Breaking the Glass Chamber:

Thursday 15th September

Lecture
Laura Beers: ‘Women Politicians or Women's Politics?’ (Chair: Patrick Diamond)

This talk considers the difference between the goal of achieving greater representation for women in political office — “Breaking the Glass Chamber” — and the goal of advancing women's interests through political action, or furthering a “women’s politics.” To answer this question, we must first define what we mean by a “Women’s Politics”? That is to say, does the female half of the electorate have different set of political priorities than their male counterparts? Secondly, is a “women's politics,” if such a thing can be said to exist, necessarily a feminist politics? Finally, assuming that there is a definable “women’s politics,” does increasingly women's political representation necessarily advance women’s political interests? And, conversely, are there times when women’s interests are better served by male representatives?

Panel 1a: Local Politics (Chair: Anna Muggeridge)

Jim Tomlinson, University of Glasgow, “Florence Horsbrugh MP: from “women's town” to Cabinet Minister.”

Florence Horsbrugh was the first woman Conservative to achieve Cabinet Minister rank when her job as Minister of Education was upgraded to Cabinet status in 1953. She has been characterised somewhat hyperbolically as “The Conservative party’s forgotten first lady”, but her career is undoubtedly one worthy of analysis.2

Horsbrugh established her reputation as an MP for Dundee, when elected not only the first woman MP but the first Conservative since the Great Reform Act in 1931 (reelected 1935). In the 1930’s Dundee had the highest unemployment rate of any city in Britain because of the collapse of the jute industry. Historically, jute had led to Dundee’s characterisation as a “women’s town” because of the predominance of women in the jute industry. But this term certainly did not betoken a city where women were prominent in political life; indeed, it is likely that her selection was eased by the belief that Dundee was hopeless seat for the Conservatives.

2 Little has been written about her, though Kenneth Baxter has placed her clearly in the story of women in electoral politics in Scotland: 'The Advent of a Woman Candidate Was Seen . . . As Outrageous': Women, Party Politics and Elections in Interwar Scotland and England”, Journal of Scottish Historical Studies 33 (2013).
Although a woman of wide interests (she was a delegate to the League of Nations, 1933-35), Horsbrugh’s parliamentary role was focused on the crisis in jute. This crisis was especially complex because the main immediate cause of the industry’s problems was competition from India. Hence a key question for her was how far her constituency could be protected against goods from within the Empire, at a time when tariff barriers were being placed around the empire. And this dilemma was occurring at a time when the question of India’s place in the Empire was bitterly dividing the Conservative party.

Horsbrugh’s explicitly eschewed presenting herself as a feminist, and she avoided being seen as focussed on ‘women’s issues.’ It was by addressing the key Conservative issues of Empire and economy, and linking these to her constituency, that she made her parliamentary reputation.

Daryl Leeworthy, Swansea University, “Causes in Common: Welsh Women, Social Democracy, and the Postwar Politics of Local Representation.”

One of the most infamous statistics of political life in Britain is the fact that between 1945 and 1997, only four women—all of them from the Labour Party—were elected to represent and serve a Welsh constituency in parliament: Megan Lloyd George (Anglesey, then Carmarthen), Eirene White (East Flintshire), Dorothy Rees (Barry), and Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley). Indeed, between 1970 and 1984, the entire parliamentary cohort was male, a situation which had last prevailed in the 1920s when women did not enjoy a universal franchise. There is little to disguise a dire situation. However, at the local level the postwar period marked the end of that sequence of firsts which so often generated newspaper commentary—first elected, first to serve as chair of council or town mayor. Indeed, local politics affords a far richer but generally neglected tapestry than does parliament. It is to this complexity that this paper turns its attention. As councillors, as chairs of committees and authorities, I argue, following Patricia Hollis and Pat Thane in other contexts, women took on the mantle of directing postwar social democracy at the grassroots, especially in relation to education, health and housing. Here I place emphasis on the changing nature of the Labour Party, on issues such as life-long learning and community cohesion, and on the leadership of women in local government. The latter, I suggest, establishes a more nuanced understanding of Welsh political history, and challenges the conventional focus on the 1984-5 miners’ strike as a turning point.

The experience of working-class women activists in post-war Wales is a particularly neglected area in British political history, with scholarship predominantly focusing on what has been considered the ‘golden era’ of women’s labour activism - the interwar years. Despite historians largely overlooking women’s political activism in Wales post-1945, aspects such as developments in the welfare state and an increase in married women’s employment established a strong base for women’s politicisation. This paper will explore the different spaces and environments working-class women participated in local labour politics in south Wales between 1945 and 1970. Taking into consideration the societal and cultural changes following the end of the Second World War, I will demonstrate how local contexts informed and constructed women’s political identities and motivations for political engagement and activism. This paper will be based on a range of oral sources - such as Women’s Archive Wales’ ‘Voices from the Factory Floor’ recordings - political parties, voluntary organisations, and trade union minutes and records. In looking at a breadth of cross-organisation documents I will show how working-class activists’ political identities were fluid and how experiences were varied. Furthermore, this paper will challenge current understandings of how political and gendered identities are performed by uncovering the role of and relationship between politics and political identities in private/public spaces and environments. Additionally, this paper will demonstrate how reconstructing concepts of space can be used to uncover the histories of other marginalised groups and their experiences in modern democracies.

Nico Blackstock, QMUL, “Gateways to Participation: Women and Extra-Parliamentary Political Activism during the Northern Irish Troubles.”

Since the rise of ‘new political history’ almost two decades ago, historians have increasingly turned to focus on ‘ordinary’ politics, beyond the confines of Westminster. Yet, despite its tragic significance and continued resonance, grassroots activism in Northern Ireland, before and during the troubles have often received limited attention. The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, People’s Democracy, the Community for Peace People and women on Ireland were all crucial voices, campaigning for an end to catholic discrimination and sectarian violence and women, like Bernadette Devlin, Mairéad Corrigan, Betty Williams, and Liz Curtis, played a crucial role within these movements. Moreover, involvement in these grassroots mobilisations often led to participation in more conventional forms of politics, illustrated by Devlin’s election to Parliament in 1969. This paper argues that more historical focus should be given to the ideological roles played by women in these movements, while also viewing female political participation in extra-parliamentary movements as a ‘gateway’ to further political participation. By focusing on these specific Northern Irish case studies, this paper argues that through focusing on grassroots political activism, more can be unearthed about the opportunities, and challenges, which popular participation offered women and how female political agency beyond the ballot box was crucial.
in the creation of contemporary British politics. This paper will also think intersectionality about how
gender, ethnicity, age, and class worked, not only to form and sustain extra-parliamentary movements, but
also to create opportunities for participation in more conventional political channels.

Panel 1b: Activism and the Women’s Liberation Movement (Chair: Ruth Davidson)

Sarah Crook, Swansea University, “A Laughing Matter? Humour and politics in the British
women’s liberation movement.”

The women’s liberation movement is best known for its serious political project: the liberation of women
from their oppression and subjugation. Within the historiography the serious aspects of this – its
campaigns, visions, and development of a feminist community — have been richly brought to the fore,
and important work has also helped to chart some of its key fissures along the lines of class, race, and
sexuality. This paper refocuses on the role of humour in the movement’s campaigns and community
throughout and beyond the 1970s. I argue that reading the sketches, illustrations, cartoons and humorous
writings produced within the British women’s movement helps historians to form a picture that
understands the movement as a forum for political debate, discussion, and campaigning, but also a site of
community, joy, and fun. Humour, I argue, helps to explain the survival of some of the movement’s
infrastructure through the painful fractures of the late 1970s and it was through the use of levity, sarcasm,
ironic and sardonic wit that some of its arguments were most potently distilled.

Jessica White, University of Liverpool, “Housewives present the petition’: discourses of race,
class and citizenship in women's tenants' activism in the 1970s.”

The role that women have played in tenants’ activist groups in the twentieth century has received sporadic
attention from historians, not least the role of women of colour. Black women played a significant part
not only in protesting against slum demolition, but also in demanding for improvements on social
housing estates. And yet, within the historical literature on tenants’ activism, the role that discourses of
race and racism played in underpinning the aims and methods of many tenants’ groups has been
overlooked.

This paper explores the politics of race, class, and gender in Britain’s tenants’ activist groups in the 1970s.
In areas such as south Manchester, housing action groups and tenants’ activist groups were made up of
both white and Black residents. However, for many of the Black female activists, housing justice was
located in the Black Power politics that had grown in England in the decades prior. Black women who
stood at the forefront of these groups were calling for improvements not merely through deploying the
language of welfare rights, but through a complex discourse that spoke to broader discussions around
Marxism and Black liberation. This paper will unpack these discourses around race, class, and gender in
Britain to analyse the role that welfare activism played in enabling Black women to make greater claims to citizenship, racial justice, and class solidarity. By examining these themes, this paper contributes to the renewed interest in the links between the anti-racist campaigns of late twentieth-century Britain and the welfare state.

**Olivia Wyatt, QMUL, Caribbean women and the politics of community in Leeds, c.1970-85**


History played an important role in the written, visual, and artistic culture of the Greenham Common Women’s Peace Camp, but it also generated sharp debates over who was allowed to define these histories. This paper will examine how women at Greenham Common sought to understand, define, and use both the longer histories they fit within and the camp’s own historical importance. Firstly focusing on the feminist reclamation of the past undertaken by Greenham women, demonstrating how longer women’s histories, most commonly early modern witch trials and the suffrage movement, were related to women’s experiences to add legitimacy to their protest and to assist them in understanding their present. Then it will look at Greenham women’s acts of remembrance which connected their movement to the history of conflict in the twentieth century. These acts drew on the emotive power of past conflicts as well as offering a tangible means of understanding the potential devastation of a nuclear war on both a small and large scale. Lastly, it will argue that women at the camp became invested in defining the historical legacy of the camp itself, often leading to intense debates over who had the right to establish the camp’s official record. This will focus mostly on the efforts of a small group to create a cohesive legacy for the camp through their published work and the creation of a ‘commemorative and historic site’ as they prepared to leave the common in 2000. Overall, it will make the case for the importance of history at Greenham by demonstrating how it was constantly in flux as it was defined, repurposed, and fought over. This has wider implications for the understanding of non-academic forms of history-making in the late twentieth century by exploring how activists claimed particular forms of expertise when constructing malleable histories that responded to the needs of their contemporary moment.
Lecture

Farah Hussain: ‘Muslim Women in the Labour Party: An Intersectional Case Study’

(Chair: Karl Pike)

In 2016, several Muslim women spoke to BBC Newsnight about their experiences as activists in the Labour Party. They spoke of how they had faced intimidation and discrimination from Muslim men when they sought selection as local council candidates. Through the use of an intersectional framework and using original interview data with Muslim women in the party, this paper centres their voices to examine the role of political parties and their members in fostering diverse chambers at the local level. With the use of All Women Shortlists now prohibited at the national level, attention must shift to local government when looking to how to increase women’s political representation in the future.

Friday 16 September

Special Session

Emma Peplow and Priscila Pivatto, History of Parliament Trust’s Oral History Project,
with comment by Sarah Childs and Mari Takayanagi

‘Outsiders on the Inside: Reflections from Women Parliamentarians’

The History of Parliament Trust’s oral history project collects life story interviews of former MPs. To date we have recorded nearly thirty former female MPs who sat in the Commons before 1997, who discuss their time in Westminster and their wider political and life experiences. These women were unusual: a small minority in number, often mistaken for secretaries, they were implicitly unwelcome in a Westminster still organised like a gentleman’s club. Through our interviews we have gained some insight into how they felt, and how women continued to pursue their political interests and operate within Westminster in spite of the obstacles in their path. Our interviews reveal a diverse group of impressive women, who either ignored, worked with, or fought against the prejudices they encountered, and made their mark on Parliament.

Our session will showcase clips from our oral history archive, focusing on women MPs’ responses to the masculine culture they encountered and how they pursued their political careers and interests in spite of being ‘outsiders on the inside’. The audience will have the opportunity to hear from the women parliamentarians themselves: voices and memories of excitement, frustration, resistance, anger, pride and achievements. The extracts we choose and introduce will reflect the breadth of a sound archive we know well, but we intend this session to be very open and discursive.
Panel 2a: Gender Equalities at Work: Campaigning and Legislating 1964-1997
(Chair: Louise Jackson)

Louise Jackson, University of Edinburgh, “Campaigning and Legislating for Gender Equalities at work.”

This brief presentation will provide a concise overview of the AHRC-funded project ‘Gender Equalities at Work: an Interdisciplinary History of 50 Years of Legislation’ from which all the papers are drawn. The project examines the creation, trajectories, legacies and lived experiences of the Equal Pay Act 1970 and Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (now integrated for GB in the Equality Act 2010) – with a focus on the relationship between actors, institutions and discourses. How has the law been made, shaped, and used, with what consequences?


During the 1970s, there was an intensification of women-led industrial disputes, particularly in the five years between the passing of the Equal Pay Act 1970 and its implementation from 29th December 1975. The EPA was a ‘catalyst’ for women’s industrial militancy in the 1970s and the five-year implementation period proved to be ‘crucial years in the development of working women’s consciousness’ (Boston, 2015: 280, 285). Through strikes, workplace occupations and demonstrations, women workers demanded equal pay, improved working conditions, union recognition and the reinstatement of sacked shop stewards, and resisted redundancy, factory closure and productivity agreements. Between 1972 and 1979 roughly 43 per cent of women-led industrial disputes were for equal pay (Stevenson, 2019: 85). The EPA legitimised women’s demands for equal pay, particularly among manufacturing, office and ancillary workers who were excluded by earlier campaigns for equal pay in the professions. This presentation will evaluate women-led industrial disputes during the 1970s to consider whether, and how, trade unions and women union activists engaged with the EPA. It will address the following questions: How did trade unions respond to equality legislation? Which unions pursued equal pay campaigns? What strategies were adopted by women union activists? And, finally, how supportive were unions of equal pay disputes?

Ashlee Christoffersen, University of Edinburgh, “The whiteness of “sex discrimination”: a historical antiracist analysis of UK gender equality legislation.”

In the UK, legislation concerning race preceded legislation concerning gender, and influenced approaches to race equality at EU level and beyond. Yet, legislation on race and sex developed in siloed (either/or)
ways, which worked to efface the existence and experiences of Black women and women of colour, as well as the ways in which white women are also racialized as white. Drawing on analysis of parliamentary records and papers and news media, archival research and oral history interviews, I demonstrate how, though race and gender were frequently discussed together in the earlier years of the acts among powerful actors and in dominant discourses, they were almost invariably discussed in such a way so as to construct them as being mutually exclusive. Often white women parliamentarians were keen that sex and race be legislated for separately, and made arguments that promoted the idea that race and gender are mutually exclusive. While the categories employed associated with race were implicitly constructed as male through gender neutrality, I argue that the category of ‘woman/women’ was more explicitly constructed as exclusively white, with long lasting implications. This is part of a long discursive tradition of degendering of Black women in particular. In discourses which may now be read as white feminist, sex was also constructed as being more important than race. Gender equality legislation was enacted in such a way that it mainly benefitted white and otherwise relatively privileged women.

Sophia Ayada, University College London, “Resisting sex equality: protecting the status quo from and in anti-discrimination law.”

On 29 December 1975, the Sex Discrimination Act (SDA) entered into force, after lengthy debates in a British Parliament composed of 25 women and 610 men. Based on analysis of parliamentary debates, occasionally complemented with archival research, this presentation explores the extent to which men parliamentarians’ resistance to equality moulded the provisions of the SDA and its conception of equality, in an attempt to maintain the status quo. Before and during the debates surrounding the adoption of this act, resistance against equality was operationalised by dismissing the very necessity of the legislation, either because women were deemed not to be really discriminated against, or because they needed specific protection that was not ensured by the act. With the adoption of the SDA, the law officially recognised the existence (or the possibility of the existence at least) of sex discrimination. Retaining a similar narrative on the absence of discrimination and the irrelevance of women’s rights to equality in the workplace had no chance of success anymore. Against this backdrop, a new form of resistance developed, committed to the recognition of men as victims of discrimination too, made possible by the introduction, during and immediately after the debates of the SDA, of the ideal of meritocracy and the primacy of talent and individuality over sex. The adoption of the SDA thus represented a turning point in the way resistance to equality was framed and organised, and its adoption embodied and triggered an epistemological revolution: the idea that men can claim specific sex equality rights because they too are discriminated against on the basis of sex.
This panel explores different facets of the relationship between women and petitioning after 1945. Late twentieth-century surveys of political participation suggest that apart from voting, petitioning was the only political activity that engaged a majority of the UK population, but it has generally been invisible to historians and social scientists studying modern British politics. Petitioning was a versatile as well as popular and widespread political practice, used across the four nations of the UK, and within a variety of local, national, and international contexts, from high profile appeals to the UN to grassroots campaigns about road safety around schools. Petitioning was used by a variety of political actors, including political parties, NGOs, trade unions, social movements, religious bodies, local action groups, and individuals, from across the political spectrum. Studying petitioning cuts across and bridges the divide between a focus on institutions and formal politics (such as Parliament) and informal political activity (such as collecting signatures in a high street). Petitioning provides a lens through which to examine the different roles, opportunities, and limitations faced by women in British politics in this critical period. While there was a long tradition of women petitioning Parliament, women and women’s groups were not limited to institutional appeals, but used petitions in a variety of creative, more informal ways.

Anna Bocking-Welch, Women and International Campaigning

As part of their involvement in international and humanitarian campaigns from the 1950s onwards, many women were involved in petitions that aimed to have a global appeal, whether through addressing authorities like the UN, foreign states such as the USA or USSR, or by putting pressure on the UK government’s foreign policy. Examples such as the Stockholm peace pledge (1950), numerous petitions organised by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament or Anti-Apartheid, or the ‘Women's rights are human rights’ petition directed to the UN’s World Conference on Human Rights (1993), thus illustrate the connections between women’s domestic political participation and global citizenship.

Richard Huzzey, Women and the Practice of Petitioning

This presentation considers the practices of petitioning for women in this period, from the processes and spaces for signature gathering to the media-friendly presentation of petitions to authority. As a practice petitioning was a neutral technology that was used by progressive or left-wing social movements, such as second wave feminists, as well as religiously inspired moral campaigners such as Mary Whitehouse.
Understanding these practices – and their value in terms of organisation, publicity, network building and other outcomes – explains the value of petitioning to many different petitioners even if political institutions were unreceptive.

**Henry Miller, Women, Petitions and Authority**

An important shift after 1945 was that women were not only active as petitioners, signatories, and petition-organisers, but increasingly acted as parliamentary sponsors of petitions and, as office-holders, the recipients of petitions. This paper examines the relationship between women MPs and petitions, particularly their deployment within parliamentary campaigns, such as the 1954 equal pay petition. It then considers the reception of petitions by women holding positions of authority and power, such as Margaret Thatcher during her time as prime minister.


When thinking of the achievements of the post-war women MPs in Parliament, we might usually consider their speeches in the House of Commons, their questions and contributions to Parliamentary debates, and their participation in Parliamentary committees. One aspect which is rarely considered is their role in Parliamentary delegations, in the sense of official tours abroad by groups of Parliamentarians. Although Parliamentary delegations stand outside the formal organisation of the Commons or Lords, they are not political party groups or government groups, but cross-party and cross-House. This paper will use newly available sources to reflect on the significance of Parliamentary delegations in relation to two women MPs; Muriel Nichol, MP for Bradford North 1945-1950, and Elaine Burton, MP for Coventry South, 1950-1959. Although barely mentioned in any summary of their political careers, Muriel Nichol was the only woman on a Parliamentary delegation to India in 1946, and Elaine Burton one of two women (with Edith Pitt) on a Parliamentary delegation to the USSR in 1955. Parliamentary delegations might be viewed as peripheral activities, but both women clearly valued their experiences and kept records.

**Charlotte Lydia Riley, University of Southampton: “A competent, efficient woman”, or “emotional and occasionally savage? Women and British overseas development policy.”**

Since 1964, the British government has appointed a series of ministers to oversee Britain’s overseas aid and development policies. This role has been held by women more than any other government position, apart from the recently created minister for women and equalities. Aid is gendered feminine because it is understood as part of Britain’s soft power overseas; the emotional labour of this position has therefore fallen to women, who perform a specific role at home and overseas to ‘sell’ aid policy. This paper focuses,
rather than on aid and development per se, on the identity of three of the women chosen to hold this position.

The Labour Party has had a specific rhetorical, political and ethical attachment to aid policy across the twentieth century. This paper therefore focuses on three Labour women - Barbara Castle, Judith Hart and Clare Short - who held the position of overseas aid minister and were associated with the broader topic of aid and development across their careers. The paper will explore the particular challenges that these three women faced in their careers in aid, and will examine how their left wing political identity shaped this experience alongside their gender.

2c: Alternative channels: Women’s networks and political change (Chair: Cait Beaumont)

Alternative channels: Women’s networks and political change

Clare Annesley has argued that a gap exists in the literature on women’s political agency and contemporary welfare reform. She notes that in ‘weak’ welfare states such as the UK space existed before Beveridge for women to shape welfare services through grassroots activism and the lobbying of national women’s associations. But she argues that in discussions of contemporary welfare reforms the specific contributions of women as political agents, rather than as beneficiaries, lacks the detail of this pre-1939 literature. Annesley notes the different channels women can use to assert their voice: as MP’s, trade unionists, public intellectuals, academics and through civil society. In this panel we will consider a range of women who were on the margins of party political structures and yet whose work ‘below the radar’ needs to be considered as part of a wider redirecting of shifting attitudes and policies towards women. Framing this panel from the perspective of women working within pressure groups, non-party women’s organisations and local government, will reveal the often-overlooked web of associations and individuals who were working to recast the intellectual and policy foundations of social and economic legislation, and assert women’s rights within a deeply gendered system. It will also reveal the importance of women’s personal and professional networks in building a collaborative and effective lobby to support policy change that can often be overlooked in more traditional political histories.

Anna Muggeridge, University of Worcester, “‘The fall of yet another pinnacle in the toppling structure of so-called masculine superiority’: women’s experiences of local government, 1945-c.1960.”

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3 Clare Annesley 'Women's Political Agency', 452-466.
This paper explores the role of women in local government in the period 1945 – c. 1960. Drawing on the experiences of individual women councillors from the West Midlands region, the paper will examine how these women worked both within and outside party structures to press for reforms broadly related to welfare issues. It will suggest that, although in this period party politics became more entrenched in the local area than it had been in the pre-war period, with far fewer women managing to win election as Independent councillors, women councillors from all (and no) parties remained willing to work cross-party on welfare issues in particular. At times, some were willing to oppose men in positions of power within local party structures on these topics, drawing on their own lived experiences to campaign for reforms to welfare services locally. Nonetheless, these women did not confine themselves to working solely on gendered issues, with women from a range of party backgrounds involving themselves in a wide range of council work. Those who were elected to positions of ceremonial importance, such as Mayor, were also keen to note the significance of their occupation of such roles as women even if they did not outwardly identify as feminists. Thus, the paper argues for a reassessment of women’s politics in the period, which pays greater attention to their experiences in local government, to more fully understand what constituted a ‘women’s politics’ in the period between the end of the Second World War and the arrival of “second-wave” feminism.

Helen Glew, University of Westminster, “Women's organisations and support for the married woman worker in Britain in the late 1940s and 1950s.”

Marriage bars, which prevented women from holding permanent positions in many workplaces, largely disappeared from British employment in the immediate post-war period, driven first and foremost by the need to fill labour shortages in many occupations and professions. However, with the abolition of marriage bars came new challenges: changing institutional cultures; removing ‘informal’ cultural expectations that women would always leave the workplace on marriage; coming up with working practices and schedules that allowed married women who were also mothers to continue in paid work. This paper, then, examines the activism of a range of women’s employment-focused organisations in the ‘aftermath’ of the marriage bar: the National Union of Women Teachers; the National Association of Women Civil Servants; and the Six Point Group. It analyses how they campaigned for workplaces and environments where married women could truly feel that they now ‘belonged’ in the workplace, examining in particular their alliances with female MPs, and their use of a range of publicity tactics. As well as contributing important historical insight into the history of the workplace in this period, this paper therefore also adds further dimensions to the continuing historical project of examining the depths and extent of feminist campaigning in the 1950s.

The Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) is often used as a template for the new wave of pressure groups in the 1960s, being characterised as being led by white, male, academic experts. However, the numbers of senior women in pressure groups grew apace in the 1970s. By 1979 Ruth Lister was the Director of CPAG with Jean Coussins, formerly of NCCL, as deputy director; Jean Streather was Director of NCOPF, having formerly been at CPAG; and Margaret Wynn, a prominent researcher, was an advisor to all these groups. They were part of a nexus of women working collaboratively across pressure groups, who also shared an interest in challenging women’s disadvantage in welfare policy and practice. As Streather recalls: There was a small group of us, very much driven by Peggy Wynn. Helene would say it started with a conversation at a bus stop, which it did – I was there. Peggy was saying, “What we need is an organisation that will campaign on behalf of pregnant women and mothers and take a holistic approach.” We then planned it around Helene’s (Helene Hayman, MP for Welwyn and Hatfield) kitchen table, and the campaign got off the ground.4

The work of the Maternity Alliance (MA), the outcome of this conversation, will be the focus of this paper. The female leadership of the MA, it will be argued, were uniquely placed to be influential in political debates, they had policy expertise, campaigning experience and were already engaged parliamentary politics through their professional roles. Whilst the influence of pressure groups on policy change can be opaque and diffuse, it will be argued that we need to consider the work of pressure group women as influential in wider debates in the 1980s and 1990s about how to respond in policy terms to women’s changed social and economic roles, debates that ultimately led to the new approach to women and families under New Labour.

**Special Session**

‘Women’s political careers in Britain and around the world’

Sofia Collignon, Royal Holloway, University of London

and Anthony Pepe, Women Political Leaders

Chair: Minna Cowper-Coles

After the UK general election of 2019 a record number of women presented themselves for office and a record number of female candidates actually went on to become MPs, comprising 34% of the total number of members of the House of Commons (+5%). Unquestionably, this has been possible thanks to the hard work of brave women who fought for their place in politics in the last century. Nevertheless, women still remain underrepresented. Why is it still so difficult for women to achieve full inclusion and equal participation in British politics?

4 LSE, CPAG, Oral Histories, Jane Streather.
The underrepresentation of women in politics is not exclusive of the UK. While some progress has been made to increase the number of women in Parliaments around the world, there has only been a small increase in the past decades in the world average of women in national parliaments. Women’s underrepresentation in decision making positions reinforce the necessity of faster progress towards gender equal political representation. How does the experience of women in politics in the UK fits in with the experiences of women in other countries? What can we learn from best practices to improve gender equality around the world? In this collaborative dialog and debate, we draw on insights from the Representative Audit of Britain candidate surveys and the Female Political Career report (published in partnership between Women Political Leaders and The Global Institute for Women’s Leadership, KCL) to discuss the non-legal barriers that women faced and still face in the different phases of the political lifecycle.
Saturday 17th September

Lecture:
Khursheed Wadia: ‘Becoming Muslim women becoming political’
Chair: Anna Muggeridge

The study of Muslim women in West European societies is recent. The category ‘Muslim women’ is recent. It emerged in the post 9/11 era. Prior to that we referred to women whose origins lay in Muslim-majority countries, or countries with sizeable Muslim populations, in terms of their ethnicity and / or nationality; thus Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Somali, Algerian, Tunisian and so on. Here, I am interested in the emergence of the category ‘Muslim women’; how women in this category are seen and how they see themselves; and what shapes their commitment to particular issues and ways of doing politics. Focusing on Britain, I start with an overview of the political engagement of Pakistani, Bangladeshi and other Asian women in the post war period up to the late 1990s / early 2000s. I then discuss the emergence of ‘Muslim women’, asking how this category is identified and self-identifies. Finally, I consider the political engagement of this category of women, highlighting commonalities with and differences from the political engagement of others. I argue that there is a tension present in Muslim women’s political engagement - there are the issues they feel compelled to think about and act upon and then ideally those with which they would like to be involved but either don’t have the time for or are excluded from because of who they are. I ask how that tension may be diminished if not resolved so that Muslim women can do politics in whatever way they want.
Panel 3a: The Changing Nature of Parliament (Chair: Micaela Panes)

Gillian Murphy, LSE, “The world is your home: why housewives want women in Parliament”:
Women for Westminster

This is the title of a pamphlet by Dora Russell published in 1945 by the group Women for Westminster. In 1940, Edith Summerskill raised the issue of women in Parliament with the Six Point Group. They came up with the idea of returning 100 women to Parliament. Work on this started with a committee within the Women’s Publicity Planning Association and then as Women for Westminster as an independent organisation. It was non-party with local branches tasked with encouraging women to stand for election. Even though MPs Edith Summerskill, Thelma Cazelet Keir, Margery Corbett Ashby and Irene Tate were members, and there were 46 branches, the group had limited success and eventually amalgamated with the National Women Citizens Association in 1949. Taking Laura Beers article ‘Women for Westminster’, Feminism and the limits of non-partisan associational culture’ as my lead, this paper will consider the central records of the Women for Westminster held in Teresa Billington Greig’s papers at the Women’s Library as well as the various branch records and its predecessor Central Women’s Electoral Committee. It will consider the women involved, the reasons why they had limited success and what happened after their merger.


In a 1947 debate on tobacco duties the Labour MP for Epping Leah Manning remarked that ‘help to the older women is [not] in the minds of the vast majority of hon. Members’, for ‘that would be feminism gone mad.’ Manning thus became the first female MP to invoke the concept of ‘feminism’ in the post-war era (the first parliamentarian had been Lord Sydenham during a 1917 debate on the Representation of the People Bill). Even though she used the trope ‘feminism gone mad’ sarcastically as a way to criticise sexist attitudes in the House, it was nonetheless in keeping with the use of the terms ‘feminism’ and ‘feminist’ by female parliamentarians at the time: as a negative concept from which female parliamentarians tried to distance themselves, and against which moderate reforms for increased gender equality could be positively contrasted. Two years later, Barbara Castle insisted the proposed Married Women’s Maintenance Bill ‘does not stem out of fanatical feminism’ and ‘is not an attempt to make a vindictive levy on the husband, but an effort to salvage for the wife and children a home’. By the 1990s, however, the concept of feminism had taken on positive qualities, and both Labour – and increasingly Tory – MPs and peers were claiming the mantle of ‘feminists’. This paper will analyse the use of the words ‘feminism’ and ‘feminist’ by female Parliamentarians during the period 1945-1997 and argue that there was an evolution in the use of the words, from something deployed defensively, as an assertion of what they – or the policy they were advocating – were not, towards a concept which could be used positively and an identity that could be proudly claimed. This evolution reflected not only the broader cultural and political climate, but also the increasingly prominent role played by women in Parliament.

This explores women’s experiences and contributions in the Upper House through three areas of enquiry: getting appointed, settling in, and areas of leadership and contributions. ‘Getting appointed’ looks at how women peers’ routes to the Lords have compared with men’s, some advantages and drawbacks for women of the nominations system, and special challenges such as domestic pressures. ‘Settling in’ explores how fears about women's admission have compared with reality, the reception with which new women members have been met, and their adaptation to and impact on the chamber’s distinct culture. The third section highlights policy areas where women have played an especially prominent role, recounts some of their legislative achievements, and discusses their attainment of office and leadership roles in the House.

Despite the long resistance to admitting women to the House of Lords, their story is strikingly successful and offers interesting contrasts with the Commons. However these experiences are largely unknown, as the Second Chamber has received so little academic attention. Drawing upon a vast range of sources including my own interviews, this is the first study of women peers covering an extended time period (1958 until 2018, with an emphasis on the period before 1997).

**Panel 3b: Political Parties and Cultures (Chair: Richard Johnson)**

**Ellie Lowe, Cambridge University, “The right hand and the left hand’: political marriage in postwar Britain 1945-1970.”**

Post-suffrage, many of the notable women MPs had been spinsters, devoting their efforts to politics and choosing to be ‘married to the party’. But as marriage rates rose over the twentieth century, so did the number of married political women. Very often these marriages were to men that they had met through political activity or with whom they shared political passions. This paper looks at political marriages, where both husbands and wives were politically active together. It will provide case studies of postwar couples to describe some of the models and functions of political marriage in this period. It analyses public partnerships, where both husband and wife pursued active political life together and other styles of relationship where couples alternated between periods of public-facing roles and supportive ones. This paper asserts the importance of using marital status as a category of analysis when understanding access to political spaces for women, reflecting on many of the barriers as well as enabling factors. It discusses what the high rates of marriage amongst party activists suggests about political cultures, and some of the cross party differences. It also provides reflections on changes in marriage and relationships in the 1950s and 60s, and the impact that this had on women’s involvement in party politics.
Colm Murphy, QMUL, "The potential and pitfalls of 'catching up': Labour women and discourses of 'modernisation', 1982-1997."

This paper explores the links between advances in women's representation and centre-left discourses of 'modernisation' in the 1980s and 1990s. The dramatic increase in women MPs in 1997 owes much to turmoil within the Labour Party over increasing female representation during the preceding two decades. Moreover, just as Labour politicians and activists argued over the ‘Minister for Women’ or the All Women Shortlist, they were also embroiled in a wide-ranging debate over the party’s ‘modernisation’ to propel Labour into government and frame its policy agenda. Unsurprisingly, these debates influenced each other. Pioneering work Sarah Perrigo, Meg Russell, and Stephen Brooke has shown how campaigns for feminist representation collaborated organisationally with self-proclaimed ‘modernisers’. But the ‘modernisation’ debates centred on ideology and policy as well as procedure. This paper highlights a small but tightly networked and influential group of self-identifying feminists situated in strategic locations in the Labour Party and wider British left: Harriet Harman in the Commons and Shadow Cabinet, Patricia Hewitt and Anna Coote at the IPPR think tank, and Deborah Mattinson in opinion research. In the 1990s, they explicitly linked intellectual and political 'modernisation' with increased female representation and consciously ‘feminist’ policies. Pointing to trends in the labour market and family models, they argued that a ‘modern’ Labour Party would adopt more women candidates and advocate ambitious policies for childcare, pay equalisation, and flexible working time. Their advocacy offered powerful justifications for constitutional safeguards for women’s representation and equality that, crucially, dovetailed with Labour’s general direction of travel. It also shaped the party’s emerging policy agenda. At the same time, this paper argues that the ‘modernisation’ framework had more ambivalent implications too. By emphasising ‘modern trends’, it did little to challenge an assumption among some (male) political leaders that gender equality was 'naturally' advancing, and that only minimal policy interventions were needed.

Emma Lundin, Malmo University, “Homosociality and double militancy: women’s lobbies, gender quotas and the gatekeeping strategies of male-dominated parties.”

This paper investigates the strengths and drawbacks of women’s-only groups and lobbies within male-dominated political parties, framed around the debates and controversies sparked by the introduction of All-Women Shortlists within the Labour Party in the 1990s. Using a biographical lens to explore the social history of gender equality activism within the Labour Party, the paper investigates the “quiet revolution” that Clare Short – one of its protagonists – claims took place in the 1980s. This followed the Socialist International’s endorsement of the use of quotas in the selection of prospective parliamentarians in 1986. The paper further connects the AWS supporters’ work to the longer quest for gender equality within the

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Labour Party and introduces similar work within the Swedish Social Democratic Party and the African National Congress of South Africa for a comparative angle.

The discussion is framed around the usefulness of ‘double militancy’, a theoretical concept developed by the American political scientist Karen Beckwith and applied to women active in both mixed-gender organisations and women’s-only lobby groups. It also examines the homosocial bonds created in women-only lobbies and whether this – a direct challenge to the hegemonic male homosociality that is still the norm in public life across the world – might explain some of the costs and drawbacks of women organising as women in male-dominated parties.

**Panel 4a: Northern Irish Politics (Chair: Colm Murphy)**

Miren Mohrenweiser, Queen’s University Belfast, “Troubled Mothers: Maternal Activism and the Republican Counterpublic During the Northern Ireland Troubles.”

“Maternal activism” and “wee women’s work” are phrases typically applied to women’s activity during the Northern Ireland Troubles (1968-1998) regardless of political or religious affiliation. What’s notable about these terms is their implied opposites—i.e. “paternal activism” and “big men’s work”—are never referred to in this gendered sense. While men were able to separate their political activity from their family status, many women chose not to or rather were not granted this liberty. Both are significant when discussing women’s relationship with the Troubles and the Republican counterpublic. I broadly group maternal activism into four categories: mothers advocating for peace; mothers advocating for their children and families; mothers engaging with indirect forms of resistance and non-conformity; mothers building support networks. This paper will focus on the last form of maternal activism—mothers building support networks—and its contribution to the Republican counterpublic, understood as community built through both intentional and unintentional action and organisation that worked to distance marginal (i.e. nationalist) communities from the dominant (i.e. unionist) state. Many of these actions during the Troubles were a response to violence against Catholic communities and were, consequently, in defence of those same communities. In regard to maternal activism specifically, this involved a reframing and reclaiming of the private sphere to defend and support the family. Maternal activism in its various forms was most visibly present in Republican/nationalist communities and played a critical role in building and shaping community support for mainstream republicanism. In this paper, I will provide examples of women’s support networks and will demonstrate how these networks developed from the intersectional struggles of working-class Catholic women during the Troubles and became a significant example of how women contributed to the construction of the counterpublic, both in the public and private sphere. I will

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argue that maternal activism provided women with a way to engage with community politics and build their own understanding of Republicanism and of their relationship to the state.

Charitini Ntini, Independent Scholar, “‘Daughters of Ireland’ The activity of women Active Service members in the Provisional IRA, 1968-1998.”

The conflict in Northern Ireland has been one of the longest and most studied topics in the European, if not international history of low-intensity conflicts. However, in exploring this history, journalists and historians have left out an important part of its truth: that of the female experience not as victims, mothers or street demonstrators, but of active participants. This study aims to contribute to a new approach that fulfils this gap and argues that women were involved in active service in Republican paramilitarism more than has been acknowledged by both historians and male ‘comrades’. In this direction, I investigate the geography and stimuli of recruitment, as well as training and patterns of activity for female members in the IRA. This is examined in parallel to the experience of members of the dedicated women’s Republican group Cumann na mBan. My research draws on a variety of primary sources, mostly interviews, biographies and Republican publications. Additionally, prosopography and quantitative work has been applied when possible in the women that lost their lives in active service. While considering the impact of gender in their experiences and treatment, the project aims to explore the female Republican ‘Volunteer’ experience in the way women defined themselves.

Aine McKenny, University of Brighton, “Redefining Political Participation: Displaying Women’s Experiences of the Northern Ireland Conflict in Exhibitions.”

This paper builds upon my PhD research which examines how women’s experiences of the Northern Irish Conflict are displayed within exhibition spaces. My work explores what narratives are rendered possible by different modes of exhibiting and what possibilities there are for women’s experiences of the conflict to exist depending on the exhibition’s material, structural and imaginative dimensions. In this paper, I will start by challenging how we define involvement and participation in politics. Building upon this notion further, I will also explore the potential for what nuanced narratives and understandings of conflict can be displayed in exhibitions once we change these understandings of participation. Using these two ideas as a foundation, I will analyse the Linen Hall Library’s collection and exhibition 'extraORDINARY Women: Supporting Communities 1965 - Today’ as a case study and examine what can be learned about the experiences of women during conflict and their involvement in political, socioeconomic and cultural change through this particular exhibition.
Panel 4b: Elections and Referenda (Chair: Rose Debenham)

Peter Edge, Oxford Brookes, “Women candidates for election to the House of Keys.”

The Isle of Man was the first Anglophone jurisdiction to introduce votes for (some) women in the national legislature, the Tynwald, in 1881. Women were not able to stand for the lower chamber, the House of Keys, until 1919; or for the upper chamber, the Legislative Council, until 1961. Our paper combines analysis of electoral data and biographical analysis of the small number of women candidates for both chambers. We argue that success rates for women candidates to the Keys were very similar throughout 1945-1997, but that the number of women candidates coming forward was much lower than men prepared to stand. The absence of a party system in Manx politics may have contributed to this, as analysis of the Manx Labour Party – the most significant party in a system massively dominated by independents – suggests. In relation to the indirectly elected Legislative Council, an emphasis on appointing former MHKs rather than looking outside Tynwald largely replicated the absence of women in the lower chamber. Broader views as to the role of women in public life – exemplified by the exclusion of Manx women from juries until 1980 (as opposed to 1919 in England) – may also have played a part in the maleness of Tynwald 1945-1997. The 21st Century outlook, which we will touch on briefly for contrast, is considerably brighter.


One of the unremarked aspects of Labour Euroscepticism is the prominent role played by female Labour MPs. In the 1970s, some of the most vocal exponents of the anti-Market (Eurosceptic) cause were women, yet the historical record focuses overwhelmingly on the contribution of male MPs, such as Tony Benn, Michael Foot, and Peter Shore. Barbara Castle is the one exception of a Labour ‘Leaver’ who retains public notoriety, yet Castle was by no means alone in her crusade against European integration. Many of the women who campaigned against joining (and, then, for leaving) the European Economic Community had backgrounds in the world development movement and anti-racist campaigns. They regarded the EEC as an insular bloc of rich, privileged, white countries. In this respect, they agreed with Clement Attlee’s view that joining the Common Market was ‘a step backwards to the old idea of a Europe apart from the rest of the world’. This paper highlights the contributions of key women in the Labour Eurosceptic movement of the 1970s, including Judith Hart, Joan Lestor, Anne Kerr, Audrey Wise, Renée Short, Lena Jeger, and Gwyneth Dunwoody. The paper assesses the extent to which a sexist focus on male campaigners has distorted subsequent understandings of the types of arguments made against EEC membership. The paper will also include reflections from two latter-day Labour Eurosceptic women – Gisela Stuart and Kate Hoey – who undertook prominent roles during the 2016 European Union referendum.
Tom Chidwick, QMUL, “‘Good Girls Say No’: Campaigning for and against a Scottish Assembly.”

On 28 February 1979, readers of the resolutely conservative Daily Telegraph were confronted by an alarming editorial which lamented ‘A Kingdom on the Brink’. Whilst readers may have expected an account of the ongoing Iranian Revolution, which only a fortnight before had seen the collapse of the provisional revolutionary government and the cementing of Ayatollah Khomeini’s control over the former Imperial State, the editorial was, in fact, a dire warning about the durability of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. As Scotland and Wales prepared to go to the polls to determine whether to establish new devolved legislatures in Edinburgh and Cardiff, the Telegraph declared that nothing short of the ‘dissolution of the British State’ was on the ballot paper.

This paper will explore how the 1970s—a decade of significant and disjointing change across the UK—was dominated by constitutional change north of the border and analyse how women from across Scottish society participated in the campaigns for and against the country’s first legislature in nearly three hundred years. In addition to charting how women contributed to the major political parties’ campaigns, it will examine how parliamentarians, activists, working women, and ‘housewives’ established a nationwide network of civic organisations to campaign for positive legal, social, and economic change, regardless of whether Scotland secured a Scottish Assembly.

Panel 4c: Struggles for equality (Chair: Helen Glew)


In 2020 more than a few eyebrows were raised when the Jersey State Assembly voted to allow married women to take control of their own tax affairs and so end the practice whereby a wife’s earnings were considered and taxed as part of her husband’s income. But as one somewhat disgruntled Jersey tax accountant noted, married women in the rest of the UK had only been afforded such independence in 1990. So why did such an anomaly persist long after women’s property rights, admission to the professions and equal pay had been recognised? In this paper I shall discuss the campaigns in the 1950s that sought to change tax legislation so that a married woman’s earnings were taxed separately from that of her husband. My focus is on the activity of Ethel Watts, a chartered accountant, tax specialist, wife and long term member of the Fawcett Society (and its predecessors). By deploying her professional understanding of tax legislation Watts skilfully demonstrated not only that the existing system was unfair to women but also detrimental to the economy as a whole. Yet her arguments were ignored even though
some MPs were sympathetic to the need for change. In my paper I shall offer some explanations as to why this was so and thus demonstrate how so-called ‘Women’s issues’ were (and continue to be) dismissed by the establishment in favour of the status quo.

Anne Locker, Institute of Engineering and Technology, ‘A wonderful flair for publicity’: Dame Caroline’s Haslett’s campaigns for women in industry 1945-1955

Dame Caroline Haslett (1895-1957) was the first Secretary of the Women’s Engineering Society (founded 1919) and co-founder of the Electrical Association for Women (founded 1924). Her work for the UK Government during and after WW2 is less well known. Haslett was a consummate networker on both sides of the political divide and a committee stalwart: she was a member of the Woman Power Committee set up by Lady Astor; a member of the Women’s Consultative Committee set up by Ernest Bevin; an advisor to Bevin on electrical matters; and the sole woman to be appointed to the new British Electricity Authority (BEA) after the electricity supply industry was nationalised.

This paper will show how Haslett built extensive personal networks through the Women’s Engineering Society; the Electrical Association for Women; the BEA; the Forum Club; and the International Federation for Business and Professional Women (she was elected President of the last organisation in 1950). She was friendly with a number of women MPs and senior civil servants and campaigned on equal pay, access to technical careers, and the International Labour Organisation’s rules on the employment of women. Haslett’s achievements help demonstrate the importance of female bureaucrats in the post-war period, and their contributions to women’s rights.

Grace Heaton, Mansfield College, Oxford, “‘God is an Equal Opportunities Employer – Pity about the Church’: Humour and the campaign for women’s ordination in the Church of England.”

In November 1992 Time magazine heralded the arrival of ‘a second Reformation’. The magazine’s cover story chronicled the moment in which the controversial Priests (Ordination of Women) Measure was passed by the Church of England’s parliamentary body, General Synod, on 11 November 1992. After decades of impassioned debate and discussion, the Motion to ordain women to the priesthood received the necessary two-thirds majority in the Houses of Bishops, Clergy, and Laity. This momentous decision, which irrevocably changed the church’s gender politics, was the culmination of decades of vibrant activism undertaken by Christian women. However, as Sue Morgan and Jaqueline deVries have noted, ‘women’s entrance into religious ministry on equal terms with men is, surprisingly, one of the most underexplored stories of twentieth-century gender and women’s history’.

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7 Morgan and deVries (eds.), Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800-1940 (2010).
This paper, therefore, seeks to provide an insight into a campaign which dominated the lives of many Christian women in the post-1968 era. It questions who was involved in the campaign for women’s ordination? What forms did their activism take? And how did these women experience and make sense of their activism? Through exploring these questions this paper will demonstrate that humour was a key component of the activism undertaken by Christian women championing women’s ordination.

Lecture:
Sarah Childs: (New) Labour Women MPs: the Feminization of British Politics (Chair: Tom Chidwick)

1997 election night. I had moved the television into my bedroom; I had my Muji notebook and purple pen to the ready; as the results arrived in quick succession, I ticked off the women candidates who had agreed to speak to me after the election. They were now ‘new Labour women MPs’. Overnight the numbers of women in the UK House of Commons doubled, from 60 to 120. 101 of these were Labour women; and 35 of the 65 elected for the first time were selected from all-women shortlists – Labour’s gender quota. Today, as a senior Commons Clerk recently reminded me, if you close your eyes and imagine a Labour MP, you should be visualizing a woman; the composition of the Parliamentary Labour party post-2019 is more than 50% women. This is nothing short of institutional re-gendering; a feminization of the Labour party. But as my 2004 book New Labour Women’s MPs: Women Representing Women made clear, counting the numbers of women is only ever the beginning. Back in 1997 P&G scholars and the public frequently talked about ‘what difference’ these women would make. This is a question that we’ve yet to adequately answer. Do not confuse women’s bodies with feminist minds, I wrote, but I was confident that many of these women were feminists. And I strongly believed politics could be re-gendered even as I knew other dynamics were in play and other actors would resist the women’s efforts.

This 2022 keynote revisits essential questions of gender and representative politics – of political equality, electoral participation, and the representation of women’s interests. It is the scholar’s responsibilities to do better for the represented and our women elected representatives that I wish to explore, namely, how impactful research can engender better representation. And so, I reconsider core research questions that politics and gender scholars were asking at the time, and what we should be asking now, as P&G analytic frameworks and methods have become more sophisticated. I lay out the case: for rejecting the traditional disaggregated conception of representation – descriptive, symbolic, substantive – in favour of an intersectional approach that brings three core feminist principles - inclusiveness, responsiveness and egalitarianism – to our new research agenda; to reconsider institutional resistance to women’s presence within parties and parliaments; and to evaluating what the arrival of new Labour’s women MPs has meant for the feminization of British party and parliamentary politics more broadly. There is much to be
optimistic about, and yet… Women continue to experience a poverty of political representation, especially minority and marginalized women, and women politicians representational work is constrained by a highly masculinized parliament (a gender insensitive Commons), and in the face of what we had not named 25 years ago – violence against women in politics/gendered political violence (VAW-P). As I look back critically on what has happened since 1997 and what still needs to happen, my keynote is designed to inspire women’s ongoing engagement with and equal participation in electoral politics.