Department of Humanities, Northumbria University

Honours Dissertation

‘Born to Struggle’:

Working-Class Women’s Activism in 1970s Britain

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List of Abbreviations

CAG	Cleaners’ Action Group
CSU	Civil Service Union
NUTGW	National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers
TGWU	Transport and General Workers’ Union
WLM	Women’s Liberation Movement
IS	International Socialists

Introduction

The 1970s are notoriously known for being a period of lingering class confrontation in Britain.[1] The post-war mass entry of women into the workplace necessitated a new understanding of social dissent, as a more diverse workforce created more complex forms of action. Between 1951 and 1971 the number of married women in work increased from twenty-three to forty-six percent.[2] This more diverse workforce made evident the levels of disparity between genders and the need for militancy. Specifically, the period from 1970 to 1974 was marked by an 'impressive array' of women's strikes.[3] The overall level of worker militancy increased, with 1973 as the high point for an 'increasingly self-confident and militant working class'.[4] The Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) emerged after this 'intense working-class activity', which highlights how the British movement was heavily influenced by socialist feminism. [5]

The historiography of the WLM is often deemed to be London-centric and described by Nathalie Tomlinson as 'threadbare'.[6] However, although this London-based group developed the movement, the local and grass roots work of activists influenced the WLM,

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[1] David Bouchier, *The Feminist Challenge* (London: MacMillan Press, 1983) p.106.
[2] Sara Connolly and Mary Gregory, 'Women and Work since 1970', in Nicolas Crafts, Ian Gazeley and Andrew Newell (eds), *Work and Pay in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) p.146.
[3] Tony Cliff, *Class Struggle and Women's Liberation*(London: Wheaton and Company, 1984) p.170.
The list seems endless, but includes: the 1970 Night Cleaners who fought for a union (which was heavily covered by the WLM press); the 20,000 Leeds Clothing Workers in which 85% of strikers were women; the 1971 London telephonist's pay dispute; the women of Brannan's thermometer factory in Cumberland defending trade union organisation; the 1972 strikes at Fisher-Bendix Merseyside and Briant Colour Printing in London; Goodman's electrical industries fought for equal pay; in 1973, the first ever hospital workers strike; and in the same year Mansfield Hosiery Mills struck over the racial discrimination of Asian women.
[4] Alan Campbell, Nina Fishman & John McIlroy (eds), *British Trade Unions and Industrial Politics, 1945–79,* Vol. 1: the post-war compromise, 1945–64 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999) p.346.
[5] Gill Allwood and Khursheed Wadia, 'Gender and Class in Britain and France', *Journal of European Area Studies,* 9:2 (2001), p.167.
[6] Natalie Thomlinson, 'The Colour of Feminism: White Feminists and Race in the Women's Liberation Movement', *History,* 97:327 (2012), p.455.

therefore it is more complicated than domination by the middle-classes.[7] Historian and prominent figure in the WLM, Sheila Rowbotham, stated that the 'industrial militancy of women brings to the fore issues of democracy within the working-class movement'.[8]

According to Kalwant Bhopal, the aim of feminist research is to 'capture women's lived experience in a respectful manner that legitimates women's voices as a source of power'.[9] This dissertation explores the relationship between the WLM and trade union activism and how the voices of working-class women are integral to producing action. The connection between both the WLM and trade union structures with working-class women has not been harmonious. On working-class perceptions of the WLM, the leader of the Night Cleaners Campaign for unionisation May Hobbs stated she had heard 'a load of toffee like bra-burning' about feminism.[10] The complexity of working-class women's relationship with the WLM will be acknowledged, especially in regards to personal identity. It uses two case studies: The Night Cleaners campaign for unionisation and the extent of a feminist consciousness, and the Leeds Clothing strike whose disenfranchisement of the female workforce led to militancy. This dissertation integrates elements of social movement theory to examine these events and the concept of leadership within them.

The first chapter will explore the emergence of the WLM as a socialist feminist movement that incorporated the experiences of working-class women into their activism. This will be demonstrated by analysing socialist feminism as a concept and illustrating how this translated into both the experiences of working-class women within the movement, and

[7] George Stevenson, 'The Women's Movement and "Class Struggle": Gender, Class Formation and political Identity in Women's Strikes, 1968-1978', *Women's History Review,* 25:5 (2016), p.742
[8] Sheila Rowbotham, *Woman's Consciousness; Man's World* (NY, Middlesex: Penguin, 1974) p.96.
[9] Kalwant Bhopal, 'Gender, Identity and experience: researching marginalised groups', *Women's International Forum,* 33:3 (2010), p.189.
[10] *Shrew* 3:9 (December 1971), p.9.

how they framed themselves. The dissertation will primarily focus on the feminist publications *Shrew* and *Spare Rib,* analysing how they present socialist feminist ideals and how their distribution provided feminist consciousness-raising throughout the country.

Chapter two will analyse two female-led working-class strikes in the early 1970s: The Night Cleaners campaign emerging from London, and Leeds Clothing Strike of 1970. It uses social movement theory to examine these events, arguing for the importance of collective identities in producing action. The Night Cleaners campaign allegedly formed a feminist consciousness, whereas the short-lived Leeds clothing strike remained focused on trade unionist ends. This analysis has been achieved through the use of feminist publications such as *Shrew* and footage from the BBC *Play for Today* entitled 'Leeds United!'.

The final chapter explores the role of two individuals who lead the Night Cleaners and Leeds Clothing strike: May Hobbs and Gertie Roche. By analysing the militant action in the framework of social movement theory it broadens the scope of achievement from the collective to the role of leadership. This chapter will use Hobbs' autobiography, *Born to Struggle* and Roche's interviews with the press. Through social movement theory and an analysis of the work of the individuals before and during the strikes it will be established to what extent they were leaders.

This dissertation aims to assess working-class women's militancy in the early 1970s; whether this be through the relationship with the WLM and trade unions, or through strike action. It will analyse the intersections between identity, WLM and militancy and will be explored through the framework of social movement theory.

Chapter One

Women's Liberation and Working-Class Women

Parallel to the strike action of working-class women was the development of the Women's Liberation Movement.[11] The 'intense working-class activity' which emerged parallel to the WLM is a signifier the movement was heavily influenced by socialist feminism. [12] Socialist feminism is the overarching term for feminists that viewed their feminism in the broader scope of capitalist oppression.[13] Arthur Marwick stated: 'the heart of what was truly significant in the changes in consciousness brought about by sixties developments: action not just gilded youth, but by ordinary, under-privileged working-class women'.[14] The WLM saw the militancy of working-class women as a formative influence on the WLM's ideology through 'cross-class alliances' of women.[15] Yet, although class was central, gender was seen as the overall unifier of the movement. The WLM struggled to identify with women workers who primarily saw their struggles in class terms before gender.[16]

Focusing on the relationship of the movement with working class women, and how print culture was important as a form of activism, it will be demonstrated how the movement engaged with different perspectives to combine theory with activism. This chapter will discuss the impact of activism, particularly by the engagement of working-class women in the WLM and how this was evident in how they framed themselves in print culture. The creation of this

[11] Cliff, *Class Struggle and Women's Liberation,* p.171.
[12] Allwood and Wadia, 'Gender and Class in Britain and France', p.167.
[13] Jeska Rees, 'A Look Back at Anger: The Women's Liberation Movement in 1978', *Women's History Review,* 19:3 (2010), p.338.
[14] Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c. 1958-c.1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,1988) p.689.
[15] Sheila Rowbotham, *The Past is Before Us: feminism in action since the 1960s* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), p.166.
[16] Sue Bruley, 'It didn't just come out of nowhere did it?: The origins of the women's liberation movement in 1960s Britain', *Oral History,* 45:1 (2017), p.67.

form of activism allowed feminist identities to develop and creates the backdrop for the exploration of working-class militancy that will be explored in further chapters.

Socialist feminists have contributed intensely to the literature and historiography surrounding the WLM and its origins: most notably, activist and feminist historian Sheila Rowbotham. As part of the International Marxist Group's underground publication *Black Dwarf,* Rowbotham published a special edition on the WLM in 1969.[17] This edition emerged on the edge of the militant industrial strike action of female workers at Ford's Industrial Plant in Dagenham and publicized the WLM support for female workers as pivotal to the new movement. This is one of the first examples of how the WLM framed itself as a champion for working class women's needs. Rowbotham's work in the period explicitly links the ideas of socialist feminism to the activism of the WLM and highlights the links of economics and gender relations that are at the core of the movement.[18] The production of this edition was synonymous to the formation of the National Joint Action Campaign Committee for Women's Equal Rights (NJACCWER) in 1969 and was the first to combine working-class trade unionists with the liberationists.[19] This evolved through the creation of the first WLM groups in 1969 that were first established in London as the Women's Liberation Workshop. They declared:

> 'the men lead and dominate, the women follow and submit. We close our meetings to men to break through this pattern, to establish our own leaderless groups and to meet each other over our common experience as women… to further our part in the struggle for social change and transformation of society'.[20]

The intention of the movement is illustrated here with the explicit declaration of being open to all women and creating an exclusive space that allows women's issues to be acknowledged.

[17] Sheila Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream: remembering the sixties* (London: Penguin, 2000) p.14.
[18] Rosalyn Baxendall, 'A Tribute to Sheila Rowbotham: activist, pioneer of thought and action', *Radical History Review,* 63 (1995), p.155.
[19] Sheila Rowbotham, *The Past is Before Us* (London:Thorsons, 1989) p.166.
[20] *Spare Rib* (April 1978).

British second-wave feminism can be seen to be dominated by socialist ideals. Inspired by Friedrich Engels, *On the Origin of the Family,* socialist feminists viewed class struggle as evident within the household and that 'the first class oppression [is] with that of the female by the male'.[21] This demonstrates the key idea that marriage represents a microcosm for the conflicts between wider society where wives take the position of the oppressed class within the household and the patriarch represents the employer and oppressor. Following on from Engels' work, socialist feminists argued that women were subjected to a unique form of oppression that excluded them from paid work and restricted them to the domestic sphere. Therefore, the family became a 'sub-mode of production' capitalism.[22] This demonstrates how socialist feminism is rooted in the ideals of economic oppression and hence why the WLM initially focused on working class women. Rowbotham's work is a vital component in demonstrating the interlink between socialist feminist theory and the personal experiences of women, incorporating theory with the realities of womanhood:

> 'the most potentially subversive to capitalism because it spans production and reproduction, class exploitation and sex oppression…Their [working class women's] organisation and militancy is vital for women's liberation but for the whole socialist and working-class movement'.[23]

Therefore, the strategies of socialist feminists often focused on the economic disadvantages of working-class women and aimed to unite their struggle. Reformist campaigns were common and worked with working-class women to solve issues such as unionisation,

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[21] Friedrich Engels, *On the Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977), p.232

[22] Allwood and Wadia, 'Gender and Class in Britain and France', p.172.

[23] Sheila Rowbotham, *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*(Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p.124.

exploitation in the work place, social security and wages.[24] These campaigns were often publicised in feminist publications.

The first national WLM conference at Ruskin College in Oxford in 1970 featured female trade unionists as speakers. The conference ensured to have a section dedicated to the issues of working-class women, with the campaign for Equal Pay being at the centre of what united the movement. Audrey Wise was a working-class trade unionist who spoke at the conference, but also saw the importance of linking the 'trade union working-class equal pay strand, and the women's lib strand'.[25] This struggle for class-based political reforms was exemplified further through the first WLM march on Women's day in 1971. The march on 6 March 1971 established the WLM's four demands to improve the position of women in society. These were: equal pay; equal education and job opportunities; free contraception and easy access to abortion; and free 24-hour nurseries.[26] These four demands acknowledged the needs of a family from a socialist perspective. The creation of these original four values was well-suited to the needs of working-class women and had clear links to implementing real-world change and explicit socialist feminist ideology. The development of the WLM was focused on the practicalities of creating change and was not intrinsically motivated by ideology.

One socialist feminist contributor for *Scarlet Woman* highlighted the activist focus of the movement and how they were 'Caught up in a great amount of work [so] we had little time to think or develop theory about what we were doing'.[27] This was demonstrated further through the campaigns of the earlier years, such as the campaigning in support of the Night

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[24] Bouchier, *The Feminist Challenge,* p.83.
[25] 'Audrey Wise Interview', in Michelene Wandor (ed.) *Once a Feminist: Stories of a Generation* (London: Virago, 1990), p,212.
[26] *Spare Rib* 69 (April 1978), p.5.
[27] Scarlet Women National Editorial Collective, 'Socialist Feminism: the last 3 years', *Scarlet Women* (July 1979), p.4.

Cleaners, defending abortion laws and strengthening women's representation in trade unions.[28] As loosely affiliated WLM groups established themselves around the country, some were more connected to traditional socialism than others.[29] For example, the Bolton group was formed and arranged with a structure that approached the movement with conventional methods, this included a chairman and note-taking secretary that mirrored the historically active labour movement in the community. As an area, Bolton is rooted in working class industries such as manufacturing, and the suffrage movement. Due to this, the Bolton Women's Liberation Group (BWLG) were concerned with activism and not theory. The minute-book of a BWLG meeting noted that 'some members were worried about getting bogged down in theory'.[30]

The experiences of working-class women within the WLM has often been overlooked. Oral history is essential in establishing the real experiences of working-class women in the movement. The range of interviews produced by Sue Bruley are integral documentation into the variety of working-class women involved in the WLM and focused on the sense of empowerment of the women and how the women felt their collective action could produce change.[31] This is explicitly demonstrated in Bruley's interview with Siri Lowe, a working-class woman from a Jewish family born in East London.[32] Siri dropped out of studying French and English at university over claims she 'couldn't imagine being a middle-class professional'. Siri felt it was a combination of:

[28] Rees, 'A Look Back at Anger', p.340.
[29] Sue Bruley, 'Women's Liberation at the Grass Roots: a view from some English Towns', *Women's History Review,* 25:5 (2016), p.725.
[30] Minute Book 1, 23 Feb 1972, Box 1, BWLG, Feminist Archive North.
[31] Bruley, 'It didn't just come out of nowhere did it?', p.69.
[32]'Interview with Siri Lowe, born in London, 1946' in Bruley, 'The origins', p.6. Siri has since died – see her obituary in *The Guardian* (27 May 2015).

> 'class and gender thing mixed together. But it was class […] and the gender bit was reinforced with those expectations at school you couldn't really be a career woman because you couldn't be a real woman who had a family'.[33]

Many of the working-class women interviewed by Bruley highlight the social mobility that was provided through education and how their interaction with feminist theory developed due to their lived experiences. This inclusion into the movement allowed them to reveal their experiences and influence the WLM's ideology.

The WLM's use of print was a way to establish feminist communication throughout the country and the ability to engage with feminist thought despite class. Magazines and newsletters varied in size of audience and method of organisation. The dedication to publishing a magazine – editing, writing and funding – demonstrates the same levels of political commitment as other forms of activism.[34] Print culture 'seized upon a potential portal to power' as it allowed participation in the movement by women who never had been able to contribute before. It combined the personal and political, print culture became a form of activism against the male dominated publishing industry and patriarchy itself.[35] The underground press in the UK in the 1960s helped establish a training ground for this branch of the WLM. Already rooted in the counter-culture of anti-establishment magazines such as *OZ* and *Friendz*, it allowed the founders of feminist magazines such as Marsha Rowe of *Spare Rib* to grasp being part of an organisation founded in counter culture. Rowe acknowledged the amount she learnt from *Oz*: 'This was prompted by all we had learned on the underground

[33] Bruley, 'Interview with Siri Lowe'.
[34] Laurel Forster, *Magazine Movements: Women's Culture, Feminism and Media Form*(London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), p.211.
[35] Laurel Forster, 'Spreading the Word: Feminist print cultures and the Women's Liberation Movement', *Women's History Review,* 25:5 (2016), p.812.

press, which included the notion that self-organising was possible, as well as familiarity with the mechanics of production and distribution.'[36]

Spare Rib is regarded as one of the most famous second-wave feminist magazines which was made possible through its accessibility by its national distribution at WH Smith.[37] This national distribution allowed it to be more openly accessible than other feminist magazines. However, the structure of production of *Spare Rib* made it more difficult for working-class women to contribute in the magazine. This is due to the female-led magazine being run by women with experience in the publishing industry. Yet, the magazine aimed to cover issues that were central to the WLM's core values as established in 1970. Inclusive articles covering issues that affected working women were common such as 'Equal Pay: make it work for you'.[38] *Spare Rib* even explored historical events such as the article, 'Women in struggle: The Strike at Mansfield Hosiery' which looked into the past experiences of militant working-class women. Therefore, framing the movement as interested in historic female militancy and how female strike action can cause change, as well as establishing ongoing campaigns.[39]

In contrast to *Spare Rib, Shrew* magazine allowed different groups to contribute a monthly issue and therefore participation in the magazine can be seen as a form of activism in itself. As highlighted by Laurel Forster: '*Shrew* was the forum for women to work through their identification with the movement and to participate in print activism in the very production of the magazine.'[40] The opportunity to work with the movement is evident in other editions such as the *Goodbye Dolly* children's book issue by the Women's Liberation

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[36] Marsha Rowe, *Spare Rib Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), p.15.
[37] Forster, 'Spreading the Word', p.822.
[38] Sarah Boston, 'Equal Pay: make it work for you' *Spare Rib* (May 1973), p.9.
[39] Bennie Bunsee, 'Women in Struggle: The Strike at Mansfield Hosiery', *Spare Rib* (March 1974), p.18.
[40] Forster, 'Spreading the Word', p.822.

Literature Collective and Leeds Group.[41] This was a special edition of Shrew focused on working women and working-class activism, with a whole double-page feature on striking women, highlighting the strong focus on working women's issues.[42] In a piece entitled 'Equal as Equal Does', the WLM establishes that 'The [Equal Pay] Act itself is very limited' and that 'women's militancy is never simply economic. It raises immediately other issues about the family, relations between the sexes, and democratic control at work and in the unions'. The edition goes on to celebrate women's strikes in the past and present, glorifying the achievement of working-class women so far and urging them to maintain their militancy. The double-page feature informs readers of the success of female militancy from the first equal pay strike at Dagenham Ford Machinists in 1968, to the Leeds Clothing Strike of 1970 and at this point in time, the ongoing Night Cleaners Campaign in 1972. The intent of this edition was to empower more women to act in 'solidarity' and 'sisterhood'.[43] Thus, it can be deemed an example of how the WLM framed themselves as a champion for working-class values and ensured that the movement would continue to support working class women's issues and give them a voice.

Through this exploration into the content of several feminist magazines, and the founding theory the movement was based on, the collaborative relationship between working-class women and the WLM can be established. Whether through a focus on historic strike action, or in framing the movement around real-life issues such as equal pay, the WLM demonstrated that activism was just as important as theory. Despite the majority of members being from the middle-classes, the WLM still managed to attract working-class women to the cause but primarily when the focus was on activism. This was especially evident in the work

[41] *Shrew* (April 1972).
[42] *Shrew* (October 1972), p.4.
[43] *Ibid*, pp6-7.

of WLM movements in the north of the country and in campaigns such as the Night Cleaners. The growing militancy of working-class women in the period gave the WLM momentum to pursue campaigns that were theoretically rooted in socialism. The extent to whether this political identity translated into the reality of the campaigns they were part of will be explored in the actions of the Night Cleaners. Yet, the WLM's relationship with working class women, and print culture as a form of activism in itself, highlights how the movement's theoretical base was dominated by the practical, especially in regard to mobilising working-class women.

Chapter Two

Women in Movement: The Night Cleaners and Leeds Clothing Strike

Social movement theory has developed during periods of radical change.[44] Before the 1960s there were complaints that 'in the study of social changes, social movements have received relatively little emphasis'.[45] As a theory, the study of social movements focuses on how ideas, individuals, events and organisations are linked together to produce collective action.[46] This analysis of social movements grew in momentum after the 1960s as grassroots political action and cultural resistance grew. Literature regarding the development of 'new social movement' theory has focused on the development of a collective identity that shifts away from the traditional class-based movements of the early twentieth century.[47] In the 1970s there was an important shift towards establishing a difference in political participation, beyond traditional networks like trade unionism. Militancy between labour and worker were no longer solely male dominated and provided outlets through 'new social movements' such as Women's Liberation.[48] In social movements the development of a collective 'we' that is contrasted with to a conflicting 'they' is integral to creating mobilisation and sustaining

[44] The development of New Social Movement theory has been concurrent with transformative movements in the late 1960s such as the African-American civil rights movement, anti-war movements, student protests in France, Germany, Britain and Mexico, and the pro-democracy movements in Madrid and Prague, all of which would influence the 1970s.

[45] Lewis Killian, 'Social Movements', in Robert E. Farris (ed.), *Handbook of Modern Sociology* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964), p.426.

[46] Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), p.5.

[47] Verta Taylor and Nancy Whittier, 'Collective Identity in Social Movement Communities: Lesbian Feminist Mobilisation' in Aldon Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (eds), *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p.170.

[48] Porta and Diani, *Social Movements,* p.6.

action.[49] This chapter explores two cases of female-led labour action in the early 1970s: the Night Cleaners that developed from London, and the Leeds Clothing Strike of 1970. Using social movement theory to examine these events, this chapter argues for the importance of collective identities in producing action and highlights how even without a feminist consciousness, gender was pivotal in both of these events.

Social movement theory identifies two major components in a movement: belonging and action.[50] Definitions of collective identity often emphasize identity in relation to difference. For example, that people who are united in a distinct cultural, racial, ethnic, class group or in other ways feel solidarity with others the same as them. However, who is or is not included in the movement is a just as important a feature.[51] In most cases, identities are multiple and inclusive, allowing people to feel close to multiple collectives.[52] Similarity may appear to be the foundation of collective identity but complete homogeneity in groups is unachievable, actors who are similar in some ways may be entirely different in others.[53] As well as this, collective identities are not the same as personal identities, although they may overlap and form part of an individual's personal identity.[54] The importance of belonging within collective identity is defined by Polletta and Jasper as:

> 'an individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution. It is a perception of a shared status or relation, which may be imagined rather than experienced directly…'.[55]

[49] Laurence Cox, *Why Social Movements Matter,* (London and New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018), p.xii.
[50] Dorothy Holland, Gretchen Fox and Vinci Daro, 'Social Movements and Collective Identity: A Decentred, Dialogic View', *Anthropological Quarterly* 81:1 (2008), p.97.
[51] *Ibid*, p.98.
[52] Porta and Diani, *Social Movements,* p.92.
[53] *Ibid,* p.93.
[54] Francesca Polletta and James Jasper, 'Collective Identity and Social Movements', *Annual Review of Sociology* 27 (2001), p.285.
[55]*Ibid*, p.285.

Collective identity is a process of consistently changing forces that alter from self-identifications and the others outside the collective.[56] The mutuality of action and belonging combine to produce a collective identity. Belonging is important in forming a collective identity, but it is also an important basis to create action. The relationship between identity and collective action is defined by how identity is defined by actor's recognition of their selves.[57] Taylor and Whittier value identity in action more closely and hence define collective identity as 'the shared definition of a group that derives from members' common interests, experiences and solidarity'.[58] This identity can create collective action, which is the intersection between involvement and personal engagement.[59] It requires actors to see a stake in their action. Identities and action are formed through interactions that evolve as actors recognise common interests, experiences and solidarity.[60] Previously, collective action was often based on the proximity of actors and a sense of community, although through globalisation this has changed in the case of strikes in the 1970s, locality was an important feature.[61] This sense of shared history is important in establishing a collective identity, which is easily created when individuals are from close proximity; this allows the movement to determine goals and strategies.[62]

This form of locality is evident in strikes of the twentieth century. Strikes are the most visible form of collective action of the working classes as they are accessible to workers and provide a platform for conflict to be solved.[63] In this instance, both strikes established

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[56]Holland *et al*, 'Social Movements and Collective Identity', p.106.
[57] Porta and Diani, *Social Movements,* p.91.
[58] Taylor and Whittier, 'Collective Identity in Social Movement Communities', p.105.
[59] Porta and Diani, *Social Movements,* p.91.
[60]Taylor, 'Gender and Social Movements', p.25.
[61] Porta and Diani, *Social Movements,* p.94.
[62] Joseph Gusfield, *Protest, Reform, and Revolt* (New York: Wiley, 1970), pp309-13.
[63] Charles Tilly, *From Mobilisation to Revolution* (New York and London: McGraw Publishing Company, 1978), p.159.

different collective identities but were rooted in similar causes of mobilisation: the neglect from the conventional union structure. The Night Cleaners' Strike and demand for a union was defined by its involvement with the WLM and feminist consciousness; whereas, the Leeds Clothing Strike was rooted in traditional class militancy in another female-dominated industry, tired of the failures of their union. Both of these events focus on working-class women in female-dominated industries but differ in the extent to which identities did or did not develop in each strike.

Feminism as a movement is defined by David Bouchier as 'any form of opposition to any form of social, personal or economic discrimination which women suffer because of their sex'.[64] In this context, feminism is a collective identity that is rooted in 'sisterhood' and engages with the concept that expresses a collective identity as women.[65] It demonstrates a level of solidarity between women, social and political across class lines, allowing an 'objectivity of our oppression'.[66] In feminist discourse the idea of belonging in collective identity is replaced by 'consciousness raising'.[67] This personal consciousness, or sense of awareness of a feminist situation of individual women is a key feature in establishing action and organising. When viewing feminism as a collective identity within a social movement, it should be understood through an ever-changing identity that may prioritise different ideals. Research into the American women's movement by Mueller (1987) established that these changes in consciousness can be significant in creating future mobilisation. [68] The concept

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[64] David Bouchier, *The Feminist Challenge: The Movement for Women's Liberation in Britain and the US* (London: MacMillan, 1983), p.63.
[65] *Ibid*, p.63.
[66] Dorothy Smith, *Feminism and Marxism* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1977), p.10.
[67] Bill Lee and Wendy Weeks, 'Social Action Theory and the Women's Movement: An Analysis of Assumptions', *Community Development Journal* 26:3 (1991), p.220.
[68] Carol Mueller, 'Collective Consciousness, Identity Transformation, and the Rise of Women in Public Office in the US' in MF Katzenstein and CM Mueller (eds), *The Women's Movements of the US and Western Europe* (Philadelphia; Temple University Press, 1987), p.90.

within the WLM that 'the personal is political' allowed the family and personal life to become aspects for social action.[69] Piven and Cloward highlight that the success of action, specifically in women's movements, is defined by achievable targets for the protestors involved: 'Institutional roles determine the strategic opportunities for defiance, for it is typically by rebelling against the rules and authorities associated with their everyday activities that people protest'.[70] Hence, mobilisation is achieved successfully through the framing of issues which make a case for the injustice of a situation and produce collective agency to create change.[71]

Feminist mobilisation was achieved in the campaign for the Night Cleaners. The campaign was unusual as it had feminist support from the WLM from the start.[72] Thousands of women were working throughout the night cleaning office buildings and hospitals for little pay.[73] These women were casual workers that were outside the regular economy and trade union structure. Through the introduction of contract cleaning groups in the 1960s and 70s cleaning work became increasingly privatised and made unionisation even more difficult as they would cut costs by lowering the already poor wages of workers. The campaign for improved pay, improved conditions and union recognition was at its peak from 1970 to 1973.[74] Through the leadership of May Hobbs, the Night Cleaners sought to unionise and formed the Cleaners Action Group (CAG) whose members were a combination of cleaners, women's liberationists and socialists.[75] It initially began in London, but the campaign moved

[69] Lee and Weeks, 'Social Action Theory', p.223.
[70] Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor People's Movements: why they succeed and how they fail* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), p.21.
[71] Polletta and Jasper, 'Collective Identity', p.291.
[72] Stevenson, 'The Women's Movement and "Class Struggle"', p.745.
[73]'Report on the Night Cleaners', *Spare Rib* (July 1972).
[74] Sheila Rowbotham, 'Cleaners Organising in Britain from the 1970s: A Personal Account', *Antipode* 38:3 (2006), p.609.
[75] Stevenson, 'The Women's Movement and "Class Struggle"', p.747.

throughout the country to accommodate the issues of Night Cleaners in Birmingham, Manchester, Norwich and Lancaster. Political identities were forged through the female workers relationship with the WLM.[76] Due to the WLM's focus on class they encouraged the female strikers to understand their actions from a feminist perspective. In her *Cleaners Organising in Britain from the 1970s,* Sheila Rowbotham gives a personal account of the relationship between socialist feminists and the Night Cleaners. She highlights the impact of direct action from both sides stating that herself and another feminist Liz Waugh would leaflet Night Cleaners to try and get them to join a union.[77] These leafleting attempts not only acted as a method of feminist consciousness-raising, but vocalised the importance of collective action in creating change.[78] Rowbotham saw the Night Cleaners struggle as 'part of a wider attempt to foreground women workers and challenge trade union complacency about women's subordination'.[79] This demonstrates the feminist narrative to engage with the Night Cleaners but does not suggest the workers had their own sense of identity. The cleaner's identity is a result of the failed attempts of working through traditional 'class' lines when approaching the union. The initial focus was on exploitation within class politics and shifted towards feminism when the traditional routes of trade unionism and strike action were not working.

[76] Stevenson, 'The Women's Movement and "Class Struggle"', p.747.
[77] Rowbotham, 'Cleaners Organising', p,611.
[78] Sally Alexander, 'The Nightcleaners Campaign', in S. Allen, L Sanders and J Wallis (eds) *Conditions of Illusion* (Leeds: Feminist Books Ltd.,1974), p.310.
[79] Sheila Rowbotham, 'Jolting Memory: Night cleaners recalled'
http://www.workandwords.net/uploads/files/S._ROWBOTHAM_NightCleaners_-_ENG_.pdf
Originally published in Maria Ruido (ed.) *Plan Rosebud: On Images, Sites and Politics of Memory* (Santiago, 2008).

Despite their relationship with the WLM, the Night Cleaners campaign maintained attempts to forge relationships with the unions. According to feminist campaigner Sally Alexander, the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) was ‘extremely reluctant to take cleaning seriously as an area of recruitment’.[80] The cleaners’ unionisation attempts were often dismissed by the trade union as their pay was often viewed as ‘pin money’ by their employers.[81] The CAG managed to unionise 75% of the cleaners by July 1972 but the official union structure of the TGWU led to growing frustrations. At the Worker’s Control Conference in Birmingham 1970, May Hobbs accused the TGWU of ‘indifference’ towards the female cleaners.[82] The *Morning Star* reported that the TGWU was deemed more supportive of the campaign than the grassroots local trade unionists.[83] In contrast, the Civil Service Union (CSU) was more supportive of the campaign and had growing support from the government. Member of Parliament Joe Ashton highlighted the exploitation of Night Cleaners working for the CSU. He called for a return ‘to the old system under which the Ministry employed its cleaners direct as a category of civil servants’ instead of relying on contractors that have ‘had constant friction with the lady cleaners it employs on night work’.[84] The union supported the strike action of the Night Cleaners and legitimised them by offering strike pay and encouraging other unions to back the strikers.[85]

Although the CSU and CAG managed to form an alliance that resulted in the unionisation of cleaners in different buildings, the campaign lacked the support from the

[80] Alexander, ‘The Nightcleaners Campaign’, p.311.
[81] Mary Holland, ‘Lonely, underpaid women who clean the skyscrapers’, *The Guardian* (29 November 1970).
[82] Norbert Soldon, *Women in British Trade Unions 1874-1976* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978) p.312.
[83] *Morning Star* (11 August 1972), ‘Meeting at Longacre’, 28/11/1970, in 7SHR/D/2, Box 8, TWL
[84] Joe Ashton, **‘**Question to the Ministry of Defence’ (20 July 1972), *Parliamentary Questions,* Vol. 841 https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1972-07-20/debates/f2fb8375-a542-410e-8cf1-8ec96cf8a263/MinistrySub-Contractors(SecurityArrangements)?highlight=night%20cleaners#contribution-77cdc7bc-657e-4211-acd2-f66e4705d55c [date accessed?]
[85] Arsenal Women’s Liberation Workshop, ‘Cleaners’ Strike’, *Shrew* 4:5 (October 1972).

overall trade union structure that it wanted to be part of and instead had to rely heavily on the support of feminists.[86] Therefore, demonstrating that the identities of the Night Cleaners was constructed on the basis of class and gender lines. This developed due to their relationship with the TGWU and how the cleaners were seen in terms of their gender over their work. Hence, when the cleaners retrospectively discuss the successes of the campaign, they often attribute the WLM over the TGWU.[87]

Feminist magazines were pivotal in establishing the relationship between the Night Cleaners and the WLM. They also provided a platform for consciousness-raising efforts that influenced the cleaners with feminist thought. *Shrew* specifically gave high coverage to the campaigning of female Night Cleaners and often demanded others help the cause. The WLM had already established support for the campaign but by allowing the cleaners themselves to take the initiative in the production of a special edition, it demonstrated the intertwined relationship between worker and feminist. The full special edition was dedicated to the campaign and coordinated by May Hobbs.[88] The edition featured the chronology of the Night Cleaners' campaign to unionise, their demands for action, the conditions they worked under and featured interviews with many of the women involved including Hobbs. Many of the articles disproved stereotypes that the public were told about 'casual' working and how the cleaners embodied the concept of the 'double workday'. The 'double workday' is the idea that working women add to their workload through domestic labour in addition to their paid work.[89]

[86] George Stevenson, *The Women's Liberation Movement and the Intractable Problem of Class, c.1968-1979* (PhD thesis; Durham University, 2016), p.49. Accessed at,http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/11430/ [date accessed?]
[87] 'Report on the nightcleaners', *Spare Rib* (July 1972).
[88] *Shrew* 3:9 (December 1971).
[89] Lee and Weeks, 'Social Action Theory and Women's Movement', p.223.

The support for the Night Cleaners extended beyond specific editions of the magazine and was intensely supported through the London Women's Liberation Workshop Newsletter. The monthly newsletter gave a platform to the Night Cleaners in all twelve issues during the period of 1971.[90] The Night Cleaners edition of *Shrew* demonstrated this interpersonal relationship between the movement and grass roots campaigning. The cleaners desire to be involved in the WLM agenda highlights the extent to which a feminist identity was present in the origins of the campaign. It can be argued that Hobbs' involvement with the WLM was more prominent than the women involved in the collective, and the extent to which the workers perceived themselves as feminist is uncertain. However, although it appears that the cleaners prioritised their working-class identity over feminism, their engagement with the WLM was important in propelling their campaign.

The movements discussed can be viewed in gendered terms as they can play a fundamental role in mobilising action. Although women are not a homogenous group that can be defined solely by gender identity, gender can be central in causing mobilisation. Gender can be critical in creating mobilisation as inequalities are embedded in all aspects of socialisation.[91] Gender allows the creation of informal networks that function despite the main focus of the movement not being voiced through gendered terms. Policies or situations that reinforce gendered expectations in society are integral to understanding the growing dissent of women who have never mobilised before.[92] Personal commitments through domestic labour have restricted women to the private sphere and made it harder to build communities to form collective action and identities.[93] The unprecedented mass uprising of

[90] London's Women's Liberation Workshop, Box PR50, *Feminist Archive North*.
[91] Taylor, 'Gender and Social Movements', p.17.
[92] *Ibid*, p.13.
[93] Lee and Weeks, 'Social Action Theory', p.223.

women workers in the Leeds Clothing strike of 1970 can be viewed in similar gendered terms. A national agreement negotiated through the wage council implemented a pay rise based on gender, 5d for men and 4d for women.[94] It was negotiated by their union, the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers (NUTGW), in 1969 and came into effect in 1970. This prompted the strike action to occur when the women workers rejected the new low pay increase. After years of disenfranchisement by the union, the women realised that the pay disparity between genders was extortionate; men were on £25 to £30 a week in comparison to women's £11 to £12. Historically, the tailoring industry was segregated into jobs based on gender and the perceptions of skill level. As stated by Ben Birnbaum, 'it is the sex of those that do the work, rather than its content, which leads to its identification as skilled or unskilled'.[95] Male workers acquired craft status for their roles which included the initial and final processes such as laying out, cutting and the final pressing of pieces.[96] Whereas, women workers were largely reduced to sewing-machine work, but also included; binding, trimming, buttonholing and finishing.[97]

The dissent of the female workforce in Leeds clothing strike can be seen through the framework of social movement theory as it provides an explanation for collective action. Trade unions can be understood in this framework as social movement theory analyses how they create, legitimize and produce collective action. Trade unions themselves can be analysed as social movements because their intent is founded in the power of workers when

[94] Katrina Honeyman, *Well Suited: A History of the Leeds Clothing Industry 1850-1990* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.211.
[95] Ben Birnbaum, 'Women, skill and automation; a study of women's employment in the clothing industry 1946-1972' (unpublished paper) quoted in Honeyman, 'Gender Divisions and Industrial Divide: The Case of the Leeds Clothing Trade, 1850-1970', *Textile History,* 28:1 (2013), p.48.
[96] *Ibid*, p.48.
[97] *Ibid*, p.48.

in a collective.[98] Yet the Leeds strike illustrated the tensions between different sections within the tailoring industry predominantly between the male and female-dominated sectors and how the isolation of women from the union formed a separate collective.[99] The women fly-picketed from factory to factory to call on others to join the strike, using a technique that would become renowned in the miners strikes in the 1980s. The strikers challenged union officials and formed a grass-roots workers' committee.

The creation of the unofficial strike committee was outlined in the *Trade Union Register 1970* by prominent member of the strike committee, Jim Roche. [100] It was a strike about economic control, not just a wage increase.[101] This is outlined by Roche's recollection of the actions of the Strike Committee whose desire was to strengthen the union, not destroy it.[102] The committee renamed itself the Liaison Committee, which was integral to redefining the strike as official and collaborating with the previous channels of trade unionism that had previously reduced their concerns. He noted how 'three quarters of the workers are female in this labour-intensive industry' and how women's work is often compromised due to domestic demands.[103] Although not named, Roche explores the concept of the double workday as women 'will often work for less wages than [they are] worth, in order to be enabled to handle [their] domestic situation'.[104] The sense of a collective experience of working women in the tailoring industry is visible when analysing Roche's work. His outline of

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[98] Peter Gahan and Andreas Pekarek, 'Social Movement Theory, Collective Action Frames and Union Theory: A Critique and Extension', *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 51:4 (2013), p.756.
[99] Honeyman, *Well Suited,* p.209.
[100] Jim Roche, 'The Leeds Clothing Strike', in Ken Coates, Tony Topham, and Michael Barratt Brown (eds), *Trade Union Register 1970* (London: Merlin Press, 1970), pp162-178.
Notably, Jim Roche was the husband of Gertie Roche who will be explored in more detail in the final chapter.
[101] Sheila Rowbotham, *A Century of Women: The History of Women in Britain and the US* (London: Penguin, 1997), p.414.
[102] Roche, 'The Leeds Clothing Strike', p.172.
[103]*Ibid„* p.171.
[104] *Ibid*, p.164.

the tailoring situation reinforces the idea that the heavily gendered situation of the workforce was a source of agitation and a resolution could only be found through a united mobilised workforce.

The Leeds Clothing strike remains a largely undocumented event other than Katrina Honeyman's book *Well Suited.* Most of the knowledge of the strike exists in memory and a BBC Play for Today from1974 about the strike, entitled *Leeds United!*. An unpublished essay by Diane Ruth Gold entitled 'Collective Action among Women in the Leeds Clothing Industry' written in 1973 provides accounts of voices from the strike.[105] Collective action is often directly linked to mobilisation theory. It helps to identify how individual actors can produce collective action when they have recognised collective injustices in the workplace.[106] Gold interviewed the strikers not long after it occurred and had access to establish their thoughts surrounding the strike and the unions themselves. Gold's interviews illustrate the dissatisfaction the women had with the union (NUTGW). Silvia Patey Johns described women's position in the NUTGW:

> 'I sometimes think there isn't a lot of sympathy with women workers, you know, it's more or less like a man's union. You see we've only one lady on the branch committee…All the others are men…They in their hearts, really think a woman's place is in the home'.[107]

Although the gender identity of women strikers was important in mobilisation, it was a combination of men and women who went on strike. During the strike Jim Roche warned the men in the industry of their ignorance of female working conditions:

> 'I want to warn the men of this industry that you have to concern yourselves more and more with the women's conditions. When a woman looks at her wages then thinks of the hours she works and her condition, she knows she is a slave…soon cutters

[105] Diane Ruth Gold, 'Collective Action among Women in the Leeds Clothing Industry' (Unpublished BA thesis; Radcliffe College, 1973).
[106] Gahan and Pekarek, 'Social Movement Theory', p,755.
[107] Gold, 'Collective Action', p.100.

> will need women's support as jobs get automated. If the employers don't reorganise themselves, the women will reorganise the industry for them'.[108]

The female workforce took the first steps at mobilisation and it was the women who began to work towards unifying the male cutters and female machinists for a new union.[109]

The 1974 BBC Play for Today, *Leeds United!* is an important representation of the Leeds Clothing strike and provides evidence of how the event affected the area. Through representations on film the idea of collective belonging and action are evident throughout. The dramatization of the event was perceived as 'radical' by the BBC's impartiality standards due to its political coverage of recent labour history.[110] It was known that the director Roy Battersby 'was deeply committed to the Left' and used his position to shed light on the militant action of Leeds clothing workers, even incorporating strikers into the production.[111] Colin Welland, another involved in the production of the play, explained his interest was due to his mother-in-law's participation:

> 'She was a little forty-eight year old Irish woman working in a clothing factory in Leeds. All her life, she, and these women…had never said 'Boo' to a goose. And all of a sudden, when they asked for a rise and are offered 5p an hour more, they regard it as an insult and go on unofficial strike. They closed the city of Leeds down. They produced their own newspaper. It was a wonderful display of natural power, workers' power'.[112]

The play aimed to emulate the collective action of the strike and the scale is evident in many of the scenes. Many of the scenes that recreated mass demonstrations, such as the meeting at Leeds Town Hall, were dependent on hundreds of volunteer extras, many of whom were women who had previously been involved in the strike several years earlier.[113] This

[108] *Yorkshire Evening News* (25 February 1970).
[109] Honeyman, 'Gender Divisions and Industrial Divide', p.81.
[110] John Hill, 'From *Five Women* to *Leeds United!:* Roy Battersby and the Politics of 'radical' Television Drama', *Journal of British Cinema and Television,* 10:1 (2013), p.131.
[111] *Ibid*, p.132.
[112] Interview with Colin Welland, 2007, cited in Hill, p.140.
[113] *Ibid*, p.141.

involvement of workers in the play's production highlights how it remained significant to the community several years after it took place. The memory of the strike was integral to the films production and demonstrated how it remained a part of the strikers' identity.

Both of these movements show the disregard for women's work and their exclusion from the traditional forms of labour activism. The exclusion of women's work from trade unions on the basis of their work being 'unskilled' or 'pin money' led to the dissent of the female workforce in both the campaign for the Night Cleaners, and the Leeds clothing strike. Social movement theory provides a basis for understanding the mobilisation of disenfranchised workers and, in the case of these two events, gender was a pivotal force for the neglect of these workers. The memory of the Night Cleaners strike as a success is due to its relationship with the WLM, and the Leeds clothing strike as an event that was unprecedented demonstrates the extent to which female militancy, especially from working class women, does not fit the expectations of traditional labour activism, as the traditional routes were not accessible for women.

Chapter Three

Leadership: May Hobbs, Gertie Roche

After exploring the importance of the collective in causing action, this chapter asks an important question: can individuals matter more than the collective? Either as a leader or prominent individual within the movement, the role of individuals in social movement theory affects the extent to which mobilisation is successful. Networks are often considered in the success of a social movement, hence leadership is often viewed in terms of individual participation or blinkered to authoritarian definitions. Yet, leadership in social movements should be examined through the actions of the leaders within the movement due to their centrality to creating action. This will be demonstrated through the pivotal actions of May Hobbs in organising the Night Cleaners and the prominent role Gertie Roche played in the success of Leeds Clothing Strike in 1970. Both of these events focus on working-class women in female-dominated industries and how individual women were central in achieving outcomes.

Social networks have a dual relationship with participation.[114] The dynamic nature between participation and networks can ensure that action is upheld. Participation of the collective is often dependent on personal past relationships in the community they are aiming to mobilise. Pre-existing ties between individuals and organisations are often central to provoking collective action.[115] 'Moral shocks' that create emotional responses within the community can mobilise people that otherwise would not engage in action.[116] This is seen in

[114] Della Porta and Diani, 'Social Movements', p.115.
[115] Taylor, 'Social Movement Continuity', p.770.
[116] Della Porta and Diani, 'Social Movements', p.122.

the Leeds Clothing Strike where locality was key to mobilisation. While networks are important in recruiting members and maintaining collective action, leadership should ensure the organisation of the movement is successful and be inventive in strategy.[117]

Features of leadership in social movements feature heavily in Weberian theory. Max Weber's political ideas about charismatic leadership are prominent in the political understanding of leadership within social movements.[118] In his view, the charisma of a leader creates a level of authority that is obediently followed by the masses, much like disciples to a master.[119] He positions the charismatic leader as the centre of a social movement and attributes this to success in mobilising people to create change.[120] Despite this, Weber reiterates that this does not mean uncontested leadership within a movement and highlights the importance of followers questioning the actions of a leader.[121] However, Weber's perceptions of charisma and leadership is problematic as it disregards the personal agency and individual commitment to a cause.[122] As previously explored, collective action is imperative in causing change. Therefore, it is important that collectives are not just seen as 'followers' to a leader.[123] Collective behaviour is not sufficient to create mobilisation; therefore, a leader's role is to navigate and provide direction for action.[124]

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[117] Ronald S. McMullen and Henry Adobor, 'Bridge leadership: a case study of leadership in a bridging organisation', *Leadership and Organisation Development* 32:7 (2011), p.716.
[118]Robert Tucker, 'The Theory of Charismatic Leadership', *Daedalus* 97:3 (1968), p.731.
[119] *Ibid*, p.735.
[120] *Ibid*, p.737.
[121] *Ibid*, p.736.
[122] Alberto Melucci *Challenging Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.336.
[123] Aldon Morris and Suzanne Staggenborg, 'Leadership in Social Movements' in David Snow, Sarah Soule and Hanspeter Kriesi (eds), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p.171.
[124] *Ibid*, p.173.

In social movements the role of leaders is defined by Morris and Staggenborg as to 'inspire commitment, mobilise resources, create and recognise opportunities, devise strategies, frame demands and influence outcomes'.[125]. The archetype for leaders of a social movement is typically an educated, middle to upper-class man who shares the ethnicity of their mass supporters.[126] Leaders from different backgrounds shape the organisational structure through their previous experiences and influence mobilisation, strategy and overall outcome of the movement.[127] Working-class leaders are more likely to share the interests of their class and mobilise through a sense of community and through the previously explored idea of belonging. This makes both May Hobbs and Gertie Roche interesting figures as their dedication to each movement subverts the traditional expectations of leaders within social movements, especially due to their class and gender. Gender was central to both of these movements as both female-dominated and under-paid, the responsibility for change was down to the militancy of the women who worked in the industries. The leadership of both women was effective due to different factors; Hobbs and her outreach to the WLM, and Roche's communication with the press and insistence the strike was a gender-issue. The most effective leaders should be both 'mobilisers' and 'articulators', therefore, inspiring more participants but also linking the movement to wider society.[128] In both cases it can be observed that Hobbs and Roche acted as instigators to connect their movements with the issues they saw their industries facing.

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[125] Morris and Staggenborg, 'Leadership in Social Movements', p.171.
[126] *Ibid*, p.175.
[127] *Ibid*, p.173.
[128] Joseph R Gusfield, 'Functional Areas of Leadership in Social Movements', *Sociological Quarterly* 7:2 (1966), p.145.

The Night Cleaners' campaign and demand for union recognition was defined by its direction by May Hobbs and her outreach to the WLM. Hobbs clearly takes the role as 'arbitrator' and 'mobiliser' as she initiated the movement and the unionisation of the night cleaners was dependent on her work. In her autobiography *Born To Struggle,* published in 1973, it is outlined that after a hiatus from working due to having children, Hobbs returned to night cleaning to find the industry had not changed. In a chapter entitled, 'Cleaners of the World, Unite!' Hobbs provides an account of why she formed the CAG and her mentality surrounding mobilisation of the workforce. She explains how the wages had stagnated and remained at £13 a week in the years Hobbs had spent child rearing and waiting for secure housing.[129] She questioned the other female workers mentality, recalling: 'You're always moaning. Why not do something instead?'[130] Her memoir not only outlines the complexity of campaigning but demonstrates the integrity of a working-class woman who stood up for the exploitation of her workforce.

The outline of the campaign and the complex relationship with trade unions has been previously discussed, but the impact of Hobbs herself has not been highlighted. In *Born to Struggle,* Hobbs notes that the initial decision to join the TGWU was undermined due to the male trade union officials 'just doing a little bit when it suited them'.[131] Sheila Rowbotham also recounts how Hobbs would ring up leader of the TGWU Jack Jones and speak to his wife on an almost daily basis to complain about the position of the Night Cleaners.[132] The campaign began at the Shell building in Waterloo, London, where a group of the CAG would leaflet each evening as the workers arrived. As a figurehead for the campaign Hobbs helped cleaners

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[129] May Hobbs, *Born to Struggle* (London: Quartet, 1974), p.76.
[130] *Ibid,* p.77.
[131] *Ibid*, p.77.
[132] Rowbotham, 'Cleaners Organising in Britain', p.613.

across the country to successfully join unions. In an interview to *Spare Rib,* one night cleaner at Shell recalled:

> 'May Hobbs, the militant cleaner, came along and gave us pep talks and she also contacted various people to come along and talk to us, to tell us what we are able to do for ourselves if we stick together and fight'.[133]

Hobbs even describes herself in this role: 'I'm just a speaker. I've spoke to thousands. I'm glad I'm no cleaner no more, it's bleedin' 'ard work'.[134] She acted as the mouthpiece for the campaign and trailed around the country to try and unionise night cleaners throughout the country.

The success of a social movement is often determined by the attempts of the leadership to include insiders and outsiders.[135] These outsiders can bring in fresh viewpoints and new social contacts that can enrich decisions and help with the campaign. Hobbs' outreach to the WLM brought outsiders into the mix for support but did not diminish the root cause for the campaign which was to unionise and highlight the concerns of cleaners and working women. During the first major strike campaign for the unionisation of Sanctuary House cleaners in London, Hobbs highlights how 'many [feminists] stuck with us on the picket line' and how their support was important to the workers: '[f]or the first time the cleaners saw how they could get something done with solidarity'.[136] It is often noted that combined leadership of insiders and outsiders has the greatest chance of success.[137] The Night Cleaners connection to the WLM began through the actions of Hobbs. In 1970 Hobbs contacted the International Socialists (IS) where they contacted Sheila Rowbotham to spread this to the

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[133] *Spare Rib* 1 (July 1972), p.11.
[134]Anna Coote, 'May Hobbs Interview, 19 July 1973', in Kira Cochrane (ed.), *Women of the Revolution: Forty Years of Feminism* (London: Guardian Books, 2010), p.17.
[135] Morris and Staggenborg, 'Leadership in Social Movements', p.178.
[136] Hobbs, *Born to Struggle,* p.82.
[137] Morris and Staggenborg, 'Leadership in Social Movements', p.189.

Women's Liberation Workshop Newsletter.[138] After this, Hobbs visited Rowbotham at her flat in East London to discuss her plan to organise cleaners and to get the support of the movement.[139] Hobbs attended the first WLM march in 1971 carrying a 'The Cleaners Action Group' sign and as highlighted in the *Socialist Worker* spoke at the rally to urge for union action over equal pay, calling for 'the self-organisation of women in their workplaces'.[140]

The connection to the WLM is also evident in Hobbs' personal contribution to feminist print culture.[141] The work of the collective was demonstrated in the special edition of *Shrew* in 1972, yet Hobbs continued to engage with the feminist press on behalf of the cleaners. An interview with Hobbs was featured in the night cleaners' edition of *Shrew.* It is an important example of the WLM forming networks with working-class women. In the interview Hobbs believes the WLM 'should be an action group' and highlights the common desire of working-class women in the movement for 'action groups first and then [to] talk about it later'.[142] Hobbs often submitted letters to the editor and engaged in feminist debate surrounding the night cleaners' campaign. For example, in a letter to the editor in *Spare Rib,* where at first, she defends how the women 'need and deserve' trade union membership. She then speaks 'on behalf of the Cleaner's Action Group I would like to thank your magazine for its support'. This relationship with the feminist press was reciprocated. In a contemporary *Spare Rib* review of *Born to Struggle,* Sally Alexander describes Hobbs as a 'working-class militant' who was 'instrumental' to the night cleaners' campaign.[143] Hobbs forged the relationship with the WLM to create support for her campaign when the trade union movement was not working.

[138] Rowbotham, 'Cleaners Organising in Britain', p.609.
[139] *Ibid*, p.609.
[140] Irene Bruegel, 'Women marchers stress need for union action over equal pay', *Socialist Worker* (13 March 1971).
[141] *Spare Rib* 4 (1972), p.19.
[142] 'Interview with May Hobbs', *Shrew* 3:9 (December 1971), p.9.
[143] Sally Alexander, 'Born to Struggle', *Spare Rib* 14 (1973), p.42.

However, her growth in involvement in the movement, speaking at WLM rallies, writing in feminist publications illustrate the development of a feminist identity. Whether all members of the night cleaners' campaign were feminist is uncertain, but through the leadership of May Hobbs feminist support developed.

Women participate heavily in social movements but are not often represented in high ranking positions.[144] In two separate studies into the role of women in the civil rights movement, Belinda Robnett and Kathleen Jones both found that although women tend to be deeply involved, they tend to occupy secondary leadership roles. Robnett argues that women are often 'bridge leaders' which she defines as 'an intermediate layer of leadership, whose task includes bridging potential constituents and adherents, as well as potential formal leaders to the movement'.[145] In her contribution to this discussion, Jones highlights that women who participate in leadership roles usually engage due to a connection with their family life and establish networks.[146]

This explanation of a bridge leader is applicable to Gertie Roche and the Leeds Clothing Strike of 1970. Roche could take on this position as a 'bridge leader' due to her previous experience of strike action. The 1970s strike mirrored one from 1936 that Roche was involved in as a young machinist, she stated: 'The [1936] strike helped me to crystallise my ideas about injustice in society…I joined the Communist Party and started attending meetings…I became very involved in political work'.[147] The 1936 strike was pivotal in creating Roche's political identity, after which she became the Yorkshire Women's Organiser for the Communist Party

[144] Morris and Staggenborg, 'Leadership in Social Movements', p.176.
[145] Belinda Robnett, *How Long? How Long? African American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.191.
[146] Kathleen Jones, *Compassionate Authority: Democracy and the Representation of Women* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p.191.
[147] Diane Gold, 'Gertie Roche Obituary, 1912-1997', *History Workshop Journal* 45 (1998), p.315.

until 1957 where she was forced out after criticisms against the USSR 1956 invasion of Hungary. After leaving the Communist Party she re-joined the tailoring industry in Leeds and became a stewardess at the small company Simon's. When she returned to the tailoring industry Roche remained avidly involved in the trade union movement and would sit in the back of meetings knitting. On Gertie's participation in trade union meetings, Diane Gold alleges she was 'waiting for the appropriate moment to stand and speak up for unity and for equal pay for women'.[148] This summary of Roche's character is important in understanding her involvement in the Leeds Clothing strike and attributing leadership qualities to her role. Roche can be seen as a bridge leader as she has the capacity to connect the female strikers – the stakeholders – to the wider community – the union.

Education appears to be an important feature of working-class leaders. They are often defined by their desire to keep educating themselves even if they come from a poor background.[149] Throughout her life Roche ensured education was an important feature. Self-education was made easier through her membership of the British Communist Party and afterwards her house became a beacon for socialist thought where she would learn about trade union, working class, and social and political history.[150] She recalled: 'I remember we used to go through the Communist Manifesto. Somebody would give a lecture on a chapter…and then we'd discuss it. See how far our theories linked in with our experiences'.[151] The prominent historian E P Thompson stated that he had Gertie and her husband Jim Roche in mind when writing *The Making of the English Class* as they represented a working-class

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[148] *Ibid*, p.313.
[149] Morris and Staggenborg, 'Leadership in Social Movements', p.175.
[150] Gold, 'Gertie Roche Obituary', p.315.
[151] *Ibid*, p.316.

elite, ‘a specially favoured aristocracy’.[152] This continued throughout her whole life and she was made an honorary fellow of Leeds Polytechnic in 1992 due to her contributions to politics and social movements, as well as her dedication to her own education.[153] Her awareness of trade union history and her personal involvement allowed her to translate her theoretical knowledge to the practical experiences of working in the tailoring industry as a woman. Her ability to help in the 1970 strike was due to her wisdom and experiences that education had given her.

Roche was an influential figure, and many agree she was more than a spokesperson for the campaign. Movement ‘spokespersons’ are individuals who put themselves forward but are not accountable leaders. Although it can be argued that Roche’s relationship with the press was a spokesperson for the strike, she was avidly involved in the framing process. By the time of the strike she used her own trade union experience from the 1936 strike to help turn ‘spontaneity into strategy’.[154] Leaders drive the framing process by forming credible connections to the collective and the press.[155] Roche was integral to framing the movement to the mass media. She spoke to the press on numerous occasions, stating the strikes origins was due to a ‘lack of communication between bosses and workers and between workers themselves…there is a tremendous revolt against the NUGTW’.[156] Roche was more than just a spokesperson as her participation was integral to propelling the movement forward, her contributions to the press was a form of leadership.

[152] Margaret C Jacob, ‘Among the Autodidacts: The Making of EP Thompson’, *Labour/Le Travail* 71 (2013), p.157.
[153] Sheila Rowbotham, ‘Obituary: Gertie Roche: Liberation in Leeds’, *The Guardian* (9 June 1997).
[154] *Ibid*.
[155] Morris and Staggenborg, ‘Leadership in Social Movements’, p.184.
[156] *Daily Mirror* (26 February 1970).

Gender was a central issue to the movement and could easily have been lost due to the leaders of the strike committee being predominantly male. For example, Arthur Asty, Frank Howells, Charlie Taylor and Cyril Hopton were considered the most influential.[157] Roche used her previous experience and political identity to contribute to the 1970 strike in a prominent way. She attended union meetings where women struggled to participate actively, with only ten to fifteen women regularly attending meetings, 'the only woman to speak regularly was Gertie Roche… Most women were inhibited at the male dominated meetings.'[158] In an open letter to the *Yorkshire Evening Post,* Roche highlights the female workers' dissent:

> 'At every meeting it has been obvious that the women are intensely involved, unleashing years of resentment…. Almost every day, reference is made to equal rights for women. Do they think this has no effect on the women who form 78% of the industry's labour force?...The revolt is due, not to a handful of left wingers, but to something far deeper- 20 years of neglect by the employers.'[159]

She ensured that the origins of the strike, gender divisions, were not ignored. The gender identity of the strikers was integral to their revolt, and Gertie Roche ensured that the cause for mobilisation was integral.

The success of these strikes can be seen as the result of the collective solidarity of the women involved. However, when analysing the strike through social movement theory the results are due to other factors, such as networks and leadership. Anthony Oberschall reminds us that in social movements, everyone has the capabilities to be a leader but the skills 'have to be learned through education and the trial and error experience of activists as the movement unfolds'.[160] What we can see through the work of both Hobbs and Roche is

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[157] Honeyman, *Well Suited,* p.212.
[158] Gold, 'Collective Action', p.96.
[159] *Yorkshire Evening Post* (26 February 1970).
[160] Anthony Oberschall, *Social Conflict and Social Movements* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973), p.158.

that leadership comes in different forms, especially in the case of gender driven movements. The experience of these two individuals was integral to mobilising the workforce of both movements: Hobbs, through direct leadership, and Roche through her prominent involvement in the trade union movement. The personal identities of these two women was not essential in creating militancy, but their experience with the WLM and trade unions allowed their leadership to succeed.

Conclusion

The prominence of working-class women's militancy in the 1970s demonstrated the disenfranchisement of women workers within traditional structures. Sheila Rowbotham stated: 'the mobilisation of working-class women has been neglected in the histories of the 60s and of the women's movement'.[161] This dissertation concludes that the neglect of working-class women's movements from historiography is significant in the wider establishment of the WLM and trade union structures. Working-class women's activism in the period was notable in its attempts to combat the issues that the rise of second wave feminism alleged to be aiming to solve. The case studies of the Night Cleaners and Leeds Clothing strike demonstrated how militancy was the result of female work being underpaid and undervalued.

Social movement theory helps us understand the mobilisation of these events. When analysing the strikes as gendered events, it allows us to understand how identity is important in producing mobilisation. This was followed with an exploration into the effects of leadership within the same framework. The leadership of Hobbs and Roche demonstrates how social movements depend on leaders. Gender was pivotal in the mobilisation of these events and the leadership of Hobbs and Roche confirmed the importance of grass-roots leaders being an active member of their communities in order to relate to the collective. The gender of the leaders and the collective were integral in causing mobilisation, despite the lack of a universal identity of all strikers developing. Gender was essential in creating a connection between the leadership and the collective.

[161] Sheila Rowbotham, *Women in Movement: Feminism and Social Action* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p.9.

Publications and print are useful in evaluating the extent of working-class women's activism; both in the WLM, and in general militancy. The overarching use of print, specifically *Shrew* and *Spare Rib* as a form of feminist activism was integral to understanding the development of feminist identities. This was evident in the Night Cleaners campaign but the level of feminist identity in strikers other than the leader, May Hobbs, is unclear. In contrast, the Leeds Clothing strike established a militancy that should be viewed in gendered terms rather than within a wider feminist identity – but this should not undermine the centrality of gender in both of these events.

Working-class women's activism in 1970s Britain came in various forms. The militancy and print activism explored throughout this dissertation and the two case studies are just a minority in a wider literature that is often neglected. May Hobbs and Gertie Roche are not alone in their accomplishments as working-class women that created change, but through an analysis of their actions we can see the impact working-class women can have in producing action. Although a feminist consciousness did not develop in both of these events, an analysis of this militancy allows us to view working-class women's issues as gendered and thus an inspiration to second-wave feminism.

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