White Feminist Stories

Locating Race in Narratives of British Feminism

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Abstract

This thesis examines dominant feminist discourses emerging from liberal media, the academy, and activist networks in contemporary Britain. In particular, it traces stories and representations of feminism's recent past (from the 1960s onwards) which are constructed and reproduced through these sites, analysing where and how issues related to race and racism are located within - and outside of - such narratives. It is based on empirical research analysing popular, academic, and activist books, newspaper articles in *The Guardian* and *The Observer*, as well as interviews with feminist activists and students of women's and gender studies courses.

Given that there is an extensive history of women of colour-led organising in post-war Britain, including an autonomous black women's movement in the 1970s and '80s, and the growth at this time of black British feminism both within and outside of the academy, the thesis interrogates dominant narratives which continue to construct British feminism as a story belonging to white women. Drawing on black and postcolonial feminist theory, it analyses the articulations of feminist politics emerging from these sites through an anti-racist lens. It demonstrates that the way the historical narratives are constructed and gain currency has a significant influence on contemporary feminist theory and politics, with whiteness reproduced as the hegemonic lens through which British feminism is understood. The thesis argues that white feminist racism haunts the dominant narrative of British feminism – as something which is repeatedly erased or evaded each time it is brought to view – and it calls for white feminist academics and activists to reckon with the long history of racism and imperialism which has been integral to the British feminist project since its inception.

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1. Feminism and its stories

'I'm beginning to feel invisible again within the WLM [women's liberation movement], having to work myself up to making "heavy" statements that will embarrass sisters in meetings - I can see the eyebrows going up already - "Not racism - that old chestnut again - it's so boring." Well, if it's boring for you, white sister.... I've got no monopoly on dealing with racism - it's your problem too.'

(Jan McKenley, 1980: 24)

'Again and again, I have to insist that feminist solidarity rooted in a commitment to progressive politics must include a space for rigorous critique, for dissent, or we are doomed to reproduce in progressive communities the very forms of domination we seek to oppose.'

(bell hooks, 1994: 67)

White supremacy - a global system of domination by people racialised as white – is foundational to the project of western modernity (Mills, 2003). Dominant white-led western feminist movements have often failed to challenge this foundation, thus reproducing it. Focusing on the British context in particular, this thesis asks whether contemporary feminists are reckoning with these histories of white feminist racism.

Racism takes many forms and is reproduced in many ways; my focus is on discourse, how contemporary feminists talk and write about feminism, feminist history and race. Equally, feminism takes many different forms and is composed of many different constituencies; as I am concerned with racism and white supremacy, my gaze is focused on white-dominated feminist discourse and spaces. I use the term 'white-dominated' to denote discourse and spaces in which a white feminist subject is configured as the norm. In white-dominated spaces, white people are usually the numeric majority, but it must be recognised that people of colour have also always been part of and worked in such spaces.

In examining how feminists write and talk about feminism, feminist history and race, *narratives* have emerged as the key discursive structures for my analysis. The thesis specifically tracks the narratives and representations of feminism's recent past (from the 1960s onwards) emerging from contemporary activist networks, the academy and liberal media, analysing where and how issues related to race and racism are located within - and

outside of - these narratives. Analysing how stories about feminism past and present are told and where race is located within them, usefully illuminates how race and racism are understood within contemporary feminist contexts.

This chapter began with two quotes, both of which bring to the fore key themes of this thesis. The words of Jan McKenley, a reproductive rights activist and black feminist involved with the women's liberation movement (WLM) in London in the 1970s and '80s, comes from a longer letter printed in an issue of the feminist magazine *Spare Rib*, in which the white editors expressed their hope that it was 'the beginning of debate and exploration of opinions in *Spare Rib*' about racism. Yet as McKenley's letter clearly indicates, this was hardly the *beginning* of the debate within the WLM: the words 'again' (and 'again'), 'that old chestnut', and 'boring' evoke the sense of tiredness and repetition associated with the discussion. This sense of 'having the same conversation over and over again' is habitual among those of us committed to ending racism within feminism. In fact it was this sense, coupled with the question 'why don't we learn from the past?' that led me to start researching how the feminist past is reproduced and the role of narratives in maintaining white supremacy within British feminism.

Yet how this repetition is experienced depends upon our own stakes in the matter, and McKenley's letter speaks to this too. In addition to feelings such as isolation, pain and anger which may result from feeling invisible, McKenley - the black feminist - carries the weight of this unequal dynamic in other ways: she is the one working herself up to make '"heavy" statements' in meetings. She is the one worrying about how her 'white sisters' will respond if she brings it up *again*. She is the one who risks being further excluded if she chooses to speak about racism in a group of mainly white feminists. White feminists on the other hand (in McKenley's view) experience the repetition simply as 'boring', as something which belongs in the past, something which has already been done.

Significantly, as McKenley draws attention to, white feminists see the repetition of the discussion as boring, because they tend to see racism as something which has nothing to do with them. But, as McKenley reminds us, and which stands as a basic premise of this thesis: racism within feminism has *everything to do with white feminists*. As a white feminist committed to ending racism, I would go even further than McKenley: racism is not only our problem 'too', it is *our problem*.

The reproduction of racism within feminism involves the reproduction of unequal power dynamics between feminists of colour and white feminists, such as the dynamic identified in McKenley's letter: feminists of colour experiencing the racism enacted by white feminists, and then also carrying the weight and the labour of educating white feminists about racism *again* and *again*; white feminists rolling their eyes and dismissing the issue as old news (although I would guess that anxiety and guilt have parts to play here as much as boredom). Thus to end racism within feminism, this dynamic needs to shift: white feminists must do the work and continue to do it, until there is no further repetition. This thesis, I hope, contributes to this work.

Connected to the repetition of 'again and again', American black feminist theorist bell hooks draws our attention to another aspect of the struggle against racism within feminism, and another basic premise of this thesis: *anti-racist critique within feminist discourse and spaces is necessary and important if racism is to not be reproduced*. Too often when someone points out racism or white dominance within a feminist space, it is understood as disruptive, and more condemningly, as destructive; it often leads to conflict and temporary or permanent breakdown in 'normal' functioning of groups (see e.g. Fellows & Razack, 1998; Srivastava, 2005). Understanding anti-racist critique in this way – in which it is 'heard as an accusation' (Ahmed, 2011: 123) – prioritises white reality and white comfort over people of colour's experiences of racism. Instead, I argue that anti-racist critiques need to be understood as feminist activist and theoretical *work* and must be included as such in historical accounts of feminism's development. However, as the thesis will show, the work of anti-racist critique within feminism is repeatedly erased from dominant narratives of feminist history. This erasure enables the reproduction of racism and whiteness, and partly answers the question of why we do not learn from the past.

Having introduced some basic premises of this thesis, the rest of this chapter will do two things. First, I will argue that attending to narratives of the feminist past is key to understanding the feminist present. Secondly, I highlight other research on feminist narratives, representation and race. I conclude by reflecting briefly on the contribution that the thesis makes to scholarship on feminism and race, as well as outlining how the thesis will be structured.

Why narratives?

This thesis uses the words 'narrative' and 'story' interchangeably to describe the representation of events over time (I will discuss in depth how I use the concept of narrative in chapter three). But why do I focus on narratives? What do they tell us and why does it matter?

In the last few years, the concept of narrative has featured prominently in social media debates about feminism and racism. When women of colour have challenged the racism of white women's feminist politics, it has become clear that such conflicts often centre on who has the power to control narratives. Stories about feminism tell us about the storyteller's assumptions about who 'owns' feminism; who are the central subjects of the story. Twitter and other social media have enabled feminists of colour to powerfully challenge the narrative that white women have always 'owned' and 'led' feminism. The impact these challenges have had is clear to see by the institutionally supported white feminist backlash which has erupted against feminists of colour online (see in particular blog posts by Mariame Kaba and Andrea Smith (2014) and Suey Park and David Leonard (2014) for a discussion of what has been referred to in the US mainstream media as 'feminist Twitter wars' - both of these posts discuss who controls narratives about feminism).

A number of social movement researchers have focused attention on the collective and personal narratives of activists, arguing for the significant role storytelling plays in the production of collective identities and solidarity within social movements (e.g. Guzik & Gorlier, 2004; Polletta, 1998). Narrative, Guzik and Gorlier argue, 'represents an essential operation in the elaboration of feminist identity, at both the group and individual level' (Guzik & Gorlier, 2004: 109). Stories, they emphasise, are deeply political:

> Narrative counts as a practice of remembering. Through the selection of events and their integration into coherent stories of a time past, the narrator actively assembles a history or histories that not only come to represent the past but also connect to a particular present (ibid: 96).

Equally important, narrative also counts as a practice of *forgetting*: the narrator assembles a history which excludes particular events and stories in order to maintain a coherent identity and position in the present. Narratives are thus always sites of struggle.

There are innumerable stories of the British feminist past; which story you get will depend on the narrator. What I am concerned with is the process by which *particular* stories come to be accepted as *universal* stories of British feminism. How do certain stories come to dominate? How are other stories subjugated? What are the implications and politics of these processes of historicisation? In particular I locate the role racism and whiteness play in the maintenance of certain types of stories as hegemonic.

Significantly, narratives become dominant and hegemonic through repetition. This links back to the earlier observation that racism within feminism is repetitive, with the same problematic patterns playing out again and again: e.g. how feminists of colour experience their marginalisation within white-dominated groups as something which must be challenged over and over again, because the patterns inevitably return as soon as attention is turned elsewhere[1]. Anti-racist critiques and the responses to them become stories of repetition: they become very familiar stories to those who keep having to make them. Yet these repetitive stories are not the dominant and hegemonic stories. Rather, they are repeatedly erased from the dominant stories: those which are most commonly rehearsed in books, journals and newspaper articles, those which circulate in white-dominated activist communities on- and off-line. Why some stories become hegemonic is clearly not then just to do with repetition, but with structures of domination and power relationships; with white supremacy. While the structure of whiteness tends to be invisible to those for whose benefit it functions, for those who keep coming up against it – whether in feminist communities or elsewhere – it can appear like a physical immovable barrier which your message simply cannot get through, as Sara Ahmed aptly encapsulates with her description of whiteness as a 'brick wall' (Ahmed, 2012).

As a relevant example, the problematic implications of certain stories not getting through can be demonstrated with reference to current trends within popular, activist and academic discourse in the usage of the concept of intersectionality. In the last few years, intersectionality has become a hotly debated concept not just within academia but also within activist communities and even in the pages of the mainstream press (Okolosie, 2014). Yet whether it is heralded as an important feminist tool or dismissed as a useless concept (or somewhere in between), there is a distinct pattern in the way that white

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[1] Racism as repetitive is not in any way limited to feminism – repetition is how racism (and other forms of oppression) is reproduced, it is its repetition in everyday encounters which enables structural racism to stay in place (Essed 2002).

people (feminist and otherwise) are taking it up: the concept increasingly and repeatedly is becoming cut off from the black feminist theoretical trajectory from which it emerged (Bilge, 2013; Alexander-Floyd, 2012). As Kimberlé Crenshaw (credited with coining the phrase) argues, a 'post-intersectional move' seems to be operationalised by those who seem to 'rather enjoy the intersectional frame without the black female bodies that were originally attached to it' (Crenshaw, 2014). Intersectionality can then (and does) become mobilised in ways which marginalise black women within feminist theory all over again. Disconnecting intersectionality from its black feminist history, it becomes coopted in the service of maintaining white supremacy and thus, as Vivian May argues (2014) epistemic violence occurs. This is one example of how the suppression of narratives of the work of feminists of colour functions to maintain white supremacy within feminism.

So what *are* the dominant stories about British feminist history and what do they say about race? This is one of the questions I will be answering in this thesis. To introduce some of the themes which I will be exploring, it is relevant to note the increase in academic, popular and activist attention to historicising the last fifty years of British feminism which occurred over the years that I worked on this project. This can be attributed to both the fact that an increasing number of younger feminist researchers are beginning to explore this period from a historical perspective as well as a number of WLM-specific landmark anniversaries having taken place in the last five years. These include the 40th anniversary in 2010 of the first WLM conference as well as the publication of Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch*, followed the year after by the 40th anniversary of the first national WLM march.

These anniversaries were commemorated across different discursive sites and spaces – including in a number of articles in the liberal media, a three-part BBC4 documentary titled 'Women' (2010) which aimed to explore 'feminism and its impact on women's lives today', an exhibition at the Women's Library in London, titled 'Ms Understood: Women's Liberation in 1970s Britain', and a national conference at Ruskin College in Oxford (where the original WLM conference was held), titled 'WLM@40: Continuities and changes'.

Although the emphasis and representations of the WLM differed somewhat between these different sites, there were some striking commonalities. The majority of the commemorations painted a picture of the WLM as predominantly if not entirely white (the 'Women' programme being the worst culprit). This is not surprising, because there is no

denying that the majority of the women who explicitly identified themselves as part of the WLM *were* white. The problem, as I will be arguing, lies in how the WLM too often comes to stand in for the entirety of women's activism in the recent history of Britain (and also how women of colour who were active within the WLM are often rendered invisible). This universalising process is evident in how these commemorative events all emphasised or attempted to create a direct continuity with contemporary feminist politics, as if all contemporary feminist activity must be tied to the same point of origin. In the process, these commemorations universalised what is one particular history of women's activism in Britain as the definitive story.

This has problematic consequences when the story is told as involving only white women, but also when women of colour's activist histories are uncritically included in the same story. For instance, the 'Ms Understood' exhibition revealed a desire to portray the WLM as racially diverse (although still predominantly white). The exhibition thus included a 'Ban Depo Provera' poster with pictures of black women. The accompanying description explained that Depo Provera (a controversial contraceptive drug) has been disproportionally prescribed to black women, which '[m]any felt … was reflective of a racist medical policy to control the fertility of the black community' (The Women's Library, 2009). The description went on to explain that '[t]he Women's Liberation Movement campaigned for the right for women to control their fertility and to choose whether to have children', suggesting that the Depo Provera campaign emerged from within the WLM. Bringing in another story sheds light on the appropriation occurring here: in the second issue of the Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent (OWAAD) official newsletter, written in 1979, an editorial response to the WLM's campaign on abortion reads:

> …we find it regrettable that once again the wider issues of abortion as it affects us have been ignored by the (mainly white) women's movement. Black women have demanded abortion, and been forced to have sterilisations! We have demanded the right to choose, and we have been injected instead with Depo Provera against our will … When making a demand for abortion rights, the women's movement has a duty to point out to all women that racism and imperialist population control programmes are also being used against black and Third World women, with genocidal implications… [It is] high time that the women's movement recognised that "Free Abortion on demand" can and does have grave consequences for black women, which have still to be taken up in a meaningful way. (OWAAD, 1979: 4-5)

This historical evidence shows how a complex and contentious history is erased by the exhibition's recuperation of the Depo Provera campaign under the banner of the WLM. In

fact, this campaign was led by black women, many of whom did not identify themselves as part of the WLM. The suggestion that the WLM un-contentiously campaigned to ban Depo Provera indicates a desire to include black women's struggles retrospectively, erasing evidence of racism within the movement.

Whether represented as entirely white or as racially diverse, neither representation was problematised in these commemorative events, but rather appeared to be 'natural' and unquestioned. The feminists of the WLM were represented as standing for innocence, idealism and egalitarianism, an image which leaves no room for exploring power inequalities between different women. Narratives of unity and sisterhood abound.

Narratives such as these do political work. As Clare Hemmings points out, in her analysis of the stories which academic feminists tell of western feminism's theoretical development, 'which stories predominate or are precluded or marginalized is always a question of power and authority' (Hemmings, 2005: 118). Her research demonstrates that the development of western feminist theory is overwhelmingly told as stories of either 'progress', 'loss' or 'return'. Progress narratives emphasise a shift from an 'essentialist' (read: racist, homophobic, etc.) 1970s feminism to a transformed, sophisticated, post-structural feminist present, while loss narratives emphasise a radical and political 1970s feminism which has been depoliticised and institutionalised in the present. Return narratives combine elements of both progress and loss narratives, but ultimately argue that poststructuralism has gone too far and that there is a need for feminists to 'return' to a more politicised focus on external structures. In all these accounts, the 1980s become what Hemmings refers to as an 'overburdened decade' – the decade in which messy transformations were in process (Hemmings, 2011: 42). In particular, the 1980s have become heavily associated with 'attention to racism and ethnocentrism in prior feminist work' – in other words black feminist critique of white feminism (ibid: 43). This over-determination of black feminism with the 1980s (and the reduction of black feminism to being simply a critique of white feminism), Hemmings suggests, results in a 'decade-fixing' of black feminist theory which 'allows for its subsequent textual and historical erasure or tokenization' (ibid: 48).

Hemmings' attention to citational practices usefully sheds light on how black feminist theory can become incorporated in the story of feminism while being simultaneously dismissed. Her findings resonate with my own research (and I will return to how her

historiographical approach has influenced mine in chapter three). The passing citation of feminists of colour is a rhetorical technique with which many white feminists claim to have attended to race while actually dismissing it (Aanerud, 2002).

This practice, for instance, is evident in Lynne Segal's memoir of the WLM. In a book which engages extensively with literature by white women, Segal spends approximately four pages proclaiming to the reader her deep engagement with black women's writing. A quick succession of names of authors and books implicitly declares Segal's knowledge of black women's literature; Toni Cade Bambara's and Mary Washington's books are described as 'sit[ting] heavily underlined, in my bookcases still' (Segal, 2007: 117). The image of a heavily underlined book powerfully evokes the sense that its reader has engaged deeply with it, yet at no point in her memoir does Segal discuss the content of these books. In fact the only work by a woman of colour whose work she does engage with is Audre Lorde's *Zami*, using a passage from the book to emphasise a connection between black and white feminist women, while in fact misconstruing its original context, which describes the painful alienation black lesbians experienced in the white-dominated lesbian scene of the 1950s New York Village (Lorde, 1982: 220-226).

In her discussion of progress narratives of feminism, Hemmings highlights a problematic imperative to leave the racist and homophobic feminist past behind:

> To be ethical subjects of feminism, we *must* leave the past behind, then. All that is narratively required is to bracket out specific reference to what has otherwise been assigned to the 1980s, namely the black and lesbian feminist epistemologies and ontologies whose absent critiques haunt the theoretical present. (Hemmings, 2011: 56)

This need to break with the past, to claim that feminism *may have been* racist in the '70s and '80s, but has since *moved on* to an enlightened, anti-racist present, is, as I will show, a well-rehearsed narrative in contemporary feminist discourse. In the process, as Hemmings identifies, the actual anti-racist critiques which were made in the past (and continue to be made) must be erased from the narrative, because to deal with their content would mean to continue to deal with racism within feminism. Thus Hemmings' evocation of a haunting is particularly apt. Avery Gordon argues that haunting 'is a constituent element of modern social life' (Gordon, 1997: 7). To understand social life, she suggests, we must 'reckon with what modern history has rendered ghostly': we must attend to the affective pull of

such 'ghosts' to investigate 'how that which appears absent can indeed be a seething presence' (ibid: 17-8).

As Gordon points out, one can only attend to the ghosts that one is personally affected by: 'we are part of the story, for better or worse: the ghost must speak to *me* in some way...' (ibid: 24). My feeling, along with Hemmings, is that racism within feminism (past and present) haunts the white stories of British feminism. Gordon distinguishes a haunting from trauma - and we must distinguish between who is being haunted and who is being traumatised by racism - because a haunting 'produc[es] a something-to-be-done': 'a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known ... and demands its due, demands your attention' (Gordon, 2011). Hauntings occur through 'those singular and yet repetitive instances when home becomes unfamiliar, when your bearings on the world lose direction, when the over-and-done-with comes alive, when what's been in your blind field comes into view' (ibid). For white feminists, I argue, the anti-racist critique in the present produces a haunting, and brings up the history of 'unresolved social violence' which must be dealt with. Yet too often, the discomfort and disorientation is turned away from, brushed aside, suppressed. Thus the white story of feminism continues to be haunted by white feminist racism – as something which has never been fully dealt with and accounted for, and which is still very much alive in the present. It is this haunting that my thesis turns towards, to which I give my full attention.

Research on feminist narratives

In reflecting on how my research fits into wider literature and research, there are two main ways it could be categorised. The larger theoretical, historical and political context is research and theorising on the relationship between feminism, race and whiteness, as I will discuss in the next chapter. A more specific theme to which my project connects is research investigating how feminists represent the history of feminism in relation to race. Aside from Hemmings, a number of feminist scholars have turned critical attention to the way that feminists themselves represent feminist history and the implications this has in terms of race (although not all these studies are specifically about race – Hemmings' work, for example, is not). Collectively, they constitute a somewhat idiosyncratic list, situated in different theoretical, disciplinary as well as geographical locations, yet each of the projects I discuss below can be usefully connected to mine.

One particularly relevant study is Mary-Jo Nadeau's (2009), who analysed literature produced by the (Canadian) National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) for how it told the story of the organisation's past, and that of Canadian feminism more generally. One document, commissioned to tell the story of the first twenty years of the NAC, was produced at a point when the organisation had gone through a period of intense struggle and transformation as a result of women of colour forcing the issue of white women's racism onto the table. Yet Nadeau finds no evidence of this painful struggle in the NAC's self-representation in the text. Instead she finds that the document tells the NAC story as one of 'expanding diversity over time' where 'moments of inclusivity appear as autonomous developments disconnected from the context of broader struggles. Anti-racist feminism is thus not named in the narrative, nor is it examined as a distinct and challenging social movement…' (Nadeau, 2009: 9). Erasing anti-racist feminist activism from the narrative of the NAC's history erases important work by feminists of colour, and reproduces white dominance within the organisation, as white women continue to control the narrative. At the same time, because the account emphasises the inclusion of women of colour within the NAC's contemporary formation, Nadeau argues that 'this form of white hegemony has been difficult to detect and even harder to unsettle' (ibid: 8). I will be returning to Nadeau's findings of a supposedly autonomous process of 'expanding diversity', particularly in my analysis of activist feminist books in chapter seven.

In the British context, Lisa Adkins analyses a recurring 'familial' and 'generational' narrative within certain academic feminist texts in which feminism is constructed 'as a kind of familial property, a form of inheritance and legacy' which must be 'passed on' by each successive 'generation' of feminists (Adkins, 2004: 427). When there is perceived to be a failure in the transmission of feminism from one generation to the next, the narrative instead ends with the 'passing away' of feminism (as in accounts that we are now in a 'post-feminist' era in which feminism is 'dead'). Adkins draws attention to what such accounts tend to conceal: to put it crudely, what is narrated as a failure in the reproduction of feminist politics is rather an admonishment of 'younger' feminists for not listening to their 'elders'. In particular, she notes that these failed reproduction narratives tend to centre on a critique of a move from feminist 'consciousness' to 'reflexivity': 'within this narrative self-reflexivity is marked by a political failure, a failure which we can surmise is said to exist in a movement away from a subject-object problematic (reflection on and

critiques of the world) towards a subject-subject dynamic (internal reflection and critique)'
(Adkins, 2004: 433). To use Hemmings' terminology, this shift is constructed as a 'narrative
of loss'.

Although race is absent from Adkins' analysis, her focus on what these narratives do in
terms of condemning reflexivity is relevant to my project, because they implicitly situate
anti-racist critiques within feminism (as a 'subject-subject dynamic') as destructive to the
proper reproduction of feminism. The positioning of anti-racist critique as disruptive and
destructive to feminist politics is a common discursive derailment as I shall be returning to
at several points of my analysis.

Amy Brandzel (2011) looks at (US) women's studies curricula - in particular introductory
modules which teach feminism's intellectual history - for how they structure the
curriculum. She points to how early 'canonical' white feminist texts – which have been
extensively critiqued as racially problematic – are still overwhelmingly taught at the start of
such modules, while women of colour's work tend to be situated nearer the end of the
curriculum. Although critiques of early white feminist texts are usually included in the
curriculum, the history which is repeatedly taught continues to construct white women as
originators of the field, with women of colour entering the story later on, and often only as
a response to white feminism (i.e. as critiquing white feminism rather than as originators
of feminist theory in its own right). Significantly, Brandzel notes, such narratives construct
the contemporary moment as the moment when feminist theory is just about to become
fully intersectional (Brandzel, 2011: 517). This construction of the contemporary moment
as when we are just about to 'overcome' past failures has significant implications. Brandzel
draws on the work of Rachel Lee, who points out that this 'just about to be' moment
renders 'women of color … eminently useful to the progress narrative Women's Studies
wishes to create for itself' (Lee in Brandzel: 517): the narrative of feminism's 'just about to
be' intersectionality ensures a future for Women's Studies in which the white feminist
remains in her position 'as the historical agent' (Brandzel, 2011: 517). As such, the white
feminist remains in control of the narrative of feminism, and continues to be its rightful
subject.

The narratives identified in these studies all have in common a desire to 'move on' from
racism within feminism (whether explicitly or implicitly). Robyn Wiegman also identifies
such a 'disciplinary imperative' in her study of the shifting 'object' of feminist theory

(Wiegman, 2012: 53). She argues that the hegemonic disciplinary shift from 'woman' to 'gender' as the correct 'object' of feminist theory functions to shift the blame of white feminist racism to the object - the category 'woman' - as if changing the category means racism has been overcome (ibid: 61-62): 'the end of the category *women* is designed to cleanse the present of political complicity and sustain the field's self-defining emancipatory capacity' (ibid: 66). This imperative to move on can be connected to Sara Ahmed's point about white people's desire, when confronted with their reality as oppressors, to look immediately for a solution (asking, for example, 'what can white people do?'): 'The desire for signs of resistance can also be a form for resistance to hearing about racism. If we want to know how things can be different *too quickly*, then we might not hear anything at all' (Ahmed, 2007a: 165). What all these studies point towards is that narratives which claim that we have now 'overcome' racism within feminism tell us more about the narrator than the story. Telling the story of feminism as having overcome racism resists hearing critiques of white feminist racism in the present – a pattern I will be identifying at several points in my analysis.

Structure of thesis and original contribution to knowledge

In this thesis, I will be drawing on research such as the above, which analyses feminist stories for their racial dimensions, as I find them useful for highlighting similar patterns in the texts and sites that I analyse. But my analysis is only made possible through an engagement with a much broader field of research on feminism, race and whiteness. This will be the topic of the next chapter. Following this, and before moving on to the main analysis, chapter three attends to methodological questions, including how I carried out the research, what I mean by 'narrative research', and epistemological and political concerns pertaining to researching race and whiteness.

Chapters four to nine form the bulk of the analysis. In analysing contemporary feminist discourse, I distinguish between three key – significantly overlapping – sites of feminist knowledge production: activism, academia, and what I refer to as popular feminist discourse ('mainstream' feminist publications and feminist content in the liberal media). Chapter four focuses on three popular feminist books, analysing how their erasure of women of colour and black feminist histories from their accounts of the feminist past reproduces a white, imperial feminism in the present. Chapter five uses the representation

of feminism in the liberal broadsheet newspapers *The Guardian* and *The Observer* as another case study of popular feminist politics, drawing out how a white feminist past is repeatedly reproduced in the popular imagination of British feminism, leading to power-evasive (Frankenberg, 1993) representations of contemporary feminist communities as unified and inclusive.

In chapter six, I turn to the sphere of academic feminism, analysing three publications which in different ways address the 'state' of contemporary feminism. Here, the work of feminists of colour is (varyingly) more visible, yet this work is often introduced in the narrative simply as a response to the 'ethnocentrism' of the 'central' field of white feminist theory. Pinpointing a moment of racial awareness within the history of feminism, the texts imply that contemporary feminist theory has 'dealt with' race and that racism within feminism is now a thing of the past. I demonstrate the falsity of this assumption by highlighting ways in which these white authors problematically appropriate or dismiss scholarship by feminists of colour.

Chapter seven focuses on the activist feminist discourse produced in two recent books. These books approach the politics of feminism and race in a somewhat more complex and interesting way, yet as I trace links between the stories which these texts tell about the feminist past and the ways in which they attempt to articulate anti-racist politics in the present, it becomes clear that histories of anti-racist critique within feminism are not represented, and therefore the recognition of white feminist racism is elided.

Chapters eight and nine analyse interviews which I conducted with feminist activists and individuals who have studied feminist theory at university. I conducted interviews in order to be able to analyse everyday discussions about feminism and race among activists and students. Chapter eight provides a holistic overview of the interview material, analysing the trends in terms of the stories which the participants told about the feminist past, as well as the themes which emerged in their articulations of feminist politics in relation to race, racism and whiteness. In chapter nine, I focus on five case studies, providing more nuanced accounts of what I argue is a causal relationship between the participants' familiarity with feminist histories and their understanding of race and racism in the present.

There are many different strands of feminist thought and activism within Britain (not all of which are white dominated), and my aim is not to provide a representative picture across

all of them. Rather, the thesis focuses on critiquing that which is normative and hegemonic in terms of race. As such, it aims to contribute towards the study - and challenge - of white supremacy within contemporary British feminism. Of course, as the repetition I have already pointed to highlights, the critique of racism and whiteness within British feminism is not new or original. Rather, the originality of this thesis lies in its systematic study of different sites of feminist knowledge production in the contemporary context. Through systematically documenting and analysing the many different ways in which whiteness shapes contemporary feminist stories and politics, I hope that this research contributes significant evidence of the scale of the problem which racism continues to pose within British feminist discourse and spaces, and that this evidence can be used in the service of its eradication.

2. Feminism, race and whiteness: Theoretical, historical and political contexts

The aim of this chapter is to contextualise my project theoretically, historically and politically in relation to theory and activism which connects feminism, race and whiteness. I will begin by locating the discussion of race within feminist discourse in post-war Britain, by tracing particular activist and academic genealogies which are important for understanding the contemporary context in which my research is located. Secondly, I will introduce and define the key terms which I use in this thesis: feminism, racism, whiteness, white supremacy, white feminism and intersectionality. As I locate these terms within the literature, I will introduce the key theorists that have informed my analysis, drawing on black and postcolonial feminisms, critical race and whiteness studies. I will conclude by reflecting on how I have positioned my own theoretical framework through engagement with this literature.

Feminism and race in post-war Britain: Activist and academic genealogies

There is a wide range of literature on the topic of feminism, race and racism, from many different geographical, political and (non-)institutional locations. In particular, a critical mass of such literature has emerged from the writing of black feminists and radical women of colour in the US (e.g. hooks, 1982; Hull *et al.*, 1982; Lorde, 1984; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981). While I draw on some of this literature in my analysis, here I will focus specifically on literature and discussions of these topics which have emerged within the British context – both outside and within the academy – in the last fifty years, as this is most relevant for contextualising debates about race and feminism within contemporary Britain.

Even more specifically, I will focus on critiques and engagements with hegemonic and white-dominated feminist politics. In making this distinction, I want to emphasise the importance of recognising that the theorising and organising of black feminists and women of colour in Britain is much more widely encompassing than this. Suki Ali notes the recurring patterns by which the scholarship of women of colour is marginalised in histories of western feminism:

It is commonplace to see the key theme of this particular historiography as one of (homogenous) white, middle-class and Western women who are out to define the world, women and gender oppression in their own terms. In such a narrative, the writings of women of colour who may or may not have been calling themselves feminist, but are part of (gendered) emancipatory or liberatory strategies are erased entirely or reduced to the role of critiquing the central emergent field. This is not to argue that we need to rewrite these accounts and paint a rainbow coalition of queers, blacks and other others as central to a developing field of feminist enquiry. That would be as problematic as the former assessment, but it does seem that such a story negates the huge struggles and highly contested nature of the field from its outset. (Ali, 2007: 194-5)

In focusing on the problems of white-dominated feminism, my research risks re-inscribing it as the 'central field', especially as I draw mainly on black feminist and women of colour's theory which in some way critiques this field. Therefore I want to spell out explicitly that black British feminism and women of colour's scholarship and organising in the last fifty years is not a 'response' to white feminism, but rather emerged from a number of different historical trajectories, encompassing diverse fields of activity (see e.g. Bryan *et al.*, 1985; Grewal *et al*, 1988; Gupta, 2003; Harrison, 2012; Mirza, 1997; Samantrai, 2002; Sudbury, 1998).

But one important strand of such scholarship and activity has nevertheless always involved engaging with hegemonic forms of white-dominated feminism, and it is some of this history which I turn to now. In discussing this history, I invariably construct my own narrative. How do we write without telling stories? Would we even want to? My analysis repeatedly deconstructs and interrupts narratives, drawing attention to their political and constructed nature. But how do I write a thesis about feminism in Britain without producing my own subjective, partial and biased narratives? The short answer is: I can't and I am not going to try. But I will emphasise that all such accounts are subjective and partial. My account in this section is based on empirical research, looking for discussions of race and racism in primary sources which document women's activism in the 1970s and '80s – in particular in newsletters archived in the Feminist Library and the Women's Library in London - as well as academic literature which deals with these issues and histories.

Because of women of colour's insistence that white feminists must deal with race if they are to stop perpetuating racism, many discussions and conflicts about racism have taken place within British feminist discourse and spaces in the last fifty years. As Ali suggests, while social differences mean that there have always been acute inequalities between

women within feminism, such differences have also always been 'loudly and painfully debated' (Ali, 2007: 195). The consistency and recurrence of such debates suggests, as she argues, that 'difference has always been at the heart of feminist praxis', despite the common narrative that feminists have only become attentive to difference more recently (ibid: 196).

Particularly relevant for my research, the early to mid-1980s was a time during which such discussions and conflicts were prominent. The late 1970s and early 1980s had been a time of unsettling change and challenge for many white feminists in Britain. With the creation of OWAAD, the first national black women's organisation, in 1978, and with many black women's groups organising around the country, an autonomous black women's movement (BWM) was gaining momentum (in which 'black' was used as a political term inclusive of all people targeted by racism)[2]. While primarily focused on issues which most immediately affected black women and their families (racist policing, restrictive immigration laws, discrimination within the education system etc.), the emerging movement also provided a more prominent platform from which black women could express their anger at the way they had been marginalised, tokenised or completely ignored by white women within the WLM. Julia Sudbury notes, as 'black women organised an autonomous base and began a coordinated attack on white hegemony … white feminists were forced to take note of the serious challenge posed by black feminism' (Sudbury, 1998: 199).

Because it would be impossible to outline all the discussions of racism within activist feminist communities at this time (and neither am I familiar with all of them), I focus here on only a few, which serve as examples of broader work and debates that took place[3]. Perhaps the most well-documented debate at this time was the protracted conflict about racism, Zionism and anti-Semitism within the *Spare Rib* editorial collective in 1982-3. With the political backdrop of Israel's invasion of Lebanon, a conflict broke out within the editorial collective over disagreements about whether to publish a number of letters which had been sent in by readers. The letters had been triggered by an article published in

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[2] In this thesis, my usage of 'black' varies, in an attempt to respect self-definitions. Black British feminism has tended to use an inclusive, political notion of 'black' (e.g. Mirza 1997) although this usage has also been contested (Swaby 2014; Sudbury 2001).
[3] The London-centricity of this account must be noted and cannot be generalised as representing the level of discussion about race and racism across the country.

August 1982, titled 'Women speak out against Zionism' (Boyd, 1982). The letters, many of them from Jewish feminists, critiqued the article as anti-Semitic. An intense debate ensued within the collective as to whether the letters were Zionist and/or racist, and/or whether censoring them amounted to anti-Semitism (Spare Rib Collective, 1983). While the debates in the collective were not discussed on the pages of *Spare Rib* until almost a year later, an intense debate, involving the larger London feminist community, is documented in the pages of the weekly *London Women's Liberation Newsletter (LWLN)*.

Although it might be tempting to attribute the particular intensity of this conflict to the sensitive politics of Israel/Palestine, it is clear from the many letters in the *LWLN* that the issues were also more broadly about race and racism within the WLM. The history of *Spare Rib* is indicative of the challenge anti-racism was posing for the WLM at this time. At the time of the magazine's tenth anniversary in 1982, of the sixty women who had been on the editorial collective, only one had been a woman of colour (Bellos, 1983). In 1982, the magazine's collective proactively set out to recruit more women of colour, a number of whom joined in October 1982, right in the midst of this highly charged discussion. Clearly, the power dynamics within the collective were highly racialised, and it is not surprising that a subsequent breakdown in communication occurred. The conflict resulted in a 'split', with a number of women eventually leaving the collective.

Conflicts such as these are common within (British) feminism and much can be learnt from them. Yet – as my thesis will show – frequently such conflicts are remembered and represented (when they are included in the narrative at all) only as destructive, and therefore best forgotten. Yet other evidence suggests that in such confrontations and discussions, some white feminists have listened to women of colour, have educated themselves about racism, and then moved forward to apply an anti-racist lens to their organising and analyses. In fact, primary sources from the '70s and '80s evidence a significant amount of coalitional working and solidarity between black and white women.

One such example was *Outwrite Women's Newspaper*, published monthly 1982-1988. *Outwrite* was run by a multiracial collective of women, with an editorial policy that black women (women of colour) should always make up at least half of the group (Outwrite collective, 1982). *Outwrite* as a political venture had clear links and debts to the BWM, but whereas there was a split in opinion in the BWM about whether it considered itself part of the wider *feminist* movement, the black women involved in *Outwrite* explicitly called

themselves feminists. From the outset, the collective situated the paper within the WLM while at the same time being critical of it and challenging its exclusions, particularly racism. Yet its anti-imperialist and internationalist perspective was coupled with a radical feminism, making it both unique and groundbreaking. However, the legacy of *Outwrite* has not been extensively documented. From my own perspective, while I had frequently heard about *Spare Rib* as part of the popular legacy of the WLM, I had never heard about *Outwrite* until I read Ranu Samantrai's (2002) study of black British feminism. More recently Rashida Harrison (2012) has also explored *Outwrite*'s significance. Yet both these studies have in common a focus on black British feminism; in the more hegemonic stories of (white) British feminism, *Outwrite*'s existence and significance is mostly absent.

Black feminist theory, including anti-racist challenges of white feminism, was also creating space within academic feminist discourse at this time. An influential early critique of the WLM came from Hazel Carby: in 'White woman listen! Black feminism and the boundaries of sisterhood' (1982), Carby laid out the inadequacies of dominant white feminist theories, which she demonstrated failed to account for the role which slavery, colonialism, and imperialism have played in structuring gender relations (between men and women, but also between black and white women). In areas such as family and reproduction, Carby pointed out, black women were positioned very differently in relation to the state than were white women. Yet she also warned white feminists against rectifying their ignorance about black women's lived by 'descend[ing] upon Brixton, Southall, Bristol or Liverpool to take black women as objects of study in modes of resistance' and argued instead that 'white feminist researchers should try to uncover the gender-specific mechanism of racism amongst white women' as '[t]his more than any other factor disrupts the recognition of common interests of sisterhood' (ibid: 232).

Another intervention into white feminist theory came a couple of years later from Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar (1984). In 'Challenging imperial feminism' they critiqued 'white, mainstream feminist theory, be it from the socialist or radical feminist perspective' which they argued 'does not speak to the experiences of Black women and where it attempts to do so it is often from a racist perspective and reasoning' (Amos & Parmar, 1984: 4). Their critique focused on white feminist analyses of the family, as well as sexuality and the peace movement. They pointed to, among other examples, the way 'some white feminists have applauded Maggie Thatcher as Prime Minister as a positive female image' as something

which 'serve[d] only to further alienate Black women whose experiences at the hands of the British state demands a more responsible political approach' (ibid). Like Carby, Amos and Parmar argued that feminist theory must engage with the historical context of imperialism and challenge racism, and suggested that black feminism was meeting this challenge. Amos and Parmar's article was published as part of a special black feminist issue of *Feminist Review* guest edited by a collective of black women (Amos *et al.*, 1984), representing another intervention into the white dominance of academic feminism in Britain.

It may seem that this was a time of transformation – part of that 'overburdened decade' of black feminist critique, to use Hemmings' phrase (2011: 42) – but while these interventions mounted important and significant challenges to the hegemonic whiteness of British feminism, they did not greatly shift power imbalances between black and white women in the longer term. As Avtar Brah reflected in a more recent discussion about *Feminist Review*'s first 25 years: 'In reality nothing happened after that issue, in terms of 'race' and racism' (Brah in Feminist Review editorial collective, 2005: 202). Brah had joined the collective a few years after the black feminist issue, and found that the white women on the collective still 'weren't aware of their whiteness' (ibid: 201). It led to three women of colour – Brah, Gail Lewis and Kum-Kum Bhavnani – walking out of the collective in 1989, stating that they would only return on condition that the white women learned to 'own' race as much as the black women. The period which followed was a tumultuous one on the collective, and a number of members left, but the remaining white members eventually wrote an editorial to demonstrate their commitment to race going forward, after which Brah, Lewis and Bhavnani rejoined (Feminist Review editorial collective, 2005: 201-203).

The critiques by Carby and Amos and Parmar have subsequently been anthologised in a number of collections, including Heidi Mirza's *Black British Feminism* (1997), where they are assembled alongside other essays in the first section of the book under the heading 'Shaping the debate'. Thus they are positioned as part of the early development of a distinctly black British academic feminist discourse.

In the *Black British Feminism* collection, Mirza describes black – and postcolonial – feminisms as a political project 'to excavate the silences and pathological appearances of a collectivity of women assigned as the "other" as she is produced in a gendered, sexualised

and wholly racialised global discourse' (Mirza, 1997: 20-1). Connecting feminist theorising to a global context of imperialism and postcolonialism has been central to the development of this distinctly British form of black feminism - as has been the much politicised and contested meaning of the term 'black' as a political identification for all people targeted by racism (Sudbury, 2001).

Ali's argument for the importance of contextualising black feminism within the 'postcolonial framework' makes an interesting observation in relation to temporality:

> One of the central themes of postcolonial studies is a critique of linear time; a time that moves from an unenlightened or primitive past to an enlightened and civilised present. This kind of analysis insists that we cannot and should not narrativise a neutral or all encompassing feminist movement or feminist theory that moves through a series of developments to reach a theoretical pinnacle in the present. (Ali, 2009: 81)

Ali's point is a relevant reminder of the political and constructed nature of narratives of feminism – including the one I have been telling here. But it also points to the importance of contextualising feminist stories within histories of imperialism and (post)coloniality. Feminist theorising and organising in Britain cannot be understood without this context, yet it is precisely this which many white feminists have attempted to do.

Key terms

Here I will outline the key theoretical terms which form the base of my analysis. In discussing these terms, I will draw on and introduce the key theorists that have informed my theoretical framework, many of which I will be returning to in other chapters.

Feminism

Part of the problem of dominant forms of feminist discourse – white, liberal, middle-class – is that there is often an implicit assumption that 'we' all know what feminism is. Most often – as I will expand on in chapter four – this assumption revolves around an unproblematised idea of 'equality' for women. Yet when other axes of inequality are brought into the equation, it becomes clear that a simplistic notion of 'equality' makes little sense for anyone other than extremely privileged women. As bell hooks explains:

> Since men are not equals in white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal class structure, which men do women want to be equal to? … Implicit in this simplistic definition of women's liberation is a dismissal of race and class as factors that, in conjunction with sexism, determine the extent to which an individual will be discriminated against, exploited, or oppressed. (hooks, 1984: 18)

Instead of focusing on equality, which – unless approached from a complex, intersectional perspective – will mainly benefit the most privileged women in society, hooks suggests it is more useful to define feminism as 'a struggle to end sexist oppression' (ibid: 24). This definition is useful because it does not prioritise the experience of one particular type of woman, and turns the focus towards the various and interconnected systems that are at the root of gender oppression. hooks continues:

> [Feminism] is necessarily a struggle to eradicate the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels as well as a commitment to reorganizing society so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires. (ibid)

As well as pointing to how sexist oppression is linked to racism and capitalism, hooks' definition emphasises feminism as political *movement* and *struggle*, rather than identity. Thus it is less important, she argues, whether one identifies as 'a feminist'; one can 'advocate feminism' without feeling the need to take on the identity (ibid: 29). As she points out, many women of colour, working-class women and others marginalised within the dominant feminist discourse have rejected the feminist label because of its racist, classist and imperialist connotations. Yet hooks argues that reframing feminism as a struggle against sexist oppression has significant implications, claiming a central space for theorising by marginalised women (particularly working-class women of colour): 'it compels us to centralize the experiences and the social predicaments of women who bear the brunt of sexist oppression as a way to understand the collective social status of women' (ibid: 31).

My own understanding of feminism is greatly influenced by hooks, and I therefore choose to define feminism in similar terms. At the same time, I recognise that there is no one definition of feminism, and as my research will demonstrate, how one defines feminism is deeply political. I also believe that there is nothing to be gained from attempting to police the borders of feminism – to suggest that some forms of feminist politics are more 'authentic' than others, or that certain people speaking in the name of feminism are in fact not 'real' feminists. There is nothing inherently 'progressive' or 'good' about feminist

politics, and in fact it can be used to inflict great harm. Yet, there is no use in claiming that such feminism is therefore not a 'true' feminism – it is more useful to interrogate how feminist discourse is mobilised and interacts within structures such as imperialism and capitalism, in order to challenge such practices more incisively.

The other side of this coin – and going back to hooks' points about identification – is the importance of respecting people's choice *not* to identify as feminist. Many activists and theorists challenging gender-based oppression do not identify as feminists or with feminism as a movement. Whether this is because of the violence inflicted by feminist movements and discourse, or for other reasons, I find it politically important for those who *do* identify with feminism not to appropriate such struggles under the banner of feminism. Therefore I do not work with the definition, as some do, that 'feminism' is an all-encompassing term for all work which in any way challenges gender-based oppression. To claim the work of people who choose not to identify with feminism as nevertheless part of feminism is to reiterate the discursive violence of an imperial feminism. Throughout my analysis my aim is always to respect the self-definitions of individual writers and interview participants (as far as these are evident).

Racism

'Racism' is regularly invoked to mean different things. Within mainstream public discourse, it is often simply taken to mean any negative statements, thoughts or actions against a person or group of people because of their race or ethnicity. What is missing from such a definition is attention to the institutional and structural context in which such statements, thoughts or actions occur – thus a white person can claim that a black person was racist towards them. But without the weight of institutional and structural racism, a black person saying negative things about a white person's race will have little impact. Thus, within race-critical, anti-racist organising and discourse, racism is commonly understood as also involving an asymmetrical and structural power relationship.

 Ruth Wilson Gilmore's definition of racism puts it starkly into the context of the harm that it causes, as 'the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death' (Gilmore, 2007: 28). This definition emerges from her study of the rapid expansion of the prison system in the US, in which people of colour – African Americans most acutely – are disproportionately incarcerated

and seen as disposable. The prison system, embedded within capitalist and state structures, is thus a prime example of structural racism.

Yet, as Philomena Essed (1991, 2002) argues, structural racism cannot exist without what she terms 'everyday racism'. Analysing black women's accounts of their everyday experiences of racism, she found that '[c]ontrary to popular beliefs that Blacks are over-sensitive about racism, it was demonstrated that accounts of personal experiences of racism are not ad hoc stories ... [but] have a specific structure' (Essed, 1991: 289). Essed identifies three interlocking and interdependent strands of everyday racism:

> ...the *marginalisation* of those identified as racially or ethnically different; the *problematization* of other cultures and identities; and symbolic or physical *repression* of (potential) resistance through humiliation or violence. Across and between everyday situations, from workplace to restaurant, from classroom to shopping, from house hunting to public transportation, and from watching television to staying in a hotel, racism operates through the characteristics of the specific situation and through the situational resources by means of which power can be expressed. (Essed, 2002: 207)

Identifying these strands of everyday racism is useful when analysing feminist discourse, and I draw on Essed's work to highlight how dominant forms of white feminism exercise racial power through processes of marginalization, problematisation and repression.

As is indicated in the naming of this form of racism as 'everyday', it functions through repetition. Thus it is not that one specific instance in itself necessarily does significant harm. Rather, everyday racism harms through its cumulative effects: 'practices with racist implications become in themselves familiar and repetitive' (Essed, 2002: 208). Its 'everydayness' also makes it difficult to pinpoint, which is part of the insidiousness, because if/when a person of colour names an incident as racist, taken in isolation, it is easy for this to be dismissed. Additionally, in Essed's words, '[t]he presupposition that those exposed to discrimination are not competent enough to make sound judgment about the situation is a powerful tool of everyday racism' (ibid: 210).

Most of the time, white people are not even conscious of how they reproduce everyday (and structural) racism. María Lugones's definition of racism is particularly incisive in highlighting how this lack of intention still functions as racist:

> Racism: one's affirmation of, acquiescence to, or lack of recognition of the structures and mechanisms of the racial state; one's lack of awareness of or blindness or indifference to one's being racialized; one's affirmation of or

indifference or blindness to the harm that the racial state inflicts on some of its members. (Lugones, 2003: 44)

Lugones usefully differentiates between different levels of what we might understand as 'activeness' or 'passiveness' in reproducing racism. Importantly this brings attention to intentionality: one does not have to affirm racist structures actively in order to participate in them – one can do it by simply denying their existence. The question of intentionality is particularly relevant for discussing racism within feminism. Because feminism is a political project with an agenda of ending (gendered) oppression, most white feminists do not see themselves as promoting racism: on a nominal level, most white feminists will claim they are against racism, as they are against sexism. Therefore, in order to analyse racism within feminist communities, we need the tools to identify how racism is reproduced without explicit intentions to do so. Both Essed and Lugones help us to do so.

But an understanding of structural and everyday racism is incomplete without attending to how it functions specifically within white-dominated society. In the following section I therefore turn the gaze upon whiteness.

White supremacy and whiteness

Modern western nation states built their wealth through slavery and colonisation, thus western societies – and beyond – are founded upon a system of white supremacy. Within formalised oppressive societies based on slavery, colonisation and apartheid, 'white supremacy' is the legally-sanctioned power of white people over racialised 'others'. However, among contemporary critical race scholars and activists, 'white supremacy' is often used to encapsulate how white dominance functions more broadly within societies which no longer legally sanction racial hierarchies. Charles Mills suggests that the revival of the term importantly signals 'the simple sociological and political truth … that power relations can survive the formal dismantling of their more overt supports' (Mills, 2003: 36). He draws on the definition developed by Frances Lee Ansley of white supremacy as:

> …a political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily re-enacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings. (Ansley in Mills, 2003: 37)

Institutional, structural and everyday racisms are all encapsulated within this definition. The term also invokes a history of formal racial inequality as structuring contemporary understandings of race. hooks explains that she prefers to speak of white supremacy rather than racism 'because racism in and of itself [does] not allow for a discourse of colonization and decolonization, [and] the recognition of the internalized racism within people of color' (Jhally, 1997). While only white people can perpetuate racism, everyone participates in (and can also resist) the maintenance of white supremacy as an overarching system. Additionally, and importantly, as feminists of colour have long argued, white supremacy interlocks with other systems of domination; it is intimately wrapped up with patriarchy, capitalism, ableism and heteronormativity. Thus bell hooks often identifies the system we must struggle against as 'white supremacist capitalist patriarchy' (ibid).

'Whiteness' is a concept which is intimately related to white supremacy, but nonetheless the terms need to be distinguished. A familiar narrative within academia is that 'whiteness' emerged as a site of theorisation with the advent of (critical) 'whiteness studies' in the 1990s, predominantly by white scholars. Yet, such a narrative presents a limited view of what theorising whiteness entails. As Sara Ahmed writes:

> Any critical genealogy of whiteness studies, for me, must begin with the direct political address of Black feminists such as [Audre] Lorde, rather than later work by white academics on representations of whiteness or on how white people experience their whiteness … Whiteness studies, that is, if it is to be more than 'about' whiteness, begins with the Black critique of how whiteness works as a form of racial privilege, as well as the effects of that privilege on the bodies of those who are recognised as black. (Ahmed, 2004: paragraph 2)

Ahmed draws attention both to the racialised politics of knowledge production – what and who counts as producers of academic knowledge and fields – and to the theoretical and political problems which arise if we begin our understanding of whiteness through an engagement with white-informed scholarship. For one, as Ahmed points out, whiteness as it has been theorised within 'whiteness studies' tends to start with the assumption that whiteness is invisible, yet 'of course whiteness is only invisible for those who inhabit it. For those who don't, it is hard not to see whiteness' (ibid: paragraph 1). As Aída Hurtado and Abigail Stewart put it: 'In short, people of Color are experts about whiteness, which we have learned whites most emphatically are not' (Hurtado & Stewart, 1997: 308).

Whiteness, Nicola Rollock suggests, 'allows White people to proceed in everyday practice without recognising or being conscious of their own racial positioning' (Rollock, 2012:

518). She quotes Bree Picower's description of whiteness as a 'way of being in the world that is used to maintain White Supremacy' (Picower in Rollock, 2012: 518). This usefully distinguishes whiteness from white supremacy: white supremacy is enacted through structural forms of domination upon which the modern western state is founded and upon which it continues to operate; whiteness is how white people move through this world: as if they are just people, while everyone else has a race. Whiteness maintains everyday racism while simultaneously denying that it even exists.

Whiteness as a way of being in the world is something which is also picked up in Ahmed's work on the 'phenomenology of whiteness', in which she describes it, 'as an ongoing and unfinished history, which orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they "take up" space' (Ahmed 2007a: 150):

> Colonialism makes the world 'white', which is of course a world 'ready' for certain kinds of bodies, as a world that puts certain objects within their reach. Bodies remember such histories, even when we forget them. Such histories, we might say, surface on the body, or even shape how bodies surface ... Race then does become a social as well as bodily given, or what we *receive* from others as an inheritance of this history. (Ahmed 2007a: 153-4)

Bodies are orientated in certain directions by their surroundings, and the surroundings in turn orientate towards the bodies which historically have been 'at home' in those spaces. As white bodies have dominated the (former) colonial powers, these have become 'white': the bodies and the institutions orientate towards each other, and white bodies become 'habitual' in these surroundings – whiteness becomes that which 'lags behind', unnoticed. Bodies that 'lag behind' flow beyond their physical limits, dominating space. Ahmed describes this as a 'sinking' feeling, linked to comfort:

> Comfort is about an encounter between more than one body, which is the promise of a 'sinking' feeling. To be comfortable is to be so at ease with one's environment that it is hard to distinguish where one's body ends and the world begins... whiteness may function as a form of public comfort by allowing bodies to extend into spaces that have already taken their shape. (ibid: 158)

Bodies that are not white, on the other hand, due to their historic exclusion, do not extend in this way and can be either (or both) invisible and hyper-visible. Histories of colonialism and racism mean that the black body (or the body of colour) is 'better described in terms of the bodily and social experience of restriction, uncertainty, and blockage...' (ibid: 161).

They do not extend beyond their reach; they are constantly made to feel uncomfortable, under a white gaze.

Hurtado and Stewart, reviewing research on whiteness, identify five 'mechanisms of power employed in the exercise of whiteness' as: 1) distancing (racism has nothing to do with me), 2) denial (whiteness does not benefit me), 3) superiority (justifying superior social positioning as 'natural'), 4) belongingness (assuming own centrality within any given grouping) and 5) solidarity between whites (ignoring racism within white communities) (Hurtado & Stewart, 1997: 300-303). These mechanisms are, in Hurtado and Stewart's words, 'both daily practices and psychological processes' which white people employ – usually unconsciously – to maintain their belief in the natural superiority of white people. All such mechanisms, as their analysis shows, are also inflected by other axes of differentiation (such as class and gender), yet other marginalisations do not ever completely eradicate the privileges afforded by whiteness. As Ruth Frankenberg suggests, claims to marginality (such as being working-class) in fact are often used in order to displace whiteness, yet cross-cutting axes of subordination 'do not erase or render irrelevant race privilege, but rather inflect or modify it' (Frankenberg, 2004: 76).

Frankenberg, one of the white scholars often associated with the emergence of 'whiteness studies' as a field, defined whiteness as having three 'linked dimensions':

> First, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a "standpoint," a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, "whiteness" refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed. (Frankenberg, 1993: 1)

Bearing in mind Ahmed's point that it is only from a white perspective that specific cultural practices can be interpreted as 'unmarked', Frankenberg's work is useful for providing an insight into how white women understand race (her study is based on interviews with white women in the US). She found that the dominant 'discursive repertoire' which her interviewees mobilised was one of 'colour- or power evasiveness' (often referred to as 'colour blindness'), in which race is seen as irrelevant. This discursive repertoire relies on the notion of a "'noncolored' self in which 'people of color are "good" only insofar as their "coloredness" can be bracketed and ignored' (ibid: 147). The notion that race does not – should not – matter within feminist communities is one which I will return to interrogate in a number of the texts and interviews that I analyse.

To conclude this section, I want to reflect briefly on the concept of 'white privilege', a term (alongside other forms of privilege, e.g. 'male', 'class', 'able-bodied') which is frequently used within feminist and some other activist communities to draw attention to benefits conferred to those who inhabit dominant social categories. Although within contemporary British feminism this has certainly not always been the case, it has become increasingly common for a language of privilege to be mobilised. It is a language I have myself frequently used in conversations about race, racism and feminism. However, as Andrea Smith argues, too often reflecting on our privileges becomes a form of confession. Writing about anti-racist workshops where such confessions are encouraged, Smith reflects:

> It was never quite clear what the point of these confessions were ... It did not appear that these individual confessions actually led to any political projects to dismantle the structures of domination that enabled their privilege. Rather, the confessions became the political project themselves. (Smith, 2013: 263)

As Smith's critique calls attention to, when recognising white privilege becomes the central political project of white anti-racism, the power of whiteness and the structures of white supremacy are evaded all over again, and whiteness remains centred in the conversation. The language of privilege can also be power-evasive in other ways, because it highlights processes which individual white people have little control over. My whiteness means I am less likely to be followed by a security guard around a shop – this is an example of white privilege. Yet there is little I can do with that information (apart from confront security guards in shops when I see them following black people around). And perhaps that is part of the appeal of the language of privilege – because there is not much that we can do about it. While it is useful to be aware of how white privilege functions, it does not provide me with the analytic tools to – in Smith's words – 'dismantle the structures of domination' which lie behind the fact that black people are viewed as criminals. There is a tendency for white feminists – and others – to use the language of privilege as a power-evasive way of talking about race. Speaking instead of white supremacy allows us to get to the root causes which enable our easy passage through white worlds. It points to the deeper structures which need to be uprooted, and calls for sustained political anti-racist work.

White feminism and white feminists

I have already used the descriptor 'white feminism', a term which originates from critiques by feminists of colour of white feminist politics which do not attend to race. Writing in the early 1990s, Razia Aziz defined this term as 'any feminism which comes from a white perspective, and universalizes it' (Aziz, 1992: 296). White feminism is *not* any feminism espoused by white feminists, but rather an articulation of feminist politics which is inattentive to histories of colonisation and racism, and thus 'subsists through a failure to consider both the wider social and political context of power in which feminist utterances and actions take place, and the ability of feminism to influence that context' (ibid). It is a discourse which anyone can promote or disrupt, thus there is no essentialist connection between white feminism and white feminists (importantly, this distinction allows white feminism to be dismantled). Brah also brings attention to the contingent nature of both 'white' and 'black' feminism, arguing that they 'are not essentialist categories', but rather

> ...fields of contestation inscribed within discursive and material processes and practices in a post-colonial terrain. They represent struggles over political frameworks for analysis; the meanings of theoretical concepts; the relationship between theory, practice and subjective experiences, and over political priorities and modes of mobilisations. But they should not, in my view, be understood as constructing 'white' and 'black' women as 'essentially' fixed oppositional categories. (Brah, 1996: 111)

A distinction should be made between 'white' and 'black' feminism, though, in that black feminism is a self-defined political project while white feminism is the naming of a problem. White feminists do not (usually) name their feminism as 'white', rather they/we just call it 'feminism'. And therein – too often – lies the problem which Aziz identifies: white feminists theorise from a particular white perspective, yet assume that the theory is universal.

'White feminism' as a descriptive term has been revitalised and gained increasing traction also in recent discussions online. Reni Eddo-Lodge, writing in response to the defensive resistance to the term put up by many white feminists, spells out the link between white feminism, whiteness, and white supremacy, describing white feminism as 'the feminist wing' of whiteness, 'a ubiquitous politics of race that operates on its inherent invisibility . . . positions itself as the norm . . . [and] refuses to recognise itself for what it is' (Eddo-Lodge, 2014). White feminism is rarely a conscious political position, but the result of white

feminists' failure to recognise their specific location as white or to position themselves and their politics in the social and historical context of white supremacy.

One way in which white feminism is reproduced is through the marginalisation of the scholarship of feminists of colour, where their concepts and theories remain unrecognised within dominant feminist knowledge communities until they are taken up by white feminists, who, through institutionally racist structures and political citational practices become credited as originators. As a white feminist, my usage of the term 'white feminism' – a term which is in everyday use among many feminists of colour – within the context of a white-dominated academic feminism similarly runs the risk of being complicit in such white forms of knowledge production. I take this risk because I believe the term is important for what it reveals about whiteness as a structuring force within hegemonic forms of feminist politics. But it is vital that white feminists who use this term as a form of analysis hold on to and cite the term's development by feminists of colour naming a structure of feminist politics which systematically excludes them.

White feminist politics and subjectivities have been usefully studied and theorised by a number of feminist scholars of colour. Aileen Moreton-Robinson, in her study of white, middle-class feminist academics in Australia, shows how her interviewees, in talking about race with her (an Indigenous woman), mobilised a 'subject position middle-class white woman' which 'is structurally located as an ideological position within whiteness' (Moreton-Robinson, 2000: xxii). Despite claiming to be interested in race and advocating anti-racism in their research and teaching practice, Moreton-Robinson found that her research participants tended to locate race as belonging to people of colour, situating themselves (in relation to her specifically, but people of colour more generally) as disembodied subjects:

> Teaching racism as a people of colour issue fails to interrogate and locate white complicity. Intellectualising about racism allows the subject position middle-class white woman academic to be professionally, but not personally, engaged and is predicated on a mind/body split that works to allow the white female body to be separated from the mind. In other words, the mind creates a virtual non-racialised disembodied subject that knows and practises racism but does not experience it. (ibid: 144)

This un-interrogated positioning of themselves highlights how whiteness perpetuates an unequal power relationship between white women/feminists and women/feminists of colour. Moreton-Robinson's book is a call and challenge to white feminists to not only

interrogate whiteness, but to 'theorise the relinquishment of power so that feminist practice can contribute to changing the racial order' (ibid: 186). It is a challenge which my work aims to meet; as I discussed in the introduction, dominant narratives about feminism have everything to do with who holds the power to define reality.

One key constituent element of the 'middle-class white woman' subject position rests on an assumption of innocence. The production of a discourse of white feminist innocence is one which I have found has significant implications in terms of how white feminists engage with race. A number of studies have drawn attention to the problems (white) claims to innocence cause within feminism. Mary Louise Fellows and Sherene Razack note that during feminist discussions of emotive issues, it is a common move for participants to make claims to their own perceived marginality, in order to ensure their own innocent position. This initiates a process of 'competing marginalities' which they call 'the race to innocence' (Fellows & Razack, 1998).

Drawing on Anne McClintock's (1994) work, they link this desire among western feminists to perceive of ourselves as innocent to historical constructions of respectable womanhood within western society, and the way in which women have historically seen their variously marginal positions as unconnected to each other. The emergence of the middle-class in European society relied upon gendered processes (infused by imperialism and other social hierarchies), where the middle-class 'lady' achieved her respectability through her association with the cleanliness of the middle-class home. This could only be achieved through the disavowal and othering of the domestic worker who cleaned the middle-class home and the 'prostitute' who was constructed as intimately connected with the 'degenerate slum'.

Fellows and Razack suggest that looking at this historical context allows us not only to see clearly how some hierarchical relationships between women have developed, but also how much (some) women's identities are invested in not feeling connected to or complicit in other women's oppression. Although their discussion suggests this could be applied to all kinds of hierarchies between women, it would appear that it is particularly pernicious in hierarchies of race and class. Sarita Srivastava, who draws on Fellows and Razack among others, finds such claims to innocence endemic within feminist organisations when white feminists are confronted with their racism. She suggests that

> ...if we look again at these emotional debates and volatile exchanges over racism we can also hear their moral undertones, undertones with roots in feminist community, imperial history and national belongings. It is these narratives of morality that help to undergird inequitable relations of race in social movement sites such as feminist organizations. (Srivastava, 2005: 30)

Srivastava further notes 'preoccupations with morality and self' within white feminist groups, which she links back to notions of respectable white and middle-class femininity constructed through the historical relations of gender, race and empire. Therefore, 'many white feminists may feel that it is their self image – as good, implicitly nonracist people – and particularly their shared moral identity as feminists that is under siege' when white feminists are asked to account for their racism (ibid).

The racialised character of the production of an innocent identity must therefore be recognised: the construction of the innocent white woman subject position works to uphold white supremacy (this connects back to Moreton-Robinson's argument). A useful link can also be made between the production of *innocence* and the maintenance of *ignorance*. Lugones' work is again insightful in this regard, specifically her delineation of white women's 'infantilization of judgment' when they are asked to address racism. Such behaviour, which Lugones writes of encountering frequently, involves claiming an inability to understand or judge 'texts and situations in which race and ethnicity are salient' (Lugones, 2003: 48). Lugones describes it as

> ...flight into those characteristics of childhood that excuse ignorance and confusion, and that appeal to authority ... If a child, the white/Angla can be guilty of racism and ethnocentrism innocently, unmarked and untouched in her goodness, confused with good reason, a passive learner because she cannot exercise her judgment with maturity. But, of course, she is not a child. She is an ethnocentric racist. (ibid: 48-9)

In fact, as Lugones continues, this self-infantilising process is in itself 'a form of ethnocentric racism precisely because it is a self-indulgent denial of one's understanding of one's culture and its expressing racism' (ibid: 49). Lugones' observations dovetail with Mills' theory of whiteness as a form of racialised 'non-knowing': an ignorance about racism which 'fights back' (Mills, 2007: 11). Whiteness, Mills suggests, requires this ignorance to justify white supremacy:

> White ignorance has been able to flourish all these years because a white epistemology of ignorance has safeguarded it against the dangers of an

illuminating blackness or redness, protecting those who for "racial" reasons have needed not to know. (ibid: 35)

While Mills' theory suggests that white ignorance applies to all genders, the ignorance exhibited by white women – and white feminist women in particular – does have distinct gendered (as well as classed) dimensions. This is highlighted by Mariana Ortega in her theory of white feminists' 'loving, knowing ignorance' about women of colour. Writing within the American context, Ortega asks why, despite decades of black feminist challenge to exclusive forms of white feminism, 'there is still so much anger on the part of women of color and so much guilt and so much ignorance on the part of white feminists who are supposed to have knowledge of them' (Ortega, 2006: 58).

Ortega draws on Marilyn Frye's theory of 'arrogant' and 'loving' perception (Frye, 1983). Frye, concerned with ways in which men oppress women, developed a theory of the 'arrogant perceiver', the oppressor who (in Ortega's words) 'organize[s] the world and everything in it with reference to the arrogant perceiver's desires and interests' (Ortega, 2006: 59). The opposite of this is 'loving perception': where the oppressor unlearns his oppressive gaze and instead truly 'sees' the other person, rather than his own interests, fears and imagination.

Ortega, analysing ways in which particular white feminists have engaged with feminists of colour's literature, adds another way of perceiving in relation to how some white feminists perceive women of colour: a 'loving, knowing ignorance' practised by 'those who seem to have understood the need for a better way of perceiving but whose wanting leads them to continue to perceive arrogantly, to distort their objects of perception, all while thinking that they are loving perceivers' (Ortega: 60). 'Loving, knowing ignorance', Ortega suggests, reflecting on Frye's four-part instruction for loving perception (look, listen, check and question), is the consequence of white feminists looking and listening to women of colour's words, but failing to check and question. Because whiteness, like patriarchy, impels those anxious to remain within its field of vision to view people of colour arrogantly, the failure to 'check and question' their perception of women of colour's scholarship can lead white feminists to appropriate it to their own needs and desires in oppressive ways, while at the same time claiming to 'know' and have 'loving perception' towards women of colour. Ortega describes this as white feminists 'being fully engaged in the production of ignorance about the lives of [women of colour]' (ibid: 58), a useful

framing which emphasises the racialised agency involved in producing, to go back to Mills, a specifically 'white ignorance'.

The theories of white feminism and the subjectivity and knowledge productions of white feminists which I have discussed in this section stem from analyses which take the intersection of different structures of domination as a starting point. In the next section, I will discuss a key and widely used concept which formally encapsulates such an analytical framework.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality as a term originates from US black feminist legal theory. Specifically, Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term to describe the experiences of (working-class) black women at the intersection of gender, race and class. Yet, while the word was new, the idea behind it was not, and has been central to black feminism since its inception (see e.g. The Combahee River Collective, 1982; hooks, 1982). What the concept conveys, in Crenshaw's usage, is that it is impossible for black women to separate their experiences of discrimination based on gender from that based on race (or class) – that black women experience oppression as black (working-class) women. Further, Crenshaw distinguished between structural and political intersectionality, where structural intersectionality denotes the experience of inequality at these intersections, while political intersectionality addresses the fact that black women have historically been discursively erased from both feminist and anti-racist movements. In order for social movements to account for and be accountable to the experiences of black women, they must begin from a position of political intersectionality, where both race and gender (and class) are centred (Crenshaw, 1991).

Since Crenshaw's original formulation, the concept has been extensively taken up and developed within different strands (and locations) of feminist theory (and beyond). Cho, Crenshaw and McCall have recently suggested that the vastness of intersectional theorising and practice means it is now relevant to think of a field of 'intersectionality studies': 'intersectional insights and frameworks are put into practice in a multitude of ways, from the top down to the bottom up, and in highly contested, complex and unpredictable fashions' (Cho *et al.*, 2013: 807). One of the tensions which has emerged between different applications and understanding of the concept is, in Jennifer Nash's

words, 'whether intersectionality is a theory of marginalized subjectivity or a generalized theory of identity' (Nash, 2008: 2). In Crenshaw's original formulation, intersectionality is used specifically to locate the experiences of black women, i.e. intersectionality denotes a point at which different oppressive structures connect. However, other scholars, following the 'generalized theory of identity' route have taken up intersectionality as a concept which helps us understand all social identities as at the intersection of different structures, wherever we are located within them. For example, Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix argue that an intersectional approach to identity allows us to see that 'what we call "identities" are not objects but processes constituted in and through power relations' (Brah & Phoenix, 2004: 77). Intersectional theory has, for instance, been applied in the study of the 'interior conflict' of white feminist activists' agency, at the intersection of gender oppression and racial privilege (Huijg, 2012).

My thesis both draws on intersectional theory as well as explores how intersectional discourse is mobilised within the texts and interviews that I analyse. The questions which then arise include: how intersectional is my own analysis? Focusing primarily on the intersection of race and gender, does my analysis evade questions of class, disability, age, sexuality and gender identity?

To answer these questions, it important to locate intersectional theory within the context of white supremacy and white dominance within academic feminist theorising. Although I err on the side of understanding intersectionality as a theory which can be usefully applied to a range of social differences and structures of oppression, there is a structural dimension to how this theory has travelled, and the way it often becomes disconnected from its black feminist history (May, 2014; Crenshaw, 2014). When black women's positionalities are marginalised in applications of intersectionality, this is a problem. While it can be (and is) argued that it is in the nature of academic theories to travel and transform, they do so within unjust and oppressive structures. It is these structures which intersectionality theory originally called attention to; thus intersectionality theory should not in my view become detached from its attention to the oppression faced by black women and the structural intersections of race and gender.

Ahmed has noted how, when intersectionality becomes dissociated from black feminism, it can be deployed 'as a method of deflection':

When I give talks on race and racism a common question is "but what about intersectionality?" or "what about gender/sexuality, class?" I am not suggesting these are not legitimate questions. But given how hard it is to attend to race and racism, these questions can be used as a way of redirecting attention. In other words, when hearing about race and racism is too difficult, intersectionality can be deployed as a defense against hearing. (Ahmed, 2012: 195, endnote 18)

Whiteness makes attending to race and racism, to use Ahmed's word, 'hard'. The epistemology of white ignorance (Mills, 2007) requires deflections by any means necessary, including the deployment of an intersectionality discourse by supposedly race-aware white feminist scholars. But, as Sirma Bilge argues,

...intersectionality does not entail a universal (i.e., undifferentiated and context-free) application of a static, almost dogmatic, rule to be applied to every form of knowledge and political organization dealing with oppression. On the contrary, the careful and conscious deployment of intersectionality requires us to take into account systemic disparities in social location. (Bilge, 2013: 419)

My experience thus far has led me to conclude that British feminist academia - the institutional and political context in which my research is located - has a distinct and enduring race problem: it does not want to deal with it. I have witnessed many feminist academic conferences where most of the speakers have been white, hardly anyone has had anything to say about race, and when someone (usually a woman of colour) raises the issue of whiteness in the final plenary, most of the white feminists look down at the floor in shame and the organisers mumble some vague commitment about 'next time'. To apply, in Bilge's words, an 'undifferentiated and context-free' version of intersectionality theory within this context will divert attention from the problem of whiteness within British feminism. Thus race must be foregrounded continuously.

This is not to suggest that other social structures are irrelevant: they are not. But applying intersectionality theory does not mean one has to attend to all social structures simultaneously: this is impossible. It is possible to make informed and political judgments about which differences and structures matter more in any given context, although this of course a matter of perspective, and one which is open to critique. I do however, at various points in my analysis, foreground other differences as they appear particularly pertinent. In particular, class remains in view as a structure which interacts in significant ways with race and gender in the production of the discourses which I analyse.

A race-critical, intersectional feminism

'With some hard work, it is perfectly possible to envisage this critical interrogation of the processes of 'race', gender, sexual and class hierarchical constructions being undertaken by anyone who is prepared to identify with the political and intellectual project being struggled with, and to debate sometimes painful and troubling ideas and strategies with those who traditionally have not been seen as allies. That is the challenge for white feminists, for as long as 'race' is seen as 'black woman's thing' or something to be dipped into occasionally, progress will be minimal, and we will have to insist on a specifically 'black', provisionally essentialist, exclusivist feminism.'

(Lola Young, 2000: 59)

My research is fundamentally informed by black and postcolonial feminist theory (and related self-defined categories such as Third World feminism and radical woman of colour scholarship), as well as other critical theorising on race, racism and whiteness. For white scholars it is important to consider what an ethical and constructive position is in relation to this literature, which is predominantly written by people of colour. I raise this to consider my own position, but in particular as this relates to a broader concern around how white feminists engage with the scholarship of feminists of colour.

In the conclusion of her article 'What is Black British feminism?', Lola Young (2000) highlights both the possibility and the challenge for white feminists to engage with and theorise from a black feminist theoretical perspective. If white feminists step up to the challenge of learning from black feminist theorising and engaging with women of colour's work as part of an ongoing commitment to relinquish power, then - Young implicitly suggests – black feminism does not have to be understood as exclusivist: it is a theoretical perspective which is relevant for everyone.

I agree with Young's point that black feminism must be engaged with by all feminists. One of the limiting attitudes which seem to persist among many white feminists is that black feminism has nothing to do with them, as if it is only relevant to black women/women of colour. This is a profound misunderstanding – and ignorance - of what black feminist theory is. As bell hooks' (1984) argues, when feminist theorising begins from the margins (from the position of those who are most oppressed), it illuminates much more of the structures which oppress women (*all* women, but in different ways), than theorising done from the 'centre' (in particular when this centre does not engage with the margins).

Yet, white feminists researching and writing about race are also prone to perpetuating racial inequality. There are two risks in particular as they relate to my research. One is the problem of setting myself up as an 'expert' on race, and that I use this status as a distancing mechanism, as if I am not also complicit in perpetuating racism and whiteness. Thus it risks setting up a hierarchy between 'good' and 'bad' ways to be a white feminist, shifting attention away from dismantling the structures of white supremacy within feminism. I seek to avoid this by locating myself within the context in which I write, not suggesting that I am somehow not also implicated in the broader critique that I am making.

Secondly - and perhaps most acutely – operating within an institutionally white and racist feminist academic context, my position as a white feminist academic writing on race has effects. White feminists are more likely to listen to me than feminists of colour when I write about racism. They may cite my work on racism within feminism rather than that of feminists of colour. I may get hired to teach or research on feminism and race instead of a woman of colour. Thus my stated aim of challenging white dominance within British feminist academia does not necessarily do so in material, structural ways – in fact, it may after all be my whiteness which is most effectively reproduced. But, I would argue, black and postcolonial feminist perspectives call for persistent attention to power within feminist discourse and communities, and feminist politics more generally call attention to the interconnections between theory and praxis. Thus who is in the room and who is enabled to speak freely in the room is just as important as what is being said. An intersectional feminist politics requires that power hierarchies and silences are confronted within the physical spaces of feminist academia as much as we claim to do so in the theory that we write. All white feminists must consider carefully the processes we engage in when we engage with race: who do we cite, laud, dismiss, invite, ignore and why? This process requires a willingness to be uncertain and uncomfortable – as I discuss further in the next chapter.

 My engagement with black and postcolonial feminism has led me to adopt what I have come to refer to as a race-critical, intersectional feminist perspective. It is one which is consistently attentive to power relations within feminism and between women, with a particular focus on race and whiteness as an oppressive structure. It is a perspective which is shaped by a continuous engagement with black and postcolonial feminist scholarship,

while aiming to always account for my own structurally privileged position within this relationship. In the next chapter, I will discuss how this perspective translated into the everyday process of doing such research.

3. Researching narratives, race and whiteness

Although I ask more specific questions in relation to different material, my overarching research question (discussed in the introduction) can be broken down into three parts:

1. What narratives and representations of 'the feminist past' are drawn upon, constructed, and told in the texts that I analyse and the interviews I conducted and how/where are issues of race and racism located within these? Including: How visible are feminists of colour within these representations?

2. How do the texts and interview participants address the relationship between feminism, race and racism?

3. What relationship can be inferred between the narratives and representations of 'the feminist past' presented by the texts and interview participants and their articulation of feminist politics in relation to race and racism?

The third question essentially gets to the crux of my thesis. I answer it by drawing on my findings from the first two questions, in order to construct my argument that how the feminist past is understood in relation to race and racism has a direct correlation with how feminist politics are articulated in the present in terms of how race and racism is or is not accounted for. In other words, I am concerned with what particular narratives and representations enable, legitimate, and/or foreclose in the present.

In what follows, I will discuss why I chose to ask and answer these questions in the way that I did, as well as how I attempted to do so. The chapter consists of three parts. In the first section, I review how social scientists have defined narrative research, and clarify what I mean when I say I research narratives and representations. In the second section, I outline what I see as some key theories on the ontology and epistemology of race, and how these inform my approach to race as a subject of research. This section includes a discussion of how race and whiteness shaped the interview encounters. In the final section, I outline the research design and process.

Narratives, stories and representation

'Narrative research' is a loose umbrella term covering a range of different research practices across different disciplines. Because of the wide range of research across different disciplines, even the definition of a 'narrative' is not straight forward. It is a concept which has perhaps been most widely used and developed within literary theory and related fields. However, I draw mainly on scholars working within the social sciences, such as Ewick and Silbey, who define narrative by identifying three features 1) 'a narrative relies on some form of selective appropriation of past events and characters', 2) 'events must be temporally ordered… [and] presented with a beginning, a middle, and an end' and 3) 'events and characters must be related to one another and to some overarching structure' (Ewick & Silbey, 1995: 200). Social scientists do not tend to distinguish between a 'narrative' and a 'story' (e.g. Riessman, 2008; Polletta, 1998), whereas scholars working within literary and linguistic traditions usually do (Cobley, 2014: 3). As I am looking at data where there arguably *is no story* outside the narratives which are presented, I do not distinguish between stories and narratives and use the terms interchangeably.

Narratives are a form of representation. Stuart Hall defines representation as 'the process by which members of a culture use language (broadly defined as any system which deploys signs, any signifying system) to produce meaning' (Hall, 1997: 61). According to Hall and the wider British cultural studies tradition, representation is about the production of knowledge and therefore intimately tied to power. Representation is central to how we understand the world. Within contemporary feminist communities in the UK, how feminism as a movement and ideology is represented is a constant site of struggle. Not everything which I find significant in the texts/sites that I analyse could be defined as a narrative, thus in a broader sense my project can be understood as looking at all forms of representations of feminism, but with a key focus on narratives that emerge from these representations, and which are central to producing meaning about feminism.

How scholars define and conduct narrative research also varies widely. Squire, Andrews and Tamboukou suggest that the diversity and incoherence between and across some of these approaches is a result of narrative research emerging from 'two parallel academic moves': one the 'person-centred' humanist approaches and the other structural, poststructural and psychoanalytic approaches 'preoccupied with the social formations shaping language and subjectivity' (Squire *et al.*, 2013, 3-4). From this, they create a

typology of 'individually-' versus 'socially-oriented' approaches to narrative, according to which my research aligns with the latter (ibid: 6). My concern is not with individual narratives and life stories, but with how stories are socially constructed, challenged and maintained within and through power relationships and structures.

Despite vast divergences in terms of how narratives are approached within research, Riessman (2008) argues that a distinguishing feature of all narrative research is its holistic approach to the narrative in question. Whether the narrative is an extended autobiographical account or a short yet 'whole' narrative in a longer segment, according to Riessman, 'narrative scholars keep a story "intact"...' (Riessman, 2008, 53). According to this definition, my research would thus not strictly qualify as narrative research. I am not only interested in narratives which are 'whole' in the sense of having a beginning, middle and end, but also in what might be characterised as narrative fragments and traces – references to a larger whole which is alluded to implicitly. At the same time, however, I am interested in how overarching narratives are created within and across different sites. A narrative with a beginning, middle and end might not be apparent within one single text, but traces of common narratives might emerge from various texts to form a 'whole'.

Ewick and Silbey suggest that one of the ways in which social scientists approach narratives is as 'method', which resonates with my approach:

> Rather than the *object* of study themselves, here, narratives are the *means* of studying something else. Scholars may solicit, collect and examine narratives as a way of accessing or revealing some other aspect of the social world. (Ewick & Silbey, 1995: 202)

I study narratives as a means of revealing things about race and whiteness within British feminist discourse. In this sense I am interested in the ways narratives are social: infused with and a product of various power relations and struggles. As Ewick and Silbey note, narratives 'are not just stories told *within* social contexts; rather, *narratives are social practices*, part of the constitution of their own context' (Ewick & Silbey, 1995: 211). This understanding of narratives also challenges the humanistic approach of narrative as inherently liberatory or resistant to domination. Ewick and Silbey suggest that there is nothing inherently either subversive or hegemonic about the narrative form. In other words, narratives 'are as likely to bear the imprint of dominant cultural meanings and relations of power as any other social practice' (ibid).

The narrative reproduction of dominant cultural meanings about race was highlighted by Antoinette Burton when, in a 1992 article, she argued that North American white feminists, while critical of bias within historical accounts written by powerful men, were not in a similar way critical of the constructed nature of feminist histories. Instead their historical narratives provided celebratory accounts of 19th and early 20th century western feminists which did not account for their imperial, racist and classist ideologies. Burton warned: 'If history truly is the production of knowledge about the past, then it is not at one remove, somewhere "back then". For feminists, "history" is and must be NOW' (Burton, 1992: 26).

Burton's article provides a good example of what I refer to as (anti-racist) feminist historiography. Telling history is a political act, and historiography interrogates how the stories we tell about the past are influenced by and also influence present concerns. Rather than accepting historical accounts of past feminisms as truths, feminist historiography looks at the constructed nature of such accounts and the conditions which have enabled their telling and dominance.

A common response to the telling of a 'single story' (to adapt a phrase of the author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009)) of feminism as a white, middle-class, western and morally innocent movement has been to call for more stories. Susan Stanford Friedman for example suggests the need to move towards feminist histories plural – 'many localized narratives' – coupled with an attention to power within storytelling processes (Stanford Friedman, 1995: 41). This is undoubtedly important. In the UK context, research such as Julia Sudbury's (1998) study of black women's organisations, the Black Cultural Archives' oral history project of the black women's movement (The Heart of the Race Project, 2009-10), and the 'Remember Olive Morris' oral history collective (Remember Olive Morris Collective, n.d.), provide important historical accounts of black women's activism in Britain. They implicitly also challenge dominant stories of women's activism during this time, which repeatedly constructs the story as predominantly a story about white women. Yet despite alternative stories and narratives being told and made publicly available, they remain marginalized and unfamiliar to the majority of white feminists as well as the general public. This is why an attention to power is crucial.

Hemmings' approach to feminist stories is that which most closely resembles my own, and I have drawn on her methodological approach in a number of ways. Hemmings conducted an analysis of peer-reviewed articles in feminist journals over a number of years, homing

in on any parts of an article which told a story about the historical development of feminist theory (Hemmings, 2005; 2011). Her close attention to the narratives which are constructed across brief segments of the articles allows her to unpick what she calls the 'political grammar' of feminist storytelling. She aims:

> ...to identify the repeated narrative forms that underwrite these stories by analyzing the textual mechanisms that generate coherent meaning and allow for author, context, and reader agreement... I pay particular attention to the subject/object relationship, binary pairs and the excluded outside, embedded temporality and hierarchy of meaning, citation practices, and textual affect. (Hemmings, 2011: 17)

Hemmings' attention to the structuring and content of the stories told enables her to track how three parallel narratives of progress, loss, and return have become dominant within western feminist theory. In a similar way, I focus attention on those bits of contemporary feminist texts that tell stories about the feminist past, and in my case, I pay particular attention to the textual mechanisms that produce coherent meanings about feminism in relation to race and racism. Whether race is explicitly in the narrative or not, my argument is that it is always present in structuring meaning.

Although narratives are central to her project, Hemmings does not specify her research as *narrative research*. Rather it is a discourse analysis of how narratives function. In acknowledging her debt to Foucault, Hemmings explains that she chooses to

> ...describe the dominant threads of Western feminist storytelling as narratives rather than discourses ... in order to emphasis *[sic]* their patterning rather than their content or context. The close attention to ordering meaning follows Foucault, as does the focus on oppositions, exclusions, and silences, but my main interest remains in narrative function, the rehearsal, the repetition, and rhythm that are so central to the making of feminist community agreement. (ibid: 229, fn 16)

The patterns, repetitions, rehearsals and rhythm of dominant narratives is something which emerges across different texts and are not necessarily consistent all the way across one single text. Therefore, like me, Hemmings can be understood as looking for fragments and traces of narratives rather than always examining them as 'wholes'.

In contrast to those who call for a greater diversity of stories or corrective narratives, Hemmings is interested in developing what she suggests are more accountable alternatives. In her words, she is interested in 'how we might tell stories differently rather than telling different stories' (ibid: 16). As she points out, providing corrective narratives will never be satisfactory, as it continues the process of ignoring the constructed nature of

storytelling and denies the reality that it is never possible to provide a true and complete representation of the past. Instead, her methodology places primary attention on power. As she argues, interrogating *how* particular stories come to dominate shines a light on contemporary power structures within feminism: the power to define a particular narrative as *the* story of feminism 'enable[s] a particular present to gain legitimacy' (Hemmings, 2005: 118). The interrogation of contemporary power structures within feminism is a central concern my research.

Researching race and whiteness

That race is socially constructed and has no biological basis is the assumed starting point of much contemporary sociological work on race. This is not the same as saying it is not real – but in which ways it is 'real' is a much theorised question. According to Falguni Sheth, the 'essence' of racialization – i.e. what comes to be identified as the 'real' around which to organise a racial category is always shifting, but always centres around a perceived threat – what Sheth refers to as the 'unruly' (Sheth, 2009). She suggests that we understand race as a technology – 'an instrument that produces certain political outcomes that are needed to cohere society' (ibid: 22):

> …race has to do with how populations are not just distinguished from each other, but divided, separated, and hypostatized into self-cohering wholes who are to be despised, vilified, and if not cast outside the gates of the city, then at least subordinated and exploited, if not physically or psychically managed. (ibid: 39)

For Yasmin Gunaratnam, race is 'the organizing category around which has been constructed a system of socio-economic power, exploitation and exclusion – i.e. racism' (Gunaratnam, 2003: 4). Adding this to Sheth's argument, we can posit that the organising category which Gunaratnam writes of centres on containing the 'unruly' – in other words a contingent grouping of humans who are perceived as a threat to societal order at any given time.

Other theories focus on the phenomenological experience and performative production of race. According to Linda Martín Alcoff, the reality of race is contingent and 'internal to certain schemas of social ontology that are themselves dependent on social practice', with 'the *source* of racializations … in the microprocesses of subjective experience' (Alcoff, 2006: 179 & 181, emphasis in original). Alcoff suggests that '[r]acial knowledges exists at the site

of common sense', with 'an uninterrogated white common sense' dominating 'public discourse and theoretical analysis about race' in western societies (ibid: 185). This 'white common sense' does not have any essential connection to white bodies but rather structures how all bodies are perceived and experienced. Sara Ahmed (whose theory I outlined in the previous chapter) considers how 'whiteness is lived as a background to experience' and 'could be described as an ongoing and unfinished history, which orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they 'take up' space' (Ahmed, 2007a: 150). Related to this point is the performative dimension of race, highlighted by Bridget Byrne: 'the repeated citation of racialised discourses and, importantly, the repetition of racialised perceptual practices produces bodies and subjects that are raced' (Byrne, 2006: 16).

Understanding race as a technology of exclusion as well as an embodied orientation produced through historical relations and reiterated citational practices involves understanding race as something undoubtedly real and experienced, yet its 'realness' is contingent. Working from this ontological and epistemological basis requires a methodological practice which neither reifies nor undermines racialised experiences and perceptions.

Gunaratnam's work is particularly helpful in constructing such a methodology. Understanding research as a 'discursive practice', she suggests that researching race requires 'a radical reflexivity' (Gunaratnam, 2003: 7). Feminist epistemology has been key in calling for researchers to locate themselves in their research (e.g. Harding, 1991; Haraway, 1996; Hill Collins, 1991), and Gunaratnam argues that this reflexivity must be not just attentive to social relations, but that 'researchers have to examine and trace how research is entangled with wider social and historical relations … [and] produces rather than simply reflects what we are researching' (ibid). The historical context of research on race is connected to histories of colonialism and racism, and this must be considered throughout the research process.

In order to attend to the complexity of realities of racialised experience as well as the contingent foundations of the category of race, researching race requires what Gunaratnam calls a 'doubled' research practice: 'in which researchers need to work both *with* and *against* racial and ethnic categories at the level of epistemology and methodology' (Gunaratnam, 2003: 29). Tensions and messiness are inevitable, with the risk

of reproducing racialised power relations ever present, but Gunaratnam suggests that 'there is much to be achieved by distrusting any neatness' (ibid: 104). However researchers decide to approach and deal with the mess, Gunaratnam concludes that the value of a doubled research practice 'can be judged in relation to three main points':

> First, whether an approach is able to illuminate the heterogeneity, areas of ambiguity and the partiality within any category of difference, so that any individual or social group cannot be understood by reference to a single category of difference. Second, whether it is able to take account of the relational nature of social difference. And third, whether it can enable us to recognize the systematic patterning and the specific contingency of the connections between individuals and social contexts. (ibid: 49-50)

I interpret this as approaching race through an intersectional lens, understanding all social categories as relational, and always maintaining an attention to power.

How do I apply a doubled research practice in my project? One pertinent question is: how do I avoid creating oppositions or reifying difference between 'white feminists' and 'feminists of colour' and/or 'black feminists'? First of all, it should be noted that these terms are all political and as such do political work. Neither 'white', 'of colour' or 'black' refers to 'a race', but to processes of racialisation. There are a number of different processes which can be identified here. While the concept of racialisation is often applied to analyse the oppressive and orientalist production of racialised 'others', this is not inherently so. For example, the term 'women of colour', as reproductive justice activist Loretta Ross explains, originated as a form of self-definition – a term of political solidarity between 'minority' women organising for justice in the United States (Western States Centre, 2011). Similarly, in Britain, 'black feminists' developed as a political category of solidarity in the 1970s and '80s under which women from different minoritised ethnic backgrounds came together to organise ('political blackness' has gained increasing traction again in recent years, while simultaneously remaining a significantly contested concept) (Swaby, 2014; Sudbury, 2001). These are both thus reclaiming and resignifying processes of racialisation.

I use the category 'white' within my research to locate those feminists who move through feminist spaces in Britain in ways (in Ahmed's words) which extend our reach. Our embodied whiteness is - to draw on Nirmal Puwar's (2004) work on race and gender in elite spaces – the 'somatic norm' within feminist spaces. This is different from how I use the term 'white feminism', as I have discussed in the previous chapter, which does not

have to cohere with white bodies, but rather is a political outlook which ignores and perpetuates racism (Aziz, 1992; Eddo-Lodge, 2014). However, even those white feminists who attempt not to practice a 'white feminism' need to account for the privilege and power accorded to us simply by moving through a white dominated society in bodies read as 'white'.

The messiness and tensions around how I approached race, whiteness and racial identity within the project are perhaps clearest to see in relation to the interviews. Although the starting point for my research was an observation that issues of race and racism appear frequently to be ignored or minimised by white feminists specifically, I decided against approaching only white people for interview, because I did not wish to argue for any essentialist connection between white feminists and the discursive production of racially problematic narratives. Equally I did not want to assume that racially marginalised feminists articulate a distinct or coherent anti-racist perspective on feminism and racism.

In the call for participants, I identified myself as a 'white feminist activist and researcher' and stated that I was 'interested in interviewing participants of any ethnicities and genders'. I also stated that 'My research is motivated by a desire to address what often appear to be recurring patterns of white privilege and marginalisation of feminists of colour within (white dominated) activist and academic feminist spaces.' It was difficult to predict what level of response it would get. White people's frequent reluctance to discuss race is well documented, although Frankenberg (1993) found that white feminists responded more positively to her 'call to speech' about race than other white women, as they were more likely to have been exposed to 'race-cognizant' discourses. I was also conscious of the fact that many people of colour would be wary of discussing race with a white researcher; such interview encounters, Rollock argues, are always situated within a context of racial politics and power which makes them 'fraught with risk' (Rollock, 2013: 501).

In the end, the majority of the participants were white. The fact that so many white feminists were willing to talk to me about racism and feminism and the fact that not as many feminists of colour were undoubtedly had a lot to do with my whiteness. It is important to investigate this whiteness as both symptomatic and productive of the current tensions around feminism and race.

A radical reflexivity also requires being attentive to and accountable for the history of exclusion and white dominance within 'mainstream' feminist movements in Britain. In several senses, this exclusion is not just 'history': I take it both as a given that racist practices and white dominance still operate within many feminist spaces and discussions in the contemporary context, but also that where it may be understood as something in the past, it is a past which still weighs heavily on the relationships between feminists of colour and white feminists. To go back to Ahmed again, most feminist spaces are already orientated towards white feminist bodies; white bodies sink more comfortably into them.

Adale Sholock (2012) suggests white western feminists who are committed to anti-racist practice and analysis should develop a 'methodology of the privileged' (drawing on Chela Sandoval's 'methodology of the oppressed' (2000)) grounded in 'epistemic uncertainty'. She notes how whiteness constructs knowledge with the assumption of the all-seeing eye, and thus 'epistemic uncertainty, self-doubt, and cognitive anxiety' can be a productive mode of functioning for white people doing anti-racist work (Sholock, 2012: 705). However, reflexivity – potentially leading to uncertainty and anxiety -- in and of itself will not lead to anti-racist research praxis. As Audrey Kobayashi argues, 'reflexivity has no meaning if it is not connected to a larger agenda' of social justice (Kobayashi, 2003: 348). But even when reflexivity *is* connected to an expressly anti-oppressive agenda, Kobayashi suggests that 'there are some limits as to how useful public reflexivity is', in particular when coming from a privileged perspective (ibid: 349).

History tells us that white women's feelings have always been prioritised within multiracial feminist communities in ways which are oppressive towards women of colour (Srivastava, 2005). A radical reflexivity requires me to take account of such histories, and consider to what extend reflecting on my whiteness in public in fact reproduces rather than challenges racial dynamics. Yet at the same time, it is necessary to be attentive to how whiteness functions throughout the research process, and to examine how the research process itself is productive of racial meaning making. As Rollock writes:

> [W]hite researchers electing to carry out race research have a particular responsibility to critically reflect upon and demonstrate awareness of these issues. They must remain alert to and report on the dynamics of race and their responses to it. To do so not only ensures the development of critically reflexive practice but also remains crucial to making the processes of whiteness visible. (Rollock, 2013: 506-7)

As Rollock suggests, making 'processes of whiteness visible' (as far as they are visible to me) is necessary because it highlights how whiteness functions at the micro-level of interview interactions. Heeding Kobayashi's words, I attempt to do this in a way which is useful in terms of the larger agenda of ending racism within feminism, rather than as simply a reflexive process in and of itself. Thus in the remainder of this section, I have chosen to focus on those moments and encounters which I think are most instructive in highlighting how whiteness structured some of these interactions. I will address three themes, which I refer to as white silence, ethical whiteness and the confessional mode.

Silence can mean many different things. By prefacing it with 'white' I want to emphasise how it can be used as a form of white solidarity against the naming of racism. When preparing for the interviews, I underestimated the extent to which such white silence would operate within the interview encounters – specifically those with white participants. As my call for participants and information sheet stated that I wanted to talk to people about feminism and race, I assumed that those who volunteered to be interviewed would be comfortable enough to talk about race. However, with several white participants, this was clearly not the case. One participant (whom I interviewed on Skype), when talking about an activist group of women of colour who she had some contact with, started googling for their website when she was describing them. After failing to find what she was looking for, she eventually referred to the women in the group as 'coloured women' and then in the next sentence changed to say 'women of colour', correcting herself, although neither I nor her commented on her use of outdated, racist terminology.

Reading the transcript of the conversation with another participant, well-versed in intersectional theory and language, it becomes clear that the conversation was in fact mostly structured around an avoidance of talking about racism in any way which was not abstract. At one point, when asked whether she'd been part of any conversations about race within feminist spaces, the participants' language became very awkward and halting in a way it had not been in the rest of the interview, but still very abstract, avoiding references to any specific conversation or event.

In both these instances my own actions and words enabled a silence and evasion of race to go unquestioned. In noticing the participants' anxiety and awkwardness in talking about race, I responded by attempting to alleviate it, which led to prioritising white comfort (theirs and mine) over remaining in the more difficult space of talking about our

complicity in racism. Our shared whiteness allowed us to gloss over these moments in a way which would possibly not have happened if a person of colour was part of the conversation. It points to how powerful shared whiteness is in the micro-processes of interaction even when the content of the conversation is supposedly race and racism.

'Ethical whiteness' centres on how white people – in particular those who wish to position themselves as anti-racist – distance ourselves from racism by pointing out the racism of others. There were a number of moments, and whole conversations which demonstrate this tendency well. This ethical white subject position has resonances with Moreton-Robinson's 'middle-class white woman' subject position (Moreton-Robinson, 2000a). As she argues, engaging in discussion about racism on an intellectual level does not necessarily correlate with anti-racist behaviour or effects, and can instead function to accrue an ethical subject position for the white speaker, one which I refer to as ethical whiteness.

In a number of the interviews with white participants, for instance, the conversation led us to position racism as something which was outside of our own encounter. For example, immigration politics came up in number of interviews with white participants as a point over which we could demonstrate agreement and affirm our anti-racist politics. This at times deflected attention away – or at least took time away – from the more tricky conversations about racism within feminism – the interviews' supposed subject. This demonstrates how quickly white people having a conversation about racism will deflect it away from anything in which we ourselves feel implicated.

Similarly, there were moments in interviews with participants of colour where I positioned myself in ways which functioned to distance me from white feminists who enacted racism. This is most clearly illustrated when one participant asked me if I was involved with feminist activist groups. I explained that although I had been, my involvement and activism had changed over the years, as I had withdrawn from a certain form of activist feminism because 'I didn't really want to be *that* kind of white feminist'. By drawing a sharp divide between '*that* kind of white feminist' and myself, I positioned myself as an ethical white subject, as *another* kind of white feminist. The statement also acted as an invitation for the participant to affirm my identity as the right kind of white feminist.

Highlighting what I call the 'confessional mode' I want to focus attention on how whiteness enables a particular form of white speech about race which prioritises white

people's feelings and experiences. One participant had only in the last six months become more aware about racism and white privilege through online feminist communities. This new awareness caused her to reflect that she had probably 'done loads of really bad things in the past that I haven't really realised'. Despite now educating herself about racism, the participant felt that the conversations and relationships she had developed online had not 'really translated into [her] real life'. In particular, she said she did not know many people who were not white and did not know what to do about that.

At several points in this interview, the participant talked about anti-racism and white privilege awareness as something which she needed 'to work on', and she linked this to her self-development as an activist. I would argue that my whiteness provided a safe enough space for her to reflect more openly in 'real life' on the contradictions she was struggling with in terms of translating what she had been reading and learning about into her everyday (inter)actions. Yet in themselves such reflections are not anti-racist (Ahmed, 2004); rather they focus attention on the feelings of white people – our guilt and dilemmas over the fact of being oppressors. It is a confessional mode enabled by a white society which always prioritises white people's feelings at the expense of people of colour. The interview encounter as a space of expected non-judgmental listening – a space where complexity and contradiction are generally encouraged – coupled with the safety afforded to the participant through my whiteness made such a performance possible.

Another white participant had been centrally involved in a conflict over racism within the activist group she was a part of, and she had been critiqued as participating in racist practices. Again, my whiteness and the specificity of the interview encounter provided a space for the participant to work through some of her complicated feelings on the topic. At a number of points, she returned to discuss the moment of the critique and its effects. Although she did concede that she may be, in her words, 'race-blind', she did not believe that the critique was justified and provided various reasons for this, which I discuss further in chapter eight. What I want to focus on here is how the interview encounter itself and my responses in some senses legitimated rather than challenged the participant's view. This becomes clearest towards the end of the interview, when we were just about to finish. At this point the participant said, 'I didn't say much about race. Is that because I'm racist?' Rather than answer this question, I deflected it back to her ('what do you think?'). She responded as follows:

I don't think we [in the group] are. Um... but I know, like, [with gender oppression], once you learn about it, you start seeing it everywhere, and seeing it much more clearly and wondering why everyone else can't see it. So I wonder if it's similar with issues around race. That once you start looking for it, you see issues around race everywhere.

I responded:

Yeah, I mean, I think that's the same with anything, with gender, or class... and when you're white you don't, and you have, you know, white privilege, and you don't come up against racism all the time [...] unless you're, you know, politically aware, or you've learnt about it somehow... you're kind of indoctrinated not to see it.

This was followed by the participant saying that she wished that the person (of colour) who had raised the critique had approached it in a more non-confrontational way. We can see clearly how my responses and agreement with her view that white people inevitably start from a position of ignorance enables the participant to make this problematic argument, which shifts the focus on to the behaviour of the person of colour. My comment about having 'learnt about it somehow' in particular feeds into the argument that it is people of colour's role to educate white people about racism. This, I would suggest, is indicative of the way whiteness can function as a common logic when white people talk to each other. We can justify and legitimate each other's innocence, becoming the arbiters of what counts as 'real' racism and what is an understandable form of ignorance.

Even though I did not start my research with complete naivety about the insidious processes of whiteness, this evidently did not ensure against its reproduction. Although this may be partly inevitable, it should not be considered wholly so. My main strategy that I had planned for when a participant said something I felt was problematic was to ask more questions requiring them to explain further what they meant. However, this tactic came into conflict with my desire to be a good interviewer and 'host' of the conversation – i.e. to hold a conversation in which the participant felt respected, listened to and not harshly interrogated. For interview encounters to challenge whiteness more effectively, it might help if participant and interviewer meet several times, and for the first conversation to focus on 'ground rules' and understandings in terms of how we understand terms like 'racism' and 'whiteness', and to agree collaboratively what our aim would be in terms of challenging racism and whiteness in our conversations (how these conversations are

approached with a participant of colour versus a white participant of course needs consideration). However, coming back to Gunaratnam's observation about the messiness inherent in attempting to challenge racism through research, there is of course no fool-proof way to avoid reproducing whiteness and racism in interview encounters. As Rollock argues, we therefore must continue to expose and reflect on such dynamics.

Ethics

The critical analysis of published books and newspaper articles, although it may raise objections and may cause some offence, does not raise specific ethical concerns. After all, critical engagement with literature is central to academic theorising, and, as I argued at the very beginning of the thesis, anti-racist critique within feminist discourse (although often constructed as destructive) is necessary and important if racism is not to be reproduced.

However, my analysis of the interview material raises some more complex ethical issues. Specifically, as I am critically analysing the narratives and framings offered by participants, individual participants who read my thesis may not agree with my interpretation of their words, and may feel I have misrepresented them. This is a possibility which I anticipated from the start of the project, but it is also one which I see as unavoidable, and one which I deem ethically acceptable as long as participants have been able to make a fully informed choice about taking part[4].

In order to gain informed consent, I stated the political aim of my research in the initial call for participants (Appendix C) clearly, specifying: "I am hoping through this research to address recurring patterns of white privilege and marginalisation of feminists of colour within white dominated feminist spaces". The information sheet for participants (Appendix D), which I sent out to anyone who expressed interest in participating, further detailed the aims of the project and what participants could expect from being interviewed. I also encouraged people to ask me any questions they had before taking part.

The information sheet included a consent form (part of Appendix D), which participants were asked to complete before the interview. This stated that participants reserved the

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[4] The project was approved by the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Review Panel at London Metropolitan University.

right to withdraw their consent "at any time during the interview process or afterwards". I recorded all interviews and produced full transcripts, which participants were given the option of reviewing and approving. Only a few took up this option and only one person asked for a section to be removed (this was a race-related comment, and the participant asked for it to be removed due to a concern related to anonymity). I will be emailing all participants once the research is complete, offering to send them a copy of the thesis if they want to read it.

As I discuss in the introduction to chapter nine, my purpose in analysing the interviews is to draw out what the material can tell us about wider feminist discourses rather than what they say about participants as individuals. Yet, the participants are of course individuals, who will respond to the analysis with individual thoughts and feelings. How participants feel about my interpretation of their interview is likely to vary, depending on their political perspective, how much I have drawn on their interview in my discussion, and how I have framed it. If individuals do disagree with my analysis, I hope that it can lead to a dialogue between us. It is impossible to do a research project on a fraught and contested subject area without inspiring differences of opinion, perspectives, and potentially even conflict. But rather than seeing any potential disagreement or tension as a negative consequence, I would argue it is potentially positive, as it may generate further productive discussions about racism and feminism between participants and myself (and I should note explicitly that I am not assuming I will be the one 'educating' in such discussions, and that participants may have very useful critiques of my analysis).

Research design: Methods of data generation and analysis

I wanted to look at feminist discourse across a variety of 'sites' and spaces. I came to categorise these as activist, academic and popular feminisms. These are not hard and fast definitions; in each of the chapters, I discuss in more detail what I mean by these categories, and the overlap there is across them. At the start of my research, I knew that I wanted to limit my focus to feminist discourse located in Britain. However, although sources such as *The Guardian* and *The Observer* have a UK-wide remit, it is clear that most if not all of the material that I analysed in fact emerged from England. For the interviews, I decided to limit the call to participants in England, as I did not feel I could adequately do

justice to the specificities of the Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish contexts in terms of dynamics around feminism and race.

Generating the data

The parameters in terms of selecting material varied somewhat across the different types of texts. For books – whether academic, popular or activist – I chose to focus on those which took feminism itself as its subject. These books all grappled with questions of what feminism is, what it was, and what they want it to be going forward. In different ways, they all attempt to in some senses speak *for* feminism or represent feminism (although several of the authors, such as Redfern and Aune, carefully point out that they do not wish to position themselves as spokespeople for feminism in any definitive sense).

For newspaper articles in *The Guardian* and *The Observer*, I selected articles and columns which specifically addressed feminism and feminist politics as a subject (not everything which was covered under the categories of 'feminism', 'women' or 'gender'). My sample included over fifty articles published between 1999 and 2012. Again, many of these articles in different ways aimed to represent feminism in some form – to provide a narrative of what (British) feminism *is*.

I decided to conduct interviews for a number of reasons. Firstly, spoken conversations are different from written text – they are messy and unpredictable – and such material brings additional insights to the project. Interviews also allowed me to focus on 'everyday' feminist talk among activists and students, who (in most cases) are not published writers. Interviews also allowed me to ask specific questions which I could not ask of the texts.

I was interested in talking to people who were invested in feminist politics and theory so I decided to solicit participants from two different (overlapping) sites of feminist knowledge production: feminist activist communities and academia. Participants from the first category included individuals who identified as feminist activists. In the call for participants I defined this as follows:

> I use the term 'feminist activist' loosely – you do not need to be part of an activist group or take part in any particular form of activism to 'qualify'. If you feel that you identify strongly with this term, then you fit into the category.

I wanted to interview people who felt a strong identification with this term, as I wanted to speak to people with an emotional, personal investment in feminist politics, whatever form their 'activism' took, whether collective/organised or more personal/everyday (or of course both).

Participants from the second category included current and former students of women's/gender studies (at any level). I hoped that these participants would provide valuable insights into how narratives of feminism's past are constructed, interpreted and negotiated within the academic feminist environment. I again cast the net widely, including people who were or had studied Women's/Gender Studies degree courses (at any level) or had studied at least one module based on feminist theory.

The call for participants was distributed via a number of UK-based academic and activist feminist email lists. I also contacted eleven activist groups directly by email, asking them to pass the call to their members. My emails also led to the call being circulated by some feminist Facebook and Twitter accounts (not by myself). I did several 'pushes' of the call through different avenues over a period of about a year and a half (in 2012-13). Apart from asking one participant directly about being interviewed after we met at an event, I chose not to approach people that I knew.

I did not attempt to make my interview sample representative in any sense, but rather I responded to each person who contacted me with some further questions to check they fit the criteria, and if they did I attempted to arrange an interview. Between the initial contact and the actual interview, as is to be expected, a number of potential participants dropped off the list as they stopped replying to emails or we could not arrange a suitable time. One would-be participant (a person of colour) also never replied to my request to return the consent form and therefore I was not able to include this interview in the sample. As I did not get any further response, I do not know the reason behind their lack of further communication. Final numbers were ten activists and nine students. The demographic details of the participants are available in Appendix A.

In terms of the interview questions (see Appendix B), I was interested in talking to the participants about 1) histories of women's activism in Britain – what they were familiar with, the kind of stories they told, 2) their thoughts and involvement with contemporary feminism, and 3) (for students only) their experience of studying gender or women's

studies at university. Cutting across all of these themes is of course my interest in race, racism and whiteness.

The specific questions evolved over time, as I found that some worked better than others in generating fruitful responses. They also varied slightly between the two groups and I did not always ask the questions in exactly the way it was written on the paper, but responded to how the conversation developed. However, in each interview I always asked participants to tell me about their knowledge of women's activism in Britain since the 1960s. In earlier interviews, this was framed along the lines of 'Could you tell me what you're familiar with in terms of women's activism in Britain since the 1960s onwards?' and in the later interviews I reworded this question as 'If I say 'women's activism in the '60s, '70s, and '80s' what does this make you think of?'.

The majority of the interviews were conducted in person, with six done using Skype. In two of these, technology failed which led to one interview being conducted by web-chat, and one by speaker phone.

Analysing the data

I drew on and was inspired by a number of different methodological approaches in data-analysis, varying according to the different types of data that I was working with.

For newspaper articles (as relatively short self-contained units), once I had selected which articles to focus on, I analysed these as a whole. For the books, on the other hand, I did not analyse these as whole units. Rather, I would read through them, looking for key words and themes which were relevant to my topic. In particular, I searched for any segment or section which told a story about feminist history, or alluded to feminist history in some way. I also searched for any material which discussed race or racism, whether direct or indirect. Similar to Ahmed (2012), who describes following the word 'diversity' around as a methodological approach, I followed words such as race, racism, difference, diversity, intersectionality around within these texts, to see what they revealed – what context they were used within, what stories they were part of, and what work they were made to do. Significantly, this also involved paying attention to absences in the text – where I felt that a race analysis was missing or being evaded.

In selecting which data to focus on from the interview material, I used a thematic framework analysis, as outlined by Ritchie, Spencer and O'Connor (2003). This involves indexing data from each transcript pertaining to specific identified themes and then creating thematic charts, where themes and sub-topics for each participant are charted in a systematic way.

In terms of analysing the narratives (or narrative fragments) within the data, my approach involved not only looking at what the narratives are, but also relating these to the wider social and cultural context in which they are constructed. Maria Tamboukou's idea of approaching narratives not for what they say about the narrator, but for what they might tell us about wider discourses resonates with my own aim: 'Rather than focusing on the meaning of stories I was more interested in exploring their connections and interaction in the production of truth and knowledge' (Tamboukou, 2013: 102).

Tamboukou further describes narratives 'both as discursive effects and as sites for the production of meaning' (ibid). Across all the data, I explored this dual function of narratives. In what ways were the stories constructed a reiteration of hegemonic narratives about feminism? What oppositional or otherwise alternative narratives emerged within the material? How do these relate to wider discourses? Were these productive of different meanings about feminism?

Relating to my third research question stated at the start of this chapter, I also wanted to make a deeper analysis of the material: to state what, in my view, the production of certain types of stories and content meant for feminism in relation to race and racism. This type of analytical sense-making is inevitably deeply personal and political. For me, my analysis grew out of an engagement with archives and histories of feminism which centre the work of women of colour: black feminist theory and activism, black women's political organising in Britain, postcolonial feminist theory, US women of colour feminisms, and related fields of critical race studies. These theoretical bases (as discussed in chapter two) led me to analyse the data in the way that I did.

In some senses, I make use of one of Hemmings' alternative approaches to feminist story-telling, which she calls 'feminist recitation'. Feminist recitation, in Hemmings' words 'require[s] attention to memory, desire and uncertainty as central to feminist practice and radical politics' (Hemmings, 2011: 27). It involves '*recombining* half-submerged narrative traces from the starting point of political exclusions haunting the present' (ibid: 195). It is

an archaeological approach to feminist theory, digging out the traces and the hauntings of the text and (re)introducing them into the narrative. This is done not to complete the narrative, but rather to open it up to different meanings. Hemmings' example involves substituting references to Michel Foucault with Monique Wittig in narratives which position Judith Butler as anachronistic within feminist theory, in order to reintroduce a feminist historical lineage which haunts Butler's work (ibid: ch. 5). In some senses, I use recitation to 'dig out' the work of specific feminists of colour, at moments where it feels their work is 'haunting' the narratives of white-defined feminist histories and theories.

Conclusion

As is clear from the discussion above, the project drew upon a number of different established methodologies and also involved different methods of analysis depending on what type of material I was working with. The decisions on how to approach the different elements of research and analysis were informed by wider epistemological concerns about the role of narratives in constructing the social world, as well as important political questions about the reality of race.

Narrative research, as I have outlined, is a broad term encompassing a variety of different disciplines and approaches. Although my approach may not strictly fit with established forms, it emphasises the importance of narratives in constructing our understanding of the world around us. It builds on methodologies which highlight narratives as social practices (Ewick & Silbey, 1995). Understanding narratives in this way enables us to focus on the often normative role that stories play in maintaining hegemonic discourses, such as white supremacy.

Research which addresses race and whiteness is another incredibly broad area. My discussion of how to go about such research draws on ontological and epistemological theories of race which place primacy on its contested, constructed, shifting, but also undoubtedly real existence in ordering the social world in a racialised hierarchy. Researching race and whiteness requires, as I have discussed, attention to both the real and constructed nature of race, as well as of power – informed by colonial histories - in the research process. My analysis of the research encounters draws attention to the contradictions which occur within research on race, and heeds the call that white

researchers on race must analyse their own role in reproducing whiteness, in order that such processes can be laid bare (Rollock, 2013).

4. Popular feminist literature: The new imperial feminism

In academic literature, the term 'popular feminism' is usually associated with popular culture. Hollows and Moseley (2006) suggest that today it is necessary to understand feminism and popular culture as deeply intertwined, because while feminist activists in the 1960s and 1970s often conceived of feminism and popular culture as antagonistic, the majority of western women who have grown up after this time are more likely to have first encountered feminist ideas *through* popular culture. It is therefore counter-productive, they argue, to suggest that feminism and popular culture are separate: 'academic and activist feminisms - however 'unpopular' they may be - are not 'outside' ... popular manifestations of feminism, but are part of the same social and cultural struggles over the meaning of feminism' (ibid: 2 & 15).

I agree with Hollows and Moseley that attempts to separate clearly between popular and activist feminisms tend to be artificial; these are not separate discourses but ones which constantly interact with each other. In fact, I found it difficult to decide whether some texts fitted in with popular or activist feminism. I initially defined popular feminism as any feminist texts aimed at a mainstream and non-specialist audience - for example articles published in newspapers and books about feminism aimed at a general audience. However, this definition includes the two books which I analyse in chapter seven as constituting an activist feminism (Redfern & Aune, 2010; Banyard, 2010), because they both aim to make feminism accessible to a mainstream audience. Yet I decided against this, because the language within these texts is clearly more resonant of an activist discourse (as I elaborate in chapter seven). What I found distinguished the texts I have located within 'popular feminism' from those I locate within 'activist feminism' is a closer relationship with normative cultural discourses around feminism, gender and sexuality. In particular, the books I discuss in this chapter emphasise a distinction between what they describe as 'traditional', 'second wave' or 'activist' feminism and the type of feminist politics they promote, which is in many ways very gender- and hetero-normative. Additionally, they do not advocate a collective feminist activism in the way that Banyard as well as Redfern and Aune do.

I have split my analysis of popular feminist material into two chapters. This chapter looks at three books: Natasha Walter's *The New Feminism* (1999), Ellie Levenson's *The Noughtie Girl's Guide to Feminism* (2009) and Caitlin Moran's *How To Be a Woman* (2011). The next chapter looks at feminist discourse in the newspapers *The Guardian* and *The Observer*. In contrast to the use of 'popular feminism' to describe any popular culture products with implicit (often contested) feminist content, my focus is narrower: I look at texts which explicitly locate themselves within feminist discourse - i.e. which use the label 'feminism' – rather than any texts which may indirectly draw on feminist ideas.

As I will show, none of the authors, who are all white, pay any attention to race or experiences of women of colour. At the same time, they claim to represent a new kind of feminist, universalising from their own experience, thus fitting the definition of white feminism (Aziz, 1992). Further honing in on pronouncements and assumptions about race and difference in these books, it becomes clear that not only do they promote a *white* feminism, but that they also contain distinct *imperial* logics, with the authors drawing on imperial notions of 'power', imagery of the British empire, and an orientalising discourse of the 'other' in constructing their arguments.

I begin by summarising each text, outlining how they draw upon and reference the feminist past. I then move on to look at how the stories these books tell about the feminist past enable the construction of a 'new' white, imperial feminism in the contemporary context; one which remains resolutely oblivious to multiplicity within feminism and critiques of whiteness by feminists of colour. In particular, I will look at how the texts employ a language of 'simple equality', how they construct a feminist subject through a racialised process of othering, and how they advocate a 'power feminism' which relies on an imperial and nationalistic discourse[5].

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[5] As an example of the overlapping of popular and activist feminist discourse, it is important to locate the critiques I present in this chapter within the context of debates and critiques which have been made in online feminist communities over the last decade. In particular, American popular feminist books such as Jessica Valenti's *Full Frontal Feminism* and Amanda Marcotte's *It's a Jungle Out There* were thoroughly critiqued by women of colour bloggers, for universalising from a white and class-privileged perspective and for marginalising the role of feminists of colour within activist movements (and, in the case of Marcotte, for using racist imagery on the book sleeve) (e.g. Blackamazon, 2007; Factora-Borchers, 2007; Holly, 2008; Karnythia, 2008).

The New Feminism by Natasha Walter

Originally published in 1998, I include *The New Feminism* in my analysis, because it marks a pivotal moment in the articulation of a 'new' British feminism within the sites I am looking at as constituting popular feminism. The book sparked a debate within the liberal media about feminism in Britain, and Walter emerged as a key public figure and writer on the topic (e.g. Cochrane, 2010; Treneman, 1998; Wilson, 2005). The book is therefore significant within the context of what is understood as contemporary feminism within the liberal media.

Walter argues passionately that a 'new feminism' is thriving in Britain. This new incarnation, she asserts, while heavily indebted to the battles won by the WLM, is in most respects very different. The old feminism, Walter argues, lost its way when it started looking inwards and 'became primarily associated with sexual politics and culture' and policing women's private lives (Walter, 1999: 3). The new feminism, on the other hand, must 'look outward again', and 'must reconstitute itself as a straightforward argument for political, social and economic equality' (ibid: 221 & 148)[6]. The fight for feminists, Walter asserts, should be for political and economic power – in Parliament, in the media, in all spheres of work. She outlines her demands as: readjustment of the work/life balance for men and women, free childcare, support and encouragement for men to be part of children's lives, increasing the minimum wage, reforming welfare to help single mothers into work, and support for women who experience sexual and domestic violence.

From Walter's perspective (in 1998), feminism's battle is more than half won. She finds her evidence for this 'in politics and journalism and television dramas and everyday life ... among actresses and writers, schoolgirls and politicians, mothers and businesswomen. Everywhere you go, you see women flexing their muscles and demanding equality' (Walter, 1999: 6). She is equally optimistic that the other half of the battle can be conquered as long as feminists stop being dogged by the movement's 'political correctness' and policing of women's personal appearance and sexuality (as the 'old myth' that feminists 'all wear dungarees and are lesbians and socialists, must be buried for good'), and instead 'make this new feminism work' by 'join[ing] hands with one another, and with men, in order to create a more equal society in Britain' (ibid: 5 & 221).

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[6] Walter has since significantly revised her position on sexism and popular culture (Walter 2010).

In proclaiming the arrival of a *new* feminism, Walter is already placing it within the context of an *old* one. Walter would not be able to advocate her feminist politics in the way that she does without repeatedly referencing that which, according to her narrative, came before. As one of the cornerstones of her argument is that the new feminism is significantly different from that which preceded it, my claim that her feminist knowledge and politics is built on that of the 'old' feminism may on the surface appear contradictory. However, Walter's repeated insistence on exactly how the new feminism differs from the old is the other side of the same coin; what matters is not whether she agrees with a particular feminist text or wisdom, but how she situates it within her narrative of the feminist past. On the most basic level, *who* she cites and therefore allows to speak for feminism's past, whether framed negatively or positively, is significant, because the references are still within the frame.

A closer look at Walter's citations and references to feminist literature and personalities of the 1970s and 1980s sheds light on a wholesale erasure of black feminist thought and activism. The index reveals a plethora of references to white British-based feminists: Germaine Greer (ten), Lynne Segal (five), Sandra McNeill (four), Sheila Rowbotham (two), among many others, while the only black British feminist quoted is Hannana Siddiqui (once) of Southall Black Sisters (who are mentioned twice more). Both Siddiqui and Southall Black Sisters are framed as grassroots activists only, not as feminist thinkers, which is in Walter's narrative the province of white women only (several members of Southall Black Sisters write prolifically). White American feminists are also referenced heavily: in particular, Catherine MacKinnon (seven), Andrea Dworkin (seven), Mary Daly (three) and Gloria Steinem (three), while the names of black feminists from the US are absent.

Counting may be a crude method of analysis, but because Walter's style of writing relies so heavily on citations, the stark disparities are worth highlighting. In Walter's narrative of the feminist past, women of colour's theory and activism is considered either so insignificant as to not warrant a mention, or otherwise completely beyond her frames of reference.

The Noughtie Girl's Guide to Feminism by Ellie Levenson

Published a decade after *The New Feminism*, *The Noughtie Girl's Guide to Feminism*, although markedly different in tone, in many ways resonates with Walter's book. Marketed as a 'witty and intelligent new look at the F-word' and complete with a 'chick-lit' inspired cover, it is a humorous and light-hearted text, aimed at 'modern' women in Britain. 'Noughties girls', Levenson describes, are women born after the 1960s – 'Women who were children or not even born when the UK had its first female Prime Minister, women who have always known they could access legal abortion should they want it', likely to have careers and financial independence and generally reaping the rewards of feminism, but unlikely to call themselves feminists (Levenson, 2009: xvii).

Levenson presents herself as an ambitious professional woman with a love for gossip magazines and fashion – the quintessential 'noughties girl' - and argues that feminism of the 'noughties' is irrevocably a mass of contradictions, but one which women should proudly embrace. Her polemic falls into the well-worn discourse that feminism is all about women having the *choice* to do whatever they want (whether the issue at hand is abortion, or wearing high heels), as well as about having 'equality' with men. She aims to popularise feminism by loosening its association with activism:

> If feminism, as a word or as a movement, is to move away from being a term of abuse, then it has to be mainstream, a word used by more than just those making the loudest noise. You don't have to do anything to be a feminist, you just have to think you are one. (ibid: 198)

Levenson suggests that the feminist label has become unpopular with women because it

> ... has become too associated with a particular type of feminism, one where people think they need to be angry all the time, where they need to look and speak a certain way. Feminism, they say, has become synonymous with the worst aspects of the women's movement. (ibid: 26)

Levenson draws on *The New Feminism* on a number of occasions, listing it as one of nine books she cites as having been 'particularly interesting and helpful in forming my own opinions' (ibid: 215). Similar to Walter, she is disdainful of '1970s feminists' (ibid: xiv-xv). Taking a step further than Walter, Levenson even renounces the need to know about feminist history: 'I [don't] necessarily need to know my place in feminist history. You don't need to know what steps we have made towards equality – you just need to know that we're not there yet. We're campaigning to be equal, not less unequal' (ibid: xv). However,

she later contradicts herself (and acknowledges doing this), by arguing that a Women's History Month is needed. 'I didn't mean that people shouldn't be aware of women in history, but rather that you don't need an intimate knowledge of academic feminism to be able to demand your rights', she explains. 'We're not all going to go away and read the works of the many feminists who have gone before us ... but we must acknowledge the role other feminists have played in shaping our world' (ibid: 207).

Despite claiming not to know much about feminism's history, Levenson does still make statements about what 'traditional' feminism was about. For example, in the concluding chapter, Levenson claims that '[o]ne of the problems with feminism of previous generations is that there seemed to be an insistence that women embrace every aspect of the movement in an all or nothing kind of way. But noughtie girl feminists reject this idea of being told what to think, whoever it is by' (ibid: 209). Such disparaging generalisations of what feminism was in the past, paint a similar picture of a restrictive, prescriptive and homogenous feminist movement as that of Walter's 'old' feminism. Not surprisingly, again, black feminism and feminists of colour are entirely absent from the narrative.

How To Be a Woman by Caitlin Moran

Moran's book is a more personal tract than Levenson and Walter, part-memoir and part feminist manifesto - and with a heavy dose of humour. Although it is very personal, it was promoted as a book about modern feminism, and Moran as speaking for the modern woman. The framing of the book on the back cover is indicative: '1913: Suffragette throws herself under the King's horse. 1970: Feminists storm Miss World. Now: Caitlin Moran rewrites *The Female Eunuch* from a bar stool and demands to know why pants are getting smaller'. As may be self-evident, Moran believes the best resistance to sexism in this day and age is to make a joke out of it, and concludes her introductory chapter by suggesting that:

> ...if there *is* to be a fifth wave of feminism, I would hope that the main thing that distinguishes it from all that came before is that women counter the awkwardness, disconnect and bullshit of being a modern woman not by shouting at it, internalising it or squabbling over it - but by simply pointing at it, and going 'HA!', instead. (Moran, 2011: 14)

Thus the 'funny' feminism which Moran promotes is constructed against an older angry, combative or victim-focused feminism.

Moran grew up in a working-class family. Her family's lack of money, as well as her own sense of always doing things wrong, is central to her personal narrative, and a repeated source of humour. In this sense the story of the modern British feminist is different than that of Levenson and Walter: overcoming class barriers becomes part of the story. However, given her early career success, Moran's personal narrative is hardly 'ordinary'. Writing this book at the age of 37, as a successful newspaper columnist and media 'personality' (who started her career in her teens) her anecdotes about modern womanhood in Britain are often similar to those presented by Levenson and Walter. Class inequality thus does not appear to be on her agenda as in any way connected to gender inequality - but rather a personal struggle which she has overcome.

How to Be a Woman suggests a similar intended audience as Levenson - e.g. 'modern' women who have grown up in Britain post-1960s, who believe in having equality with the men in their lives, but who eschew feminism. Moran sets out to convince such women to declare themselves as feminists proudly:

> It really is important you say these words out loud. 'I AM A FEMINIST.' If you feel you cannot say it ... I would be alarmed ... Because if you can't, you're basically bending over, saying 'Kick my arse and take my vote, please, the patriarchy.' (ibid: 72)

Moran is critical of what feminism as a movement has become - lamenting how what was once 'the one most exciting, incendiary and effective revolution of all time' has 'shrunk down into a couple of increasingly small arguments, carried out among a couple of dozen feminist academics, in books that only feminism *[sic]* academics would read, and discussed at 11pm on BBC4' (ibid: 12). What is notably different in Moran's narrative of the feminist past, compared to Walter and Levenson, is her wish to reclaim the spirit of an earlier feminism, rather than reject it as old-fashioned and outmoded. This is typified in her adoration for her 'heroine' Germaine Greer, whose writing in *The Female Eunuch* she describes as having been '[n]ew; fast; free' (ibid: 12 & 77). Contrast this to Levenson's description of Greer as 'a stereotypical man-hating feminist', whom 'noughties girls' cannot relate to (Levenson, 2009: xvi) and it is clear that Moran's representation of the recent feminist past is much more positive than that of Levenson and Walter, who are both keen to distance themselves from anything which could potentially be understood as

offending men. Moran jokingly even proclaims that 'feminist' on its own does not seem enough, and that she prefers it pre-fixed with the adjective 'strident' (Moran, 2011: 81). However, apart from references to Greer, Moran does not draw on writings or thinking by other feminists.

Humorous material such as Moran's can be particularly resistant to analysis, with critiques dismissed as 'not getting the joke'. Yet humour is central to the structuring of social life. Billig distinguishes between disciplinary and rebellious humour, where the former is intrinsically conservative, mocking those who break social rules, while rebellious humour challenges and mocks the social rules (Billig, 2005). Research on humour and gender suggests that humour is often used by both men and women as a tool in their gender construction (Crawford, 2003). Moran's (and Levenson's) use of humour is interesting on this level, because it could be argued that her use of humour rebels against the pervasive stereotype of the humourless feminist. She uses autobiographical anecdotes of all the times she 'got being a woman wrong', using self-ridicule to highlight the unrealistic expectations of femininity. The femininity which she repeatedly fails to inhabit is a white and middle-class ideal, and her failure to live up to it is recounted as intimately tied to her working-class background. What becomes clear in the analysis to follow, however, is that while her humour rebels against gendered and class normativity, it reinforces normative colonial and racial comic scripts.

The language of equality

The erasure of feminists of colour's scholarship severely damages the analyses that the books present. The lack of engagement with the theories and experiences of women of colour can clearly be seen in how each of these books takes up 'equality' as the goal of feminism, without any critical analysis of what this concept actually means. Walter does this most insistently, asserting that '[f]eminism is about equality for women, nothing more nor less', describing it as the most 'straightforward' of goals (Walter, 1999: 41 & 148). In her vision of a society where feminism has prevailed, she describes how:

> ...we will see women and men sitting together in equal numbers in Parliament... We'll hear women's laughter and women's anger echoing through every office and every boardroom in the country. We will watch as many films made by women as by men; we will read as many newspapers edited by women as by men; and so we will see women treated with more respect throughout our media. (ibid: 257)

Levenson, similarly, writes:

> I want equality. I want equal pay with men. I want equal opportunities for education, jobs, sport and entertainment. I want equality when it comes to responsibility for caring for the vulnerable in our society ... I want equality of moral rhetoric so promiscuity amongst women is not seen as worse than promiscuity among men ... And I want equality of expectation, so boys and girls are all expected to be the best people they can. (Levenson, 2009: xviii-xix)

Moran also draws on the notion of equality between men and women: 'We need the only word we have ever had to describe "making the world equal for men and women"' (the word in question being 'feminism') (Moran, 2011: 81). At another point, she formulates her definition of feminism as 'Simply the belief that women should be as free as men, however nuts, dim, deluded, badly dressed, fat, receding, lazy and smug they might be' (ibid: 88).

In all cases, (gender) equality is here invoked without questioning the ways in which power structures operate along other axes of inequality, such as race and class. I quoted bell hooks' discussion of this fact in chapter two; in the British context in the early 1980s, Hazel Carby similarly argued that white feminists 'have to recognize that white women stand in a power relation as oppressors of black women ... compromis[ing] any feminist theory and practice founded on the notion of simple equality' (Carby, 1982: 214). Whether one agrees with hooks that it is better to move away from the concept of equality altogether and focus instead on 'ending sexist oppression' (hooks, 1984), or whether one still wishes to retain the concept, it is clear that the usefulness of sexual/gender equality as a goal of feminist politics should not be assumed to be self-evident; the concept must be theorised to take account of difference.

Unfortunately all the books eschew any such nuanced analysis. Levenson in fact explicitly rejects an intersectional approach to equality. Describing a straw poll conducted among her friends to find a more palatable word than 'feminism', she explains that 'the only alternative ... which came up were variants on the word equal' (Levenson, 2009: 26). She goes on to argue against adopting such a variant because it 'suggests a concern with discrimination against all types of social group - age, sexuality and race as well as gender'. She finds this problematic: 'If we bind it up with other forms of discrimination then we lose sight of the specific fight for women's equality' (ibid). Yet that gender can be separated from race and class in the way that Levenson believes is exactly the kind of claim which intersectionality theory contests (e.g. Crenshaw, 1991).

Equally, Walter glosses over the significance of other forms of oppression when she asserts that 'disadvantaged women want power and equality just as much as more advantaged women' (Walter, 1999: 220). This statement comes from a chapter in which Walter attempts to attend to the experiences of working-class women. However, her insistence that women throughout society all want the same thing serves immediately to erase class differences as soon as they are made visible. Writing of her visit to a housing estate in Glasgow - described as a place 'where you might feel justified in saying, here feminism has not reached' (ibid: 216), iterating an assumption that feminist consciousness originates from locations of privilege - Walter concludes that here also the new feminism is thriving, led by 'women [who] are trying to build [communities which] rest on a new ideal of equality' (220). Taking this statement to its logical conclusion, Walter appears to claim that all that the women organising in this housing estate want is equality with the men that live there, not an end to poverty itself.

Walter also uses the notion of equality to erase the significance of differences between women, describing a visit to Hannana Siddiqui in the 'small, frayed office' of Southall Black Sisters, contrasting it to 'the vast, echoing tearoom of the Institute of Directors in Pall Mall' to visit the head of the City Women's Network. Walter concludes that while the two women 'wouldn't have much to say to one another' and probably would not 'be able to run a conference that both women would feel easy attending', what matters is that 'they are working for the same end: equality for the sexes; power and self-respect for women' (ibid: 45-6). What is missing is any examination of the inequality of power *between* the two women.

The assumption that (gender) 'equality' is a simple and straightforward goal which can be achieved without attending to differences and inequalities between women can only be made from a position of privilege along other axes. But in addition to personal experience, this formulation of equality rests on a stubbornly white feminist trajectory. It is a white feminist call which repeatedly refuses to hear or acknowledge black and anti-racist feminist critiques which have long since argued: equality is anything *but* simple.

Feminist subjects and objects

Writing in the 1980s, Chandra Mohanty critiqued western feminist development texts for producing homogenising, ahistorical representations of the 'oppressed third-world

woman'. This discursive othering, Mohanty argued, building on critiques of the binary logic of humanist philosophy, is part of the process by which the western feminist constitutes herself as a subject:

> By contrasting the representation of women in the third world with ... western feminism's self-presentation in the same context, we see how western feminists alone become the true 'subjects' of this counter-history. Third-world women, on the other hand, never rise above the debilitating generality of their 'object' status. (Mohanty, 1988: 79)

Mohanty's argument can be located within broader postcolonial, feminist and psychoanalytic theories on the construction of the self as dependent on the 'other' – on the subject defining itself against its object. Here I will draw on her insights – broadening them to consider the representation of racialised women more generally - to analyse how the three texts construct their modern feminist subjects: Walter's 'new feminist', Moran's 'strident feminist', and Levenson's 'noughtie girl'.

The feminist subject presented in each of the texts appears heavily based on the subjectivities of the authors themselves. Walter, for example, inscribes heteronormative and classed assumptions into her description of the new feminist:

> [She] will probably still have her eyes on marriage, although she takes for granted that it will be a partnership of equals ... Such a woman also takes contraceptive and abortion rights absolutely for granted, in order to control her fertility as far as possible. (Walter, 1999: 186)

Levenson, similarly, models the 'noughtie girl' heavily on herself and her peers, describing how '...noughtie girls define and understand their feminism by what we see around us every day, and from talking to our friends' (Levenson, 2009: 210). Interestingly, Levenson explicitly notes that because she is not one, she has 'not attempted to cover' 'many of the issues specifically concerning lesbians' in her chapters on sex and marriage. (ibid: xviii)[7]. Moran also makes claims about what 'strident feminists' think and do, as evident, for example, in her discussion about pornography, where she claims that '[s]trident feminists are *fine* with pornography. It's the porn *industry* that's the problem' (Moran, 2011: 35).

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[7] All three texts are highly heteronormative, as is evident in their painstaking reiterations that feminists do not hate men, are not generally lesbians, do take an interest in their appearance, enjoy fashion, etc. Victoria Hesford's argument that contemporary feminism is haunted by the 'spectre of the feminist-as-lesbian' is relevant here (Hesford 2005).

For the most part, the texts do not attend to race or ethnicity at all, and it can be presumed that the authors wish to include women of colour implicitly in their generic construction of the modern feminist. For example, after her comment about excluding lesbian experience, Levenson adds: 'Other than that, I hope that this book is interesting for all women', implying a universal appeal across other differences (Levenson, 2009: xviii). In Walter's text, passing comments such as 'visiting [beauty] salons where women young and old, white and black, preen in front of mirrors...' equally illuminate an implied inclusion: racial differences are casually remarked upon, but only to indicate that they do not matter (Walter, 1999: 88). Yet at other times, racialised depictions of women of colour make it clear that whiteness is in fact central within these texts' constructions of the modern feminist.

Women of colour are rarely interviewed in *The New Feminism*, however, occasional flippant remarks where black women are brought into view shed light on the falsity of Walter's presumed universality. She writes, for example, that 'white women may have much to learn from black British culture, which seems to be more upfront about celebrating women's sexual allure alongside their power, and not getting bogged down in waif-like images' (ibid: 98). Her description of black British culture as 'seeming' to be in a particular way emphasises her lack of knowledge of the experiences of black women, and also further exposes how the chapter – about fashion and beauty - is aimed at white women and addresses white cultural beauty ideals[8].

Unfamiliarity with anti-racism is obvious in comments made also by Moran. She suggests, for instance, that women reclaiming the phrase 'strident feminism' is similar to the way that 'the black community has reclaimed the word "nigger"', a statement disturbing on several levels: not only is the comparison a very poor one, but the claim that the latter term has been universally reclaimed by 'the black community' reveals a fundamental lack of knowledge about black politics (Moran, 2011: 81). In fact, Moran only brings up the topic of racism in order to make comparisons to sexism: in arguing that women should proudly declare themselves feminists, Moran suggests that not to do so is as non-sensical as if 'in the 1960s, it had become fashionable for black people to say they "weren't into"

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[8] This othering process is not limited to racialised women: most significantly, Walter claims that working-class women are included in her vision of the new feminism, while at the same time repeatedly positioning them as 'other': the 'less glamorous', less 'smart', less 'articulate' and more 'extraordinary' than the professional middle-class woman we tend to associate with feminism (Walter, 1999: 211 & 213).

civil rights' (ibid). While such statements are flippant and used for comic value, they betray a lack of knowledge and interest in black people's experiences, which indirectly points to the boundary of who is included and excluded in Moran's descriptions of modern women.

All three texts also make othering references to non-western women. Walter, in a manner consistent with the texts which Mohanty critiqued, uses them as props to make an argument about women in the west. For example:

> ... the development of the contraceptive pill is credited with springing women from traditional feminine behaviour and confinement to the home ... But why do women in the developing world not use reliable contraception even when it is made available to them? As evidence shows us, women's education is a necessary precondition to women taking the decision to limit their families. If nineteenth-century feminists had not broken open the doors of schools and universities for young women ... the contraceptive pill alone would have had much less effect on women's lives. (ibid: 51-2)

Here, the reference to 'women in the developing world' is not made in order to highlight anything about their lives, but rather to make a point about women in the west. With one passing mention, 'women in the developing world' are homogenised as uneducated and incapable of making decisions about their lives. They are positioned as the voiceless victims of patriarchy with which the modern western woman is contrasted. Additionally, the 'developing world' is constructed as inherently 'behind' the west in terms of women's rights. At another point, Walter mentions the beauty standards and norms in 'many Muslim and orthodox Jewish communities' in which 'women's self-decoration is seen as sinful, and women are coerced into covering their hair and their bodies', to make a larger point that 'as long as women are unequal, whether they are encouraged to be narcissistic or encouraged not to be, are in an equally demeaning position' (ibid: 86). The experience of the 'other' woman is brought in simply as a point of comparison, reminiscent of what Mohanty calls the 'feminist-as-tourist' model of women's studies pedagogy, in which 'brief forays are made into non-Euro-American cultures, and particular sexist cultural practices addressed from an otherwise Eurocentric women's studies gaze'. The purpose of this approach is 'to supplement and "add"' to the western feminist narrative, evading any recognition of power hierarchies or western-centrism (Mohanty, 2003: 239). This approach, Mohanty argues, discursively colonizes the non-western woman, by suggesting that her experience of oppression is instantly readable and understandable to the white western woman.

In a similar style, in a section titled 'What about foreign women?', Levenson asserts: 'Compared to women elsewhere in the world, we have fantastically free lives, though this should not be used as an argument to stop us getting complete equality in the West' (Levenson, 2009: 6-7). A sharp distinction is here established between western women and those 'elsewhere', who are denied subjectivity and feminism. Levenson continues:

> ... as feminists is it essential that we are aware of and attempt to change the lot of women elsewhere in the world? Should there be a sense of international sisterhood? ... We can apply the sisterhood on two levels - both the need to improve women's lives around the world at a human rights level, and the push for greater equality in our own lives, and while this book focuses on the second of these, it does not mean we should ignore the importance of the first. (ibid: 6-8)

Non-western women are included in an imagined 'international sisterhood', yet the agency sits firmly with western women only, who could potentially use their relative 'freedom' to 'change the lot of women elsewhere', women who clearly do not have any ability to change their lot themselves. This othering of 'foreign women' is repeated at another point in the book, when Levenson tells an anecdote about a woman she knows who had promised to obey her husband. She wonders if the reader will assume this woman is old, or 'a foreign woman from a country less enlightened than ours' (ibid: 157).

In a different way, Moran makes a problematic discursive move in relation to racialised women – in this case, specifically Muslim women who wear the burka. This is done in the context of explaining how she decides whether something is sexist, which she calls 'are the boys doing it?' test: 'It was the "Are the boys doing it?" basis on which I finally decided I was against women wearing burkas'. She explains the rationalising of burkas as 'quite a man-based problem, really', concluding that 'I don't know why *we're* suddenly having to put things on our heads' (Moran, 2011: 87). Although Moran has presumably never been asked to wear a burka, her use of 'we' positions Moran and Muslim women who wear burkas as the same. As with Levenson's description of a global sisterhood, Moran ignores power differentials between women, and presumes that the reasons why women wear burkas are transparent to her.

Again, one problem identified through this analysis is the complete erasure of scholarship and insights by feminists of colour. The uncritical invocation of an 'international sisterhood' and of non-western (Muslim) women as voiceless victims reproduces a white western feminist script which has long been discredited as colonial and racist within

postcolonial and black feminist theory. But, as Mohanty's analysis highlights, portraying racialised women in this way is not only significant and harmful in reducing 'othered' women to a homogenous victim status; the problem lies in the production of the ultimate agentic feminist subject as the (white) western feminist. Women of colour, and the topic of race and racism, enter the narratives in these texts simply as rhetorical props, and thereby emphasise the inherent whiteness of the 'new', 'strident' feminists and 'noughtie girls'.

Imperial constructions of power

Finally, I turn to how the texts mobilise a discourse of power which resonates problematically with the legacy of an imperial feminism. This discourse is most developed in Walter's chapter 'The new feminism embraces power', in which she argues that women's 'straightforward equality' can be achieved only when women can access positions of political and economic power in equal numbers to men. In Walter's view this goal is already within sight:

> As women break into every corridor of power in Britain, we can see that we are in the final stretch of a long feminist revolution, that is taking women from the outside of society to the inside, from silence to speech, from impotence to strength. (Walter, 1999: 168)

This statement illuminates Walter's conservative vision of what feminist success entails, as well as her perspective of unacknowledged privilege: were other aspects of identity, such as ethnicity and class, taken into account, Walter would need to qualify her statement significantly as to which women have successfully broken into the corridors of power. Although the vast majority of women in elite positions are in fact white, middle- and upper-class women, the failure to make this fact explicit becomes complicit in perpetuating the race inequality within institutions of power. Walter also claims that '[m]ore women in power will mean a better deal for women throughout society', ignoring evidence that privileged powerful women rarely in fact use (or are able to use) their power to promote feminist ideals (ibid: 182).

Walter defines the power that women need in order to achieve equality as consisting of three components: firstly, power over their own bodies, secondly, a 'power to work and vote and speak, buy and sell as we want' and thirdly 'the power to influence others and take decisions that affect others' lives, even in the most exclusive and difficult places in the

land' (ibid: 178). But despite theorising about these different types of power, Walter's chapter focuses almost exclusively on the third kind.

Walter constructs the 'new feminism' and that of the 1970s and 1980s as having near polar opposite positions on power. While the 'new feminism' embraces power, the women's movement 'turned their backs on the growth of women's worldly power' (ibid: 170). She caricatures the beliefs among 1970s and '80s feminists – exemplified in her narrative by the Greenham Common peace-camp - as adhering to the binary view that 'Men worked in death, destruction and money; women in creation, healing and emotion', asserting that 'just as a generation of women were growing up who were easy with power and independence, the feminist movement could only speak the language of the group and the victim' (ibid: 171 & 176). What might be loosely understood as 'radical feminist' perspectives on power thus come to represent the feminist movement as a whole. Not only does this suggest that only radical feminists had theories about power (and that they all held the same beliefs), but that radical feminist politics and Greenham Common (both white-dominated) encompassed the entirety of the feminist movement.

Moran, although less explicitly and in different terms, also writes of a need for women to claim worldly power. In doing so, she evokes imperial British history, and suggests that women need to claim their equal share in whatever the men have had:

> Let's stop exhaustingly pretending that there is a parallel history of women being victorious and creative, on an equal with men, that's just been comprehensively covered up by The Man. There isn't. Our empires, armies, cities, artworks, philosophers, philanthropists, inventors, scientists, astronauts, explorers, politicians and icons could all fit, comfortably, into one of the private karaoke booths in SingStar. We have no Mozart; no Einstein; no Galileo; no Gandhi. No Beatles, no Churchill, no Hawking, no Columbus. It just didn't happen. (Moran, 2011: 134-5)

Imperialists, armies and empires are uncritically positioned alongside artists and scientists as representing victories and creativity. Only a few pages later, Moran asks 'Why wasn't it a woman who discovered the Americas, in 1492?', and then goes on to explain how women haven't achieved these kinds of milestones because 'We're not as good at hefting stones, killing mammoths and rowing boats .... In addition, sex often had the added complication of getting us pregnant, and leaving us feeling 'too fat' to lead an army into India' (ibid: 137-8). At yet another point, railing against the shrinking size of women's underwear, Moran jokes:

> [A]s a country, our power has waned in synchronicity with the waning of our pants. When women wore undergarments that extended from chin to toe, the sun never set on the British Empire. Now the average British woman could pack a week's worth of pants into a matchbox, we have little more than dominion over the Bailiwick of Jersey, and the Isle of Man … How can 52 per cent of the population expect to win the War on Terror, if it can't even sit down without wincing? (ibid: 98)

References to British empire, the 'discovery' of the Americas, armies, and the 'War on Terror' are, in Moran's comedy arsenal, references to what has made Britain great.

The imperial legacy of Britain is also brought into view by Walter and Levenson in their lauding of Margaret Thatcher as a feminist icon. Walter, describes Thatcher as 'the great unsung heroine of British feminism', and Levenson agrees: she 'made women of my generation feel they have every right to be at the forefront of the power making structures of society' (Levenson, 2009: 195; Walter, 1999: 175). Making the imperial connection more explicit, Walter interprets Thatcher's 'constant references to "Victorian values"' as evidence that she liked to be able to use 'examples of other ages when Britain was ruled by women' (Walter, 1999: 173). Yet Walter does not recognise that Thatcher's references to Victorian Britain were also references to the British Empire. This connection was undeniably embedded in Thatcher's image, and formed part and parcel of her anti-black, anti-immigration agenda, which black and anti-racist feminists campaigned extensively against (Samantrai, 2002). Yet Thatcher's racist legacy is not challenged, but rather reiterated: Walter's description of Thatcher's power as 'worldly', and her choice to use this prefix repeatedly to describe the kind of power British women desire itself becomes evocative of an imperial logic.

Like 'equality', the texts all approach the concept of 'power' as something clearly defined and straightforward, as about political and economic 'worldly' power to decide over others. Yet, had they engaged with other feminist perspectives, their understanding of power may have looked very different. Audre Lorde, for instance, theorised a radically different conceptualisation of power. Her warning to white feminists that 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house', remains critically relevant as a direct challenge to these texts' calls for feminists to embrace power, arguing that women must embrace differences between women as 'that raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged' (Lorde, 1984: 112). Lorde's theory suggests that women's 'real power' is yet to be defined, as something to be generated through creative

explorations of differences by women seeking to build nurturing interdependent relationships based on the belief of the inherent equal worth of each individual.

To compare Walter's, Moran's and Levenson's work to Lorde's may seem incongruous, yet the comparison is revealing. Their neglect in considering differences renders Lorde's theory of women's power an impossibility within the confines of their articulations of feminism. The narrow definitions of power immediately put their calls for equality with men on questionable footing; it would be more accurate to describe their primary concern as achieving equality of power between *some* women with *some* men, otherwise there would be nobody left to have power over.

Conclusion

I chose to begin my analysis with these books, because they are in many ways the easiest to critique. Through their wholesale erasure of the scholarship of feminists of colour and the experiences of women of colour more broadly, these texts present entirely white accounts of feminism past and present. Drawing on and thus reproducing a reductive, simplistic white feminism, the books present facile arguments about 'equality' and 'power' which have long been critiqued and debunked as unworkable for women who are not white, middle-class and generally privileged. Unfortunately, it is not simply the case that these books construct arguments which appear irrelevant and out-of-touch. These books – both lauded and critiqued – have had significant impact on public, liberal contemporary feminist discourse in Britain. Thus their power to erase and marginalise feminisms of colour should not be underestimated. While there has been plenty of feminist discussion and critiques of these texts in the feminist blogosphere and mainstream media, these have not usually addressed race and whiteness (e.g. Benn, 1998; Penny *et al.*, 2011; Penny, 2009)[9]. The fact that the imperial resonances and whiteness of these texts have been absent from public feminist discourse about them is indicative of how ingrained normative whiteness is within mainstreamed British feminism.

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[9] Although Moran has been roundly critiqued for racist comments she has made on Twitter (Phillips 2012; Eddo-Lodge 2012; Nagarajan & Okolosie 2012).

5. United, inclusive and innocent: Feminism in *The Guardian* and *The Observer*

In this second chapter examining 'popular feminism', I analyse the feminist discourse produced within the pages and on the website of the national broadsheet newspaper *The Guardian* and its Sunday paper *The Observer*. Published by the Guardian Media Group (GMG), these papers represent a centre-left position on the political spectrum, and have a mostly middle-class readership[10]. The GMG has a history of positive coverage of feminist politics from the late 1960s onwards (Cochrane, 2010e). *The Guardian* and *The Observer* are the only British newspapers which regularly document feminist activism and have been consistently publishing articles documenting a 'new' or 'young' feminist movement in Britain since 2006 (Dean, 2010: 395). This coverage is almost universally supportive in tone; as Kaitlynn Mendes has found, of all UK (and US) newspapers, *The Guardian* is 'undoubtedly the most sympathetic to feminism' (Mendes, 2011: 147). The GMG counts a number of explicitly – predominantly white – feminist journalists among its staff, and also commissions feminist content written by freelance journalists, 'experts', bloggers, and activists. Their consistent coverage and pro-feminist approach lie behind my decision to focus on these papers in my research.

My analysis is based on over fifty articles which all fit the criteria of having as their main topic feminism/feminists/women's rights activism and were written from a (pro) feminist perspective. The earliest article included in my sample was published in 1999 and the latest in May 2012 (an arbitrary cut-off point – there have been many relevant articles published after this date). The *Guardian* and *Observer* discourse on feminism has many similarities with that which I discussed in the previous chapter. This is more pronounced in the earlier articles, where feminism is represented as more or less exclusively white. In contrast, there has been a marked shift in the discourse from 2007-8 towards representing feminism as a multicultural and ethnically diverse movement. I will explore this shift, which converges with a narrative of the emergence of a 'new', 'young' feminist movement in Britain. Although I focus my analysis in more depth on articles published since 2006, including older articles in my sample has usefully enabled me to examine a larger,

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[10] In 2007, just over 70% of *The Guardian*'s readership was classified as evenly split across upper to lower middle-class (Richardson, 2007: 81).

overarching narrative of the emergence of contemporary British feminism, and how it has been constructed as continuous with a very specific, white feminist past. Thus while the new movement is often represented – to varying degrees – as multi-ethnic, as I will argue, the narrative techniques used to construct contemporary feminist politics reveal a continued attachment to the white feminist frame (see also Jonsson, 2014). This is particularly clear in the 'common sense' assumptions which frame feminism as a movement which does/should unite all women, as a political position which is morally pure and innocent, and as a movement which now works to include 'other' women who have been previously marginalised or excluded.

The first main section of this chapter will focus on the broader narrative of British feminism which is constructed across the sample. This will be followed by three sections which look in turn at the narrative techniques which frame feminism as united, innocent and inclusive, and their consequences in terms of race. As the *Guardian* and *Observer* discourse on feminism is the product of many writers, and thus also a site of contestation over meaning, I will conclude the chapter by highlighting power struggles within the discourse and how this plays out discursively and structurally in relation to race.

Before moving on to the main analysis, however, the next section briefly contextualises how the feminist discourse presented in these papers fits into a wider discourse governed by the norms and parameters of liberal journalism and public debate.

Liberal journalism and feminist discourse

The 'promotion of the liberal interest' was the central principle upon which *The Guardian* (then *The Manchester Guardian*) was founded in 1821 and liberalism has to this day remained the integral political component of its journalism (*The Guardian*, 2002). In its own words, the GMG and (its owner) the Scott Trust, 'exist to support high-quality, independent, liberal journalism' (Guardian Media Group, 2010). It is important to understand how liberalism (valuing principles of independence, equality and freedom of expression) as well as journalism as a discursive field more broadly shape the feminist discourse within the GMG's papers.

The political slant which underscores most articles that I analyse can be located (with some variation) on the spectrum of a liberal feminist approach, which takes 'equality' as an

assumed goal of feminism (with all its attendant problems discussed in the previous chapter), and which primarily sees political and legal reform as the route to women's emancipation. This liberal feminism is also shaped by the broader conventions and norms of journalism, such as 'objectivity' and 'impartiality' in news reporting, the separation of 'fact' from 'opinion' (Chalaby, 1998), as well as the valuing of 'public debate' (e.g. the need to hear different sides of an argument in order to gain an informed view). The journalistic quest for a 'good story' also defines what is considered of interest. For example, most of the feature articles about feminism tend to be anchored around narratives of individuals, thus being instrumental in appointing leaders in feminism, at odds with many activist feminist principles which tend to emphasise collective leadership and shun hierarchies.

Despite lofty principles such as equality and public debate appearing conducive to the promotion of feminist arguments, the containment and commodification of feminist discourse within the liberal press should not be underestimated. Dean, for instance, argues that feminism in the quality press has been 'domesticated', with certain formations of feminism (liberal, individualistic, reformist) affirmed in order to disavow other versions (those perceived as 'man-hating', unattractive and too radical) (Dean, 2010). Mendes also observes a trend in the press towards the '"lifestyling" of feminism' in recent years, with less coverage of feminist activities and campaigns in the news sections, but more in features and lifestyle sections (Mendes, 2011: 10). This trend can be observed in *The Guardian* and *The Observer*, where many feminist articles are categorised under the 'Life & Style' section on the website and published in the supplement sections of the papers. They tend to be feature articles rather than news stories, or otherwise comment pieces. Themes of domestication and lifestyling of feminism tend to be couched in a logic that feminism is about women's individual choices, rather than a collective social movement. However, as Mendes notes, the *Guardian/Observer* discourse does not adhere to the lifestyling trend to the same extent as other newspapers, and does also cover (some) feminist activism as news.

A cornerstone of liberalism is the importance of public debate, and the GMG prides itself as a public sphere where such debate can happen. Focusing on its feminist content, not only is it the product of many different writers, focusing on (some) different issues and perspectives within feminism, but *The Guardian's* website also hosts feminist debate on its 'Comment is Free' (CIF) blog, where a wider range of writers (including activists, bloggers

and representatives of campaigning organisations) are commissioned (often after pitching pieces themselves) to contribute commentary. As Dean writes, the plurality of feminist voices makes it

> ... nonsensical to conceptualise a single "Guardian position" on feminism. Instead, the paper and its website are sites of contestation, although the voices do often converge on specific issues or themes. (Dean, 2010: 396)

This is an assessment I agree with: while there is contestation, there are clear convergences, as I will elaborate on throughout this chapter. Additionally, the principle of liberal debate which the GMG promotes has implications in terms of how differences within feminism are framed. Liberalism is premised on a notion of equality: that all voices are equal and that everyone is entitled to their opinion. This premise, like Habermas's (1989) formulation of the public sphere, lacks sustained attention to power structures within the sphere of debate. Thus the identity (race, gender, class) of the speaker, while it may be brought into view within their argument (as feminists often do position themselves – at least in comment pieces), is simultaneously presumed irrelevant to their ability to be heard and listened to within the sphere of debate. Identity, within the GMG's feminist discourse, both does and does not matter. As whiteness is the presumed norm within this discourse, there is a lack of attention to how whiteness itself frames the space within which feminist discourse is produced, and I will return to this in the concluding section.

From the 'old' to the 'new': Tracing contemporary feminism's emergence

Tracking articles over a decade allows for an analysis of how the narrative of British feminism has been constructed over time, rather than in just any one article. Although there is no hard and fast turning point, this broad view shows there is a different emphasis across the earlier articles (1999-2005/6) from the later ones (2006/7-2012), with earlier ones focusing more on older feminists who were active in the WLM (often with a retrospective approach), while from 2006/7 onwards, an increasing number of articles announce the arrival of a new generation of feminist activists. It is therefore interesting to explore how this shift from the 'old' to the 'new' is narrated across the sample – how they are constructed in relation to each other and what the implications are in terms of race.

The early articles tend to focus on individual high profile feminists, such as Germaine Greer, Sheila Rowbotham and Lynne Segal, emphasising their influence on British feminist politics (Viner, 1999; Jardine, 1999; Ellen, 2000; Benn, 2000; Hill, 2000; Allison, 2003). While specific emphases and arguments vary, feminist activism is most commonly constructed as having been at its peak in the 1970s, and is associated with radical, symbolic activism and a focus on liberating (white) women's bodies and sexuality. Germaine Greer is repeatedly constructed as the central personality and thinker of this moment, with other references to books and individuals limited to around a dozen different names and titles. Looking at the whole sample of articles, this limited repertoire of references is consistent. Mentions of *Spare Rib*, *The Female Eunuch*, Greenham Common, WLM conferences and marches become the symbolic, familiar landmarks of recent British feminist history – as do more stereotypical imagery (often invoked ironically) such as that of dungarees and bra-burning (Benn, 2000; Wood, 2001; Toynbee, 2002; *Guardian* staff, 2003; Bindel, 2006; France & Wiseman, 2007; Benn, 2008; Cadwalladr, 2008; Cooke, 2008; Groskop, 2010; Cochrane, 2010b; Raven, 2010; Cooke, 2010; Hodgson, 2010; Cusk, 2010; Frostrup, 2011; Banyard, 2011).

While early articles predominantly tell a narrative of decline, with the height of feminist activism situated firmly in the past, the pronouncement of feminism's passing sits alongside calls for its revival. In such calls, the need for continuity with the feminist past is emphasised. For example, in a feature in which women in their 20s and 30s talk about their views of modern gender relations, the author concludes that '[n]one of these women [are] old enough to have been a part of feminism's Seventies heyday. And yet, gradually, they are returning to issues that were voiced in that era' (Wood, 2001). It does perhaps not require spelling out that the feminist past which is constructed across these early articles is overwhelmingly white in terms of its references points.

Moving forward five years, a theme begins to emerge asserting that, despite a constant barrage of claims that feminism is dead, unfashionable and/or irrelevant, there is in fact an increasing interest in feminism among young politicised women. This trend begins in 2006, with an article titled 'Marching to freedom', about how young feminists are reviving Reclaim the Night marches in London (Bindel, 2006). In 2007, there are four articles about young women's activism: one about university students organising against 'lads' mags' and lap dancing clubs, a report about the FEM 07 conference, another about new feminist

magazines, and an *Observer Woman* feature titled 'The new feminists' - complete with a photo shoot - interviewing seven young activists (Bell, 2007; Bennett, 2007; McCabe, 2007; France & Wiseman, 2007).

The trend of highlighting new and young feminist activism continues in a similar vein with regular features, with the titles giving a good indication of the emphasis and tone: 'Let's make some noise' (Norris, 2008); 'Feminism is not finished' (Cochrane, 2010a); 'Women's mass awakening' (Bidisha, 2010); 'The new feminists: Still fighting' (Orbach & Shaitly, 2010); 'The next famous five young feminists' (Anon, 2010b); 'Feminism is back and we want to finish the revolution, say activists' (Davies, 2011a); 'Training the new generation of "suffragrettes"' (Davies, 2011b); 'How to create a feminist future' (Banyard, 2011); 'The rubber gloves are on: Marchers to fight for women's rights amid cuts' (Davies, 2011c); 'This year let's celebrate... a new energy and spirit among UK feminist activists' (Bird, 2012); and 'Feminists hail explosion in new grassroots groups' (Topping, 2012).

As I noted in my discussion of Walter's *The New Feminism*, the construction of this as a 'new' or 'revived' movement sets up a relationship between these young feminists and an 'old' or at least 'older' feminist movement. This relationship is constructed through statements which indirectly reference the past – e.g. that feminism is 'not finished', 'back', '[s]till fighting' and 'returning' (Banyard, 2011). More explicit connections to the past are also made: new feminist publications are compared to WLM magazine *Spare Rib*, *Shrew* and *Red Rag* (McCabe, 2007); a new feminist network is described 'as a natural extension of the consciousness-raising groups [of] the 1970s and 1980s' (Norris, 2008); a new burst of feminist publishing 'repackages longstanding arguments' (Cochrane, 2010a) and the books are 'joining the scores of classic and still (depressingly) relevant works' by older feminists (Bidisha, 2010); the 'feminist resurgence' is described as 'following the trajectory that the second wave took...' (Banyard, 2011); an activist is quoted as saying that 'the fundamentals of feminist activism remain the same: a struggle against privilege and profit, stretching from the bedroom to the boardroom' (Topping, 2012) and young feminists are described as 'building on the walls left by those who came before' (Bennett, 2007). The feminist past referenced within this narrative is constructed as *the* universal feminist past, when it is in fact a very particular white, WLM history.

Feminism as a united community

In the majority of the articles, feminism is framed as a movement for or a belief in women's equality with men. As with the popular feminist books, the concept of equality is not questioned, but rather assumed to be self-evident. As such, it tends to erase differences between differently positioned women (and men). This can be seen in the frequent (in Dean's words) 'recourse to grim statistics' to highlight women's continued inequality (Dean, 2010: 396), such as:

> Women's political representation in the UK is still only 19.3 per cent... Women's representation among FTSE 100 directors stands at just 11 per cent ... Meanwhile, the part-time pay gap between men and women is more or less the same as it was in 1997 ... women who are in work, of whatever kind, must deal with ever-increasing levels of sexual harassment ... more and more women find that they are expected to attend corporate entertainment events held in the insalubrious surroundings of lap-dancing clubs ... With all this in mind, is it any wonder that UK rape conviction rates have fallen from 33 per cent in the 1970s to a record low of just 6 per cent? (Cooke, 2008)

Similar references to statistics and legal, political, or social inequalities are used in other articles as well, with a repeated focus on the pay gap, a lack of women's representation in high-powered positions, a lack of childcare and discrimination against mothers in the workplace, as well as the low crime conviction rates for perpetrators of rape (e.g. Rake, 2006; Bindel, 2006; Bindel, 2007; Cochrane, 2008; Angyal, 2010; Gold, 2011; Cochrane, 2009). However, the category 'women' is seldom broken down to look at how different women are affected by these issues – instead such lists suggest that all women are affected to the same extent. The exclusive focus on gender erases other axes of inequality, and the representation of feminists as predominantly white (and middle-class) conceals the fact that women of colour and working-class women are more adversely affected in all areas of gender inequality.

Driving the formulation of feminist politics as dealing with inequality based on gender only – and that all women are affected by this inequality in the same way - is a suggestion that all women have interests in common and that feminism fights on behalf of all women equally. This translates into an argument that feminist politics require women to unite together *as women* (and also a repeated call that all women should embrace feminist politics, which I discuss in chapter eight in relation to activist feminism). Thus, a prominent

narrative within the discourse is one which frames feminism as a community, where an emphasis on unity and sameness takes priority over any recognition of difference.

The version of unity which is strived towards is not necessarily predicated on all feminists agreeing on all political points; there is some recognition that feminists have different political views and approaches to many issues (e.g. Toynbee, 2002; Brooks, 2009; Williams, 2012). However, the desire for unity is expressed through the implicit or explicit argument that whatever differences there are between women, they still have fundamental interests in common, and therefore it is in all women's interests that women unite together (Cochrane, 2009; Bindel, 2006; Norris, 2008; Cochrane, 2008; Davies, 2011b; Topping, 2012). For example, one comment piece argues that as long as 'there is no one organisation or definition of feminism', 'feminist-bashing' is too easy:

> Although there are different strands of feminist thought, there is a common agenda on which we can unite. Women still need to work together on the issues that preoccupied 1970s feminists but still are not resolved. (Rake, 2006)

Another article, which acknowledges that 'feminism has benefited ambitious, well-educated working women far more than women who are in lower-status work or who have moved out of paid work', still argues that gender interests overrides class, by claiming that 'it is not the case that women in different classes or with different lifestyles cannot find common causes to unite behind' (Walter, 2003). Although class difference is highlighted, there is no recognition that the feminist movement has been dominated by the concerns of middle-class women; instead the onus for their lack of progress is placed on working-class women, who are constructed as lacking ambition in advancing their status.

In later articles focusing on a 'new' feminist movement, united communities are also emphasised. For example, a local feminist group is described as 'bring[ing] together people of all ages', offering 'a space where women can talk freely about how discrimination affects their daily lives' and 'the chance to meet a large group of like-minded progressive people' (Norris, 2008). A similar point is stressed in another article when a young feminist is quoted describing her relief at finding 'all those like-minded people together … you just think: "Wow"' (Topping, 2012). Feminist groups are often portrayed as spaces which offer relief, support and refuge from a politically hostile and

alienating society, with descriptors such as 'like-minded' also constructing such spaces as free from conflict and differences of opinion.

Looking at this narrative through the lens of race and difference, it is clear that differences between feminists are overlooked in order to construct a picture of a harmonious community. This familiar narrative is one which has been repeatedly interrupted by activists occupying marginalised positions within such communities, in particular women of colour. Speaking in 1981, Bernice Johnson Reagon warned white feminists that political spaces designed as places of safety set themselves up to fail or make themselves politically irrelevant. Premised as they are on sameness, they collapse when 'different' people enter and refuse to fit within already established parameters for inclusion. Instead, Johnson Reagon argues that progressive feminist politics must be based on building coalitions across difference. Truly coalitional spaces, she notes, feel nothing like 'home' – in fact you are more likely to feel out of your depth and like you might 'keel over any minute and die' (Johnson Reagon, 1983: 356). Biddy Martin and Chandra Mohanty, similarly suggest that any 'notion of feminism as an all-encompassing home' is inadequate, and potentially dangerous in its failure to recognise difference (Martin & Mohanty, 1986: 192). Both Johnson Reagon's and Martin and Mohanty's critiques highlight how people whose identities are marginalised within political communities are unlikely to experience such spaces as safe and comforting. Constructing them as such is not politically neutral but perpetuates a power-evasive narrative centring white women's belonging within feminism. Although many of the newer articles portray feminism as visibly multi-ethnic, the framing of feminist communities as united across racial difference is done through a denial that these differences matter. This is informed by a white and generally privileged feminist legacy which prioritises gender as the most important axis of oppression.

Innocent feminists

Discussing white feminism in chapter two, I suggested, drawing on the work of Srivastava (2005) and Fellows and Razack (1998) that a key constituent element of white, middle-class feminism is an investment in innocence. Drawing links to colonial discourses of white, middle-class women's moral purity, Srivastava notes 'preoccupations with morality and self' within white feminist groups, in which 'many white feminists may feel that it is their

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self image – as good, implicitly nonracist people – and particularly their shared moral identity as feminists that is under siege' when white feminists are confronted with anti-racist challenges (Srivastava, 2005: 30). Fellows and Razack observe an 'emotional attachment to innocence' more broadly among feminists, where claims to marginality are prioritised in feminists' collective and self-narratives, often through evading accountability for the ways in which many women also stand in relations of power over each other (whether through race, class, disability, sexuality and so on) (Fellows & Razack, 1998).

I will draw on Srivastava's and Fellows and Razack's insights here to examine a similar 'attachment to innocence' and moral uprightness in the *Guardian/Observer* feminist discourse, and how this attachment is raced and classed. This attachment can be observed in the ways in which feminism itself is often positioned as unfairly victimised and blamed by various outside forces, as well as in how white, privileged feminists are constructed (and construct themselves) as morally pure and innocent. An oft-repeated mantra within the discourse is that feminism is today seen as unpopular, 'dead' and a 'bad word' by many women. Yet, this is invariably attributed to external forces, e.g. capitalist consumerist culture (Viner, 2002), middle-class white men (Aune, 2003), the media and popular culture (Walter, 2003; Rake, 2006), and/or a more general anti-feminist 'backlash' against women in a number of political and social arenas (Cochrane, 2008; Elliott, 2008; Cooke, 2008; Anon, 2010a).

The construction of feminism as unfairly victimised is interestingly elaborated in an early piece titled 'Feminism as imperialism', in which feminism is positioned as an innocent discourse which has been abused by imperialist men (Viner, 2002). Written in response to George Bush's talk of 'women's liberation' prior to the US's invasion of Iraq, the article identifies this as 'theft of feminist rhetoric':

> [T]his theft of feminist rhetoric is nothing new... in fact, it has a startling parallel with another generation of men who similarly cared little for the liberation of women. The Victorian male establishment, which led the great imperialistic ventures of the 19th century, fought bitterly against women's increasingly vocal feminist demands and occasional successes ... but at the same time, across the globe, they used the language of feminism to acquire the booty of the colonies. (ibid)

In claiming that imperialist men have 'stole[n] feminist language', the author neglects to consider why dominant strands of feminist language have been so easy for these men to 'steal'. Using the symbolism of 'theft' liberally, the article appears to suggest that western

feminism and imperialism have developed in isolation from each other, rather than being deeply entangled (Burton, 1994; Ware, 1992; Midgley, 1998). In her eagerness to prove feminism's innocence, the author fails to consider the possibility that it is partially the feminist rhetoric in itself which produces an imperial logic of non-western gender relations as primitive and fundamentally oppressive. Even though the author explicitly acknowledges Muslim feminism – which is positive, and a rarity – she still neglects western feminists' own complicity in the production of imperial feminism:

> Colonial patriarchs like Cromer … wanted merely to replace eastern misogyny with western misogyny. But, like Bush, they stole feminist language in order to denounce the indigenous culture; and, says [Leila] Ahmed, feminism thus served as a "handmaid to colonialism". "Whether in the hands of patriarchal men *or feminists*," she writes, "the ideas of western feminism essentially functioned to morally justify the attack on native societies and to support the notion of comprehensive superiority of Europe." (Viner, 2002, *my emphasis*)

Although the author uses a quote from Leila Ahmed which clearly implicates western feminists as well as 'patriarchal men' as proponents of imperial feminist rhetoric, she persists in emphasising feminists' innocence in this process, in her continued use of the symbolism of theft.

When feminism's appropriation or unpopularity is attributed to external forces of which 'true' feminism itself is merely the innocent victim, critical voices from 'within' feminism are silenced, such as those who have highlighted how different women have been marginalised or excluded by dominant forms of feminist thought and practice. Race and class form two major axis of difference along which such critiques have focused.

Although race and class critiques are often dismissed by omission, they are occasionally made visible. However, this is predominantly still framed around privileged feminists' good intentions. For example, in an article about a feminist conference, race and class exclusions are located in the past, when the author acknowledges that 'a common accusation against last century's feminism was that it was a white middle-class movement'. But, she goes on to argue: 'this gathering could not be accused of ignoring issues of race or international politics … [and c]lass issues too were at least in evidence' (Bennett, 2007). This framing prioritises the need to clear feminism's name: conference content focused on issues of relevance to women of colour and working-class women is provided as sufficient evidence that feminism can no longer be accused of any wrong-doing. This suggests the accusation

is more troublesome than the exclusion which led to it, thereby re-centring the concerns of the white, middle-class feminist (i.e. the accused).

Innocence can infer both the state of being not guilty of a crime or accusation – such as the accusation of racism – and a state of being 'pure' or uncorrupted, like a child. We can see in the examples above how feminism and feminists are constructed as innocent in both senses – of feminism as an uncorrupted discourse which is hijacked by external forces at no fault of its own, and of feminists as not guilty of charges of imperialism or racism.

Innocence and what I am referring to as 'moral uprightness' are not the same thing, but they are connected. Morality infers a value system which makes distinctions between right and wrong, with those who are positioned as morally upright always acting according to what is right. Acting in a morally 'right' way is closely associated with ideas of selflessness – that one does what is right for the greater good, without self-interested motives. Thus it is connected to the idea of innocence, as a selfless person is usually understood as acting from pure, innocent intentions. Feminism, like all social movements, is a moral discourse which makes claims about what is right and wrong. Historically, the 'moral uprightness' of white, middle-class feminists has been highly problematic in terms of race. Antoinette Burton's work on the relationship between British feminists and Indian women during late 19th and early 20th century, for example, highlights the imperial and racist dimensions of the white, middle-class British feminist project (Burton, 1994). She refers to the 'white woman's burden' to describe the moral discourse which constructs the white middle-class feminist's mission to 'help' Indian women as a selfless, benevolent act. A selfless moral uprightness is in this discourse synonymous with ideal white, middle-class respectable womanhood.

Echoes of such a moral discourse are evident in the contemporary *Guardian* and *Observer* feminist discourse. This is most explicit at the end of an interview feature with Natasha Walter. Here, the article quotes Walter explaining why she does not write from a place of rage:

> I haven't suffered in that way. I just haven't. I don't have that personal weight of rage that some inspirational feminists have. And I'm not going to pretend that I do. It's maddening when you feel a comfortable, middle class feminist trying to take the weight of the world's sorrows on her shoulders. (Cochrane, 2010c)

Walter's quote is framed as follows:

> Instead, she says, what she does is "to put the argument in place and think about it", to act as a conduit for the stories of women who have suffered, whether it's a rape victim seeking refuge, or a young lap dancer in London. In some ways, her lack of intrinsic rage makes Walter's writing even more admirable, particularly considering the opprobrium she's faced. She does it out of a social conscience, "out of solidarity", she says. What better reason is there? (ibid)

Both Walter's rationalisation and the interviewer's interpretation of it echoes powerfully with the script of the privileged woman's 'burden'. Walter is positioned as motivated only by her desire to help other women, as if she is not gaining anything herself. Morality is also inscribed with class privilege: the assertion that Walter's commitment is 'even more admirable' because she has not herself suffered, positions her as an inherently more moral person precisely because of her privileged life experience. Walter (described in the article as 'one of Britain's foremost feminist voices for more than a decade') comes to represent a morally upright feminism. Equally problematic, describing Walter's role 'as a conduit' implies she is transparently presenting other women's experiences without altering them through her own subjective interpretation. Thus the power relationship between Walter and the women she represents becomes hidden.

Similarly, an interview piece titled 'Why Kat Banyard is the UK's most influential young feminist', Banyard is described as:

> … modest, mild mannered, quiet, with just a subtle edge of intensity when she speaks. I ask where her incredible drive comes from – the motivation that has led her to pursue full-time feminist activism, without pay, while many of her peers are (often understandably) forging careers based on the size of their salaries. Is she driven by anger? No again. "I think I just like seeing the best in humanity. If you believe in the inherent dignity of people, in justice and human rights, then feminism is for you". (Cochrane, 2010d)

Again, moral uprightness looms large in this construction: Banyard is not interested in making money, but is driven solely by her commitment to justice – thus she is selfless. The description of her 'modest' and 'mild mannered' personal characteristics completes the picture of the morally upright, respectable white, middle-class woman.

The classed and raced nature of this feminist morality is also emphasised through the types of feminist issues which are foregrounded. Although a variety of issues are highlighted across the articles, when looking at which organisations and individual feminists are regularly interviewed, referenced and quoted, it becomes clear that the

contemporary feminism represented is predominantly that which focuses on campaigning against pornography, prostitution, and the sexual objectification of women (note how, in the Walter interview, one of the examples of a victimised woman is 'a young lap dancer'). Organisations such as Object, UK Feminista and London Feminist Network (as well as individuals like Banyard and Walter), which hold very firm positions on pornography and prostitution as violence against women are often shown to represent the entirety of feminist views on these issues and not recognised as contentious and contested approaches (Walter, 2006; Hanman, 2006; Bindel, 2007; Bindel, 2006; Bell, 2007; Cochrane, 2010c; Basu, 2010; Topping, 2012). A dominant view emerges that the sexual objectification of women and the sex industry are the most urgent concern for contemporary feminists.

There are strong echoes within this anti-sex industry feminism with earlier forms of 'social purity' feminism, in which feminists positioned themselves as moral crusaders against prostitution (Bland, 1995) - for example when contemporary feminist groups campaign against the opening of lap-dancing clubs in their neighbourhoods based on the argument that it makes the neighbourhood less safe for women (i.e. non-sex worker women). This is a classed (and raced) discourse, where sex workers become positioned in an antagonistic position to non-sex worker women. Debates about whether prostitution constitutes violence against women or a legitimate form of work have of course raged for several decades within Anglo-American feminisms (see e.g. O'Connell Davidson, 2002). Yet pro-sex worker, anti-capitalist and queer feminist positions are more or less entirely absent (whether on the topic of sex work or anything else). Anti-sex industry arguments are instead represented as hegemonic within contemporary British feminism.

Another area in which echoes of the 'white woman's burden' is evident is in articles which discuss women's oppression outside of the west. There is a shift in the discourse in relation to the representation of non-western women over the period of articles I am looking at. While in earlier articles, there is little mention of non-western women, in later years (e.g. 2010 onwards) there appears to be an increased focus on documenting the work of feminist activists in other countries – not just for the sake of comparison with western women, but rather to construct a picture of a global feminist/women's movement (e.g. Orbach & Shaitly, 2010; Nyabola, 2010; Walter, 2011; Glennie, 2011; Jackson, 2011; Frostrup, 2011).

One such article, titled 'Feminism's global challenge: With one voice', written by Mariella Frostrup (a well-known TV presenter and journalist), clearly illustrates the association of moral uprightness with the white, western woman. Frostrup spends a large part of the article comparing western women's relative luxury with the experiences of women outside of the west, with anecdotes from her charity travels in sub-Saharan Africa. She argues that while western women have been duped into believing equality has been achieved, 'in less affluent parts of the world... feminism is the buzzword for a generation of women determined to change the course of the future for themselves and their families':

> Not, they're quick to point out, that they're fans of the strident man bashing we enthusiastically took part in during feminism's second wave. Theirs is a quiet, dignified and entirely implacable determination to make equality not just an aspiration but a reality, in the areas of life where it most counts, from government to enterprise. (Frostrup, 2011)

Further into the article, Frostrup's describes how she 'cried frustrated tears' in Mozambique when the 'women farmers gathered around me raised their hands in shame and in unison to indicate that everyone of them was a victim of domestic violence'. Her article finishes by highlighting the charity work she is doing together with other prominent public figures to raise awareness about women's oppression in Africa. She describes how there's 'a new wave of support sweeping from the developed to the developing world through women joining forces and rolling up their sleeves to lend a hand' (ibid). Thus Frostrup positions herself as an altruistic campaigner for other women's rights. The description of the direction of support from the 'developed' to the 'developing world' compounds this picture of western women as morally good campaigners simply 'lending a hand' to support less fortunate women than themselves. The contrast in her description of African women as 'quiet' and 'dignified' and western feminists' as 'strident' and 'man bashing' (however tongue-in-cheek) constitutes a patronising, racialised othering, where the non-western women's dignity is presented to the nonchalant western (feminist) reader to pull on our heart strings: they are worthy of our support because they are dignified victims. And the western feminist remains central: the invocation of the white woman's tears emphasises her selflessness, but also powerfully centres her feelings and role as saviour: if she is not there to listen and tell their stories, then who would?

Framing feminism as an innocent discourse and feminists as morally upright and selfless campaigners has significant problematic effects in relation to race. For one, when

feminism is repeatedly framed as innocent and victimised, it makes the discussion of racism (and other forms of oppression) *within* feminism a near impossibility. Whenever the prospect that (dominant, western) feminism as a discourse might be racist or imperialist is raised, it is dismissed through claims that it is not the fault of feminists themselves, but rather that of external forces that have abused or appropriated feminism. Feminists themselves are always constructed as acting according to the highest values, as being morally pure. Thus they cannot be racist, because this implies a belief system which is morally wrong. Racism – as I discussed in chapter two – is often constructed in this way: as existing only where there are racist intentions; thus if someone has good intentions – which feminists are always constructed as having – they cannot be racist.

Secondly, the emphasis on feminists' innocence erases power relationships between women. The colonial history of white, middle-class women exercising their power over 'other' women is erased in these stories. The construction of privileged feminists as selfless is particularly pernicious: it disingenuously conceals the fact that self-interest is of course always likely to be present in how we choose to act. For example, Walter and Banyard, through the media attention they have garnered, have become well-known names within contemporary popular British feminism, thus increasing their influence and power. But any self-interest on their part is concealed in the descriptions of them. Yet their rise to prominence clearly taps into a history of white and privileged women being elevated as 'leaders' precisely because they are privileged and acceptable to the media. This maintains white dominance within feminism, and thus serves the interests of white and privileged women. Thus when self-interest (whether on a personal or a collective level) is concealed as a motive for why white feminists act, the representation of the morally upright respectable feminist will continue to have colonial and racist resonances.

Inclusion politics

I have already argued that the new feminist movement constructed in *The Guardian* and *The Observer* is premised on the belief that women should unite together. Thus the new feminist movement is described as a place where young women are finding a sense of community and belonging. But who belongs in this new movement? Paying attention to race is instructive when answering this question. Whereas the feminist past is represented as white, many of the articles about the 'new' feminist movement are keen to portray it as

more ethnically diverse and multicultural (France & Wiseman, 2007; Bennett, 2007; Cochrane, 2010a; Bidisha, 2010; Orbach & Shaitly, 2010; Banyard, 2011).

A few articles explicitly point to who is and who is not part of this movement. One, for example, describes how many of the new feminist groups 'were formed on [university] campus[es]' but have 'since attracted ... teenage girls, working mothers, and men as well' (Bell, 2007). Walter is quoted in another article, saying 'the questions we'll all be asking ourselves over the next year are: how wide is this new wave? Will it touch people beyond the usual suspects? Will it galvanise energy more widely in the grassroots – bring in other classes, women of other backgrounds?' (Cochrane, 2010a). This echoes an earlier comment article which argues that '[a] unified movement must include those who feminism has failed to reach in the past, such as men, many ethnic minority women, working-class women, and young women' (Rake, 2006).

All three examples position privileged (and in the last case, specifically white) women at the centre of feminist communities, 'reaching out' to include 'other' women (and men). Those 'others' are thus positioned outside of feminist politics, passive audiences waiting to be 'reached'. Rather than this being presented as a result of class-privilege and racism, it is presented as inevitable, and the solution premised on what Ien Ang calls a 'politics of inclusion', a term she uses to describe a flawed response to critiques that white feminists have failed to attend to race:

> [T]oo often the need to deal with difference is seen in the light of the greater need to save, expand and improve or enrich feminism as a political home which would ideally represent all women. In this way, the ultimate rationale of the politics of difference is cast in terms of an overall politics of *inclusion*: the desire for an overarching feminism to construct a pluralist sisterhood which can accommodate all differences and inequalities between women. It should come as no surprise that such a desire is being expressed largely by white, Western, middle-class women... (Ang, 2003: 203)

Ang criticises this approach, as it fails to alter power relations between differently positioned feminists: premised as it is on a centre and a periphery, the most entitled members remain at the centre, making decisions about who else to 'include'. This does not interrogate processes of exclusion. It does not question how whiteness and racism alienate many women of colour from white-dominated feminist communities. In addition to remaining within a power-evasive frame, Ang highlights how the inclusion of women of colour's 'voices' can be used by white feminists to demonstrate a multicultural diversity

which is more about image than reality, and implicitly acts as a defence against any further critiques.

We can see a politics of inclusion operating clearly in the article above quoting Walter. She is further quoted as saying:

> I'm not saying that women [in the movement] aren't asking these questions. So it's not a criticism of what's going on, but it's the challenge. I feel that we're beginning to see more happening, but at the moment it's still quite focused in narrow areas. We need to see it spread. (Cochrane, 2010a)

Privileged feminists continue to be the unquestioned central actors in this description, who are trying their best to include and 'spread' the movement.

The article which this quote comes from is in many ways paradigmatic of the emerging discourse of an inclusive and diverse new feminist movement. The picture accompanying the online version depicts Million Women Rise, an annual march in London led by women of colour. The majority of the women in the picture, chanting or singing, are women of colour. Coupled with the headline 'Feminism isn't finished', the picture illustrates a racially diverse feminist movement. It begins with a profile of a young feminist whose enthusiastic activism is described as marking her as 'exactly the type of feminist' celebrated in the recently published *Reclaiming the F Word* (Redfern & Aune, 2010). This sets the scene for the article: while relatively new 'converts' to feminism are quoted, the expertise and analysis is provided by a core group of high-profile feminists, with the words of Catherine Redfern, Kristin Aune, Natasha Walter, and Kat Banyard framing the narrative. These white women are thus positioned at the centre of the new feminist movement.

Two feminists of colour, Suswati Basu and Shahida Choudry, feature prominently within this article. Basu is profiled about half-way through, with a whole paragraph highlighting her involvement with various groups. While described as 'embod[ying] the movement's drive and excitement', Basu is not in fact herself quoted. Shahida Choudry is the subject of the final two paragraphs. Described as 'a 40-year-old mother, who lives in Birmingham and has worked in the domestic violence sector throughout her career', Choudry is quoted as saying that although her work 'has been driven by feminism, it's only recently that I've started to frame it like that'. But the reader is not invited to speculate as to why Choudry has only recently found the language of feminism relevant. The prominent discussion of Basu and Choudry in the narrative works to demonstrate women of colour's *inclusion*

within contemporary feminism. The description of Basu as 'embodying' this new movement (without quoting any of her own words) reveals an anxious desire to portray a multicultural movement. As with the picture, it is women of colour's *bodies* in particular which are being visualised to represent feminism. Yet it is white women's *words* which provide the expertise. As a domestic violence professional, Choudry is clearly an expert on women's rights, yet she is not framed as such. Instead, her affective experience of feminism is prioritised, quoted as describing the 'amazing' feeling of marching down the streets as part of Million Women Rise.

Another illustrative example of inclusion politics comes in the form of the aforementioned *Observer Woman* feature 'The new feminists' (France & Wiseman, 2007). It profiles seven young feminists (five white and two Asian) – presented as a series of short interviews where each of the women are asked questions such as 'Are men necessary?' and 'How are you different from your mum's generation?' The writers frame the piece with an introduction which evokes the white WLM:

> It's a long time since sisters were burning their bras for equality, but what's to get angry about today? We ask a panel of young feminists about modern sexual warfare … These are not the clichéd dungaree wearers of yesteryear. These are women who are smart, funny, articulate, cool. I had imagined that they would be the daughters of Seventies feminists. But many seem to have had feminism thrust upon them: at school they were told they could have it all, when they left they realised that wasn't the case. (France and Wiseman, 2007)

Despite the assertion that these young women are not after all 'the daughters of Seventies feminists', one of the Asian women in fact *is*: 'My family is all about equality. My mum is an activist for Southall Black Sisters, and she helps rehabilitate women in prison. I was going on marches from the age of four…' she is quoted as saying. Yet this actual mother-daughter relationship between a 'Seventies feminist' and a young feminist is glossed over as it disturbs the overall narrative of what 'Seventies feminists' look like. The Asian feminist activist who campaigns against discriminations faced by black and Asian women, and who does work such as rehabilitating women in prison does not fit into the story which has been constructed of the 'heyday' of the feminist past, so even on the occasion when she is visible, her story is not recognised as belonging to the same narrative. Women of colour are depicted as included within contemporary feminism, but the feminist past is stubbornly represented as white.

In her work on diversity and inclusion, Sara Ahmed observes how the language of diversity often precludes discussions of racism. Instead, diversity discourse is mobilised to produce positive affect: it is a 'politics of feeling good, which allows people to relax and feel less threatened, as if we have already "solved it"' (Ahmed, 2009: 44). Ahmed analyses what she calls 'diversity pride' (for example LGBT history month priding itself on being diverse in its representation of LGBT people from history) and argues that this tendency among white-dominated organisations to represent themselves as diverse (often through imagery of people of colour) works to silence discussions about racism within those organisations – with the visual (superficial) diversity used as a shield against criticisms. In this way, she suggests, 'diversity becomes a technology for reproducing whiteness: adding color to the white face of the organization *confirms the whiteness of that face*' (Ahmed, 2012: 151). The articles I have discussed above reproduce whiteness in this way. Their emphasis on representing feminists of colour makes the critique of whiteness more difficult to make, and this is in part how whiteness works: it hides. But dissecting these representations, it becomes clear that white feminists are still positioned in the centre of the movement, and as successfully reaching out to bring 'other' women in. Neither is there any discussion of racism or white privilege, or even differences between women. Their differences are represented as superficial only, and as strengthening the (still unified) movement through adding 'diversity'.

Struggles and contestations

To conclude this chapter, I will first highlight some contestations to the dominant narratives of feminism which I have outlined, and then reflect on how these relate to power struggles within feminism. While few early articles highlight the significance that differences between women have played within feminist politics (Toynbee, 2002 being an exception), there has been an increase in comment pieces which point to the importance of recognising difference in later years. Predominantly, these have focused on class (Hamilton, 2010; German & Power, 2010; Tariq, 2010; James, 2011), race (Abbott, 2008; Martin, 2010; Islam, 2011; Nagarajan & Okolosie, 2012) or intersectionality and difference more generally (Hodgson, 2010; Banyard, 2011).

Some of the pieces which focus on race present direct challenges to the whiteness which is hegemonic within the discourse. For example, Diane Abbott (MP), authored a comment

piece in 2008 in which she argued that 'most black women feel excluded' from the feminist movement and that the 'unrelentingly white and middle-class nature of the modern women's movement has repelled many of us' (Abbott, 2008). She writes about the rise of OWAAD and 'the many clever and charismatic black female activists' she worked with in the 1980s, a historical narrative which stands at odds with the regular feminist content in which black women are overwhelmingly absent (this is the only mention of OWAAD in all the articles I analysed). In a piece titled 'I'm not a feminist (and there is no but)', Renee Martin, a black womanist blogger, responds to the call by a white woman for all women to call themselves feminists, by explaining that she chooses to identify as a womanist and not a feminist 'because my life experiences lead me to believe that feminism was not created for women like me' (Martin, 2010). Another piece responds to white feminists defending Caitlin Moran's racist comments (made on Twitter) by arguing that women of colour have always been central to feminism:

> The most sustained critique of feminism has always been that it is a white, middle-class movement. This is not true. Women from all backgrounds stand up to the social forces around them and are engaged in feminist activism. The feminist story belongs to all women everywhere but that is not the impression you would receive from the mainstream media... (Nagarajan & Okolosie, 2012)

The narratives presented in these pieces represent a counter-discourse to the dominant feminist frames constructed in *The Guardian* and *The Observer* – one which is well-established and familiar within anti-racist feminist narratives, but which is seldom heard within mainstream media, as Nagarajan and Okolosie's piece calls attention to. What all these pieces have in common, however, is that they were written by people who are not regular journalists or columnists for the GMG (with the exception of Okolosie, who is now a regular columnist for *The Guardian*) and that they were published on *The Guardian*'s 'Comment is Free' (CIF) blog. As the CIF platform enables activists and bloggers to pitch their stories to the editor, it is not surprising that challenges to dominant forms of feminist discourse appear predominantly here. The positioning of these black feminist perspectives as comment – i.e. opinion – points to how such challenges are framed and contained. The effect of Abbott's piece, for example, is undermined by it being presented as one perspective among twelve as part of a series of columns 'celebrating women in the public sphere'. CIF pieces, which are in many cases not published in the printed paper, also have less reader exposure. In this way, I argue, oppositional narratives and resistance to

whiteness are contained, and no accountability is expected as a result of this challenge. They appear to have little effect on the dominant constructions of feminism in the more prominent news and feature articles.

This is not to suggest that the dominant narratives remain rigid and unchanged. As I have shown, there has been a marked shift in recent years to representing feminism as a more racially diverse movement. The link to activist feminism is clear here, as this shift reflects increasing levels of discussion about racism within activist communities during this time, forced onto the table by feminists of colour. The formalisation of the Black Feminists group in 2010 and its central role in promoting an explicitly named intersectional politics is particularly significant (Okolosie, 2014). We can see this beginning to have an effect also on the *Guardian*/*Observer* discourse. For example, in December 2013 (after I wrote the first draft of this chapter), a lengthy feature article declared the arrival of 'the fourth wave of feminism' (Cochrane, 2013). The article represents a racially diverse constituency of feminists tackling a broad range of issues, including (state) racism, and also claims that the majority of feminist activists today 'define themselves as intersectional feminists'. This, undoubtedly, is progress, and the result of persistent challenges by black feminists to the dominant whiteness of British feminist communities. Yet the specific narratives I have identified above have not in fact significantly altered in this piece. The concept of intersectionality becomes incorporated—one might say appropriated—and represented as a central organising principle of contemporary feminism when in fact the term has been strongly resisted and vocally dismissed by many white feminists (e.g. Cosslett & Baxter, 2012; Moore, 2013; see Okolosie, 2014). This retrospective recuperation of intersectionality follows a similar narrative of inclusion I have identified above, used to demonstrate the progressiveness of contemporary feminism while simultaneously erasing feminists of colour's work to get it on the agenda in the first place. This narrative of 'expanding diversity', as Mary-Jo Nadeau identifies in a different context, suggests that 'moments of inclusivity appear as autonomous developments disconnected from the context of broader struggles' (Nadeau, 2009: 9). It leaves the stories of antiracist feminism untold and thus whiteness unchallenged.

The dominance of narratives which centre the histories, experiences, and comfort of white feminists legitimates the contemporary representation of white women as the continued central feminist subjects within the *Guardian* and *Observer* discourse. Although feminist

activist communities are increasingly represented as inclusive and diverse, it is clear from the narratives which frame these representations – of a united, inclusive and innocent feminism - that whiteness continues to structure how the story of contemporary feminism is told. This story leaves whiteness unmarked at the centre. The practices of white feminists are never under critical scrutiny and their politics are not questioned for the ways in which they may exclude or discriminate.

Considering the many years of critique feminists of colour have mounted against white feminism, the occlusion of these histories throughout the *Guardian*'s feminist narratives is not simply an oversight or a lack of knowledge. Rather, it points to a deep unwillingness to attend to anti-racist critiques of white feminist racism in the present. It reveals a deep anxiety and desire to keep hold of the power to define feminism on white terms. Although challenges to these representations will become increasingly difficult to ignore, for now the whiteness of mainstream media provides white feminism with the necessary legitimacy and power to keep reproducing itself.

6. Academic feminism: 'Knowing' race

In chapter two, I introduced Aileen Moreton-Robinson's and Mariana Ortega's work on white feminist academics' engagements with race. Based on interviews with white feminist academics (in Australia), Moreton-Robinson argues that when talking about race, her participants mobilised a 'subject position middle-class white woman' which 'is structurally located as an ideological position within whiteness' (Moreton-Robinson, 2000: xxii). While claiming to be interested in race and advocating anti-racism in their research and teaching practice, Moreton-Robinson found that her participants tended to locate race as belonging solely to people of colour, while they positioned themselves as 'non-racialised disembodied subject[s]' (ibid: 144). This subject position refuses to recognise whiteness as itself a racialised position, and maintains white dominance through an evasion of interrogating white supremacy within feminism.

Ortega suggests that while contemporary white feminists (as opposed to those in the 1970s) now claim to listen to women of colour and attend to issues of race, their scholarship and actions perpetuate a 'loving, knowing ignorance' about women of colour (Ortega, 2006). 'Loving, knowing ignorance', Ortega suggests, drawing on Marilyn Frye's theory of 'loving' and 'arrogant' perception (Frye, 1983) is the consequence of white feminists looking and listening to women of colour's words, but failing to check and question whether they have understood. Because whiteness impels those anxious to remain within its field of vision to view people of colour arrogantly, the failure to 'check and question' their perception of women of colour's scholarship can lead white feminists to appropriate it to their own needs and desires in oppressive ways, while at the same time claiming to 'know' and have 'loving perception' towards women of colour.

In both Moreton-Robinson's and Ortega's analyses, the white feminist claim to 'know' about feminisms of colour and of race and racism is interrogated, which makes them particularly pertinent to the analysis I present in this chapter. Here I will examine the narratives of feminism presented in contemporary texts published in Britain by white feminist academics: Nancy Fraser's 'Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History' (2009), Angela McRobbie's *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* (2009) and Kath Woodward and Sophie Woodward's *Why Feminism Matters: Feminism*

Lost and Found (2009). The texts were chosen because of their focus on feminism itself as a subject: they grapple with questions of what feminism is, what it was, and what they want it to be going forward.

I will begin by providing an overview of each text, including a summary of their main arguments, as well as a drawing out of the narratives and representations of the recent feminist past presented in each text - in particular where these narratives touch on race. In the section which follows, I examine in more details how each of these texts, in different ways, position the authors as knowledgeable about race and racism (and in some cases, whiteness). Here I engage again with Hemmings' analysis of dominant feminist narratives, in particular the ways in which such narratives tend to fix a point 'before' and 'after' race awareness within western feminist theory – a technique employed in all the texts. I will then go on to argue that each of the texts, while positioning their authors as having achieved race awareness, still engage in problematic ways with concepts which have been theorised by feminists of colour. I will show how their 'loving, knowing ignorance' about the work of feminists of colour, and their lack of interrogation of whiteness as a structure of power within academic feminism, leads each of the texts to reproduce the 'subject position middle-class white woman' as the central subject of feminism theory.

'Feminism, capitalism and the cunning of history' by Nancy Fraser

Published in the journal *New Left Review*, Fraser's article sets out to 'tell a story... about the broad contours and overall meaning of second-wave feminism' in order to propose a way forward for feminists which will enable them to most effectively intervene in the current moment of global economic crisis (Fraser, 2009: 97). Her concern is to 'situate the trajectory of second-wave feminism in relation to the recent history of capitalism' in order to trace how following its 'extraordinary successes' in the context of 'state-organized capitalism' in the 1970s, feminism has become problematically intertwined with the neoliberal project from the 1980s onwards.

The narrative of the feminist past which Fraser presents (temporally located in the 1970s) is extremely generalised. This is intentional; Fraser expressly does *not* want to take account of specificities in her article - or as she puts it, she is *not* concerned with feminism 'at this or that activist current, nor this or that strand of feminist theorizing; not this or that

geographical slice of the movement, nor this or that sociological stratum of women' (ibid: 97). Rather, her aim is to 'see second-wave feminism whole, as an epochal social phenomenon' (ibid).

In tracing such a generic, holistic narrative, Fraser describes second-wave feminism as having 'first erupted in the early 1970s' in 'OECD welfare states and the ex-colonial developmental states' (ibid: 101). Although she acknowledges different strands of feminist politics, she locates the origins of the movement as having emerged from 'the anti-imperialist New Left' (ibid: 97) and resolutely positions socialist feminism as the central current of feminist politics of this era. In representing this early second wave feminism as closely allied with anti-imperialist struggles and the New Left, Fraser claims that it 'expanded the number of axes that could harbour injustice', through attending to the intersections of gender, class and race (ibid: 103).

After outlining the key elements of this early 'second wave feminism', Fraser moves on to consider its evolution within neoliberalism, a context in which she suggests feminist ideas 'thrived' and 'found their way into every nook and cranny of social life' (ibid: 107-8). She suggests – while claiming it is 'heretical' to do so - that it is perhaps not 'mere coincidence that second-wave feminism and neoliberalism prospered in tandem', but that there may have been 'some perverse, subterranean elective affinity between them' (ibid: 108). She goes on to argue that the rise of neoliberalism led to a subtle yet problematic 'resignification' of feminist politics in the service of capital. She argues, for example, that 'second-wave feminism's' claim that inequality cannot be reduced solely to class led within the neoliberal context to an abandonment of class altogether: to a shift 'from redistribution to recognition' and 'powerful pressure to transform second-wave feminism into a variant of identity politics' (ibid: 108).

In another 'resignification', feminist critiques of the one-earner family model, led in the neoliberal moment to women around the globe entering labour markets only to experience 'depressed wage levels, decreased job security, declining living standards...' (ibid: 109). Thus, in a number of different ways, Fraser argues, feminist campaigns have dovetailed with neoliberal logics. Further, she suggests that this is not just a matter of capitalist cooptation, but that feminists themselves have unwittingly played a part in this process. In particular, she criticises what she sees as the academic feminist turn from social to cultural theory, arguing that 'feminists absolutized the critique of culture at precisely

the moment when circumstances required redoubled attention to the critique of political economy' (ibid).

Fraser ends her article by proposing that, in the current climate of economic crisis, political and social uncertainty, 'feminists should think big' (ibid: 117). She argues they must 'reconnect feminist critique to the critique of capitalism', 'militate for a form of life that decentres waged work and valorizes uncommodified activities', advocate 'participatory democracy … [and] strengthen public power', and 'break the exclusive identification of democracy with the bounded political community…' of the nation state (ibid: 116). This, she hopes can lead to a revived 'socialist-feminism', which she describes as having inspired her 'decades ago and that still seems to offer our best hope…' (ibid: 98). The 'return narrative', expressed in her explicit desire for an idealised form of 1970s socialist feminist politics, thus figures prominently in her account.

The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change by Angela McRobbie

McRobbie's book argues that a combination of cultural and political forces in the west are colluding in a complex form of backlash against feminism, with authentic feminist politics giving way to a hollowed-out form of 'post-feminism'. In this moment, McRobbie argues, feminism has 'at some level transformed into a form of Gramscian common sense, while also fiercely repudiated, indeed almost hated…' (McRobbie, 2009: 12). She uses examples from Anglo-American popular culture to demonstrate how feminism has been incorporated and taken on board, while it is at the same time denigrated, to ensure it will never be a viable political movement again.

McRobbie, like Fraser, traces post-war feminist activism as emerging from the Left, suggesting that 'the women's movement in the late 1960s and through the 1970s, was strongly influenced by the history of socialist struggles', although, in contrast to Fraser, limiting this claim to the UK, 'much more so than in the US' (ibid: 25). Similar to Fraser, McRobbie also asserts that this socialist-inspired feminism pioneered an intersectional analysis:

> It drew on some of the repertoire of class struggle, but also modified this through challenging its productivism, its patriarchalism and the over-determination of class, with the effect that sexuality, race and ethnicity were always to be subsumed within the overarching logic of class. (ibid)

Related to this, McRobbie claims that feminist politics in Britain in the 1970s were much more deeply intertwined with anti-racist and class struggles than contemporary depictions of the movement allow for, and that 'these intersections have shaped the field of feminist scholarship and also women's and gender studies courses' (ibid). However, she argues that the backlash against feminism has involved a 'process of undoing' (ibid: 9) of the connections between feminist and anti-racist politics (as well as other movements against oppression), and that this is a crucial element of the new gender regime:

> Feminism's wider intersections with anti-racism, with gay and lesbian politics, are written out of the kind of history which surfaces even in serious journalism, and the feminism which is then vilified and thrown backwards into a previous era, is a truncated and sclerotic anti-male and censorious version of a movement which was much more diverse and open-minded. (ibid)

While McRobbie concedes that 'that which is being undone, is, and possibly always was, fragile and seemingly torn apart by internal conflict', she argues that the feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s, together with other social justice movements 'did nevertheless constitute a terrain of radical political articulations, comprising groups who perceived inequities and oppressions across the boundaries of sex, race and class, none of which were self-standing' (ibid: 30).

She also draws attention to a similar backlash taking place against anti-racist politics, arguing that contemporary western culture has forced a 'rolling back' of anti-racism (ibid: 41). In media and in politics, in a similar process to what has happened to feminist politics, she argues, 'anti-racist and multicultural politics' have also been vilified:

> ...they too are reduced to clichés of 'political correctness' and their demise is seen to usher in a new period of more enlightened and modern community politics, where righteous anger and self-organisation are replaced by a politics of role models or mentoring or assimilation and integration or through cultural leadership programmes. Black politics *per se* fades and new racialising pathologies become visible, including a 'nostalgia for whiteness'. (ibid: 9)

She evidences this emergence of a 'nostalgia for whiteness' in fashion photography and celebrity magazines, where she notes that, after a period where these cultural sites were more accountable to representing diversity, there has been a re-emergence of an almost exclusively white range of models and celebrities, marked by 'a subtle provocation factor' in the adoption of a 'style of flagrant anti-political correctness' (ibid: 42).

Another narrative McRobbie constructs is of academic feminism, following its initial surge of development, 'finding it necessary to dismantle itself' (ibid: 13). She explains this process as follows:

> For the sake of periodisation we could say that 1990 marks a turning point, the moment of definitive self-critique in feminist theory. At this time the representational claims of second wave feminism come to be fully interrogated by post-colonialist feminists like Spivak, Trinh and Mohanty among others, and by feminist theorists like Butler and Haraway who inaugurate the radical de-naturalising of the post-feminist body... (ibid)

The reference to 'post-colonialist feminists' and the interrogation of 'representational claims' suggests that racism is a potent underlying cause of the dismantling process McRobbie describes. She goes on to address how, from her current perspective, it is clear to her how early feminist research was flawed in its foundation:

> Looking back we can see... how particular it was to gender arrangements for largely white and relatively affluent (i.e. housewifely) heterosexual women. While at the time both categories had a kind of transparency, by the late 1980s these came under scrutiny ... The concept of the housewife in effect facilitated a certain mode of feminist inquiry, but we were at the time inattentive to the partial and exclusive nature of this couplet. (ibid)

Presumably the 'we' at the beginning of the paragraph (who are looking back) are the same 'we' who (towards the end of the paragraph) were in the 1970s 'inattentive to the partial and exclusive nature' of their scholarship (in other words, white and middle-class academic feminists). The continuity of this 'we' suggests that McRobbie never questions her own and her peers' positions as central to the feminist project. When claiming that 'at the time both categories had a kind of transparency', she is writing from her own and other privileged white women's position – as for feminists who did not come from these backgrounds, the categories were surely never transparent.

In critiquing the 'post-feminist' hegemony in popular culture and society, McRobbie, like Fraser, points a finger of blame to the cultural turn within feminist theory. This includes a critique also of her own earlier work in media studies, suggesting she was too optimistic about the ability of women to subvert popular culture such as women's magazines, and the effect feminist-educated women would have on the cultural industries (ibid: 3-5). And although she comes from a media studies background, and the book is concerned primarily with analysing popular culture, McRobbie emphasises in her introduction that her book is 'fundamentally sociological', positioning herself as having 'returned' from

cultural theory, and instead 'concerned to dissect the management of social change and the forms of gender power' (ibid: 10).

Why Feminism Matters: Feminism Lost and Found by Kath and Sophie Woodward

Kath and Sophie Woodward, mother and daughter, decided to write a book together as an attempt to create an inter-generational dialogue about western feminism past and present. They question what they see as a divisive antagonism between 'second wave' and 'third wave' feminists, and through their work aim to move feminism forward while retaining key concepts from its past, as they argue that 'the feminist past is a resource in understanding the present and in the development of ideas' (Woodward & Woodward, 2009: 165).

Strangely, while their methodological approach in itself problematises the concept of 'waves' (as 'feminist thinking crosses temporal boundaries' (ibid)), they rely heavily on its usage in distinguishing between different temporal and ideological strands of western feminist thought, and at times themselves appear to perpetuate these divisions. They are keen to challenge what they perceive to be 'third wave' feminists' contempt for 'second wave' feminists. For example, they point out that 'the third wave often defines itself as pro-sex and multi-ethnic, as a critique of the perceived whiteness of the second wave' (ibid: 50). They go on to challenge this 'perception':

> I-Sophie[11], well versed in the critiques of the second wave, was surprised when I first saw I-Kath's collection of *Spare Rib* magazines, from the 1970s and early 1980s… and noted how prominent the discussion of race and accusations of racism were in these magazines. (ibid)

Woodward and Woodward's narrative of the feminist past focuses mostly on academic feminism and education, as Kath was involved and taught women's studies from the 1970s onwards. The dominant sentiment they appear to want to convey is of feminism as a site of affirmation for women. They describe women's studies courses as 'often life-transforming, through their validation of women's experiences and intimate and private social worlds', emphasising that Kath's 'strongest and best memories of working in women's studies in the 1980s were of friendship and, especially, laughter' (ibid: 4 & 52).

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[11] When expressing an opinion or reflection as individuals, the authors identify themselves as 'I-Sophie' and 'I-Kath'.

Woodward and Woodward, through their dialogue with each other and with feminist theory, are concerned with 'rescuing' what they consider to be key important concepts from 'second wave' feminism. In the final chapter these are summarised as: 'the feminist polemic and writing with a political agenda; an understanding of patriarchy; repoliticising the personal; and bringing back a politics of difference, through an understanding of both woman and embodiment' (ibid: 168). In particular, they argue for a 'grown-up politics of [sexual] difference', drawing heavily on Irigaray and Cixous.

Their narrative does acknowledge that women's studies and 'second wave' feminism has been subject to critique, and they claim that they do not wish to 'overstate the achievements of feminist politics or to underplay the persistence of patriarchal and postcolonial practices of exclusion…' (ibid: 15). They also point out that 'Some of the criticisms of women's studies in the academy have been framed by its ethnocentrism in relation to the politics of race' and go on to note the 'productive' 'theoretical shifts' within feminist theory which have occurred as a result of engagement with theories that interrogate 'ethnocentricity' and whiteness (ibid: 16). Yet, at the same time a return narrative is evident in the authors' positions on difference and 'diversity', as becomes clear when they state that they 'wish to draw on the problematising and awareness of diversity that recent feminist theory raises, yet not allow this to lead to a fragmentation of what feminism is' (ibid: 7). Implied is a judgement that an 'awareness of diversity' has the potential of going 'too far' in 'fragmenting' feminism into unrecognisable parts.

'Knowing' race and 'seeing' whiteness

As noted, each of the texts make claims to understand the significance of race and racism in relation to feminism. This claim to have learnt and taken on board such knowledge is a position which Moreton-Robinson and Ortega take as a starting point for interrogation. They understand such a position to be common among contemporary feminist academics, and I would argue that such a position is now hegemonic within contemporary academic feminist discourse in Britain. This is a marked difference from the popular feminist discourse I discussed in the previous two chapters.

I noted in the summaries that each text presented a 'return narrative' in terms of how they envisioned the future of feminism. Return narratives, as conceptualised by Hemmings,

attempt to encompass elements of both progress and loss narratives. They construct an opposition between materialism and the cultural turn within feminist theory, and suggest that the turn to poststructuralism and difference, while a necessary focus at one point, has now 'gone too far'. Thus there is a need for feminist theory to 'return' to more material ground in order to survive, thrive and address contemporary challenges. Such narratives, Hemmings notes, often have problematic consequences in terms of race, because black feminism and debates about 'difference' tend to get stuck in time, as a moment which has passed. Black feminism, Hemmings finds, is often cited as a catalyst for thinking about difference, and 'fixes a before and after of racial awareness', usually located in the 1980s (Hemmings, 2005: 122). When such a moment becomes fixed in time, it 'marks the work of racial critique of feminism as over and thus as able to be assumed or gestured to rather than evidenced in work after that point' (ibid: 123). Thus return narratives tend to 'leapfrog back and forth across literature focusing on the legacies of colonialism in Western feminist theory' (ibid: 126). Each text clearly marks itself out as theorising in a moment after 'racial awareness'. In this section, I therefore examine *how* they position their authors as knowledgeable about race and racism and whether Hemmings' argument about return narratives is applicable.

For Fraser, the moment of racial awareness coincides with the very beginning of 'second-wave feminism'. As noted above, she traces the emergence of this movement from an anti-imperialist Left primarily concerned with class and race. She argues that feminists were therefore influential in 'expanding the number of axes that could harbour injustice':

> Rejecting the primacy of class, socialist-feminists, black feminists and anti-imperialist feminists also opposed radical-feminist efforts to install gender in that same position of categorical privilege. Focusing not only on gender, but also on class, race, sexuality and nationality, they pioneered an 'intersectionist' alternative that is widely accepted today. (Fraser, 2009: 103)

Although by distinguishing socialist, black and anti-imperialist feminists from radical feminists, Fraser does not claim that *all* feminists were concerned with connecting oppressions, the wider narrative of her article positions this form – particularly socialist feminism – as the most prominent strand of 1970s feminism. This becomes clear as she concludes the section in which she presents her general narrative:

> All told, second-wave feminism espoused a transformative political project, premised on an expanded understanding of injustice and a systemic critique of capitalist society. The movement's most advanced currents saw their struggles as

multi-dimensional, aimed simultaneously against economic exploitation, status hierarchy and political subjection. To them, moreover, feminism appeared as part of a broader emancipatory project, in which struggles against gender injustices were necessarily linked to struggles against racism, imperialism, homophobia and class domination, all of which required transformation of the deep structures of capitalist society. (ibid: 107)

Here, Fraser conflates 'second-wave feminism' as a whole with its 'most advanced currents', suggesting that it was predominantly a progressive socialist movement which linked and challenged all forms of oppression. Suggesting that 'second wave feminism' 'pioneered' an 'intersectionist' approach positions 'racial awareness' as an inherent component of contemporary western feminist politics right from the start. It is, I argue, an appropriative rhetorical move, and one which a reading of black feminist critiques of this time will contest. One need only look at the articles in *Feminist Review*, one of the most prominent British feminist journals – and one specifically committed to a socialist feminist perspective - to find an intense debate about racism and socialist feminism playing out on its pages over a number of years in the 1980s. I have already discussed Amos and Parmar's critique of white feminists in chapter two, in which they highlight the racism of 'mainstream feminist theory, be it from the socialist or radical perspective' (Amos & Parmar, 1984: 4). The following year, Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh, two white feminists, attempted to address what they described as 'ethnocentrism' within socialist feminism (Barrett & McIntosh, 1985) in an article which garnered significant critique. Heidi Mirza described the article as participating in an established 'tradition of inhibiting black women's progress by trying to accommodate an understanding of our differences within the rigid theoretical framework of socialist-feminism' (Mirza, 1986: 103), while Kum-Kum Bhavnani and Margaret Coulson argued that 'socialist-feminism must, itself, be open to being transformed under the impetus of black struggles. But it is still hard to find instances where this has happened' (Bhavnani & Coulson, 1986: 83). Yet in Fraser's narrative, this debate finds no room; socialist feminists are positioned as having always had an anti-racist analysis, thus it does not require any further attention – to use Hemmings' phrase, 'leapfrogging back and forth' across the extensive literature which addresses racism within socialist feminism.

McRobbie is the most thorough in analysing racism as a structuring power within contemporary western society. As I described above, she positions anti-racism as a parallel movement to feminism, and as a politics which has similarly been attacked and 'undone'

by the media and politics. At several points she also highlights how black and Asian women's experiences in Britain are different from the experiences of white women, as structured also by racism as well as sexism (among other intersecting oppressions). For example, in a chapter in which she analyses television make-over programmes, she observes how the format of these programmes follows a common script of the white upper middle-class presenters bullying the white working-class women who come on to the show to 'pull up their socks... and "get out there"' (McRobbie, 2009: 146). However, McRobbie notes, when a black or Asian woman comes on to the show, the presenters are much more gentle in their treatment, as the relationship between white women and women of colour is understood to be unequal, and a bullying approach would be interpreted by viewers as racist. She draws the following conclusion:

> It could be suggested that there is an assumption underlying these programmes... that white women have somehow reached a state of equality [with men]... hence [white] women can become more like men in the workplace, that is, become more competitive... The almost philanthropic mission on the part of [the presenters] to improve the national stock of white womanhood stops short however at the challenge of improving black or Asian British womanhood. Even at a common-sense level, such assumptions about equality cannot be made about black and Asian woman *[sic]*... (ibid: 146-7)

Through this analysis, McRobbie highlights the continuing existence of a relationship of unequal power between white and black and Asian women in contemporary British society. Of all the texts, McRobbie's is the only one which makes this continuing inequality explicit. Yet at the same time, she evades any discussion of how this inequality structures relationships between white feminists and feminists of colour within the contemporary context. She briefly highlights her own and her white peers' racial ignorance *in the past* when she admits that looking back on their earlier research, she can recognise its false universalism (as quoted above). Following on from this admission, she writes, '[w]hile at the time both categories [of femininity and feminism] had a kind of transparency, by the late 1980s these came under scrutiny' (ibid: 13). Yet on the same page, she explicitly fixes a moment of racial awareness only a few years later – 1990 - when she claims that 'the representational claims of second wave feminism come to be fully interrogated' by postcolonial feminists (ibid). The use of 'fully' signals that this interrogation was completed once and for all. After this point, white feminists are implicitly 'fully' aware of their own white specificity, and of postcolonial feminism. Thus no further discussion of white

feminists' racism is required: it is constructed as no longer relevant in the contemporary context.

Woodward and Woodward are keen to show their awareness of women of colour's experiences, and one way in which they claim knowledge of this is through looking at the experiences of their students. They propose that two of the central questions which they want to address through their work are: 'What are young women's concerns?' and 'How do the differences in the cultural, economic and political life of these young women impact on their attitudes to feminism?' (Woodward & Woodward, 2009: 19). They are also keen to point out that their students 'are different from the middle-class white students that feminism has so often been criticised for representing exclusively... with widening participation... and the increased diversity of students attending art and design colleges, this is a very different demographic' (ibid: 13). Through their relationships as lecturers as well as interviewers of these students from diverse backgrounds, they suggest an ability to represent their experiences.

This is evident in their discussion of a black British student, who they describe as having become interested in feminism through doing a dissertation on hip-hop and youth culture. I quote their discussion of her experience at length:

> When asked, she never explicitly stated why she did not engage with feminist ideas previously; she clearly latches on to feminist ideas in a specific way, when it relates to something she is interested in and is part of her everyday life. This example resonates with discussions over the implicit whiteness of feminism (Lorde, 1978, 1984; hooks, 1984); and one of the key claims of those who call themselves third-wave feminists is that it is characterised by being multiracial (Morgan, [1999] 2004; Hernandez and Rehman, 2002). However, as hooks (2000) has noted, often those who are championed as the public faces of third-wave feminism... are white, as are those post-feminist icons of success and the *Cosmo* myth that you can really 'have it all'. Hurdis (2002) notes that the key texts of the third wave are as guilty as the second wave in their emphasis on privileged white women. This particular student does not discuss her earlier lack of interest and later engagement in terms of whiteness, or indeed her sense of being excluded, but rather that it is through *Dreamworlds* [a film about gender and sexuality in hip hop culture] that she first became aware of this. As Morgan ([1999] 2004: 278) notes, 'white women's racism … may explain the justifiable bad taste the f-word leaves in the mouths of women who are over thirty-five, but for my generation they are abstractions drawn from someone else's history'. (ibid: 23)

Here, Woodward and Woodward heavily reference the work of several (American) feminists of colour to make sense of their student's experience. While she is described as

having not herself made the link between the 'implicit whiteness' of feminism and her own disinterest in it, they make the link for her. However, with the final quote from Joan Morgan, they also offer an explanation as to why the student had not linked the two: because the racism women of colour experienced from white women's during the 'second wave' of feminism is no longer resonant for women of colour in relation to the 'third wave'. Their use of Morgan's words places white women's racism as part of history, and the continued 'implicit whiteness' is the result of a misrepresentation of the third wave caused by high profile white feminists.

Thus, Woodward and Woodward position white feminist racism as existing only in the past. Their reference to a shift within feminist theory, following its engagement with critiques of its 'ethnocentrism' and 'whiteness' (quoted above) implies a temporal break between the 'ethnocentrism' of feminist theory in the past, and its race-aware present. It is worth noting their repeated use of the term 'ethnocentrism' in favour of 'racism' – a rhetorical technique employed also by Barrett and McIntosh, which Bhavnani and Coulson critiqued as diverting discussion away from racism (Bhavnani & Coulson, 1986: 81). The only time the term 'racism' is explicitly used in relation to feminism, is when they refer to the 'accusations of racism' within the pages of *Spare Rib*, and here it is still qualified by being framed in terms of 'accusations', which immediately raises doubts of whether they were justified or not.

Their discussion of their student is also revealing in Woodward and Woodward's claim to 'know' and understand both women of colour's theory and their experiences. Yet this claim is made through evading a consideration of their own whiteness. They do not consider whether the student may have felt uncomfortable speaking about or mentioning racism when being interviewed by a white feminist (who is also her lecturer) and instead they assume a transparency in their communication, and an ability to interpret and represent her experience directly.

This evasion of the meaning of whiteness is consistent with an observation they make towards the end of the book. In discussing what they see as the value of writing the book together, which hinges on their different generationally-influenced perspectives, they point out 'obvious similarities between us, especially of class and ethnicity...' (Woodward & Woodward, 2009: 166). However, this seems mentioned almost as an aside – there is no

reflection within the text on what this similarity between them signifies, or how it may influence the perspectives taken in the book.

Appropriating the work of feminists of colour

Having located a moment of racial awareness within their narratives of feminism, the writers of each of the texts position themselves as knowledgeable about feminisms of colour and of the implications of race and racism for contemporary feminism. Here, I will focus attention on some ways in which the texts take up – or imply that they do – the work of feminists of colour, and how they position themselves in relation to feminists of colour or concepts which have been extensively theorised by them. To focus the discussion, I will look at one example for each text: the invoking of black feminists and feminists of colour (Fraser), postcolonialism (McRobbie), and difference (Woodward and Woodward). While, as is clear from the previous section, each text's engagement with race and racism varies considerably, I will argue that each in some way appropriates the work of feminists of colour in a manner consistent with Ortega's 'loving, knowing ignorance' – an ignorance which continues to centre whiteness.

Invoking feminists of colour

I have already quoted an excerpt above in which Fraser invokes black and anti-imperialist feminism as situated alongside socialist feminism to form the dominant strands of the second-wave feminist movement. Constructing (implicitly white) socialist feminists, black and anti-imperialist feminists of colour as together forming the 'movement's most advanced currents' is a recurrent framing of second-wave feminism in the article (Fraser, 2009: 107). For example, in a section discussing second wave feminism's struggle against androcentrism in the state-organized capitalist moment, Fraser positions 'anti-imperialist feminists and feminists of colour' alongside socialist-feminists as having 'to confront sexism within the Left while remaining part of it' (ibid: 104). And when discussing what she sees as feminists' 'ambivalent' relationship to 'Westphalianism' (state sovereignty), she highlights 'feminists in the developing world' as having been 'clearly disposed to be sensitive to trans-border injustices' as their 'gender critique was interwoven with a critique of imperialism' (ibid: 106).

Clearly, Fraser wishes to construct a western feminist history in which women of colour have been central in driving its most progressive theorising and organising. This goes against the trend of many of the texts I analyse in this thesis, in which women of colour tend to be situated on the margins of the narratives, as 'included' in the story at a later stage (if at all), or simply as respondents to the central white feminist field. Yet this rhetorical inclusion of feminists of colour in the origin story of second wave feminism has a major fault: it rests upon their theoretical exclusion.

Fraser's argument is not informed in any significant way by the actual theorising of feminists of colour. This is perhaps clear even from the first couple of paragraphs, since even the presumption that one is able to assess the 'broad contours and overall meaning of second-wave feminism' without reference to specifics can only be made if one presumes to have an all-seeing eye from which to survey the movement in its entirety. Such a subject position within feminism, going back Moreton-Robinson, is mobilised by white middle-class feminists who fail to racialise whiteness. While Fraser does not claim to be objective – she does clearly position herself as aligned with socialist feminism – she writes as if from a 'non-racialised' subject position. While black feminists and feminists of colour are racialised in the article, socialist feminists are not; whiteness is never named or interrogated.

But it is not only the evasion of whiteness as a structure of power within feminism which reveals Fraser's lack of engagement with feminists of colour; this is also evident in the story of feminism which she constructs. There are many points within it where a counter-narrative could be interjected and Nanette Funk has responded in-depth to Fraser's article to point to the problematic generalisations and assumptions which underpin her sweeping story (Funk, 2013). Yet Funk's analysis does not pick up on the prevailing whiteness of Fraser's story. For example, when Fraser argues that 'feminists absolutized the critique of culture' when they should have been paying attention to the 'political economy', Fraser erases masses of feminist theory through her own 'absolutising' of this shift from materialism to culture. To use just one prominent example, folding theorists such as Chandra Mohanty into the narrative - as someone who surely never stopped paying attention to capitalism, while also analysing culture - shows up this erasure. I chose Mohanty because I believe that her work, in Hemmings' sense, is haunting Fraser's narrative. In particular, Fraser's concern with feminism's 'ambivalence' towards

Westphalianism, fails to make any reference to Mohanty, and her well-known work theorising an anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist 'feminism without borders' (Mohanty, 2003).

Yet Mohanty is hardly alone in continuously linking culture and materialism; it is only possible to construct a narrative of feminism as having abandoned materiality by ignoring whole swathes of scholarship by feminists of colour and Third World feminisms. This is something which Brenna Bhandar and Denise Ferreira da Silva responded to in Fraser's more recent opinion-piece in *The Guardian*, 'How feminism became capitalism's handmaiden – and how to reclaim it', a short piece which summarised similar arguments, which have also been expanded on in Fraser's recent book *Fortunes of Feminism* (Fraser, 2013). In a blog post titled 'White feminist fatigue syndrome', Bhandar and da Silva state that '[w]hat appears at first glance to be a reasoned self-reflection ... at second glance reveals the innate and repetitive myopia of White feminism to take account, to converse and think along with Black and Third World Feminists' (Bhandar & da Silva, 2013):

> The literature is vast, the examples myriad, and thus, it's all the more tiring when White feminists speak of second-wave feminism as if it were the only "feminism" and use the pronoun "we" when lamenting the failures of their struggle. Let us just say there is no such thing as a "feminism" as the subject of any sentence that designates the sole position for the critic of patriarchy ... There is though a feminist subject-position, the one Fraser is lamenting, which has sat very comfortably in the seat of the self-determined, emancipated subject. That position, of course, is that which she identifies as a contributor to neoliberalism. But that is no surprise, for both her feminism and neoliberalism share the same liberal core that Black and Third World feminists have identified and exposed since very early in the trajectory of feminisms. (ibid)

Bhandar and da Silva's critique sharply brings to view the whiteness of Fraser's narrative, and also calls to mind Moreton-Robinson's argument about the middle-class white feminist subject position which theorises without seeing her particularity and her whiteness. Therefore it is all the more problematic that in Fraser's earlier article which is the subject of my critique, she repeatedly invokes feminists of colour as being part of the movement which she constructs. They are visibly constructed as part of the movement, yet with no discernible theory and politics of their own. Rather, the function of their rhetorical inclusion is to legitimate the white socialist feminist position – as progressive, anti-racist, intersectional. Constructing white socialist feminists and black and anti-imperialist feminists as equal peers in struggle, the racism of white socialist feminists is discursively

erased. Thus the white socialist feminist subject emerges at the end of the article as the central figure upon which Fraser pins her hopes for feminism's future.

Claiming a postcolonial practice

Moving on to McRobbie, I turn to her final chapter, in which she proposes a need to pay close attention to 'the feminist classroom' within the 'global university', as a site of deep uncertainty but also of possibility for the affirmation of feminist politics. Here, McRobbie draws on postcolonial theory, using Homi Bhabha's concept of a 'third space' to describe her feminist classrooms as 'a genuinely new space… fraught with uncertainty and potential', and as a way of 'pondering not just the passage for these young women in and out of the feminist academy, but also the post-colonial politics that are played out through these encounters' (McRobbie, 2009: 164 & 151). McRobbie also draws on Gayatri Spivak's work in her discussion, setting her own theory of the significance of this space in a hypothetical dialogue with Spivak, who she suggests, would argue against its significance because of its focus on a global elite in an imperial, capitalist centre, rather than on those who are excluded.

Each year, McRobbie explains, 200 young (mostly) women pass through her lecture theatre, the majority from outside the UK. In addition to Bhabha's 'third space', McRobbie draws on Mary Louise Pratt's 'contact zone', to make sense of this encounter. Pratt uses the concept of contact zones, McRobbie explains, to describe encounters between 'early travellers and explorers' and indigenous people in countries (not yet but) to be colonised. McRobbie describes Pratt's definition of the contact zone as 'a place marked by transparent differences of power', but also a space with 'a great deal of interaction… there was surveillance and learning but not within an overtly coercive set of relationships' (ibid: 165). This observation, McRobbie argues, can be applied to what she describes as the 'feminist post-colonial classroom' (ibid: 166) in order

> …to analyse the issues about pedagogy in what seem like a 'hospitable' cosmopolitan setting. Where there is a prevailing ethos of radical multi-culturalism and classroom democracy, and where the learning process is understood to be more than just the transmission of knowledge, questions about background and place of origin, about expectations and desires, and about the interface of experience in the university and also in the metropolitan city are all part of the pedagogic encounter. (ibid: 166)

Yet, despite the initial naming of power differences within contact zones, McRobbie's analyses of the encounters in her classroom largely evade any discussion of race and power. So what work does the description of her classroom as 'post-colonial' do? Drawing on Chandra Mohanty's (2003) work on feminist pedagogy is useful here. Mohanty, like McRobbie, is concerned with feminist postcolonial classrooms in western universities, and how to create radical spaces for dissent. Her writing on the subject questions the role of the feminist academic within the university as a capitalist industrial complex, and explores the possibilities engendered within the contradictions between complicity and resistance in such institutions. She theorises the importance of developing 'pedagogies of dissent' by 'creating spaces for epistemological standpoints that are grounded in the interests of people and that recognize the materiality of conflict, of privilege, and of domination' (ibid: 216):

> Thus creating such cultures is fundamentally about making the axes of power transparent in the context of academic, disciplinary, and institutional structures as well as in the interpersonal relationships (rather than individual relations) in the academy. It is about taking the politics of everyday life seriously as teachers, students, administrators, and members of hegemonic academic cultures… Cultures of dissent are also about seeing the academy as part of a larger socio-political arena that itself domesticates and manages Third World people in the name of liberal capitalist democracy. (ibid)

Taking this back to McRobbie, there are potential resonances here, in that what McRobbie describes as the 'uncertainty' within the 'contact zone' I interpret as being about 'taking the politics of everyday life seriously' within this space – of taking those moments of uncertainty seriously, about examining the interpersonal relationships, and laying bare how power structures them, and the potentials for disrupting those structures. However, this is conjecture on my part, as McRobbie gives little sense of what actually happens in her classrooms (apart from students learning about feminist and postcolonial theory), or what the relationships between her and her students are like. She represents the experience of her students, with little sense of what the students themselves might say. In fact, Woodward and Woodward critique her on this same point, pointing out that she 'writes about "young women" and makes allusion to her students, although there is little sense of what these young women actually think' (Woodward & Woodward, 2009: 18).

Although the concept of the 'contact zone' could usefully highlight the asymmetrical power relations inherent within the classroom, McRobbie does not discuss this any further.

Specifically, difference and power relations based on race are invisible throughout the discussion. Racial differences are implied by the fact that the majority of her students are from overseas, yet not engaged with in terms of how this affects the classroom as a feminist space, and any recognition of power asymmetries based on race are immediately tempered by the description of the space as one of a 'prevailing ethos of radical multi-culturalism and classroom democracy' (McRobbie, 2009: 166). Describing her classroom in these terms, McRobbie implies that this is an anti-racist space without ever making race explicit, or explaining what work she does to challenge her white privilege in relation to many of her students.

Through this discussion, McRobbie takes up the position as feminist postcolonial professor; as someone who has taken on board anti-racist theory, and who has the ability to transfer this to her students (of colour). Yet the fact that she makes this claim in the context of institutional whiteness and a vast underrepresentation of women of colour as lecturers and professors in her field is not discussed. Her focus on international students is also significant, because it evades any discussion of her relationship with British young women, including young women of colour. Mohanty writes about these different dynamics of race, highlighting how people of colour are positioned differently by white people in different locations, depending on specific histories of white supremacy and colonisation. She points out how white academics in the US find her, as an Indian academic living in the US, much less threatening than, for example, an African American academic (Mohanty, 2003: 215). If McRobbie were to write about the relationships between herself as a white feminist academic and her British students of colour, this would require a different and more explicit analysis of race and racism within her classroom.

In her description of her feminist classroom, McRobbie places herself as a feminist teacher within a very central position in this 'third space' of possibility and uncertainty for the future of feminism. Situating her discussion within postcolonial (feminist) theory implies a reckoning with race which in fact is not there. Thus whiteness remains unquestioned at the centre of this 'postcolonial' feminist classroom.

Whitening 'difference'

One of the main arguments of Woodward and Woodward's book is for what they call a 'grown-up' politics of difference, and they dedicate a whole chapter to laying this out (Woodward & Woodward, 2009: 85-110). In introducing the chapter at the beginning of the book, they describe it as 'engage[ing] with feminist debates about equality and difference through a dialogue between different feminist theories and times' (ibid: 10), a description which one might read to assume will include a wide range of feminist theorising on difference as a concept encompassing not only gender, but also race and other axes of differentiation. Reading the chapter, however, it soon becomes apparent that what they are addressing is *sexual* difference only, with no attention to difference as a wider concept.

 The authors are concerned specifically with reclaiming a politics of (sexual) difference in order 'reclaim the lost category "woman"' (ibid: 89) – to be able to speak and write of women's experiences *as women*, something which they feel has been 'lost' by the mainstreaming of poststructuralist theory within feminism. Speaking politically about and as women, without the scare quotes which they lament have become the norm, they believe is essential in order for feminist politics to become relevant outside of academia: 'Women are not all the same, yet there are enough important common grounds to use the category woman' (ibid: 171).

Woodward and Woodward describe the trajectory of the politics of difference as having 'travelled a troubled route through structuralist emphasis on binaries, the problem of equality and the poststructuralist virtual abandonment of any version of gender difference that could inform a political position' (ibid: 86), leaving discussions of race and other differences entirely out of the story. This is despite the fact that their narrative of the recent feminist past positions debates about difference as 'central to feminism in the 1980s and recognised as such' and admonish 'third wave' feminists for 'underestimating the extent of second-wave engagement' with issues related to difference (ibid: 87).

That the authors can recognise that debates about difference have been central to feminism while managing to completely ignore race is troublesome. Writing in the late 1990s, Ann Phoenix summarised such debates as follows:

> Recent focus on difference has been partly impelled by the dissatisfaction of black feminists with the constructions of 'woman' made by white feminists and of 'black

people' made by black men (Brah 1996). The often heated debates about difference and identity among feminists, black activists and academics (who, of course, overlap) were productive of exciting new ways of conceptualizing the difference/identity couplet. These allowed both the recognition that contemporary societies are characterized by difference and that a focus on difference as complex allowed better analytical purchase on understanding societies and subjectivities than was allowed by a dualist focus on difference as bipolar. (Phoenix, 1998: 860)

Phoenix goes on to argue that there is now 'widespread agreement that identities (and hence differences) are plural and intersecting, rather than singular...' (ibid), suggesting such an approach to difference has become hegemonic within both feminism and race and ethnic studies. This is an assumption made also by Moreton-Robinson in an article about feminist theorising on difference. While she critiques many white feminists for failing to account for whiteness when theorising difference, she nonetheless argues that '[s]ince the mid-1980s a transition has been taking place in the thinking and writing about what constitutes difference':

> In the 1990s, the theoretical limitations of the traditional gender/sex difference debate exposed by the analyses of women of colour, lesbian and black feminists led to the recognition that feminism needed to develop critical theories which are inclusive of difference and reflexive. (Moreton-Robinson, 2000b: 343)

A significant voice in the theorising of multiple differences among women was Audre Lorde, who argued that the liberation of women depends on their ability to relate and gain strength from each other as equals across differences such as race, class and sexuality:

> As a tool of social control, women have been encouraged to recognize only one area of human difference as legitimate, those differences which exist between women and men ... But our future survival is predicated upon our ability to relate within equality. As women, we must root out internalized patterns of oppression within ourselves if we are to move beyond the most superficial aspects of social change. Now we must recognize differences among women who are our equals, neither inferior nor superior, and devise ways to use each others' difference to enrichen our visions and our joint struggles. The future of our earth may depend upon the ability of all women to identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference. (Lorde, 1984: 122-3)

Yet Lorde's influential writings on women and difference are absent from Woodward and Woodward's discussion. This is despite the fact that they describe their chapter as a dialogue between feminist theory from both the 'second' and 'third' wave, arguing that 'a

politics of difference can be reconstituted through an exchange between different versions of feminism and different feminist voices…' (ibid: 109):

> What is most important for our project is the need to engage with the diversity of feminist critical thinking and to explore rather than reject a whole host of feminist interventions which so productively address the problems and the possibilities of difference. (ibid: 87-88)

Yet the 'different feminist voices' and the 'diversity of feminist critical thinking' which they draw on (most extensively Irigaray, Cixous, and Butler) completely excludes the work of feminists of colour.

To understand how it is possible to write a chapter on the politics of difference in 2009 without any reference to race or the work of feminists of colour, it is necessary to interrogate Woodward and Woodward's claimed awareness of race more closely. What becomes evident by looking for their discussion of race, whiteness and ethnocentrism across the book is that these (brief) discussions coincide with clusters of citations of work by feminists of colour. Thus it becomes clear that Woodward and Woodward understand scholarship by feminists of colour as relevant only when it pertains to race, and that race is marginal to an understanding of difference. True to Moreton-Robinson's observation, they see race as a topic which belongs solely to people of colour – and conversely, people of colour's theory is only visible to them when it pertains to race. With the exception of Rebecca Walker, whose work is mentioned at other times in relation to 'third wave' feminism, the work of feminists of colour is only applied when the authors are discussing race (ibid: 16, 23 & 15). The sense of dismissal of women of colour's feminist theories becomes complete in their final chapter, when they construct an all-white list of 'key thinkers' (Irigaray, de Beauvoir, Moi, Friedan, Cixous) who they explain that they connected with most deeply in writing the book (Woodward and Woodward, 2009: 166).

By assuming that feminists of colour only have theoretical relevance to feminism when the topic for discussion is race, Woodward and Woodward reveal their 'loving, knowing ignorance' of women of colour. Their conflation of 'difference' with 'sexual difference' – as if writing of difference within the feminist context is enough for the reader to know they mean sexual difference – betrays a woeful 'white solipsism' (Rich, 1986). Not only does this severely delimit their own theorising, but the racial connotations of theorising a *'grown-up'* politics of difference as one belonging to white women are abundantly clear. Despite claiming to have reckoned with 'ethnocentrism' (which they situate as a problem now

firmly in the past), they forcefully re-centre white feminist theory as the *only* theory which is relevant for theorising (sexual) difference.

Conclusion

Each of the texts analysed in this chapter start from a position of implied racial awareness and they all narrate a moment when this racial awareness came to the fore within (western) feminist politics. Yet while the texts vary in the extent to which they consider the relationship between feminism and (anti-)racism, they all share an avoidance in discussing the existence of racism within feminist communities and movements themselves. Where this is referred to, this is softened (i.e. Woodward and Woodward's references to 'ethnocentrism'), and is located as an issue which belongs to the past and which has now been resolved. Even McRobbie, who does acknowledge a continuing relationship of inequality between white women and women of colour, does not relate this back to feminism itself, but rather focuses on the relationship between women in popular culture, and also limits this inequality to structural issues, specifically women of colour's exclusion in various sectors of the work force. This removes any responsibility for racism against women of colour from white women.

By evading any discussion of racism within feminism in the contemporary context, the texts fail to recognise whiteness as a continuing and pervasive power structure within (British) feminism. Where whiteness is mentioned – such as Woodward and Woodward pointing out their shared ethnicity – this is done without any recognition of how it in fact structures the authors' relationships to their subject.

A lack of attention to whiteness allows the authors to position themselves alongside feminists of colour without recognising power differences. Thus, for Fraser, (implicitly white) socialist and black feminists have always worked alongside each other in harmony, struggling against the common enemies of capitalism, imperialism and sexism. McRobbie sees an opportunity for affirming feminist politics by working with and through the power differences between herself and her international students in her 'postcolonial feminist classroom', yet does not reflect on the institutional whiteness of that classroom, or of British feminist academia more broadly. And Woodward and Woodward claim to listen to feminists of colour by quoting them on the subject of race, and presume to be able to

understand the experiences of their students of colour, yet proceed to theorise difference as if they did not exist.

Thus all texts have in common an unacknowledged yet pervasive centring of whiteness. This shines through perhaps most revealingly in how the authors position themselves in relation to their subject. Woodward and Woodward position themselves as arbiters of just how far difference can be taken before it goes 'too far'; McRobbie writes of a continuous 'we' who used to be inattentive to race, and Fraser racialises women of colour while the central feminist subject (the socialist feminist with whom she is herself closely identified) remains non-racialised, yet clearly white. While the authors claim to know the work of women of colour, and understand the importance of race, in describing their envisioned feminist futures, it becomes clear that the white middle-class feminist remains central to those visions.

7. Activist feminist books: Welcoming diversity

In December 2013, *The Guardian* published a lengthy feature about 'the fourth wave of feminism', which portrayed British activist feminism as a racially diverse movement. 'The majority of activists I speak to define themselves as intersectional feminists', the journalist explained, describing how one of the activists she interviewed 'says she constantly tries to check her privilege, to recognise how hierarchies of power are constructed' (Cochrane, 2013). Out of the different sites of feminist knowledge production in Britain, activist feminism is certainly at the forefront of forging an intersectional discourse. There are many strands of and approaches to feminist and gender-justice activism in the UK, many of them pioneering anti-racist, women of colour-led, intersectional praxis.

Activist feminist discourse and communities have transformed significantly – and continuously – since I started my research in 2008. Grassroots feminist networks and communities, both on- and offline, have grown exponentially over the last ten years (Redfern & Aune, 2010). Perhaps the most significant change since the start of my research has been the extensive take-up of social media by social justice activists. While blogs were already flourishing when I started my research, newer online tools (in particular Twitter), as the *Guardian* article suggests, have enabled activists 'to build a strong, popular, reactive movement online' (Cochrane, 2013).

In terms of race, difference and intersectionality, however, everything is not quite as rosy as the article makes out. Contemporary activist feminism has been the site of intense – and repetitive – struggles over racism. Lola Okolosie (2014) documents some of these in relation to the concept of intersectionality and how it has been mobilised and resisted within British feminist communities in recent years. She highlights how black feminist attempts to centre intersectionality as 'normative practice for the wider movement' have been met with resistance from many white feminists (including high-profile columnists), variously dismissing it as 'alienating and academic' and a 'cloak for abuse' (ibid: 90-93). Such debates have been painfully played out on Twitter and on blogs, with black feminists being repeatedly drawn into the position of having to, in Okolosie's words, '"teach" intersectionality …. [and] "explain" ourselves' (ibid: 92). In many instances, the blog of the London-based Black Feminists group has been an important space where feminists of

colour have influenced discussions about race and intersectionality, insisting that white feminists must recognise whiteness and racism (e.g. Adams, 2012; Phillips, 2012; Black Feminists, 2013; Lianne, 2012; Okolosie, 2013; Eddo-Lodge, 2013). The prominent feminist 'web-zine' and blog *The F-word* also provides interesting evidence as to how the hegemonic activist discourse has transformed around race and intersectionality over the years. The first five years following its 2001 launch saw *The F-word*'s content written primarily through a gender-only, white and otherwise privileged lens. This slowly began to shift from 2006 onwards, with an increased awareness of racism and white privilege (influenced by debates in the wider Anglo-American feminist blogosphere) and a much more explicitly intersectional approach becoming predominant on the site from 2009 onwards (although the majority of its contributors are still white) (e.g. moosa, 2007; Livesey, 2008; moosa, 2008; Spalding, 2008; Jonsson, 2009; Laura, 2009; Combe, 2010).

The rapid expansion of activist feminist groups, blogs and forums presented something of a research challenge. While I recognise that the internet today is an incredibly significant site of feminist discourse, I decided not to analyse content on Twitter and blogs, both because of the challenge of collecting this type of data in a meaningful sense, but also for ethical considerations. Although mostly public, social media is often the site of conversations which can still be quite personal and private, and the ethics of 'mining' such conversations for academic research need to be carefully considered. Blogs are slightly different – more intentionally public - but again present ethical issues. Feminist blogs are collective spaces of discussion and evolution, with blog posts written with different levels of research, time and forethought by individuals at different ages, different stages of their 'feminist consciousness' and awareness, differing experiences of privilege, oppression and levels of education. Browsing *The F-word*, for instance, it is clear that individual bloggers' positions and identifications can evolve significantly over time. It can therefore seem unduly harsh to critique a blog post a young woman wrote one evening in 2008 when her perspective in 2014 is very different. Thus while I do believe that analysing the changing discourse of *The F-word* (and other online sites) over the last decade can tell us something important about how race is being taken up within white-dominated activist feminist communities, I decided to focus my analysis on commercially published texts (produced for public consumption and debate) and interviews with individuals who have expressly given me consent to analyse their words.

This short chapter focuses on two books: *Reclaiming the F Word* by Catherine Redfern and Kristin Aune (2010) and *The Equality Illusion* by Kat Banyard (2010). These texts both take as their focus contemporary feminist activists and the issues which they are concerned with. I would argue that they both reflect and have played a role in shaping feminist activist discourse in recent years. They also present a more sophisticated discourse in relation to race than the popular feminist texts I discussed in chapters four and five, but also one which comes with its own set of problems.

The following section introduces the texts, and provides an overview of how the feminist past is represented within them. The second section examines how a language of 'expanding diversity' (Nadeau, 2009) is adopted by the texts in order to portray a multicultural contemporary feminist movement which attends to intersections of gender, race and class. The third section considers how the books frame feminism as an already clearly-defined movement, and how this results in a narrative of inviting others 'in', without interrogating the whiteness at the movement's centre.

The texts

Reclaiming the F Word: The New Feminist Movement (Redfern & Aune, 2010) and *The Equality Illusion: The Truth About Women and Men Today* (Banyard, 2010) are both aimed at 'selling' the need for feminism to a mass audience. Published only months apart, they are part of a handful of non-academic mainstream publications attempting to define a 'new' British feminist agenda, including also Walter's and Levenson's text discussed in chapter four. All authors are strongly connected to what Redfern and Aune describe as the 'new feminist movement' which they see as having emerged since 2000. These books therefore come to represent an 'insider perspective', with the authors' authority based on their central positions within the movement (as they define it) in representing activist feminism to a larger audience. This is clear, as I will discuss below, in the ways in which the authors frame the texts as inviting others 'in' to the movement.

Both books are concerned with describing what today's feminist concerns are, both tackling one aspect of gender inequality per chapter. They share a similar aim to debunk the myth that feminism is 'dead', irrelevant and outmoded. For Banyard, the myth stems from the 'illusion' in British society (and western society more broadly) that women and

men are now equal (Banyard, 2010: 2), while Redfern and Aune, although keen to demonstrate that many women (and men) do in fact call themselves feminists, attribute the lack of wider identification with feminism to three themes: 'the way feminism is defined, the idea that equality has already been achieved, and society's emphasis on individual gains at the expense of collective action' (Redfern and Aune, 2010: 6).

While Redfern and Aune's main purpose is to highlight the activism of a new feminist movement in Britain (and beyond), Banyard focuses mainly on outlining how gender inequality pervades all aspects of society. In her final chapter, she then highlights the work some feminists are doing (at the grassroots, as well as within bigger organisations and government initiatives) to challenge inequality. She builds the arguments in each chapter based on interviews with women and girls who have experienced various forms of gendered oppression, backed up with evidence from research reports.

Redfern and Aune started their project by surveying self-identified feminists in the UK (at conferences, events, online and within local organisations and groups), to find out who they were (in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, location, and education levels), how they came to identify as feminist, what they believed to be the most important feminist issues, what kind of feminist politics they identified with, and what kind of activism they were involved with. 1,265 surveys were completed (two-thirds of them online) (Redfern and Aune, 2010: 221). Redfern and Aune weave the results of the survey into the structure of the book, with each chapter both defining the 'issues' and then highlighting feminist responses (not solely based on the survey results – other examples of activism from both within Britain and other countries are included).

While certain problems and disagreements within feminism are occasionally noted by Redfern and Aune, both books are devoid of more critical perspectives on feminist politics and discourse. The topics of racism and other forms of exclusion and marginalisation within feminism are not approached. Instead they represent contemporary feminist activists in a solely positive light. They set this tone in the introduction as they explain how they 'want to show [that] feminism is liberating, diverse, challenging, exciting, relevant and inclusive' (ibid: x).

Although racism *within* feminism is not discussed, racism *is* acknowledged as a form of oppression which feminists should tackle. Both books make a concerted effort to represent women's experiences as diverse, and to point out that their gendered

experiences are influenced by other social divisions. Banyard stresses that the women she interviewed in her research 'came from diverse backgrounds in terms of class, race, age, sexuality and disability', noting that their experiences 'demonstrate how differing aspects of people's identities influence how gender inequality manifests itself in day-to-day life' (Banyard, 2010: 11). In her chapter on body image, to use one example, this perspective translates to a recognition that the 'dominant Western beauty ideal is white'. She discusses the negative impact this has on women of colour by relating it to the experiences of three young British Asian women whom she interviewed, and backs it up further with research on how black women relate to beauty standards in popular culture (ibid: 28). Redfern and Aune similarly point out that 'racist, classist and ageist beauty ideals exist alongside patriarchal ones', noting that 'positive representations of women of colour and disabled women are rare' (Redfern & Aune, 2010: 19 & 26).

Neither book provides any extensive narrative of the feminist past, but some references are included. Similar to the way in which contemporary feminism is represented in wholly positive terms, the feminist past is described favourably. 'Feminism has a proud history and we've all benefited from it', Redfern and Aune argue (ibid: 207), while Banyard states that '… we can look to feminist successes in the past as inspiration for future actions' (Banyard, 2010: 207). In what may be a reference to Walter (1999), Redfern and Aune state:

> This isn't going to be one of those 'new feminist' books that reiterate negative stereotypes about 1970s' feminism and position younger feminists in opposition to it… Whilst recognising that second-wave feminism wasn't perfect, in our experience younger feminists are quick to acknowledge their debt to older feminists. (Redfern and Aune, 2010: xi)

The book is structured into seven chapters in homage to the seven official demands of the WLM. The 'reclaiming' in its title also highlights the continuity the authors construct between the different eras of feminism: the feminism of the recent past has been denigrated and is in need of being 'reclaimed' anew. Responding to a different discourse emerging from within feminist communities themselves (in opposition to the hostile mainstream), the movement's legacy is problematised by Redfern and Aune when they suggest that its mythical quality overshadows the contemporary movement:

> In many people's imaginations, [the peak of the WLM] was a glorious, never-to-be-repeated age … Consciously or not, many people are stuck on this view of the golden age of feminism. But it isn't helpful … We need to remember that criticisms

of today's feminism as lacking in some way often stem from an idealised image of 1970s' feminism that isn't necessarily accurate. (ibid: 13)

They also point out that 'this view of feminism is a very Westernized view of the movement, neglecting feminist activism that has occurred since the 1970s and in non-Western countries and the global South' (ibid: 13).

Although references to the past are much more limited in Banyard's book, at moments when it is visible, a white-centric chronology of feminism is reproduced. In one instance, she refers to the 'three waves of feminism' by attaching a name to each one: 'From Mary Wollstonecraft to Germaine Greer to Ariel Levy - activists and theorists throughout the years have created a rich body of feminist thought and together brought about historic gains for women' (Banyard, 2010: 3-4). Representing the waves of feminist history with the names of three white women reinforces the whiteness of the wave analogy, contributing to the process of women of colour being 'drowned out by the wave' (I discuss this more in the next chapter) (Springer, 2002: 1061).

While Redfern and Aune acknowledge that 'second wave feminism wasn't perfect', they never expand on this claim with any specific details. Such allusions to problematic elements of the feminist past are also repeated in other parts of the book. Thus a pattern emerges where past problems are highlighted only to be simultaneously dismissed without further details or reflection. For example, in a discussion about religion, the following analogy is made:

> Just as black women felt excluded by a feminism in which white women's experiences were taken as the norm, so religious feminists (many of them Asian, black and mixed ethnicities) feel that secular feminism denigrates an integral part of their identity... (ibid: 154).

That black women felt excluded by a normative white feminism has not in fact been previously discussed. Yet it is presented with the presumption that the reader is already aware of this history, and also as if it is not a topic worthy of discussion on its own. No more detail is provided about when, how and why black women felt excluded, and how they responded to this, and the past tense places this exclusion firmly as history. The passive positioning of white women in this sentence is also notable: saying that black women 'felt excluded' is not the same as acknowledging that white women excluded them.

The authors are clearly aware that feminism is criticised for being too white and middle-class, as their original survey asked whether respondents agreed or disagreed with the statement 'Feminism is too white and middle class' (just under half agreed, but what this means is not discussed) (ibid: 236). When discussing the potential reasons why people choose not to identify as a feminist, they mention this perception of feminism as one possible reason among a host of others as to why people may feel alienated: '[they may] think that feminism is only about white, middle-class women's issues' (ibid: 6). However, the authors never focus on the 'white and middle-class' perception long enough to give the reader a sense of whether they think it is a valid criticism. It is unclear therefore whether 'white and middle-class' is understood as just another negative stereotype which they wish to 'reclaim' feminism from, along with the rest of its negative baggage which the media has burdened it with.

Narrating an increasing inclusiveness

In chapter one, I introduced research by Mary-Jo Nadeau which, examining the narrative which the (Canadian) National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) constructs of its own history, finds a 'subtle, yet persistent, tendency of white multiculturalist narratives to substitute for anti-racist histories' (Nadeau, 2009: 6). Nadeau finds that the under-representation of women of colour within the organisation during its early years is noted within the text, but rather than interrogating how hegemonic whiteness and white feminists' racism maintained their exclusion, the narrative focuses instead on women of colour's increasing involvement as 'an ongoing and progressive succession of *inclusivity*' (ibid: 11). Such a narrative erases the histories of anti-racist challenges led by women of colour coming from both within and outside of the organisation and instead 'moments of inclusivity appear as autonomous developments' (ibid: 9). This re-affirms the position of white women at the centre of the organisation – as the ones who continue to define the narrative.

Nadeau's findings are useful for thinking about what is troubling about Redfern and Aune's as well as Banyard's suggestions that contemporary British feminism is a diverse and inclusive movement. As Nadeau finds in the NAC text, both books promote a narrative of feminism in Britain as one of *increasing* inclusiveness. Contemporary feminist politics are situated as a natural progression from the 'second wave', which is essentially described

as an innocent and inspirational – yet, clearly white - movement. Although, as already mentioned, Redfern and Aune hint that the 'second wave' 'wasn't perfect', these flaws are never detailed. The whiteness of the feminist past which these texts draw on is therefore never interrogated.

Ahmed's work on the 'language of diversity' (2007b; 2012) is also pertinent here. Interviewing 'diversity practitioners' in Australian universities, Ahmed found that many practitioners have adopted a language of diversity as a way of adapting to what has been termed 'equity fatigue' – a failure of 'equality' initiatives to have their desired effect within institutions (Ahmed, 2007b). She suggests that the usage of the term 'diversity' in place of 'equity' or 'equality' is not by default problematic, but often becomes so when it is 'cut off from histories of struggle which expose inequalities' (ibid: 254). This echoes Nadeau's argument that 'diversity' and 'inclusiveness' takes the place of an historically-contextualised anti-racist perspective.

This disconnection is evident in both texts: both lack a narrative of how feminism has changed from being (in their representations) white to its contemporary diverse manifestations. Social changes rather than anti-racist struggles appear in the narrative as the main cause of change within feminist politics. For example, Redfern and Aune explain how contemporary feminists in the west are concerned with and have an awareness of women's inequality in the global south because globalisation makes us 'more closely connected than before with the rest of the world' (Redfern and Aune, 2010: 113). They also suggest that this 'increasingly global society' means contemporary 'feminism transcends national boundaries' (ibid: x). This common representation of globalisation as a recent phenomenon is critiqued by Doreen Massey as 'a Western, colonizer's view', as people in formerly colonised countries have experienced the acute presence of their colonisers for centuries (Massey, 1993: 59). The suggestion that feminism has only recently begun to 'transcend' national boundaries in the contemporary context erases the long histories of western feminist entanglement with European empire-building. The notion of transcendence is in itself problematic: as Mohanty argues, feminist relationships across national boundaries must be formed through an engagement with differences and power inequalities rather than through attempts to transcend them as if one is situated 'outside contemporary world history' (Mohanty, 2003: 111).

The lack of a narrative of change within feminism, and the invocations of an innocent and influential feminist past which contemporary feminists are indebted to, leads to the presentation of the authors' own more intersectional perspectives as an unexamined continuation of earlier forms of feminism. Banyard emphasises this continuity by stating that 'the feminism we need today is the feminism we've always required: one driven by truth, bent on justice, and founded on the fundamental belief in the equality and rights of all people' (Banyard, 2010: 205-6). Positioning feminism as a political movement which has always been inclusive of 'all people' again erases the histories of struggle by feminists of colour against white feminist racism (among other struggles).

Similarly, by constructing their feminist chronology as one which emerged from a white WLM but is now happily multicultural, Redfern and Aune are unable to draw attention to power inequalities and racism within contemporary feminism in the British national context. In fact, I would argue that they block such discussion: commenting on the ethnic breakdown of their survey participants, they suggest that it 'broadly reflects the make-up of the UK population' (Redfern & Aune, 2010: 208). This claim reads as an indirect defence against charges of racism and marginalisation which have occurred within feminist communities in the UK over the last ten years, of which the authors are undoubtedly familiar. As Ahmed finds, when the language of diversity becomes disconnected from its history of anti-racism, 'people can then define "diversity" in a way that may actually block action', for example when 'valuing diversity' comes simply to mean 'counting people who look different' (Ahmed, 2007b: 254 & 240). By presenting statistics of a national representativeness of 'diversity', Redfern and Aune in this case block the potential for analysing power inequalities among white feminists and feminists of colour, by suggesting that the 'counting of people who look different' is sufficient evidence that racist exclusion is no longer an issue.

Yet while they both construct a narrative of increasing diversity, it is also important to distinguish between the two books, in particular when it comes to their global perspectives. Redfern and Aune more explicitly point out the relationships of unequal power between women in different parts of the world, when, for example, discussing the global care chain which starts with a domestic worker in the Philippines and ends with a professional working woman in the west (Redfern and Aune, 2010: 126). Their discussion of fashion and beauty is also contextualised with the industry's dependency on

sweatshops and they highlight that 'the successes of privileged countries exist alongside – and have exacerbated – the disadvantages suffered by countries outside the West' (ibid: 30 and 107).

Banyard, on the other hand, does not question the hierarchical dichotomy between the 'developed' and the 'developing' world, evading any discussion of imperialism, past or present. Thus she does not recognise that some women stand in relations of power over others. Instead, she focuses exclusively on women's oppressed status, as is evident in her explanation of the book's (occasional) global focus:

> Of course, sexism is a worldwide problem, and although the main focus of the book is on Western society, I also explore additional issues facing women and girls in other countries – from the risk of being denied an education in sub-Saharan Africa to the high rates of clandestine abortion in Latin America. (ibid: 12)

The oppression which women and girls in the Global South face is framed as 'additional' to those that western women face, suggesting that all women face the same basic experience of oppression. This denotes an additive rather than intersectional understanding of oppression and denies the causal relationships between the experiences of western and non-western women, particularly those formed through histories of imperialism.

Additionally, for Banyard, despite pointing to intersecting oppressions in the lives of women of colour, gender is always prioritised as the defining difference, as is particularly apparent when, in her chapter on work inequality, she discusses the experience of 'Elizabeth', a Nigerian migrant who works nights as a cleaner despite being an experienced legal secretary. Here, the only question Banyard finds pertinent to ask is: 'Why do so many women have to work below their skill level because those are the only jobs that fit around their caring responsibilities?' (Banyard, 2010: 75). She does not ask how Elizabeth's identity as a black African migrant woman shapes the employment opportunities available to her. The diversity which her feminist analysis can contain is here shown to have clear limits.

'Mainstreaming' and 'spreading' feminism

Struggles over who 'owns' feminism are recurrent within feminist discourse. The telling of histories play a central role in such struggles: our version of what has come before will shape our understanding of who is entitled to claim authority over feminism in the

present. In the introductory chapter, I pointed to the intensity of contemporary online conflicts over racism within feminism, and how such conflicts often centre over control of narratives: i.e. who can authoritatively tell the story (or stories) of feminism and who are its protagonists? Within hegemonic feminist discourse, the story of feminism belongs to white women. This story continues to centre white women in the present moment, as the movement leaders who can 'invite' others in. Despite their attempts at attending to multiple oppressions and representing a diverse feminist demographic, the stories these books tell unfortunately reproduce this dynamic.

By outlining the multitude of ways in which women are still oppressed in Britain as well as around the world, both books make a strong case for the need to strengthen collective organising against gender-based oppression. Both books also present a straight-forward answer: more people (men and women) must 'reclaim' feminism, and feminism must become part of the mainstream, in other words, feminism becomes an all-encompassing solution. For example, in her final chapter, in which she encourages readers to become involved with feminist activism, Banyard writes:

> Happily, recent years have seen a resurgence in feminist activism, particularly in the UK … The task facing us now is to build on and expand this activity. We need to move it firmly into the mainstream and ensure that feminism becomes widely recognised as one of the most important movements for social justice of our time. (Banyard, 2010: 207)

The mainstreaming of feminism is positioned as an urgent political priority which Banyard presumes will automatically have the effect of reducing all women's oppression. Redfern and Aune follow a similar logic, by arguing that 'reclaiming feminism' should itself be a feminist goal. In fact, their seventh demand is, as they explain, 'also our suggestion for a solution – a feminist revival, or an end to the backlash against feminism' (Redfern & Aune, 2010: 204). This demand, they explain, came from analysing the survey results and finding that 'the state of feminism' emerged as a concern among many of the respondents:

> …their comments can be summarised as a desire for a larger, more visible, diverse and inclusive feminist movement, and an eagerness to ensure that more people – especially young people – are attracted to and empowered by it. In short, for even more of us to reclaim feminism. To a large extent, we believe that a feminist resurgence is occurring, and we've hopefully given a taste of the movement's passion and vibrancy. But we want to build on what's already there and spread feminism to more people. (ibid: 205)

The 'spreading' of feminism is, similar to Banyard, posited as automatically having a beneficial effect for all women. The narrative of feminism as an inspirational and wholly positive movement to end women's oppression makes such suggestions sound like common sense: i.e. if everyone embraced feminism, then all women's oppression would end. However this logic only makes sense when based on the assumption that feminism is and always has been an inclusive movement, which any detailed analysis of feminist history will quickly open up to dispute.

Valerie Wagner (1995) argues that the logic that all women (or people) must claim a feminist identity in order to end gender oppression is problematic, because it prioritises the maintenance of feminism as a definable movement and an identity-based community. As Wagner argues, such claims can in fact stall meaningful activism, as a feminist discourse centred on the need for stable feminist identities limits the developments of localised movements, by stopping them from 'tak[ing] forms unrecognizable to each other', which, she argues, they inevitably must do in order to address the different challenges different communities of women face (ibid: 128).

We can see this happening in these books: despite stressing the diversity and inclusivity of contemporary feminism, by focusing on the need to *reclaim* a feminism which already exists, the texts simultaneously place limits on what feminism is and can be in the future. As both books present a white feminist history, and portray contemporary feminism as a (multicultural) continuation of that movement, they grant authority to those forms of activism which are recognised as 'feminist' by normative (white) standards, while marginalising or erasing 'unrecognizable' forms from the narrative. It places limits on what feminism (which becomes synonymous with all anti-sexist struggle) is and can be.

There are clear correlations here with the type of politics of inclusion that I discussed in chapter five, drawing on Ang's (2003) work. This is perhaps most clearly illustrated by Redfern and Aune when they end their introductory chapter with the following invitation: 'Welcome to the new feminist movement' (Redfern & Aune, 2010: 17). In Elizabeth's Spelman's words, '[w]elcoming someone into one's own home doesn't represent an attempt to undermine privilege, it expresses it' (Spelman in Ang, 2003: 203-4). Although the books suggest that *everyone* should (re)claim feminism, the white authors' positions at the centre, as those 'spreading' and 'mainstreaming' feminism outwards, remain untouched, allowing them (and others like them) to stay as its ultimate authorities.

Conclusion

Through framing their narrative of (British) feminism as one of expanding diversity both within its ranks and its analysis, but one where (however unintentionally) white women remain centred, these books unfortunately preclude honest discussion of ongoing racism within feminist activist communities. One might argue that an introductory book to feminism is not the place to air such 'dirty laundry', yet without such an examination (or even acknowledgement), whiteness is reproduced and reasserted as British feminism's unnamed organising structure. As the primary audience of these texts are likely to be activists already involved with feminist communities, those that are curious or interested in becoming so, as well as students of gender and feminist theory, it seems important not to perpetuate the dominant silence on the topic of white feminist racism within them. As the next two chapters will show, this silence was common among the white participants that I interviewed, a number of whom mentioned having read one or both of these books. Thus while the books should be welcomed for providing a more complex analysis of the intersection of gender, race and class oppression in women's lives than that provided in texts such as Walter's, Levenson's and Moran's, they remain within a power-evasive frame which claims not to see white women's continued dominance within the movement.

8. The interviews: A thematic analysis
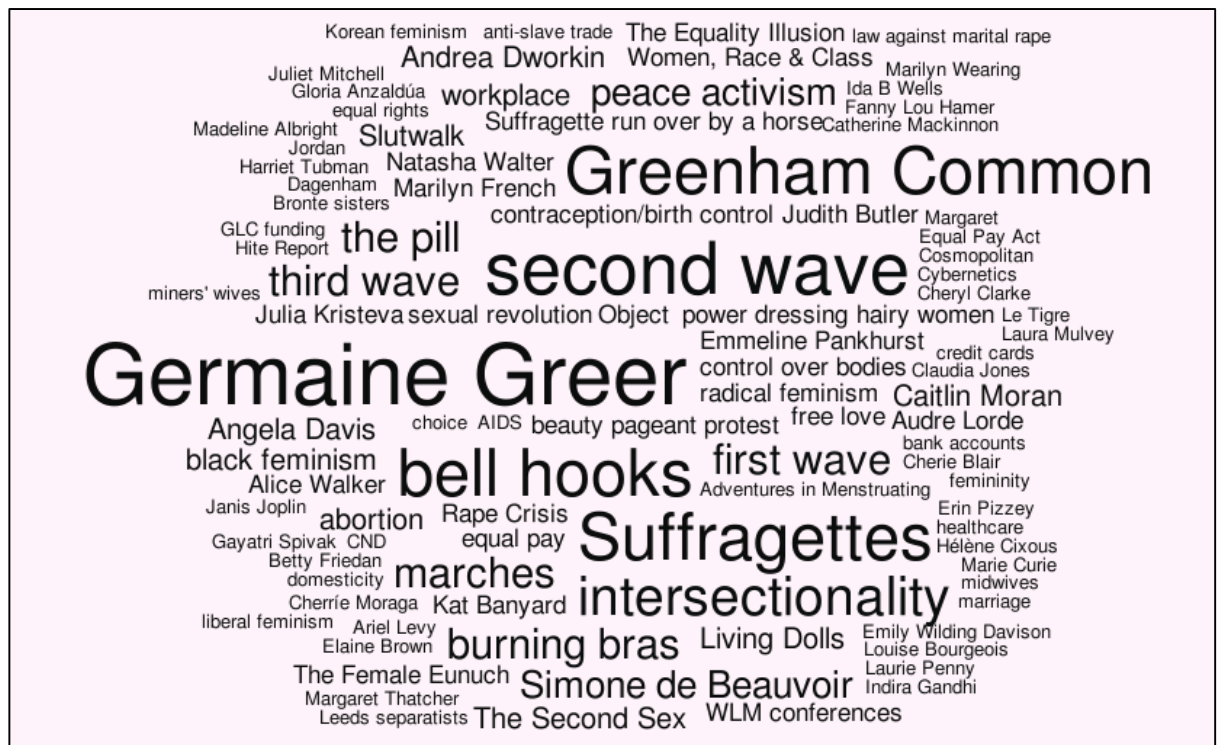
A 'word cloud' of reference points mentioned in the interviews. The size of the words reflects how many of the participants mentioned them (each 'item' is counted once per interview even if mentioned multiple times). The smallest words were mentioned by one participant only. Germaine Greer was the most frequently mentioned (referenced by 14 participants).

In the next two chapters, I turn to data generated in the interviews. This chapter provides an overview across the whole sample, looking at trends and themes in relation to questions such as: How did the participants talk about women's activist histories? What kind of narratives did they construct about women's activism and feminism past and present? How did issues related to race and racism fit (or not fit) into these narratives? How visible were women of colour in their narratives? What links can be made between the feminist stories they told and their own articulated feminist politics more generally?

I decided to conduct interviews because spoken conversations are very different from written texts, in that they are messy and unpredictable. Conducting interviews allowed me to focus on 'everyday' feminist talk amongst activists and students, who (in most cases) were not published writers, and it also allowed me to ask specific questions which I could not ask of the texts. The data generated through the interviews undoubtedly presents a more complicated and messy picture of contemporary feminist discourse on race – one full of contradictions and ambiguities. In this sense, it has presented challenges in terms of

analysis. At the same time, it is a discourse – or a convergence of discourses - that I recognise as undeniably *real* – contemporary feminist discussions about race *are* full of contradictions and ambiguities. This, I hope, is what the interview analysis will bring to the project. While the written texts present more coherent representations (although there is variation there too), the interview encounters generated data which shows the contradictions in feminist talk about race more clearly.

The analysis of the interview material is of necessity only partial. I carried out and transcribed 19 interviews and it is not possible to do justice to all the material in two chapters. I have drawn out themes which are most relevant to my research topic, but have only been able to highlight a selection of relevant examples.

My aim in discussing the interview material is not to individualise the analysis, or to point fingers at individual participants (for their lack of knowledge about black feminism or awareness around race, for example). For one, this seems unproductive and somewhat unethical, as all participants engaged with me in good faith. I appreciate their willingness to participate in a project which might be considered as 'risky' (for different reasons for different participants). I am also not interested in - in relation to the white participants - analysing the data in a way which sets me up as the 'knowing' 'anti-racist' white researcher pointing out the racism and white privilege exhibited by others, as if I am not part of this process myself. As I have discussed in chapter three, the interview encounters on numerous occasions illuminate my own complicity in racism and whiteness.

But more importantly, the individualising of analysis is counter-productive to the research aims, which are to draw out and analyse how stories and representations of feminism are constructed and reproduced. As I discussed in chapter three, my approach to these narratives centres on locating them within the wider social, cultural and political context in which they are produced. In relation to the interviews, this context includes wider societal discourses around race as well as those which circulate within feminist spaces such as activist groups and women's and gender studies classrooms. This is not to suggest that the individual participants have no agency or choice about how they engage with these discourses; they do and the analysis will show this clearly. But my purpose here is to draw out what the interview material can tell us about wider feminist discourses rather than what they say about the different participants as individuals.

At the same time, I approach the narratives and representations with caution in terms of what they reveal. The interview is a highly artificial setting, and to add to this artificiality, I was specifically asking participants to construct narratives for me. My information sheet and what I had told them prior to the interview starting alerted the participants to my interest in analysing which stories get told and how. These factors are likely to have made them already attentive to the political and artificial dimensions of how we speak about 'history'. This is evident in the number of participants who made reference to stereotypical images – for instance burning bras – as an immediate response to my question about women's past activism – signalling their awareness of how stories about women's activism are distorted in mainstream culture.

In chapter three, I addressed issues of race and whiteness as I saw them shaping and producing the interview encounters. One of the ways in which this is clear is in terms of the race/ethnicity of the interview participants, and I pointed to how my own whiteness undeniably impacted on who felt inspired or safe enough to participate in the project. In terms of the analysis I present in this chapter, the disparity in numbers between white participants (14) and participants of colour (5) needs to be noted. While I do not claim that my sample is representative in any sense, as I do at times present my findings in terms of numbers of participants, it needs to be clear that the sample I am working with is almost three quarters white.

As I present the analysis in this chapter and quote individual participants, I refrain from commenting about the relationship between each participant's racial identification and the things they said in the interview - instead I simply note each participant's self-defined ethnicity in brackets. Race matters to the analysis, but at the same time I do not want to draw any overly simplistic link between people's racialised identity and their articulation of specific narratives. I will discuss the relationship between experiences of racialisation and the development of race consciousness more in the individual accounts, as this allows for a more nuanced reading of what the connections might be in specific contexts.

As I outlined in chapter three, I recruited participants from two groups (students and activists) because I saw them as constituencies that would be able to provide useful insights into two key sites of feminist knowledge production: feminist activist spaces and the feminist classroom. Although I tailored the interviews with some different questions for students and activists, as the interviews progressed, I found that there were no clear

themes emerging that were specific to students versus activists. Which category a participant belonged to was also not always clear – several of the 'students' also identified as activists and some of the activists had also studied feminist theory in higher education in some form. As I do not believe there to be a significant distinction to be made between these two groups in terms of the analysis, I have chosen not to distinguish them in the analysis unless it is particularly relevant.

I began this section with a very unsophisticated yet compelling visual representation of reference points which came up in the interview. The 'word cloud' includes all references to individuals, campaigns, events, books, ideas, concepts and theories (including some rather vague ones) which the participants included in some way as belonging or relating to feminism or women's activism (whether in the past or present). Of course, there are many flaws with this simplified form of representation – significantly, the context is lost (a good example being Andrea Dworkin, who was mentioned both as an inspiration and as the kind of feminist another participant identified herself *against*). Yet this image is simultaneously revealing of what was included within the overarching frames of women's activism as discussed across the interviews – and highlights both the dominance of certain stories, as well as resistances to them, and ambiguities in between. The remainder of this chapter aims to think more deeply about this dominance, resistance and ambiguity.

The focus in the next section is on the histories of women's activism which were told within the interview encounters, highlighting the content and structures of these narratives. The section after discusses how feminism and race were discussed more broadly in the interviews. The final section considers how the findings in the second section link to those of the first – in other words, how particular stories about women's activist histories are told and others are not, and the direct correlation this has to contemporary feminist politics around race.

Constructing narratives of women's activism

One of the first observations I made as I was carrying out the interviews was that the majority of participants did not in fact have in-depth knowledge about histories of women's activism in Britain. As the image above shows, with a few exceptions, the most frequent references to specific individuals, books and campaigns are those which are

commonly associated with feminism also within mainstream culture. This is not surprising, considering the paucity of content about women's activist histories – apart from the Suffrage movement and burning bras perhaps - in school curricula and popular culture. Learning about such histories requires an active interest and a seeking out of information not typically available within mainstream culture beyond a few big names, caricatures and stereotypes. However, this 'seeking out' is not dissimilar to the process of learning about feminism generally, so the fact that many of my participants had not actively sought out histories of feminism suggests that they did perhaps not consider learning about what came before as particularly important in coming to a feminist consciousness; contemporary feminist discussion and theory was deemed more relevant.

Although most participants had pockets of knowledge in particular areas of interest, which sometimes included historically contextualised knowledge, most did not construct any form of coherent chronology about women's activism from the 1960s onwards (whether in the UK or elsewhere). Rather, they relied on a more generically familiar story. When asked what 'women's activism in the '60s, '70s and '80s' or 'in the last 50 years' made the participant think of, responses such as the following were common:

> It makes me think of Germaine Greer [laughs]. Um… it makes me think, you know, that was when a lot of, like, the kind of… I feel like now some people want to say that it's, like, post-feminist, which I don't believe at all. But I feel like that was when a lot of the really big issues were kind of talked about. So kind of, like, abortion and things like that, and women entering the workplace […] That was when you got the image of, like, the hairy feminist burning her bra [laughs]. (B, white British)[12]

Although this participant had in-depth knowledge of specific texts and issues which had been influential in the development of her feminist consciousness, the overarching narrative of women's activist history was constructed very vaguely, with specific references drawn from what appears like a popular culture-informed story of white, Anglo-American feminism. Unless participants had a specific interest in activist history, they frequently drew on such narratives, which points to the power of mainstream culture in defining the narratives of social movements even for those who are invested in them. Even if the participants were aware that these were not the whole story, they were still the ones which were readily available for telling.

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[12] A note on transcription: '...' means a pause in speech, while '[...]' indicates that text has been cut from the original transcript.

I classified the participants loosely as belonging to one of three groups in terms of their familiarity with histories of women's activism (whether in Britain or elsewhere): three had very limited knowledge overall, 14 had broad strokes familiarity with some particular histories, and two had significant and detailed knowledge of particular histories. Of course, this classification is based on what the participants shared in the interview, and they may well have areas of knowledge which they did not think of at the time or did not feel were relevant in response to my questions. It is also based on my judgement about what counts as historical knowledge, and what counts as 'broad strokes' as opposed to 'detailed' knowledge of particular histories. The distinction centres on the way in which participants were able to produce a narrative of events/developments over time, as opposed to make reference to singular events, texts or people. The majority of participants, while they were knowledgeable about particular texts, issues or people, when asked to talk about women's activism in the last 50 years produced a very broad and vague historical arc which suggested a lack of concrete detailed knowledge. The two participants who I categorised as having detailed knowledge differed in this sense. One had intentionally sought out historical knowledge (E, black British Caribbean) and one had been involved in feminist activism for many years and had built up knowledge this way (J, white British).

Another question I asked of the data was how visible women of colour's theory and activism were within the stories and representations of feminism presented by participants. Basing my analysis on whether the participant discussed or mentioned specific women of colour, as well as how they couched their broader discussion of feminism (for example, whether they demonstrated familiarity with the existence of black feminism as a body of thought), I found that three participants showed no familiarity at all, seven demonstrated a very limited familiarity, six showed some detailed knowledge of specific theorists and/or areas of campaigning, and three demonstrated a significant knowledge and awareness of the work of feminists of colour (a category all three also belonged to). Of all the participants, only one had specific knowledge about black *British* feminism. This was the same participant mentioned above (and discussed as a case study in the next chapter) who, as a young black feminist, placed great importance on learning about the histories of black feminists in Britain.

The way participants structured their narratives of women's activist history is also significant in relation to race. When asking about their familiarity with women's activism

from the 1960s onwards, I deliberately phrased the question without reference to terms such as 'waves' or 'women's liberation', as such terms are themselves bound up with particular narratives (I deliberately also said 'women's activism', not 'feminism', in order to broaden the scope, although the fact that my wider project was framed explicitly around the term 'feminism' is likely to have negated my avoidance of the term here). Yet, significantly, in terms of structuring a story, thirteen of the participants framed their discussion at some point in the interview in terms of waves – first, second and/or third – as relatively stable categorisations of chronologically distinct manifestations of feminism.

Slightly veering away from (or at least supplementing) the chronological approach, a couple of the participants also used 'third wave' and 'second wave' as marking particular forms of politics: one participant spoke of a feminist society at university as 'at heart really second wave' to denote that it was anti-sex work (Q, white British) and another clarified that she identified with 'what I supposed we'd call third-wave feminism' and associated this with politics which were less dogmatic and more intersectional (than the implied 'second wave') (F, white British). But the majority of participants used the wave analogy to denote a chronological progression. One participant, who did not know a great deal about British feminism as she had only moved to Britain a few years earlier, commented: 'before I came to England, I knew there was a first, second, third wave feminist movement' (M, Asian). Another participant talked about learning the history of feminism from an introductory book, from which she said she'd learnt that

> … the first wave, second wave and then third wave, and whatever, kind of, area we're in now, each one had its own, kind of, not distinct, but broad goals – areas in which women have, kind of, tried to move forward, I guess. (R, white British)

Other participants made more fleeting references to 'waves', which indicated a familiarity and acceptance of this form of periodisation of women's activist history.

The prevalence of the wave metaphor in the interviews mirrors its prevalence within white-dominated feminist discourse more generally. It points to a specific white-defined Anglo-American lineage, which has divided feminist history into distinct periods of heightened activity. This is a contested metaphor which has been critiqued for erasing different genealogies of activism by women of colour, for example by Kimberley Springer who,

writing in the US-context, highlights how extensive histories of black feminism are 'drowned out by the wave' (Springer, 2002: 1061)[13].

The whiteness inherent in the wave narrative as a structure was evident also in the content of the narratives many of the participants produced. Examining the stories which emerged within each interview, I identified several different (overlapping and cross-cutting) familiar stories of women's activism – again ones which resonated in some ways with stories of the 1960s-80s as represented in popular culture. The one most commonly drawn upon was one I identify as a 'social change' or 'social issues' narrative, where a story of women's activism was rooted within a story of social change or specific issues related to gender inequality.

> ...so '60s, it makes me think of, you know, the sexual revolution, you know, free love, women, you know, the beginning of birth control. Women being allowed to, not be promiscuous, but to have more control over their body. So to have sex, or come up with their own rules for their body [...] The '70s I think about, like, work-related aspects, mostly due to my mother, sort of, things I read. So women in the workplace, um... challenging current ongoing trends, which were probably made illegal, but were still definitely culturally acceptable. (N, white)

> I think maybe it would just make me think initially of things that were big issues then. So, like, I suppose, it would make me think about... like, abortion, you know, because that was a big issue for people in those decades. So, like, '60s here and '70s in America. (Q, white British)

As can be seen from these examples, the social change/social issues focus was not necessarily at the exclusion of discussion of activism, although the issues and social changes were given primary focus within the story and the activism related to it was often mentioned in vague terms ('women in the workplace ... challenging ongoing trends').

In terms of specific activism which was mentioned, there was not one dominant overarching narrative across the interviews, but a number of different ones. Six participants framed the story within what I call a 'WLM' narrative. This can be seen most clearly in the following example:

> Oh, the Miss World action, and all of the... I can't remember what the name of those gatherings were, where they started at Oxford and then... they started the women's movement in this country. [...] What do I think of? *Spare Rib*. And the founding of a lot of those, like, [local women's centre], Women's Aid, Rape Crisis,

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[13] Although it should be noted that Springer concludes that it is still worth persisting with the wave model, while also critiquing it, in developing a 'third wave black feminism'.

you know, all of those organisations were founded in the late '70s, early '80s. And the Leeds separatist people. (S, white other)

All of the references in this excerpt relate to activism which formed part of an explicitly defined WLM in Britain in the 1970s. Other participants who drew on histories associated with the WLM made reference to political lesbianism (G, white British), campaigns against beauty pageants and for abortion (J, white British), 'equal pay, equal rights, marches and protests' (I, British of Indian origin), and radical feminism (D, white British). To tell the story of the WLM requires some knowledge outside of what is recognisable from popular culture. At the same time, within feminist activist and academic discourse in England, women's activism in the '60s, '70s and '80s is often represented as synonymous with the WLM. As I have discussed in previous chapters, it is a story which has become embedded – both in media and academic feminist discourse – as *the* movement which built the foundations of contemporary feminist politics in Britain. For participants who were not race-critical but who had sought out or otherwise learnt some feminist history, the WLM provided the obvious reference points in response to my question.

Other recurring narratives related feminism to the peace movement as well as to the 'sexual revolution'. Greenham Common was one of the most frequently recurring references, mentioned by 10 participants. The high profile media coverage and historical association of women's activism at Greenham in mainstream culture has clearly connected feminism with peace activism in the popular imagination. A number of participants also talked about 'free love' and the sexual revolution. One of the participants spoke in some detail about the impact of *Cosmopolitan* and *The Hite Report* on women like her mother and grandmother (J, white British). Another associated women's activism (in the past) with living in communes (C, white British).

What becomes clear across the majority of these narratives is again their consistent whiteness. Only three participants talked about women's activist history in ways which included black feminism and women of colour's activism in any significant way. They also significantly questioned the dominant whiteness of feminist communities and histories, as the following excerpt shows:

> I've read things like *Women, Race and Class* by Angela Davis, that kind of stuff. [...] I think we had one class, where we had a quick run-through of the different kind of feminisms – third wave, second wave, first wave. [...] While I absolutely agree that things like femininity and domesticity and all those things are problematic, I do

find that second wave seems to be dominated by this particular kind of woman, and her particular kind of experiences. And the people who represent second wave feminism to me have not changed. People like Germaine Greer and [Gloria Steinem]. (A, black)

[It makes me think of] white second wavers. But that's how we're taught about feminism in uni, because I think... when I finished my sociology undergrad, some of it was talking about the history of feminism, and it was very white-washed up until about, up to the '70s, '80s, when people like bell hooks and Gloria Anzaldúa and Audre Lorde, um, started talking about intersectionality and how important it was to take these intersections into account. But that isn't even the real history. (P, mixed race black Jamaican, white English & Kashmiri)

In these participants' accounts, different narratives emerge to counter the dominant white story of feminism. While they locate their narrative in relation to a dominant white story, they do so by arguing that this is not the whole story and that resistance to it exists. At the same time, the dominance of the white-defined wave narrative becomes particularly clear when it is used also by those who wish to resist it. Although participant P, in the excerpt above, is clearly frustrated with the 'white second wave' narrative she was taught, which suggests that white feminists 'came first', and that feminists of colour only started talking about the ideas which underpin intersectionality in the '70s and '80s, it is still the narrative which is available to her and one which she must engage with in order to be intelligible. It becomes the inevitable starting point from which she can critique.

The majority of the participants articulated a feminist narrative framed within majority-white terms. In each interview, if the participant did not explicitly talk about ethnicity, I would ask who they thought - or who they pictured - was involved in women's activism in the 1960s-80s in Britain in terms of ethnicity and other markers of identity. Seven of the participants responded that they thought that feminist activism at this time was mostly done by white women. Five participants, rather than assuming that the image of white women that came to mind was the total picture, spoke instead in terms of dominance, power and publicity, recognising that it was likely that women of colour had been active in less publicly visible ways, even though the participant was not familiar with this history. The following extract demonstrates this ambivalence well:

I kind of think that they were all white. In my head, in images that I remember seeing, they all seem... But I don't know, I mean, but I feel I also know from having done reading about it, more since being involved with [local organisation] and reading about the history of other groups of women doing this sort of thing, I know that there have been, um... groups of black women being very active for a

long time. But I don't know how it fits in with the kind of more mainstream, kind of, sort of, marching type of activism. And I suspect that, you know, there are lots and lots of people who have been doing lots and lots of work for a very long time, but that they… it just doesn't get huge amounts of publicity. (G, white British)

As I started this section noting, learning in any depth about women's activist histories requires an intentional process of seeking it out. The majority of the participants, whatever their level of knowledge about histories of women's activism, expressed a feeling that they should know more, but this is not surprising considering that I was asking them about this topic (however much I emphasised that it was not a 'test', I never fully managed to stop making it feel like one). But there were very varied levels of commitment to learning about history. Only very few seemed to be actively committed to seeking out historical (in both senses of the word) texts and accounts to enrich their understanding of feminism. This has significant implications in terms of the building and passing on of an anti-racist feminism. As the 'mainstream' story of feminism available – both in popular culture and within much feminist literature and culture - is an insistently white narrative, moving beyond this story to learn about black and women of colour's activist histories requires active intent. As many of the white participants (as I will discuss in the next section) did not seem to feel that racism and black feminism was directly relevant to their lives, that active intent was in many cases acutely missing.

Feminism, race, racism and anti-racism

The above analysis refers in particular (although not exclusively) to the parts of each interview when I asked the participant about their familiarity with women's activist histories. I now turn towards the larger discussions, to look at the different narratives and discourses which the participants drew upon and constructed in talking about feminism in relation to issues of race, racism and anti-racism (both explicitly and implicitly). This part centres more on our discussions about contemporary feminism, although this is not entirely distinct from the discussions about feminist history. I will begin by looking at how participants articulated their thoughts about race and racism at a more general level (i.e. not necessarily in relation to feminism), as how people understand racism and their relationship to it is of course going to frame their understanding of it in any particular context, such as feminism. Then I will move on to discuss how the participants spoke about race and racism in relation to feminism, followed by a discussion of how the

prevalent description of feminism as 'white and middle-class' was mobilised by different participants.

Using Frankenberg's categories of 'discursive repertoires' on race is interesting here. Categorising participants across these categories, based on their interview as a whole, I found – as Frankenberg did – that my participants can be located along the spectrum of her third and fourth categories – 'color- and power-evasive' and 'race-cognizant' (Frankenberg, 1993: 239). In fact, I categorised 11 of the participants as belonging to the 'race-cognizant' category, demonstrating an awareness of racism as a system of domination, and informed by some form of anti-racist analysis of society (it should be noted that Frankenberg's categories were devised to analyse white people's race consciousness specifically, but that I have located the participants of colour in this category as well, which means there were five participants of colour and six white participants in this category). Three participants I categorised as belonging in the colour- and power-evasive category - lacking any anti-racist analysis – while the remaining five belonged somewhere in between these two categories.

The three participants that I categorised as power-evasive did not discuss race or racism unless I specifically brought it up. Neither did they demonstrate any awareness of racism as systemic or institutional within British society. For example, one participant, when asked whether there had been any tensions around race or racism in the classroom replied:

> ...there was no sort of, like, racism or tension or anything like that from anyone, ever. But that's probably because of the community. The university wouldn't allow it. And those type of people... wouldn't just, wouldn't have these opinions, and didn't. And it was a... we all respected each other to talk around it in a civilized way. (N, white)

The construction of the university as an institution which does not 'allow' racism draws on a power-evasive discourse which positions liberal, mainstream institutions of British society as not racist. Racism is thereby located in deviant individuals – i.e. those not able to talk about it 'in a civilized way', and whom would not be found in university classrooms.

These three participants positioned themselves – and liberal white society more generally - as having nothing to do with race and racism. For example, when one of them told me that race did not feel relevant to her and I questioned her about this, she elaborated:

> Especially being maybe white British, or a western white woman. I mean, we don't often, maybe because we're in the majority, we don't see ourselves as a particular

race. Maybe we don't discuss ourselves as a race? Because then you're kind of
tying yourself into nationalistic kind of views, and stuff that's very much frowned
upon, I think, in public. (D, white British)

While the participant recognised herself as being white, she felt the need to dissociate
herself from whiteness to avoid being seen as racist ('frowned upon' 'nationalistic' views
presumably code for racist views). The ambivalence should be noted here: there is clearly a
fear of being seen as a racist, and therefore an implicit recognition of white people as
racist, but the participant deals with this by further reinforcing her distance from race,
when relating it to feminism:

> ...when you, kind of, talk about race and feminism, I kind of think of 'well, ok so
> that's very much coming from maybe a black or a Muslim or a whatever feminist
> standpoint', it's not coming from a white standpoint ... So I don't really see myself,
> because I'm a, because I happen to be white and I'm a feminist, I don't consider
> that as part of the race debate, maybe? Um... yes, it's strange really.

Race becomes synonymous with feminists of colour and Muslim feminists, but the
participant understands herself as outside of the debate because she 'happen[s] to be
white'. At the same time it appears that the conversation itself is challenging her
understanding somewhat, as evidence by her reflection that it's 'strange'. The other two
participants similarly construct race as synonymous with people of colour, with one
participant (N) making a telling 'people of race' slip in talking about 'people of colour'.

When I asked each of these participants why they had wanted to participate in the
interview, they continued evading the topic of race, despite the fact that my project was
clearly described as being about feminism and race. Instead they all framed their answer
around wanting to help and support my project, either as a feminist or as a student.

The other 16 participants all articulated some form of anti-racist analysis which
constructed racism as systemic and institutional within contemporary society. However,
what I find interesting in using Frankenberg's categories is that where participants were
located on this scale did not necessarily have a direct correlation to any coherent anti-
racist praxis. Focusing specifically on the white participants here, there was a great
variation among those who were race-cognizant in terms of how this (in my
understanding) translated into their everyday lives and feminist praxis. For example, on
one end, one participant (C, white British) articulated an informed anti-racist analysis which
positioned racism, sexism and capitalism as inextricably linked. She was knowledgeable

about racism and anti-racist history, and demonstrated a perspective where all people's liberation was tied up together, therefore it was part of her responsibility to challenge racism. On the other end, two participants (Q and B, both white British), demonstrated an understanding on an intellectual level of the interconnectedness of gender, race and class, and an awareness of how white feminists have perpetuated racism. At the same time they appeared troubled when discussing their own positioning within this, and articulated feelings of anxiety and guilt which appeared to lead them to avoid translating their analysis into taking anti-racist action.

The five participants that I categorised as falling somewhere in between power-evasive and race-cognizant discourses exhibited in different ways an awareness of racism as systemic and institutional within contemporary British society, and did not shy away from talking about this. Yet, at the same time they generally positioned themselves as outside of this process and therefore also articulated a power-evasive discourse. One participant on the one hand spoke confidently about everyday and systemic racism that people of colour experience in Britain, but on the other described racism as something separate from white people. Here, she talks about the different experiences of white women and women of colour:

> But it just seems like their fight is maybe seen as different to our fight, because they have... race as well as sexism, whereas we just have sexism. Because we're not in a predominantly Asian or black culture, we're in a white culture, so we don't have racism to deal with. The only racism we deal with is dealing with racism that happens to those women. (O, white British)

White women become positioned as innocent bystanders to racism, which implies that racism is perpetrated only by racist individuals, rather than understood as a system which everyone is part of. There is a vacillation and ambivalence between a race-cognizant and power evasive discourse, exhibited again by this participant (as well as others), when at some points she positions white feminists as outside of racist relations, but then at another point as part of them (as elaborated in a quote below).

In discussions about race and racism specifically in relation to feminism, most of the participants that I categorised as either race-cognizant or somewhere in between race-cognizant and colour-evasive also at some point made a claim or observation about feminism being 'white and middle-class' or being dominated by 'white and middle-class'

women, an oft-repeated description levelled at what might variously be described as 'liberal', 'mainstream' or 'white' feminism.

Ten of the participants explicitly stated in one way or another that there is (still) a problem within British feminism in terms of racism and/or white privilege. This was stated, alluded to and/or explained in a number of different ways. One participant, for example, questioned why white feminists who could deconstruct sexism in the media somehow didn't seem able to 'use their critical faculties' to understand that the media was also racist (C, white British). Another stated that 'white feminists can't get past their privilege' and that they 'need to be more active when it comes to, to take more responsibility when it comes to racism' (P, mixed race black Jamaican, white English and Kashmiri). These participants (and some others) both clearly saw white feminists' racism as a willing ignorance, a choice not to engage. In contrast to the participants I discuss next, these participants did not consider racism within feminism inevitable, because feminist politics are based on challenging inequality and should therefore be able to apply the same analytical lens to race as well as gender.

Others saw this ignorance as less active, but more as inevitable:

> I think that kind of dominance within the movement gets replicated again and again, because when you, if you're living somewhere, if you're living in a society that is predominantly white, where you have, you know, racism exists and people have different levels of access to things, and I think that just by being feminist doesn't automatically mean that you can challenge all of those things. (Q, white British)

> [Racism is] there, it's prevalent in society which means it's gonna be prevalent within the movement, because it's all based on societal structures. (O, white British)

Both of these explanations differ from those above, as they argue that racism is inevitable within feminism because it reflects wider society. Another participant also argued that white dominance within the movement was inevitable, although her reasoning was different:

> I think there's always a problem of people tending to assume their particular experience and priorities are universal without necessarily kind of testing that. (H, white British)

This removes the dominance of whiteness, and bypasses accountability for this dominance. Instead the practice of universalising is itself assumed to be universal: we all

presume our experiences reflect the universal. This construction of universalism eludes the fact that it is only from a position of (cultural, social, political) dominance that people assume their experience is universal. The marginalised come up against this false universalising constantly through the recognition that their experiences are never accounted for within that which is presumed to be universal.

Five participants articulated more mixed pictures in their discussion of racism and feminism. In their accounts, contemporary feminist spaces and politics are constructed as sites in which struggles over (anti-)racism play out, where racism is both challenged and reinforced. For example, one participant of colour expressed ambivalence about her experience of studying women's studies. On the one hand, she spoke of the women's studies classroom as a safe space – one where she had been able to come out as a lesbian. But when asked what it was like talking about race on the course, she said:

> I had the feeling when you are talking about race and ethnicity, we, I mean I, as a foreigner, quite enjoyed it, and most white students, English students, they looked a bit... sorry for it, a bit shamed, but we know it is only the past. And they were, they were so interested in other cultures' women... Of course I had some bad feelings from, from one of the English students. But it was not about race, it was about foreign students who cannot speak English fluently. So people sometimes, er... um... complained 'why they talking very slowly?' something like this. But it was ok. (M, Asian)

She went on to tell me that she had overheard a white English student say to another that they would not sit with the foreign students, and how she noticed that they never said hello to her unless she initiated it. This portrait of white English students 'so interested in other cultures' women' yet displaying what could be deemed as bullying behaviour towards the international (specifically East Asian) students is not an endearing one. Yet, while the participant talked extensively about Britain being an institutionally racist country, she positioned these students as outside of this racism (at least in conversation with me). This distinction draws on a liberal discourse of 'progressive' whites as not racist, which the participant was able to utilise to excuse the behaviour of her fellow students, and thus hold on to the women's studies classroom as a relatively safe space for her.

Two of the white participants who fell into this category expressed contradictory thoughts about whether contemporary British feminism participates in racism. One participant, who said at several times in her interview that it was 'not right' that black women were 'not heard' within feminism also suggested:

> I think feminist movement is at the moment in the process of trying to work out how to be inclusive […] I think that's the beauty of feminist groups. Because we're feminists, we try not to be exclusive and we're fighting it out between ourselves by having the conversation, and that's got to be a good thing. (L, white)

Another participant felt that 'grassroots feminism' today is 'hopefully … a lot more intersectional' than it used to be, but that liberal media feminism is not (B, white British). While both these participants recognised the history of racism within feminism (and the exclusive nature of liberal media feminism), they both constructed contemporary activist feminism as emerging on the other side of this history – as going through a process of becoming inclusive and intersectional.

Four white participants dismissed the importance of anti-racist perspectives within feminism. The reasoning behind this appeared to originate from two different perspectives. On the one hand, two participants lacked knowledge of women of colour-led feminisms (two of the participants classified as power-evasive above). One of them suggested that black women were not 'engaged' with feminism, and therefore race was a 'silent topic' within feminism, because it could not be addressed by white women (N, white) (I discuss this participant as a case study in the next chapter). The second participant, while aware that feminists of colour do exist, demonstrated a similar positioning of herself (and thus white people generally) as separate from race. In response to my question of how relevant she thought race is to feminism, she responded:

> I think it's really relevant. […] if you've got somebody who's a black feminist, they're gonna have their own views, they're gonna have their own background, their own baggage, their own lens on the world that's really relevant and really interesting and that, I think, only improves feminism, and include those kind of views. So I think it is important, but I guess I just don't see it as being related to me in my own feminism, I guess. I kind of maybe see it as something that needs to be done… I'm admirable of it, and I enjoy, kind of, seeing debates coming out from those, kind of, communities, but I guess I haven't really involved myself in it too much, just because I guess it doesn't speak to my own identity, my own, you know, how I see myself, my own background. (D, white British)

Although the participant's initial response, that race is 'really relevant' to feminism, it was followed up by specifying that it was not relevant to *her*. At another point she described 'the race issue' as 'a fringe issue within feminism', as one element of many different strands.

Both these participants associated race specifically with people of colour, rather than as an analytical category like 'gender'. Both stated very clearly that as white women, race had nothing to do with them, and that it was only relevant to talk about race when women of colour were present – as something to learn about from women of colour, but something which they were not implicated in (a sentiment reinforced by the voyeuristic implications of the word 'enjoy').

The two other white participants who were dismissive of – or in the very least heavily conflicted about - anti-racist efforts within feminism came from a somewhat different perspective. Both these participants were activists who had experienced – either directly or indirectly – anti-racist critiques from feminists of colour. One participant (S, white other) had been involved in a conflict within her activist group. At various points throughout the interview, she came back to discussing the events, deliberating about whether how she and the other white members of the group had acted was racist. Although she shifted her position on the matter several times, her emphasis in telling the story of the conflict consistently emphasised the destructive effects of the anti-racist critique which had been made of the white members of the group. She characterised the group as having become 'dysfunctional' following the conflict and described how several (white) people had left the group because they found it 'really difficult to participate'. She also described feeling 'quite attacked' by the critique, and thought it would have been better if the person who had made it had approached it in a different manner. At another point, she backed up her own description of events by referring to how another white group member had felt them to be 'quite petty'.

The other participant exhibited a higher degree of anxiety around racism within feminism, emphasising throughout the interview how hard she tried to be inclusive in her organising, and how difficult this was. At one point, she relayed an anecdote about witnessing a black woman on a feminist panel criticise a question from a young white woman in the audience. The black woman, she described, 'just went for her':

> And I was absolutely furious. And I wish, to this day, I wished that I'd stood up and said, after, you know, 'I completely, you know, you have every right to say that, but this is your sister who was trying to help you, she needs you to give her guidance, she doesn't need you to call her a racist'. It was absolutely horrendous. And I was angry at the black woman for, um, for turning, what I felt was, turning it into, um... all about race and ethnicity, and not about patriarchy any more. (J, white British)

In both these accounts, we see the participants construct anti-racist critique as something which divides and destroys. Even though both participants also recognised that the issues being raised were (potentially) valid, they were ultimately represented as destructive to feminism. They also both implied (or in the latter case stated explicitly) that it is feminists of colour's responsibility to teach white feminists about racism.

The arguments, explanations and justifications made by these four participants draw on a number of familiar tropes of white feminism. It is common to hear the white-dominance in representation and priorities of feminism justified by the assertion that women of colour are simply not engaged with feminist politics. Similarly, the construction of anti-racist critiques as causing disruption and destruction, of them not being delivered in the right manner and tone, of them being petty – will be familiar to all those who have attempted to challenge whiteness within feminist groups. The 'angry black woman' who 'kill[s] feminist joy' by pointing out the racism of white feminists is another familiar figure in the white feminist imaginary (Ahmed, 2009: 49). That gender should always trump race is an underlying tenet of white feminism, and the argument that black women destroy the sisterhood by prioritising race over gender is patently familiar, as is the suggestion that it is the responsibility of feminists of colour to educate white feminists about racism. That each of these participants articulated these views as common sense, without awareness of a long history of critiques of such arguments, points to the ready availability of the white feminist frame for those feminists who do not see a necessary connection between gender and race oppression.

Conclusion

As this overview shows, there were differing perspectives on race and feminism and varying levels of knowledge about histories of women's activism among the participants. However, it is clear by tracing different participants across the two sections, that there is a correlation between someone's level of knowledge of histories of women's activism – particularly histories of anti-racist, black and postcolonial feminisms – and the way they constructed feminism's relationship to race in the present. The way this happens at an individual level will be better accounted for in the following chapter, but can any general correlations be said to exist across the sample?

As the findings discussed in the first section show, the majority of the participants did not demonstrate in-depth knowledge of histories of women's activism in Britain. This meant that when asked to provide a narrative of such a history, they drew on readily available stories of well-known events, individuals, caricatures and stereotypes. They also drew on familiar narratives which associate feminism with particular social issues such as workplace equality and abortion, with the peace movement and 'free love', and with the WLM. All these narratives present an overwhelmingly white story of feminism. Only three of the participants, who were all women of colour, demonstrated knowledge of the histories of black feminism and feminists of colour.

The overwhelming whiteness of the stories the majority of the (white) participants told helps illuminate the findings I presented in the second section. While more participants were familiar with debates around race and racism within the contemporary feminist context, the majority of the white participants struggled to articulate coherent anti-racist feminist politics. Their white feminist frames of reference were clearly restrictive in this regard: without learning about black and postcolonial feminist histories, contemporary feminists are left without the tools to challenge racism and whiteness. A number of white participants articulated a simplistic and problematic white feminism, as they were clearly unfamiliar with anti-racist critiques. Others on the other hand were clearly familiar with the critiques, yet reiterated common white feminist tropes of defensiveness and dismissal, suggesting they had not engaged with the scholarship of feminists of colour. Even those white participants who were keen to present their politics as, for instance, intersectional or inclusive, appeared uncertain about how to do this and exhibited feelings of white guilt and anxiety, again, I would argue, because they were stuck in white feminist frames. The three participants (of colour) who were critical of the whiteness of contemporary feminism, on the other hand, made these critiques through reference to histories of white dominance within feminism, and demonstrated a familiarity with earlier critiques made by feminists of colour. They were thus able to challenge the dominant white story of feminism's past. They thus demonstrated that developing an anti-racist feminist perspective requires also an historical perspective.

9. Interview case studies

In the previous chapter, I looked at how feminism was constructed in relation to race across the interview data, identifying commonalities across different participants. In this chapter, I move on to look at the data from five interviews more deeply. Exploring these case studies in more depth allows me to follow the narratives that are developed by one participant through an interview, which enables me to draw explicit links between a participant's articulation of feminist politics with the stories she tells of the feminist past (in a similar way as I have done with individual texts in earlier chapters). The analyses in this chapter therefore more closely resemble a narrative analysis as defined in my methodology - narratives are kept intact for each participant, rather than analysed in pieces.

Also relating to more 'traditional' narrative analysis in the social sciences, this chapter engages more explicitly with 'personal' narratives. The ways in which the participants narrated stories of feminism were deeply inflected by more personal stories – life experiences such as those within the family, classed and racialised experiences, and experiences of migration, for example, influenced how each participant came to feminism as well as how she made sense of it. We see how the personal and the political interact (and are deeply intertwined) in the construction of feminist politics. But what should be equally clear is that feminist politics are not just based on personal experience – they are forged by individuals within their social, political and cultural context. Stories of the feminist past play a part: How do participants' personal stories weave through, connect or disconnect with available narratives of what feminism is? Racialised experiences are particularly salient in this context and I attend to how the participants construct feminism in relation to their racial identities, and the dominance of whiteness within the wider feminist context.

The nineteen participants of course differed from each other in various ways, but (as is clear from the previous chapter), some participants also exhibited significant similarities. For the case studies, I have therefore chosen participants that had as little in common with each other as possible. This included thinking about diversity in the participants' race and class backgrounds, as well as what they said.

Each participant, as I will show, deployed different strategies in accounting for and negotiating race, racism and whiteness within feminism. Although different themes emerge as particularly salient in each case study, there are also some overarching themes that I trace across them. In particular, four out of five of the participants constructed the feminist past (and in some cases, the present) as more or less entirely white. This narrative was reproduced in different ways, and it is instructive to examine how different personal and political perspectives can still arrive at the same problematic endpoint. Exploring how each participant positioned herself and negotiated her own belonging (or not) within feminism is another theme which sheds light on how they constructed meanings about feminism and race. In addition to race, class positionality is a significant factor for a number of the participants, but I also examine some other political and personal trajectories and identifications which the participants deployed to make sense of their relationship to feminism. Linking the two together, how the participants made sense of their own relationship to feminism (whether explicitly or implicitly) is relevant when examining how they constructed feminism in relation to race.

Participant L (white, 51 years old)

This participant was involved with a number of networks and activities, including grassroots work, campaigning and blogging. The participant came from a working-class background and, although she strongly identified as a feminist, she also spoke of feelings of exclusion from feminist politics, theory and spaces. I selected her interview as a case study because of her strong emphasis on class as the key indicator of exclusion and inclusion within feminism. The way the participant's class analysis was deployed to make sense of racism and whiteness highlights how a white working-class feminist identity can be mobilised both as a point of solidarity with feminists of colour (connected through their mutual exclusion from a dominant white, middle-class feminism) as well as to evade accountability for white privilege. Constructing herself as having a 'gap' in her feminist knowledge due to her working-class background, enabled the participant to reproduce a white narrative of feminism while avoiding responsibility for a lack of knowledge about feminists of colour.

The participant had first started learning about feminism in her 30s, when she entered university as a mature student. However, she explained that due to child care

responsibilities it was not until her late 40s that she had time to become involved with activism. This personal narrative draws on a popular critical representation of feminism as a middle-class movement, constructing activism as something only accessible to women with an education and free time on their hands. The personal narrative here adds further legitimacy to this representation, which draws on a hegemonic understanding of what 'activism' looks like: something which one does away from or in addition to one's 'everyday' life.

The participant described her earlier perception of feminists as 'bra-burning, [with] hairy armpits' as a result of going to a working-class comprehensive school, where 'there was no kind of feminist texts', constructing feminism and working-class education as mutually exclusive. She also spoke of her perceived lack of knowledge of feminist theory in terms of class:

> I've got this gap in my knowledge about feminist theory that I want to actually address. I'm not sure how to address that because I can't afford to go back to uni and do women's studies, which is what I'd love to do. But I can't do that. […] And going back to my working-class background, I have got a whole literary gap anyway. So when I first went to uni, I just felt completely not good enough in any way. I hadn't got the right cultural background, and all that cultural capital stuff. And again in the feminist blogosphere, I still have that feeling sometimes. I don't feel I've got the right to speak. But I'm getting over that, I mean I'm 51, so, you know…

Class barriers to feminism were described both in financial and psychological terms (feeling out of place and without a right to speak). Repeatedly, the participant constructed feminism as being antithetical to being working-class. Although the participant herself was now heavily involved with feminist activism, she explained this as being the result of her university education and subsequent career, as well as her increasing confidence and free time with age.

The participant's experience of working-class women being excluded from feminism is significant in relation to her construction of the relationship between feminism and women of colour. To explore this, I will first look at how the participant talked about women's activism past and present.

When asked about her awareness of women's activism from the 1960s onwards, the participant began by citing Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* and Marilyn French's *The Women's Room* as 'two books that were really important to me when I was growing up'.

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She also spoke about the work of Susan Brownmiller, Andrea Dworkin and Catherine Mackinnon, whose books she had read as part of her degree. Apart from these texts, she said she was not familiar with much feminist activism until recently.

When asked how she saw race and racism fitting in with the history of feminist activism, the participant spoke of a perception that both 'second-wave' and 'third-wave' feminism were movements of white, middle-class women concerned only with their own priorities. She was aware of a (general) critique of this white and middle-class dominance, and said that she agreed with it. In both history and contemporary feminism, she said she felt that black women's voices were 'not heard'. The meaning of this phrasing is ambiguous. While it is clearly not the same as 'not speaking', the participant appeared to use the description of black women 'not being heard' to denote their exclusion from spaces where they could speak and be heard. This can be seen in the following excerpt, where the participant takes the fact that she could not 'hear' any black women as evidence that they were not 'there':

> They're just not heard in any way at all. No they're not. Because if they were, I would be able to name some, and I can't, Terese, and I'm in the feminist blogosphere, for two years now, and I can't name a single black woman. […] I suppose bell hooks, maybe. Alice Walker, although I'm not sure she is a feminist activist, although she writes great books about feminism. So no, I just don't think they're there.

The fact that the participant had been involved with the feminist blogosphere for two years and still did not know of any black feminists besides bell hooks and Alice Walker was provided as evidence that black women's voices were not *there*. This conclusion sidesteps the possibility that the participant did not know about black feminists' work because she had not looked for it. In this way her own accountability in *not hearing* their voices was evaded.

The participant's construction of black women as not part of feminist spaces can be explained, I argue, by relating it back to her sense that working-class women were excluded from feminist politics and spaces. The participant made this claim based on her assumption that if (white) working-class women are excluded from feminism, then black women were excluded even more so. This assumption was made because she believed that however bad she had it as a white working-class woman, black women/women of colour had it worse than her:

> ...I know I'm bottom of the pecking order, but a black woman is going to be below me, because being white, I have privilege that she hasn't got.

> ...the aversion I have to the narrative, the white middle-class woman narrative [of feminism], is a hundred-fold for women of colour.

In making the link between class and race oppression, the participant expressed a perception that black women/women of colour had it 'worse' than her because (implicitly) she positioned them as triply oppressed by gender, class, *and* race. However, by positioning herself as privileged in relation to black women/women of colour, and also positioning (white) working-class women as *outside* of feminism, the logical end point became that black women/women of colour were even more on the outside. The narrative she told therefore excluded women of colour from feminism almost altogether. They cannot be heard because they have been excluded from the spaces from where they can be heard. Hence, they are not there.

But this narrative does not quite hold. At a later point in the interview, when talking about feminism's attempt at becoming inclusive, the participant said (referring to a housing estate near where she grew up):

> When I think of inclusivity, I think of those women on that estate, and I think they're not saying anything, are they, Terese? A, they don't know they can say anything, b, they probably don't have the... they're probably not able to articulate it, and c, because of the discrimination they suffer in their communities, they're not allowed to speak. And I think that's the same for women of colour as well, in a way, especially working-class women of colour. We're still having the same arguments about racism now, because the women of colour who are suffering haven't got the voice. I would argue - without any evidence to back me up - that the women of colour who do enter the blogosphere are generally going to be well-educated women of colour who've been to university.

It is clear from this comment that the participant *does* know of other feminists of colour besides bell hooks and Alice Walker. In fact she made reference to feminists of colour in the blogosphere at several points in the interview (not by name). But, like herself, they were presumed to be the university educated 'exceptions'. In the main, the participant positioned working-class women and women of colour as voiceless victims. Here the argument that they are 'not heard' became rather different: it is rather that they did not speak. The suggestion that arguments about racism are circular ('having the same arguments') within feminist communities because women of colour *do not have a voice* as opposed to because they are *not being heard* by white feminists shifts attention to the

victimhood of women of colour, and away from accountability of white feminists. Women of colour are described as so oppressed – by 'their communities' as well as through class exclusion - that they are unable to articulate a critical analysis of their oppression (and class, again, is positioned as the primary indicator of exclusion/inclusion within feminist activism).

The comparison the participant made between class and race oppression was used both as a point of connection and distance between herself and women of colour. We have seen above how the participant expressed affinity with women of colour because (white) working-class women like herself and (working-class) women of colour are both marginalised by white, middle-class feminists. At the same time, the participant also expressed a feeling of uneasy distance:

> I would find it difficult to identify with a woman of colour in some ways, because her cultural background is so alien to me.

And speaking about her experience at a feminist conference and listening to the anger of a woman of colour:

> ...I didn't know how to deal with that, Terese. 'Oh god, whatever I say, I don't know what to say, because I don't know what I'm talking about. I can't presume to know what you're experience is'. So I can't say... So I'm silenced by it, actually, probably in the same way they're silenced, by that lack of understanding of each other.

The difference between white women and women of colour is solidified with reference to experience and culture. Because she will never be able to experience what it is like to be a woman of colour, the participant assumed that it is impossible for them to really understand each other. This argument, which appears to draw on a liberal discourse of multiculturalism and difference (in particular the reference to culture), creates an artificial equivalence: our experiences and cultures are different from each other, we are 'separate but equal'. When the participant suggests that she (as a white woman) felt 'silenced' in the same way as women of colour are silenced in feminism, the relationship of oppression – racism – becomes removed from the equation as if the question is only one of not being able to understand each other.

Although the participant did recognise racism as a form of oppression which people of colour experience, the difference she recognised between herself and women of colour was not articulated in terms of a power relationship, but rather as a difference of culture

and experience. In this way, the participant avoided seeing herself as implicated in the oppression of women of colour. Although she did at points speak explicitly of white privilege, this declaration was 'non-performative' (Ahmed, 2004), because it was not accompanied with an aim to undermine or challenge it. It was constructed as an inevitable barrier which feminists of colour must deal with, rather than one which white feminists should dismantle.

Overall, the participant constructed a feminist narrative of white, middle-class dominance: one which continues into the present. Her own positionality as a white, working-class woman informed this narrative – both in terms of her experience of exclusion, being an exception, and finding it difficult to speak and be heard in feminist spaces, but also (with education and age) of something like belonging. This belonging, I would argue, is forged through whiteness; once class barriers were negotiated, whiteness legitimated her. The participant's personal narrative intertwined with the hegemonic, white narrative of the feminist past - of feminism as a movement of white women. She is hailed by this whiteness, and participates in its reproduction, by asserting that women of colour are not heard within feminism, and ultimately are not 'there'. In fact, she constructed herself as less knowledgeable than she was about women of colour's feminism. Class and race interact in this constructed lack of knowledge: her class positionality made her feel unqualified and lacking in knowledge (and my presence as a white, middle-class researcher needs to be kept in view as part of this account), but simultaneously, she was able to utilise a well-rehearsed form of 'white ignorance' or 'non-knowing' (Mills, 2007) (see pp. 40-41) about people of colour's experiences, where 'not hearing' women of colour's voices was presumed to mean that they were not speaking. Ultimately, the topic of white responsibility for racism within feminism was evaded, with the logical endpoint of her argument being that it is the responsibility of women of colour to speak up and to speak loud enough to make themselves heard in order for racism within feminism to end.

Participant E (black British Caribbean, 21 years old)

This participant had become involved with feminist activism a year or so prior to the interview. She described herself as having been on a 'feminist path' since childhood, but 'just didn't know it was called feminism'. In the previous year, she had become involved with blogging and through this she found the language of Womanism and feminism.

Since starting blogging she had also become involved with a local black feminist group. I chose this interview as a case study as this participant produced a black feminist narrative which was in sharp contrast to most of the other participants (which is of course related to the white dominance in my sample). Two other participants of colour did speak in significant terms about black feminism, however the larger narrative was still framed in response to a dominant white feminism (even as it was simultaneously critiqued). This participant on the other hand – although she did speak about white feminism in response to some of my questions – in the main constructed a black feminist narrative which placed black women at the centre of women's activist history in both the UK and the US. Significantly, her connection to black feminism had been forged through intentionally seeking out information about black women's activist histories, and this is relevant for thinking about the politics of knowledge-production and reproduction within feminism in relation to race.

The participant described herself as being 'rooted' in black feminism. This rooting involved an intentionally constructed connection between herself and black feminists before her. In sharp contrast to the majority of the other participants, this participant, when talking about feminism, consistently drew links and comparisons with the past. This is clear in her discussion of why her activist group identified as 'politically black':

> So really, I guess, we just mean women of colour, not necessarily someone who's racially black. But, um... and some people have a problem with that. They'd rather not share their word, 'black'. They'd much rather we think of another name. But we didn't create it. I kind of feel like, well, what I've learnt so far, political blackness has been around since the '80s in the very least. From what I've learned, with OWAAD, et cetera, we didn't create this, it's always been here.

The fact that black feminists before her had used political blackness as an organising principle infused its contemporary usage with legitimacy and importance. Black British feminist history was constructed as central to the participant's articulation of contemporary black feminist politics. The participant further talked about the need to learn more about this history. In response to my question about women's activism in the '60s, '70s and '80s, she spoke at first primarily about US-based black feminism and civil rights history, explaining that this history was more readily available to learn online when she started reading blogs. But she also felt a 'disconnect' in terms of what she felt to be her lack of knowledge of black British feminism. She told me she was rectifying this through doing her own research into OWAAD and black feminist history. This research was

implied to be part of her activist work - as politically important to the contemporary black feminist movement she was a part of. The historical connection needed to be forged intentionally, as a form of resistance against dominant narratives. This becomes clear in the following excerpt, in which the participant reflected on why she knows more about US black politics:

> It's very easy to find stuff about America, but here, it's much harder. And that is a case of how history is preserved and how it's told and how it's not. I should know more Black British women and I have been learning things [...] I know Claudia Jones, I know Olive Morris, but by doing my own research. I probably wouldn't know them if I hadn't found out myself.

The expectation of having to look further and do your own research is connected, I would argue, to the black feminist project, as a political practice which those who are multiply marginalised actively engage in in order to find histories, narratives and knowledges which reflect their lives. At another point in the interview, when the participant talked about a feminist event she had spoken at, where a white woman had asked her where to find information about race, the participant spoke of her frustration at this oft-repeated scenario:

> There are times when I feel like I'm having the same conversation with some white feminists, and I feel like I can't fight it anymore [...] But [afterwards] I did forward her some more things, telling her where to find things about race. I feel like it's really simple. I don't want to make it feel like it's a really big effort, but when they say, like, 'I don't know where to go', I don't get it. I know exactly where to go. The Internet is quite useful.

Although the comment about the Internet points to the fact that most information is now easily available, it also relates the supposed inability to find out information for yourself to white privilege and the wilful 'white ignorance' which Mills (2007) writes about. This form of interaction is based on and reproduces an unequal relationship of the oppressed being responsible for educating the oppressor. The repetitiveness ('I feel like I'm having the same conversation') draws on both a personal-political lived experience as well as a black feminist narrative of repeated frustration in relation to white feminists. The dynamic of white feminists demanding that black feminists teach them about racism has a long history within Anglo-American feminism (as addressed by e.g. Lorde, 1984), one which the participant through her research was familiar with.

The participant primarily organised separately from white feminists, and understood this through a connection to the past. When I asked her if she had a sense that in the past there was one feminist movement or several, it was very clear to her that a separate movement (OWAAD) had been created by black women in order to not have to deal with white women's racism and ignorance within the dominant feminist movement. She went on to expand on a point we had discussed earlier in the interview: that often it feels as if history is repeating:

> And again, it rings true that the same issues that they had in the '80s is still happening in 2013. It's pretty weird that no one's saying 'hello, we're doing the same thing that's happened in the past four decades', and no one's trying to change it. But I get that, very much. But I think that in the '80s it was not any different from now. In fact in some ways I'm sure it's worse. Or I don't like to say worse, but just different. So I guess now we have more of a liberal crowd, I guess, who know what not to say around black feminists, but they don't necessarily understand it. I can definitely see there is definitely a need for ... I can understand it now, so I get why it was like that in the '80s.

White feminist racism as repetitive is a theme within black feminist narratives, and one which the participant drew on to locate her own critique, and also her political practice. She spoke of feeling privileged in relation to other black feminists before her, as she found Womanism and black feminism right at the start of her engagement with feminist communities. Therefore she was to a large extent shielded from white feminists' racism, and spoke of having only encountered it directly following Caitlin Moran's comments on Twitter (see Phillips 2012; Eddo-Lodge 2012; Nagarajan & Okolosie 2012):

> Whilst I knew there was racism in white feminism, I'd never had to experience it directly, I guess. And I hadn't seen it in my age and my time. That was the first time. And I saw all these people agreeing with her, the kind of things that they were saying about black feminism. I was like 'wow, this is really, um... interesting'. It was my first shock of 'this is how it really is in mainstream feminism and issues to do with race'. They don't want to talk about it.

The participant's 'rooting' in black feminist history led her to avoid white feminist spaces, because it had taught her of the harm which has been caused to black women in their relationships with white feminists. Paradoxically, this knowledge had shielded her from white feminist racism, so the sudden exposure to it in the contemporary context still felt shocking.

Drawing on a black feminist narrative, as well as her own lived experience, led the participant to articulate an intersectional experience of oppression. In fact, in this personal

narrative, we can see how the participant argues that she understands intersectional oppression because of her own experience:

> Growing up black in Britain, or even black, and a woman in Britain, I was very much aware of any disparities, or discrimination I would have. I didn't call it anything, but I was aware of it. So being aware of my own issues made me hyper-aware of other people's.

She went on to say that although she was able-bodied and straight, her own experience made her aware of the oppression disabled and LGBT people experienced. I would argue that it is in fact the combination of her lived experience *and* her acquired political knowledge about black feminism and intersectionality which allows her to explain the connection in this way. As the participant herself noted, when she was younger she was aware of disparities and discrimination without having the words for it: it is the black and intersectional feminist language which enabled her to draw the connections explicitly.

The centring of black women within feminist histories had a significant impact on how the participant articulated her feminist politics. Again, her grounding in black feminism played a significant role: for her, it was common sense that feminism belonged as much to her as it does to white women. Therefore it was a shock to her when, in the midst of the conflict which followed Moran's comments, the editors of *Vagenda* magazine claimed that 'feminism is, and to an extent always has been, a white, middle class movement' (Cosslett & Baxter, 2012). Discussing this article, the participant reflected:

> I'd never heard anyone tell me that feminism isn't mine because I'm black. That was the first time. Yeah it was, apart from reading about it, but people saying it, it was my first time. But [the] *Vagenda* [editors] [...] said we shouldn't care anyway, because feminism is a white, middle-class thing. [...] And I was like 'ooh, this is really...'... I think, after reading and, like, being very rooted in, particularly, black feminism, whilst it's very much more open to trying to do what's right about these spaces, talk about, like, shutting us out completely. If you could literally write that and then publish it, that means you really, really mean it.

Two conflicting narratives, which have both emerged from women who have been marginalised by a dominant 'mainstream' feminism, meet here. There is the narrative that feminism *is* a white and middle-class movement – a common critique made by those who feel excluded from it (and one partly reproduced by participant L above). But there is another narrative – a black feminist narrative which draws on a different genealogy of women's activism and theorising. It undoubtedly recognises the dominance of white, middle-class women in making claims to speak *for* feminism as a whole, but it rejects the

argument that feminism *belongs* to white, middle-class women. Having knowledge about black women's activist histories makes a statement such that feminism *is* white and middle-class nonsensical, which is what the participant reacted to. In her reading of the article, even though the writers make this comment as a critique (they are not claiming this is a good thing), the statement in itself performed the exclusion: the participant understood it as 'shutting us out completely'.

Seeking out history and knowledge which is not available in the mainstream is, I would argue, a necessary part of the process of developing a radical consciousness. In a sexist society, developing a feminist consciousness requires this intentional knowledge-seeking process, for example, as feminist perspectives on gender oppression are not readily available within mainstream culture and institutions. As both this and the previous participant attested, it was once they started reading and learning feminist theory that they started to identify as feminists. A significant difference between them was race: this participant's experience of racism and growing up black in Britain led her to look for black feminist theory, while the white participant's racialised position of dominance did not lead her to seeking information about black feminists. Yet as an active member of the feminist blogosphere, she was clearly invested in educating herself outside of the mainstream and this is when it becomes clear that her claim that she did not know anything about feminists of colour because of class barriers is exposed as more about an inability to see outside the structures of whiteness.

As a result of intentional knowledge-seeking of black women's activism – which links to black feminist practice – this participant had built a resource, an alternative well of knowledge from which to construct her feminist politics. This centred a black feminist intersectional perspective, which looks to the margins as a starting point for political action (hooks, 1984). However, from black feminist history, the participant had also learnt about the repetitiveness of white feminist racism, and this influenced her feminist politics in the present, as she refrained from participating in what she identified as 'mainstream' and 'white' feminism. So while she claimed a deep unequivocal belonging within the trajectory of black feminism, she rejected 'mainstream', 'white' feminism completely – as somewhere she would never belong.

Participant C (white British, 33 years old)

This participant identified as an anarchist feminist. I chose her interview as a case study because she was a white feminist with an informed anti-racist analysis, who spoke very strongly in favour of connecting different social justice struggles together. Yet, like many of the other participants, she also constructed the feminist past – and present – as very white, drawing on familiar popular narratives. She positioned herself as outside of organised feminist activism partly because she objected to this whiteness. The case study shows up precisely the problem which the previous participant identified when she objected to feminism being described as white and middle-class: even if you are making an anti-racist argument about the exclusion of women of colour and working-class women from the movement, it risks perpetuating the same exclusion discursively; it flattens feminism into *being* the simplified problematic white, middle-class feminism which you are objecting to. Feminists of colour and working-class women are made invisible all over again.

The participant articulated feminism as a way of living her life more than as necessarily a form of organised activism. Although she had gone to a few meetings of a local feminist group, she had stopped because she felt that it was mainly a group of people who 'read similar things, thought similar things, sitting together agreeing', which she did not find a productive use of her time:

> I felt like going to the acting group, which clashed on the same night, I was actually doing more for feminism, because it was talking to people who didn't already know everything and didn't already agree about everything, and maybe getting people to think a bit differently, and talk to their friends or whatever, rather than just still sitting, going 'oh, isn't it terrible?' and that's it.

The participant's feminist politics were located within a wider concern with oppression (capitalism, racism, imperialism, sexism and homophobia were all touched on) and spoke of her frustration with different liberation movements being too 'separatist'. She came across as someone who read widely – theory, history and fiction – and connected a lot of the discussion to books she had read. This wider concern and connection to a number of activist movements, allowed the participant access to a wider range of discourses and narratives about oppression and liberation.

A lot of our discussion was framed around discussing racism, which the participant had been 'very concerned about' in her own life from a formative age. She was knowledgeable

in particular about the US-based civil rights and Black Panther movements. She clearly saw anti-racist struggles as relevant to her life and she found it frustrating that many (implicitly white) activists did not make connections to black politics:

> I'm surprised how many people don't, with politics generally, as well, people who have quite, kind of, wanting civil rights politics, and how little they've read from black civil rights, or even heard of. Like, most people I've talked to haven't heard of Huey Newton and know anything that he said. I mean, he also talked about women's rights and gay rights as well as black rights and people don't know. If you mention the Black Panther Party, they think they went out shooting people. It just seems like it's not really of interest, because it doesn't seem, maybe, relevant to them and their lives, but it is.

She also spoke in some depth about Angela Davis' *Women, Race and Class*, in particular about the tensions Davis discusses between white women's activists and black activists in the movements for abolition of slavery and suffrage. The participant's knowledge of American civil rights history, as well as her involvement with anarchism, led her to produce a sceptical narrative about feminism. In particular she was resistant to the sense that social movements want you to toe a particular line. This again was described as a result of her involvement with several movements.

> I'll see something maybe on an anarchist website and react to it negatively as a feminist, but I equally might see something on a feminist website and react to it negatively as someone who's anti the class system. And I just think it can be very, kind of 'yeah, this is the line you have to toe in this discipline' kind of thing, rather than taking the whole picture.

The need to see 'the whole picture' was a recurring theme which resonated with the participant's articulation of a broad politics of anti-oppression and anti-violence where all different movements were understood as intricately connected.

In response to my questions about women's activist history in Britain, the participant told me she did not know much. This was not an area which she had read much about.

> My awareness is probably fairly vague. I'm aware of the Greenham Common thing, and yeah, I mean, other than there generally being protests, not really. Pressure in the media, from various female writers, and also books. I mean, I'm aware of a lot of the feminist books through that period. I haven't read most of them [laughs] but I'm aware. And I suppose people, Germaine Greer is a really obvious one, who would continually go on programmes and argue with people. But yeah, no, not really.

Despite having a clear anti-racist awareness and knowledge of black and anti-racist struggles (although more so in the US context than UK), the participant reproduced a very white-defined narrative of feminist history: without having done reading into the area, this was the story which was available to her. When I first asked her about what she was familiar with in terms of women's activism in the last fifty years, she spoke of the free love movement and the pill, although in a critical way, arguing that the narrative of free love which often is used to represent the '60s did not reflect the reality of most women's lives in the '60s and '70s:

> So I think probably people's perceptions, particularly of the '60s and '70s, are based on a very small number of people who lived in communes, like Greenham Common, or part of the hippie movement or whatever. But I don't think that was the case for the majority of people.

This concern with the gap between 'real life' and ideological activist movements was a recurring theme in the interview, which the participant brought up also in relation to her view of contemporary feminism. She described the discussions that the local feminist group had as 'very highly, kind of, intellectualised, and just not very realistic' and discussed the recent Slutwalk marches as 'naïve'.

Constructing feminism as a form of exclusive ideological dogma which alienated most 'ordinary' women, the participant distanced herself from it. This was also done through constructing white feminists as racist, in particular through a critique of the 'sexist black man' stereotype which she had heard white feminists reproduce when painting hip hop culture as sexist while ignoring 'the more subtle sexism in more predominantly white music'. She also spoke of hearing feminist friends talk about black men as more sexist than white men ('which I've questioned, obviously'). Through distancing herself from these views, the participant shored up her position as anti-racist – something I have discussed in chapter three as constructing an ethical white subject position. Simultaneously, she conflated feminism with white feminists, and constructs the feminist movement as a whole as racist.

A wider range of historical narratives was available to the participant because of her wide reading. For example, twice in the interview she related the discussion to Bernardine Evaristo's fictional book *Blonde Roots*, which she had recently read, highlighting how it had made her think more deeply about how slavery and colonialism continues to impact

contemporary culture and structures. Interestingly, at one point a direct link to her ambivalent feelings towards feminist politics was made when she discussed the book:

> A lot of things from [the book] made me think. [...] things like at the end she talks about emancipation coming but the people who'd done all these barbaric things still having the land and power and I think that's something that sits really badly with me. And yeah, it's one of the things that causes a lot of angst with me supporting feminist things where there's this thing of people being promoted and being high up in companies and being paid more money, and I don't really agree with that at all. Or, like the army argument. I support women being treated equally, but I'm not a fan of the army. It's the kind of thing where I go 'I'm not sure I want to fight for this', you know?

The participant's knowledge and openness to different forms of struggles and narratives allowed her to assess feminist arguments critically from an (implicitly) intersectional perspective. However, at the same time she constructs a hegemonic, dominant form of feminism as the whole of what feminism is, and thus produces an overly negative and homogeneous picture of it. Although familiar with the work of Angela Davis and clearly interested in work which connects gender and race, the participant did not draw upon any coherent black feminist narrative and in fact did not mention black feminism at all (she did not position Davis as a black feminist, but rather as part of US black politics in a way which constructed black politics and feminism as separate). Drawing on (largely-US based) anti-racist history and writing, the participant could clearly identify the whiteness of the contemporary feminist movement, and had an anti-racist critique of it. This is a critique which comes largely from the work of black feminists, yet they were absent from her narrative of feminism.

Perhaps in exactly the way that participant E above objected to, this participant presented her critique by saying that feminism *is* exclusive, *is* white and middle-class. Constructing it in this way without drawing on any alternative anti-racist feminist histories arguably reproduced the exclusion and whiteness – as if there were no alternative narratives of feminism. Paradoxically, it also negated her own position as an anti-racist, white feminist (although she uneasily resolved this by positioning herself outside of organised feminist communities). Having limited knowledge of the specific histories of feminist activism in Britain, the participant repeated some of the popular white-defined narratives of women's liberation. Although she was critical of this version of feminist politics, she simultaneously reproduced it as a true representation of feminism. This led her to construct a flattened

version of feminist politics, at the expense of seeing feminism as multiple and diverse, with many different constituents and approaches.

Participant I (British of Indian origin, 47)

This participant had recently completed a postgraduate degree in gender studies. She had started becoming aware of women's issues in her thirties and began the degree at a point in her life when she was looking for a new career and challenge. At the beginning of our conversation, she described taking the course as 'a life-changing experience'. I chose her as a case study because she described a complex navigation and negotiation of her own belonging within feminism, which illuminates complex race and class dynamics inflected by empire and (post)colonialism. Simultaneously highlighting and downplaying racism within feminism, the participant constructed a narrative of increasing inclusivity, where the feminist past was represented as white, but where the present was described as multicultural and accepting of difference – although not without its continuing problems. The fact that she constructed British feminism as only recently including women of colour emphasised the sense that the participant felt her own belonging within feminism to be conditional - the result of her own effort to assert herself in the feminist classroom and to demonstrate that she was 'no different' from white feminists. This process, I argue, was facilitated in part by her ability to mobilise a middle-class positionality through which she could minimise her experiences of racism.

As a British Asian, middle-class migrant from India, the participant said she felt accepted and included on her course (all the lecturers and the other British students were white but there were international students of colour). Yet her account demonstrated how that inclusion required effort to be maintained. For example, when I asked if there had ever been any tensions around race and racism in the classroom, she reflected:

> The east Asian women, I think there is a... some of them are disadvantaged where they're not comfortable speaking English, and it's possible maybe sometimes they don't say things because they just... [...] There was one who speaks fairly clear English. She would participate somewhat, but the others didn't actually participate so much in the conversation, so it's difficult to say what was going on in their minds. For myself, no, I've usually been alright and if I felt at any time that 'this doesn't apply to India' or something, then I've always said it, and that's been fine.

As in other parts of the interview, the participant emphasised a positive interpretation and related this to her own agency and effort: if she felt uncomfortable about anything in the classroom, she felt empowered to speak up and be heard. The fact that most of the east Asian international students did not speak much in class was attributed to their lack of English-speaking skills, thereby the onus lay on them rather than the lecturer or other students to include them better. At the same time, she expressed frustration that many contemporary feminist texts, while more attentive to race and class than earlier (white) feminism, homogenised ethnicity:

> People are a lot more conscious about, if nothing else, race and class issues and that, in more recent readings, I think that comes across more. But not necessarily all the time. […] It's a big issue for me is that if an ethnic group is just considered as one whole group. And that… I can see so many differences between… So that's still problematic. But I appreciate that, you know, it's quite difficult to, as an outsider, to appreciate that. I mean, when I first came to England, frankly, to me, anybody who was white, I wouldn't have been able to tell if he was a Lord or a middle-class or a working-class or even from Scandinavia or England. And today I can tell. So you can't… that awareness has to come from somewhere, and some of us, I suppose, make an effort. I make more of an effort to have that.

It was the participant's own effort which ensured her inclusion and belonging (in this case, within British society), while white British people were not expected to make the same effort to understand the nuances of ethnicity and identity. When we discussed awareness around race and difference within feminism, she recognised that there was a problem, but at the same time emphasised that in her department, she had seen 'a lot of awareness of that'.

In her discussion of the feminist past, the participant drew upon a predominantly white Anglo-American feminist narrative, but she also questioned it and appeared conflicted about it. When I asked her about what she was familiar with in terms of women's activist history in Britain, she responded with a number of familiar references:

> Before I started the course I didn't know anything. But since doing the course, I'm familiar now with the Greenham Common activism […] I've come across lots of references to it, so I feel that 'yeah, that's something I know about'. Of course, second wave feminism as such – equal pay, equal rights and marches and protests, going back to the Suffragettes, of course, I know a bit about that.

When I asked her if she had a sense that there was one unified movement or several women's movements over the past 50 years in Britain, she responded that she saw it as one unified movement, and that it was made up of white women:

> I do think it was something just to do with white women, though. I certainly didn't think of it. But, you know, it's funny, you think of it like that, but you also think of it as universal at the same time, you know, because you're so used to [it].

She went on to relate this to some more formative experiences:

> When I was growing up in India, and it's still very… colonialism is still very much there. And you don't actually think that you're absent from the discourses you're reading. You just take what is written by westerners and you just don't… If I was a sociology student, I might have thought about it. But as an ordinary lay person, you just don't think about that you're actually absent from the discourse. And you think it's a universal discourse and it actually isn't.

This excerpt highlights the discursive violence of colonialism – the impossible mental convolutions the coloniser demands of the colonised. It is significant that she related this experience directly to how she saw feminism: feminism, in her experience, also demanded that she see whiteness as universal. She could only claim the history of British feminism as being also her history if she was able to subsume herself within the universal. Again, she spoke of the need for constant negotiation; she carefully negotiated this sense of both belonging and not – of being part of the universal as well as constructed as 'other' - both within feminism and society generally.

At another point in the interview, we discussed further whether feminism was a white or multicultural movement, at which point she reflected:

> A lot of literature says it was white, middle-class women [in the past], and I think it certainly was. It started there because they were the women who were feeling that oppression at home, whereas that may not have been the case for a lot of other women, like the literature says, and I agree with that. But certainly other women have come in, and their voices are being heard now. So as for myself, I don't feel that I'm heard less than anybody else. […] I certainly never felt different.

The participant drew on the narrative of increasing diversity within feminism, which positions white, middle-class women as the originators of feminism, and women of colour as having joined later (Nadeau, 2009). The reason which the participant gave as to why this happened is ambiguous – it is unclear whether she meant that other women did not feel oppressed in the home, or whether their attention was diverted from that oppression because they were more acutely oppressed outside the home. But either way, women of colour and working-class women are constructed in this narrative as more recent arrivals to feminism. Her comment that she 'never felt different' speaks to how class privilege facilitates belonging.

Despite the presumed universal whiteness among earlier feminists, the participant emphasised the need to appreciate what they achieved. Talking about writing her dissertation, she said:

> I thought 'I've got to be really careful'. I can criticise earlier studies […], because they didn't look at this, they didn't…. But that is why… I'm here because of that. So I've got to make sure that I have a sense of appreciation as well as being critical and all that.

Here she positioned herself as part of the feminist lineage which she draws upon, as having directly benefited from what white British feminists fought for in earlier times, which I would again suggest was facilitated by her class identification and acceptance within the academy. With feminism now multi-racial and on the whole constructed as inclusive, she positioned herself as part of contemporary feminism. Yet, her own position in a movement which she constructed as historically white, became itself somewhat precarious through this construction. The effort she made to belong in the feminist classroom highlights that, as a British Asian woman (differently positioned from the international Asian students), her claim to belong was understood as a recent phenomenon.

In discussing the relationship between feminism and racism, the participant explained how she felt that feminism has both challenged and reproduced racism:

> I think feminism has been useful in reducing racism. I think as part of its own effort to see women as equal, the issue of race came up. And I think that it has generally played a role in the whole issue of race so that way I think it has contributed to the awareness of race and generally [the] reduction in racism. And I'm saying that because it's not fully gone. But again, does it play a part in it not being gone? Yes, I think even there it plays a part, because sometimes you don't even realise you're being racist or colonialist or anything, because that's part of you, the way you were brought up. And you don't realise it.

If I am understanding this correctly (and the meaning feels somewhat ambiguous), the participant suggests that (white) feminists, though not expressly concerned with race, have been forced to consider race when calling for equality, because it is not possible to gain 'true' equality without an intersectional lens on women's rights. In this framing, feminists are not only white – implicitly the participant recognised the work that feminists of colour have done to call attention to the intersection of race and gender within feminist politics.

At the same time, the participant argued that racism within feminism was inevitable due to everyday racism being so ingrained within postcolonial British culture. Through her use of a universal 'you', she did not appear to distinguish between herself (and other people of colour) and white people in reproducing racism. Again, a negotiation was happening here, which both recognised the racism which is reproduced within feminist politics and spaces, yet explained this as something which cannot be helped, and which people of colour also reproduce.

Yet, when I asked her what kind of things she would like to learn more about in relation to feminist theory, the participant spoke about a desire to learn more about Indian and Third World feminism:

> I think I would like to know more about the Third World, the early Third World feminists, and how, and a lot of feminism in India I really don't know much about. […] And there I get stuck a bit, because obviously the literature from, say, India, is not so easily available or referenced, or it's not there. Certainly, it doesn't feature as much on the […] reading lists […] So that I have to do myself.

Here, the participant pointed to her awareness and interest in other areas of feminist knowledge production which were not included on her course. Yet the lack of literature from outside western feminist theory was not framed as an accusation against the course convenors, but rather another inevitability, and one which could only be rectified if she put in her own effort and time outside the course.

The participant's reluctance to speak of deliberate exclusions or racism within feminism points further to the balancing act she maintained to be included within white-dominated feminism. At several points, she addressed this need to 'be careful' explicitly. For example, she told me an anecdote of a friend who she felt saw racism in an incident where she suggested there was none ('we' refers to the participant and her partner):

> We just found it really difficult to go along with his explanation. We would think that, actually, he's reading too much into it. So that way I feel I've got to be careful, because my own experience has not been of that. I don't want to unnecessarily create a situation where I'm going to, yeah, introduce problems where there aren't any.

She explained that prior to her postgraduate studies, she had not thought a lot about difference, including racism: 'In fact, I was more conscious of difference after reading all about it'. She again emphasised a need to be careful not to read too much into everyday

encounters. Her comment in response to my question whether she felt that the course had taught enough about race and anti-racism, elaborated *why* she felt the need to be careful:

> Yes, to me, I think, like I said, there was enough knowledge and because beyond a point, I've got to make sure that I can, you know... I don't want it to overpower me, as well. So I think there was enough there, yeah.

While earlier she had described her friend as seeing racism where none existed, here the risk of recognising racism is explicitly invoked. Here it becomes clear that the participant deliberately employs a strategy of minimising racism to avoid it overwhelming her. As Ahmed notes, people of colour within institutionally white spaces often make strategic decisions to avoid pointing out and critiquing racism: 'Not speaking about racism can be a way of inhabiting the spaces of racism' (Ahmed, 2011: 124). This survival strategy sheds some light also on the participant's construction of feminism (past and present): earlier white British feminists, she implied, were only racist by omission, and contemporary white feminists have on the whole become race-aware and accepting of difference. There was a constant balancing act between 'seeing' and 'not seeing' racism.

The participant's ability to draw on a white-defined narrative of British women's activism, which tells a story of increasing racial and ethnic diversity, enabled her to make room for herself within the contemporary feminist classroom. She emphasised her own (and implicitly other racialised women's) agency and effort as key to her belonging within feminism, and simultaneously downplayed the racism of white feminists. My own position as a white feminist researcher must also be accounted for in this conversation, as the participant may have used the same strategy with me. Not only am I a white feminist, but I was also asking her to point to racism within feminism, when this was clearly not something which she was keen to do. Avoiding acknowledgement of insidious forms of racism, as she reflected, was deployed as a deliberate strategy to avoid becoming overwhelmed, and one which enabled her to claim her inclusion within white-dominated feminist spaces.

Participant N (white, 28 years old)

This participant had studied sociology at university, including a number of modules based on feminist theory and history. I chose her as a case study because she very confidently reproduced a particular white liberal narrative as *the* universal story of British feminism.

This universalising manoeuvre is one frequently reproduced within – and thus legitimated by – liberal pro-feminist media, such as those I have analysed in chapters four and five. It is one which refuses to consider race as important within feminist politics – as something which is only relevant for women of colour – and thus one which erases feminists of colour's activism and theory. Analysing how this logic is produced by this participant reveals the assumptions and mental convolutions she must make in order to produce a coherent narrative of feminism. Deploying what Moreton-Robinson (2000) calls the 'middle-class, white woman subject position' who does not reflect on her own positionality while expounding on racial 'others', the participant repeatedly made deeply problematic statements while maintaining an attachment to white feminist moral goodness, with feminism constructed as just about 'supporting other women'.

The participant identified strongly as a feminist, although made a distinction between 'active' and 'passive' feminists, describing herself as the latter, because, she was 'more likely to be an activist on issues that will have quick turnarounds and quick responses rather than slow turnarounds and slow responses'. Thus she would respond to some calls for action (such as signing a petition), but was not engaged in ongoing organising. In fact, she described issues that did not get immediate attention and change as 'a waste of time' (at least of *her* time). This framing of what kind of activism is useful in achieving change draws upon a history of political protest associated with public appeals to the state: one closely aligned with a liberal (but in many ways conservative) white feminism, as I will discuss.

The participant described herself as coming from a family 'with a real emphasis on academic learning' and 'quite an equal household'. She had read both *The Second Sex* and *The Female Eunuch* before the age of 18, as well as a number of biographies of feminists such as Germaine Greer and Sylvia Pankhurst. She explained how after reading Pankhurst's autobiography:

> I really got interested in the history of Suffragettes, that became a real interest-point for about a year, and it still has. And if anything, I sort of escape other eras and I become very modern, or I go to the beginning of feminist history.

Her comment about the Suffragettes as representing 'the beginning of feminist history' is consistent with the white liberal Anglo-American narrative, which starts with the suffrage movement and its appeal to the state for full citizenship. The participant reiterated this

narrative as the definitive story of feminism and women's rights, as can be seen in her response to my question about what feminism meant to her:

> ...probably the same thing it means to every woman who decides she's a feminist, you know? Your experiences of women being treated equally have only been relevant for the last hundred years, since the beginning of the 1900s, that beginning. So we've got a long more way to go, and it's not finished.

This narrative of women's equal rights having begun to be established with voting rights in the beginning of the 1900s drew again on the same popular narrative, and the participant constructed this story as universal, with the assumption that 'every woman' sees feminism this way. The fact that the history of the British women's suffrage movement have well-documented racist and imperial dimensions was not acknowledged (e.g Burton, 1994).

As evident in the above excerpt, the participant equated equal treatment with legal rights provided by the state. The story she drew upon defined women's rights in terms of public and political 'equality'. She was deeply invested in this version of feminist politics – stating that she was more interested in 'public equality' than 'private equality' like 'family dynamics'. Her political outlook might be described as a 'power feminism', reminiscent of that articulated in *The New Feminism* (Walter, 1999). Like Walter, for example, the participant praised Margaret Thatcher, saying that for her, 'the most important thing was - whether [or not] you liked her policies [...], as an individual woman, she was the first female Prime Minister, under a Conservative government, which you would never expect'. At another point, when we were talking about feminist history, she reflected on the fact that to her (and, she guessed, to most people), the women who come to mind in terms of having 'advanced women's position' in the world, were not likely to be those that identified or were identified as feminists. In particular she named Marie Curie, Margaret Thatcher, Oprah Winfrey, Cherie Booth, Indira Gandhi and Shirley Williams.

When I asked her about her familiarity with women's activism in the '60s, '70s and '80s, the participant associated the '60s with the sexual revolution and free love, and the '70s with struggles for women's rights in the workplace. She followed this with quite a conflicted description of feminism in the '80s, saying that mostly people associate it with AIDS and 'sexual health scares', then proceeding:

> But I think the '80s is a period that's actually been forgotten, apart from when you think of, you know, women going supposedly power dressing, and things like that

> [...] And I don't think that's real [...] this idea of power dressing, and with power dressing, you get more power in the workplace... is a kind of romantic vision of... all of a sudden women were progressing into jobs that they... that they weren't. So, you know, um... you know, there were like two recessions in the '80s [...] there just weren't jobs available. So this whole... that's the only thing I get from the '80s. I think the rest of '80s feminism is, sort of, ignored and it just never really, it just doesn't exist.

As with the 1970s, the association here is with the workplace, and the idea of 'power dressing', which draws on a popular cultural representation of powerful women in the 1980s. But there is also an interesting mix of claims here – particularly that ''80s feminism' is both 'ignored' and 'doesn't exist'. These contradictory claims rest on the continued construction of feminism being equated with politically and publicly powerful women. As the participant points out, the popular representation of women going 'power dressing' is a romanticised version of the 1980s which does not reflect the reality of women's employment at this time. Yet this association of feminism with political and public power makes other forms of feminist politics invisible to the participant, including, of course, women of colour-led feminist activism.

In fact, the narrative of feminism as a story of publicly powerful women was articulated with many problematic implications in terms of race. For one, the participant appeared very confident in this story and in her own articulation of it as definitive. I would argue this is an inherent part of this form of white liberal feminist politics. For example, when I asked her whether she identified as a feminist, the participant asserted that she did and that she gets 'quite angry at people who don't':

> I get quite annoyed at people who do [identify as feminist] but aren't willing to say it, or don't, because of something really pointless, or something they kind of don't like, or they misinterpreted what it means to be a feminist, or... you know. [...] I don't think people want to be identified as a feminist because they think it means that they have to be some giant label, or they have to be quite aggressive. And I try to say to people that it's not about that, it's about... being proud of supporting females, you know.

In this excerpt, the participant draws on a familiar trope within feminist discourse, of feminists being stereotyped and misunderstood. Women who buy into this stereotyping are dismissed, their reasons being 'something really pointless' – and admonished for not seeing the bigger picture, which is just about supporting women. Alternative critiques of feminism – significantly, that dominant white and middle-class feminists have excluded other women – are erased. It reproduces a white discourse of feminist innocence, which

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argues that feminists are unfairly victimised and labelled, but they are not themselves implicated in the victimising and labelling of 'other' women (this is something which I discussed in my analysis of the *Guardian* discourse).

Although the participant mentioned 'black feminism' as one of many strands of feminism she had studied on one of her modules, it was clear that she had not seen this as relevant to her own feminist politics, and that she had chosen not to learn anything further about it. Her reasoning for this was clarified when she constructed a distinction between what she felt were 'core' issues within feminism and those which were not. The number of women in positions of power, for example, were described as core issues; as central to the feminist project. On the other hand, the participant explicitly named race as an issue which was not of interest to her because it was not one that she identified with: 'I think the ones that I identify with are important to me. So I don't tend to look at... um, things to do with, like, race, but I do tend to have a look at things related to, like, power ratios'. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, this constructs race as something which has nothing to do with white people, which Moreton-Robinson notes in relation to the middle-class, white feminist subject position: race is perceived as belonging to the 'other', while whiteness as a racial identity is denied (Moreton-Robinson, 2000, 131).

The fact that the participant did not feel race was relevant to herself became particularly clear when I asked her whether she was familiar with any debates about racism within feminist communities:

> Yeah I'm familiar with, yeah, different concepts, and I... went out with an African, so I'm aware of people's opinions on, you know, like, African opinions, and which is really interesting, because when you come over to the UK, then there's a cultural dynamic between what one person sees and what other people do. Online, I'm aware, but I don't really think it gets talked about a lot. And I think that's because there's... I don't know if it's mostly white women campaigning for feminism, or the... communities aren't Caucasian aren't contributing? [...] So I just don't think it's talked about, sort of, in feminist networks a lot, but I think there is a lot to talk about within the... within, sort of, non-feminist communities, you know black women would talk about it, but even if they did label themselves feminist, they wouldn't engage in it. So I think it's an engagement problem really.

She went on to say that racism in feminism is 'quite a silent topic, not because it's un-PC, but because of a lack of engagement' on the part of women of colour.

The participant's confidence in her own knowledge is telling. Despite appearing to know very little about black feminism and women of colour's feminist theory and activism, the

participant immediately positioned herself as knowledgeable about the subject of racism in feminism. Her appropriation of an 'African' partner to claim that she understands 'African opinions' is particularly disturbing for its dehumanising and homogenising framing. She assumed that when I asked about 'racism', I was asking her to talk about black people, rather than white people. At one point she admitted that she did not know 'if it's mostly white women campaigning for feminism', but rather than be guided by her own uncertainty, the participant then proceeded with this assumption as if it was a fact and concluded that women of colour were not engaged with feminism.

It is her confidence in her own knowledge which I would argue is most problematic here, and it is a confidence which has been instilled in her from a hegemonic white, middle-class liberal feminism which positions her as the central subject. Unlike any of the above participants, she appeared to never have questioned her own belonging within this movement.

When I asked the participant further about the debates online which she had made reference to, she admitted that she had not in fact read them. She justified this as follows:

> I don't tend to read it, because it seems to be just... It's not made alive, it's... it's just got no kick to it that... It doesn't interest me, you know? Even if it was, you know, my mum's background is she's, my mum's Irish, and I've gone out with, you know, people from other countries [...] but even if I was reading up about Irish feminists, I probably wouldn't be interested. Or white feminists, the notion of being white and female, because I just don't think there's enough debate, or not enough's being, you know, there's no kick to it. [...] I like reading things where there's, not an aggressive element, but there's a sort of, an action point, or it's gonna go somewhere, something's gonna be done about it. And I just don't think, until you have the community on your side, really pushing for it, these sort of essays and these debates and these conversations are, kind of, like, dead.

Rather than question her own privilege, the participant blamed her lack of interest in debates around race on people of colour – because women of colour were not in her view 'really pushing' for any change or action. To her, such debates were therefore (in her earlier words) a waste of time. This relates back to her understanding of what constituted feminist activism proper. Aligned with and nourished by a white liberal feminist history of white women demanding inclusion in the state, the participant dismissed the importance of other forms of feminist work – significantly that which interrogates and aims to transform power in more fundamental and complex ways. The forceful language of this

form of discussion being 'dead' and without an 'aggressive element' was a powerful dismissal of anything which did not fit her worldview – a demonstration of entitlement.

As someone so un-interested in race, it might seem odd that the participant had volunteered to take part in the project in the first place. When I asked her why she had responded to my call, she explained that she liked to help students with their research and that she liked 'the idea of contributing to something' other than 'writ[ing] on a forum where my words are gonna be forgotten'. The fact that my project was about feminism and race appeared coincidental to her, and she never brought up race without me specifically asking. At the same time, while many of the white participants expressed concern that they did not know enough about the topic, this participant clearly did not feel this way. To her it appeared self-evident that the information she provided to me would be useful, as she assumed that she did understand the dynamics of race within feminism.

Immersed in the discourse of a white, liberal feminism which centres white, middle-class women, the participant spoke as a rightful owner of feminism, with an all-seeing eye of how it operates and what it should mean. My questions did not appear to penetrate this certainty. This confidence is, I would argue, one which white, liberal feminism inspires and encourages for those who can fit its mould. And the colour of that mould is clearly reproduced in the participant's construction of feminism: according to her, women of colour simply did not engage with feminism as they should. The feminist stories which she was familiar with and drew inspiration from did not recognise black feminist histories or power inequalities between women, so they were not on her radar. Interested only in 'public equality', she also appeared to hear only those 'public' narratives of feminism which have been legitimated within the hegemonic public sphere. In this universalised account of feminism, it is presumed that all women require the same form of equality. In the participant's view, white women have paved the way for all women, and women of colour just need to follow their lead to claim full equality. As with the public narrative of liberal feminism which she draws on, the racism of white feminists is completely erased, as is the imperial underpinnings of the history of white women's rights in Britain. In the words of Amos and Parmar over a quarter of a century ago: 'white women have condemned Black women for not engaging in the struggles they have identified as important – the colonial heritage marches on' (Amos & Parmar, 1984: 4).

Conclusion

Looking at how each of these five participants constructed stories of feminism's past and present highlights a telling recurrence: although there were significant differences in each of their political perspectives and personal trajectories in relation to feminism, four out of five of the participants – including those with an anti-racist perspective – over-determined and overstated whiteness as a numerical fact within histories of women's activism. The common sense conclusion made by these participants was that most (if not all) women involved in activism in Britain in the last fifty years have been white. This, I would argue, comes from the dominant construction of (feminist) political activism in particular white-defined ways, drawing on hegemonic narratives from white feminist theory, activism, public culture and media.

As participant E's case study shows, to produce a different narrative of women's history which centres black women, an intentional process of knowledge-seeking is required. Otherwise the same narrative becomes reproduced, even if one is critical of it. To state the obvious, whiteness is a barrier to the reproduction of black feminist narratives - and whiteness is a structure which impacts on everyone - being a person of colour does not necessarily give one access to marginalised narratives, as participant I demonstrates. Finding out about black women's activism, black feminism, and feminists of colour, is something generally done only after politicisation in a women-of-colour-affirming space.

Comparing the three white participants, it is significant to note that even though they had very different perspectives on the relationship between feminism and race (from a power-evasive position of feeling unqualified to speak of it, to an anti-racist position which dismissed organised feminism as racist, to a white, middle-class subject position which denied race was even relevant), very similar narratives of feminist history were reproduced. In different ways, these three participants all also position themselves as outside of racist relations within feminism – participant L by foregrounding her class marginality, C by deploying her own anti-racist perspective to construct an ethical white subject position from which to speak, and N by seeming unaware of its existence. As such, their own complicity in maintaining racist structures within feminism was evaded.

Belonging is a key theme across the case studies, and it is clear that those who are structurally marginalised perform much more extensive work in order to belong and be accepted, while for others it comes as a given. Racial identity was a significant factor in

shaping experiences of belonging within feminism, but these were also deeply inflected by class and divergent perspectives on political struggle (i.e. anarchism versus liberal reformism). How each participant understood her relationship to feminist politics had a significant impact on how she then constructed and made sense of the relationship between feminism and race. The case studies provide insight into a range of different strategies which differently positioned feminist-identified women deploy to negotiate race and racism within contemporary feminism. They highlight the significant role whiteness continues to play in structuring the narratives which are so key in the reproduction of feminist knowledge.

10. Conclusion

Summary of the research

This thesis asked what narratives and representations of 'the feminist past' are drawn upon and constructed in white-dominated forms of contemporary British feminist discourse. In particular, it centred questions about race in relation to these stories: how and where are issues of race and racism located within these narratives? How and in what way are feminists of colour visible? How does whiteness structure representations of the feminist past? Furthermore, the thesis asked how the relationship between feminism, race and racism is constructed within these discourses more broadly – what kind of analyses are presented? Drawing the answers to these first two questions together, a third question asked about the relationship between them: How do particular narratives and representations of the feminist past enable, legitimate, and/or foreclose understandings of feminism and race in the present?

To answer these questions, I undertook a qualitative study of popular, academic and activist feminist texts (written by white feminists), as well as newspaper articles about feminism in *The Guardian* and *The Observer*, all of which have played a role in shaping contemporary debates about British feminism. I also interviewed feminist activists and students of women's and gender studies courses in order to gain insight into everyday discussions about feminism and race in activist and academic spaces. I traced the dominant narratives told within and across the texts and by the interview participants as a way of unearthing understandings and assumptions about the relationship between feminism, race, racism and whiteness in the present.

My methodological approach was informed by insights from the broad area of narrative research and what I refer to as feminist historiography. It attends to the deeply political nature of telling feminist histories and argues that telling stories about the past is a social practice which should be analysed for what it tells us about the present. Importantly, such an approach requires attention also to what is missing from narratives of the past. Making use of Hemmings' (2011) methodology of 'feminist recitation' as a way to approach feminist stories, I drew in histories of black, women of colour's and anti-racist feminist work in my reading, inserting this work into the narratives of the past where I felt it was

missing. This form of feminist recitation enabled an analysis of how race and whiteness structured many of the narratives which I analysed.

In answer to my first question, I found that most of the texts centred an overwhelmingly white story of the British feminist past in which women of colour's theory and activism was marginalized or erased altogether. Where black feminism or feminisms of colour were visible in these narratives, this was usually positioned as a response to unintentional exclusions or 'ethnocentrism' of early white feminists. Often, there was a lack of any in-depth historical details of feminism, but a 'general' white feminist legacy was constructed and presumed to be universal.

The universalising of a white feminist history is most stark in the three popular feminist books I analysed in chapter four. Here, black feminism and women of colour's activism more broadly is erased altogether. The books in different ways all established a relationship between the feminist past and their version of contemporary feminist politics. Walter and Levenson both deride what they construct as a 'political correctness' and overly personal politics of the feminist past, in order to argue that contemporary feminists can wear and do what they want. Moran on the other hand wants to reclaim what she describes as the radicalism of the feminist past, and for modern women to become 'strident feminists'. Although they place different value in it, the feminist past which they construct is remarkably similar, presenting a popular culture-informed simplistic version of white 'women's liberationists' of the 1970s (and in Walter's case, a radical peace-loving and power-averse version of 1980s Greenham women) to represent the entirety of feminist history in Britain over the last fifty years.

Similar reference points are dotted through the feminist discourse of *The Guardian* and *The Observer*. Germaine Greer, Sheila Rowbotham and Lynne Segal are the most prominent figures associated with the feminist past – in particular in the earlier years of my sample, and references to *Spare Rib*, WLM marches and conferences, Greenham Common, *The Female Eunuch*, dungarees and bra-burning are used as short-hand to allude to a universal feminist past. This past is constructed as an important legacy for an emerging new feminist movement. As articles from 2006-7 onwards focus more on tracking the rise of a new, young movement, the continuity of concerns, struggles and priorities with the movement of the 1970s is repeatedly emphasised, with young activists

described as drawing inspiration from what came before. Again, a white, simplistic version of the WLM represents this 'before'.

The work of feminists of colour is slightly more visible in the narratives of the feminist past presented in the three academic texts. Yet the stories which each of them tell are still structured by whiteness in problematic ways. In two of the texts, white women are constructed as the originators of feminist thought and activism, and women of colour enter the narrative at the point when a critique of ethnocentrism is made. The entrance of women of colour pin-points a moment when white feminists become aware of race and difference. These moments are narrated as marking a shift after which feminism as a whole is anti-racist, yet this is only asserted rather than evidenced, and white feminist theory continues to be centred also after this moment. In the third text (Fraser's), women of colour are included from the beginning. Yet this narrative uses women of colour's presence to claim that anti-racism has always been integral to second wave feminism, thus erasing white feminist racism.

In the two activist feminist books which are the focus of chapter seven, the same familiar white genealogy of British feminism, associated heavily with the 1970s WLM – particularly in Redfern and Aune – is presented.

The majority of the interview participants did not have in-depth knowledge about the feminist past beyond culturally familiar figures and stereotypes of 1970s feminism. Participants constructed their accounts of women's activism in Britain in relation to social changes related to work and reproductive rights, to the WLM, the peace movement, 'free love' and Greenham Common – all predominantly white stories. Fourteen of the nineteen participants were white, and only three of the participants – all women of colour – constructed a narrative of the feminist past which included black feminists and feminists of colour. In only one account was black *British* feminism part of the narrative. As the interview participants were all in different ways deeply invested in feminist theory and/or activism, their lack of knowledge of the history of women of colour's activism and scholarship in Britain attests to how marginalised these histories have been within popular, academic and activist narratives of the feminist past.

In answering the second question, I found that there was significant diversity in the ways in which the different texts and interview participants theorised the relationship between feminism, race and racism. In analysing these articulations, I develop my argument (related

to the third question) about the relationship between the stories which people tell about the feminist past, and their race politics more broadly.

Because they erase black feminist and women of colour's scholarship entirely, the popular feminist books are able to reproduce the same white, middle-class, imperial feminism which has been so extensively critiqued for the harm it inflicts on women of colour. Not only do they continue to centre white, middle-class women by framing feminism around the goal of 'equality' with men without questioning how race and class complicate this notion, but more insidiously, these texts construct women of colour as the other of white women (particularly non-western women), one second implying that women of colour are included in their generic 'woman', the next making clear that they are not. Severely limited by their white feminist frames of reference, these texts produce feminist politics which are not only irrelevant to women of colour (and other marginalised women), but which also continue to do harm: arguing that women should claim power alongside (white, powerful) men without critiquing the racist and classist basis of that power, the texts promote the type of imperial 'power feminism' which is frequently invoked in public discourse to position white, western 'liberated' women in opposition to the oppressed, othered, non-western woman of colour.

In the *Guardian* and *Observer* discourse, the erasure of women of colour from the history of British feminism collides with the more recent representations of contemporary feminism as diverse and multicultural. Constructing this diversity as a recent phenomenon without providing any historical context of women of colour's struggles to challenge white feminist racism leads to a power-evasive representation of British feminism. In this version, feminists are united in common cause against gender-based oppression. Feminism is presented as an innocent discourse (often unfairly victimised by outside forces), and its adherents are constructed as selfless, altruistic campaigners guided by strong moral convictions to help other women. Social differences between feminists (such as race and class) are mainly ignored, but even where they are highlighted as potential barriers, privileged feminists are constructed as innocent and as doing their best to remove barriers which are not of their own making. Activist communities are thus represented as operating a politics of inclusion, where white and generally privileged women are positioned at the centre, attempting to invite 'others' in. Power differences between feminists are erased in

this formulation of contemporary feminist politics, and whiteness remains a central unacknowledged structure.

By marking a moment after which white/western feminists are race-aware, the academic texts position themselves as knowledgeable about race. However, by situating racism (or 'ethnocentrism', or inattentiveness to difference) as something which belongs in feminism's past, the texts become incapable of attending to racism within feminism in the present. This continues the power-evasive trend of the popular feminist discourse. Although the extent to which each text attends to race and engages with scholarship by women of colour varies considerably, none of them fully takes on board the critique of white feminist racism and dominance, and thus whiteness is never fully interrogated. Lacking an attention to power dynamics between white feminists and feminists of colour, the referencing and partial inclusion of the work of feminists of colour is instrumental: rather than drawing on this work to interrogate the whiteness of feminist theory, it is appropriated to legitimate feminist political perspectives which still centre white feminist theory as holding the keys to the future of feminism.

As with the *Guardian* and *Observer* discourse, the two activist books' representation of contemporary feminism as racially diverse stands in contrast to their narratives of a white feminist past. This increasing multiculturalism is presented as a case of 'expanding diversity' (Nadeau, 2009) which fails to account for the anti-racist struggles which feminists of colour led to get white feminists to listen and change their behaviour. The foundational white structure is never challenged in this story, as it continues to be told from the white point of view, where feminist activism has simply and without internal power struggles expanded to become more inclusive.

The interview participants articulated a range of different perspectives on the relationship between feminism and race, but again correlations can be made between these articulations and the participants' understandings of the feminist past. The majority of the white participants – none of whom exhibited any significant knowledge of histories of feminisms of colour – struggled to articulate an anti-racist feminist perspective. Some simply reproduced problematic and exclusionary white feminist politics. When asked to account for race, they relegated this topic as only relevant for people of colour. Others were more anxious about racism and recognised their white privilege, but without the knowledge of histories of anti-racist feminist organising, they were left without the tools

to transform their guilt and anxiety into anti-racist action, or were trying to do so in ways which reproduce whiteness – such as seeing anti-racism as a form of self-development. Only one white participant confidently articulated an anti-racist perspective. Although she did so without knowledge of black British feminist histories, her politics were informed by black and anti-racist scholarship from the US. However, because a lot of this scholarship (with the exception of Angela Davis) was not significantly connected to feminism, her anti-racist perspective led her to dismiss feminism (past and present) as white and middle-class, distancing herself from it. Knowledge of black feminism and the work of feminists of colour in the UK may have led her to construct a less white and more complex picture of British feminism, where there is space for anti-racism.

Two interviewees of colour were also largely unfamiliar with histories of feminists of colour. One (discussed as a case study) simultaneously highlighted racism and ignorance of white feminists and minimised the existence of racism within feminism, arguing that contemporary feminist spaces were not racist, and generally inclusive of women of colour. However, the white feminist history she constructed led to her own belonging within feminism being understood as somewhat conditional – a belonging she needed to work to maintain. The other three participants of colour were much more familiar with feminisms of colour, both past and present, and were thus able to claim much more strongly their belonging within feminism – and to assert the centrality of women of colour within histories of feminism. They were the only participants who expressed a coherent anti-racist feminist perspective, and their historical knowledge allowed them to challenge the whiteness of dominant feminist stories more effectively.

The research highlights how particular white feminist stories are reproduced within white-dominated feminist discourse in Britain, and constructed to stand in for a universal feminist past. Across all the texts and interview material, black feminism and the activism and scholarship of women of colour was marginalised – *except* by those interview participants (of colour) who had sought out scholarship and connections to feminist communities which specifically centre the work of women of colour. In other texts, even those which positioned themselves as anti-racist and knowledgeable about race, the stories which were told about the feminist past often excluded mention of the work of feminists of colour, or where they did so, it was in a reductive way.

Thus it should be clear that it is impossible to construct feminist anti-racist analyses, theory and praxis which is not historically informed by the work of feminists of colour. In the British context, this includes the history of black British feminism as well as other work by women of colour. Histories of white feminist racism must also be accounted for. To dismiss or avoid such histories will inevitably reproduce problems which have already been critiqued, resulting in a cyclical reproduction of whiteness and what Brenna Bhandar and Denise Ferreira da Silva (2013) aptly refer to as 'white feminist fatigue syndrome' on the part of feminists of colour.

Significance of the research

This research contributes to scholarship on contemporary British feminism (some of which I have analysed), presenting a challenge to power-evasive accounts of contemporary feminist discourse which fail to account for white feminist racism and whiteness more broadly. Although the study does not claim to provide a comprehensive review of British feminism, I chose to focus on texts and sites which set out to (in different ways) define feminism and set feminist agendas, and which have been influential in shaping feminist discourse within white dominated spaces. The research's systematic focus across different spheres of discourse – academic, activist, and popular – provides significant evidence of the inherent whiteness which harmfully continues to structure these sites of feminist knowledge production.

The work also aims to continue and build on scholarship and debates about race and racism within British feminism which have been ongoing for over forty years; work which has been led and sustained by black feminists and feminists of colour, which has challenged white feminists to account for white women's positions of power over women of colour and to recognise how whiteness has limited their feminist analyses. It aims to respond to the many calls by feminists of colour for white feminists to take responsibility for educating ourselves about how racism functions and is reproduced, and to transform our theories and praxis accordingly in order to end racism within – and beyond – feminism.

The research provides insight into what I have been referring to as white feminist racism. This could be simply understood as racism which is enacted by white feminists, but I argue

that it is more than that. The specificity of how whiteness and gendered dynamics interact within a feminist context means there are some unique elements which distinguish white feminist racism from racism more generally.

White feminist racism is a form of racism which is haunted by its own existence. Because feminism is a movement mobilising for rights, justice and/or equality (however framed), it articulates itself as inherently against oppression and discrimination. It is constructed and articulated as a movement which does 'good' by reducing inequality that women experience. The suggestion that feminism might also do harm and reinforce oppression (racist or otherwise) is difficult to reconcile with this image: it contradicts the fundamental premise of (white) feminist politics. Responses to anti-racist critique therefore tend to refute the claim that white feminists can be racist. As Srivastava (2005) notes – and as anyone who has challenged whiteness in feminist spaces can attest - such claims tend to be met with defensiveness, denials, anger and often tears. Srivastava notes how it is the self-image of the white feminist as a *good person* which is understood as fundamentally challenged by claims that she has done something racist (ibid: 30). The only way in which the white feminist can accept that this is true and still maintain her self-image as a good person, is by mitigating this fact through appeals to good intentions, having made a mistake, and/or having been indoctrinated by a racist, patriarchal society not of her own making. This form of mitigation can be seen, for example, in the academic texts in which white feminists are implied as having unintentionally excluded women of colour from their analyses. Following a moment of anti-racist intervention by feminists of colour, white feminists are then repositioned as knowledgeable about race: as having learnt from their mistakes and incorporated an anti-racist analysis from this moment on.

The construction of the innocent white feminist subject also frequently relies on a form of distancing. In the British context, this often operates, as noted in my discussion of McRobbie's 'postcolonial classroom' (chapter six) through an erasure of the work of feminists of colour in Britain in favour of those from elsewhere (specifically, the US). None of the texts I analysed engaged with the work of British feminists of colour in any significant way. The interviews also powerfully highlighted this absence. Only one of the participants was familiar with the histories of black British feminism (herself a black feminist). In other interviews, when feminists of colour were mentioned, these were primarily from the US.

The erasure of the work of feminists of colour located in Britain – including, significantly in this context, anti-racist critiques of white feminism – is an erasure of the specificities of the British context, including the legacy of colonialism, which powerfully shapes contemporary British race inequalities. Attending to histories of white feminist racism in the British context crucially must attend to histories of colonialism and its aftermath. More generally, the locating of anti-racist critique somewhere else, far away, is a discursive move which functions as a claim to innocence. The critique is always directed at someone else, in a different context; it is never directed at me, here, in this room.

The fact that white women benefit from white supremacy and are in many ways invested in maintaining it cannot be accounted for in the framing of feminists as innocent. This fact, which must be recognised in order to deconstruct white feminist racism, challenges the underlying premise of feminism as a morally good and innocent discourse. As Srivastava (2005) points out, this image of feminism is connected to histories of empire and colonialism, in which many white middle-class feminists were actively involved in upholding racist systems of domination, by presenting themselves as embodiments of European, white, middle-class morality. In the postcolonial context, this moral discourse continues to be reproduced, for example, when (white) western feminists position themselves as agentic subjects through a process of othering the non-western woman (as I discuss in chapters four and five). The idea that feminism is a morally good and innocent discourse must therefore be challenged in order to end white feminist racism[14].

Thus a key aspect of white feminist racism is its (claimed) un-intentionality, which resonates with the process by which liberal white discourse reproduces racism more generally. There is supposedly no racist intent behind racist actions, yet they continue to be reproduced and cause harm. Inclusion politics, the citing of feminists of colour to mark an anti-racist moment, narratives of increasing diversity – these practices are all done with 'good intentions', to show how women of colour are not excluded from feminism these days. But concealing the history of struggle to get here (whatever 'here' is) performs discursive violence, which is pernicious partly because it becomes ever-more difficult to challenge.

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[14] This is not to suggest that all white feminists are middle-class, but that the enactment of white feminist racism as I conceptualise it here can be traced to a white, middle-class subjectivity.

The pattern of repetition of anti-racist critique followed by white feminist denials and evasions of accountability, I argue, has resulted in a generalised repression of the existence of racism within feminism on the part of white feminists. This is clear from the majority of the texts which I have analysed. Even when anti-racist critiques are included in the narratives of the (otherwise white) feminist past, they are minimised, glossed over, quickly incorporated, and then the narrative moves on. I hazard a guess that most people who have been involved with feminist communities for any length of time (whether thirty years ago or this year) will have some experience of such moments of critique, conflicts, and emotionally wrought debates about racism. They recur, habitually. Yet such moments are seldom narrativised within the dominant stories of feminism. They are understood by white feminists as shameful, embarrassing, and best forgotten. Because dominant stories continue to be those told from a white perspective, white feminist racism is thus never properly analysed. Its existence cannot be incorporated within the narrative without tearing its underlying premise apart. But the repression of these stories inevitably leads to their endless repetition.

In many ways the findings of my research may be obvious. It is not surprising that when white feminists draw only on a white feminist heritage and ignore the scholarship and activism of feminists of colour, they will continue to articulate analyses which are exclusionary and racist, as well as limited in value (as they are failing to engage with huge swathes of theory), or that the more invested someone is in seeking out black and anti-racist feminist histories, the more they will be able to challenge the dominant whiteness of feminism in the present. I would argue that the value of this research is therefore not so much the finding that there is a correlation between the stories that circulate about feminism's past and the continuing problem of whiteness within feminism, but in the detailed deconstruction of the range of different discursive techniques by which whiteness is reproduced within contemporary British feminism. Drawing on black and postcolonial feminist theories and research, I apply their insights to a specific set of texts and sites which have been part of shaping the contours of contemporary feminist debate. The thesis provides detailed accounts of the different ways in which narratives are constructed to maintain white hegemony within feminist discourse while at the same time concealing it.

Thus the research provides an in-depth and systematic analysis of the relationship between stories, race and whiteness within contemporary British feminism. It responds to

the many calls by feminists of colour for white feminists to do the *work* of challenging racist power structures within feminism; to take responsibility for the often tiring, repetitive process of pointing out problematic race politics again and again and again (and researching and writing this thesis has at times felt incredibly repetitive!). The work of continuous and systematic anti-racist critique is necessary to halt the uncritical reproduction of whiteness, and white feminists must take responsibility for doing this work.

Thus this research calls on fellow white feminists – activists and academics – to engage with it not as a criticism of individual writers and texts (which it is not), but as empirical evidence which points to systemic problems with racism and whiteness within contemporary British feminism. By calling attention to the power of stories in shaping contemporary understandings, the findings have implications for how the feminist past is taught, written about, and commemorated within feminist communities. It urges white feminist academics and activists to consider how the received white stories of British feminist history are inflected by empire and racism, and argues for the importance of learning and teaching about the diverse histories of feminism and women's activism in Britain, including histories of white feminist racism. It also calls on us to think more critically about how we engage with the production of feminism in the liberal media, which has a powerful platform in shaping feminist discourse in the public sphere.

Crucially, the work which white feminists need to do must resist repeating the familiar colonial gestures of inclusion – by, for example, adding feminist of colour histories into an existing broader (white) narrative. Such a process will simply add another chapter to the long history of white feminist co-optation of women of colour's work. Instead, we must, to draw again on Aileen Moreton-Robinson's words, "theorise the relinquishment of power so that feminist practice can contribute to changing the racial order" (Moreton-Robinson, 2000a: 186). Such theorising in the British context must attend to whiteness in its specific relation to British imperial history. It must interrogate the ways in which the colonial project positioned white (in particular) middle-class women as moral subjects, and how white feminists used this position to advocate for their rights on the backs of women of colour (Burton, 1994). British feminist history is deeply entangled with British imperial history, and claims to innocence disavowing this connection only further the reproduction of an imperial feminist whiteness. Thus telling stories of British feminism differently

requires a deconstruction of the dominant white feminist narrative, by attending to the colonial impulses of its construction. It requires a relinquishment of control of the narrative.

Over the six years that I have been working on this project, feminist discourse has changed significantly. Representations of feminists within the liberal media have become more diverse; race has become a more prominently discussed topic within activist feminism, and a language of intersectionality has been adopted within many activist and academic circles. These shifts, as I have discussed, are the result of pressure from feminists of colour on white feminists to change their behaviour. Thus, this is an important moment within British feminism, but also one fraught with risk. As my analysis of the academic feminist texts showed, moments of racial awareness can quickly become relegated to the past. From this moment on, white feminists may talk about intersectionality and cite the work of feminists of colour as evidence that they have taken anti-racist critiques on board. However, this is not enough to transform theory and praxis: theories easily become appropriated, and individual women of colour tokenised. Undoing white domination within feminism requires an ongoing commitment to challenge fundamentally and deeply held ideas about what feminism is and how it is practiced. In particular, it requires white feminists to reckon with the long history of white feminist racism which has been integral to the British feminist project since its inception. The repeated denial of white feminist racism has caused its presence to haunt white British feminism; to use Avery Gordon's evocative phrase, 'that which appears absent can indeed be a seething presence' (Gordon, 1997: 17). To address this seething presence, which white feminists repeatedly deny, requires action, 'a something-to-be-done' (Gordon, 2011). It can only be undone by giving it our full attention.

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Appendix A: Interview participants

Participant	Age	Self-defined ethnicity
A	24	Black
B	25	White British
C	33	White British
D	25	White British
E	21	Black British Caribbean
F	26	White British
G	30	White British
H	43	White British
I	47	British of Indian origin
J	47	White British
K	29	White other
L	50	White
M	31	Asian
N	28	White
O	34	White British
P	28	Mixed race (Black Jamaican, White English and Kashmiri)
Q	31	White British
R	22	White British
S	32	White other

Appendix B: Interview questions

The interview questions evolved over time, as reflected by the two topic guides. Version 1 was used in the first five interviews, after which the questions were reviewed and updated to version 2. As the interviews were semi-structured, the questions were not always phrased in exactly the same way or order.

Version 1: Activists

Introductory/General
- Involvement in activism
  - how did you become involved?
  - what issues are most important to you?
  - what kind of activism are you involved with?
- About your activist group/community
  - Activities
  - Background/identities of members of the group (e.g. ethnicity, age, class, sexuality, disability, nationality, gender)

Historical narratives
- Knowledge/awareness about histories of women's activism in Britain over the last 50 years
  - Key ideas, moments, campaigns, literature, organisations, names
  - 'Type' of women involved – impacts/effects of this
  - One movement or several? Awareness of unity vs. divisions, conflicts, etc.
  - Reflecting on above (e.g. what was the role/result of conflict?)
  - Legacies – what are they?
  - How does race/racism/anti-racism fit in with this history?
  - How does wider context of British social history fit in?
- Reflecting on this knowledge
  - How did you learn about this history?
  - How important do you think it is for today's feminists to know about women's activist histories? Why?
  - Do you think there are things that can be learnt from the past? If so, what? Do you think you have learnt from it?
  - Do you feel that you know enough about this history? If not, what would you like to learn more about? Why do you think you haven't learned about it before?

Race and feminism
- Discussion of terms such as 'racism' and 'white privilege' (in and out of feminist context)
- Relationships between race, anti-racism, gender and feminism – in general what are your views on this?
- Tell me about race and feminism in your group/community.

- Have issues of race/racism come up? (e.g. as a topic of discussion, as a campaigning issue, through intersectional approach to gender oppression, racist incidents)

Version 1: Students and ex-students

General
- What made you decide to study women's/gender studies
- Experience of course
  - Did you enjoy it? What did you like/not like?
  - What did you get out of it?
  - What were the staff & other students like?
- Background of the staff and other students: e.g. ethnicity, nationality, age, class, sexuality, gender
- Thoughts on and experiences of feminism:
  - Do you identify as a feminist? Why/why not?
  - What are your thoughts on contemporary feminism?

Historical narratives
- Knowledge/awareness about histories of women's activism in Britain over the last 50 years
  - Key ideas, moments, campaigns, literature, organisations, names
  - 'Type' of women involved – impacts/effects of this
  - One movement or several? Awareness of unity vs. divisions, conflicts, etc.
  - Reflecting on above (e.g. what was the role/result of conflict?)
  - Legacies – what are they?
  - How does race/racism/anti-racism fit in with this history?
  - How does wider context of British social history fit in?
- Reflecting on this knowledge
  - Did you learn all this from your course? Are there other sources where this knowledge comes from?
  - Do you think the course taught you enough about race?
  - How important do you think it is to know about history? Why?
  - Do you think there are things that can be learnt from the past? If so, what? Do you think you have learnt from it?
  - Do you feel that you know enough about women's activist history? If not, what would you like to learn more about? Why do you think you haven't learned about it before?

Race and feminism
- Discussion of terms such as 'racism' and 'white privilege' (in and out of feminist context)
- Relationships between race and gender, anti-racism and feminism
- Tell me about race and feminism on your course – e.g do you think there were instances of racism and/or white privilege? If so, how were these dealt with?

Version 2: Activists

- Can you tell me a bit about how you first became interested in women's rights?
    - Prompts if needed: Were there particular people, campaigns, books, organisations (etc.) that inspired you? How did you find out about these?

- (If not already covered) What are the issues you feel are most important to you?

- When did you actually start to identify as feminist? How do you define feminism?

- Can you tell me a bit about the activism you are involved with?
    - Prompt if needed: doesn't need to be 'organised' activism – could be about what you do in your everyday life.

- (For those in an activist group/community): Can you tell me something about the background and identities of the people involved in your group?
    - Prompt if needed: For example, in terms of ethnicity, age, class, sexuality, gender.

- If I say "women's activism in the '60s, '70s and '80s", what does that make you think of?
    - Prompts if needed: any particular campaigns / ideas / organisations / groups / individuals / key moments etc?
    - How did you come to be familiar with these?
    - If participant struggles, steer conversation towards the fact that women's activist history is so often written out of mainstream education etc. Try and elicit their thoughts on the importance (or not) of knowing this history for contemporary feminists.

- (Depending on their answer to the previous question) Do you think there were particular kinds of women (e.g. from particular backgrounds) involved?
    - Prompts if needed: Were there women with different backgrounds working together? One movement or several? Any divisions, conflicts?

- Are you familiar with any debates about racism within feminist communities? (past or present) Have you been part of or witnessed any? Can you tell me a bit about that?

- (For those in activist group/community): Is racism discussed within your group/community? If so, in what context has it come up? (E.g. is it something you have done activism around? An issue which has arisen within the group?)

- What made you interested in participating in this research project?

- Is there anything else you wanted to talk about related to race and feminism?

Version 2: Students and ex-students

- What made you decide to study women's/gender studies?
    - Prompts if needed: Were there particular people, campaigns, books, organisations (etc.) that inspired you? How did you find out about these?

- What was your experience of the course?
    - Prompts if needed: Did you enjoy it? What did you like/not like? What did you get out of it?

- Can you tell me a bit about the background of the staff and other students: e.g. ethnicity, nationality, age, class, sexuality, gender

- (If not already covered) Do you identify as a feminist? Why/why not? How do you define feminism?

- If I say "women's activism in the '60s, '70s and '80s", what does that make you think of?
    - Prompts if needed: any particular campaigns / ideas / organisations / groups / individuals / key moments etc?
    - Did you learn about this on your course? If not, how did you come to be familiar with these?
    - If participant struggles, steer conversation towards the fact that women's activist history is so often written out of mainstream education etc. Try and elicit their thoughts on the importance (or not) of knowing this history for contemporary feminists.

- (Depending on their answer to the previous question) Do you think there were particular kinds of women (e.g. from particular backgrounds) involved?
    - Prompts if needed: Were there women with different backgrounds working together? One movement or several? Any divisions, conflicts?

- Are you familiar with any debates about racism within feminist communities? (past or present) Have you been part of or witnessed any? Can you tell me a bit about that?

- Was race taught on your course? If so, can you tell me a bit more?

- Did you ever feel there was any tension around race and racism on your course? E.g. in the classroom, between students, lecturers, and/or tutors? What happened?

- What made you interested in participating in this research project?

- Is there anything else you wanted to talk about related to race and feminism?

Appendix C: Call for participants

Call for feminist activists and students in England to participate in research

- *Do you identify as a feminist activist and live in England?*
- *Have you studied or are you studying feminist theory (e.g. women's studies, gender studies) at a university in England?*

If you answered yes to **either** of the above questions, please read on to find out if you are interested in taking part in my research.

I am a white feminist activist and PhD student researching how stories of the recent feminist past are told within contemporary feminist spaces in England. In particular I am interested in how issues of race and racism fit into these narratives. This approach is guided by the idea that how we tell stories about the feminist past influences how we understand the feminist present. I am hoping through this research to address recurring patterns of white privilege and marginalisation of feminists of colour within white dominated feminist spaces.

As part of my research I am interested in interviewing feminist activists and people who have studied or are studying feminism at university in England. As an interview participant, you would be asked questions about recent feminist history (1960s onwards) in relation to race. Please note that this would not be a test to find out how much you know! I am simply interested in finding out about what kind of stories of the feminist past you are familiar with, and where and how you learned about these.

I am interested in interviewing participants of any ethnicities and genders.

If you would like more information about the project and what participating would entail, please contact me [contact details].

Please feel free to forward this email to anyone who you think may be interested.

This research project has been approved by the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Review Panel at London Metropolitan University and follows the University's Code of Good Research Practice.

Appendix D: Participant information sheet and consent form

Race and Representations of the Recent Feminist Past
PhD project, Terese Jonsson, London Metropolitan University

INFORMATION FOR INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

<u>About the research</u>

This research project aims to find out how stories of the recent feminist past (1960s onwards) are told within contemporary feminist spaces in England. In particular I am interested in how issues of race and racism fit into these narratives. This approach is guided by the idea that how we tell stories about the feminist past influences how we understand the feminist present.

The project incorporates both textual analysis and interviews. I am analysing feminist texts such as historical accounts, memoirs, academic and popular books, articles in the media, blogs, as well as films and exhibitions. Interviews will complement this analysis, as they will allow for a better understanding of the stories that are in everyday circulation within feminist spaces, but which are not necessarily written down or published.

<u>Interview participants</u>

I want to interview 20-30 people in England who either identify as feminist activists or who are studying or have studied feminism at an English university.

I use the term 'feminist activist' loosely – you do not need to be part of an activist group or take part in any particular form of activism to 'qualify'. If you feel that you identify strongly with this term, then you fit into the category.

For those who have studied feminism, I am particularly looking for people who are studying or have studied degree courses or certificates in Women's/Gender Studies or similar, but you may also have studied another subject – as long as your course contained at least one module based on feminist theory. This could be either at undergraduate or postgraduate level.

I am interested in interviewing participants of any ethnicities and genders.

<u>About the researcher</u>

I am a white feminist activist and researcher, doing my PhD at London Metropolitan University. I have been involved with various feminist groups, including organising events such as Ladyfest Brighton 2005 and Ladyfest London 2008. My research is motivated by a desire to address what often appear to be recurring patterns of white privilege and

marginalisation of feminists of colour within (white dominated) activist and academic feminist spaces.

About the interviews

As an interview participant, you can expect to be asked about your thoughts and experiences of feminist activism or education, and in particular as this relates to race. I am also interested in finding out about your familiarity with women's activism from the 1960s onwards. Please note this is not a test to find out how much you know! There is no need for you to prepare beforehand – I am simply interested in finding out about what kind of stories of the feminist past you may be familiar with, and where and how you learned about these.

If you are potentially interested in participating, but have reservations about discussing these topics for any reason, please do not hesitate to contact me for further clarification. I would additionally like to emphasise that the aim of my research is not to individualise responsibility or blame, but rather about exploring themes in terms of common stories about feminism and race which are circulating in feminist communities.

Participation in this project is of course entirely voluntary, and you are free to change your mind at any time before, during or after the interview. During the interview, you can also choose to not answer specific questions, or to end the interview early.

The interview will be audio recorded. After the interview I will type up the transcript and if you would like to read it, I can send this to you to approve. If you feel there are particular parts of the interview you do not want me to quote in my thesis, this is fine.

I am based in London, but can arrange to travel to your locality and meet at a place which is convenient and accessible for you. We can also do the interview via Skype. Interviews are likely to take 1-1 ½ hours. I will reimburse travel costs on provision of receipts.

Confidentiality and data protection

All interview data will be anonymised, and I will not identify you by name, location, activist group or academic institution in the thesis. Transcripts will be coded to ensure anonymity.

Accessibility

If you would like to be interviewed and have concerns about any accessibility issues, please contact me so that we can discuss these and agree a way forward.

<u>Ethics approval</u>

This research project has been approved by the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Review Panel at London Metropolitan University and follows the University's Code of Good Research Practice.

Terese Jonsson

[contact details]

Should you have further questions about the research, you may also contact my supervisor:

Dr Irene Gedalof, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, London Metropolitan University

[contact details]

Race and Representations of the Recent Feminist Past

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN STUDY

I have read and understood the INFORMATION FOR INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS for this project. On the basis of this information, I consent to being interviewed by Terese Jonsson. I give my permission for this interview to be audio recorded. Following my approval of the transcript, I consent to it being used as data for this research project, which may include it being used for publication and/or presentation at conferences.[15]

I reserve the right to withdraw my consent to participate at any time during the interview process or afterwards.

Signed:

Printed name:

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR REFERENCE

If you have studied feminism at university, please write the name of the course and institution below, as well as the year in which you completed or will complete your course (this information will be anonymised in the thesis):

Please write below how you define your ethnicity, and also your age. This will be the only personal information used to identify participants in the thesis.

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[15] An earlier version of the consent form, which some participants signed, only specify consent for use in thesis (not other publications or conferences).