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Feminising Politics: The Case of Family Policy Under New Labour

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Elected in 1997, New Labour looked radically different from any government which preceded it; a clear moment of change. It differed both descriptively via the significant increase in women MPs in 1997 - of the 120 elected in total 101 were Labour - and substantively through the establishment for the first time of a Minister for Women. The late Tessa Jowell MP, previously a Minister for Women, was clear that in substantive terms, New Labour was the most feminist government in UK history (Campbell and Childs 2015b). Her claim is difficult to dispute given the administrations that preceded New Labour. More contested would be explanations for why this was the case, not least in terms of who was driving the changes, and the nature and extent of the feminist policies introduced. For example, between 1997 and 2010 family policy, championed by feminist critical actors in government and the wider Labour Party, was transformed in ways which moved concerns regarding family leave, flexible working and childcare into the mainstream of UK public policy for the first time. Academic investigation - theoretical and empirical - into the origins and outcomes of the New Labour government have been expansive (for example see Russell 2005; Heffernan 2000; Hay 1999; Gamble 2012; Finlayson 2003), focusing especially on debates regarding the acceptance of the legacy of Thatcherism, although with little attention to feminism and gender (Hay 1994; Driver 1998; Heffernan 2000; Fielding 2002). Gender and politics analysis frequently examined the relationship between women's descriptive representation and substantive representation under New Labour; these are predominantly broader enquiries into representation rather than particular policy changes (see Childs 2001, 2002, 2004, 2008; Durose and Gains 2007; Lovenduski and Norris 2003; Squires and Wickham-Jones 2002, 2004); gendered assessments of family policy are few and rather dated (Daly 2010b; Clarke 2007; Rummery, Gains and Annesley 2007).

This thesis re-examines the relationship between women's descriptive and substantive representation during the New Labour years centring on the feminisation of family policy. In so doing, it both challenges classic, but arguably thin accounts of substantive representation that look to the *numbers* of women MPs (Phillips 1995; Young 1994, 2000; Mansbridge 1999) and core executive approaches (Annesley and Gains 2010) that whilst acknowledging

the role of Ministers for Women, too quickly downplay their agency. In order to re-examine the relationship between women's descriptive and substantive representation the thesis deploys an extended version of Fiona Mackay's "thick conception" representation (2008: 125), introduced substantively in *Chapter 2*, enhancing the role of critical actors therein, emphasising the historical inheritances that constrain critical actors and drawing on more recent work on frames and feminist discursive institutionalism. Accordingly, this thesis examines the processes and outcomes of family policy under New Labour, with particular focus on the identity, role, and effectiveness of two Ministers for Women. Harriet Harman's and Patricia Hewitt's actions were undoubtedly constrained in several, differing ways. These included dominant policy frames, perceived status by those at the centre of power, namely in No.10 and Treasury, and the extant formal and informal rules of the Westminster and Whitehall system. At the same time, a focus on the dynamic relationships over time between gendered actors, institutions and ideas draws out when feminist policy success was achieved in relation to the significant changes in family policy and when efforts were stymied. These dynamic relationships determined the extent and scope of feminist family policy. Bringing the role of feminist actors and ideas to the fore counters the marginalisation of their role which is found within mainstream accounts of the development of the New Labour project and the New Labour period in office.

Utilising a new set of twenty six semi-structured elite interviews and previously unused archival data this thesis provides a more complete and nuanced account of the development of family policy under New Labour. This chapter outlines why the family policy developed under New Labour is a compelling site of analysis. It situates New Labour in context before outlining the research puzzle at the heart of this thesis and finally, briefly introducing the structure of the thesis.

Family policy was chosen as the policy focus for this thesis as it was a policy space which the contemporaneous UK women's movement and feminists within the Labour Party had long been campaigning for (Lovenduski 2007: 147). The policy case studies can then be seen to be representative cases of feminist concerns (further detail on the case study approach is found in *Chapter 2*). Additionally, family policy is also of particular interest as it is an area of public policy which had been, at best, a peripheral public policy concern prior to New

Labour's election for both Conservative and Labour governments (Eisenstadt and Oppenheim 2019: 14). This point will be returned to in detail in *Chapter 3*. The first policy case study is childcare. New Labour moved from what was essentially a blank page in public policy terms in 1997 to a comprehensive nationwide early years and childcare policy prior to leaving office in 2010 (Eisenstadt and Oppenheim 2019: 14). This was a radical change and constituted a step change in the relationship between the state and the family from what had come before. This policy case study has a particular emphasis on the development of the childcare policy offer in opposition, led in-part by Harriet Harman in the Shadow Treasury team. It then moves to focus on New Labour's flagship childcare policy in office, Sure Start.

The second case study is family leaves and flexible working. This policy area was marked legislatively by the Employment Act 2002 and the Work and Family Act of 2006. The former included a substantial extension to maternity leave, the introduction of two weeks of paternity leave, of parental leave, of adoption leave and the right to request flexible working for parents of young children. These measures directly impacted the lives of many families across the UK; the state was creating a family policy on a scale which had previously never been seen in UK politics. This policy case study primarily focuses on the work of Patricia Hewitt who served as the Secretary of State at the Department of Trade and Industry (the Department with legislative responsibility for this policy area) and Minister for Women from 2001 – 2005.

1997 was a critical moment with the potential for feminist policy change to occur. On a surface level, at least, the chamber of the House of Commons was visibly altered by the election of an unprecedented 101 women Labour MPs, many of whom were self-described feminists (Lovenduski and Norris 2003: 91). New Labour's election also brought with it the establishment of the Minister for Women, a reserved seat at the Cabinet table for so-called 'women's interests' (Durose and Gains 2007: 102). As a result of the dramatic increase of women MPs and the new post of Minister for Women this period signalled a step change in women's descriptive representation, at least, in Westminster. From the women and politics literature the link between descriptive and substantive representation has long ignited exploration (for example see Pitkin 1967; Phillips 1995; Childs 2008). In addition, this

literature indicates that when political parties of the left or centre-left are in power they are often more attentive to issues of equalities (Beer 2009: 225). Taking a historically attendant, temporal approach this thesis studies the work which began in opposition by feminist actors and the party leadership in order to begin the process of party, and wider political, feminisation. Gendered analyses of the modernisation which took place particularly under the premierships of Neil Kinnock, John Smith and Tony Blair in opposition are limited, consequently this thesis adds an additional layer of analysis to this field.

Situating New Labour's Feminisation in Time

Understanding how relationships between actors, institutions and ideas shaped the development of family policy under New Labour requires first setting out the historic context. This thesis, as a whole, takes a temporal approach which will be further outlined in *Chapter 2*. An understanding of the timing and sequencing of events enables a deeper understanding of how a particular event came to pass than would be achieved if looking at it ripped from all context. As Douglass North puts frankly: "Without a deep understanding of time, you will be lousy political scientists, because time is the dimension in which ideas and institutions and beliefs evolve" (1999: 316). A deeper understanding of the New Labour journey situated "in time" (Pierson 2000: 72) gives a clearer understanding of the context within which they arrived into office in 1997.

After 18 years as Her Majesty's Opposition, Tony Blair led Labour to victory and set out to "govern as New Labour" (Diamond 2011: 145). Much has been written of this journey (for example see Russell 2005; Heffernan 2000; Hay 1999; Gamble 2012; Finlayson 2003) but of particular interest to this thesis is the role that women and the 'women's vote' played in the modernisation process in the Labour Party. The Labour Party's defeat under the leadership of Michael Foot in the 1983 General Election gave rise to the modernisers within the party seeking to change both the policy trajectory and the way the party was perceived. In October 1983 the Campaign Strategy Committee was founded in a bid to professionalise the way the party campaigned and communicated its messaging under the auspices of the new leader Neil Kinnock (Hay 1999: 95). There was a recognition amongst the leadership at least,

that it could not be business as usual for the party. Research undertaken by the Labour Shadow Communications agency in the wake of the 1983 defeat demonstrated that the Labour Party, in part due to close links with the trade unions, was perceived to be a particularly masculine party which represented the ‘working man’ (Perrigo 1995: 408; Russell 2005: 97). This was a problem due to the changing shape of the economy, with the decline in heavy industry and the rise of the service economy. The rapidly expanding service economy was growing in tandem with the rapid entry of women into the workforce in the 1980s (Perrigo 1995: 407; Cowman 2022: 195). Purely mathematically if the Labour Party was to win power again it would need to expand its base further than its traditional vote.

Feminist party activists had been campaigning since the 1970s to restructure the party into a more inclusive space for women. For example, there had been the work of the Women’s Action Committee (WAC) which had pushed for One Woman on the Shortlist (OWOS) for Parliamentary selections, successfully ratifying the policy in 1988 (Perrigo 1995: 412). The WAC, however, became associated with the far-left of the party and due to an internal crack-down on factionalism it became marginalised. Nevertheless, there was success to the extent that women’s representation had been put on the agenda (Ibid: 409). More broadly the party began to take the lack of internal representation more seriously through enacting quotas in 1991 for 50 per cent representation for women in local party structures and 40 per cent in national. This policy also included parity between men and women Labour MPs within ten years or three general elections, whichever was sooner (Ibid: 413 - 414).

The final straw in Labour’s ‘women problem’ was the 1992 General Election where if women had swung to Labour in the same proportion as men Neil Kinnock would have been sitting in Downing Street (Short 1996: 19). The piecemeal approach to feminisation was given fresh impetus by the defeat. Feminists in the party were presented with an opportunity to bring significant change due to the leadership’s recognition there was an electoral viability problem. The inclusion of more women as candidates and consequently as MPs was seized upon as a key tool for modernising the party (Childs 2008: 25 - 26). The majority of effort was channelled into the passage of all women shortlists (AWS), a form of positive action which would see a significant proportion of vacant winnable seats to allow constituency members only to choose from a selection of women. Of course, this was not without

controversy from some elements of ordinary members, not least local male members who felt it was their turn (Perrigo 1995: 415). Kinnock was unconvinced by AWS but his successor as leader, John Smith, was a greater supporter and pushed through the ratifying vote at party conference in 1993 (Lovecy 2007: 82). In a politically astute move he tied the vote for AWS with One Member One Vote (OMOV) proposals which were far more popular amongst the membership, therefore members could not vote for one without the other. Subsequently, under Tony Blair the AWS mechanism was utilised in selections which paved the way for the iconic photograph of Blair with the 101 women Labour MPs in the wake of the 1997 General Election. This was the highest number of women MPs ever elected to Westminster and symbolically distanced the Labour Party from its traditionally masculine image (Russell 2005: 97; Cowman 2010: 169).

Whilst this breakthrough could be understood as a success for the feminists within the party (Annesley 2010: 61) some in the academy have argued this success was purely on the terms of the leadership (Perrigo 1995: 415 - 416; Russell 2005: 107). Sarah Perrigo argues that the feminist party reforms from 1989 onwards were as a result of the leadership wishing to remedy the perceived image problem (Perrigo 1995: 415). There is consensus between both Perrigo and Meg Russell that there was indeed no gender justice argument which was held by the leadership but simply electoral necessity (Perrigo 1995: 415 - 416; Russell 2005: 107). This thesis counters this view as the existing literature (Annesley 2010: 61), as well as interview and archival data collected for this thesis, outlined in subsequent empirical chapters, demonstrates the importance of the loose feminist network within the party pushing for reforms as part of the modernisation process. In addition to the increase of women's descriptive representation that was brought about by the implementation of AWS, feminisation also took place in the policy arena. This substantive representation of 'women's issues', in so far as they can be homogenously described, was a key part of the modernisation of the policy platform upon which New Labour stood (Annesley and Gains 2007). The academy is in near consensus that New Labour indeed created a legacy that lived up to Tessa Jowell's (a former Minister for Women, amongst other roles) infamous assertion that the New Labour government was the most feminist in history (Annesley and Gains 2007; Rummery, Gains, and Annesley 2007; Campbell and Childs 2015b). A dissenting voice can be found, again, in Meg Russell. Russell primarily views the modernisation process

through the lens of the struggle between the left and the right of the party (2005: 15). She argues that New Labour is only associated with women, in terms of policy focus, due to the fact the 1997 election coincided with the election of 101 women Labour MPs (Ibid: 125). There was a direct link, however, between the election of such a high proportion of women MPs elected with the implementation of AWS and internal party change, it was not merely a coincidence as Russell appears to argue. Secondly, the focus on policy that directly impacted the lives of women was again not by chance. Whilst women's bodies do not necessarily equal feminist minds (Childs 2004: 197), feminist critical actors proved pivotal to achieving gendered policy change. New Labour brought women's concerns into the mainstream in a way which had never been seen before in UK politics. One of the most notable changes, as referenced above, was the unprecedented change in family policy. As Mary Daly notes the family was moved from the private sphere into the public (2010b: 433). Kirstein Rummery et al. argue that New Labour raised the bar on the presence of women in UK politics and raised the bar for maintenance of 'women's issues' on the political agenda (2007: 232). For instance, childcare is now firmly in the mainstream of UK public policy, when prior to 1997 it was at best in the margins of mainstream political debate (Eisenstadt and Oppenheim 2019). Why this change occurred is the core question at the crux of this thesis.

Research Puzzle

The sheer contrast from what had come before, in family policy terms, was stark. Why was 1997 the moment of change and why did the change manifest in the way that it did? This thesis uses the following question to understand why this was the case: How did the relationships between actors, institutions and ideas determine the development of New Labour family policy? The following sub-questions allowed for further detail to be elucidated:

- How did party feminisation impact policy change?
- Who were the key actors driving change?
- What were the dominant frames shaping policy?
- What effect did formal and informal institutions have on party and policy change?

This thesis builds on and goes beyond the existing mainstream New Labour literature by establishing the relationships between actors, institutions and ideas that determined the development of New Labour family policy. Change may have been expected to occur in the way that it did for a number of reasons. For instance, as a result of the Labour Party's modernisation process an environment had been created where feminist actors and ideas had a tangible impact on the development and outcomes of family policy (Annesley and Gains 2007: 3 - 26). There is currently a literature that offers a gendered perspective on the modernisation process of the Labour Party (including Perrigo 1996; Short 1996; Russell 2005; Kenny 2007; Mattinson 2011). In opposition there was also the development of a distinct family policy. This move towards a feminisation of the party laid the foundations upon which feminist actors and ideas, largely drawn from the wider women's movement, could come into the mainstream of public policy (Annesley 2010: 61). As previously highlighted, as a result of the modernisation process new and altered forms of representation of women were found when New Labour entered government. In particular, the introduction of the Minister for Women (and associated civil servants) and the election of 101 women Labour MPs pointed to the potential for these women, the majority of whom described themselves as feminists (Childs 2004: 103), to 'act for' women through their work as policymakers. The groundwork had been laid in opposition by feminist actors to create an altered political environment.

Conversely, significant constraints were placed on feminist actors during the New Labour years, including formal institutional constraints such as the unprecedented influence of the Treasury over social policy (Coates and Oettinger 2007: 118). The Treasury's priorities and exceptional impact on domestic policy in the New Labour period led to the marginalisation of other influences on policy (Annesley and Gains 2007: 15 - 16). The twin priorities of the Treasury at the outset of the New Labour government in 1997 were to demonstrate economic competence and to tackle unemployment. The first, in part, was demonstrated by operating within the spending commitments of the previous government for the first two years, with the second being confirmed in multiple interviews for this study. Given these priorities and the well-documented involvement of the Treasury in the two case studies (Coates and Oettinger 2007) the role of the Treasury is pursued in greater detail in the

empirical chapters of the thesis and builds upon the existing literature surrounding the nature of the core executive relationship in the New Labour period, particularly between the Treasury and No.10 (for example see Finlayson 2003; Gamble 2012; Heffernan 2000). Relatedly, informal institutions which shaped, particularly, the way policy was framed set limited parameters within which feminist actors could operate. For instance, the use of social investment as a policy frame, priming children to the marginalisation of women in both policy framing and output (Lister 2006: 315). The idea of social investment was prevalent in New Labour and more widely in social democratic parties at the time (including Giddens 1998; Esping-Andersen 2001; Midgley 2001). Additionally, the linked ideas of the state's historically distant relationship with the inner workings of the family (Pedersen 1995) and the prevailing (unequal) gender order (Rummery, Gains and Annesley 2007) set strong precedents which the New Labour leadership was hesitant to challenge. And finally, New Labour's fragile, and much sought after, relationship with the business lobby (Giddens 2010) set a tight boundary within which feminist actors could develop policy.

As noted above, this thesis draws on the body of research around women's political representation and New Labour (for example see Annesley, Gains, and Rummery 2007; Perrigo 1996; Squires and Wickham-Jones 2004; Childs 2004) and feminist institutionalism literature, which will be outlined in *Chapter 2* (for example see Mackay 2008; Mackay, Kenny and Chappell, 2011; Thomson 2018; Childs and Krook 2006). The women's representation and New Labour literature was largely based on contemporaneous accounts. This thesis is able to bring a more complete picture. This is achieved by augmenting the existing accounts with previously unused archival data and a new set of elite semi-structured interviews with key actors from the time who are now able to speak more freely about their experiences as they are no longer active in frontline politics or the civil service. The historical perspective which is enabled via these methods, in particular, aligns with the feminist institutionalist approach to representation which acts as the analytical framework through which the empirical data is viewed.

Structure of the Thesis

The thesis provides a rich contextual account of both New Labour and the wider policy environment within which family policy sat before moving to provide empirical evidence to outline the dynamism between actors, institutions and ideas which determined the nature and extent of feminist family policy outcomes. *Chapter 2* outlines the analytical framework, research design and methodology which were employed to elucidate the research questions and sub-questions. The primary analytical tool utilised is Mackay's notion of "thick" substantive representation (2008: 125) which is extended to operationalise her historical, contextual approach and to incorporate wider insights from the FI literature. Theory-guided process tracing is also employed as a complementary methodological approach which takes a temporal perspective to chart change over time. *Chapter 3: Situating Family Policy 'In Time'* provides deep historical contextualisation of the state's relationship with the family and family policy in the 20th century. This historical perspective aligns with the analytical framework of the thesis by situating the feminisation of the Labour Party and New Labour's family policy "in time" (Pierson 2004: 8).

Chapter 4: Feminising the Party and Politics? is the first of the empirical chapters. It investigates how and why the feminisation of the Labour Party occurred, with a particular focus on the altered and new forms of women's representation under New Labour. Charting the feminisation of the party develops a 'thicker' understanding of the environment where substantive representation could occur. *Chapters 5* and *6* are policy case studies (*Childcare* and, *Family Leaves and Flexible Working*) and are the final two empirical chapters. In both chapters the substantive representation of women is central given the case study selection, as the cases were selected as representative of contemporaneous women's movement interests and therefore sites for potential feminist policy change. *Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion* then brings the insights from the empirical chapters to outline the contribution of the thesis to the wider literature and identifies avenues for future research. Finally, *Chapter 7* also offers the key conclusions of the thesis.

Chapter 2: Analytical Framework, Research Design and Methods

Introduction

The New Labour period saw significant advances in women's descriptive and substantive representation. The analytical framework of this thesis therefore draws on insights from the gender and politics literature as well as the new institutionalist literature to develop a distinctively feminist institutionalist approach and a "thick" approach to representation, building in particular on the work of Fiona Mackay (2008). Mackay's concept of "thick" substantive representation - first published some 16 years ago - offered a critique of what were then dominant ways of understanding women's representation and outlined a "whole system approach" to studying the substantive representation of women (SRW) (2008: 125).

Mackay's approach advances the field by synthesising gendered and new institutionalist perspectives and situating representation in context, rather than over-relying on elected women representatives as the principal vehicle of SRW. Feminist institutionalism (FI) has since become a significant subfield with conceptual refinement and empirical application (see for example Kenny and Mackay 2009; Krook and Mackay 2011; Mackay, Kenny and Chappell 2011; Kenny 2013; Thomson 2018). Drawing on FI scholarship and institutionally-focused feminist political science more broadly, including research on critical actors (see Childs and Krook 2006, 2008, 2009) and the gendered core executive (see Annesley and Gains 2010), this chapter further develops a "thick" understanding of representation (Mackay 2008). In doing so, it argues for a closer attendance to the importance of critical actors, greater consideration of historical and ideational inheritances and greater focus on the potential for policy framing. Subsequent chapters apply this framework to evaluate women's representation under New Labour. This is seen most notably by the election of an unprecedented 101 women Labour MPs and the introduction of the role of Minister for Women, as well as the important role women and feminist actors played in contributing to a more feminised party and politics at that time.

After outlining the analytical framework, this chapter also discusses the methodological approach and research design of the thesis. Taking a theory-guided process tracing approach, the chapter makes the case for a historical and temporal analysis ensuring that the dynamism of the relationships between ideas, actors and institutions are better captured as evolving and relational over time. A case study design is employed for empirical analysis of two policy areas: (i) childcare and (ii) family leaves and flexible working. This allows for an in-depth analysis of the "thick" representation of women's interests alongside identification of the constraints and enabling contexts with which political actors, not least the Ministers for Women, had to negotiate. The chapter closes with a discussion of research methods, including semi-structured elite interviews, archival research, autobiographies and memoirs, the Hansard corpus and government documents.

Mackay's Model in an Institutionalist Context

Mackay's model, outlined in detail below, is centrally focused on the interplay between gender and institutions in understanding representative processes and explaining their outcomes. It built upon previous developments in the new institutionalism field and brought them into dialogue with institutionally-focused feminist political science. Since the 1990s the study of institutions has grown substantially in political science. Previously institutionalist approaches had focused largely on institutions themselves and not the actors within them. There was a development in the field towards the end of the 20th century which began to centre on the importance of the interplay between actors and institutions, as well as structure and agency - this has come to be known as new institutionalism (NI) (for example see Hall and Taylor 1996). Noted NI scholar Douglass North set out that institutions can be formal (such as rules or laws) or informal (which can include, for example, shared expectations for behaviour), with the interplay between the formal and informal shaping individual behaviour (1990). Kathleen Thelen and Sven Steinmo argue that NI recognises the informal shared rules, in addition to the formal, which govern behaviour are powerful and can be remarkably resilient to change (1992: 3 - 4). Gretchen Helmke and Steven Levitsky define these informal norms (or institutions) as: "…socially shared rules, usually unwritten that are created, communicated and enforced outside of official sanctioned channels" (2006: 5).

Mainstream NI literature generally omits a gendered perspective (Kenny and Mackay 2009: 274; Kenny, 2013: 34). Mona Lena Krook and Mackay (2011: 3) noted that whilst institutions have always been sites of interest they became more prominent in the field of feminist political science. In the last two decades FI has become a significant variant of institutionalism in its own right. The FI literature similarly primes the importance of institutions, both formal and informal, but also recognises that politics, by its very nature of being a human and relational activity, is a gendered pursuit which is a negotiation between actors, institutions and ideas. Mackay draws on Joni Lovenduski's work which sets out three ways in which institutions are gendered. Firstly, everyone in an institution has a sex and performs gender norms; secondly, the experience of those individuals within the institutions varies as a result of their particular sex and gender identity; and finally, as a result institutions have distinct gendered cultures and continually produce and reproduce these cultures (Lovenduski 1998: 348). Building on this work Meryl Kenny and Mackay outline why gender is central to any understanding of institutions:

> "Not only are gender relations seen to be 'institutional', but those relations are also 'institutionalised", embedded in particular institutions and constraining and shaping social interaction" (2009:274).

For FI scholars institutions are both sites of continuity as well as sites for change. Karen Beckwith argued that whilst gendered relations are institutionalised the role of agency is important for the possibility of "regendering" these institutions (2005: 133). Mackay similarly incorporates agency and change into her framework, recognising the critical actor as an agential site for the substantive representation of women. Additionally, she is explicitly concerned about the internal dynamics of institutions and the often non-linear form policy development can take as a result of institutions being continually reproduced by actors who have multiple interests, backgrounds and levels of power (2008: 126). Indeed, as noted in her work with Kenny in the early stages of FI development Mackay reflected on a key distinction between feminist political science scholars and NI scholars:

> "Feminist political science has as a central feature a transformational agenda. That is to say that feminist political science is explicitly concerned not only with recognising how institutions reproduce gendered power distributions but also how these institutions can be changed" (Kenny and Mackay 2009: 276).

FI's focus on institutional change became embedded into the field (Curtin 2018: 124), exploring both sudden change and change which is incremental over time.

The Emergence of Mackay's Concept of "Thick" Substantive Representation

Fiona Mackay's notion of "thick" substantive representation offers a critique of what she terms 'thinner' concepts of representation that focus narrowly on elected representatives (Mackay 2008: 125). The origins of the thinner conception of representation can be found in Hanna Pitkin's influential work on political representation, *The Concept of Representation*. It provided a framework which outlined four key modes of representation: formalistic, descriptive, symbolic and substantive (1967). These modes have been adopted throughout political science research into studies of representation. Pitkin identified the distinction between passive (such as descriptive) and active (such as substantive) modes of representation (Ibid). Mackay argues that as a result of Pitkin's urging that the focus on the active modes of representation has become prevalent in academic enquiry (2008: 126). Indeed, early research in the field primarily focused on how feminist interventions were increasing in party politics (how they 'acted for' women – substantive representation) and women's attempts to gain election. Namely, how early forms of quotas were employed (the mechanisms by which to achieve election – formalistic representation) (Norris and Lovenduski 1993: 89 - 90).

The focus particularly on women's substantive representation developed through the 1990s and into the 2000s. Whilst Pitkin argued that the focus should be on substantive representation it has been the link *between* descriptive and substantive representation of women which has subsequently been the site of much academic inquiry. Mackay notes that scholars cannot give up on the idea that "something is going on between presence and

action" (2008: 126), referencing such works as Anne Phillips' significant, *The Politics of Presence* (1995). Phillips developed an idea of representation which sought to uncover a link between the descriptive (numbers of women elected) and the substantive. Phillips' argument that whilst the focus on ensuring the presence of certain groups, such as women and those from ethnic minorities, can lead to essentialism in terms of what the group identity or interest could be perceived as, it is often not merely enough for issues to be advocated for without those with lived experience being present. Phillips argues both ideas and the presence of diverse representatives is what is needed to move closer to the goal of genuine substantive representation (1995: 167 - 192). This relationship that Phillips draws out between ideas and actors (in these debates the actors are generally elected representatives) being central to the goal of substantive representation began to trace a broader conception of what elements counted when addressing representation. This broader conception is something which Mackay incorporates into her wider conception of 'what counts' for the substantive representation of women including criteria of recognition, redistribution and accountability, outlined further below.

Other scholars attempted to provide greater clarity to show the links between the descriptive and substantive. Iris Marion Young argued that whilst there is no guarantee that women representatives will 'act for' women, there is at least a case to be made that there are at least some shared social perspectives which can be grounded in gender (1992, 2004). Women representatives would therefore be more likely, although not guaranteed, to advance policy ideas which were attendant to the broad gendered concerns of women. Jane Mansbridge built upon Young's argument by acknowledging that women representatives have an understanding of these broad, shared gendered concerns and would be more likely to be adept at conveying them (1999). These accounts did advance the literature by probing into why women representatives may be more likely, and necessary, to perform the substantive representation of women. These accounts, again, focus primarily on the representatives themselves. Mackay's model counters the frustrations she felt with this classic representation literature by firstly moving away from a focus predominantly on just representatives by looking at the wider context. Relatedly, she also foregrounds institutions, formal and informal, as sites to better understand how substantive representation can occur (2008: 128).

There are four aspects to the "thick" conception of substantive representation in Mackay's framework:

1. "…it is 'thick' in the sense of an approach that does not 'fix' the who, where, when and how of substantive representation of women in advance but traces over time the critical actors, sites and dynamics in context; including institutional and gendered dimensions."
2. "…attention needs to be paid to the internal dynamics of institutions and the 'doing' of gender and the impact of these processes on continuity and change, innovation and resistance."
3. "…[addressing] what counts as the substantive representation of women: how do we know when change (as the substantive representation of women) has been achieved?"
4. "…recognizing the 'two steps forward one step back nature' of policy and institutional innovation" (Mackay 2008: 125 - 126).

Mackay's approach values the role of individual actors but does not "privilege - or overload - any one category of actors" (Ibid: 126). Instead it underlines the importance of "institutional aspects and alternative actors, whilst…keeping parliamentary spaces and political representatives in focus" (Ibid: 131). This focus on the wider environment within which Parliamentary actors operate is what makes Mackay's framework distinctive from previous conceptions of SRW. She focuses on two key issues. Firstly, Mackay argues:

> "empirical research demonstrates that the capacity and inclination of female representatives to 'represent' and 'act for' women are modified and constrained by numerous personal, institutional and party political factors" (2008: 127).

This is of particular concern in strong party Parliamentary systems, such as Westminster (Childs 2004; Lovenduski 2005), and pertinent to this thesis where the study is located in the Westminster system. Secondly, given the prominence afforded to parliamentarians in the

earlier literature Mackay recognises that the likelihood for them to be able to achieve a meaningful level of policy change in a Westminster-style system is limited:

> "the capacity of parliaments and parliamentarians substantively to progress distinctive policy agendas vis-à-vis political executives is constrained…the executive and its policy networks dominate the policy-making process and where government initiates almost all legislation" (2008: 128).

Instead, Mackay takes a wider, contextual perspective "incorporating institutional aspects and alternate actors" in addition to the focus on political representatives in the legislature (Ibid: 131). In particular, the role of the core executive in the Westminster system will be returned to below. This "thick" conception of substantive representation requires a holistic, "whole system approach" (Ibid: 125). Rather than just determining whether not women representatives 'act for' women the whole system approach looks more widely to provide a contextualised analysis, including outlining the "actors, relationships, interactions, institutions and norms" which combine to provide a deeper understanding of how the SRW occurs. (Ibid: 125).

Not 'fixing' the who, where, when and how of the substantive representation of women

This first point of Mackay's framework is central to the understanding of this thesis. Mackay "does not 'fix' the who, where, when and how of SRW in advance but incorporates the theoretical uncertainty and contested nature of substantive representation" (2008: 132). Leaving space for "uncertainty" as to where SRW could emerge shows Mackay developing her distinct "thick" framework of SRW which moved away from the traditional gender and politics literature which was heavily focused on women representatives as the primary vehicle to achieve substantive representation. Nevertheless, as can be seen from this aspect of her framework Mackay recognises that individual actors (in this case, critical actors) are still pieces of the puzzle to the achieve substantive representation; they are part of the dynamic mix. The concept of critical actors came to prominence in response to

dissatisfaction with the idea of critical mass theory as an effective mechanism for change (Childs and Krook 2006: 522). Initially introduced by Drude Dahlerup in the late 1980s it was argued that effective representation (in this context of women; substantively and descriptively) is achieved by actors engaging in critical acts (1988); thereby becoming critical actors. Lovenduski provides a definition of what constitutes a critical act:

> "acts that change the position of the minority and lead to further changes. The most important critical acts are those that mobilise governing institutions to improve things for the minority group" (2001: 757).

Therefore, we are looking for political actors who are acting for women; those that are taking purposeful action which will materially improve the lives of women. From this Sarah Childs and Mona Lena Krook argue that it is not purely a numbers game as it is in the critical mass literature. For critical actors to achieve change the threshold required, numerically at least, is low:

> "Male or female, these legislators can be identified as those who initiate policy proposals on their own and often – but not necessarily – embolden others to take steps to promote policies for women, regardless of the number of female representatives present in a particular institution" (Childs and Krook 2008b: 734).

Childs and Krook are not arguing that critical mass is redundant but that critical actors can achieve change in the absence of critical mass. Mackay, publishing in the same year, 'thickens' the approach by taking a broader perspective when identifying who critical actors can be:

> "[They] might include feminist champions (female and male) in parliaments, government, bureaucracy and civil society…Other 'critical actors' might include allies, fellow travellers, 'desert flowers'[1] or gatekeepers…" (2008: 131).

[1] Those who are generally inactive until provoked by crisis into action.

This broader conceptualisation of who can be a critical actor is convincing when taken as part of Mackay's whole system approach which recognises the multitude of other political actors who can impact on policy change. Paul Chaney built on the work of Childs and Krook, and Mackay by interrogating the relationship between both critical mass and critical actors when it comes to achieving change. Citing the Scottish Parliament as an example, Chaney outlines that a high proportion of women Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs), coupled with a smaller core base of highly active feminist representatives, brought 'women's issues' to greater prominence than would have been the case if critical actors were acting in isolation or if there was only a numerically higher number of women represented (2012: 455). He argues this is due to a variety of factors, most pertinent for this thesis is the enhancement of this mutually reinforcing relationship in a left-of-centre political party (and the individual actors therein), where parties (and activists within) have traditionally been more supportive of 'women's issues' as a baseline compared to their right-of-centre counterparts due to stronger links with respective women's movements and development of women's sections within parties (Ibid: 453). This broader perspective on both who can be a critical actor and a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between critical actors and critical mass will be drawn upon further in the empirical chapters of the thesis.

As noted in *Chapter 1* the introduction of the Minister for Women under New Labour in 1997 was a new form of women's representation in UK politics. This role aligns with Mackay's call to look beyond just parliamentary representation (see also Weldon 2002) to explore other avenues of SRW, including state feminism. State feminism has been defined by Joni Lovenduski as 'advocacy of women's movement demands [from] inside the state' (Lovenduski 2005: 4). The advancement of state feminism has largely been seen through the growth of women's policy agencies (WPAs) (for example see Mazur 2001, 2002; Outshoorn 2004: Lovenduski 2005). WPAs began to emerge in Western political systems from the late 20th century and as Lovenduski sets out they affected institutions in so far as how much they had by way of resources, power and degree of importance to the political system (Lovenduski 2005: 1). These WPAs can range from Women's Ministries, to policy officers and reserved posts in the ruling Executive. Most mainstream political parties also now have 'quasi-WPAs' through the form of Women's Policy Officers. These have the potential for

change through employing insider strategies within the broader institution of political parties. Nevertheless, when resources, power and importance are not afforded or evident in WPAs their mere existence has been shown not to be enough to ensure executive attention on gender equality (Annesley, Engeli, and Gains 2015).

In regards to the establishment of the Minister for Women, under New Labour, two ministerial posts were created, one at Cabinet level and one at a junior ministerial level. Yet, the Cabinet post of Minister for Women was, and has subsequently been, a role which has been given as a dual role to another Cabinet minister effectively signalling a lack of status (Squires and Wickham-Jones 2002, 2004). The role and status of the Minister for Women and attendant civil service support throughout the New Labour years (from the Women's Unit, through to the Government Equalities Office) varied significantly (Durose and Gains 2007). This thesis re-assesses the role and function of state feminism apparatus (primarily via the Minister for Women) under New Labour, with the benefit of a new set of interviews with many of those who served in post, previously unused archival data from the development of the post in opposition and autobiographical accounts of those who served as the Minister for Women.

As noted above one of Mackay's key motivations to develop her framework was "the capacity of Parliaments and Parliamentarians substantively to progress distinctive policy agendas vis-à-vis political executives…" (2008: 128). Mackay noted that particularly in Westminster systems power for legislative initiation, at least, is heavily centralised in the executive (Ibid: 128). Consequently one area of interest in this thesis where critical actors engage is an institution which is comprised of both formal and informal elements; the "complex web of institutions, networks and practices" of the core executive (Rhodes 1995: 12). As this thesis is concerned with feminist policy change within the Westminster, where policy is driven by the executive, an understanding of the concept of the core executive is fundamental. In the Westminster system the primary components of the web of the core executive are "the Prime Minister, cabinet, cabinet committees and their official counterparts, less formalised ministerial 'clubs' or meetings, bilateral negotiations and inter-departmental committees" (Ibid: 12). These institutions, and actors therein, are the "heart of the British government machine" (Rhodes 2011: 22). But how does this "heart" of the

machine work? There are two key elements of the core executive - function and power. The functional aspect relates to how the members of this web "pull together and integrate central government policies and…act as final arbiters of conflicts between different elements of the machine" (Rhodes 2013: 320). The other aspect of the core executive is power. The "power and influence…is contingent and relational; that is, it depends on the relative power of other actors and events" (Ibid: 320). Those in the core executive have the potential to determine where power is held and distributed but that potential rests on the wider context. The "relational" element of the way power is exercised signals the importance of the informal relationships and networks which form the basis of political life. Historically, women have been less likely to have access to and derive success from these relationships and networks in the political sphere (Verge and Claveria 2017; Verge and Astudillo 2019). As a result a gendering of the concept has enabled scholars to explore the impact the core executive has on women in politics. Claire Annesley and Francesca Gains have applied the idea of a *gendered* core executive to a case study of two feminist former UK government Ministers for Women, Harriet Harman and Patricia Hewitt. Annesley and Gains built upon Mackay's work to argue that sites of the substantive representation can be found in places other than those focused on by the majority of gender and politics scholars, namely beyond "parliament and women's policy machinery" (2010: 911). This looks beyond the traditional sites of interrogation and builds upon Mackay's whole system approach. Annesley and Gains developed the original definition of the core executive, defining it as:

> "the institutional locus of power and resources required to shape public policy in Westminster-style parliamentary democracies, but [one] that…demonstrates a clear gender bias" (2010: 910).

The gender bias to which they refer is "as a consequence of years, decades and centuries of practices which traditionally excluded women" and as a result the opportunities women have to introduce gendered policy change is significantly constrained (Ibid: 914). This understanding of the gendered formal and, particularly, the constraining informal institutions found within the gendered core executive is one this thesis shares. It also closely aligns with Mackay's "thick" conception of representation (2008: 125), looking at institutions and actors in their context. Adding further context Annesley and Gains also note

that in the New Labour period the gendered disposition of the core executive within which feminist Ministers were operating manifested itself as “blokey [and] laddish” culture (Annesley and Gains 2010: 919).

Annesley and Gains’ central argument is that the Ministers’ successes in post were not due to their “innate capabilities as feminist politicians” but as a result of the resources and relationships afforded to actors by the gendered core executive (Ibid: 910). While Annesley and Gains advance the understanding of women’s substantive representation through their work on the gendered core executive (2010), I argue that they take too much agency away from the role of actors in their analysis. Their framing of resources and relationships being “placed at [the] disposal” (Ibid: 910) of actors of the core executive strikes a passive tone in relation to the role of the actor. The potential of these actors to be feminist critical actors in their own right, aided by the core executive, is not considered. For instance, they advance the argument that in order for Ministers to make a difference in terms of policy advancement they need to have a department with a large budget (resources) and the ear of “vested interests” and close, trusted contacts (relationships) at the heart of government (Ibid: 918). Whilst the argument regarding resources is more convincing, as actors could not *access* these resources without appointment to the core executive, I argue how individual actors *marshal* these resources leaves room for greater agency that Annesley and Gains allow. This includes the opportunity for policy alignment with the actor’s ‘home’ department (both Ministers had an independent cabinet post in addition to serving as Minister for Women). In addition, I argue the relationships actors have fostered, both internal and external to government, prior to joining the core executive can be, and often are, independent of the relationship channels which are made available as a Minister. In this thesis I argue this can be conceptualised as an insider/outside status in relationship to the New Labour project. In addition, Annesley and Gains do not explore the party concerns which frame the ideational parameters within which policy development could occur, interacting dynamically with relationships. These elements will be returned to in greater detail in the empirical chapters. Mackay’s ‘thicker’ account leaves scope to draw these wider elements in to the analysis and also recognises that institutions (rules) shape what actors can do, while at the same time emphasizing that actors also shape institutions through their daily behaviour.

Childs and Krook's work on critical actors has been developed by Niki Johnson and Cecilia Josefsson. Like Mackay, they place a stronger emphasis on critical actors acting *within* the wider context of formal and informal institutions. For example, this could include their political party, if they are part of the government and the impact of exogenous shocks to the system (Johnson and Josefsson 2016: 847). This critique is extended by Shirin Rai and Carole Spray who contend that the idea of critical actors gives an undue weight to the individual actor and their "behavioural characteristics rather than the social structures-in-dominance" (2019: 291). This thesis aligns with the perspective widely held by NI and FI scholars, for instance Gains and Vivien Lowndes, who argue that it is actors who bring institutions and ideas to life (2022), meaning their importance cannot be underestimated: "Institutions constrain human behaviour but, at the same time, are human constructions" (Ibid: 398). Whilst mindful of the critiques above which argue against placing emphasis on actors devoid of context, this thesis places a stronger emphasis on the role of critical actors (within context) than is found within Mackay's original framework.

Linked with Mackay's "in context" approach is another concept I argue which should be used to aid the understanding of the institutional – and particularly informal – constraints that shape the behaviour of actors. Mackay returned to work on the informal parameters which operate upon actors in 2013 with Rod Rhodes, gendering his original idea of the "departmental court" (Rhodes 2011; Rhodes 2013; Mackay and Rhodes 2013). The concept centres on the idea of court politics, taken from the monarchical tradition of who is in favour at court (or in favour with those in power) and who is most effective at navigating the relationships and opportunities presented to them. Rhodes' original concept outlines the members of the departmental court, in the Westminster system, as the Ministers, senior civil servants and special advisers who work closely with the principal politician in their department (usually a Secretary of State) (2011: 140). He goes on to outline that the court politics amongst these actors manifests in internal departmental conflicts, often between civil servants and political appointees, but it also often leads to actors loyally defending their principal in disputes with other departments or Ministers (Ibid: 140). The departmental courts set the day-to-day practices of their departments, this is done via a set of "protocols, rituals, languages, and [links] with the rest of Westminster and Whitehall"

(Rhodes 2011: 15). These courtiers set the accepted culture and bureaucratic practices of a department. As noted above, Rhodes and Mackay went on to gender this concept, arguing that successful women Ministers have often been "constrained to manage like men" given the long-standing gendered beliefs and practices, manifesting in departmental cultural inertia, which have traditionally excluded women from senior elected office (2013: 582). More explicitly, Rhodes and Mackay outline that the "departmental court constitutes gender as white, male and middle class and, therefore…imposes significant constraints on female civil servants and ministers seeking to act on an equal footing in their daily work" (Ibid: 587). This description matches with that of the "blokey" New Labour culture, referenced above (Annesley and Gains 2010: 919). This concept uncovers another layer of informal constraints which are placed on women Ministers to act in the default (read male) mould of political behaviour to achieve success.

This concept of the departmental court is of consideration in this thesis when examining the relationship between the gendered core executive and the Minister for Women. Favourability in court politics is a strong informal institution which Ministers must navigate to achieve success and points to the importance of who the actors are and their networks. Annesley and Gains outline that the locus of power in Westminster systems is the core executive (2010: 910) which technically the Minister for Women is a part of. However, as a result of data collected through interviews, autobiographies, memoirs and archives, I align with the argument pursued by Martin Burch and Ian Holliday that under the New Labour government there was a "core of the core executive" (2004: 3). This "core of the core executive" was where power lay in the New Labour era. It was comprised of Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and their respective departmental courts in No.10 and the Treasury, a "dual monarchy" (Bevir and Rhodes 2006: 677). Whilst Annesley and Gains do acknowledge that power was centralised in the New Labour period (2010: 916 - 917) they do not explicitly distinguish between the original conception of the core executive and the "core of the core executive". Burch and Holliday's work therefore allows for a greater degree of precision in the case of New Labour, which will be employed in this thesis. Burch and Holliday's account builds upon earlier work in the core executive field which identified the 'prime ministerial clique' approach where an "inner elite" of the core executive is found to hold a disproportionate amount of power (Dunleavy and Rhodes 1990: 9). Whilst there was a

fierce rivalry *between* the courts of No.10 and the Treasury (under Blair and Brown respectively) in this thesis the actors within these courts are shown to work in a unified way - as the "core of the core" executive - to protect the New Labour project. Loyalty is a key quality of courtiers (Rhodes 2011: 162) and the courtiers from both No.10 and the Treasury were bound in loyalty to the New Labour project. As explored in the empirical chapters of this thesis this "core of the core" was significant in determining who was able to embody the New Labour image, what was permissible in terms of feminist policy development and how it was achieved.

Internal dynamics of institutions and the 'doing' of gender

The framework proposed by Mackay demonstrates an understanding that institutions (both formal and informal) are not fixed but are dynamic entities and their impact, influence and power can change over time. The second element of Mackay's framework is the analysis of the internal dynamics of institutions. Mackay notes that political institutions are inherently "gendered" (2008: 130) and that the:

> "entry of 'non-standard' actors into these gendered…domains can cause disruption: the challenge may extend beyond the discomfort caused by the sex-gendered presence of traditionally marginalised women to a dynamic process in which gender logics may be unsettled and the gendered coding of political norms as paradigmatically masculine may be rewritten" (Ibid: 130).

Here Mackay realises the potential for institutional change via the disruption of new actors and through incremental change via day-to-day enactment of institutions. She goes further by explicitly noting that the normalisation of the descriptive representation of women "can generate new codes and norms" (Ibid: 130). Mackay is further exploring the link between the descriptive and substantive modes of representation through how the 'doing' of gender can change over time within institutions. Mackay also worked on continuity in the 'doing' of gender in relation to institutional change. She later focused on the "stickiness" of the formal and informal rules that govern gendered institutional contexts which make newness a

"liability", an additional layer to add to her original framework (2014: 551). The engrained nature of formal rules and informal norms often makes the environment even more challenging for those actors who were not previously involved; "'sticky' institutional legacies" (Kenny 2013; 167). It also builds upon Lovenduski's argument that men and women must act (do gender) through the dominant form of competitive masculinity to be politically effective (Lovenduski 2005: 2 - 5).

Through the work on newness and change Mackay developed the concept of nested newness as a way of understanding how new actors in new institutions navigate the formal and informal rules which govern their success (or otherwise) (2014: 550). This concept will be employed in this thesis to complement Mackay's "thick" framework (2008), particularly when assessing the effectiveness of the novel Minister for Women post within the Westminster system. The concept has been developed alongside several cases of devolution within the UK context where institutions have been newly created, for example the Scottish Parliament sitting within the wider environment of established UK politics (Mackay 2014). Whilst the concept has been developed in a devolved context it has a wider application which centres on the "newness": "[nested newness] is a metaphor used to capture the ways in which the new is embedded in time, sequence , and its institutional environment" (Ibid: 552). Applying the concept to Westminster has resulted in a greater focus on the "newness" of the role of the Minister for Women (a post within the core executive) and the actors who held that post. The "newness" of the role and the actors therein interacting with the gendered traditions of Westminster is how this concept is operationalised in this thesis. As noted by Mackay "no institution however new or radically reformed is a blank slate" (Mackay 2014: 552) as any institution sits within a wider environment (Ibid: 559, see also Riker 1995; Goodin 1996; Lowndes and Wilson 2001 and Convery and Kenny forthcoming). I argue that Mackay's later work enhances her original framework by providing a further layer to her contextual and historical approach to understand how politics is 'done' and how the internal dynamics of institutions are shaped and challenged by the new. This work builds upon Margaret Weir's concept of "bounded innovation" where she argues that when ideas and politics interact over time they create accepted limits within which policy can be developed (1992: 192). FI is attendant to the gendered implications of institutional design where "feminist designers" are often seeking to disrupt the status quo, whilst

understanding the legacies within which new institutions sit (Mackay 2014: 554). This is why a structural understanding of gender is central to FI.

What counts as the substantive representation of women

Point three of Mackay's framework is the question of what counts as substantive representation. Given the long-standing concern of representation in the gender and politics literature, as noted above, this is of particular interest. Mackay's framework has direct applicability in the empirical chapters which study where party feminisation occurs and where feminist policy change was apparent. Mackay was interested in the question of what counts as:

> "Conceptions of SRW have been under developed to date, with researchers frequently using process change or responsiveness to women's movement demands as proxy measures. This does not allow for change generated within institutions or for SRW which has not originated from women's movement demands…Judgements need to be made about the 'quality' of SRW, in order to assess the outcomes of SRW" (2008: 132).

She notes that there are three primary criteria that policy should be held to: (1) recognition, (2) redistribution and (3) accountability in delivery (Mackay 2008: 132 - 134). The ideas of recognition and redistribution draw from Nancy Fraser's work which focused on requirements for social justice (1995, 2003). Mackay applied these two elements to the quality of representation in her framework. Recognition relates to the extent to which the issue in question has been legitimised in the political process:

> "The criterion of 'recognition' therefore relates to questions of the extent to which institutions and politics recognise—at a symbolic level—the full political and social citizenship of women: to what extent have the gendered implications of policy or gender based barriers to full citizenship been recognised?" (2008: 132).

This is of importance given the way attempts at the substantive representation of women's interests have often been maligned in the political arena (Fraser 1995: 71). Secondly, redistribution goes in a different direction to understand whether governments are actually willing to enact policies which "require expenditure and material outcomes in terms of redistribution of resources, power and benefits" (Mackay 2008: 133). This raises the stakes in terms of what counts in substantive representation, beyond rhetoric to tangible shifts in money and power. Finally, the third pillar of accountability is less relevant to this thesis as it primarily relates to broader, external mechanisms of engagement with the public including "periodic voting" such as general elections and referenda (Ibid: 134).

Two steps forward one step back

The final point of consideration from Mackay's framework is particularly attuned to the notion of institutional change and its often non-linear form. Mackay noted that "issues of timing and sequence" are critical to understanding how change can occur (2008: 134). As noted previously the role of actors as an explanation of why moments of (new) institutional design results in contradictory and sometimes unanticipated outcomes is compelling, as advanced by Wolfgang Streeck and Thelen:

> "[they are] continuously created and recreated by a great number of actors with divergent interests, varying normative commitments, different powers and limited cognitions" (2005: 16).

How actors behave and how they interact dynamically with institutions and ideas will in large part be governed by wider contextual and historical legacies. Mackay's argument is attuned to this point and builds on that of Paul Pierson who argues that a "snapshot" approach can rip a moment in time from its wider context (2000: 72). This can mean that crucial contextual detail is lost to explain continuity or change. In focusing on historical and temporal approaches, NI and FI scholars both have drawn on the concept of path dependency, which identifies the early stages in a sequence as the most permissive time to make a change - i.e. setting the path - with change being more difficult to achieve as time

passes. This insight from the wider literature advances the importance of the early stages of institutional development and this thesis pays particular attention to what decisions were taken at the outset of new institutions by new actors. Pierson, however, also makes clear - a point on which Mackay aligns - that the path is not 'fixed' and one key element to consider is the social processes which "unfold over time" (Pierson 2004: 5). Once again recognising that politics is a human and relational activity grounds this theory in the reality of dynamic lived experience.

To better understand how institutional change is operationalised Kenny provides an overview of the varied conceptions of institutional change which are recognised within the NI and FI literature (2013: 48), namely layering, displacement, drift and conversion (Mahoney and Thelen 2010: 15 - 16). Through these conceptions Kenny outlines the variety of ways which have been identified in the feminist institutionalist literature to allow for a greater understanding of the "incremental and bounded change" which occurs within political institutions (Kenny 2013: 49). To briefly summarise; layering is a gradual form of change with new amendments or revisions to existing institutional rules, which can lead in the longer term, to a transformational change. Displacement is an abrupt form of change where old rules can be disregarded. Drift is a passive form of institutional change where existing institutional rules are overlooked and finally conversion is when current institutions are repurposed towards new objectives. Having a broader conception of how institutional change can manifest itself has provided a greater toolkit for scholars with which to identify and track change through time. This broader conception highlights that institutional change is messy, often contradictory, and can unfold gradually. Nevertheless, it outlines how there can still be significant consequences, while conversely pointing to the fact that moments of significant change (i.e. newness, critical junctures) do not necessarily lead to radical change. This concept will be returned to in *Chapter 4* in relation to the new forms of women's representation found under the New Labour government.

Mackay's feminist institutionalist approach to representation is the primary analytic framework of this thesis. It has been modified to give greater weight to the role of critical actors; to operationalise Mackay's framework, bringing it further into conversation with feminist institutionalism and the critical actors literature that has been published since.

Finally, it is attendant to ideas which set policy frames impacting particularly on the actions actors can take, this element is outlined further below.

Methodology

A "thick" approach to studying SRW has resultant methodological implications (Mackay 2008), highlighting the focus on tracing change over time, including small 'moments' which can amount to incremental change, which is well-suited to theory guided process tracing (TGPT). TGPT can allow the researcher to "*connect* the stages of a particular process" via detailed case study analysis which can result in the identification of why a certain outcome emerged through time (Kenny 2013: 59; original emphasis). TGPT is of particular interest when studying the informal institutions set and contested by actors. As Kenny argues that TGPT is complementary to a FI framework as it is:

> "well-suited to capturing the empirical complexities of gendered institution, highlighting the dynamic and changing nature of the relationship between gender and institutions over time" (2013: 60).

As noted by Susan Franceschet, in order for a gendered institutionalist approach to fully integrate the substantive representation of women a key element is to employ research methods which are "contextually sensitive" (2011: 63). As noted above the analytical framework used centres on a "thick" conception of representation (Mackay 2008) and the TGPT methodology is complementary as it is a contextually sensitive approach which allows for a deeper understanding of the dynamic temporal shifts between ideas, actors and institutions. Relatedly, TGPT also recognises the importance of historical narratives. As Tulia Falleti notes: "Historical narratives are useful for contextualising the different steps of the process rather than fragmented into analytical stages"(2006: 4). For this research the historical perspective is of importance to place the development of family policy in context throughout the 20th century (see *Chapter 3*) but also looking temporally at New Labour's development in opposition and, relatedly, how the feminisation of the party occurred in that period.

Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennet also argue that in relation to TGPT the incorporation of timing and sequences is of importance. For instance, taking this temporal approach allows the researcher to observe multiple sequences or trajectories (2005: 22). Their argument builds on Pierson's, set out above, which highlights the importance of timing and sequence to understand how institutions evolve. They argue that archival work, in particular, is beneficial to this aim given the opportunity for tracing change over time from a historical perspective. Documents found in two archives were key resources for this thesis, which I return to in more detail below. These documents have been employed as a valuable triangulation point to other data sources as well as to situate Labour Party modernisation and policy development in context. The act of situating events in context is a key benefit to the TGPT method, particularly when observing institutional dynamics. Whilst a deep contextual understanding is achieved through archival documents, another element of a historical approach is to recognise the importance of the initial stages of an institution's life. Kenny notes: "'Small' events in the early stages may have a significant impact on overall outcomes, while 'large' events at later stages may be less consequential" (2013: 59). As noted above in relation to path dependency, the early stages in a sequence are often the most permissive time to create change. As a result TGPT is employed in this thesis to uncover often complex causality *through time*, with particular reference to gender and institutions. This was achieved by utilising several methods (outlined below) which generated a significant amount of data. TGPT is associated with the gathering of significant amount of data which "ensures accounts and interpretations c[an] be corroborated and checked through a variety of methods" (Ibid: 60). I used this data to trace the dynamic relationships between actors, ideas and institutions over time, with a gendered lens.

George and Bennet also highlight the other central benefit of the process tracing method – that the micro-level is revealed (Ibid: 20); meaning the dynamics at an individual level between actors, institutions and ideas - how the formal and informal constraints, for example, placed upon feminist critical actors seeking policy change determines the parameters of their actions. They assert that to reveal the micro-level a large amount of information is required (Ibid: 122). Again this work has sought to uncover the micro-level by

employing multiple sources to gather the large amount of data needed to effectively utilise this TGPT.

An additional element of the contextual perspective is the identification of frames which has been developed in the discursive FI literature. Mieke Verloo defines policy framing as: “an organising principle that transforms fragmentary or incidental information into a meaningful problem, in which a solution is implicitly or explicitly endorsed” (2005: 20). As noted by Erikson, identifying frames over time “reveals how different ideas construct a given phenomenon” and that framing can comprise of “utterances, statements and debates within the given process” (2017: 39). Framing is of particular use when applied to the study of policy. The incorporation of solutions which are “implicitly or explicitly endorsed” in Verloo’s definition once again shows the complementary nature of TGPT and FI. Teresa Kulawik developed this point as part of an early move to a discursive feminist institutionalism: “Policies are usually investigated as a reaction to ‘objective’ problems, yet, through the lens of discourse, problems are no longer taken as given but perceived as a result of interpretation” (2009: 266). Josefina Erikson built on this by arguing the institutionalisation of ideas sets “what is acceptable and possible to say on a certain issue” (Erikson 2015: 459). Here we can see that there is a dynamism between institutions and actors and ideas, they each inform one another.

Erikson has applied her work explicitly to policy framing (2015, 2022), whilst Mackay is attuned to the importance of framing. I propose to extend the framework by bringing a more unambiguous focus on *policy* framing. The policy solutions which are deemed appropriate (or not) could be described as the ‘ideas’ which inform institutions, both formal and informal, which in turn interplay with actors. The policy case study chapters, in particular, will identify the ideas which came to frame these policy areas as a result of the dynamic interactions between these players. To operationalise the analysis of policy framing Erikson developed a tool - a ladder of political institutionalisation to establish levels of embeddedness in political culture. The bottom of the ladder is the frame becoming part of the political agenda, with ascending steps including gaining support from a key actors, then a form of official acknowledgement and finally moving to some form of policy success, such as legislation (Erikson 2015: 457). This ladder is of particular utility to establish the levels of

political institutionalisation which was achieved by framings pursued by feminist critical actors. Erikson also raises an important final point of consideration in relation to framing – what isn't being said or included: "Which perspectives are being excluded or marginalised, what is left unproblematic?" (2017: 40). This thesis is particularly attendant to the implicit assumptions which framed the policy development in the two case study chapters.

In *Chapters 5* and *6* a case study approach is employed. The case study approach for these two key elements of family policy allows for an in-depth exploration of the policy development and the ideas, institutions and actors that shaped them. Linked to TGPT, which values historical narratives and dynamic temporal shifts, a case study approach provides a detailed understanding of historical political context. The historical political context of UK family policy and the Labour Party in this work guards against selection bias given a deep understanding of the environment from which they emerged (Lustick 1996: 605). As noted by Childs and Krook, in-depth case studies enable the author to capture how gender manifests temporally and in relation to different institutions (both formal and informal) (2006: 527), often via within-case analysis, a point outlined further below. This is achieved by taking a gendered lens to institutional norms and practice, as a development of the "thick" contextual approach outlined above (Mackay 2008). This approach situates institutions in their wider context, political institutions which have traditionally excluded women in their formation and development (Annesley and Gains 2010: 914).

Case study approaches are sometimes criticised for only producing a single observation which has limited relevance outside the bounds of the case (for example see King, Keohane, and Verba 1994). Given the historical and temporal perspective employed, the cases produce multiple observations of the changing nature of the relationships between institutions, ideas and actors over time. This approach is also complimentary to TGPT as this *within-case* analysis is crucial to uncovering the micro-level dynamics between actors, institutions and ideas over time. As Kenny reflects:

> "single case studies generally include multiple observations. This is specifically the case for historical and temporal approaches, which are specifically interested in examining patterns over time" (2013: 57).

The framing research question - how did the relationships between actors, institutions and ideas determine the development of the feminisation of the Labour Party and New Labour family policy? - has set the parameters to allow for a micro-level analysis of these cases. The thesis pulls out the dynamic relationships between actors, institutions and ideas which resulted in these unprecedented cases of policy change.

The two policy cases selected, childcare policy, and employment leave and flexibility policy (outlined in *Chapter 1*), were previously largely neglected by central government intervention in the UK but they were not novel concerns within the wider UK women's movement or feminist activists within the Labour Party (Randall 2000: 83 - 106). As Alan Bryman outlines representative cases are selected to exemplify "a broader category of which [they are] a member" (2016: 70). As a result, the cases explored can be taken as representative of the policy concerns of the wider UK women's movement and feminist activists within the party at that time. Other policy case studies could have been selected as representative of the contemporaneous women's movement, such as policy related to tackling violence against women and girls or reproductive rights (Harman 2017: 24 - 26). These two areas, however, had already received significant attention in public policy terms in the 1960s and 1970s, notably via the Abortion Act 1967 and the Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act 1976. The two cases which have been selected are of particular interest as they are two examples of family policy, a policy area which had been resolutely neglected by government prior to 1997 (Daly 2010b). What makes these two cases worthy of study is the sheer scale of change which occurred under New Labour. *Why* was the election of New Labour the galvanising moment to bring these policy areas into the mainstream of politics?

Methods

1. Elite Semi-Structured Interviews

The primary method of this thesis is semi-structured, elite interviews. This work is based on a new set of twenty-six interviews in total (see *Appendix A - Interview Details* for further information). Initial targeting began with those who had served as Minister for Women in the period between 1997 – 2010 and their junior ministerial colleagues. I began with those who had served in these roles as it was clear from preliminary reading of the literature that this novel form of representation would prove illuminating to the central research puzzle. Using a snowball technique, I gradually incorporated other actors including, former Labour Party communications experts, special advisers, party leadership figures and civil servants. The interviews were carried out over a period from April 2019 to September 2020. Fifteen interviews were conducted face-to-face, seven were via-Zoom and the remaining four took place on the telephone. The move away from face-to-face interviews to Zoom and telephone was necessitated by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting lockdown restrictions during the data collection phase. This switch from face-to-face to online and telephone created challenges in building rapport with interviewees which is more easily achieved in a face-to-face situation. This was, of course, an unforeseen circumstance but interviewees were generally still open and generous with their time and reflections on the period.

Twenty-four interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Due to security restrictions where two interviews were carried out audio recording was not possible. When recording was not permitted extensive notes were taken during the interviews and written up immediately afterwards. The interviews generally lasted around an hour but ranged from thirty minutes to two hours in length. The interviews are a mixture of attributable and non-attributable data. The subjects were given the option to indicate if they would like all or part of their interview transcripts to be attributable. In the one instance where the subject did not want to be identified steps have been taken to ensure anonymity when using quotations. The subject in question is only referred to by their generic job title (DTI Special Adviser), a post which was held by a number of people over the period of study therefore the possibility of identification is substantially limited. This new data set is of particular note given, as discussed in *Chapter 1*, the existing literature in this area was published either during New Labour's period in office or shortly after. The interviewees for this study bring a longer term and more contextualised perspective to their interviews, a benefit which was

not available to those earlier studies in this area. This benefit aligns with the merits of both theory-guided process tracing and the concept of "thick" representation (Mackay 2008), with both centring the importance of historical narratives and changes in relationships, ideas and institutions over time.

Rather than following a rigid interview schedule the semi-structured approach was chosen to allow for a degree of spontaneity, to be able to follow-up and probe the interviewee's account. Employing the semi-structured approach both a thematic content analysis and a narrative analysis of the interview transcripts is utilised. Themes were identified through hand coding by close reading of the interview data. Coding is a method where data is broken down into sections which are given labels (Bryman 2016: 11). Thematic content analysis is then employed as a technique that allows for the identification of recurring ideas from the coded data. This method can create a fragmented and decontexualised account of the data (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). To counter these issues and to make explicit the relational element of politics and policy change, narrative analysis is also utilised. Narrative analysis brings storytelling by interviewees to the fore (Mishler 1991). These stories provide rich insight into the policy-making process that are omitted from other data sources such as official governmental accounts or policy documents. Stories from interviewees have illuminated the centrality of human interaction in the study of actors, institutions and ideas; taking them from theory to practice. This social element is also tied to the "real rules" which govern how political processes work in reality - "rules-in-use" - the mix of formal and informal elements used in practice (Bjarnegård and Kenny 2016: 376). These interviews allowed for the uncovering of how informal rules shaped the actions of the interviewees, and whether formal rules actually structured behaviour on the ground, again an insight difficult to extract from most other methods (Erikson 2015: 459).

When employing the elite interview method there is always a concern regarding the reliability of the subject's memory (Richards 1996). This is a significant factor in this study due to the fact the period being studied, including internal party development in the mid-1980s until 2010, is now at its earliest 40 years ago. As a result, this is where triangulation has proved crucial in this thesis. The cross-referencing of interview data with government documents from both the New Labour years in government and archival data from the

Labour Party’s time in opposition have mitigated concerns related to lapses in memory. In addition to concerns around memory in relation to elite interviewing the contemporary historian Antony Seldon notes, when referring to ex-politicians, that they have been ingrained with partisan politicking they can find it challenging to extract an objective truth (1988). Yet, it would be implausible to expect politicians to be non-partisan. In the study they were chosen as interviewees precisely because of their political experience in both the modernisation process of the party and their various roles in government. Even though the political interviewees will replay their experience through a partisan prism eight interviewees for this thesis were not politicians or political appointees. As a result, their interviews provided a triangulation point when contrasting accounts with those partisan figures of the ex-politicians and political advisers. Nevertheless, there are key advantages to elite interviewing. Although the events which the interviewees have been asked to recall have been up to 40 years ago they are in the unique position to give their insights into events as they were either the protagonists in or were closely involved in them. Elite interviews allow access to information which would not otherwise be in the public domain (Richards 1996: 200). Seldon’s other concern regarding extracting an objective truth is a concern for all researchers when considering the reliability of a subject’s account. This thesis approaches interviewing in a wider feminist tradition where:

> “Researchers reinterpret the notion of believing the interviewee as a utilitarian and decidedly feminist approach. Specifically a believed interviewee is likely to trust the interviewer and thus likely to disclose the truth” (Reinharz 1992: 28).

Shulamit Reinharz’s approach is not one of blind acceptance of whatever an interviewee states but one where the starting point is belief, whilst incorporating the flexibility to question the interviewee if given reason to. Interview data is also triangulated with several other methods (outlined below) meaning the consideration of reliability is moderated via the alternative sources.

2. Archives

In order to address concerns highlighted with elite interviewing a second method has also been employed. Data from the archives act as a triangulation point for the elite interviews and as well as complementing them by acting as an unobtrusive and non-reactive method. As noted by Eugene Webb et al. (1966) reliance on purely reactive methods, such as elite interviews that are undertaken specifically for a study, runs the risk of the more obtrusive method affecting the results. Given this concern a balance can be achieved when a mixed method reactive and non-reactive approach is employed. Archival work was carried out at the Churchill Archive Centre, Churchill College at the University of Cambridge and at the Labour History Archives at the People's History Museum, Manchester. The Churchill Archive Centre holds the papers of former Labour leader Neil Kinnock. I studied archival material which had been collected particularly regarding the origins of the role of Minister for Women. These materials included personal correspondence between Kinnock and his Shadow Cabinet colleagues and personal staff, speeches and speaking notes, Labour Party documents and transcripts of media appearances. Personal correspondence is well suited to narrative analysis whilst additional party and media documentation have been hand coded for content analysis. Again the more unofficial archival material, in particular, gives an insight into the informal rules in the political process which would ordinarily be hidden from view.

The material collected from the Labour History Archive primarily comprised of internal Labour Party family policy documents, many of which are from the agenda setting period in opposition, prior to the election of New Labour in 1997. This data was again hand coded for detailed thematic content analysis, in particular, identifying policy frames. The documents from this archive were more formal in nature and did not give the 'black box' account often found in Kinnock's archive but they were useful in showing the dominant policy framings. Erikson highlights the importance of these frames for actors:

> "Actors have to relate to an institutional frame one way or another: they either formulate policy in accordance with it or have to question its credibility and push for a different frame" (2015: 459).

In the policy case study chapters, in particular, the way actors relate to and try to work with or challenge the dominant institutional policy framing is detailed. These archival documents give a strong basis upon which to understand the boundaries within which they operated.

3. Autobiographies and Memoirs of New Labour period

Autobiographies and memoirs add another layer of historical context to the thesis. Autobiographies generally cover the whole life or a significant part of the subject's life and memoirs often focus on a particular period in the subject's life (Popkin 2017: 694). Given the New Labour years are now over a decade passed, several key political actors relevant to the case studies have produced autobiographies. In addition, several have produced memoirs of their experiences during the New Labour period. These include:

Autobiographies (accounts covering whole life/political life of actors)

- Ed Balls, *Speaking Out* (2016)
- Tony Blair, *A Journey* (2010)
- Gordon Brown, *My Life, Our Times* (2017)
- Harriet Harman, *A Woman's Work* (2017)
- Joan Ruddock, *Going Nowhere* (2016)

Memoirs (accounts focusing on New Labour period)

- David Blunkett, *The Blunkett Tapes: My Life in the Bear Pit* (2006)
- Naomi Eisenstadt, *Providing a Sure Start* (2011)
- Philip Gould, *The Unfinished Revolution: How New Labour Changed British Politics Forever* (1998)
- Deborah Mattinson, *Talking to a Brick Wall: How New Labour stopped listening to the voter and why we need a new politics* (2010)
- Claire Short, *An Honourable Deception? New Labour, Iraq, and the Misuse of Power* (2004)

Whilst autobiography and personal accounts are often used by historians they are not as frequently used within political science disciplines as these accounts are not available when researching a contemporaneous subject (Bryman 2016: 544). Somewhat unusually for a political science thesis this research benefits not only from the archive data outlined above but from autobiographies and memoirs. These accounts also augment data from interviews and cover related topics in further depth that was not possible in an hour-long research interview. Many autobiographies and memoirs of key players in the New Labour years have now been published but the majority of those are from male actors. This thesis benefits with the inclusion of some significant women actors from the time (outlined above). These accounts are of particular importance to a feminist researcher. Historian Nancy Cott argued that in terms of women's autobiographical accounts feminist researchers should not view these as partial, marginal accounts of history but central to the understanding of women's lives (1977: 1 - 18) with Reinharz building on this contending that "no other historical source is more likely to disclose women's consciousness" (1992: 157). Again, whilst there are similar concerns relating to self-reported claims (Bryman, 2016: 546) which are found in interviews, data is triangulated from several sources to mitigate these concerns. Yet, this thesis follows the same foundational standpoint of belief in the subject telling their story. These accounts offer an insight into the informal institutions. Actors are often able to reflect in detail on the micro-level of the political process in action. We find out about how informal norms or formal rules and structures are interpreted by the actor in question and how, in turn, they inform their behaviour (Bjarnegård and Kenny 2016: 376).

4. Hansard Corpus

Thematic content analysis of the Hansard corpus was undertaken of the Second Reading (House of Commons) debates of the following relevant pieces of legislation:

<u>Case study 1 – Childcare</u>

- Childcare Act 2006
- Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009

Case study 2 – Family Leaves and Flexible Working

- Employment Act 2002
- Work and Families Act 2006

The 'Second Reading' of a Bill in the Westminster Parliamentary system is where the relevant government Minister and their counterpart in the opposition open the debate on a Bill. This exchange is then followed by backbench interventions and summing up by the respective frontbenches. This point in the process of a Bill proceeding through Parliament will provide a large amount of data from which thematic content analysis has been undertaken. By hand coding this data dominant policy frames related to each piece of legislation were identified. The identification of these policy frames from publicly held debates acts as a counterpoint to analysis of first-hand accounts identified in methods 1, 2 and 3 above. There has been concern regarding the accuracy of Hansard as a verbatim record of Parliamentary debate, with omissions including unfinished sentences (Mollin 2007: 187). Given the use of Hansard, in this research, has been to extract thematic policy framing (via hand coding of the data), not detailed linguistic analysis, such criticism is limited and not crucial to the identification of these themes. Transcripts of Parliamentary debates also give the opportunity to assess the level of institutionalisation of such a frame. As outlined above Erikson (2015: 457) developed a institutionalisation ladder starting with getting a particular framing on the political agenda through to finally achieving policy success. Within Parliamentary debates we can see if a frame is explicitly expressed on the floor of the House, if key actors or a group of actors begin to use the framing and if it is given official acknowledgment by a government Minister. The floor of the House of Commons is utilised as a site where the formal institutionalisation of a policy frame is analysed.

5. Government Policy Documents

Hand coding of data was undertaken on government policy documents for thematic content analysis. These documents are relevant to various initiatives within each policy case study, including:

Case Study 1 – Childcare

- *Meeting the Childcare Challenge: A Framework and Consultative Document*, 1998 (Green Paper)
- *Every Child Matters*, 2003 (Green Paper)
- *Choice for parents, the best start for children: a ten-year strategy for childcare*, 2004

Case Study 2 – Family Leaves and Flexible Working

- *Fairness at Work*, 1998 (White Paper)
- *Supporting Families: A Consultation Document*, 1998 (Green Paper)
- *Women and Work Commission Report*, 2006
- *Women and Work Commission, Follow-Up Report*, 2009

The policy documents and government commissioned reports, outlined above, give the researcher an understanding of the government's policy priorities. Additionally, the researcher can identify the dominant policy framing ideas and will have access to at least a partial understanding of the motivations driving the policy development. The temporal progression of ideas and policy framing will also be able to be identified through content analysis. Documents also provide a "thick description" which "temporally and historically" situate accounts (Kenny 2013: 60 - 61). Nevertheless, these documents can only serve to give a partial account of policy change. Government documents are the 'public' face of policy development and foreground a state-centred approach to policy change (Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier 1994; Hudson and Lowe 2009). That is why they only form one piece of the methodological jigsaw. The 'black box' accounts will be forthcoming through the elite interviews, autobiographies, memoirs and archival data. As noted by Reinharz in relation to mixed-methods approaches:

> "[The] comparison of researcher-produced interview material with researcher-located archives and organisational literature enabled [an understanding of] the relation between individual belief and organisational ideology and history" (1992: 148).

The methodological jigsaw uses reactive and non-reactive tools and uncovers the informal rules in action through 'black-box' accounts. In addition, it identifies dominant policy framings and traces the dynamics of the actors, institutions and ideas over time. This is done with a keen attendance to history and a contextual lens.

Conclusion

Mackay's conception of a "thick" notion of representation which is deeply contextually grounded (2008), in combination with the wider FI literature, acts as the framework of analysis for the empirical chapters. As noted above, the framework has been extended to give further weight to the role of critical actors, to foreground a greater historical perspective and to be attendant to the ideas which set policy frames, impacting particularly on the actions actors can take. Mackay's extended model elicits the dynamic relationship between actors, institutions and ideas which determined the development of New Labour family policy. The mixed methods approach has enabled the triangulation of data to ensure the limitations of individual methods are moderated and it also aligns with the analytical framework which is historically attentive. The following chapter continues in this vein by charting the historical context of, primarily, the state's relationship with the family and family policy throughout the 20th century. It adopts a temporal perspective through TGPT which will inform the subsequent empirical chapters and serves to highlight, in particular, the ideas which framed New Labour's family policy and bounded the scope of change in the party and policy.

Chapter 3: Situating Family Policy 'In Time'

To situate the evaluation of New Labour's approach to family policy 'in time' it is essential to understand the family policy it inherited, particularly given the importance of historical and temporal analysis to this thesis. The ideas explored in this chapter - the relationship between the state and the family, the dominance of the traditional gender order and the emergence of social investment all came to be policy frames which bound the critical actors working towards feminist policy change in the New Labour years. This chapter will chart the evolution of family policy throughout the 20th century from a gendered perspective, creating a 'thicker', contextual understanding for the forthcoming empirical chapters. At the heart of the story of UK family policy is the welfare state and its relationship with the family and the market. At the turn of the 20th century governing parties took a minimalist approach to welfare policy, catering to only the very poorest; framing the narrow parameters in which policy explicitly relating to the family operated within throughout most of the century (see Timmins 1995 for a broad overview) - the narrow parameters inherited by New Labour. Yet today the 21st century welfare state is not a peripheral entity but is central to the social fabric of the UK and the families within it (Eisenstadt and Oppenheim 2019: 33).

1870 – 1914

The Victorian Social Settlement Under Strain

As noted above, the non-interventionist state of the late 19th century and early 20th century operated within very narrow parameters regarding support for the family. In relation to the state, the family and the market, the family was a relatively autonomous entity (Pedersen 1995: 25 - 78). The father's responsibility to maintain the family was central - if only at the level of an ideal - to the Victorian social settlement and was based upon the idea of the 'family wage' (Ibid: 32). The 'family wage' was the basis of welfare pre-War – where a man's earnings were presumed sufficient for the needs of a dependant wife and children (Williams 1989). This was an early version of a male-breadwinner model (MBM). Nevertheless, this settlement did not reflect the reality for the majority of families even at that time. Working

class women routinely worked, particularly in informal settings such as taking-in laundry and cleaning (Lewis 1992: 161). The family wage did not live up to its name.

Concern about the inadequacy of the 'family wage' system began at the turn of the century to garner greater public interest. Social reformers seriously questioned the adequacy of the 'family wage' model. Studies in London and York by social reformers such as Charles Booth and Seebohm Rowntree (respectively) in the late 19th century showed a third of the population were living below the subsistence poverty line (Lewis 1994: 76). This evidence gave more weight to the idea that the 'family wage' was a broken concept, with campaigners pressing for greater state intervention in family life, particularly to protect the health and wellbeing of children. This campaign was met with resistance, given it challenged the foundations of social relations in Britain, but in time small concessions were made (Pedersen 1995: 32). The state was taking its first steps towards a closer relationship with the family which it had previously held at arm's length. One of these small concessions was that children began to derive benefits from the state. Here was an early and modest move towards defamilialisation. Defamilialisation refers to the shift of roles previously undertaken in the family or private sphere being taken into the public sphere- towards the welfare state and/or the market (Beyeler and Annesley 2011: 85). For instance, responsibility for education was also shifting from the private to the public. The 1870 Education Act introduced universal primary education (made mandatory in 1880), which signalled an important shift in the role of the state (see *Table 1* for highlighted legislative change throughout this period). Children were, as a result, beginning to be viewed by political elites as sites of "social regeneration" (Randall 2000: 23); there was an inherent benefit to the state to invest in their future because it was also the state's future (known as social investment). In addition, the 1906 Education (Provision of Meals) Act enabled local authorities to provide school meals either for a very low cost or for free for those who needed it, a recognition of the limitations of the 'family wage' (Pedersen 1995: 53). Then in 1908 the Children's Act mandated compulsory medical examinations of children in schools and introduced the juvenile court system. These measures shifted, in part, children's dependency from the family to the state. The idea of who or what provided for children was beginning to change.

The turn of the 20th century also brought greater state intervention into the lives of mothers and expectant mothers. These interventions incrementally eroded the ideal of private familial responsibility. Even though the MBM was ultimately left in place there was no challenge to the 'separate spheres' doctrine of traditional gendered family roles (Lewis 1994: 75). The interventions remained studiously small 'c' conservative and overall women's material dependency still resided primarily within the family. Yet, there was patchwork provision of existing family support which included voluntary and local authority run maternity and child welfare centres. These centres gave women advice on motherhood, cooking, sewing and 'housewife' classes (Thorne 1994: 102). In 1914 formal local authority child and maternity services were established (later consolidated in the 1918 Maternity and Child Welfare Act). These services included domestic assistants, food for expectant and nursing mothers and their children, day nurseries and support for widows, deserted wives and children born outside of marriage (Ringen 1997: 32). That said, maternity services were not mandated therefore the problem of patchy provision persisted.

In addition to these modest advances in social policy was the social reformers' campaign for the financial endowment of motherhood. These campaigners for women's rights fundamentally challenged the role of the male breadwinner as the sole material provider for the household and was fiercely opposed by trade unions (Randall 2000: 28 - 30). After all, if the state was to meet the financial needs of the family why would employers need to pay such generous wages to unionised workers? Whilst the idea of endowing motherhood was radical, it still operated within the 'separate spheres' maternalist philosophy which was characteristic of Victorian society. This policy framing idea persisted creating narrow parameters for innovation. The endowment of motherhood was not advocating women enter the formal labour market but instead that their current, unpaid, labour in maintaining their children and the home should be valued. This granted a degree of economic independence for women. The campaign for the endowment of motherhood advocated a candid reimaging of the value placed on women's informal labour. Yet, the campaign struggled and was dealt a blow with the introduction of the 1911 National Insurance Act. Through this legislation the state was reaffirming the role of husband as provider, with women and children only deriving health benefits if they were dependants of insured workers (Lewis 1994: 77). Women only made up 10 per cent of recipients in their own right

as workers in insured roles (Ibid: 77). Nevertheless, it did mark a shift in the state's role as a provider of health care. Similarly to the provision of health and wellbeing legislation directed at children this new insurance system shifted the onus onto the state to ensure the future health of workers. This would enable husbands to sustain their families in the immediate sense but also enable them to do so in the future. The conception of what the state was for and what it could do was an idea which was being challenged by social reformers. Yet, the idea of a small, distant state set tight parameters with which these actors could achieve change.

1914 – 1945

Unprecedented Upheaval and Incremental Change

As a result of the First and Second World Wars, the period from 1914 – 1945 were years of unprecedented social, economic and political upheaval in the UK and indeed around the world. The pivotal social policy intervention in the UK in this period was the publication of the Beveridge Report in 1942. It would go on to shape the post-War welfare settlement, within which the parameters of family policy would develop (Timmins 1995: 19 - 20). The state and the market began to work in closer partnership when workplace nurseries were established to cater for the influx of women in industry during the wartime periods (Randall 2000: 30). This was a reconceptualisation of care work as a 'public' good, as a necessity to enable the war effort on the home front (Ibid: 30). Whilst this was a temporary change other incremental steps were taken at this time including the continuation of the mothers' endowment campaign and modest support for maternity was introduced (Lewis 1994: 74).

In this wartime (and interwar) period the campaign for the endowment of motherhood had an altered focus. Although the original campaign still operated within the 'separate spheres' parameters it was unusual in advocating that mothers would be the direct beneficiaries. An allowance introduced during the First World War contributed to the shifting context of this campaign, a move to reframe without the mother at the centre which could outwardly have been perceived as a distinct shift in the idea of state's relationship with families. Universal separation allowances were introduced in 1914, and by Armistice Day 1.5 million wives of

conscripts and several million children were in its receipt (Pedersen 1995: 109). Yet, whilst the payment was generous it was framed as a:

> "national obligation for services rendered…the payment was not the wife's at all, but belonged to the men 'rendering services'…" (Ibid: 112).

The lack of ownership over this benefit on behalf of wives was further underscored by the regulation which stipulated if there was infidelity proven on the wife's side, payment would be terminated. Women were now viewed in the context of the family unit as a holistic entity not as legitimate sites of state intervention in their own right, as they had been in the original campaign for mothers' endowment. In the wake of this shift the campaign became one which advocated for a Family Allowance (Lewis 1994: 74). Social reformers were key to keeping this issue on the political agenda. A leading social reformer advocating for women's rights and future MP, Eleanor Rathbone, established the Family Endowment Society in 1917. She was previously an advocate of the endowment of motherhood but had contributed to the reframing of the campaign to one for a Family Allowance. This Allowance would not place a greater value on women's care work or reduce their dependency on their husbands but would instead be framed as combatting child poverty. Building upon the social investment in children first seen pre-War, this signalled the start of a welfare path that often resulted in the marginalisation of women (particularly as mothers) in service of children (Lister 2006: 427). The strategy of de-centring women, nevertheless, secured wider support for the campaign (Lewis 1994: 83). As noted in the previous chapter, the importance of timing and sequence when taking a historical perspective often illuminates the importance of early decisions or changes. This idea of the marginalisation of women in family policy continued to persist (Lister 2006) and will be explored in later chapters of this thesis, particularly in relation to childcare policy under New Labour.

With the 'family wage' still failing, the case for the introduction of the Family Allowance gathered pace, and further controversy, in the inter-War years. Even with the reframing of the campaign, notable figures such as the influential economist William Beveridge (who would go on to author the report of the same name) argued that the debate surrounding the Family Allowance had been "infected by the taint of feminism" (quoted in Thorne 1994:

111). Male dominated trade unions also continued to voice their opposition with the state threatening, through the Family Allowance, to meet the needs of the families their members theoretically provided for (Ibid: 111). The controversy continued when it reached the UK Parliament. The payment was initially proposed to go directly to the father as the head of the household but many MPs, including the recently elected Eleanor Rathbone, insisted the payment go directly to the mother (Cowman 2010: 152). The introduction of the Family Allowance was one of the final acts of the Churchill administration in 1945 and was the first universalist benefit of what would be recognised as a modern welfare state (Timmins 1995: 49). Rathbone's eventual success highlights two contrasting points. Firstly, the role of the father as the provider was eroded as the payment went to the mother. But, secondly, the level at which the Allowance was set was such that it did not alleviate poverty or allow for women's economic independence. Nor did it explicitly value care work as the original incarnation had sought to. Whilst it did not pose a significant threat to the traditional family unit given its low rate it did, however, push the parameters of the MBM with the state also becoming a provider. It was at the same time both radical and moderate, an echo of limited social policy developments in the pre-War years. These examples of bounded innovation through the first half of the 20th century demonstrate how narrow the parameters were in this policy space. This was primarily as a result of the embeddedness of the traditional, gendered family set-up and the state's arm-length relationship with it.

As well as providing a level of material maintenance through the Family Allowance, the state also began to augment its role in regard to maternity and child daycare services. When listed these interventions appear numerous and wide-ranging. In 1914 there was the introduction of 600 full time health visitors in England, in 1915 greater availability of subsidised parenting classes for mothers, in 1916 more rigorous training for midwives was introduced, funding for midwives and antenatal care increased in 1917 and by 1918 over 1525 welfare centres were operational within England (Thorne 1994: 105). Consolidated in the 1918 Maternity and Child Welfare Act, the provisions were not mandated and were both very unevenly distributed and heavily reliant on voluntary organisation. Again, the state's actions could be described as inconsistent; formal parameters had been put in place (via legislation) but the lack of enforcement meant that informally these measures were not fundamentally changing the state's role. Further steps towards a policy of social investment,

originally seen pre-War, were being expanded, yet these new services did not threaten the maternalism associated with the 'family wage' social settlement (Ibid: 106 - 107). They did, however, shift the responsibility for the wellbeing of children, and in turn their mothers, from a wholly private affair to one in which the state played a part. More than this, the light-touch state approach to implementation suggests a lack of commitment to genuinely shift the balance of responsibility.

As a response to the influx of women in industry during the First World War, workplace nurseries were quickly established, with government funding, to ensure mothers were able to join the formal labour market (Randall 2000: 30). This forced a partnership between the state and the market, recognising that a previously 'private' function (childcare) was essential for the maintenance of the economy and the war effort. Even so, women's role in the social settlement, in the eyes of the state at least, remained static. Whilst it may have initially seemed that women's dependency had shifted from the male breadwinner to the market during the first world war with their move into the workplace, perhaps even looking towards a universal breadwinner model, it was to be short-lived. Continuity was maintained even through these significant breakpoints in history. At the end of the War these workplace nurseries were dismantled as quickly as they were erected and to little opposition; there was an expectation that women would return to the home and men to industry undermining their necessity (Ibid: 30). State, market and family relations largely reverted to type.

Outside of the childcare provided in the factories, 1918 saw the introduction of the Education Act. This Act enabled local authorities to support the provision of nursery schools for children aged two to five years old. This provision was, once again, optional for local authorities (Ringen 1997: 72). Nursery schools were primarily set up for educational development, not to ease the childcare gap faced by many working families. Without being mandated there was no particular incentive for local authorities to invest in these services (Pedersen 1995: 81). There was also limited provision for day nurseries which were more targeted at working parents. These were still primarily supported by voluntary or philanthropic providers. Day nurseries also quickly became stigmatised as poor quality (Randall 2000: 32). The 'family wage' social settlement of a care giving mother and working

father was still the model which guided state intervention. Gradually by 1944 the provision of both nursery schools and day nurseries had expanded from a small base - on the eve of the Second World War there were 100 day nurseries in England, and 188 nursery schools. By 1944 there were 1450 full time nurseries, 109 part time nurseries and 784 nursery classes (Randall 2000: 38). Yet, immediately after the Second World War numbers dropped dramatically.

Nearing the end of the Second World War the Beveridge Report, which would go on to shape the post-War welfare settlement, was published. The Beveridge reforms encouraged a return to the traditional idea of the male breadwinner. Women's dependency on the male breadwinner was to be sustained. The three foundational pillars of the 1942 Report were a national health service, tax-funded allowances for children and full (read male) employment which would be used to fund social security (Timmins 1995: 21). The inclusion of the child allowances, framed similarly to the Family Allowance campaign, was intended to alleviate child poverty. Once again child poverty was linked with the employment status of parents, primarily fathers. When Child Allowances were introduced in 1943, they were initially targeted at the poorest children (contrary to Beveridge's call) but were soon extended. Allowances were set at a low, flat rate, not means-tested and with the explicit intention to promote work incentivisation. In this they were purposely intended not to genuinely challenge the status quo of familial relations. Nevertheless, this report set the universalist framework pursued post-War which marked a clear break from the piecemeal state support afforded not only to families but to society more widely: an end to what Winston Churchill had memorably described as the "ambulance state" (quoted in Timmins 1995: 14).

1945 – 1979

The Family in Flux

The UK emerged in the post-War era with a Labour government intent on rebuilding the country. Part of this rebuilding was the establishment of a welfare state. This welfare state was initially underpinned by traditional notions of familialism. By the end of the War effort the welfare state was set to expand on a massive scale but the family's internal workings

were yet to be significantly challenged by it. In particular women's dependency within the family unit remained largely unchanged. The Beveridge Report conceptualised women primarily as wives and mothers: separate spheres for men and women. In the immediate aftermath in 1945 the Minister for Health was clear on this:

> "Under normal peacetime conditions, the right policy to pursue would be positively to discourage mothers of children under two from going to work" (quoted in M. Phillips 1978: 533).

This period, in particular the 1950s and 1960s, has been widely characterised as the golden age of the MBM (Daly and Rake 2003; Daly 2010a). Effectively this meant that the pre-War 'family wage' settlement, with all its known shortcomings, was now fully embedded and provided a framework to the new welfare settlement. Yet whilst the state created a system to support this particular type of family unit, it was still not reflective of how many families existed in reality. It would be challenging to characterise this period as one of a coherent and active family policy even with the introduction of the formal welfare state apparatus. Legislative changes that occurred in relation to the family were primarily belated reactive to changes in society.

Childcare arrangements still remained largely in the hands of the market and voluntary enterprise with nursery and daycare provision soon returning to pre-War levels. For the then Health Secretary, Aneurin Bevan, childcare provision was necessary to combat wartime labour shortages but not something the state should have any continued involvement with thereafter. The message was clear; women should be back in their homes and ensconced in their familial dependency (Randall 2000: 39). Given the state's interest in reverting to pre-War social models little movement was made in governmental terms, at least, in this area throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Departmental responsibility was also fractured between the Department of Health and the Department of Education, leading to a lack of ownership or championing of this issue (Featherstone 2003: 64). The market was beginning to expand its role in this area but in a way which did not challenge the fundamentals of the MBM. By the 1960s the private sector providers had expanded to a less structured form of childcare provision: playgroups. In 1965 there were 500 of these groups in England but by 1972 there

were some 15,000 (Randall 2000: 60). Operating in mainly middle-class areas and on a part-time basis, they did not effectively facilitate the (re)entry of mothers into the workforce.

In 1963 the government commissioned a review, the Plowden Report, into early years and primary education. The Report concluded that greater nursery education should be available for children ages three to five but that it should be on a part time basis, or more unambiguously, a child-centred approach rather than one that facilitated mothers to work (Thomas 1990). Only providing provision on a part time basis meant that for many women entry into the labour market on a full time basis would be impossible. Essentially this Report advocated for the status quo in terms of state/family relations. This chimed with the government approach more broadly where the Ministry for Health in 1968 explicitly stated that young children should be at home with their mothers. Yet, this pervading view was starting to press against social changes which were beginning to be recognised by policymakers. In particular, the issue of lone parenthood began to be acknowledged throughout the 1960s and by 1969 one million children in the UK lived in single parent households (Randall 2000: 60). This exposed a tension between government policy (or lack thereof) and the lived experience of many families in the UK. Lone mothers, the overwhelming majority of single parents, did not have the option to stay at home to look after their children as the government advocated, they had to use the variable private and voluntary provision available or rely on informal help from friends and family. The increasing reliance from women on the market rather than the family for maintenance spurred the formation of a childcare lobby. Mobilising the shifting of ideas, the lobby pressed for the need for better quality, greater provision and for provision at times that would be of benefit to working parents, particularly mothers. Their vision was of a move towards a universal breadwinner model. The emerging new actors in this lobby were a more formal expression of the second wave of feminist campaigners who had childcare as a central demand to enable women's economic independence from the male breadwinner (Randall 2000: 65 - 66).

In addition to the rise of single parenthood, the rates of divorce, re-marriage and co-habitation also rose significantly in post-War Britain (Eisenstadt and Oppenheim 2019: 16). These changes signalled a broader decoupling of marriage and parenthood. In time this

fracture was recognised by policymakers and led to several significant pieces of legislation in the late 1960s and early 1970s (see *Table 1*). Collectively there was recognition from policymakers that the family was not the source of stability it had previously been conceptualised as, at least in public policy terms. These measures sat uneasily with the MBM upon which the welfare state had been initially founded. Increasing numbers of people were beginning to fall outside of the traditional family mould. The thread which connects the pieces of legislation is a growing autonomy for women, both in terms of reproductive and economic rights (Ringen 1997: 33). In 1967 two significant pieces of legislation (the Abortion Act and the Family Planning Act) granted women greater reproductive choice. By the 1970s women's economic rights, including their protection in the workplace, were also being brought into the mainstream of public policy. 1970 saw the introduction of separate tax assessments for husband and wife (and abolished the Married Men's Allowance) and saw for the first time in law the commitment to equal pay for work of equal value. The 1975 Employment Protection Act conferred some maternity rights to women and 1976 also saw women receive the right to be reinstated to their place of work after maternity leave, subject to certain provisions. Women began to be conceptualised, in law at least, as economic actors in their own right and not merely dependants of their husbands (Cowman 2005: 2).

Attention to state provision of family benefits was limited within this period. Between 1948 – 1977 pensions and other mainstream benefits were uprated 19 times. In comparison, Family Allowance was only uprated on six occasions (M. Phillips 1978: 532). The relative lack of resourcing afforded to the Family Allowance further underlines the limited parameters within which family policy was operating. It still existed outside the mainstream of public policy. These benefits, whilst framed in their introduction as child poverty alleviation measures, did not contribute to this goal in any meaningful way and certainly did not allow for a reframing of the dependency between state, husband, wife and child.

By the mid 1970s the Labour government began to take steps, when combined with the legislation outlined above (and in *Table 1*), which marked the beginning of the state acknowledging that the family was not a homogenous entity but a diverse and evolving unit of society. In 1977 the government scrapped Family Allowance and replaced it with Child

Benefit. This benefit was non-means tested, paid directly to the mother and initially paid at a lower rate for the first child and at a higher rate thereafter. This was amended in 1978 to a flat rate for all children and finally in 1991 was paid at a higher rate to first children and lower to subsequent children. Nevertheless, it was shaped in a similar vein to the Family Allowance, particularly evident through the ongoing concern over work incentivisation for parents (as seen with the alterations of the benefit rate in the first few years). But it was now explicitly child centred with child poverty alleviation as its central goal. Women, whilst in direct receipt of the benefit, were still viewed by the state as the conduits to maintain the next generation; a benefit with explicit social investment framing. 1977 also saw the introduction of Child Special Allowance paid to divorced women who were not cohabiting or remarried and the Widowed Mother's Allowance. Again both are framed in terms of the increased threat of poverty to these familial groupings. These payments did, nevertheless, unambiguously acknowledge that families were often not the cardboard cut-out version public policy had previously been designed in relation to.

1979 – 1997

Retrenchment and the role of fathers

The 1970s were the decade where the post-War Keynesian settlement fractured and a retrenchment, or at least a halting of, welfare state expansion occurred (Pierson 1995: 1). This was not a period of intense development in the UK family policy agenda. It did, however, mark the election of the UK's first woman Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher: a Prime Minister that likened the nation's finances to a family budget (Ringen 1997: 33). The idea of the family as the "cornerstone of society" had been central to the 1979 General Election but the idea of the family did not translate into a tangible family policy programme (Somerville 1992: 113). Despite the legislative changes outlined above in the 1960s and 1970s (and detailed in *Table 1*) which recognised that the traditional family unit was not a true reflection of lived experiences of many, this period in office was characterised by a rhetorical hankering back to the 'golden age' of the family.

In 1979 the Conservative Secretary of State for Social Security, Patrick Jenkin, proclaimed:

> “Quite frankly, I don’t think that mothers have the same right to work as fathers. If the good Lord had intended us to have equal rights to go to work, he wouldn’t have created men and women. These are biological facts, young children do depend on their mothers” (quoted in Ringen 1997: 74).

Coming from the politician leading on welfare policy at the outset of the Thatcher administration his voice can be taken to be illustrative of the governmental new right ideology of the family. The new right ideology rejected the post-War consensus which had led to paternalistic approaches from government (Bashevkin 1996: 527). A new government may have been elected but it still operated with a small ‘c’ conservatism at its heart; typified by the separate spheres argument. This moralising tone not only came from government but was supported by a fledging ‘family values’ lobby, bolstered in part by attachment theory; the necessity of maternal care in early childhood for developmental progress, popularised by John Bowlby in the 1970s (Franzblau 2002: 96). For example, Family Concern, Child and Family Protection and Christian Social Action became powerful insider public policy actors with significant crossover in personnel with the right of the Conservative Party (Somerville 1992: 100). These groups all advocated for the maintenance of a ‘traditional’ family unit. This was also, however, a time which began to see the bifurcation of attitudes towards gender roles within the policy community, such as the establishment of the Working Mothers’ Association in 1984 and the Daycare Trust in 1986. These latter groups were at a distinct disadvantage as unlike the ‘moral lobby’ they did not have the ear of the government. In the departmental court of Westminster the ‘moral lobby’ had the ear of power and enabled an entrenchment of the MBM ideal.

Childcare was beginning to be recognised as a policy concern at a national level due to the rising tide of women’s employment. Women’s employment was growing due to a variety of factors including a decline in manufacturing in the UK with traditional ‘family wage’ jobs disappearing and the rise of the service economy (Beyeler and Annesley 2011: 86; Orloff 2012: 257). Service sector jobs were often low-paid, part-time roles which disproportionately were taken up by women who needed a degree of flexibility to balance employment and care work. The ‘family wage’ had effectively collapsed, meaning the MBM

was becoming even more divorced from the reality of the family's lived experience but neither the state, nor the market, provided sufficient provision of childcare services to support this new reality. The only action taken in this area by government was framed as an anti-child poverty measure, not one which effectively facilitated sustained labour market engagement for women (Randall 2000: 64 - 65). The 1980 Education Act gave local authorities responsibility for nursery education but this power was discretionary and further reinforced the variable levels and quality of provision already available. Women were increasingly reliant on the market for material maintenance and this derisory measure did little to support this reconfiguration.

In opposition to the Thatcherite family policy agenda (or lack thereof), the Labour Party began to develop their childcare policy offer. This was particularly evident at a local level where across the UK Labour controlled councils began to develop childcare policy as a mainstream concern. Known as "municipal feminism" this policy drive framed the importance of childcare both in terms of facilitating women's economic independence from the male breadwinner model and for quality provision to enable children's development (Cowman 2022: 192 - 193; Randall 2000: 103). This was a novel approach in UK public policy. Yet, given the strong institutional constraints placed upon state and local government spending by the national government, any significant expansion of childcare at local level was limited. Even with this push from municipal leadership in Labour councils daycare places in England still declined overall from 28,437 in 1980 to 27,039 in 1991 (Randall 2000: 81). Alongside its municipal efforts, feminist actors within the Labour Party nationally had also started to incorporate concerns over childcare provision into their policy platform. For instance, 1982 marked the first party document, *Labour's Programme*, that specifically addressed 'women's needs', which incorporated a call for a large-scale increase in childcare provision.[2] 1985 also saw the Labour Party Workplace Nurseries Campaign. This movement within the party was to develop through its period in opposition and will be explored further in the empirical chapters.

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[2] The Labour Party. 1982. *Labour's Programme*. Labour Party General Secretary Archive. Labour History Archive and Study Centre.

The most significant change in the post-1979 period came with fathers entering the family policy agenda. Prior to the late 1980s fathers had not been explicitly targeted in any form of policy relating to the family. They were conceived of as the economic head of the family and were not deemed a site for state intervention. But the only major intervention in family policy under Thatcherism was the establishment of the Child Support Agency (CSA), made into law under her successor John Major. The introduction of the CSA reframed the family policy debate in terms of parental responsibility and was the first significant step in bringing the private sphere into the public realm. Through the CSA the government wished to transfer the financial burden of one parent families from the state back to, in the majority of cases, the father (Eisenstadt and Oppenheim 2019: 66). Its 'necessity' reflected the rise in single parent families and their ever-increasing maintenance burden on the state. For example, 1981 had seen the introduction of One Parent Benefit, thereby increasing the state's role in maintenance of the family. Whilst the government was still following its policy of state retrenchment, it had also chosen to directly intervene in the life of the family in a particularly invasive way (Ringen 1997: 93). Such intervention had previously only been seen when the state had to step in to protect the safety of children. The state was exerting an unprecedented level of power over the previously private sphere of the family. Whilst an unprecedented and interventionist step, the CSA existed within the parameters of the 'golden age' of the family. It served as a corrective on fathers who did not contribute financially that is, to act as their families' breadwinner. The CSA underlined, then, that the primary responsibility for maintenance of the family was not to be found with the state.

John Major's government provided concrete steps upon which the succeeding Labour government would build, most notably with respect of the CSA and with its contribution on childcare policy. Whilst the impact was limited in practical terms it's work ensured that this element of family policy began to move towards the mainstream political agenda; a novel space for this policy area to occupy (Randall 2000: 172). The biggest expansion in this area under the Major government was in what was known as the 'rising fives' (Ringen 1997: 77). 'Rising fives' was when children started primary school a year early (at age four): a state intervention but one which utilised existing provision. Major had also taken a bold step in declaring in late 1993 that there would be universal provision of childcare for all three and four year olds (although promptly altered in scale to all 4 year-olds by 1994). The way this

would be achieved would be through the Childcare Voucher Scheme (CVS). This enabled parents to 'buy' childcare from prescribed providers. The vouchers only covered nurseries, reception classes and playgroups. The exclusion of daycare highlights the fact that women's full-time labour market engagement was not the policy goal. By now the reality of the majority of families in the UK bared little relation to the MBM. It was severely outmoded and the one-and-a-half worker becoming the lived reality of most families (Lewis 2001: 153 - 154). The CVS did align more to the one-and-a-half model by facilitating part-time work, primarily undertaken by women. Nevertheless, it was also driven by the acceptance of the educational arguments in favour of nurseries which were widely accepted by the early 90s (Ringen 1997: 75). Yet, given the lofty ambition of the CVS it was only trailed in four local authorities and did not include any government support of new service providers to augment the existing provision.

Thatcher's 'family values' approach, twinned with welfare state retrenchment, stalled any substantial development in welfare state organisation but the modest progression made under Major began to draw in family policy to the mainstream of UK public policy but did not fundamentally challenge the existing relationships between the family, state and the market at that time. Nevertheless, supranational movement did signal a wider change. In 1994 the Pregnant Workers' Directive was introduced by the EU. Maternity rights in the UK were minimal prior to the implementation of the Directive, and whilst the Directive was not comprehensive in its scope it did raise the floor for standards in the UK (Ringen 1997: 50). The 1994 EU Pregnant Workers' Directive introduced the right to statutory maternity pay, the right not to be refused time off for antenatal care, the right to complain regarding unfair dismissal and the right to return to work with a previous employer up to 29 weeks post-birth. Although, when implemented in UK law these provisions (bar the antenatal care regulation) came with the need for a minimum period of employment from the pregnant woman's current employer. Again, as with the CVS, this interpretation of the Pregnant Workers' Directive did not create a substantial change to public policy but it began to bring working mothers into mainstream public policy discourse.

Conclusion

The development of feminist family policy under New Labour was made in the shadow of 20th century welfare policies. The dominant theme of the distant relationship between the family and state and the persistent notion of the traditional gender order were institutionally embedded. The emergence of the idea of social investment in children, in particular, was also becoming institutionalised. These ideas came to be policy frames which set the parameters within which critical actors were able to develop policy upon election in 1997. It is evident looking back at the 20th century that family policy was not central to public policy in the UK; for much of the century, the state supported a largely hands off approach following a welfare state model which was insufficient to effectively maintain the family, particularly when family units began to evolve into more disparate entities. Whilst there has been various interventions, detailed in this chapter, which constitute a clear encroachment of the state into the 'black box' of the family, no interventions were designed to alter the patterns of dependence central to the MBM. The family remained largely marginal to public policy throughout the century. The boldest policy moves in relation to the family, and in turn women's level of dependency, were seen in the last decade of the century under Major's premiership both through the CVS and women's rights in the workplace but even then these forays were limited in practical terms. Yet they did move these questions towards the mainstream political agenda. Moving from what was effectively a blank page legislatively, if not ideationally, New Labour created an active and interventionist family policy from 1997 – 2010. It is this move from a stagnant family policy to an activist family policy which will be analysed in the policy case study *Chapters 5* and *6*. The first of the empirical chapters, *Chapter 4*, interrogates the *how* and the *why* of Labour's feminisation, drawing on the altered and new forms of women's representation under New Labour, setting the foundations for understanding how the feminisation of the party impacted policy change.

Table 1: Highlighted 20th Century Family Policy Legislative Change

Year	Legislation
1834	Poor Law - *'poor relief' floor set for workers*
1870	Education Act

	- *universal primary education*
1902	Midwives Act - *regulation of training*
1906	Education (Provision of Meals) Act - *low cost or free school meals for those that needed*
1908	Children's Act - *compulsory medical examinations of children in schools and introduction of juvenile court system*
1911	National Insurance Act
1918	Maternity and Child Welfare Act - *local authority child and maternity services*
1918	Education Act - *local authorities to support provision of nursery schools for ages 2 – 5*
1943	Children's Allowances Act
1945	Family Allowances Act
1967	Abortion Act
1967	Family Planning Act - *local authorities to dispense free contraception and family planning advice*
1969	Divorce Reform Act (not enacted until 1971)
1970	Equal Pay Act
1970	Income and Corporation Taxes Act - *introduction of separate tax assessments for husbands and wives*
1975	Employment Protection Act - *minimal maternity provision*
1976	Labour Relations (Continuity of Employment) Regulations - *right to be reinstated at place of work post maternity leave, subject to certain provisions*
1977	The Child Benefit (General) Amendment Regulations
1977	The Social Security (Child Benefit Consequential) Regulations - *Child Special Allowance introduced*
1980	Education Act - *local authority conferred discretionary responsibility for nursery education*
1991	Child Support Act - *establishment of the Child Support Agency*
1994	Pregnant Workers' Directive (European Union) - *raised floor for minimum maternity provision*

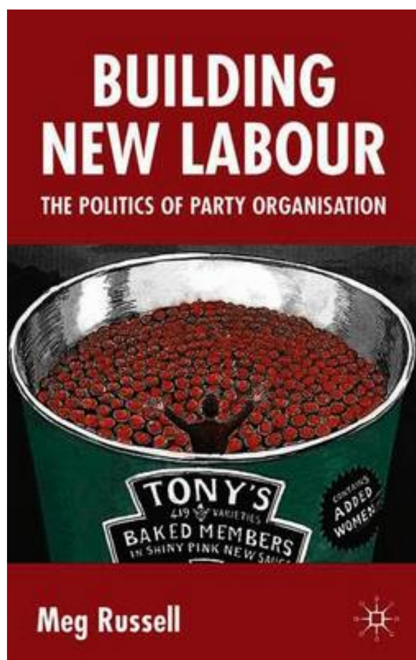
Chapter 4: Feminising the Party and New Forms of Representation

This chapter revisits the Labour Party's modernisation project and provides new, gendered insights into the development of New Labour. It provides a gendered reading of the modernisation process and supplements the mainstream New Labour literature with its focus on Labour in opposition in the 1980s and 1990s which is largely absent of gendered considerations. A more contextualised and agential account is promoted which is reflective of feminist activism within the party. The concept of the critical actor is then explored, expanding the original notion of who could be a critical actor to include the Labour Party actor Deborah Mattinson. The party's new forms of women's representation are most clearly demonstrated through the establishment of the Minister for Women and the unprecedented cohort of women Labour MPs elected in 1997. By exploring new archival data the chapter adds substantially to the literature on the Minister for Women. In particular, new detail and insights are offered on the diminution of the role in government from its origins in opposition, evaluating the shift from the idea of a full Ministry for Women to the reality of a post of Minister for Women in government. This is further explored through the lack of status afforded to the role by the "core of the core executive" (Burch and Holliday 2004: 4) and the civil service, as well as the impact of the formal institutional constraints on the post - aspects that are considered further in subsequent chapters.

Gendering Existing Accounts of Labour's Modernisation: Going beyond 'adding women in'

Much of the literature on Labour's modernisation can be considered to ignore gender and the role of women in the party (as indicated in *Chapter 1*). Meg Russell, herself a former Labour Party Women's Officer and adviser during the New Labour years to Robin Cook during his time as Leader of the House of Commons, primarily views the creation of New Labour through the lens of the struggle between the left and the right of the party (2005: 15). For Russell, Labour's modernisation has a symbolic and superficial association with women: captured in the now infamous picture of *Blair's Babes* (returned to later in this chapter). She conceptualises it as a thin veneer added to the finished product, with no

depth or commitment behind it (Ibid: 125). Russell's perspective is typified by her choice of cover image by the political cartoonist, Steve Bell, pictured below. Aside from clearly drawing on her thesis of the strong party leader (Ibid: 283) - seen through Blair's messianic pose - the cartoon explicitly references the role of women in New Labour. Women are notably "added" to the 'recipe' of New Labour, suggesting they are an 'add-on' rather than an integrated part of the "shiny pink new sauce". In this, Russell's account reinforces Anna Coote's work, which argued that women or feminist ideas had never been central to the New Labour project (1999).



Russell does, however, acknowledge feminist party activist accounts such as Sarah Perrigo's discussion of feminists who organised to change the party's internal structures and its policy platforms (1995). Building on Perrigo's work, I posit a more agential account than Russell's. This chapter adds further detail on the role of feminist activists in the modernisation process, acknowledged in alternative, more specialised politics and gender literature (for example Lovenduski and Norris 2003; Childs 2004; Durose and Gains 2007). Perrigo, herself a Labour party activist and academic, described the hostile environment within which feminists found themselves in the party in the late 1970s and early 1980s. She notes that the party: "[privileges] the male political actor and severely circumscrib[es] the activities of most women members" (1995: 408). That said, feminist party activists who wanted to feminise both the party and policy were able to bring about some change, albeit on the

party leadership's terms (Ibid: 416). At the cost of losing their "radical edge" (Ibid: 415), some women adapted their strategies to align with the primarily electoral motivations of the party leadership. The strategic support which is seen in the later stages of opposition in the mid-1990s may not have been the explicitly feminist arguments for justice that the activists within the party had fought for. Yet, contrary to accounts which marginalise feminist contributions both the face of and the policy platform of the party had undoubtedly changed to align with their goals by the time of the 1997 General Election.

Several women who would become high profile Labour women MPs and advisers during the New Labour years, are repeatedly identified across my interviews, as women critical to the feminisation of the party during its modernisation process, supporting the gender literature's attention to Labour women's agency. These include: Barbara Follett, Harriet Harman, Patricia Hewitt, Margaret Hodge, Fiona Mactaggart, Sally Morgan and Clare Short, who all figure in this and the following chapters. This is not to say that they operated as a formal group, although some women did form informal groupings, nor is it to suggest that they all focused on the same dimension of feminisation. In other words, it was not just one person, one group or one idea that put these issues front and centre of the agenda but various actors engaging in compounding ways.

To illustrate, in 1987, reflecting the desire to increase the numbers of women MPs, Barbara Follett (later MP for Stevenage from 1997) co-founded the Labour Women's Network (LWN). LWN was, and still is, an organisation focused on training women candidates for office. Follett recalled the galvanising motivation in the aftermath of the 1987 defeat:

> "'the only good thing to come out of it was a few more…a few more Labour women in Parliament. And I said that to Barbara Castle and she put me in my place by saying, 'Dear, we had more than we have now in 1945!'. So that's when I thought something drastic had to be done" (Interview 24 2020).

Conversely, Clare Short, first elected to Parliament in 1983, recounted a more gradual policy and organisational change, describing the late 1980s and early 1990s in terms of the party's focus turning to women and women's issues. "There was a tide at work, it wasn't just a few

people fixing it…[it was a] generational issue…an issue whose time had come" (Interview 13 2019). There was also an international feminisation of politics. In *Labour's Strategy for Women - a summary*, written by Short, during her time as Shadow Minister for Women, she holds that:

> "Women in the Labour Party have been engaged in a quiet revolution over the past few years. It is part of a process of change which is taking place in our sister parties throughout the world. We have won agreement that women, their opinions and needs should be given equal weight in the political process. The Party has therefore introduced a system which requires that men and women will share power as equals at every level of our organisation".[3]

Short highlights the importance of women's sustained pressure within the party for structural change to its internal representative mechanisms as well as recognising that this change in the party is not limited to the UK, but a pattern is emerging in similar political parties internationally. Short is moreover using her platform to ensure that the work of women activists within the party which laid the groundwork for this change is not forgotten. She notes:

> "In policy making the Labour Party has decided that it is essential that women are represented on all policy committees in order to ensure that the women's perspective is reflected in every area of policy…Long gone are the days when policy for women was seen as something affecting one or two discrete issues. It is now widely recognised that there is a distinct women's perspective on everything – from low pay to public transport to overseas aid".[4]

Whilst arguing that "a women's perspective" touches on all areas of policy *Labour's Strategy for Women - a summary* then focuses on areas typically associated with 'women's policy'

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[3] Short, Clare. 1994. *Labour's Strategy for Women - a summary*. Labour Research Department, Policy Documents, May 1994 – December 1994. Labour History Archive and Study Centre.
[4] Short, Clare. 1994. *Labour's Strategy for Women - a summary*. Labour Research Department, Policy Documents, May 1994 – December 1994. Labour History Archive and Study Centre.

including, childcare, women in the workplace and equal opportunities legislation. There is also an observable and ongoing opaqueness about what feminised policy would look like in practice. At one level the idea that women may bring a different perspective to policy design and development is not a new one and is of course central to arguments regarding the substantive representation of women's interests (A. Phillips 1995). However, "a distinct women's perspective" is a phrase which points to a singular, monolithic idea of what difference women in general will bring to policy. This, of course, lacks an intersectional approach but given this is a party document aimed at a generalist audience a lack of nuance might be expected. Indeed, the party's policy response was still limited in the later years of opposition, outlined in greater detail below. The party's greater success lay with communicating the image of a modernised, feminised party. These examples refine the existing literature of feminist activism, as they add weight to the argument that not only the feminisation of the party is marginalised in mainstream understanding (as noted above) but also a more agential account of the role of feminist activists within the party.

A Party Critical Actor and Labour's Electoral 'Women Problem'

In the face of four straight electoral defeats - 1979, 1983, 1987 and 1992 - Labour's leadership were persuaded that an extensive modernisation process within the Labour Party was necessary. Deborah Mattinson, then a Labour Party adviser and polling expert, convinced the party leadership to fully accept the need to feminise as part of their modernisation and create a specific 'women's policy' offer. Over a period of seven years she made the strategic case that the party must appeal to women; it was this electoral necessity argument which ultimately convinced the party leadership. Mattinson has previously been identified (Lovenduski 1999) as a key player in the modernisation of the party but in naming her as a critical actor in New Labour's feminisation her sustained interventions, understood as critical actions, take on a more precise meaning. I am thereby extending the original literature which focuses on critical actors as male or female legislators (Childs and Krook 2008): Mattinson is a party actor – employed but not elected - working to achieve feminist ends. This extension widens the scope of who can be a critical actor.

In her role as a polling expert Mattinson was invited by the then party leader, Neil Kinnock, to present on Labour's 'women problem' to Shadow Cabinet in 1989. In her interview Mattinson confirmed she made a strategic, conscious choice to frame her presentation as one of electoral necessity: "Fundamentally Labour couldn't win without winning the women's vote" (Interview 9 2019). As a communications and polling expert, her focus on the external presentation of the party is not surprising. Election results and the polls are a mechanism to gauge public support, and women were not supporting the party sufficiently at this time. By inviting her to speak to the Shadow Cabinet Kinnock was signalling clear support. Nevertheless, at that time, his influential, self-identified feminist aide, Patricia Hewitt, noted that the feminisation of the party was not viewed by the wider Shadow Cabinet as a priority (Interview 7 2019). She remembered this element of the modernisation process was perceived as a "side show" and not "core business" (Interview 7 2019). Despite this, Mattinson pursued her argument line by co-authoring a Fabian pamphlet, *Women's Votes: The Key to Winning*, later the same year.

With another defeat behind the party, the 1992 General Election, Mattinson was again invited to present before the Shadow Cabinet in 1996. Receiving a "much warmer welcome" Mattinson took the same strategic approach of emphasising electoral necessity, more pertinent than ever. This time she focused on telling stories and narratives from women rather than on the electoral mathematics:

> "…nobody was arguing...people were entirely sold on the fact that we needed to have more women, that we needed to have more women friendly campaigning and women friendly policies…. I don't think we needed to make the case for doing it any more. It was really about how you do it better" (Interview 9 2019).

In my interview with a former political adviser closely involved in the action it was noted Mattinson's sustained interventions were "utterly key in this…that was the catalyst in terms of putting it front and centre" (Interview 8 2019). 1996 was a significantly different context from 1989. In addition to the ongoing electoral necessity of winning women's votes, were (i) two changes of leadership, with Neil Kinnock resigning after the 1992 defeat, succeeded by John Smith who died suddenly in 1994, followed by Tony Blair; (ii) a more robust

modernisation movement in New Labour; (iii) increases in the presence of women in the Shadow Cabinet. Both Mattinson and Patricia Hewitt had also grown in seniority. Harriet Harman, a long-standing feminist MP and a then member of the Shadow Cabinet recalled Mattinson's intervention in her autobiography:

> "Deborah's research gave us the opportunity to begin to argue forcibly that, even if men didn't like the idea of women marching forward in the Party, they needed us to help Labour win women's votes. Without those, the Party would remain in opposition" (2017: 132 - 133).

Mattinson undertook critical actions through her sustained insistence for the need for a feminised party, working to influence the party's senior leadership institution of the Shadow Cabinet. Again, it is clear from this account that electoral necessity was the tipping point rather than a liberal feminist argument to argue for equality in representation for women and greater attention to women's policy concerns.

Wanting Women's Votes but Suspicious of Feminism?

Whilst the Labour Party's leadership had been persuaded of the necessity of winning women' votes, women still found it difficult to gain support for feminist policy development. Patricia Hewitt, working as Kinnock's adviser at the time office, reflected in a first-hand account on the challenging, if not sometimes hostile, environment in the Labour Party in the opposition years:

> "I felt again the deep frustration of being one of a relatively small minority for whom gender equality really was a priority…But in meeting after meeting, year after year it was women – notably feminist 'wimmin' – who kept insisting that women feature in election broadcasts, at press conferences, in policy documents, on the Shadow Cabinet and as candidates…until men themselves start to own the agenda, women have to speak up" (2014: 194 - 199).

When reflecting on the introduction of all women shortlists (AWS) she also noted reticence from those at the top who viewed it as: "… 'Big F' Feminism – and Feminism with pushy, middle-class, London women" (Ibid: 193). Similarly, and in line with Hewitt's frustration, Harriet Harman recalls this period in the 1980s and early 1990s in her autobiography, *A Woman's Work*:

> "Like every aspect of society, the Labour Party was male-dominated from top to bottom. Though we women worked hard as grassroots members of the Party, the decision-making was done by men" (2017: 44).

Supportive evidence for this claim is found in the autobiographies of New Labour's two Prime Ministers who felt no need to devote any significance to the part feminisation played in the modernisation process of the party. Neither Blair's *A Journey* (2010) nor Gordon Brown's *My Life, Our Times* (2017) make reference to party feminist activism either in the opposition period or when Labour was in government. There are no references to the increases in women's representation in 1997 and beyond, or even to the public's perception of the party as male-dominated. The greatest concession to Labour women's feminisation efforts is found in Brown's account of 2010 Equality Act, where he recalls: "It was pioneered by Harriet Harman, who had, more than anyone put gender equality on the map" (2017, 232). Brown does, however, reflect on childcare policy where the Treasury was highly-involved, a point returned to in *Chapter 5*.

The small number of committed women who were operating within a male-dominated party, were evidently doing so in an organisation which was not designed for them or accommodating to their vision. Another clear example, lies in *Integrating Equal Opportunities into Policy and Campaigning* produced following the 1992 General Election defeat. Dated May 1992, authored Kathy Sutton of the Labour Research Department, and intended for an internal party audience it argues for the necessity of the integration of equal opportunities concerns. Referring to the election campaign:

> "The Party failed to make use adequately of older women representatives of the Shadow Cabinet or front bench team. And those women who were placed on Party

> platforms were primarily of a younger age range. Research carried out by Patricia Hewitt and Deborah Mattinson following the 1987 defeat suggested that older women such as Jo Richardson had a particularly strong appeal for older women voters”.[5]

Part of a wider post-mortem, the speed at which this document was produced is of note. Again, Patricia Hewitt and Deborah Mattinson’s interventions were raised, showing that there was an evidence base to demonstrate that whilst the message is important, how a message is communicated is paramount. Nevertheless, as noted above, this had not been taken seriously by those in the Shadow Cabinet following the aftermath of the 1987 General Election or in preparation for the 1992 General Election. Only after the latest defeat in 1992 would their work be cited by the party and Mattinson was successfully able to persuade the Shadow Cabinet. *Integrating Equal Opportunities* also argues that the both the message for women and its communication are crucial considerations ahead of any election victory:

> “We need to ensure we have a positive message that is relevant to women, which is communicated clearly and at all levels of society both nationally and locally. This requires a political education campaign which encourages local parties to participate in campaigning around ‘women’s issues’ as central issues to our Party…We need to develop positive themes which attract women, e.g. the valuing of women’s contribution to society either through paid work or at home caring for children or the elderly. The Tories do not value women’s contribution, they fail to provide support to women who care for children, the elderly and they refuse to give women equal pay at work”.[6]

‘Women’s policy’, as discussed in this document, is still described very much in general terms. Even so, it marks an apparent galvanising of policy development, with many documents in Labour Party History archive dating from this latter stage of opposition from

[5] Sutton, Kathy. 1992. *Integrating Equal Opportunities into Policy and Campaigning*. Labour Research Department, Policy Documents May 1992 – Sept 1992. Labour History Archive and Study Centre.

[6] Sutton, Kathy. 1992. *Integrating Equal Opportunities into Policy and Campaigning*. Labour Research Department, Policy Documents May 1992 – Sept 1992. Labour History Archive and Study Centre.

1992 to early 1997 (as substantively discussed in *Chapters 5* and *6*). One example, can be seen in a related selection of documents making up the *Hearing from Women* campaign pack. As noted in *Integrating Equal Opportunities* the party sought to develop a political education campaign on 'women's issues'; *Hearing from Women* is the result. This pack (including model letters, press releases, a draft survey and discussion group guidance) was sent to all Constituency Labour Parties in May 1993. Margaret Beckett, the then Deputy Labour Party Leader, sent a cover letter to all Constituency Secretaries and Women's Section Secretaries. In it she writes:

> "I am writing to you as Labour Party members, men and women, to support an exercise to canvass the views of women voters. It is important that we continually monitor the attitudes of voters to the Labour Party, and maintain, both locally and nationally, a real awareness of women's concerns. It is also vital that we do so without preconceived ideas as to what we may hear".[7]

An explanatory note contained within the pack (from context, likely written by Deborah Mattinson) makes the rationale for this exercise explicit:

> "Winning women to Labour in the 1992 Election proved harder than we had hoped. Sad to say, we failed to gain women's support in sufficient numbers to win the Election. 'Hearing from Women' and other polling and campaigning will be undertaken to help us get it right next time…Women should play a leading role in the exercise since part of its aim is to counter the image that many women have of our Party as a 'man's party'".[8]

The survey from this campaign pack, to be carried out by party members, was not likely to produce rigorous findings, therefore it would seem it served another function. *Hearing from Women* can be considered to be a communications exercise from the *party* to members,

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[7] Beckett, Margaret. 1993. *Hearing from Women* - cover letter. Deborah Lincoln, Correspondence - 'Hearing from Women'. Labour History Archive and Study Centre.
[8] Mattinson, Deborah. 1993. *Hearing from Women, Survey Kit*. Deborah Lincoln, Correspondence - 'Hearing from Women'. Labour History Archive and Study Centre.

rather than *members* to the party - a signal that change was taking place. The electoral motivation and the stubbornness of the party's male image are recognised as being serious motivators for the party, which by 1993 had been out of power for 14 years. Taken together, this interview and archival data adds new and gendered insights into the traditional New Labour modernisation story.

Changing Representation - Minister for Women

The establishment of the post of Minister for Women is another example of the party's feminisation, this time in office; the institutionalisation of women's interests at the Cabinet table in 1997. This was an example of institutional change via layering. Whilst the Minister for Women was a new piece of the institutional furniture in UK government it sat within existing institutional structures of governance so could not be conceptualised as a more radical institutional change of displacement or conversion. I add to the existing literature through the use of archival data and my interviews and establish that whilst the Minister for Women is found *within* the complex structure of the core executive, it was not part of the "core of the core executive" in the New Labour period (Burch and Holliday 2004: 4). Under New Labour the locus of power within the Westminster system was No.10 and the Treasury. Moreover, the post was a clear diminution from what had been first advocated by party feminists. It lacked formal status, it was no longer the head of a Ministry but a 'second class' Minister who did not have a full, independent seat at Cabinet, and it was a post without policy development opportunities of Whitehall Departments with legislative and budgetary powers. It also suffered from an uncooperative civil service. Feminism remained an issue too: whilst the inner core executive was comfortable using women as symbols of modernisation there was a reticence to engage explicitly with the kinds of feminism found amongst some women MPs. This diminution of the role is an example of a gendered core executive where, as Annesley and Gains reference "women tend not to be allocated ministerial portfolios that wield the most power or resources" (2010: 917). The appointment to such posts reinforces the gendered power dynamics within the core executive.

- From Ministry to Minister

> "Can you imagine how different things might be if there were a special Ministry set up to cater for women's needs? Run by women, for women, listening to their point of view, giving them a voice in central government, local government, regionally and nationally".[9]

This transcript from a party political broadcast (PPB) for the Labour Party's 1987 campaign makes two clear points about the planned for Ministry for Women. First, that politics would be done 'differently' with women in power. Secondly, that the party had bold ambitions for the Women's Ministry. Whilst the latter were rather ill-defined, reflecting the format of a short PPBs, more detail was found in a 'Women's Launch' held by the party close to Election day. In the transcript of his keynote speech, the then Labour Party leader, Neil Kinnock references the then Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher:

> "She had a unique opportunity to make life better for the women of this country. An opportunity to bring women into the centre of political and economic life. She wasted that opportunity. Worse than that – as Jo Richardson[10] has described – her policies, reflecting her values, have made women poorer, less free, more insecure and more burdened than they were a decade ago".[11]

The unique opportunity that Kinnock is referring to is that of Thatcher being the first woman Prime Minister of the UK. Although female bodies do not always equal feminist minds (Childs and Krook 2006) Kinnock is alluding to the anticipated link between descriptive and substantive representation. He continues:

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[9] Author unknown. 1987. *Women's Campaign - Party Political Broadcast*, draft transcript for radio. *KNNK 2/1/82 Women 1986 – 88*. File 2 of 2. The Papers of Neil Kinnock, GBR/0014/KNNK. Churchill Archives Centre.
[10] Member of Parliament who served as the first Shadow Minister for Women.
[11] Kinnock, Neil. 1987. *Women's Launch* - speech transcript. KNNK 2/1/82 Women 1986 – 88. File 1 of 2. The Papers of Neil Kinnock, GBR/0014/KNNK. Churchill Archive Centre.

> "Every policy has a specific impact on women. And women are at the heart of our policies…We will strengthen the role of women – both within their families and within their working lives outside the home…We have listened to what women have been saying, as mothers, workers, carers and consumers about what they want for themselves and their children".[12]

Central to the 'Women's Launch' is the proposal for a Ministry for Women, which would be the home of women's policy in government. Kinnock states:

> "Women are at the heart of our policies. They must also move to the centre of Government.
>
> We shall create a Ministry for Women with Cabinet status which will:
>
> - Strengthen laws on equal opportunities
> - Coordinate the work of Government departments as they affect women
> - Ensure that every department – whether it is responsible for education, jobs, social security, transport or crime, is dealing directly with the needs and concerns of women
> - And to listen to what women are saying about our society and to ensure that their voice is heard throughout Government".[13]

One point stands out in this extract. Kinnock describes the new policy as creating a 'Ministry' not a just a 'Minister'. This implies a greater commitment from the centre than just the creation of just a single post. A 'Ministry' implies a larger function (and relatedly, greater power) including multiple Ministers, budget, dedicated civil servants and a independent policy platform. Noting that the Ministry would have "Cabinet status", without qualification, also signals that it was not envisaged to be given as an add-on role to a

[12] Kinnock, Neil. 1987. *Women's Launch* - speech transcript. KNNK 2/1/82 Women 1986 – 88. File 1 of 2. The Papers of Neil Kinnock, GBR/0014/KNNK. Churchill Archive Centre.
[13] Kinnock, Neil. 1987. *Women's Launch* - speech transcript. KNNK 2/1/82 Women 1986 – 88. File 1 of 2. The Papers of Neil Kinnock, GBR/0014/KNNK. Churchill Archive Centre.

substantive Cabinet post as was the case under the New Labour period. Stating that women "must also move to the centre of Government" points to a democratic deficit of women's representation despite a woman Prime Minister being in office. Kinnock also backs up his proposal by listing established Ministries for Women elsewhere, including France, Australia, New Zealand and Sweden, implying that Britain is already lagging behind comparative countries, signalling impetus for change.

Nevertheless, archival material points to the fact that questions were contemporaneously being raised regarding the Ministry for Women's likely effectiveness and power, and its capacity to deliver SRW. In the first instance, and whilst his opening states that "every policy has an impact on women" Kinnock then goes on to relate women's concerns primarily to the family, seemingly narrowing the scope of the post. Turning to the question of power, an undated handwritten note by Kinnock (although from context it is likely to have been written around the same time as the 'Women's Launch') lists questions and answers on the Ministry, likely in preparation for a press briefing:

> "Can the Ministry have real power outside a major Government department?
>
> If Labour's Women Minister were to be placed in, say, the Department of Employment it would be very difficult for her to have an impact on anything other than employment. That's why we've opted for a separate Women's Ministry. It will have <u>real</u> power because it will have the full commitment and backing of the Cabinet and the Prime Minister. And that's what counts" (emphasis author's own).[14]

Here, then, is a concern that the Ministry could be merely window dressing. A briefing note from Deborah Mattinson to Kinnock dated March 1987, three months prior to the 1987 General Election, refers to polling and focus group work undertaken by Mattinson on the idea of a Women's Ministry and women's campaign. It raises concerns regarding perceptions of Labour's sincerity in representing women:

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[14] Kinnock, Neil. c. 1987. *Questions on a Minister for Women* - written notes. KNNK 2/1/82 Women 1986 – 88. File 1 of 2. The Papers of Neil Kinnock, GBR/0014/KNNK. Churchill Archive Centre.

> "A very appealing idea, especially when the consultative nature of the Ministry is expressed…Lines like 'Labour, listening to women' and 'Giving women a voice in Britain' have researched well…Obviously it is important not to appear as though Labour has suddenly discovered women, rather to stress that the policies have been in place for a long time".[15]

This type of data allows us to look behind the curtain with regards to political messaging, begging questions whether the Ministry and women's issues would have been pursued if they had not done well in focus groups. As noted above, and given Labour's heavy defeat in the 1987 General Election, Mattinson's concerns were well placed. Despite the pledge to create a Women's Ministry and some policy ideas which would fall under so-called 'women's issues' the party still had a 'women problem'. Another piece of correspondence from the archive points to a continued tension between rhetoric and reality. In her role as Shadow Minister for Women, Jo Richardson wrote a note to the Shadow Cabinet to inform their Away Day post the 1987 General Election defeat:

> "…the Party's image remains largely that of a men's Party…our polling data showed that many of the women who strongly supported the Women's Ministry also thought that such a new and exciting idea must be an 'Alliance'[16] proposal".[17]

Richardson's intervention points to the fact that not enough had been done to shift perceptions amongst voters that the party had changed. The legacy of Labour's male dominated image hampered the party's communication message that it was the kind of party that would propose a Women's Ministry. Together these two women's interventions

[15] Mattinson, Deborah. 1987. *Women's Ministry and Women's Campaign* - briefing notes. KNNK 2/1/82 Women 1986 – 88. File 2 of 2. The Papers of Neil Kinnock, GBR/0014/KNNK. Churchill Archive Centre.

[16] The 'Alliance' referenced in Richardson's note is the SDP-Liberal Alliance which contested seats at the 1987 General Election and was initially formed by those from the social democratic tradition in the Labour Party and liberal supporters.

[17] Richardson, Jo. 1987. *Shadow Cabinet Away Day* - notes. KNNK 2/1/109. The Papers of Neil Kinnock, GBR/0014/KNNK. Churchill Archive Centre.

suggest that the Labour Party's links with women and their association with 'women's issues' was weak. Mattinson's stated concerns proved correct; and we can presume that Richardson's notes had a limited impact given Mattinson received a lukewarm response from the Shadow Cabinet when she presented on these issues two years later, in 1989, as previously discussed.

As is now revealed by my analysis of the Kinnock archive, from the very beginning, the Women's Ministry proposal was beset by concerns regarding the leadership's genuine commitment to making this an institution with real power. When the policy was actually implemented in 1997 it had indeed been significantly watered down. This was evident through the transition from a Ministry to a Minister, where the status and resources of the Minister for Women were often minimal. This move aligned with Annesley and Gains' argument that the gendered nature of the core executive is displayed when women are often not appointed to ministerial roles which hold significant power or resources (2010: 917). The *scale* of the diminution - the lack of resources and the perceived lack of power - would hamper SRW when Labour was in power. The literature surrounding the Minister for Women only briefly reflects this transformation (Durose and Gains 2007; Annesley and Gains 2010; Childs 2004). On arriving in government, the post holder would be Minister for Women alongside another Cabinet role, with little civil service support in respect of the former. The creation of a junior minister was only granted (without pay) after protestations from the original Minister, Harriet Harman, in 1997. Other failings query the commitment to genuinely ensure women's interests were represented at the heart of government. When compared with the ideas contained in the 'Women's Launch' (referenced above) in opposition to what was enacted in government the change is stark. For instance, the lack of pay for the first junior Minister, outlined below, jars with Kinnock's first point referenced in his 'Women's Launch' (noted on pp 76 - 77 above) - to work towards strengthening equal opportunities legislation. The second point he noted on the role coordinating and mainstreaming are certainly functions which were seen in practice in government yet they are two points which require little in the way of resources and are less tangible ways to measure success. The final idea from the 'Women's Launch' was the Ministry engaging with the women's sector. As is evidenced in the interview data outlined below, when in government the Minister for Women was indeed a new access point that was utilised by

those in the women's sector and beyond to lobbying for policy change. In practice, however, due to institutional power dynamics these organisations saw the post as a secondary access point because of the lack of legislative institutional power associated with the post, a point explored in further detail later in this chapter.

- Lack of Status Afforded by the Inner Core Executive

A common reflection in interviews amongst those who served as Minister for Women and their junior Ministers, was the lack of status and consideration afforded to them by the "core of the core executive" (Burch and Holliday 2004: 4). A new institution had been layered into the Westminster system but it was not, in many of these interviewees' opinions, *institutionalised*. Between repeated forgetfulness in the appointment process and a lack of concern regarding the signals being sent around pay, detailed below, a clear pattern is formed with women's representation given low-status by the "core of the core executive" throughout the New Labour period in office. Whilst individual elements of this forgetfulness have been described in isolation in first-hand accounts relating to that period (for example Hewitt 2014; Ruddock 2016; Harman 2017), these findings add to the number of incidents themselves. In doing so a richer picture is developed of how this post was perceived by this narrower, inner core executive through time. It is shown to not merely be an oversight in the first flush of office in 1997, the lack of attention continued for over a decade, demonstrating the work of a gendered core executive with little genuine regard for the post.

Several interviewees detailed similar stories of the lack of attention paid to the appointment of the Cabinet level Minister for Women post. For instance, Jo Gibbons, the former adviser to Baroness Margaret Jay who served as the second Minister for Women, recollected frankly:

> " She [Jay] was also made Minister for Women [*whispered*] *because they forgot to make a Minister for Women* and then they suddenly thought 'Oh my God, who can we give it to? We'll give it to Margaret…I don't think there was any thought [given to the appointment]" (Interview 3 2019).

Patricia Hewitt, who succeeded Margaret Jay in the post of Minister for Women in 2001 recollected a muddled appointment process too:

> "I was delighted to be made Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. The PM and I had a very brief conversation about what needed to be done and then off I went to the Department. And I then got a call which I think was from Jonathan [Powell] rather than Alistair [Campbell] saying 'Oh, we want you to do the Today programme tomorrow' and I said 'Fine, no problem' and whoever it was said 'They're particularly interested in the women thing' and I said 'Excuse me?'. And Jonathan, I think, said 'Oh did Tony not tell you?' and I said 'No', 'You're going to be Cabinet Minister for Women'. I was delighted, of course, but Tony hadn't actually mentioned it. I never told that story until after we left government but it was emblematic of what was going on" (Interview 7 2019).

Hewitt also recounted the story about the 'forgetfulness' of No.10 to offer her the Minister for Women post in a book chapter entitled *Gender Discrimination*, published in 2014. In her written account she is more explicit about the nature of why she felt this story was significant:

> "…I tell the story because it illustrates one of the main points I want to make: that gender equality was never a central part of the New Labour project…Despite the efforts of many women, over many decades Labour in government remained dominated and largely led by men – and mostly men for whom gender equality is not a central issue…Tony's real political passions simply didn't include equality between men and women" (2014: 190 - 193).

This is a stark reflection on the perspective of the "core of the core executive" during the majority of the New Labour period in office and links to concerns above regarding the level of genuine commitment to pursuing a feminist agenda by those at the centre of power (Burch and Holliday 2004: 4). Ruth Kelly, who briefly held the post from 2006 – 2007, also experienced a similar appointment process and recounted:

> “I didn’t know I had it at first… it was probably within twenty-four or forty-eight hours of getting the main role” (Interview 4 2019).

Ruth Kelly brings the total to three of the Secretary of State level appointments who were not informed of their dual appointment. Again, whilst the Minister for Women is part of the wider institution of the core executive it was not where the formal or informal institutional power lay. Those with power, in this case No.10, persistently showed a disregard to the status of the Minister for Women, it was often literally not worth thinking about. Here we see empirical examples of what Mackay outlines as “institutional actors apparently forget[ting] new formal rules and espoused norms, especially those that seek to redistribute power between men and women…” (2014: 555). The carelessness in the appointment process of Minister for Women could be taken on one or two occasions as an oversight, although one would struggle to think of an example of a great office of state being omitted from a reshuffle in any government. However, interview data shows there was a sustained lack of attention to the appointment of the role which had been utilised by the party as a symbol of renewal.

Joan Ruddock also recalled being assured by the party leadership, prior to election in 1997, that the Minister for Women would also have a junior ministerial post (Interview 1 2019). However, when in government Harman had to press for a junior minister. When this was granted the appointment was made without salary or budget (Harman 2017; Interview 1 2019; Interview 7 2019; Interview 22 2020). Ruddock, reflected that:

> “…the complete failure to appoint immediately a Minister for Women which had been a promise that sort of underlined the fact that this was not top of Tony’s agenda” (Interview 1 2019).

Again, this was not an isolated incident regarding the funding of the Minister for Women role. Meg Munn was a junior Minister for Women, from 2005 - 2006, under both Tessa Jowell and Ruth Kelly when they held the Cabinet post. When she was first appointed to this role it was again done so without salary, again the post was undermined with a lack of

remuneration. Whilst unpaid posts are not unheard of in Ministerial appointments, given the cap on the number of paid ministerial roles in government, it certainly created a disconnect between rhetoric and reality. Meg Munn explained:

> "What turned out to be hugely frustrating was of course…it becomes a joke, especially since one of the big issues was… in the Women and Work Commission was equal pay and yet you are not paying the Minister" (Interview 5 2019).

She went on to detail that it was raised with the Prime Minister as a concern:

> "I mean I did say to Tony [Blair] when he rang me and said 'There isn't a salary' and I said 'That's not a good idea' not from a personal point of view but just that it would be bad publicity" (Interview 5 2019).

The salary was granted six months after appointment and, given New Labour's well documented concern with image and political optics, it is revealing this clear communications gaffe was not rectified more quickly.

As well as the "core of the core executive['s]" (Burch and Holliday 2004: 4) indifference to the Minister for Women a further institutional restraint was placed upon the first Minister for Women and her junior Minister (Harriet Harman and Joan Ruddock, respectively) found in the broader core executive: the civil service. Harman served as Secretary of State for Social Security as well as the Minister for Women from 1997 - 1998. Reflecting on what she considered additional institutional resistance facing her, Harman recalls:

> "My top team of civil servants in the Department for Social Security (DSS) saw my additional role in Equality as unimportant and as a distraction from my departmental responsibilities" (2017: 197).

These gendered, informal institutional constraints, including civil service antipathy, ultimately hampered the effectiveness of the Minister for Women role. This challenges Annesley and Gains' argument where success is, in part, as a result of the resources "placed

at [the] disposal" of the Minister, particularly when the Minister has access to the a large Whitehall department with considerable budgetary power (2010: 910). Harman had this significant institutional advantage of leading a major Whitehall spending department. Despite having access to these significant resources barriers were faced in achieving the purported goal to put women's voices at the heart of government. Civil servants, as per the Civil Service Code, are bound to be impartial but Harman's account suggests they were acting in line with the "core of the core executive" tendency not to take the post seriously. By the time Harman was re-appointed to the role in 2007 she recognised a shift had taken place:

> "…[a] new generation of civil servants who were committed to equality and proud to work in the Government Equalities Office (GEO), a world away from those I'd met in 1997 who felt that being in the GEO was some form of punishment" (2017: 289).

Whereas in 1997 the Women's Unit was a small band of civil servants which sat within Harman's 'home' department, the then DSS, by 2007 the GEO was a department in its own right, with the power to bring forward legislation. As a result of these institutional changes by 2007 the change in attitude by civil servants is striking. Here we can see the formal and informal institutional factors working together; when the GEO was formed it had the power to bring forward legislation in its own right, a role it did not have as the Women's Unit in 1997. This bolstering of the formal institutional status and resources in turn impacted on the perspective of the civil servants serving within it. The change in formal rules impacted on the informal rules governing the behaviour of civil servants. That said, Harman documents that another important perspective had not shifted:

> "…the GEO was still seen by other government departments as marginal and inferior" (2017: 290 - 291).

This perspective tallies with the interview data showing the low-esteem the role of Minister for Women was often held by those senior politicians and civil servants elsewhere in Whitehall. Similar sentiments are found in Joan Ruddock's autobiography, *Going Nowhere* (2016). As Harman's junior minister from 1997 – 1998, Ruddock was also at the heart of the

action. As well as recounting the story of her position being granted without payment (as noted in the interview data above) she also felt slighted by those elsewhere in government:

> "…sadly there are too many men on our side [Labour] who think our mission isn't serious" (2016: 221).

Ruddock also documents frustrations with the civil servants supporting the Minister for Women at that time (from 1997 - 1998). Discussing a draft speech that had been prepared for the 1998 UK EU Presidency meeting in Belfast:

> "The language is inappropriate at simple levels with references to husbands and not partners and work rather than paid work (a sore point with women who stay at home to look after their children) plus the assumption that all women are mothers. Some major revision required and fast" (Ibid: 232).

She later reflects:

> "We'd all like to delegate much more but many of the civil servants are not on top of our agendas…"(Ibid: 242).

Ruddock's perceptions link with Harman's view that in the 1997 – 1998 period, civil servants were not enthusiastically mastering their briefs or providing the level of service Ministers would expect. Effectively acting as another institutional constraint, this lack of support from the civil service and from No.10, in the early days of the Minister for Women undoubtedly stifled its effectiveness.

Despite the low status afforded to the original Minister for Women by the "core of the core executive" (Burch and Holliday 2004: 4) and the broader core executive, through the a reluctant civil service, Harman did see the role as a driver of a feminist policy agenda in government. Yet, primarily due to lack of formal institutional power her ambitious programme was stifled. The gendered dynamics of the core executive did not afford the Minister the formal institutional levers needed to achieve substantive change, including

legislative powers. Nevertheless, the role did provide a new access point for the women's movement into government which had not been there previously. As Ruddock recounts, women's groups "flocked" (Interview 1 2019) to their doors in this first period. Women's movement groups saw the visible change in both the House of Commons and to the Ministerial line-up. Nevertheless, several interviewees (namely former Labour special adviser to the Minister for Women Jo Gibbons, former Minister for Women Ruth Kelly and former junior Minister for Women Meg Munn) noted that when the institutional constraints became evident, outside groups and agencies would view accessing the Minister for Women as a secondary point of contact. These groups would first lobby the Secretary of State at whichever department held the policy brief associated with their cause. This continued under Margaret Jay's tenure. Jo Gibbons, her former adviser noted:

> "say you're the TUC [Trades Union Congress] and want better rights for women workers you would go to the DTI, as it was then, you wouldn't come…I don't think…you would come to Margaret additionally but your main focus would be DTI. If you were Gingerbread [charity for single-parent families] your main focus would be DWP [Department for Work and Pensions] or whatever it was then" (Interview 3 2019).

Gibbons starkly sets out the central problem - lobbying efforts focused on where the power for change lay, and power was not perceived to be held by the Minister for Women, at least for the first term. As noted by Patrick Dunleavy and Rhodes in the core executive in Westminster systems Ministers will protect their own responsibilities and resources as a way of "safeguarding" their position (1990: 12). As a result, the view of the Minister for Women as a secondary point of contact is reinforced with other Whitehall departments being protective of their own policy areas. In the Westminster system it is difficult to achieve policy change without the area being outlined as a specific responsibility of the post. These formal institutional constraints were another element which limited the potential of the Minister for Women.

- Minister for Women and Feminism

New Labour's uneasy relationship with feminism was another theme which emerged from the interview data. This is of particular interest as, noted above, New Labour were committed to using women as a symbol of modernisation and change. In reality, this meant *women* rather than *feminists*. This manifested in different ways through the first and second senior ministers for women, Harriet Harman and Margaret Jay. Harman, a self-identifying feminist (2017) was replaced after a year by Jay, who was, as she noted herself, not a feminist (Interview 2 2019). Whilst little thought was given to Jay's appointment, noted above, there was certainly recognition that the explicitly feminist agenda of Harman and Ruddock was seen as a problem to the party. Harman and Ruddock were not in favour in the "departmental court" (Rhodes 2013; Mackay and Rhodes 2013) of New Labour. Ruddock noted regarding their relationship with No.10 that it was a:

> "constant battle…constant struggle"… [we were seen as an] embarrassment…muddying the image of New Labour…[and]…interfering nuisances" (Interview 1 2019).

This frustration with the No.10 machine in the first year appeared to be confirmed through other interviews. Fiona Reynolds, the incoming director of the Women's Unit (the civil servants who supported the Minister for Women) in 1998, recalled reviewing a draft report for the United Nations (UN) on the state of gender equality in the UK which had been written by Harman and Ruddock. She remembers receiving a call from a senior communications figure at No.10 who was unimpressed by the document's contents:

> "They were embarrassed by it; it was expressed in what was seen as old fashioned women's equality language which New Labour just did not like. I got the impression that having set up the Women's Unit they were probably regretting it a bit actually by that stage" (Interview 6 2019).

The disconnect between New Labour wishing to use women as a symbol of modernisation but labelling feminist post holders as harbouring "old fashioned" beliefs shows the tensions which emerged when putting these novel forms of representation into practice. As noted above Harman and Ruddock had a long-standing and close relationship with the UK

women’s movement. Whilst Harman had been in Parliament since 1982 and had a number of high-profile shadow ministerial posts, she was not closely involved in the *modernisation* project of New Labour. This outsider status to the inner-workings of the New Labour project and her close proximity to the women’s movement meant Harman’s time in post from 1997 - 1998 clashed with the party leadership. The rhetoric she was using was not perceived of as befitting the modern image New Labour wished to project. This informal constraint of a lack of support from party leadership was evident when she was sacked (from both posts) after one year, due to the controversy surrounding a measure to cut single parent benefit in her post as Secretary of State at the DSS, a measure which impacted disproportionately on women. She also was hampered in her role due to a well-documented rift with her junior Minister, Frank Field (for a detailed account see Blair 2010: 217). Harman’s departure from government in 1998 is returned to in *Chapter 5*.

When Jay arrived in post as Harman’s successor it was clear that the party leadership wished to move the post in a different direction. As discussed, Jay was not a feminist and she noted that she was explicitly told by No.10 that this was a secondary role to her other role of Leader of the House of Lords (Interview 2 2019). Gibbons, Jay’s adviser recalls:

> “the ‘sisters’ as I call them didn’t like the fact that Margaret got the job because, you know, she wasn’t one of them and she wasn’t going to do it the way they thought it should be done…Margaret was not in their mould. So they [Harman and Ruddock] were the sort of classic kind of left feminist that comes through the labour movement. Margaret wasn’t that ” (Interview 3 2019).

Jay’s appointment to Minister for Women, whilst not a priority for No.10, did form a different approach from the original Ministerial team. Fiona Reynolds confirmed this by reflecting on the move of the Women’s Unit to the Cabinet Office from Harman’s ‘home department’ of Social Security. She described this move as a “restart” (Interview 6 2019) for the Minister for Women and the agenda the Ministerial team would pursue:

> “And what we decided to do was basically turn the women’s agenda from a sort of special pleading, you know ‘We need to be listened to’ to ‘Come on, we’re half the

> population and doing all these extraordinary things, the workplace needs us, families need us, the system needs us. Let's value what women do, let's recognise what women do, listen to what women want and the world will be a better place'. So it was suddenly a much more optimistic and a much more outward facing generous agenda… we just said 'We've got to reinvent it, reframe it… represent it'. So we kicked off a whole load of work on work/life balance, equal pay etc but not in the mode of women demand equal pay but why equal pay would benefit the economy and society" (Interview 6 2019).

This description provides a major reframing from the original goals of the Minister for Women and situates the role of the Minister as one who makes a case for gender equality not on the basis of gender justice but one rooted in the 'business case'. The situation of women as relational to the workplace, their roles in families and the wider "system" characterises women not as worthy of consideration as ends in themselves but deserving a hearing as those who uphold other societal structures (Interview 6 2019). Jay took this policy space and reframed it. In so doing she institutionalised a different set of ideas which set the parameters for policy development under her tenure. She set what was "acceptable and possible to say on a certain issue" (Erikson 2015: 459). This aligns to Lister's *Children (but not women) First* thesis where the use of social investment as a policy frame led to the centring of children as policy targets in both policy development and output, to the marginalisation of women as policy targets (2006: 315). This point is returned to in greater depth in the next chapter.

Additionally, it adds nuance to the existing understanding surrounding feminism and New Labour. As was noted at the outset of this chapter Perrigo argues that feminists lost their "radical edge"(1995: 415) in this period by aligning their goals to the goals of the leadership. However, in this case the feminists themselves did not lose their radical edge (they had tried to pursue it in that first year as Minister for Women and junior Minister) but instead they had this role taken from them through the appointment of Jay to the post. This marginalisation of women's interests will be returned to in the policy case study chapters of this thesis. Whilst described as "more optimistic" by Fiona Reynolds the 'business case' reframing could also be viewed as more palatable to the senior figures in the party at the

time (Interview 6 2019). Whereas the original post holders strained against the institutional constraints they faced in order to achieve policy change Jay was more aligned with this perspective. Gibbons recalls:

> "Yeah I think Margaret felt that violence against women should be a Home Office priority in connection with the DWP, or whatever it was called then, where it was relevant. She really tried to think about her role as a cross-cutting person. So what was something she could do that was cross-cutting that wasn't really clearly the responsibility of another Department" (Interview 3 2019).

The location of the Minister for Women's civil servants is raised again in this statement. Despite the Women's Unit moving from the DSS (where Harman was based) to the Cabinet Office (the Department which supports the Prime Minister and Cabinet in their duties), i.e. closer to the *locus* of power in the Westminster system, the agenda was deemed low priority even by the Minister for Women. This conclusion bolsters Annesley and Gains' work (2010) on the gendered core executive, which argues that without the resources and relationships afforded to the Minister by the core executive it would be unable to be a post of any significance. However, their argument does not account for the role of the individual actor in post. In this case Jay herself viewed the work of the Minister for Women as low status and low priority. Whilst institutional change had taken place, a form of gradualist institutional layering, the new institution itself was not enough itself to create tangible change to women's representation. As a result, the resources and relationships that come from the core executive is shown to be of importance but not the only requirement for success, a point returned to in greater detail in *Chapters 5* and *6*.

The 101 Women MPs: a 'symbolic' critical mass

’Blair’s Babes’ in 1997 (BBC News 2007)

Beyond the new form of representation found in the Minister for Women there was also the striking descriptive change in representation in 1997 with the election of an unprecedented 101 Labour women MPs. Interviewees repeatedly referenced the culture change in Parliament as a result of this change and the impact of what they described as a ‘critical mass’ of women had on policy. Visibly altering the House of Commons, the women MPs created an environment within which aspirant feminist critical actors were able to pursue the substantive representation of women. In particular, my interviewees suggested that this group of Labour women MPs constituted a psychological support to feminist critical actors, a claim explored in further detail in *Chapters 5* and *6*. Paul Chaney (2012, see *Chapter 2)* built upon the concept of critical mass by advancing the argument that there is a mutually reinforcing relationship between critical actors and the women representatives around them. The image above was taken to celebrate the arrival of 101 Labour women MPs at the 1997 election. It encapsulates the historic change that had taken place in the composition of the House of Commons. 1997 was a moment of elation for feminists in the party. Labour’s use of AWS to increase women’s description representation had been a success. Much of Westminster focused politics and gender literature was attentive to this influx (for example Childs 2004).

Memorably, the collective term used by the media for Labour’s new women MPs was *Blair’s Babes*. Whilst the label devised by the *Daily Mail* is reductive and sexist, Deborah Mattinson, advising Blair on strategy ahead of the 1997 election, reflected:

> "the whole 'Blair's Babes' thing was very attractive. It was kind of sneered at but women found it very exciting and motivating to see a lot of women politicians, women who looked like them" (Interview 9 2019).

Whilst there are accounts of the newly elected women MPs embracing the increased exposure (see Lovenduski and Norris 2003; Childs 2004), several interviewees noted that as this very visible change had occurred there was a weight of expectation in terms of representation. There was an expectation that these women would 'do' politics differently in terms of how they engaged with the adversarial Westminster system and how they would pursue new and different policy objectives from their male counterparts. This pressure of expectation was not new for women MPs. Krista Cowman notes that women MPs elected in the inter-War period reported "the weight of expectations on them, which exceeded those attached to men" (2010: 124). At over half a century later one interviewee, Fiona Mactaggart, who was elected for the first time in 1997 recalled the pressure:

> "it [the Blair's Babes photo] looked like pilot fish around a shark…every woman thought that the thing they thought would be different by having women there would happen. And we didn't name what we were going to achieve, unlike that Pledge Card which really minimised the expectations, actually that photograph maximised expectations" (Interview 22 2020).

Mactaggart, in particular, was concerned about the continued media interest in these new representatives: "…I was terrified that the tabloids would, after 1000 days of Labour, do a 'they're just pointless' you know 'a bunch of tarts showing off'" (Interview 22 2020). She felt she had to prove the impact she and her female colleagues were making, a pressure that was not placed upon the typical (read male) politician. As a result she felt compelled to undertake research to prove the difference that women MPs were making in politics:

> "So I was doing research on what we'd achieved and actually there was a whole load of chunky things I could show like the transfer in budgets from the men's wallets to the women's purses had been really quite significant. But also I phoned the clerks of all the Select Committees to find out what went on. And the Defence Committee

clerk was the kind of guy you would think would be clerk to the Defence Committee…a bit shirty. And I said 'Has having women for the first time ever on the Defence Select Committee made a difference?', expecting him to give me a rather reluctant response. And he said 'Oh yes, of course!' and I thought 'Oh, what?' and he said 'Well we used to talk about how big the bombs and the bullets were and now we talk about the families that soldiers leave behind'" (Interview 22 2020).

Mactaggart's efforts uncovered examples of the impact of women's voices on policy in the new Parliament. These women were existing within an institution, the House of Commons, which had until that moment been completely male dominated and their newness was being perceived as a "liability" (Mackay 2014). Moreover, as well as the engrained culture in the Commons the core executive under New Labour was still "blokey [and] laddish", as noted in *Chapter 1* (Annesley and Gains 2010: 919). These new women MPs were operating in a legislature which was male dominated but working with an executive which also displayed these traits. Building on existing literature that notes the considerable pressure felt by New Labour's women MPs (for example Childs 2004), my interviewees provided further examples of how this manifested and how it was compounded by the residual effects of the informal institutional gendered norms and overt sexism which made undertaking their role as Parliamentarians more difficult. Over time, the women's presence mediated the masculinised cultures found in the Commons. For example, Clare Short recalls the shift she witnessed:

"if [in 1983] anyone mentioned cervical cancer they [the male MPs] giggled, you know what I mean. The transformation was quite great. And the big influx of women MPs in '97 helped the transformation of the atmosphere of the Commons" (Interview 13 2019).

Barbara Follet recounted:

"… the men took us through an initiation almost of teasing and holding…when women stood up to talk doing…let me show you what they were doing [cups

> breasts]. And we learnt to fight back. So for a while I would say we were all…blindsided...” (Interview 24 2020).

Joan Ruddock also recalled how the parameters of Parliamentary debate changed after the 1997 election, when Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT - typically used to treat menopause symptoms) was discussed on the floor of the Commons:

> “… and that was due to the confidence…If you got up as a woman with only forty or fifty other women around you and six hundred baying men…so yeah, that [greater number of women MPs] was very good” (Interview 1 2019).

This collective change in the space taken up in the Commons post-1997 led to individual MPs to feel more confident, emboldened in what they could speak about in the Chamber.

Conclusion

The mainstream Labour Party literature tends to marginalise the role of feminists and the feminisation of the party as a significant plank of party modernisation. Where it is acknowledged it is seen as a purely transactional vote winning strategy. This chapter extends existing analyses - mainstream and gendered. Party feminists were central to re-gendering Labour's modernisation process, incorporating women and including their collective interests. In particular, the identification of Deborah Mattinson as a critical actor in convincing the Labour Party to take these concerns seriously has been a novel finding. Usually conceived as male or female legislator, the identification of a party actor as a feminist critical actor extends the original conception. The current literature predominantly focuses on the unprecedented number of women MPs elected at that time, as noted above (see Childs 2002, 2001, 2004; Annesley, Gains, and Rummery 2007), but a deeper understanding of the Minister for Women role in office is needed to augment this.

FI studies of the gendered core executive (for example Annesley and Gains 2010; Fiona Mackay 2008; Fiona Mackay, Kenny, and Chappell 2011; Fiona Mackay 2014) are extended

by the identification of multiple institutional constraints raised through my interviews and through first-hand accounts. The lack of status afforded to the Minister for Women is a clear institutional constraint spanning the whole New Labour period. This adds greater depth to current understanding of the relationship between the "core of the core executive" (Burch and Holliday 2004: 4) and the Minister for Women in the New Labour years not least the attitudes and behavior of civil servants in the early years of this post. Whilst a feminisation of the party had undoubtedly occurred during the years of opposition and into government, self-described feminists in the party and then in government, found both environments to be hostile to explicitly feminist goals and a strategic alignment with those in positions of power was necessary for them in order to make progress.

New forms of representation in government and Parliament following the 1997 General Election undoubtedly changed the culture within which women's collective interests were represented and advanced. In relation to the Minister for Women, taking a temporal approach has significantly added to the literature in this area, not least due to the number of both Cabinet level and junior Ministers for Women from that period who were interviewed. Utilising previously unused archival material the original proposal for the post was shown to be watered down significantly by 1997. Taken together, the diminution from its initial conception in opposition and the sustained lack of status afforded to the Minister in the early years of government, a lack of genuine feminist commitment from the "core of the core executive" is evident (Burch and Holliday 2004: 4). This chapter lays out starkly the lack of status. From the Prime Minister repeatedly forgetting to appoint Ministers for Women, not paying a salary for those in the junior post, as well as strong resistance from the civil service in the first year of the post and the limiting nature of the formal institutional constraints. At the same time, and as will be explored in *Chapters 5* and *6*, post-holders retained the belief that the Minister for Women had the potential to affect significant policy change. In this, Labour's new group of 101 women MPs was regarded as a symbolic critical mass creating an environment which emboldened individual MPs to change what was deemed acceptable to be discussed on the floor of the House.

Chapter 5: Policy Case Study 1 – Childcare

Introduction

> "From this Budget onwards, childcare will no longer be seen as an afterthought or a fringe element of social policies" Gordon Brown (*Hansard* HC Deb. vol. 297 col. 309, 2 July 1997).

> "In 1997, we had a patchwork quilt with lots of holes. We still have a quilt, but with almost no gaps and some of the patches are beautiful" Naomi Eisenstadt (2011: 162).

When Gordon Brown highlighted childcare as central to his work in the Treasury in his first long-planned Budget in 1997 it was a statement of intent. Childcare was no longer to be a "fringe element". By raising childcare policy Brown demonstrated that the Treasury felt it was within their purview. The second quotation comes from Naomi Eisenstadt, the inaugural Director of the Sure Start Unit[18] in government. Her observation was made after New Labour had left government in 2011 and aligns with Brown's assertion at the outset of New Labour's time in office.

This chapter uncovers the relationships between actors, institutions, and ideas which determined the development of New Labour childcare policy and makes four central claims. Firstly, feminist influence on childcare policy was potent in opposition through two major feminist critical actors, Margaret Hodge and Harriet Harman, and their influence endured into the first term in government. The legacy of feminist intervention waned over time throughout the New Labour period as a result of the dynamic mix of actors, competing policy frames and childcare policy's institutional location within the executive. Secondly, the historically entrenched idea of the traditional distance between the state and the family remained even at the turn of the 21st century under New Labour. As a result, because of this

[18] Sure Start, New Labour's flagship childcare policy, will be discussed in greater detail below.

deep-rooted idea, moving from what was essentially a blank page in public policy terms in 1997 to a comprehensive nationwide early years and childcare policy prior to leaving office in 2010 was a radical change. It constituted a step change in the relationship between the state and the family from what had come before. Childcare policy framing is shown to be particularly dynamic with several competing policy frames achieving a level of institutionalisation (Erikson 2015: 457) during the New Labour years. Thirdly, the Treasury is identified as the greatest institutional and ideational influence on New Labour's flagship childcare policy, Sure Start. In the first term the Treasury pursues a labour market engagement frame rather than one that aimed to challenge gender relations in relation to care-giving in traditional family set-ups. This frame is directly shaped by Harriet Harman through her work in the Treasury opposition team. By identifying this framing and coupling with Harman's focus on interventions which specifically targeted women, new detail is added to the existing literature which argues that the Treasury "sought means of eroding gender inequalities" (Coates and Oettinger 2007: 122). Finally, and relatedly, the increasing dominance of the social investment framing in the second and third terms pursued by both the Treasury and the Department of Children, Schools and Families led to a dilution of feminist influence in childcare policy. This adds further empirical weight to the literature which argues that the needs of women were marginalised under New Labour by the needs of children (Lister 2006; Featherstone 2006). Although a marginalisation did take place, by 2010 the universalisation of Sure Start had created an infrastructure of childcare throughout the country. Whilst the policy frame had altered from opposition and the early years of government to one which advanced the needs of the child, the resulting policy had become institutionalised to the extent to which childcare was effectively part of the "economic infrastructure", originally pursued by Harman.

Table 2: Key Childcare Milestones for New Labour in Opposition and Government

1982 – 1992	Margaret Hodge, Leader of Islington Council – runs precursor programme to Sure Start
1987	*Childcare: Priorities and Spending Under a Labour Government*, policy document authored by Harriet Harman
1993	*Budget Action for Investment and Jobs – The Childcare Deficit*, policy document authored by Gordon Brown and Harriet Harman
1994	*The Childcare Gap*, policy document authored by Harriet Harman
1997	Labour win General Election landslide

1998	Sure Start pilots begin
1998	*Meeting the Childcare Challenge* Green Paper published
2003	First Minister for Children appointed (Margaret Hodge)
2003	*Every Child Matters* Green Paper published
2004	10 Year Childcare Strategy
2006	Childcare Act
2009	Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act (statutory basis for Sure Start)

Critical Actors in the Development of Childcare Policy

The first argument of this chapter is that the influence of feminist critical actors was strong in the development of policy in opposition but was subsequently diluted throughout the party's time in government. This is as a result of alternative actors and framings as well as the position of policy within the architecture of government. The two feminist critical actors working on childcare policy in opposition and into government were Margaret Hodge and Harriet Harman. In this case the work of a council leader and a Shadow Minister show that where SRW of women occurs is not 'fixed', creating a 'thicker' understanding of the context within which childcare policy which was later developed in government. Whilst Leader of Islington Council from 1982 - 1992, Hodge piloted the pre-cursor to the Sure Start programme which would be delivered in government – a development which I return to later in this chapter. In opposition Harman shaped the framing of Labour's childcare offering, serving as the Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury from 1992 – 1994, under Shadow Chancellor Gordon Brown. In government she had further, although limited, influence on childcare policy as Secretary of State for Social Security and the Minister for Women before her swift removal from office in 1998. The identification of Hodge and Harman as feminist critical actors in relation to childcare policy in opposition is a new addition to the existing literature which had previously only identified Harman as a critical actor in her role in bringing forward the Equality Act 2010, and did not cover Hodge's contribution (Annesley and Gains 2010).

Margaret Hodge's influence on the flagship New Labour childcare policy of Sure Start was crucial. Hodge was part of the municipal feminist movement (noted in *Chapter 4*) within which feminist actors in local government put their feminist beliefs into practice. Hodge had

a particular interest in championing the development of a childcare policy. Reflecting on her time as a Council Leader she stated:

> “I like to think we invented Sure Start [in Islington]. I know a lot of other people claim to…I think we actually did. We actually turned it into practice” (Interview 12 2019).

This early form of Sure Start had been in operation since the mid-1980s under her auspices. As a result, Hodge had considerable expertise in this policy space. When elected to Parliament in a by-election in 1994, Hodge was asked by the then Shadow Secretary of State for Education and Employment, David Blunkett, to undertake a review of Labour’s Under Fives policy. Working collaboratively Hodge brought stakeholders together to make progress on a credible childcare policy which could be taken into government. Hodge recounted the collaborative way she undertook this process working with a “cabal” (Interview 12 2019) of feminist actors inside and outside of Parliament to develop the origins for a more comprehensive early years programme in government.

Turning to Harriet Harman, she is clear that the guiding mission of her political career has been to champion feminist causes and improving the lives of women. In her autobiography she reflected on first being elected to parliament in 1982: “…I knew exactly what I was coming into Parliament to do. I was there for women…” (Harman 2017: 68). Harman’s work in opposition from 1992 - 1994 on childcare policy should be understood in the context of this mission. Harman brought two key perspectives to her work on childcare. In the first instance, a re-gendering of economic infrastructure to explicitly consider childcare as a necessary tool to deliver a strong economy. Furthermore, Harman views childcare as an economic enabler for *women* not a policy space which can alter traditional gender relations. Her view does not actively challenge the traditional care-giving roles of mothers and fathers. As noted in *Chapter 4*, Harman’s role in childcare policy was curtailed due to her removal from office in 1998 as Secretary of State for Social Security and Minister for Women after only one year in office. This was largely as a result of her lack of favour in the “court politics” (Mackay and Rhodes 2013) of New Labour and short tenure in post. In office her feminist approach was deemed “old fashioned” (Interview 6 2019), as noted by senior civil servant

Fiona Reynolds, and misaligned with the New Labour image. Despite her outsider-status to the *modernisation* project of the Labour Party she did have greater success in opposition in the development of childcare policy. Looking historically, childcare as a labour market activation tool, primarily for mothers, has been evident in Labour Party policy development for many decades. Harman's long-standing commitment to this policy area is seen through archival material. A briefing note from Harman to Neil Kinnock, the then Leader of the Opposition, entitled *Childcare: Priorities and Spending Under a Labour Government*, in 1987 outlines:

> "Labour is committed to comprehensive expansion in childcare. This commitment was in our 1983 manifesto; it was reiterated in a *Charter for Under 5s* (1985) and the *Putting People First* campaign of 1986…".[19]

She goes on to detail how it will impact: "children, needs of parents, women and labour market access, job creation".[20] Further papers demonstrate Harman's continued commitment. *Budget Action for Investment and Jobs – The Childcare Deficit*, co-authored by the then Shadow Chancellor Gordon Brown and Harman in her role as Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury outlines a more explicitly economic framing in 1993:

> "Today we are identifying childcare as an essential investment issue. Labour believes that affordable, accessible, high-quality childcare, available throughout the country…is absolutely essential for individual opportunity and economic prosperity. Childcare is now just as much part of our economic infrastructure as transport".[21]

This framing is nearly identical to Brown's first budget speech delivered in 1997. The full quote of the opening of this chapter reads:

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[19] Harman, Harriet. 1987. *Childcare: Priorities and Spending Under a Labour Government*. KNNK 2/1/82 Women 1986 – 88. File 2 of 2. The Papers of Neil Kinnock, GBR/0014/KNNK. Churchill Archive Centre.
[20] Harman, Harriet. 1987. *Childcare: Priorities and Spending Under a Labour Government*. KNNK 2/1/82 Women 1986 – 88. File 2 of 2. The Papers of Neil Kinnock, GBR/0014/KNNK. Churchill Archive Centre.
[21] Brown, Gordon, and Harriet Harman. 1993. *Budget Action for Investment and Jobs - The Childcare Deficit*. OS Box 62, Pamphlets 362.2 – 362.33. Labour History Archive and Study Centre.

> "From this Budget onwards, childcare will no longer be seen as an afterthought or a fringe element of social policies. From now on, it will be seen, as it should be, as an integral part of our economic policy" (*Hansard* HC Deb. vol. 297 col. 309, 2 July 1997).

The influence of Harman's discursive re-gendering of economic infrastructure is seen clearly in Brown's inaugural budget. Putting a key demand of the feminist movement in the first New Labour budget, particularly given the evidence to suggest New Labour's hesitancy to engage with explicitly feminist demands, as seen in *Chapter 4* is striking. The motivation for childcare policy in *Budget Action for Investment and Jobs – The Childcare Deficit* is the changing patterns and shapes of women's lives. Childcare is presented as an enabler for mothers to return or stay in the workforce. This framing points to a family policy which could be more accurately described as a mothers' or women's policy, given the omission of men and their working patterns being conceptualised as a motivation, a framing also explored in the following chapter. The labour market activation framing is also strong throughout the document. For example:

> "…if we are to use properly the skills of our workforce…Britain's childcare deficit must be addressed".[22]

The justification for this framing is developed further by Harman in *The Childcare Gap*, an internal party document written in April 1994, still in her post as Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury:

> "In the last fifty years, a revolution has taken place in both patterns of family life and patterns of employment. When the Beveridge Report provided the foundation for the post-War social policy, the pattern of work and families, was a working husband

[22] Brown, Gordon, and Harriet Harman. 1993. *Budget Action for Investment and Jobs - The Childcare Deficit*. OS Box 62, Pamphlets 362.2 – 362.33. Labour History Archive and Study Centre.

> supported by a nonworking wife…Today there is no pattern of 'family life': families come in all shapes and sizes and 50% of the workforce are women".[23]

The labour market framing is put even more starkly as she goes on:

> "Now that women are half the workforce we must have a comprehensive national childcare programme on a long term and coherent basis. Childcare must be seen as part of the economic infrastructure".[24]

This extract strengthens Harman's claim to be seen as a feminist critical actor in this policy space given Brown's direct lift of childcare as "economic infrastructure" for his first Budget. During her time as Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury from 1992 – 1994 Harman recalls in her autobiography:

> "I argued that the economic infrastructure we were going to invest in needed to include childcare as well as 'hard infrastructure' such as roads and railways...I pressed for it to be seen not just as social provision but as economic policy" (Harman 2017: 148).

She re-genders economic policy to place an evidently gendered policy area in the mainstream. One of the feminist activists operating at that time, Kay Carberry – the then head of the Trades Union Congress' (TUC's) Equal Rights Department – reflected on the enormity of this moment:

> "One of the indicators of how seriously the government took all of this was in the first Budget speech that Gordon Brown made as Chancellor. He talked about the need to establish a National Childcare Strategy…which for those of us watching that speech…greeted it with amazement and joy because we had been campaigning and

[23] Harman, Harriet. 1994. *The Childcare Gap*. OS Box 62, Pamphlets 362.2 – 362.33. Labour History Archive and Study Centre.

[24] Harman, Harriet. 1994. *The Childcare Gap*. OS Box 62, Pamphlets 362.2 – 362.33. Labour History Archive and Study Centre.

> working for such a goal for decades. The TUC first produced a report that…on the basis of evidence…argued for a national childcare strategy in 1976. So it was a long time coming" (Interview 21 2020).

Carberry goes on to cite Harman's role in re-gendering of Shadow Treasury policy as a key driver to get this policy on the agenda (Interview 21 2020).

Harman Sets the Initial Policy Frame in Government

When New Labour moved into government in 1997 Harman was appointed Secretary of State for Social Security and Minister for Women until 1998. As noted in the previous chapter, Harman's removal from government was as a result of the fallout from the decision to cut benefits to lone parents (primarily mothers) and as well as a high-profile rift with her junior Minister Frank Field. Harman was put in a challenging position to carry forward cuts to lone parent benefit in the Department for Social Security (DSS) given her dual position as Minister for Women (Childs 2004: 166; Durose and Gains 2007: 104). Despite its unpopularity in the media and amongst other MPs the "core of the core executive" (Burch and Holliday 2004: 4) insisted in its implementation to stick to the Conservative spending plans as they had promised during the General Election campaign. In addition, it has been reported in autobiography and memoir from Harman, junior Minister for Women Joan Ruddock and Secretary State for Education and Employment David Blunkett that Harman was repeatedly undermined by Field in post due to his perspective of believing himself to be more knowledgeable on the DSS brief than Harman (Harman 2017: 203 - 203; Ruddock 2016: 248; Blunkett 2006: 85). As noted above and in *Chapter 4,* Harman was out of favour with the party leadership when in office as her particular feminist approach was deemed "old fashioned" (Interview 6 2019) and did not align with the party leadership's perception of a modern party. Her junior Minister, Joan Ruddock, described their brief period in office as a "constant battle…a constant struggle…" (Interview 1 2019).

Nevertheless, before Harman's removal from office in 1998 she did have some, limited, success. Her influence can be seen through the labour market engagement in the green paper published in May 1998, *Meeting the Childcare Challenge: A Framework and*

Consultation Document. In Josefina Erikson's ladder of institutionalisation of policy framing (2015: 457) Harman was able to insert childcare into the mainstream political agenda. Harman's work on the green paper shows an agential account of the critical actor at work as Minister for Women, 'acting for' women, not a passive recipient from resources and relationships from the "core of the core executive". The green paper was presented to Parliament by The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (David Blunkett), The Secretary of State for Social Security and the Minister for Women (both posts held by Harriet Harman). Given the multiple Departments involved in the development of this strategy a broader approach is seen in government; childcare is not conceptualised purely as an 'employment issue', a 'women's issue' or a 'benefits issue' but as a policy area with many facets. This is the first time childcare is discussed with alternative framings in New Labour policy development. The publication of a national childcare strategy one year into government again points to a prioritisation of this policy area. There was recognition in the foreword, written by the then Prime Minister Tony Blair, that the government must support families in "new ways which reflect the new challenges they face" (Department for Education and Employment 1998: 1). The "new challenges" faced are primarily viewed in the document in relation to women's changing role in the labour market, referenced previously in the archival data written by Harman. Gendered norms are not challenged throughout the document. This is made more explicit further on in the green paper:

> "A lot of parents- *especially* mothers- prefer to work part time while their children are young so they can spend more time with their families"(Department for Education and Employment 1998: 9; emphasis added).

The assertion that "*especially* mothers prefer" to work reduced hours is not a statement which is evidenced in the document but one which is rooted in long-standing cultural and social norms and one which does not challenge traditional gendered roles in regards to caregiving. As noted in *Chapter 3* these norms were pervasive and set tight parameters within which family policy could develop. Whilst maintenance of the traditional gender order is evident, Harman was successful at putting childcare policy at the heart of government for the first time in UK public policy.

The ‘business case’ framing for childcare, evident in the document, can also be linked to Harman’s time in the Shadow Treasury team when she was arguing for childcare as economic infrastructure. It is made explicit within the green paper:

> “Four out of five non-working mothers say they would work if they had the childcare of their choice, and one out of seven mothers who do not have a job but want one see childcare as a barrier to finding work” (Department for Education and Employment 1998: 12).

Paid work is framed as the ideal and the government is conceptualised as a reconciling force to remove barriers women face in regards to childcare. Challenging the gendered norms of caregiving in the traditional family set-up is absent from the agenda. However, the green paper does go further than previous policy on childcare by framing employers as part of the solution. Employers are highlighted as having a “vital role to play in delivering the Strategy” and a vested interest in this area (Department for Education and Employment 1998: 40). Looking more widely than just childcare it is noted that:

> “The benefits to employers of ‘family friendly’ policies include the retention of skilled personnel from which to recruit and less stress and absenteeism among their workers” (Department for Education and Employment 1998: 46).

Framing ‘family friendly’ policies as not only good for the bottom line but good for employees’ wellbeing demonstrates that the childcare strategy, although heavily focused on labour market engagement of parents, was part of a more holistic approach. Upon her removal from Cabinet in 1998 Harman’s role in actively contributing to government childcare policy ended. Nevertheless, Harman had created a feminist policy legacy which set the initial frame for New Labour’s childcare policy. Her actions, particularly during her time on policy development in the Shadow Treasury team from 1992 – 1994 ensured that childcare became a mainstream public policy concern and not the marginal interest it had been previously, even when she was no longer in post.

Anxiety in Government

The second argument of this chapter highlights that as a result of the limited childcare policy intervention by the state prior to 1997 New Labour was radical in pursuing such an interventionist family policy, but this work was limited by the ongoing resistance towards the state reaching too far into the traditional family set-up. The "stickiness" of this long held understanding about the family/state relationship proved a strong factor in tempering change (Mackay 2014: 551). Hesitancy within the Labour Party can be seen from materials developed in opposition and moving into government. In a Labour Party pamphlet, *Parenting: A Discussion Paper*, written by the then Shadow Home Secretary Jack Straw and the then Shadow Minister for Women Janet Anderson noted during a discussion on the expansion of nursery provision: "Parenting is not an area into which governments should rush…".[25] This pamphlet was written the year before New Labour assumed office.

This recognition of an anxiety as to the role of the state continued well into the period of government. A pre-2005 General Election document, *Children forward not back*, includes a foreword by the then Prime Minister Tony Blair and the then Secretary of State for Education and Skills, Ruth Kelly. They state:

> "Government should never needlessly interfere in the lives of parents or children. The state does not raise children- people do. But government should not abandon families either…Parents expect government to be on their side as they bring up children: providing help, support and security for themselves and their children when it is needed. Labour acknowledges this limited role but also important responsibility for government…There are those who say even this limited role for government is too much; that any role for government is an intrusion into family life. We reject this view. It is borne of a belief that there is no such thing as society".[26]

[25] Straw, Jack, and Janet Anderson. 1996. *Parenting: A Discussion Paper*. OS Box 62, Pamphlets 362.2 – 362.33. Labour History Archive and Study Centre.
[26] Blair, Tony, and Ruth Kelly. c.2005. *Children Forward Not Back*. OS Box 62, Pamphlets 362.2 – 362.33. Labour History Archive and Study Centre.

Whilst Blair and Kelly are keen to stress they understand the concern about the state's encroachment into the family they do also temper this claim by providing a direct break with the past with the rejection of "there is no such thing as society". Whilst not Thatcher's exact words the sentiment being rejected is clear – government does now have a role to play in family life, indicating a clear break from the small government mentality of the 1980s and 1990s. The role of the state is clearly growing but there are well-defined limits – for instance, the state is not conceptualised as a provider of childcare. The anxiety of the government to be seen as an enabler of increased childcare provision, rather than a direct provider is seen throughout the second reading of the Childcare Bill in 2005. During her opening statement the then Secretary of State for Education and Skills, Ruth Kelly, stated:

> "Our aim is always to support parents as they try to make the right decisions for their children rather than to pretend that the government knows best" (*Hansard* HC Deb. vol. 440 col. 27, 28 November 2005).

Concerns about this encroachment into family life were not only coming from the senior politicians in the Government benches but also from the Opposition benches at the time. For example, in her response to Kelly's opening statement, the then Shadow Secretary of State for Education and Skills Theresa May picked up on the changing parameters of the state's reach into family life: "For the first time, we are seeing the government's involvement in the lives of our children moved from the classroom into the maternity room" (*Hansard* HC Deb. vol. 440 col. 37, 28 November 2005). The concern across the House is a demonstration of the long shadow of the 20th century's family policy where the state and the family were held at a distance from each other.

Despite the evidently sustained hesitancy around the changing nature of the relationship between the state and the family, alternative perspectives were present; for instance, Naomi Eisenstadt, the former Sure Start director, recalled:

> "…before '97 there was real concern about the nanny state. And somehow New Labour decided they weren't bothered about the nanny state…I remember Margaret

Hodge once said to me that she wanted the state to be a nanny and I agree. Everyone needs some help" (Interview 20 2020).

Whilst Eisenstadt's comment that New Labour as a whole "weren't bothered about the nanny state" is undermined, as seen from the interventions of the Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Education and Skills above, she does highlight that this hesitancy to move into the relative privacy of the family was not universally held. Ed Miliband, then an MP, but previously an adviser to both Harriet Harman in the Shadow Treasury Team and then an adviser to then Shadow Chancellor Gordon Brown, also reflected a less hesitant view during the Childcare Bill second reading:

> "In the nineteenth century primary education for all was accepted as the responsibility of government; in the 20th century secondary education for all was accepted as the responsibility of government. This Bill recognises that at the start of the twenty-first century we are embarking – I emphasize the word 'embarking' – on a journey down a road which pre-school provision will become a clear responsibility of government" (*Hansard* HC Deb. vol. 440 col. 71, 28 November 2005).

Framing this policy as sequential from past reforms has the effect of making this new phase of the relationship between the state and the family appear less controversial, merely the next logical step. In his autobiography, *A Journey*, Tony Blair reflects on New Labour's vision for the family:

> "The vision that was set was to: support families to exercise their rights and manage their own affairs while living up to the responsibilities they have; enable a work-family balance, by helping people move from welfare to work, improving childcare and supporting family commitments; and addressing the hardest to reach families by tackling the causes and consequences of deep-seated social exclusion" (2010: 642).

Whilst childcare specifically is not reflected upon at length in Blair's autobiography, he does outline a reciprocal relationship between the family and the state. Rather than the anxiety of how the state will be perceived entering into family life Blair views this as a positive

element of a mutually beneficial settlement; the government will enable families to better balance work and life, but they will also expect families to contribute through becoming socially invested in the workplace and in their home life, contributing to a greater whole.

Focusing on an alternative element of the state's changing relationship with the family two interviewees employed the same phrase – 'a new frontier of the welfare state' – when discussing New Labour's childcare policy. This signalled that from their perspective, childcare policy was a significant addition to the post-War welfare state settlement in the UK. This phrase is also found within the data from autobiographies and memoirs of the time. The first of those to use the phrase in interviews, Patrick Diamond, the former Head of the No.10 Policy Unit from 2001 – 2005, recalled:

> "…it [New Labour] had space, energy, an ability to focus on new areas like family and childcare policy which meant that the boundaries of the state were significantly extended… if you look at the 2005 Manifesto Labour's commitments to early years and childcare are pretty ambitious. And the discourse was about 'we're going to create a new frontier of the welfare state, the new frontier of the welfare state is not just going to be about social security and benefits, it's going to be about services to children and families, which talks about early disadvantage but also provides an infrastructure for families so that early years becomes part of what every child is entitled to rather than just kind of a slightly patchwork system'" (Interview 26 2020).

Countering claims of timidity or anxiousness surrounding government intervention, Diamond, when arguing against the neoliberal perception of much of New Labour's policy stance stated:

> "…I think one reason why I don't agree with it [a neoliberal framing] is because it underestimates the degree to which even though they weren't traditional social democrats like [James] Callaghan or [Harold] Wilson there was still a very strong belief in the power of government. And I think one of the core things that Labour did was it actually redefined the responsibilities of government to acknowledge that

> family, childcare and the wellbeing of children was a legitimate area for government to intervene" (Interview 26 2020).

The argument from Diamond distils the idea of New Labour acting as a distinctively interventionist government in regards to the family. When reflecting on this in relation to Sure Start, Margaret Hodge, the former Minister for Children from 2003 - 2005, recalled: "…this was a new frontier of the welfare state. If you look at my speeches at that time it's full of this…"(Interview 12 2019). This ambitious framing of a new frontier by Margaret Hodge was also recalled by Naomi Eisenstadt in her memoir of the time, *Providing a Sure Start: How Government Discovered Early Childhood*:

> "We were, in Margaret Hodge's words, delivering a new frontier of the welfare state. Schools had been in place as an expectation of what the state offers all children for many decades. We had no such public consensus or shared expectation of what the state should offer young children" (2011: 147).

Moving childcare policy to the political mainstream was a radical departure from the legacy of 20th century public policy. Nevertheless the scale of change in this area, particularly regarding the state as a provider of childcare, was tempered due to the anxiety some key actors felt at the state intervening in the functioning of traditional family life.

The Treasury and Sure Start – A Story of Multiple and Changing Framings

The third argument this chapter pursues is that over the course of the New Labour government the Treasury was the greatest ideational influence on Sure Start. It was an influence which did not seek to challenge gender inequality but one which aimed to increase women's presence in the labour market primarily as an anti-child poverty measure. Sure Start was a policy which was piloted in 1998 and evolved throughout New Labour's time in office and was finally given a statutory basis in 2009 through the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act. Sure Start initially targeted families in the most deprived areas to both provide childcare and to provide support and training to parents – from

parenting classes to skills development programmes to assist them into the labour market. These hubs were referred to as Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLPs) and incorporated community involvement in provision of services and on governance panels. The Comprehensive Spending Review in 2000 doubled the number of SSLPs from 250 to 500. Another major injection of funding was allocated in 2004 to create Sure Start Children's Centres (SSCCs) which saw more local authority involvement and a move away from the community based approach. By 2010 3,500 SSCCs had been opened, as promised in the 2004 Childcare Strategy (Eisenstadt 2011).

Whilst the move to the universalisation of the Sure Start programme constituted infrastructure building, as advocated by Harman, this was coupled with an increasing focus on the needs of children (over women/parents). This shift was seen through the stripping away of the additional services which primarily supported mothers. It is well documented through the New Labour years that the Treasury under Gordon Brown's Chancellorship (1997 – 2007) had an unprecedented level of influence across UK domestic policy (see Gamble 2012; Finlayson 2003; Heffernan 2000; Balls 2016). Given childcare policy in government was nurtured from the most dominant department it is a signal of the importance afforded to it. The literature surrounding the gendered nature of the Treasury's economic policy at the time argues that Brown's Treasury: "…sought means of eroding gender inequalities in ways that previous Conservative administrations had not" (Coates and Oettinger 2007: 122). The thesis challenges its central argument as the Treasury's interventions in childcare policy do not challenge gender inequalities in a substantive way but sought to ameliorate the friction *women* face in engaging with the labour market. Childcare policy again does not challenge wholesale the gender order which results in inequality but aids women to balance work and family life more easily.

The key actor at the Treasury during the New Labour years was, undoubtedly, Gordon Brown. As referenced above the fruits of Harman's policy framing were clearly heard in Brown's first Budget. In his autobiography Brown gives an insight as to how his Budgets were formed:

> "Budgets, as the Rev. Jim Wallis once told me, are statements which have an ethical dimension because they tell people what we value"(Brown 2017: 432).

From this reflection it can be assumed that Brown genuinely valued bringing childcare into the mainstream. This was evident in government as the drive to operationalise the flagship childcare policy, Sure Start, came from the Treasury. In 1998 Norman Glass, a senior Treasury civil servant, led the Comprehensive Spending Review of Services for Young Children. As noted above Naomi Eisenstadt, an early years specialist and practitioner, was brought into government to run the Sure Start programme in 1999 (where she stayed until 2006). Eisenstadt outlined how pivotal the Treasury were:

> "…the biggest thing was that the initial lot of £450 million didn't come out of Departmental budgets, it came straight out of the Treasury" (Interview 20 2020).

Direct funding from the Treasury indicated the level of involvement they would have. When questioned, another former senior Treasury civil servant, Nick Macpherson[27], characterised the Treasury's interest in Sure Start as being primarily motivated as part of a wider anti-poverty strategy, in so far as it was a driver to get economically inactive/underactive parents into the labour market (Interview 23 2020). Eisenstadt also recalled that Glass went to speak with the then Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Alastair Darling, to discuss Sure Start funding. Darling replied: "How much money do you need?" (Interview 20 2020). This obvious display of goodwill from the Treasury was surprising as Eisenstadt also noted that their involvement in this policy space was "non-traditional" (Interview 20 2020). She recalled, in her memoir of the period, that Brown saw Sure Start as a way to "carve out a social policy role at the Treasury…" – part of his domestic policy empire building (2011: 3). Here we see multiple motivations from one institution: anti-poverty, domestic empire building and the shadow of Harman's feminist infrastructure position. The Treasury's unprecedented power over

[27] Nick Macpherson held several senior roles in the Treasury spanning the New Labour period – 1993 – 1997 as Principal Private Secretary to the Chancellor, 1998 – 2001 Director of Welfare Reform, 2001 – 2004 Head of Public Services Directorate, 2004 – 2005 Head of Budget and Public Finance Directorate and 2005 – 2016 Permanent Secretary.

economic and welfare policy in this period provided an opportunity to create fundamental policy change, underlined by Eisenstadt, who ran the Sure Start Unit from the Treasury:

> "…early years was a policy free zone…So that made it a really free space to do interesting things. Yeah…it was heaven" (Interview 20 2020).

Characterising early years provision as a "policy free zone" chimes with the neglect of this policy space by previous governments, as explored in *Chapter 3*. The former senior Treasury adviser and Minister, Ed Balls[28], spoke of how fundamental this shift was in the Treasury from previous governments:

> "…when we came in in 1997 to the Treasury, working in the social security team was not career making and by the time we got to 2001 the whole agenda around welfare to work, support…you know tax credits, family policy…that sort of broad agenda that was run by Nick Macpherson who then became the Permanent Secretary. This was where the energy was, this was where people wanted to work" (Interview 19 2020).

This shift in power dynamics within the institution demonstrates how the work was valued internally. Social policy, including childcare, being where the political "energy" makes clear just how important the role of the Treasury was in the shaping of this policy area.

Competing Actors and Ideas

Harriet Harman's framing of "economic infrastructure" and Treasury enthusiasm for Sure Start to act as an anti-poverty measure played their part in making Sure Start a reality in government. Nevertheless, a repeated note from the literature on the origins of the policy is that the initial framing of Sure Start is contested (Eisenstadt 2011; Eisenstadt and Oppenheim 2019). By identifying and separating out the different framings it is seen that the initial feminist legacy in terms of policy framing, at least, was diluted throughout the

[28] Balls held a number of senior posts relating to the Gordon Brown and the Treasury including 1994 – 1997 Economic Adviser to Shadow Chancellor Gordon Brown, 1997 – 2005 Chief Economic Adviser to HM Treasury, 2006 – 2007 Economic Secretary to the Treasury

time in government through the move to universality which led to the diminishment of parent-centred support.

The then senior Treasury civil servant, Nick Macpherson, reflected on the contested initial objectives of Sure Start: "…[like] a lot of successful policies…it had a lot of…for want of a better term, parents…all of whom had slightly different emphases on what they wanted." (Interview 23 2020). David Blunkett was tasked with the implementation of Sure Start once the funding had been secured by the Treasury. From the outset he conceptualised Sure Start not within the narrow confines of purely childcare (or economic) policy but as more of a wider, community based initiative. In his memoirs he identifies tensions with others in government:

> "We have a little dispute running with the Department for Health and the Treasury about the exact nature of the Sure Start programme. There is a danger that it is just going to become an adjunct of childcare, aimed purely at the disadvantaged in the old fashioned, professional way…But the intention of Tessa Jowell [the then Minister of State at the Department for Education and Employment] and myself all along was that Sure Start would engage the community and ensure that it was as much about self-help as professional delivery, and that getting the wider community involved would mean that inevitably it would not simply focus on disadvantage" (2006: 156).

In her autobiography Harman acknowledges the competing frames outlined by Blunkett and recalls his approach:

> "[to him] childcare was not a women's issue, it was a children's issue…For them [David Blunkett and civil servants at the Department for Education and Skills] it was purely about a child's education and wellbeing and nothing at all to do with women wanting to go out to work" (2017: 198 - 199).

This recollection adds further detail to Blunkett's priorities for this policy area. Harman recognises the dilution of an element of feminist legacy, with the loss of women's labour market engagement as a policy motivation. While Blunkett was leading the implementation

of Sure Start at the then Department of Employment and Education Sure Start was being rolled out as a cross-departmental endeavour with the Department of Health. Yvette Cooper held the post of Minister for Public Health with responsibility for Sure Start at that time and is reported to have subscribed to the Treasury framing of Sure Start primarily as an anti-poverty measure through parental employment (Eisenstadt 2011). Blunkett went further to explain his perspective on the policy framing, aligning with Harman's perspective that he viewed it as a children's issue:

> "[from the start it was] a sure start for the child…a neighbourhood approach. [Professional services from the community] so they weren't coming in missionary style to deliver and move out" (Interview 25 2020).

This community approach takes a broader view than the anti-poverty strategy pursued by the Treasury. The Treasury's focus, particularly, in the first term of the New Labour government was to tackle unemployment and a key target of this policy was lone parents (Clarke 2007). Employment was viewed as the most effective route to tackle poverty therefore their interest (and the Department for Health's interest due to Cooper's lead) would have been less invested in the more holistic approach favoured by Blunkett and Jowell. Nevertheless, as Blunkett was the Secretary of State for the implementation of the policy, he may have expected his framing to be the dominant one, but the Treasury's unprecedented influence was recalled in his memoirs:

> "Gordon [Brown] had spotted very clearly that childcare was going to be a major issue for the coming decade, and it took me a little more time to realise that I was not going to be sorting this particular policy out alone" (2006: 28).

In 2001 Blunkett was re-shuffled to Home Secretary and as a result lost responsibility for Sure Start. However, when he was moved to Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for a brief period in 2005, responsibility for Sure Start had moved to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). When he regained responsibility for the policy he came to see it in a much altered format due to the move to universalise the service, which had already taken place. He described the policy as significantly altered:

> "It had expanded beyond the capacity to enable us to embed the original programme. So I saw it very much as children's centres rather than family centres, very much geared to meeting childcare needs rather than actually delivering on the building of capacity for the adults" (Interview 25 2020).

This substantial shift in policy is of note. The move towards a universalised childcare service fundamentally shifts the focus of the policy away from targeted interventions, such as parenting classes and employment skills development for parents, in the most deprived communities. The stripping away of the capacity building services for parents noted by Blunkett is of importance. These services, primarily used by mothers, equipped them both for parenthood and the world of work. By ultimately focusing on providing a quality childcare service for the early years (to the exclusion of the additional wrap-around support for parents found in the initial conceptualisation of the policy), Sure Start lost an element of its feminist origins. Mothers from the most deprived areas of the country lost the extra support services; universalisation came at a cost. The growing influence of the formal institution of the Treasury coincides with the omission of the community-wide involvement and upskilling. Yet, this is not to say this focus is necessarily at odds with feminist demands. As was demonstrated previously Harman advocated for childcare policy to be seen as a re-gendering of economic infrastructure. Sure Start's universalisation is surely an example of infrastructure building. Nevertheless, the stripping away of the additional support which benefitted parents (primarily mothers), whilst at the same time providing more and high-quality childcare add nuance to the literature of the 'children not women first' thesis (Lister 2006) of New Labour's approach. As noted in *Chapter 3* the notion of social investment in children was developed in the pre-War years through the Family Allowance as a mechanism for combatting child poverty. Valuing children as sites of social investment through more and quality childcare but scrapping parents' (primarily mothers') skills development and training supports Ruth Lister's argument to an extent. Whilst the feminist legacy of childcare policy was still found in universalisation, namely the creation of a childcare infrastructure, the removal of skills development for parents diminished the feminist legacy which supported women in deprived areas.

Putting Sure Start on the Statute Book

The service that Sure Start provided was enacted into law through the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009, towards the end of the New Labour period in office. The Bill was brought forward by the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), newly formed in 2007, under the auspices of its Secretary of State, Ed Balls. Ed Balls had strong historical, personal and political, links with Gordon Brown (who by 2009 was Prime Minister) and the Treasury. As a result, the influences of these experiences undoubtedly informed his position as the Secretary of State leading this new institution and the resulting legislation. Reflecting on the Treasury's role in regards to Sure Start, Balls stated:

> "I think one of the consequences of the Treasury embracing Sure Start in that first year is that we are undoubtedly influenced by that [child-focused] agenda… it would be wrong to say the Treasury loses its work focus as the Treasury is always very work focused in this period and the Treasury is also very 'childcare to support work' focused but over that period the Treasury becomes more concerned about the child. So by the time you get to the Children's Department in 2007, which all comes from the Treasury, that is a very child-focused strategy. You wouldn't look at the Children's Department and the way we thought about childcare in the new Department and think that was only about parents back to work" (Interview 19 2020).

This shift to what Balls characterises as a "very child-focused strategy", which is moving away from a focus on women and their labour market engagement, is evident in the interventions in the Second Reading debate of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Bill. The Bill covers a wide range of policy, as the name suggests, but the changing nature of the Sure Start programme is questioned even by those from within the Labour Party:

> Ed Balls (Labour): "A decade ago, there were no children's centres. There are now almost 3,000 Sure Start children's centres around the country. The next stage of our reforms is to ensure that every family can access the support of such centres. That is

why the Bill will enshrine in law our 2020 goal of ensuring that there is a children's centre in every community in the coming years. That is the way to ensure that the benefits of Sure Start, which millions of children and families around the country are receiving, are received by all children and families in perpetuity.

> Ann Coffey (Labour): Abacus, in my constituency, was one of the first Sure Start centres. Part of its success has been the inclusion of parents in its advisory body. I welcome the establishment of children's centres on a statutory basis, but will my Right Hon. Friend ensure that their governance arrangements include parents in the wider community so that services are developed in a way that meets the local community's needs?

> Ed Balls (Labour): …Every Sure Start will be expected to have a governing body and we need to ensure that the voluntary sector and the private sector have a proper voice if they are involved in Sure Start, and that parents are also represented. Sure Start is founded on the premise that it starts from the community and from parents' work, needs and interests—indeed, many of our best outreach workers are parents. It is vital that all services that support children work together effectively to put the needs of children and families first. Sure Start is an example of that" (*Hansard* HC Deb. vol. 488 col. 29, 23 February 2009).

Balls' response to Coffey's concern over the lack of community and parental involvement in the new form of Sure Start provision suggests that the governance surrounding local SSCC's will be professionalised through representatives from the voluntary and private sector. Leadership by professionals not community-based initiatives and parents, is what Blunkett, in particular, highlighted as a key concern about the policy focus. This definite shift cements further the Treasury's explicit and implicit role in the development of Sure Start, and by the end of the New Labour period in office, the Sure Start policy had undoubtedly become "child-focused' with the labour market engagement frame, (advocated for initially by Harman) coming second to this framing. Whilst it was the DCSF that finally provided a statutory basis for Sure Start, the Treasury's influence is undeniable in the development of this particular policy from beginning to end (notably from Norman Glass to Ed Balls). Here

we see the Treasury's influence superseded the initial feminist demands in relation to childcare, particularly evident in the latter stages of Sure Start's development with the increasing 'child-focus' rather than a holistic approach taken in the early years. At the same time, however, the data collected for this study adds nuance to this argument. Sure Start was indeed a policy with many competing frames which shifted in dominance throughout its development; nonetheless, Margaret Hodge's legacy via the creation of a blueprint for Sure Start ensured this policy was initially created as a piece of the municipal feminist movement. The legacy of Harriet Harman's actions in shaping childcare as economic infrastructure was also seen through the universalisation of Sure Start, but these feminist concerns began to be marginalised by the increasing focus on the child. Nevertheless, the long-standing policy development which contributed to the creation of Sure Start in government was informed by feminist activism.

Temporal Shifts - The Increasing Dominance of Social Investment as a Policy Frame in Childcare Policy

The final argument of this chapter is that the increasing dominance of social investment in children as a policy frame gives greater weight to the existing literature of the marginalisation of women as a policy concern under New Labour. As noted above, by New Labour's second (2001-2005) and third terms (2005-2010) a social investment framing became a dominant frame in regards to childcare. The literature has previously argued that under New Labour's welfare policy led to the needs of women in public policy being marginalised by the needs of children (Lister 2006; Featherstone 2006). This literature is now extended by this example from family policy under New Labour. This theme draws on the body of literature which details the substantial influence of the idea of social investment on New Labour and more widely on social democratic parties of that time (Giddens 1998; Esping-Andersen 2001; Midgley 2001). Taking a temporal approach, this thesis argues that the educational and developmental needs of the child were prioritised in policy framing, rather than childcare being utilised as a tool to ease women's unequal domestic burden or wider policy to upskill parents. Two key periods of time document this shift. From 2003 onwards the initial focus on addressing unemployment as a policy driver had been

addressed through rising employment rates. 2003 was a key moment in the development of childcare policy with the implementation of the Minister for Children and the release of a government proposals on greater involvement of local authorities in the provision of childcare. Secondly, the period from 2004 - 2006 was also a period of significant activity with the publication of the *Ten Year Strategy for Childcare* and the development and delivery of the Childcare Act 2006.

2003: Minister for Children and *Every Child Matters*

2003 marked the move to a more child-focused social investment framing for childcare policy under New Labour. This was signalled in two ways- through the establishment of the Minister for Children and the release of the *Every Child Matters* green paper. Whilst the post of Minister for Children was established in 2003 the idea of a post of Minister for Children dates to 1991. A policy document from 1991 by the then Labour spokesperson for children, Joan Lestor, entitled *Labour's Minister for Children: A Voice for Children, for Change* views children as sites of social investment. In a foreword to the document the then party leader, Neil Kinnock states: "Our hopes and ambitions for the future are vested in our children…[for them to become] secure, confident and resourceful…".[29] This child-centred and social investment framing of the Minister gives an insight into the original idea of what the role would be. Despite this long-standing policy development towards a Minister for Children the post was not established until 2003. Margaret Hodge held the post from 2003 – 2005. Whilst the first term and early second term had been dominated by childcare as economic infrastructure and a labour market activator 2003 demonstrated a shift towards a prioritisation of the child. This shift manifested itself both in terms of quality of childcare as an end in itself but also as a means for enabling children reach their potential in the future. Margaret Hodge had laid the municipal feminism roots of Sure Start. As the Minister for Children, her remit altered, with children being at the centre her work. She reflected on her appointment to the post of the inaugural Minister for Children and when asked why this

[29] Neil Kinnock quoted in Lestor, Joan. 1991. *Labour's Minister for Children: A Voice for Children, for Change*. OS Box 62, Pamphlets 362.2 – 362.33. Labour History Archive and Study Centre.

post was established in 2003 and not earlier in the New Labour period of government she replied:

> "I think because Sure Start when it was started it was held…it was this issue about trying to get the professionals to work together, so it was Health and it was Education and where else was it? Health, Education they were the two main departments and it was felt it just didn't work across two departments so if we could build a Children's Ministry you could bring everything together around the needs of the child. It was my vision really…absolutely dream vision. So building services around the needs of the children, of the child rather than allowing the professionals…building down from the separate professional expertise into the family but building up from children…" (Interview 12 2019).

Here Hodge picks up on a point previously explored; that disparate government departments shaped the competing frames. For instance, Hodge went on to cite that the Treasury and the Department for Work and Pensions also had a stake in childcare policy (Interview 12 2019). Whilst childcare policy was under Hodge, the Minister for Children role was not part of a separate Ministry but sat within the (then) Department of Education and Skills. Nevertheless, Hodge's reflections point to a change in focus towards the needs of the child from 2003 onwards. Hodge here has both a feminist approach but also a strong focus on a child-focused social investment. When reflecting on the evolution to a universalised version of Sure Start, for instance, Hodge stated:

> "The reason we wanted to universalise it was partly the feminist agenda – you and I should have it – partly, also bluntly, it's politics. All these ruddy journalists with young children wanted tax relief on their childcare and you wanted them to write it up in a positive way…Gordon wanted women into work, Gordon wanted that sort of stuff. Tony wanted middle-class journalists to be supportive of it, I just wanted quality and lots and lots of it…You know, you have to compromise about these things and I wasn't the most powerful in that triangle. I was the least powerful" (Interview 12 2019).

Hodge's argument outlines that a strategic alignment of policy goals was necessary to advance her primary aim (of quality childcare provision). Even though the move to universalisation of Sure Start heralded the transition to the social investment framing of childcare under New Labour, Hodge's account demonstrates that feminist goals and the social investment frame were not mutually exclusive. For example, universalisation points to Harman's initial framing of childcare as economic infrastructure. This insight adds nuance to the existing literature which argues that social investment in children marginalised the needs of women under New Labour (Lister 2006; Featherstone 2006).

In late 2003 a government green paper was also published, *Every Child Matters* (ECM), which set out proposals for local authorities to have a more active and uniform role in ensuring the provision of childcare. ECM states:

> "Since 1997, we have tried to put children first. We have increased the focus on prevention through the child poverty strategy, Sure Start, and our work to raise school standards" (HM Treasury 2003).

ECM was published by the Treasury (despite childcare policy nominally falling under the Department for Education and Skills). Once again the Treasury's enduring institutional influence on this policy field is evident. Nevertheless, over time the Treasury's stance started to differ, with a changed focus from the employment policy framing of the early years of New Labour. Naomi Eisenstadt, recalled in her memoir of that period what she identified as the Treasury's motivation: "…officials at the Treasury were particularly interested in prevention and early intervention as a means of saving money over the longer term" (2011: 11). Ed Balls conceded that the Treasury began to also concentrate more on the child-focused element of the policy:

> "…I think the Treasury in the middle period…all the way through it [the Treasury] increasingly rides both horses [employment activator and quality provision], it was actually the champion of both in different ways… Whereas I think if you went back to '97 the Treasury would have been less vocal on those kind of things [quality of childcare provision]" (Interview 19 2020).

Balls, however, pushed back on the idea of the Treasury and government becoming increasingly invested in childcare quality as a means to an end – children's future as economically active citizens:

> "if the caricature of the Treasury is that it only cared about work or that the caricature of the Treasury is that it only cared about children in so far as they needed to be wealth creating adults…I don't think that fits with setting up that department [Department of Children, Schools and Families]" (Interview 19 2020).

His reflection above points to a more nuanced take on the idea of social investment under New Labour. There is an acknowledgement of the importance of investment in children's future but he argues that the remit of the DCSF went further than that. As an example, he also argued that the move to have a graduate leader in every childcare setting trained in early years education pointed to a commitment to *quality* provision of childcare: "…you wouldn't have done EYFS [Early Years Foundation Stage] if your goal was work only because it was expensive" (Interview 19 2020). EYFS was established under the Childcare Act 2006. It is a framework for learning, development and care for children from birth to five years old. Balls also pointed to Sure Start policy as an example of this: "I don't think that anybody who worked in Sure Start ever thought this was a work driven agenda…" (Interview 19 2020). Whilst Balls' point reflects the later stage of Sure Start in the early in the New Labour period, the data outlined previously suggests that employment was the primary driver with the framing of childcare as infrastructure policy. Nevertheless, by midway through the second New Labour parliamentary term, the theme of quality, related to the social investment focus, is stronger throughout various data sources.

2004 – 2006: The Active Middle Period – the Ten Year Strategy and the Childcare Act 2006

Whilst the feminist legacy had not disappeared from childcare policy, the move to the dominance of the social investment in children framing was entrenched further in 2004. In

2004 the *Ten Year Strategy for Childcare* was published, signalling an additional development in this particularly active period for childcare policy during the New Labour government. By this point the frame was becoming increasingly politically institutionalised. The strategy was laid before Parliament by a number of different government departments including the Treasury as the lead, Department for Education and Skills, Department of Work and Pensions and Department of Trade and Industry. Due to this, childcare policy is again seen as an area with a myriad of influences which could often blur the goal of the policy. Nevertheless, the move to a social investment framing runs through the document. The *Ten Year Strategy for Childcare* has a less overt labour market driver than *Meeting the Childcare Challenge*, outlined above (which was published in 1998), with the three areas outlined as the principles driving the formulation:

1. "importance of ensuring every child has the best possible start in life"
2. "need to respond to changing patterns of employment and ensure that parents, particularly mothers, can work and progress their careers"
3. "[responding to the] legitimate expectations of families that they should be in control of the choices they make in balancing work and family life" (HM Treasury 2004: 2).

The first point relates to social investment and is developed further throughout the document in starker terms. For example:

> "…expanding opportunities within and across generations, tackling disadvantage and increasing the productive capacity of the nation…children are the citizens, workers, parents and leaders of the future" (HM Treasury 2004: 5).

Yet, point two also demonstrates an additional shift in tone from earlier conceptualisations of childcare as purely infrastructure policy or a labour market engagement tool. It also explicitly recognises that women may want to work to progress their careers as an end in itself, which points to a new perspective not found prior in New Labour policy framing. This framing was also evident in the second reading of the Childcare Bill in 2005 with an intervention from Ed Miliband. He was then a newly elected Labour MP. Immediately prior

he had served as Chair of the Treasury's Council of Economic Advisers (an appointment made by the then Chancellor Gordon Brown). He argued that the primary reason for the Bill was equality:

> "…the need for more equal life chances for children and equal access to the labour market for women, who tend to be the primary carers" (*Hansard* HC Deb. vol. 440 col. 67, 28 November 2005).

Later, he continued:

> "For parents, in particular mothers, we know the long term costs of being out of the labour market for a number of years. Each year of interruption to hourly employment has been estimated to reduce hourly earnings by four per cent…the case for the Bill on the grounds of equality and efficiency is clear" (*Hansard* HC Deb. vol. 440 col. 69, 28 November 2005).

Miliband had both close links to the Treasury, through the Council of Economic Advisers, and previously as an adviser to Harriet Harman during her time as Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury as a policy researcher and speechwriter. He then went on to stay in the Shadow Treasury team working directly to Gordon Brown in his role as Shadow Chancellor. Given Miliband would been involved in developing the policy framing of childcare as infrastructure when he was advising Harman it is notable to see his framing moving from economic necessity to gender justice. However, in the wind-up speech of the debate the leading government Minister, the then Minister for Children, Young People and Families, Beverley Hughes referenced Miliband's contribution: "[he] was right to set the Bill in the context of the drive for equality in the interests of children, their families, our economy, and indeed out social fabric" (*Hansard* HC Deb. vol. 440 col. 99, 28 November 2005). Whilst referencing Miliband's contribution the government Minister does not accurately detail what Miliband argued. Miliband's argument advocating for childcare to enable women to have the opportunity to advance their career or gain pay increases is novel in the debate itself and in the wider pool of available data. Yet, Hughes' statement has removed this crucial element of equality with the interests of children being foregrounded once again.

This foregrounding of children related to the argument advanced in this thesis; essentially the focus on children and their needs was to the marginalisation of women's needs. In the later New Labour years the view of women being legitimate targets of social investment policy is scarcely found within the data whereas children's needs and future potential are presented in a uncontroversial manner as legitimate sites for intervention. This finding adds further detail to Lister's 'children, not women, first' thesis (2006) through New Labour's family policy approach.

Conclusion

This chapter has made the case for how radical the change brought about by New Labour was in relation to childcare policy yet identified the anxiety of an overbearing state reaching too far into the traditional family set-up, shown to be particularly acute in the first term. As noted in *Chapter 2*, Mackay focused on two elements of "what counts" in relation to the quality of SRW in terms of policy; recognition and redistribution (2008: 133). Right from the outset of the New Labour period recognition of this policy area was achieved through the legitimisation of this as a mainstream policy concern. Redistribution relates to the movement of resources, power and/or benefits in relation to a particular policy area. Redistribution was also achieved internally to government, at least, with the significant resources and power of the Treasury driving forward this policy area. Whilst government did not ultimately pursue becoming a provider of childcare in this period it was a key enabler and facilitator to build the 'economic infrastructure' of childcare in the UK.

Linked to Mackay's criteria for the quality of SRW is Erikson's ladder of institutionalisation of policy framing (2015: 457). Similarly to Mackay the bottom rung of the ladder relates to getting a policy on the political agenda and two feminist critical actors were central to the development of childcare policy, particularly through their work in opposition: Margaret Hodge and Harriet Harman. Margaret Hodge's time as leader of Islington Council in the mid-1980s provided a concrete policy example for replication when New Labour assumed government. Working in opposition to shape childcare as 'economic infrastructure' the legacy of this feminist critical actor's actions were evident in Gordon Brown's first budget in

his description of childcare as 'economic policy', which could be characterised as the second rung of Erikson's ladder to achieve support from key actors (2015: 457). Whilst Harman's direct work on childcare stalled at the beginning of the New Labour period, the move to universalise the Sure Start programme effectively created a childcare infrastructure throughout the UK by the time New Labour left office in 2010. She was, therefore, a key part of the explanation for the successful institutionalisation of this policy framing. This chapter also demonstrates an additional formal institutional influence on childcare policy under New Labour; the Treasury. It was the Treasury priority of labour market engagement, coupled with its unprecedented levels of influence, that led to labour market engagement for women to emerge as the dominant policy frame in the first New Labour parliamentary term in particular, rather than a policy solution which sought to genuinely alter the gender relations in the home. This framing was directly shaped by the policy development of the critical actor Harriet Harman in opposition, the continuing influence of a feminist critical actor. The labour market engagement framing, coupled with her desire to focus interventions on women was evident in the Treasury's early work in this area and adds details of Harman's actions to the existing literature which has argued that the Treasury "sought means of eroding gender inequalities" (Coates and Oettinger 2007). Whilst traditional gender norms in relation to caregiving were not challenged by the early interventions of the Treasury, it would be incorrect to argue that the Treasury was not shaped by feminist activism or that the labour market engagement framing was at odds with feminist goals, particularly when tracing Harman's interventions.

In the mid-to-late period of New Labour, the social investment framing, fuelled by the Treasury and later the DCSF, came to prominence and has previously been argued to have marginalised the needs of women in public policy in favour of those of children (Lister 2006; Featherstone 2006). By the end of the New Labour years advocacy for childcare policy was indeed framed in child-focused social investment terms. Whilst the policy itself had reached a deep level of institutionalisation, via policy success demonstrated through legislation, the policy framing had altered. The strategic linking of childcare policy with the social investment frame which was so overwhelming in the later New Labour period adds further detail by drawing on family policy specifically, as opposed to welfare policy which is found in the literature from Lister (2006) and Brid Featherstone (2006). Whilst in government the

early feminist interventions in childcare policy had been diluted, to an extent, childcare policy was still a key demand of feminist campaigners and political actors both inside and outside of the party whilst in opposition and in government; a radical, and at least partially, feminist public policy change still occurred.

Chapter 6: Policy Case Study 2 – Family Leaves and Flexible Working

Introduction

Developments in family leaves and flexible working policy under New Labour were marked legislatively by the Employment Act 2002 and the Work and Family Act 2006. The former included a substantial extension to maternity leave, the introduction of two weeks of paternity leave, of parental leave and the right to request flexible working for parents of young children. These measures directly impacted the lives of many families across the UK and in so doing, the state was creating a family policy on a scale which had previously never been seen in UK politics. The Work and Family Act 2006 followed up on the contents of the Employment Act 2002 with an extension to statutory maternity pay and the broadening of the right to request flexible working. These advancements manifested in law the demands of feminists within the party and beyond (Lovenduski 2007: 145). Beyond legislative interventions additional governmental initiatives were pursed in this area, most notably the Women and Work Commission (WWC). The WWC was established in 2004 to tackle issues of equal pay in the workplace and the effective implementation of work/life balance policies. The WWC's initial report was published in 2006, with a follow-up published in 2009. These two pieces of legislation and associated policy developments were brought before parliament by the then Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Secretary of State and Minister for Women, Patricia Hewitt.

As noted in *Chapter 2* the need for flexible working practices and enhanced workplace rights had long been a policy concern for feminists within the Labour Party and those in the wider UK women's movement from the mid-20th century onwards. Undoubtedly the significant developments outlined in the legislation above gave women enhanced maternity and parental rights, as well as the opportunity to better balance work and home life with the implementation of the right to request flexible working. For the first time fathers were framed in a positive light in public policy terms via the novel introduction of the two week paternity leave. Nevertheless, the extension to a 12 month long maternity leave when contrasted with the introduction of a two week paternity leave signalled where the

expectation for caregiving lay. The significant disparity with a lengthy maternity leave indicated that the state still conceptualised women as the primary caregivers to children.

The legislative home for the development of family policy relating to family leave was primarily the DTI. In large part, the policies were outlined as mechanisms to encourage and sustain labour market engagement *for women* (for example see Coates and Oettinger 2007). This is unsurprising given the well-documented dominance of the Treasury in the New Labour era, one element of New Labour's "core of the core executive" (Burch and Holliday 2004: 4), particularly during Gordon Brown's Chancellorship (for example see Heffernan 2000; Finlayson 2003; Gamble 2012). In the first term and early second term, the Treasury was focused on tackling unemployment as well as specifically tackling the high unemployment rate of lone parents (overwhelmingly mothers). Employment was viewed by the Treasury as an anti-poverty measure and this framing shaped the resulting family policy legislation. Relatedly, as noted in *Chapter 1*, women were also seen as symbols of modernisation in a changed labour market by New Labour, thereby the concentration on their engagement with the labour market follows. Another dominant policy frame set by the Treasury and by the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, which had a bearing on family leave policies, was economic competence. Being seen to govern in a fiscally responsible manner and to act in a way which was mindful of the needs of business was paramount to Labour's renewal in opposition. This concern was of continuing importance for New Labour in government (for example Heffernan 2000; Russell 2005; Gamble 2012). Together, these dominant ideas interacted to set the parameters to open up possibilities of the substantive representation of women (SRW), but also foreclosed the scope within which family policy could develop under New Labour.

This chapter draws out the actors, institutions and ideas which determined this element of New Labour's family policy. It opens with Hewitt's role and details how she acted to maximise her departmental resources by innovatively combining her roles and civil service support. The chapter then goes on to make the case that in engaging in critical acts Hewitt worked with, and in the knowledge of, support from her fellow Labour's women MPs in 'acting for' women. Discussion of the key ideational constraints faced by Hewitt - manifested as institutionalised policy frames in this area of family policy - then follows.

These policy frames bound the possible policy innovations that the aspirant critical actors working within this area could pursue. As demonstrated in previous chapters New Labour's desire to be seen as economically competent and business-friendly by the City and other economic stakeholders was paramount. This chapter acknowledges New Labour's embrace of the idea of women as a symbol of modernisation, and explores how this sat at odds with a historical legacy of the traditional gender order. The analysis then moves to examine the feminist frames central to Hewitt's legislative and policy interventions: (i) fathers as carers and (ii) women as workers. In the former, the role of fathers is ultimately constrained by New Labour's ongoing adherence to an updated, but nonetheless traditional rather than transformative concept of men's and women's gender roles. In the latter, women's workplace rights were accepted even if in a diluted form in the face of business interests.

To bring about her feminist reforms Hewitt embodied a 'user-friendly' feminism and engaged in consensus building behaviour, utilising her political relationships to maximum effect. She used these strategies within government and the cabinet, as well as in respect of core stakeholders; bringing together the dominant business lobby and women's and feminist organisations advocating for enhanced conditions for women in the workplace. Finally, Hewitt's consensus building approach is of particular note given the painstaking work New Labour had undertaken in opposition to demonstrate to business that a future Labour government would break with conceptions of past Labour economic mismanagement.

Hewitt's Role

This chapter argues that as Secretary of State at the Department of Trade and Industry and Minister for Women from 2001 – 2005, Patricia Hewitt fulfils the criteria of a feminist critical actor who achieved notable feminist policy change. Operating albeit within formal institutional constraints and institutionally embedded policy frames, which undoubtedly inhibited the scope of the policy development, this chapter demonstrates how Hewitt achieved greater agency, influence and established greater resources than her predecessors in the role as Minister for Women. This was the first time a feminist Minister had both the

will and option to utilise their departmental resources to maximum effect by aligning policy aims as Minister for Women and their substantive departmental role, undertaking the "most important" critical acts by "mobilis[ing] governing institutions to improve things for the minority group" (Lovenduski 2001: 757) . Embedding a feminist policy perspective into her work at the DTI, Hewitt fused her Minister for Women role with her Secretary of State role. With a differing approach to feminist policy compared to those who served before as Minister for Women, (Harman's 'women and children first' radicalism; Jay's indifference - both noted in *Chapter 4*), Hewitt successfully incorporated the role of men as fathers, creating in turn a more expansive family policy. Substantively, fathers became regarded as a site for positive public policy intervention.

Hewitt's insider relationship with the heart of the New Labour modernisation project pre-1997 placed her as an influential feminist in government close to the "core of the executive" (Burch and Holliday 2004: 4) of Blair's 'court' (Mackay and Rhodes 2013). Prior to entering Parliament in 1997 Hewitt had served as press secretary to the former modernising Labour leader Neil Kinnock (1983 - 1992) and then went on to co-found the left-leaning think tank Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) (1989 - 1994), which only grew in influence over Labour's time in opposition. Kinnock's successor John Smith had asked Hewitt in 1992 to chair the Commission on Social Justice, a major Labour Party policy development project, a post she held until 1994. Finally, between 1994 - 1997 she was the Head of Research at Arthur Andersen consulting, a group hired by Labour to develop economic and fiscal policies to take into government (Mazzucato and Collington 2023: 77). As a result of these various posts Hewitt played a significant supportive role in the New Labour project: what ideas shaped it, and crucially how they were communicated. I argue the relationships Hewitt built before and then continuing into Government were a result of her own professional and political background, giving agency to Hewitt as a critical actor in her own right. As a result this more agential account challenges the existing literature which argues that Hewitt was a success in her role as Minister for Women due, in part, to relationships which were afforded to her by the core executive whilst in post (Annesley and Gains 2010). Her insider status to the New Labour project was long-standing and enabled her to deftly navigate the relationships crucial to affect change whilst in government.

Institutional Innovation: Aligning the 'Home Department' and a Feminist Minister for Women

> "Family-friendly working was absolutely at the heart of what we were trying to do" Patricia Hewitt (Interview 7 2019).

Speaking of her time as Secretary of State at the DTI and as Minister for Women (from 2001 - 2005) Hewitt makes clear she saw family-friendly policy as central to her work (2014; Interview 7 2019), a point reinforced by senior DTI civil servants and a close political adviser (Interview 15 2020; Interview 16, 2020; Interview 8 2019). 2001 was a critical institutional turning point. Prior to 2001 this element of family policy had been largely absent from the political agenda in the UK.

Utilising the resources afforded to her by the core executive, in an innovative way, Hewitt undertook the critical act to merge the work of the DTI and the Women and Equalities Unit (WEU), a more agential account than suggested by Annesley and Gains (2010) which is overly reliant on the claim of resources being *afforded to her* by the core executive. With Hewitt given the senior Cabinet role as the Secretary of State at the DTI alongside the post of Minister for Women duties a structural opportunity was created in 2001. Hewitt experienced the first genuine opportunity for a feminist holder of the Minister for Women post to utilise the legislative resource of a major Whitehall department. Here can be seen the importance of timing and sequence to create feminist policy development. As noted in the previous chapters, Harman's first time in post as Minister for Women from 1997 - 1998 was unsuccessful, in part due to her outsider status with the New Labour modernisation project and her "old fashioned" feminist project, despite having access to the resource of a major Whitehall department with a significant budget. Harman's successor, Margaret Jay, stated she is not a feminist (Interview 2 2019) nor did she have much interest in the role of Minister for Women (Childs 2004, 166 - 167; Interview 2 2019). In contrast, and taking the novel approach of effectively merging her role as Secretary of State at the DTI and Minister for Women, Hewitt merged the civil servants working with her at the DTI and the Women

and Equalities Unit. Ordinarily civil servants would generally work within their departmental or unit boundaries - but the DTI and WEU civil servants worked without this delineation. With these joint resources of the DTI and the WEU - admittedly afforded to her by the core executive - it took Hewitt herself to take the novel step of merging the two posts and personnel, a point noted in multiple interviews including Hewitt, a close political adviser and two, politically neutral, senior DTI civil servants (Interview 7 2019; Interview 8 2019; Interview 15 2020; Interview 16 2020). Hewitt utilised the resources afforded to her but making them greater than the sum of their parts to achieve change, giving weight to this more agential account of feminist policy change.

Several interviewees directly remarked on the impact Hewitt had on her role as both Secretary of State at the DTI and Minister for Women even if there were differences in perception of how and why she made an impact. Geoffrey Norris, the Principal Business Adviser in Number 10 to Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, worked closely with Hewitt, given much of the legislation she worked on related to changes to workplace leave entitlements. Norris privileged her role as Secretary of State for Trade and industry, and was dismissive of her Minister for Women post:

> "I think the reality is that Patricia was significant as a Minister for Women not because she was the Minister for Women but because she was at the DTI…Patricia impacted because she was a DTI Secretary" (Interview 18 2020).

Norris' reflection builds on previous findings from *Chapter 4* regarding the view the inner core (masculinised) executive had of the Minister for Women; one of insignificance. Given Norris' place in the executive, within No.10, it is unsurprising that his perspective aligns with the prevailing attitudes held by those players. Whilst Norris is correct to the extent that it was the institutional power of the DTI which ensured legislation was tabled, he fails to recognise the merging of both roles under Hewitt. Norris' view moreover jars with another interviewee with an even stronger working relationship with Hewitt - a close political adviser. The former adviser recalled Hewitt's priorities:

> "…for Patricia it was important that every element of her brief looked at how it…how a policy would affect women and families specifically and not generally. So she would want to dig in and that was where we would work…the core of it was a feminist agenda but equally at the core of it was a recognition that having an economy that also speaks to those values will also bring a successful family life as well" (Interview 8 2019).

When questioned on the split between staff working on DTI related policy and women and equalities policy, the former adviser rejects the opposition or hierarchy between the DTI and the Minister for Women: "I think the key was that it had to be integrated…it was about doing it all together" (Interview 8 2019). This insight into Hewitt's role counters Norris' reflection in two ways. It notes through Hewitt's integration of the advisers and civil servants of both the DTI and the WEU the resources at Hewitt's disposal were augmented by the specialist knowledge of those working at the WEU. In other words, Hewitt was not merely relying on DTI civil servants. The special adviser also gives agency to Hewitt through the highlighting of her feminist analysis on work/life balance family policy, previously unacknowledged through Norris' account. With Hewitt grasping the opportunity to merge the work of the Minister for Women with their Departmental post, she skilfully marshalled the institutional resources and relationships available to her. In this Hewitt can be regarded as a successful critical actor in the development of feminist policy change.

Mobilising New Labour's 'critical mass'

It was not only Hewitt's innovative marshalling of resources which enabled her success as a critical actor, she was operating within a changed, feminised, political environment. Notably, 1997 saw the election of a 101 women Labour MPs, descriptively, at least, changing the face of the House of Commons. As noted in *Chapter 2*, a simple opposition between the concepts of critical mass and critical actors is unhelpful- crucially missing the ways in which the presence of additional women can support the critical acts of individual women MPs. Interviews demonstrated that it was not only MPs who constituted this critical mass of perceived support but also senior special advisers. Margaret Hodge, herself a self-described feminist Labour MP, illustrates the importance of this descriptive change to

women's representation under New Labour via MPs and special advisers, as Hewitt pursued work/life balance policy change:

> "…both Gordon and Tony didn't want to do it [flexible working legislation] because they thought it would upset business and they wanted to make sure they were on the side of the business community. And it was a whole…I always use this as an example of the power of the women in politics. So it was a whole load of us as Parliamentarians… there were some really key people in No.10, so in this one…Sally Morgan, Carey Oppenheim were the two, I think, key people. And we just kept the pressure… They were both [Blair and Brown] hostile to it, it was the women. It was women…I use it as an example of women working together to really change the world" (Interview 12 2019).

Hodge's reflection that Hewitt was working as part of an informal network of actors to achieve feminist change gives further weight to the idea that it was not only the resources of a Secretary of State at the DTI that ensured she made an impact in her role. Indeed, Hodge's account builds on findings from *Chapter 4* which related to the importance of feminist actors both within the Labour Party and government to ensure that feminist policy change occurred. Notably she also listed two actors within No.10 (Morgan and Oppenheim) key to countering No.10's priming of business interests in this policy area, a point also raised by Sally Morgan, Tony Blair's Political Secretary from 1997 - 2001 (Interview 10 2019). This is of particular interest when thinking about the gendered core executive. The core executive is, of course, not a monolithic entity but a complex institution which is comprised of formal and informal institutions and actors with differing perspectives. Nevertheless, the locus under New Labour was the party leadership found in both No.10 and the Treasury; the "core of the core executive" (Burch and Holliday 2004: 4). Undoubtedly Blair and Brown's perspectives were dominant but there is a recognition here that feminist insiders had success in navigating the relationships with the "core of the core executive" successfully to achieve their own ends.

This chapter builds upon findings in *Chapter 4* which noted this critical mass of other women MPs gave representatives the *perception* of support which emboldened them to tackle

subjects such as HRT on the floor of the Commons. Whilst it need not supersede the idea of critical actors as a mechanism for change, these observations which speak to numbers, add weight to the utility of a critical mass as a mechanism for instilling the *perception* of collective support to embolden representatives to ‘act for’ women. Excerpts from the Work and Families Bill (Second Reading) in 2005 show a growing confidence amongst women to bring their personal lived experiences of family life into their workplace to advocate for policy change. In ways which would have been highly unusual prior to 1997, Labour’s women MPs were now using the House of Commons floor to speak on women’s issues and in gendered ways. Recounting of women’s experiences as mothers was marginal in the Second Reading debate on the Employment Bill in 2002 (which covered very similar ground legislatively), yet by the time of the Second Reading debate for the Work and Families Bill in late 2005, numerous MPs stood up to speak about their experiences of parenthood and related these experiences to the measures under debate for this Bill. For instance, Julie Morgan a Labour MP recounted:

> “I remember the stress of juggling bringing up children and working as a local authority social worker. When the Government first took office, we undertook a major consultation of women, and it revealed that work-life balance was one of the primary concerns. Women wanted us to do something about it and all the measures in this Bill will help. They will also involve fathers more meaningfully” (*Hansard* HC Deb. vol. 375 col. 674, 5 December 2005).

Labour MP Madeline Moon recalled a time when her mother discussed with her how her father had managed to get time off work around her sister’s birth. Her father had claimed to his employer that the young Moon had been behaving badly, she recalls her mother saying:

> “Good grief, you were not behaving badly. It was just an excuse to get him off work because I needed him at home to look after you. We did not have all this leave in those days and your father had run out of his leave” (*Hansard* HC Deb. vol. 375 col. 696, 5 December 2005).

These examples of women MPs speaking of their experiences as mothers and daughters to the House of Commons are just a few of the many which were included within this Parliamentary debate (point also referenced in Childs and Webb 2012: 149 - 151). These examples of women 'acting for' women, show that the masculine norms which had a grip on the House of Commons were beginning to be eased. Women's familial experiences were now becoming legitimised in the policy process and women were bolstered to 'act for' women in the Commons.

Gendered Historical legacies: Women Seen as a Symbol of Modernisation whilst Maintaining Traditional Gender Relations

The traditional gender order of 20th century UK family policy cast a long shadow, setting the parameters of policy innovation, discussed in detail in *Chapter 3*. Whilst in opposition, New Labour's family policy primarily focused just on the role of women. As previously noted, work on a 'women's policy' offer had been in development throughout the latter stages of Labour's time in opposition, and then accelerated and broadened into a wider 'family policy' from 1992 onwards. This notwithstanding, the solutions inevitably focused on women's roles as carers and workers rather than the family as a whole or fathers specifically. Yet, the documents from the Labour History Archive add depth to the literature surrounding New Labour's family policy drivers. This is seen through the theme of between work and family life and the valuing of unpaid care work, not just the previously acknowledged labour market enablers. For instance, a document from the Labour Research Department, *Integrating Equal Opportunities into Policy and Campaigning*, published in the aftermath of the 1992 General Election defeat sought to differentiate Labour from the Conservatives:

> "We need to develop positive themes which attract women, e.g. the valuing of women's contribution to society either through paid work or at home caring for children or the elderly. The Tories do not value women's contribution, they fail to provide support to

women who care for children, the elderly and they refuse to give women equal pay at work".[30]

This document shows that the Labour Party recognised that the development of a 'women's policy' (or 'policies') could be a clear point of differentiation from the Conservative Party. Whilst the document itself is light in terms of concrete policy proposals it nonetheless shows that the party was cognisant of the need to incorporate women's whole lives – not just as workers and not just as mothers- into public policy. That said, it is also evident that family policy is directed at ameliorating the detrimental outcomes women face both domestically and in the public realm, rather than challenging the unequal domestic division of labour and traditional gender relations more broadly.

The traditional focus on targeting motherhood, rather than also including fatherhood, continued as Labour drew nearer to office. *Women and Work*, published by the Labour Party in 1994, contains a *Charter for Working Women*. Adding significant policy detail, it built on the 1992 document *Integrating Equal Opportunities into Policy and Campaigning.* Many of its contents would be implemented in the Employment Act 2002 and the Work and Families Act 2006. Yet, there were other elements of the *Charter* which went beyond what would go on to be enacted in law, including stronger flexible working policy (including part-time working options for up to five years for post maternity or parental leave) and up to five days per year family leave for sick dependants, with more days allocated to single-parents and carers for those with chronic illnesses.[31] Specifically looking to flexible working, the document advocates for government to lead by example through supported extended career breaks in the public sector for those caring for dependants, and for the development of returner programmes for those returning from career breaks. These policies go considerably further and broader than manifesto pledges in 1997 and what was subsequently pursued in government. This more holistic view of the work/life balance policy offer is encapsulated in the document:

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[30] Sutton, Kathy. 1992. *Integrating Equal Opportunities into Policy and Campaigning*. Labour Research Department, Policy Documents May 1992 – Sept 1992. Labour History Archive and Study Centre.
[31] The Labour Party. 1994. *Women and Work*. Deborah Lincoln, Correspondence - 'Hearing from Women'. Labour History Archive and Study Centre.

> "The policies of the Conservative government treat women either as workers, or as mothers, or as consumers, not as a combination of all three which in reality they are. There are no co-ordinated policies to deal with real life for women".[32]

Whilst tackling the challenges from the lived experiences of many women's lives effectively through the policies outlined above the policy in the *Women and Work* policy document does not mention or allude to the role of fathers in contributing to family life. This omission, in public policy terms, continued until Patricia Hewitt took the initiative to incorporate the role of fathers into her policy platform as the Secretary of State at the DTI and Minister for Women.

The continuation of the traditional gender order runs counter-intuitively with the theme of modernisation which is central in much of the New Labour project (see Finlayson 2003). Women are frequently the symbol of modernisation, particularly in relation to their increasing role in the labour market and the significant increase in terms of descriptive representation in Westminster. A key document from the papers of Tom Sawyer, the Labour Party General Secretary from 1996 – 1998, is indicative of this and clarifies the party's direction of travel. Written in 1996 and entitled, the *Road to the Manifesto, Building Prosperity, Flexibility, Efficiency and Fairness at Work* it is strongly suggestive of the priorities of the party ahead of the General Election. In a passage which links the increasing number of women in the workforce with economic modernisation, the document reads:

> "To sustain economic opportunity and prosperity in a global economy, Britain needs to use the talents of its workforce to the full….The new labour market of the 1990s, with its growing emphasis on the importance of flexibility, can bring new opportunities for people to work in ways which better meet their needs, allowing them for instance to combine caring for children and part-time work, and to learn new skills and take on new responsibilities…in the organisations of the future, success will increasingly come

[32] The Labour Party. 1994. *Women and Work*. Deborah Lincoln, Correspondence - 'Hearing from Women'. Labour History Archive and Study Centre.

> through the quality of the workforce and the flexibility which encourages people to give their best".[33]

This document, first and foremost, is written as an employment policy document and the majority of the text focuses on strengthening employment tribunal legislation and the relationships between trade unions and employers. Nevertheless, it is women's role in the workplace that is returned to repeatedly. Work and life are central to this policy platform and flexibility for employees is the mechanism to achieve this. Whilst these are progressive aims to secure flexibility and to enable the combining of work and family life, it is clear from reading this document that the move to push for flexible working is something which will be targeted at women. Modernisation necessitates changes to enable women to balance work and family life, not parents (mothers *and* fathers) to balance work and family life. In this way it draws the parameters within which family policy would be set, ameliorating the friction between parenthood and paid work for women but not going further to challenge the gender norms which create the unequal division of unpaid labour in the first place. The deeply institutionalised historical inheritance is the environment within which political actors operated, including the Minister for Women.

Incorporating Fathers but Only So Far - Hewitt Signalling User Friendliness

Working within these ideational parameters Hewitt became Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and Minister for Women in 2001. Until that time this aspect of family policy had been neglected in New Labour's legislative programme. As noted by Mackay policy change is never linear or static and rests upon the changing cast of actors, ideas and institutions that act upon policy development (2008: 134). Hewitt's incorporation of men in the policy process and policy outcomes was a notable move, seen by observing the distance travelled in policy terms over time from Labour in opposition, outlined above, and by reference to her predecessors as Ministers for Women. She had genuine success at incorporating the role of fathers in a positive way for the first time in UK public policy. As a New Labour insider,

[33] The Labour Party. 1996. *Road to the Manifesto, Building Prosperity, Flexibility, Efficiency and Fairness at Work*. Labour Party General Secretary Archive. Labour History Archive and Study Centre.

Hewitt was perceived by those of the “core of the core executive” (Burch and Holliday 2004: 4) to be a proponent of a more palatable version of feminism than her predecessors, and particularly in contrast to the inaugural Minister, Harriet Harman. Explaining this difference in perception Hewitt outlined the New Labour leadership viewing her in the following way:

> “Rightly or wrongly, I think I was always seen as more ‘user-friendly’ by Tony [Blair] and those closest to him than Harriet [Harman]… Harriet’s political project has always been feminism first and foremost, whereas I’d worked on a very wide range of issues at IPPR; I’d been very closely involved in Labour’s Policy Review and then the Social Justice Commission; and I was pretty much the only Labour MP who had actually worked in business” (Interview 7 2019).

She was, in other words, in favour at the “departmental court” (Mackay and Rhodes 2013) in a way Harman was not. Whilst Harman had success in re-gendering economic policy to incorporate childcare concerns in opposition, she was not closely involved in the *modernisation* project of New Labour. When she moved into government this outsider status to the modernisation project manifested itself in explicitly feminist demands and language which the “core of the core executive” (Burch and Holliday 2004: 4) under New Labour did not feel comfortable with, as explored in the previous chapter. Hewitt’s own account, above, further strengthens other’s claims to this leadership mindset. With a change in personnel, there was change in the dynamics between the actors in the core executive and the Minister for Women. Hewitt utilised the perception of her as “user friendly” and her stance signalled a shift from the feminism espoused by the first Minister for Women office holders (Harriet Harman and her junior Minister Joan Ruddock) by explicitly mentioning the role of fathers. Hewitt credits her time at the influential IPPR working on family policy for this shift. Whilst she operated within tight parameters, given that family policy was effectively a blank slate legislatively at the beginning of New Labour’s time in office, there was scope for her perspective to have an impact on policy development. In her own words, Hewitt represented a clear change from the direction of Harman and Ruddock’s feminism espoused in their short tenure as Ministers for Women - one which did not champion the role of men and fathers:

> "Even in the 1970s, as an active feminist, I was unhappy with a certain strand in feminism that saw the care of children as a space for women that men shouldn't be allowed to encroach upon and that led to, or reinforced, hostility to men working as midwives or child care workers or fathers sharing the care (as well as the maintenance costs) of their children. I thought that was wrong in principle, but also damaging in practice for both children and women" (Interview 7 2019).

And whilst at IPPR Hewitt and her colleagues:

> "had been developing a different kind of feminist narrative which essentially says that if women are going to have equal opportunities in the workplace, men need to take equal responsibilities at home. That means treating fathers as far more than just a source of financial support or blaming them for not paying up; it means proper paternity leave and supporting fathers - not just mothers - to balance family and paid work, rather than perpetuating the expectation that mothers will be the main carers and fathers the main earners" (Interview 7 2019).

Prior to Hewitt taking post as Minister for Women and Secretary of State for DTI, men's role in the family unit had not been incorporated in any meaningful way in public policy. From 2001 it was Hewitt's drive to incorporate fathers into the policy narrative was clear. The Employment Act 2002 contained the right to request flexible working (a piece of legislation which was available to both men and women). Additionally, the Act also introduced two weeks of paternity leave. Her stance brought into legislation genuinely novel social policy under New Labour. She was an actor with a different perspective who was able to utilise her insider status to gain favour in the masculinised "core of the core executive", enabling innovative feminist policy change in this area. A close political adviser recalled Hewitt purposefully creating space for fathers' voices to be heard in the policy development process:

> "[We held] a whole series of conversations with all of the various fathers' groups…most of the good ones and the more difficult to manage…more difficult to work with ones. So

it was very much about family…it began with women and families but then it became broader equalities issues as well….” (Interview 8 2019).

Nevertheless, Hewitt was not constraint free: despite her success she was still operating within the historical legacies of 20th century family policy and the related traditional gender norms that underpinned them. Patrick Diamond, the former Head of the No.10 Policy Unit from that time (2001 - 2005), is stark about the constraints within which family policy operated:

“I think the Labour government’s model was…primarily about women and ‘we’ll do a bit for men’ so obviously they did daddy leave, the two week daddy leave, but it wasn’t based on a notion that you needed…nor was it to tackle inequality that you had to create equality around the distribution of parental care. I think fundamentally the Labour government never really bought into that assumption… parental policies were seen as policies to help women rather than as a mechanism to create more equality and better distribution of care between parents through leave policies” (Interview 26 2020).

With Diamond at the heart of New Labour policy development leading the No.10 Policy Unit in New Labour’s second term, his perspective is particularly pertinent. His point regarding the two week “daddy leave” is worthy of further consideration in regards to how genuine the commitment was to change the role of fathers. On the one hand, two weeks paternity leave compared to the 12 month entitlement of maternity leave by the end of the New Labour tenure sends a clear signal of who should be providing the majority of care, i.e. mothers. On the other hand, and despite this disparity, it is notable that no other piece of public policy, bar John Major’s introduction of the Child Support Agency, had previously ever actively targeted the behaviour of fathers. Whilst paternity leave under Hewitt seems a modest addition, leaving the fundamentals of the welfare state or gender relations unchallenged, it was an unprecedented move which positively and pro-actively incorporated fathers into public policy.

Working with Business

As a New Labour insider, Hewitt understood the importance of skilfully mediating business lobby interests, particularly through her work as a consultant in the private sector prior to election. Two examples show Hewitt's actions in pursuit of a feminist family policy in the face of business opposition, alongside ongoing hesitancy from the "core of the core executive" (Burch and Holliday 2004: 4). Firstly, Hewitt's consensus building approach resulted in a novel piece of legislation in regard to flexible working. Secondly, Hewitt's continued pursuit of women's workplace rights is evidenced through the Women and Work Commission. Through these examples we see Hewitt is utilising *her* relationships and connections, not relationships afforded to her by the core executive as argued by Annesley and Gains (2010), to achieve success as a critical actor.

Hewitt describes herself as a consensus builder (Interview 7 2019), a point also noted by her former colleague the senior Treasury civil servant Nick Macpherson (Interview 23 2020). Through this she contrasts herself with depictions of Harman's time as Minister for Women, partly discredited by the party leadership due to her using "old fashioned women's equality language" (Interview 6 2019). Neither Harman nor Ruddock's priorities tackled the role of fathers. Theirs was a 'women and children first' feminism, as noted in the previous chapter. Hewitt is the first to recognise that her feminism and her approach was more palatable to those in authority even as she also recognises the importance of those who took a more overt stance:

> "I've always been a committed feminist. But I'm also a consensus builder. And at any particular point in time to get a consensus, in more or less the right place, you also need people who are putting down a stake for what at that point is seen as the more extreme position, and it was Harriet [Harman] and others doing that and me doing more of the consensus building. But there were and are also different views, for instance about whether family policy and the courts should positively promote co-parenting, as I think it should. I didn't get anywhere on that!" (Interview 7 2019).

This consensus building by Hewitt reinforces the importance of who can be or becomes the critical actor. Utilising her "user friendly" insider status, Hewitt was able to bring her feminist perspective to the development of this policy. Yet, without those at the 'extremes'

setting the outer parameters of the debate Hewitt's role as the consensus builder would not have been possible. Nor might she have been able to build consensus with the diverse stakeholders in the policy space.

Hewitt's consensus approach is most clearly demonstrated via the Flexible Work Taskforce (FWTF). The FWTF was established by Hewitt in 2001 precisely to find common ground amongst varied stakeholders, in respect of a policy initiative that would ultimately give rise to the implementation of the right to request flexible working for the parents of small children. The resulting legislation followed in the Employment Act 2002. Her consensual approach here cannot be overstated: the leadership was particularly concerned that business believed they could trust New Labour with the economy (for example Russell 2005; Gamble 2012; Finlayson 2003). As a result, she then brought together advocates from the TUC and Maternity Action who wanted more prescriptive rights to part-time and flexible working *and* those from the CBI and wider business lobby who were sceptical of this agenda:

> "So I basically said to this group 'Look I think we can do something really significant here that will work for everybody - but we can only do it if you all agree because otherwise I can't sell it to Tony, I can't get it into the [Employment] Bill'. And Alan [Johnson MP] knew what was wanted and we managed to get the group to move from a limited right to work part-time after maternity leave to all parents, fathers as well as mothers, with a young child up to the age of five, being able to change their hours of work. And it went even further if the child had a disability and later we extended it to people caring for an older relative as well" (Interview 7 2019).

Again, Hewitt underscores the importance of bringing two extreme (relatively speaking) voices together to achieve a middle-ground which has benefits not only to boosting women's economic autonomy through a higher likelihood of sustained labour market engagement but also a benefit to business through greater staff and skills retention.

The 'Right to Request' was a novel piece of legislation which ultimately brought flexible working onto the agenda without, in the opinion of business leaders, over regulating

business. Given the multiple pressures Hewitt was facing she recalled the intensity surrounding the right to request policy:

> "It happened because we had the combination of strong Ministerial leadership, from Alan [Johnson] and myself; a really strong argument that was feminist but also business-friendly (a successful economy means making best use of the whole workforce); and strong personal relationships. Right at the end when it looked like it was all going to fall to pieces I just spent a weekend on the phone, twisting arms, pulling in political favours, getting people to sign up to a unanimous report" (Interview 7 2019).

Again we see Hewitt using her favour at 'court' to utilise her insider status to develop feminist policy change, pulling in political favours - using *her* relationships fostered prior and in government- not those relationships afforded to her by those in the "core of the core executive" (Burch and Holliday 2004: 4). This 'soft law' which resulted in an unlikely consensus, was spearheaded by a feminist critical actor through the establishment of the FWTF. Credit for the right to request policy was given to the FWTF by John Cridland, a WWC Commissioner and the then Deputy Director-General of the UK's largest business lobby group the Confederation of British Industry (CBI): "[the FWTF] was responsible for the right to request, which I think was an epoch breaking approach" (Interview 17 2020). Cridland went on that the "epoch breaking approach" was in reference to the social partnership model adopted by the Taskforce which brought disparate views together in order to find a mutually agreeable consensus. Cridland's perspective carried considerable weight given the level of influence the CBI had at that time. Reflecting on the role of the business lobby at the time, Patrick Diamond noted that:

> "…the Labour government overall was very cautious about what it thought business could tolerate. And I think it is fair to say the CBI…it would be going too far to say it exercised a veto over policy but it had a very strong voice… So I think you do see in this area how a Conservative led government, that maybe had a more secure relationship with business, was in some ways willing to go further than a Labour government that was always looking behind, always looking over its shoulder,

> concerned business was going to attack it for being anti-private sector" (Interview 26 2020).

Diamond's account moreover aligns with that of senior DTI civil servant Tracy Vegro , when she reflected on the FWTF:

> "'I mean, [the] right to request now seems so tame doesn't it? But at the time we hadn't introduced it so it was seen as a 'aghh' how would employers cope, I remember the CBI were quite worried about that" (Interview 15 2020).

Combining Diamond's account, from his perspective in No.10, of the CBI not quite having a "veto" on this policy area undoubtedly signals the strength of the business lobby in this era whilst Vegro's account shows how the civil service factored in their perspective. In this instance, there is a clear indication of the importance and strength of having a feminist critical actor in post at the DTI to achieve feminist policy change, when operating in a constrained environment, bringing both her feminist perspective and her pragmatic approach about what was possible within a particular policy space.

Hewitt continued to pursue feminist family policy in 2004 by establishing the Women and Work Commission (WWC). Established in partnership with the then Prime Minister Tony Blair, the WWC was created to progress issues such as the gender pay gap and work/life balance policy. Leading trade unionist Margaret Prosser was asked to head the WWC. Its initial report including 43 recommendations was published in 2006. In 2009 a follow-up 'three years on report' considered progress against the 2006 recommendations. Even as it presented women as the face of a modern labour market, the WWC was undoubtedly shaped by the ongoing importance placed by New Labour leadership on their relationship with business. The historical legacy which New Labour brought into office was one of perceived economic mismanagement, and consequently New Labour policy was viewed through this prism. Economic efficiency arguments were evidently a priority in the WWC rather than arguments which tackled the root causes of women's inequality in the workplace. Consideration of women's place in the labour market has undoubtedly gained

far greater attention than in any previous government but the policy solutions were constrained within tight parameters set by New Labour's economic efficiency drive.

Several interviewees including a senior DTI civil servant who supported the Commission, a closely involved political adviser, a senior figure from the business lobby who was a commissioner, and Margaret Prosser (Interview 15 2020; Interview 17 2020; Interview 8 2020; Interview 11 2019) all recalled sincere support from both No.10 and the Treasury for this Commission from an economic standpoint. The lead civil servant for the Commission, Tracy Vegro, who had a background in productivity policy, recalled the moment of WWC's creation in 2004:

> "[Tony Blair] was focusing on women and their economic value and that now the Equalities Unit was being put in that Department [the DTI]… a more open minded approach in the Department for Business because they did see at a macro-economic…at a very hard headed level we needed women in the workforce and you needed a skilled workforce" (Interview 15 2020).

Pressed further on support from the centre:

> " …it's not the policies that are the most exciting or the most interesting…it's the thing that's eye-catching to the Ministers that generally gets support and that's really what makes something fly or not…And because of that then business took it seriously. The real world took a lead from the fact that the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, who was at the time…this was pre-Iraq…he was riding high" (Interview 15 2020).

Vegro's account strengthens to the idea that it was economic efficiency rather than a gender equity framing that was predominant. Above all, the 'business case' acted as an internal constraint frame within which this policy area could evolve. A clear demonstration of this lies in the initial report of the WWC (published in 2006). Despite its focus on tackling women's persistent inequality in the workplace, the theme which dominates every chapter and frames the context in which the recommendations have been written is the 'business

case' for supporting women already in the workforce and encouraging those currently not engaged to come into the labour market. In Margaret Prosser's Foreword she states:

> "The evidence we uncovered of the potential boost to the UK economy from harnessing women's skills has brought into sharper relief the well-publicised skills shortages that exist in the UK today…Many women are, day-in, day-out, working far below their abilities and this waste of talent is a national outrage at a time when the UK is facing some of its strongest competition from around the globe" (Department of Trade and Industry 2006: iv).

This extract from Prosser's Foreword to the WWC report, frames the inequality that women face in the workplace as detrimental to the bottom line (the 'business case'). Gender inequality is conceptualised as necessary to be tackled to 'boost' the economy or to be more competitive internationally.

The audience for this document is also made clear - business - throughout the repeated claims to the competitive gains to be made. This is the case even in *Chapter 3* entitled: *Combining Work and Family Life*:

> "Firms offering more 'quality' part-time positions will retain their senior women, make the best use of their skills and expertise and see a higher return from in investments in training" (Department of Trade and Industry 2006: 37).

In sum, rather than focusing on how women's inequality at work can be tackled, the 'business case' frame is deployed to show business how a more flexible approach to jobs will provide them with long-term benefits.

The front cover of the WWC visually captures the frame – linking women with modernisation and within this the 'business case' for women's greater workplace participation. In recognizing the influx of women into the labour market in the latter half of the 20th century, the reader encounters 4 illustrations of women. One is a mother with a baby, another a corporate businesswoman, another a military officer and finally a doctor.

Three of the four pictures would have been almost unheard of in the early 20th century as life choices for women, but the commissioning of this report was a signal that the government understood that in order to meet the needs of a modern labour market new policy responses were required. Such representations are made throughout the WWC report in 2006. Modernisation is referenced in the *Introduction* when discussing the contemporary labour market:

> "In the 30 years since the Equal Pay Act, major changes in the UK's economy and society have increased the opportunities available to women. It has become more socially acceptable for women to work" (Department of Trade and Industry 2006: 3).

The *Introduction* then goes on to note the various societal changes in the 20th century which led to the realignment of the labour market resulting in much higher female labour market engagement (see *Chapter 3* of this thesis for further details). Again, women's labour market engagement is seen as the policy target to ensure women can balance paid employment with unpaid care work.

At the same time, flexible work policy is again conceptualised as a motherhood policy and not a family policy, as outlined by Diamond above. Only women's labour market engagement is deemed difficult to reconcile with family life. Viewed through the prism of what works (or does not work) for business, the current way in which women are engaging with the labour market is characterised as a problem to be addressed by flexible working

practices, whereas the inequality women experience in the workplace itself is not problematised.

The literature that exists on the WWC argues that its recommendations and wider family policy interventions were “insufficiently powerful” to tackle gender inequality at its root (Coates and Oettinger 2007: 128). Conceptualised as a labour market engagement mechanism for women rather than a wholesale reimagining of how work and family life could be supported by the state, WWC could only be a limited intervention. Whilst the WWC sought to provide recommendations for a “fairer future” (Department of Trade and Industry 2006) in a modern labour market the embedded structural gendered norms which contributed to workplace inequity were not tackled. Here then, traditional gender norms sit arguably counter-intuitively with modernisation. The framing that only women need to be enabled to work within an unchanged labour market rather than tackling the root causes of gender inequality which have, in part, created such an unequal engagement with the world of work.

Conclusion

The role of the critical actor is even more crucial to achieve feminist policy change when working within tight policy frames and formal institutional limitations. To achieve change in such circumstances requires a deft navigation from a political insider. The agency of critical actors is central. Through this more agential account, based upon interview and archival data, Hewitt as a New Labour insider becomes a critical actor in her own right, challenging the work of Annesley and Gains (2010) which downplays her agency, influence and ability to establish resources and relationships. Albeit supported by the institutional resources of the DTI, Hewitt informed her work at the DTI and as Minister for Women with her feminism and her long-standing networks and relationships. The resulting policy change delivered on mainstream feminist demands to significantly strengthen women’s rights in the workplace and the opportunity to have a greater degree of work/life balance. Drawing on Mackay’s framework these policy changes are an example of the *quality* of the substantive representation of women under New Labour (2008: 133). Family leaves and flexible working

had, in short, been recognised in the political process, as a mainstream policy concern. Redistribution is the other element of Mackay's framework in relation to the quality of SRW relevant to this thesis. Redistribution of resources, power and/or benefits was again seen through the significant extension of maternity leave and the introduction of paternity leave in particular. Material resources ensured these policies changed the lives of families in the UK. Manifested in consensus building and utilising her "user friendly" face of feminism status, Hewitt created policy change which achieved feminist ends. Hewitt's initiative to integrate the work of her Minister for Women role and her Secretary of State role (as well as her two sets of civil servants) - was an unprecedented move in UK politics in 2001. As an insider she was able to work creatively with the institutional resources available to her. Relating to Erikson's ladder of institutionalisation (2015) Hewitt was not only successful in getting these issues on the political agenda, her policy ascended to the top of the ladder to achieve a deep level of institutionalisation with significant policy success, notably through embedding this element of family policy in legislation. These findings add empirical detail to the primarily theoretical critical actor literature (for example Childs and Krook 2006, 2008; Chaney 2012) using Hewitt as a case study.

Her unique (at the time) feminist perspective changed the narrative in family policy to create room for fathers to be seen as legitimate (and positive) targets for policy intervention. Whilst a wholesale challenge to the dominant gender order was not achieved, her alternative approach altered the shape of this element of family policy, creating (bounded) feminist policy change. Chaney's (2012) argument of a mutually reinforcing environment with critical actors and critical mass is illustrated through the mutually-reinforcing relationship between the critical actor of Patricia Hewitt and the wider environment of feminist activism and women's representation within the Parliamentary Labour Party. The informal network of feminist actors within the Parliamentary Labour Party, as well as the wider pool of feminist civil servants and special advisers, acted to maintain family policy's place on the public policy agenda. As a critical actor Hewitt was pivotal to the final shape of these elements of family policy and left the state's relationship with the family significantly altered from before her time in office.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion

This thesis has interrogated the actors, ideas and institutions which determined the shape and scope of New Labour's family policy. This has been achieved by drawing out the impact of the feminisation of the party on policy, identifying the key actors driving change, the dominant policy frames and the formal and informal institutions which were in place both opening up and constraining possibilities for change. How these actors, institutions and ideas interacted illuminates how the policy development took place. In so doing, I have countered the mainstream New Labour literature which largely marginalises the role of feminists and feminist ideas on the development of the project and the New Labour period in office. I applied the framework of Fiona Mackay's "thick" conception of the substantive representation of women (SRW) (2008), 'thickening' her framework still further by foregrounding the agency of critical actors, operationalising her contextual, historical approach and finally, drawing on the potential of policy framing in relation to the SRW. This thesis makes three key contributions: (i) an enhanced understanding of the critical actor, who they are and their relationship to other actors; (ii) greater attention to the structures, contexts and (in)formal institutions within which the critical actor operates; and (iii) a more developed consideration of how critical actors bring about change, working within and challenging inherited policy frames.

Revisiting the Concept of the Critical Actor

The role of the critical actor is central to this thesis. As noted above, a critical actor is one who engages in critical acts (Dahlerup 1988). These critical acts are those that "change the position of the minority and lead to further changes" and acts which "mobilise governing institutions to improve things for the minority group" (Lovenduski 2001: 757). In this thesis the minority group in question is women and in two distinct ways the *role* of the critical actor has been key to understanding the development of New Labour's family policy. Firstly, utilising Mackay's broader conception of who counts as a critical actor. Secondly, the thesis points to how aspirant critical actors can perceive a large cohort of women representatives as a source of support, emboldening them to 'act for' women.

- Critical Actor – who counts?

This thesis demonstrates that it is not only legislators who can act as critical actors, widening the original focus of the critical actor literature (Childs and Krook 2008, 2009). The narrow conceptualisation of those who could engage in critical acts failed to account for the wide array of political actors who have significant roles in shaping policy, processes or institutions. As noted previously, Mackay employed a broader conception by arguing that critical actors could be found in feminist champions both inside and outside of Parliament and government, including those in civil society and wider allies (2008: 131). Whilst Harriet Harman and Patricia Hewitt have been identified as critical actors in the more traditional conception, this thesis also identified an additional party actor, the former Labour Party adviser and polling expert Deborah Mattinson. Mackay's approach purposefully left space for uncertainty as to where actors pursuing SRW could emerge (2008: 132). Mackay's work built upon foundational work which argued that the core executive in a Westminster style democracy was not only politicians at the centre, but advisers, senior civil servants, influential central government departments, law officers and the security services (Dunleavy and Rhodes 1990: 3 - 4). This broader approach, beyond elected representatives, is one which is more attuned to the sheer number of disparate actors who exist within the Westminster system and the connections between them.

The importance of individual actors acting *within* organisations and how they navigate them - in this case the Labour Party and its leadership body, the Shadow Cabinet - is evident. Whilst Mattison's role within the modernisation process has been noted in the literature previously (Lovenduski 1999; Short 1996: 19; Russell 2005: 112), the role of the party actor as a feminist critical actor is a new addition. Her expertise enabled her to seize on framing opportunities and to gender the Labour Party modernisation project, achieving tangible change. The majority of the members of the Shadow Cabinet Mattinson was able to influence would go on to become Cabinet members upon election in 1997. As a result, she was influencing those that would be at the heart of decision making; those who would form the core executive. Acting strategically, by 1997 this feminist actor brought convincing

evidence to key decision makers. This ensured that the party took capturing women's votes seriously, meaning the party reflected on both image and policy to move it away from the traditional, male-dominated perceptions voters held.

- "Something is going on between presence and action." (Mackay 2008: 126) - Critical Actor and Critical Mass

This thesis re-examines the relationship between critical mass and critical actors and argues two points. Firstly, that the belief in critical mass created a perception of support that boosted the confidence of individual women MPs and Ministers. Secondly, that this confidence emboldened those actors more freely discuss 'women's issues', in so far as they can be described. There has been longstanding dissatisfaction with the idea of critical mass as an automatic mechanism for achieving change (see Dahlerup 1988; Mackay 2008 and debate summarised in Childs and Krook 2006) and as a result the idea of critical actors has come to the fore. Given this, it was of note that the interview data for this study repeatedly cited critical mass as a concept which related to changes in SRW in Parliament. Those interviewed, who had been in Parliament prior to 1997, noted that having the perceived support of other women Parliamentarians gave them a new found confidence to speak to 'women's issues' in the Commons, as they would not have had that confidence previously when surrounded by "six hundred baying men…" (Interview 1 2019). The change was the perception of support from fellow women MPs which instilled a confidence that had not been accessible previously in such a male-dominated institution. It was also noted in interviews that as well as a network of feminist parliamentarians who were operating post-1997 there were key feminist senior special advisers in No.10 forming part of this critical mass.

A change in women's descriptive representation created a shift in the typically masculine institution of the House of Commons which went beyond a change in what the Chamber looked like; the topics discussed in the House also changed. This changed Westminster created an environment within which aspirant critical actors could pursue SRW through the perception of a supportive critical mass of MPs and special advisers. This argument builds on the work of Peter Allen and Sarah Childs who studied the Women's Parliamentary Labour

Party (WPLP) and understood it as a “missing link” (2018: 619) to better illuminate the connection between women’s descriptive and substantive representation at Westminster. In this study, the “missing link” explored is that between critical mass and aspirant critical actors and the perception of support between actors.

Critical Actors and the Gendered Core Executive

In heavily centralised Westminster style democracies, power is primarily held in the executive. How SRW of women is achieved, or constrained, in such a context is therefore likely to relate to the executive (Mackay 2008: 128). Whilst accepting Claire Annesley and Francesca Gains’ specification of a gendered core executive with a masculinised disposition (2010: 909) I challenge their argument that the gendered core executive is “the institutional locus of power and resources to shape public policy” (Ibid: 910). The *locus* of power in the specific case of New Labour were the two *inner* dominant institutions within the wider institution of the core executive, namely No.10 and HM Treasury, the “core of the core executive” (Burch and Holliday 2004: 4). Whilst, as noted above, Annesley and Gains do recognise that power was centralised under New Labour (2010: 916 - 917) it is Burch and Holliday’s concept which allows for a greater degree of precision when studying the New Labour period. It was this “core of the core executive” that acted “a barrier to feminist political actors intent on re-gendering public policy” (Annesley and Gains 2010: 910). Taking a more contextual approach identifies that whilst the Minister for Women as a formal institution is technically included within the wider core executive, by virtue of its ‘newness’ in 1997 it was an awkward fit within the informal rules which also govern what happens *within* the complex institution(s) of the core executive. This broader view also enables a “thick” understanding of representation which sets out the context with which actors were working within to achieve the substantive representation of women’s interests (Mackay 2008). This contextual approach supports Mackay’s framework as it does not ‘fix’ the who, where, when and how of SRW in advance (2008: 132) but identifies it through analysing the broader environment.

Annesley and Gains had previously applied their idea of the gendered core executive (2010) to interrogating the success of two key actors from the New Labour period who served as Minister for Women, Harriet Harman (in relation to her second period in post from 2007 - 2010) and Patricia Hewitt. This thesis revisits these Ministers and argues for a much more agential account. It does this by challenging Annesley and Gains' argument that the particular success of Hewitt as a feminist critical actor in the New Labour period was as a result of the resources and relationships *afforded to her* from the core executive. The findings also add context to and explain why Harman was not comparatively as successful in the post of Minister for Women when she held it for the first time, from 1997 – 1998, despite having access to significant resources via the major Whitehall department, the Department of Social Security. There are three points where a contribution has been made. Firstly, it is more attentive to the agency of both Hewitt and Harman, rather than characterising them as mere passive recipients of resources from the core executive. Two further, linked, considerations are not explored fully in Annesley and Gains' analysis. These are the insider/outsider status of the actors and then the opportunity to strategically develop feminist policy. The insider/outside status of the actor is not addressed directly in their argument. Their focus is on the relationships which are given to Ministers as part of their institutional role within the core executive, and does not account for the relationships, in particular, which have been fostered by actors independently prior to joining government. Situating critical actors 'in time', adding a temporal analysis, allows for a 'thicker' understanding of the conditions within which critical actors can pursue feminist policy change.

- Insider/Outsider Status in Relation to the Core Executive

The respective success of the critical actor in relation to the core executive in this case can be viewed through the lens of court politics. Rhodes' helpful idea of court politics (2011) (later gendered in partnership with Mackay (2013)) is operationalised in this thesis by identifying who is in favour and who is better able to navigate the resources, rules and relationships presented to them by a masculinised core executive. Harriet Harman and Patricia Hewitt had markedly different relationships with the "core of the core executive" under New Labour (Burch and Holliday 2004: 4) , No.10 and the Treasury. This can be

traced, in part, due to their differing backgrounds prior to entering Parliament. Hewitt was embedded in the New Labour project through her experience working at the heart of the party's modernisation in opposition. This meant she had long-standing relationships and proximity to the key actors who went on to form the "core of the core executive" in government. In contrast, whilst Harman was appointed to several Shadow Ministerial and Secretary of State posts throughout Labour's period in opposition she was not closely connected to the party modernisation project of New Labour, with her style of feminism branded "old fashioned" (Interview 6 2019) and, as a result, was out of alignment with the New Labour brand. In contrast, in the court of New Labour Hewitt was an insider.

Within New Labour (relatively) extreme perspectives were not in favour. In this case, when working with a masculinised core executive feminist critical actors who had moderate perspectives were more successful in achieving change. Harman's background was intertwined with the women's movement in the UK and her feminism was rooted in activism in a way Hewitt's feminism was not (Harman 2017: 26). When Harman served as Minister for Women in 1997 – 1998 she held the post alongside serving as the Secretary of State for Social Security. As noted in interviews it was felt that her feminist approach did not fit with the New Labour image of modernisation and change (on modernisation see Finlayson 2003). Conversely Hewitt, whilst still a self-described feminist, noted she was perceived by Tony Blair to be a more "user-friendly" (Interview 7 2019) feminist than Harman. In this case Hewitt was seen to build upon the work of colleagues who had demands which were perceived as more extreme in order for her to come through the middle - by comparison she was perceived as a more moderate force. This example gives agency back to the critical actor, who was not a passive Minister simply utilising existing institutional resources and relationships placed at her disposal by the core executive. Rather, Hewitt was aware that her feminism was more palatable to those in leadership and she knowingly capitalised on the work of others with a different perspective. Hewitt understood that her role as a consensus builder was made easier by those who had come before. Those who had widened the parameters of the debate enabled her to develop a more moderate consensus by virtue of not coming at the issue in a way which would have been deemed extreme.

Of course, the resources and relationships at Hewitt's disposal were as a result of No.10 appointing her to both posts, such as legislative powers at the DTI and civil servants, but it was Hewitt, as a feminist critical actor, who utilised those resources and relationships in an opportunistic and novel way to make feminist policy development central to her time in post. Hewitt's actions point to a more agential conclusion than pursued by Annesley and Gains. When Hewitt became Minister for Women in 2001 she forged an innovative path in order to pursue feminist policy development. As discussed previously, Hewitt merged two roles (Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and Minister for Women) both in terms of her policy platform and the civil servants from the DTI and those from the Women and Equalities Unit (WEU), a point confirmed in interviews both by Hewitt herself and a closely involved political adviser and politically neutral civil servants (Interview 7 2019; Interview 8 2019; Interview 15 2020; Interview 16 2020). This was an unprecedented step to merge the policy and personnel of the dual posts held by Ministers for Women. As noted above in interviews with Hewitt, a former political adviser and senior civil servants, Hewitt acted strategically to bring together her work as Minister for Women and Secretary of State. Hewitt utilised the resources and relationships at her disposal and made them greater than the sum of their parts. For the first time the Minister for Women, under Hewitt, was having a significant impact in policy development and change.

- Institutional Innovation in Formal and Informal Structures

Institutional innovation, most notably in this case via the creation of the Minister for Women, does not have a linear trajectory towards SRW. Mackay's framework sets out the 'two steps forward, one step back' nature of institutional innovation. The formal and informal institutions within which the Minister for Women role was 'nested' led to an inconsistent journey for the development of feminist policy development via this role. The literature surrounding the Minister for Women is limited (for example see Childs 2004; Durose and Gains 2007; Annesley, Gains, and Rummery 2010), with most of the women and New Labour literature focused on the changes to the substantive representation of women focusing on the influx of women MPs in 1997. There are two clear ways this thesis adds to the literature – firstly, by providing a complex investigation of the role and its development

through time, particularly its formal institutional limitations in office and secondly, an understanding of the informal limits placed upon the role in office.

This thesis demonstrated significant change over time from the original conception of a full independent Women's Ministry, aligning with previous research which argues that the gendered core executive often manifests itself through the appointment of women to roles with low levels of power and resources (Annesley and Gains 2010: 917). The initial idea, developed by former party leader Neil Kinnock and former Shadow Minister for Women Jo Richardson in opposition, had a vision of a full independent Women's Ministry with an attendant full Cabinet Minister. In 1997 it became a post to be held on a dual-basis with a Cabinet level post. Additionally, there was no independent Ministry but a small team of civil servants forming the Women's Unit (WU) and a supporting junior Minister. This diminution also manifested through the appointment process for the role. Several Ministers for Women (and their junior Ministers) recalled the Prime Minister forgetting to appoint them to the role in reshuffles. These repeated and sustained instances of 'forgetfulness' display a lack of institutional embeddedness of the Minister for Women within the core executive of the Westminster system. These instances are empirical examples of the idea developed by Mackay who argues that "institutional actors apparently forget new formal rules and espoused norms, especially those that seek to redistribute power between men and women…" (Mackay 2014: 555). This 'forgetfulness' can be understood as a mechanism of institutional continuity which acts as a resistance to gender equality. Additionally, several of those appointed to the junior post reported that they were not paid for their work as a Minister, a signal pointing to a lack of status. This is particularly pertinent given the broader work to close the gender pay gap in government. This thesis adds detail and depth to the literature which currently exists in this area (Childs 2004: Durose and Gains 2007; Annesley and Gains 2010) through these examples of the gendered core executive limiting the status of the Minister for Women.

The introduction of the Minister for Women can be understood as a type of institutional layering, a new post within current institutional rules. Mackay's concept of "nested newness" refines this concept of institutional change further with its particular attention to the gendered implications of a new institution within a wider masculinised core executive

(Mackay 2014). At present the “nested newness” literature primarily uses devolved contexts within the UK political structures to interrogate new institutions sitting within the wider system such as the Scottish and Welsh Parliaments. This thesis augments this literature focusing on “newness” within the Westminster context, by demonstrating the difficulties of embedding new formal institutions, and new actors, within complex, long-standing institutional contexts, and the resulting tensions between formal and informal rules (explored in Helmke and Levitskty 2004; Mahoney and Thelen 2010) . Mackay, who originated the concept, points to a “stickiness” of formal and informal rules that govern institutions which can make “newness” a liability, meaning the “newness” needs to prove itself against wider norms (Mackay 2014: 551), as noted in *Chapter 2*. Mackay goes on to argue that as women and ‘women’s concerns’ are still not the norm in political institutions one way to counter the perceived “liability of newness” is to rely on previous forms of legitimacy which are often highly gendered (Ibid: 551). Whilst “nested newness” does not give an explanation for how change occurs it does illuminate why continuity may be expected and the difficulty in achieving change within gendered institutions. The informal rules of acceptability, in particular, which governed women’s representation in Westminster – embodied by actions of the “core of the core executive”(Burch and Holliday 2004: 4) (in the case of New Labour No.10 and the Treasury) - clearly had an impact in differing ways in relation to Harman and Hewitt, as outlined above. This example also demonstrates the dynamism of such relationships where the actor in a new post who is deemed more “user-friendly” by the “core of the core executive” can work within the informal rules and utilise informal relationships to find alignment between strategies and dominant ideas. Given her insider status Hewitt mitigated her “liability of newness” with the “core of the core executive” in the role of Minister for Women. Conversely, as the embodiment of “newness”, the first Minister for Women, Harman, found that despite facing largely the same formal constraints as Hewitt she was unable to navigate these relationships as easily. This was due to a violation of the informal governing rules of the “core of the core executive”, such as the perception of Harman as a more radical feminist figure.

Formal institutional structures also have been demonstrated to have the ability to both hinder or enable feminist policy making. As noted above, in government the role was given on a dual basis with a separate Cabinet level post. Whilst the post of Minister for Women

was always held by a member of the Cabinet, it was their substantive Cabinet role which afforded them a seat at the decision-making table. Until the creation of the government Equalities Office (GEO) in 2007 the Minister for Women did not have the support of an independent department which could bring forward legislation. This was another manifestation of formal institutions hindering the process of feminist policy making. One way in which feminist critical actors had the ability to develop feminist policy legislation without the resource of an independent, legislatively empowered Ministry for Women was to align their policy goals as Minister for Women with that of their substantive Department, as noted above a strategy employed by Hewitt. Policy alignment, however, was not always possible. For instance, when Harman was in post initially as Minister for Women and Secretary of State at the Department for Social Security (DSS) her priorities did not easily align with her DSS portfolio. There was an additional impact that the formal and informal constraints, outlined above, placed upon the role of Minister for Women when the ability to align policy was not present. When Harman was in post from 1997 - 1998 she recalled in her autobiography that she was confronted by civil servants who saw working on the Minister for Women brief as “a form of punishment” (2017: 289) and Ruddock noted in her autobiography that there was a lack of enthusiasm from the civil servants who were “not on top of [their] agendas” (2016: 242). Feminist policy development was being blocked both informally and formally at the outset of the post of Minister for Women in government. Trying to circumvent these disparate institutional hindrances Harman sought to use the role as an access point into government for the wider women’s movement. Nevertheless, several other interviewees noted that the Minister for Women was perceived as a secondary contact due to its lack of independent formal power to initiate legislative change and relatedly its lack of institutional embeddedness conferred a lack of status, both formally and informally.

Historical Legacies Framing Policy

Taking a ‘thicker’ approach to SRW, this contextual and historical perspective on policy frames demonstrates that it is not simply enough to look at policy development as a ‘snapshot’ in government but it is essential to understand the impact of ideational

parameters placed upon actors within the longer term policy process. These historical and ideational legacies framed New Labour family policy as a result of their deep institutionalisation in the in UK politics, seen in *Chapter 3*. Accordingly, actors working within these constraints were governed by dominant ideas which limited how policy could be conceived. The primary framing related to the reluctance to alter the relationship between the state and the family, leading to a lack of interest in challenging gender norms from the party leadership. In addition, the idea of social investment as a policy driver was central to the New Labour project and finally, was the maintenance of New Labour's fragile relationship with business.

- Legacy of the State/Family Relationship - maintenance of the traditional gender order

The hesitancy to challenge the traditional relationship between the family and the state is evident particularly regarding the data from the policy case studies which bound the parameters within which feminist critical actors operated. The legacy of 20th century public policy was enduring - where the state and the family, for the most part, held each other at a distance, as noted in *Chapter 3*. The long-standing historical context of the relationship between the state and the family made it a particularly "sticky" informal institution for critical actors to challenge effectively (Kenny 2013; 167). In spite of this, family policy became a highly active site of public policy in the New Labour era. Some elements of childcare policy were interventionist, undoubtedly altering the state and family relationship which had been in place previously, such as Sure Start in its initial targeted form. Yet, New Labour's wider childcare offer was one of regulation and coordination rather than direct government provision of childcare. In addition, there was significant extension of maternity leave, the introduction of paternity leave, as well as the introduction of the right to request. Hewitt stated in her first-hand account, however, that she was unable to go further in altering the family dynamic particularly in terms of the maternity/paternity divide or to introduce broader parental leave; such elements would have challenged the traditional relationship between the state and the family in a more transformational sense (2014).

Relatedly, maintenance of the prevailing gender order is the dominant idea which runs through the data collected for this study. Maintenance of the prevailing gender order can be

seen to be deeply institutionalised (Erikson 2015). This, again, set a tight boundary within which critical actors operated. Whilst New Labour's work on family policy was significant in public policy terms by reinventing an effectively blank slate into a mainstream policy concern, it did so within limits where only incremental change was possible to tackle the roots of gender inequality. As Patrick Diamond, former Head of the No.10 Policy Unit from 2001 – 2005, suggested New Labour's family policy could be more accurately described as a women's policy programme with no genuine move to pursue a policy which targeted unequal gender relations (Interview 26 2020). The embeddedness of the policy frame can also be seen in relation to Hewitt's work on flexible working and employment leaves. For instance, the significant extension of maternity leave was strongly associated with the Treasury's anti-poverty and labour market engagement strategy, essentially encouraging mothers into or return to the workplace. The introduction of two weeks paid paternity leave was a novel inclusion of fathers in a positive light in public policy and as a result was a signal to demonstrate a challenge to the prevailing gender order. Yet, when looked at in comparison with the 52 week maternity leave allowance it is difficult to argue that this policy genuinely sought to fundamentally alter gender inequality given the gross disparity in allocation. In her first-hand account reflecting on her time in post Hewitt concurred that the changes to maternity leave, in particular, "reinforced the assumption that families are primarily women's responsibility" (2014: 195).

- Social Investment in Children

The Treasury's drive to tackle unemployment was primarily a mechanism for the alleviation of child poverty. The idea of social investment was not only found in the Treasury, it was a central idea of the New Labour political philosophy (see Giddens 1998). The idea of children as legitimate and important sites for public policy intervention was seen in the 20th century, as noted in *Chapter 3*, where investment in their future was dominant often to the marginalisation of the wider family unit. A deep institutionalisation of this idea was already in place ahead of New Labour's time in office. Social investment manifested itself not only in Sure Start but through the creation of the Minister for Children, the *Every Child Matters* policy and the linked establishment of the Department for Children, Schools and Families in 2007. This thesis both confirms and extends the literature which surrounds social

investment in children during the New Labour period. The literature argues that the move to a social investment perspective led to the priming of the needs of children to the marginalisation of women throughout the New Labour years (Featherstone 2003; Lister 2006). As noted in *Chapter 5,* the dominant government framing of childcare policy, particularly from the appointment of the Minister for Children onwards, was one of social investment in children. Children were now being conceptualised as legitimate sites for social policy intervention due to their future role in the economy and society. Conversely women, or mothers specifically, were not conceptualised as legitimate sites for social policy interventions in their own right. A similar thread was also evident at the early stages of Sure Start with the heavy focus on employment support for parents in particularly disadvantaged areas. The evidence from this research adds to the literature on women's marginalisation in favour of that of children by adding new data through interviews and archival work in particular. The increased provision and quality of childcare was a key demand from those within the wider feminist movement, as well as from active feminists within government and the Labour Party at that time. Feminist demands were being met by the government pursing an active childcare policy albeit tempered with the social investment focus on children and on their needs, not necessarily the needs of mothers. This finding points to a more nuanced understanding of the framing of childcare policy during the New Labour years than currently exists within the literature.

- Keeping business happy

The final key idea which constrained our critical actors was New Labour's unwillingness to compromise its long fought for relationship with the business community. The historical legacy of perceived economic mismanagement by the Labour Party became a prism through which policy was viewed. As a result it was a particularly "sticky" idea which governed New Labour's actions in office (Kenny 2013; 167). For instance, it was clearly demonstrated by Gordon Brown's commitment to keep to the Conservative government's previous prudent spending plans for the first two years of his Chancellorship. Against this backdrop critical actors were confronted by tight restrictions placed upon policy development. Individual critical actors would need to challenge the ideological constraint of New Labour's reticence

to rile the business community. It was evident, however, that the will of the individual actor was not enough to push against ingrained ideas which shaped the party context within which family policy operated. Hewitt recorded Prime Minister Tony Blair (Interview 7 2019) as being reticent particularly around flexible working policy. For Blair, New Labour, had to be a party that business could trust. Hewitt understood this reticence, as a result of her insider status to the New Labour modernisation project. Yet, she employed her tactic of consensus building to develop an novel piece of 'soft law' policy – the right to request flexible working– which had buy-in from disparate stakeholders such as the CBI and the TUC. The individual actor could also be seen to be working within these tight parameters in opposition to strategically develop feminist policy. Harman also successfully regendered economic policy through her time in the Shadow Treasury team. Making the case for childcare as economic infrastructure she strategically brought her feminist approach to a typically masculinised policy area of infrastructure. Harman's close connections to the UK's women's movement ensured she was well-informed to advance a key long-standing demand of the women's movement; access to good quality, affordable childcare. We saw this manifest itself through Gordon Brown's first budget in 1997 where he described childcare as "an integral part of our economic policy" (*Hansard* HC Deb. vol. 297 col. 309, 2 July 1997). In this instance Harman's work had been embedded in the new Treasury orthodoxy within parameters which would satisfy business. As noted in *Chapters 5* and *6*, the two policy cases both outline the quality of SRW which was achieved under the New Labour period, in differing degrees by the impact of the feminist critical actors, resulting in both policy recognition in the political process and policy redistribution through the allocation of resources and power to these policy areas.

Limitations of This Study and Avenues for Future Research

This thesis focuses on two areas of family policy development under the thirteen years of the New Labour government. Both policy areas were of long-standing interest to feminists both within and outside of the Labour Party. Nevertheless, there are many other areas of policy under New Labour which could be assessed to understand the impact of feminist actors and ideas on their development. In 2005 the late Tessa Jowell (then Minister for

Women and Equalities) remarked that the New Labour government was the most feminist government in our history (Campbell and Childs 2015b). In order to fully assess this claim, a wider exploration of both politics and policy in the New Labour years is essential and is a clear avenue for future research. Broader explorations of the public policy pursued by New Labour with a gendered lens could go further to prove, or disprove, Jowell's claim. This is in addition to a more extensive exploration of the engendering of the machinery of government in this period and beyond. In this thesis the interviewees varied from ex-politicians who were active during the New Labour period, civil servants, party advisers and those from business and the trade union movement. In a wider ranging study on multiple policy areas, future research would benefit from a larger pool of interviewees, particularly to be able to draw out linkages between how policy was developed in different contexts across government.

Contemporary, detailed accounts of family policy have begun to emerge (such as Eisenstadt and Oppenheim 2019). Nevertheless, whilst Eisenstadt and Oppenheim's account gives a detailed sweep of family policy over a twenty year period (broadly from 1997 – 2017) it pays little attention to the gendered dynamics of policy development. The current literature on the New Labour period which intersects with gender considerations is primarily focused on women's representation (for example Childs 2004) or literature which takes a broader overview, rather than an in-depth analysis, of women's role in policy and politics at that time (for instance Annesley, Gains, and Rummery 2007). In addition, the majority of the literature which focuses in this area was either written during or shortly after New Labour's period in office (for example see Annesley, Gains, and Rummery 2010; Annesley 2010; Bashevkin 2000; Daly 2010b; Childs 2002). These accounts had the benefit, often, of interviewing key actors with events fresh in their memory. An additional avenue for future research would be accounts which take a contextual, historical approach drawing on elite interviews with the actors who now have distance from their government and the wider political environment. As noted in *Chapter 2*, interviews undertaken many years after the events under investigation have to be approached mindfully given the deterioration of memory which may have taken place. Nevertheless, this thesis has been able to gain insights from interviewees who have had the time to reflect on their role and those of others around them, as well as the impact of wider political events on policy development.

In addition, interviewees' concerns about future political careers will have dissipated and actors are now able to view their contribution in context, allowing contemporary research to draw on this 'thicker', historical perspective.

This thesis is enhanced by the inclusion of archival material from both the papers of Neil Kinnock and the Labour Party documents held at the Labour History Archive. The use of archival data was not available to contemporaneous studies and therefore adds a further layer of analysis and allows for triangulation with other data sources. The papers from Neil Kinnock's archive, in particular, provided insights into the actors who were active in policy development in the long period of opposition. At present these papers have been underutilised in the literature therefore a broader study of other areas of policy development would be enhanced with greater engagement with these sources. As a significant period of time has passed since the Party's modernisation project and the New Labour government, it is likely that several other key actors will give their papers to archives in the coming years. These archival documents will add further contextual richness to future empirical studies.

Additional routes for analytic exploration remain. By the very nature of Mackay's "whole system approach" (2008: 125) the scope of analysis is extremely broad, meaning that the ability to truly encompass the whole system in one PhD is not possible. As noted previously, Mackay's "thick" framework does not "fix" the who, where, when and how of SRW in advance but traces how it emerges over time (2008: 125). Whilst this thesis identified SRW through a variety of actors, institutions and the successful navigation of policy frames, a broader scope such as a greater focus on additional external actors to the Westminster system and international policy exchange could provide an even richer understanding of the "whole system" outlined in Mackay's framework. Secondly, as this thesis developed the role of the feminist critical actor in the pursuit of the substantive representation of women, further exploration of the impact of the actor and their networks and relationships (drawing on the theme of insider/outsider status) via broader empirical examples would enhance the literature. Understanding the impact of the feminist critical actor on policy change on a larger scale would enrich a largely theoretical existing literature.

Conclusion

Taking a fresh look at the New Labour period, now over a decade out of office, has allowed for new insights into the period, particularly when viewed through a gendered lens. This thesis sits both within the wider New Labour literature and within the contemporary feminist institutionalism literature. Gendering the New Labour literature and adding to contemporaneous accounts has uncovered nuance and perspective which can only come with temporal distance. This thesis has moreover provided an enhanced account of the role of the critical actor in the substantive representation of women, and emphasised its importance by extending the framework outlined by Mackay. This has been shown through an understanding of the importance of the relationship between critical actors and the inner core executive; and the mutually reinforcing relationship between critical mass and critical actors. This research has shown that critical actors pushed for transformational change, building on small 'wins' over time, but also working within restrictive formal and informal institutional parameters which limited creativity and innovation in policy. The importance of the insider/outsider status of feminist critical actors, in this case most notably the relationships they fostered prior to joining government, in the achievement of the substantive representation is highlighted. This is a point underexplored in the current literature. Their status impacted their ability to navigate the formal and informal institutional constraints placed upon them and their ability (or otherwise) to utilise relationships effectively towards feminist policy development. In addition, this PhD has contributed to the wider interpretation of who can be considered a critical actor. Finally, taking a temporal approach demonstrates the importance of the historical and ideational legacies which set the limits within which feminist policy making could occur. This approach elucidated the identification of the changing relationships over time, particularly relations within the gendered core executive and the shifting agency of actors in this case. The deep rooted ideas surrounding the family, state and gender relations allowed for an analysis which was situated 'in time'. For feminists in the New Labour period it was the dynamism of the relationships between actors, institutions and ideas which determined when success was possible, and on what terms.

Appendix A – Interview Details

Number	Interviewee	Date	Format
1	Joan Ruddock	27/03/19	Face-to-face (transcribed)
2	Margaret Jay	02/04/19	Face-to-face (detailed notes)
3	Jo Gibbons	17/04/19	Face-to-face (transcribed)
4	Ruth Kelly	15/05/19	Face-to-face (transcribed)
5	Meg Munn	05/06/19	Face-to-face (transcribed)
6	Fiona Reynolds	19/06/19	Face-to-face (transcribed)
7	Patricia Hewitt	26/06/19	Face-to-face (transcribed)
8	Former political adviser	27/08/19	Face-to-face (transcribed)
9	Deborah Mattinson	03/09/19	Face-to-face (transcribed)
10	Sally Morgan	05/09/19	Face-to-face (detailed notes)
11	Margaret Prosser	24/10/19	Face-to-face (transcribed)
12	Margaret Hodge	14/11/19	Face-to-face (transcribed)
13	Clare Short	27/11/19	Telephone (transcribed)
14	Neil Kinnock	15/01/20	Face-to-face (transcribed)
15	Tracy Vegro	29/01/20	Face-to-face (transcribed)
16	Helen Grimshaw	19/02/20	Face-to-face (transcribed)
17	John Cridland	20/03/20	Telephone (transcribed)
18	Geoffrey Norris	15/04/20	Telephone (transcribed)
19	Ed Balls	16/06/20	Zoom (transcribed)
20	Naomi Eisenstadt	25/06/20	Zoom (transcribed)
21	Kay Carberry	27/07/20	Zoom (transcribed)
22	Fiona Mactaggart	29/07/20	Zoom (transcribed)
23	Nick Macpherson	06/08/20	Zoom (transcribed)
24	Barbara Follett	06/08/20	Zoom (transcribed)
25	David Blunkett	19/08/20	Telephone (transcribed)
26	Patrick Diamond	02/09/20	Zoom (transcribed)

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