other feminist themes.

This research also opens the door to a further development of a theory of ‘ambiguous space’. That being the use of space which is not within the absolute power of one group of socio-political actors, and therefore may facilitate the extended agency of one group through negotiation. This research suggests that, again, use of these ideas may facilitate new ways of thinking about the changing nature of socio-political spaces. In particular, other leisure spaces beyond sport, such as other creative recreational spaces e.g. galleries and museums (Nosan, 2003 and Hill, 2016:103), though applications to histories of colonialism and LGBTQ+ histories are clear.

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