

The London School of Economics and Political Science

**The Politics of Vulnerability:  
Affect, Relationality, and Resistance in UK  
Austerity**

Jacqueline Gibbs

A thesis submitted to the Department of Gender Studies of the London  
School of Economics for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,  
London, September 2018.

## Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the MPhil/PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. Quotation from it is permitted, provided that full acknowledgement is made. This thesis may not be reproduced without my prior written consent.

I warrant that this authorisation does not, to the best of my belief, infringe the rights of any third party.

I declare that my thesis consists of 99,884 words.

**Statement of use of third party for editorial help:** I can confirm that my thesis was copy edited for conventions of language, spelling, and grammar by Christopher Arden, Jacob Breslow, Iain Campbell, Ian Gibbs, Frances Glavimans, Aura Lehtonen, Sebastian Sporn, and Renee Miller-Yeamon.

## Abstract

The increasing prevalence of vulnerability as a descriptive concept in policy, political and social discourses occurs alongside a renewed, undeniably “vexed” (Murphy 2012:70), interdisciplinary feminist investment in the term as a crucial concept for social justice. This thesis contends that vulnerability must be understood as an affective and malleable concept, and one which performs changing work depending on the sites, subjects, and discourses to which it is attached. My analysis of the affective and discursive workings of this *politics of vulnerability* contributes to recent feminist theorisations of vulnerability as a key ethical political concept. It also extends feminist theorisations of care and relationality, temporality, and resistance through analysis of the cultural and affective ‘work’ that claims to vulnerability perform. In doing so, this thesis provides a critical analysis of the workings of vulnerability in relation to gender, disability, illness, citizenship, and nation in the context of recent UK austerity. Reading for the ways in which vulnerability appears across three key sites of (what has elsewhere been termed) “public feeling”, my analysis highlights the ambivalent politics produced through claims to vulnerability which seek to challenge conditions of precarity, debility and violence exposed through austerity processes. To do so, this thesis provides analysis of: responses to changes to illness and disability benefits and processes of assessment; feminist activist and advocate responses to the closure of domestic violence services; and media representations of the funding and staffing ‘crisis’ facing the NHS. The thesis draws together interdisciplinary literatures across the fields of queer feminist cultural studies, affect, feminist disability studies, violence, care and the state. It argues that reading for vulnerability across, and in relation to, changing political subjectivities, contextual debates, and critical attachments enables a better grasp of both the possibilities and significant limits to feminist investments in its transformative potential.

## Acknowledgements

The completion of this thesis occurred thanks to the support of many others.

I can assuredly say I would not have reached the point of writing these acknowledgements without the insight, knowledge, and support of Associate Professor Sadie Wearing. Sadie's contributions to my thinking now seem to travel with me as I write. She has encouraged me to try again, especially when I thought I couldn't, and has taught me that a little dry humour can be transformative. Assistant Professor Leticia Sabsay has been an essential interlocutor and advocate throughout this process. Leticia challenged me to explain my ideas and to take them, and myself, seriously. Sadie and Leticia's combined encouragement in all aspects of my time at the department has been fundamental to my finishing this work. I feel very lucky to have worked with you both.

Professor Clare Hemmings has provided invaluable feedback on my work and continues to inspire my thinking. Thank you also to Associate Professor Marsha Henry, Assistant Professor Ania Plomien, and Professor Wendy Sigle who provided essential perspectives on earlier drafts of these chapters. Hazel Johnstone's knowledge and patience continues to sustain the work of the department and our achievements as students. Dr. Kate Steward has shown an incredible willingness to respond to any of my concerns and has been a very encouraging presence as I have worked to make sense of academic life. Together, the staff and faculty at the Department of Gender Studies have provided a reassuring and enriching environment to work in.

My colleagues at the Department of Gender Studies have provided consistent feedback and friendship throughout this process. My conversations with Aura Lehtonen about theory, politics, and life have shaped my thinking — thank you for your generosity in sharing this journey with me. Billy Holzberg has been a wonderful intellectual support and confidant at countless points over the years. And while we are occasionally confused as one and the same, Ilana Eloit brings a passion and criticality to her work that I would be very lucky to share. Together, you are three people I cannot imagine these last years without. Dr. Jacob Breslow and Dr. Emma Spruce have been comforting and inspiring colleagues who have helped me to shape the kind of teacher I would like to be. Louisa Acciari, Jenny Chanfreau, Dr. Marina Franchi, Miha Fugina, Julia Hartviksen, Aiko Holviki, Magdalena Mikulak, Dr. Amanda Shaw, Lindsay Simmonds, Priya Raghavan, Hannah Wright and the ever-growing cohort of researchers at the department have made it the collegial and encouraging place it is to work. Thank you also to Tomás Ojeda for some lovely chats in the very last stages of this project. Many thanks also go to the Masters students at the Department of Gender Studies who I have had the privilege of teaching and learning from. This PhD was generously supported by a London School of Economics and Political Science studentship.

I am indebted to my undergraduate supervisor at the Australian National University, Associate Professor David Bissell, for the friendship and encouragement that shaped both the theoretical and practical course my work has taken. My year learning from Dr. Nirmal Puwar at Goldsmiths, University of London, was essential to my pursuing this degree in Gender.

Too often unexpressed gratitude goes to the unwavering foundation provided by my parents Robyn and Ian, and sister Adrienne — thank you for sheltering me from all that it took to sustain that foundation and for forgiving me for all that I have missed. Thank you also for encouraging your 7-year-old to be a writer and for reading all her earliest ‘publications’.

Didem Incegoz, Phil Thomas, Lucie Mercier, Jonathan Roux, and Matt Mahon have shared in the day to day of getting by in a city that we have together made a home. Your presence has provided an intimate and intellectual community which has sustained me throughout this PhD. Thanks also goes to my ‘neighbour’ Annette Behrens for dedicated discussions and appreciated distractions, and Renee Miller-Yeamon who dropped by annually for the most restorative thesis complaint sessions.

Sebastian Sporn has been a dedicated friend throughout this process — thank you for the countless sessions of wine-soaked psychoanalysis, interest, and laughter. The rest of the ‘LP lot’ — Nelsy Casallas, Miriam Kappel, Jordan Naylor and Christopher Arden — thank you for filling my non-PhD life in London with an unexpected amount of joy. Lydia Randall, Kate Stevens, Anna Miller-Yeamon, and Eloise Boyd — through different time zones and changing lives — remind me every day that I am fortunate for having known the most supportive of friendships. While Frances Glavimans will no doubt remind me of her centrality to my progression — as in every case, here it remains true. Thank you for believing in me, always being on the other end of the phone despite all that I miss, and for knowing exactly the words and songs that were needed over the many challenging points throughout this thesis.

And finally, to Holly Chung. You might joke that you didn’t apply for the several PhD’s you have ended up enduring, but have offered me the belief, daily care, laughter, and gentle perspective which has been essential to my getting through this one. It is unlikely I will ever find words to express all that I learn from your compassion, vulnerability, strength, and courage. This thesis was completed because of your love, as is everything we build together.

# Table of Contents

<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>THE DISCURSIVE AND AFFECTIVE WORK OF VULNERABILITY IN UK AUSTERITY .....</b>	<b>8</b>
VULNERABILITY FOR FEMINIST THEORY .....	12
KEY INTERVENTIONS OF THIS THESIS .....	16
<i>An affective politics of vulnerability.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Mapping vulnerability as an interdisciplinary concern .....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>A situated analysis of vulnerability politics in UK austerity .....</i>	<i>19</i>
THESIS OUTLINE.....	20
CONCLUSION .....	24
<b>VULNERABILITY AND FEMINIST THEORY: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....</b>	<b>25</b>
AN AMPLIFIED INTEREST IN CORPOREAL VULNERABILITY.....	27
<i>Vulnerability as a ‘universal’ condition.....</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Corporeal Vulnerability and precarity.....</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Universality and differentiation.....</i>	<i>38</i>
EXPANDING THE FRAMEWORK OF VULNERABILITY .....	41
<i>Vulnerability, agency, and resistance .....</i>	<i>41</i>
<i>Vulnerability in care and dependency.....</i>	<i>47</i>
<i>Being cared for: dependency and autonomy together .....</i>	<i>51</i>
INTERDISCIPLINARY CONCEPTS .....	54
DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK FOR THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF VULNERABILITY .....	57
<i>Discursivity and vulnerability.....</i>	<i>57</i>
<i>Affect and cultural politics .....</i>	<i>60</i>
<i>Public feeling in austerity.....</i>	<i>67</i>
<b>READING FOR VULNERABILITY POLITICS: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS.....</b>	<b>71</b>
BUILDING AN ARCHIVE OF VULNERABILITY IN AUSTERITY .....	71
READING CULTURAL TEXTS .....	80
PERFORMATIVE EMOTIONS AND FEELING .....	85
READING METHOD .....	93
RESEARCH AND VULNERABILITY.....	98
EMOTIONS IN RESEARCH.....	101
<b>PROTECTING ‘THE MOST VULNERABLE’: DEPENDENCY AND CARE IN THE AUSTERITY</b>	
<b>CONTEXT .....</b>	<b>105</b>
AUSTERITY AS A RESEARCH CONTEXT .....	108
<i>Reflecting on austerity as a distinct context.....</i>	<i>108</i>
<i>Austerity and its effects .....</i>	<i>110</i>
VULNERABILITY POLITICS IN AUSTERITY .....	115
RECOGNISING ‘THE MOST VULNERABLE’ WITH CARE.....	117
VULNERABILITY AND COMPASSION .....	125
INVULNERABILITY AND DESERVINGNESS .....	127
TEMPORALITY AND INTERDEPENDENCY.....	132
MOVING BEYOND THE ‘MOST VULNERABLE’ TO AUSTERITY .....	135
<b>VULNERABLE TEMPORALITIES: PUBLIC FEELING AND DISABILITY ASSESSMENT UNDER</b>	
<b>AUSTERITY .....</b>	<b>138</b>

TEMPORALITY, VULNERABILITY AND PUBLIC FEELING .....	142
THE WCA AND THE POLITICS OF VULNERABILITY .....	148
THE WCA AND NEGATIVE 'PERCEPTIONS' .....	152
FEELING AND TIME .....	156
VULNERABLE BODIES IN TIME.....	162
INTERDEPENDENCY, RECOGNITION, AND CARE .....	171
<b>FEMINIST FEELING: TELLING THE STORY OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICES UNDER</b>	
<b>AUSTERITY .....</b>	<b>176</b>
A FEMINIST POLITICS OF VULNERABILITY .....	180
VISIBILITY AND VIOLENCE .....	184
FROM VULNERABLE WOMEN TO VULNERABLE REFUGES .....	191
RETURNING TO THE REFUGE OF THE 1970S .....	194
WOMEN'S AID AND THE LOSS OF A VICTORY .....	198
SISTERS UN CUT AND A CONTINUED FIGHT.....	206
THE VEXED SITE OF VULNERABILITY .....	215
<b>'FUND OUR NHS INSTEAD': VULNERABLE INSTITUTIONS IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF</b>	
<b>LIMITATION .....</b>	<b>218</b>
<i>HOSPITAL</i> AND CULTURAL IMAGINATION OF THE NHS.....	221
CAPTURING PUBLIC FEELING IN THE NHS .....	225
'IT FEELS LIKE THE ELASTIC IS GETTING NEARER TO BREAKING': THE NHS IN CRISIS .....	232
SLOWING DOWN THE CRISIS NARRATIVE .....	235
WHAT HAPPENS TO CARE? .....	239
SUSTAINING BELIEF WITHIN AN ATMOSPHERE OF LIMITATION .....	242
COMPETING VULNERABILITY AND UNIVERSALITY.....	246
SAVING 'OUR' NHS AND THE AFFECTIVE LIMIT TO UNIVERSAL VULNERABILITY .....	254
<b>VULNERABILITY POLITICS IN UNCERTAIN TIMES .....</b>	<b>258</b>
VULNERABILITY AND UNCERTAINTY .....	260
VULNERABILITY AND CULTURAL POLITICS .....	264
RETURNING TO PARADOX .....	268
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>276</b>

## Introduction

### **The discursive and affective work of vulnerability in UK austerity**

This thesis explores the politics of vulnerability in the context of recent UK austerity. My use of the politics of vulnerability refers to the discursive and affective work that the concept of vulnerability variously and unpredictably performs when it is mobilised in government, activist, artist, and advocate responses to the cumulative and co-produced effects of more recent UK austerity measures.<sup>1</sup>

This thesis argues that vulnerability has appeared as a key term within debates and discourses of UK austerity. Claims about austerity policies have been broadly made around either: a growing, differentiated, individual, or population based vulnerability which is the effect of austerity policies; or a looming national, institutional, and economic vulnerability to which austerity policies serve as a ‘resolution’. Indeed, throughout the building and changing discourse of UK austerity over the last ten years, claims about the disproportionate effects of, or requirements for, austerity have been numerous. Many of these claims appear in this thesis, emerging when the intersecting effects of austerity policies, both current and expected, have been captured in an explicit or implied language of vulnerability.

---

<sup>1</sup> In Chapter 3, I introduce my framing of UK austerity discourses in detail. Following many who are engaging with the restructuring of the welfare state since the election of the Coalition Government in 2010, I consider the UK austerity discourse as a specific, but historically intertextual context that is a newer articulation of the longer running retrenchment of the UK welfare state and its unevenly distributed entitlements (Bassel and Emejulu 2017:1; Bhattacharyya 2015; Brah, Szeman and Gedalof 2015; Bramall 2013; Evans 2015; Gedalof 2018).



This thesis contends that the multitudes of discursive and affective appearances of vulnerability in discourses of UK austerity are important. UK austerity has hastened the shrinking of the UK welfare state on both national and local levels. And because the UK welfare state acts as a historic response to differentiated forms of vulnerability, austerity processes give rise to significant cultural and political challenges in addressing sustained precarity in the UK today. Exemplifying the effects of the roll-back of a “responsive” (Fineman 2013:4) state, the recent shrinking of the welfare state has revealed sustained and newly emerging forms of differently manifesting vulnerability in relation to gender, race, class, disability, resident status, and their intersections. Recent scholarship has highlighted that austerity logics rely on normative gendered expectations for care to be managed within the private sphere (Davies and O’Callaghan 2017:5; Karamessini 2013:14; Pearson and Elson 2015; Rubery and Rafferty 2013:133). Austerity’s behavioural discourses have revived imaginations of autonomy from the state and explicitly targeted individuals who are variously imagined to be engaged with social services and supports. A cultural politics of vulnerability emerges through the gendered, racialised, and ableist configurations of ‘welfare dependency’ that have gained further resonance over the austerity period.

This has disproportionate effects for women, particularly minority women (Bassell and Emejulu 2017; Brah, Szeman and Gedalof 2015; Lonergan 2015), who are more likely to be in precarious employment, in receipt of services and credits which are being cut under austerity processes; as well as more likely to be employed in the shrinking social sector. As I go on to explore in Chapter 5, cuts to community services have had a greater impact on minority women’s specialist services, a reflection of longer running issues of sector representation and funding. The mobilised suspicion and surveillance of groups imagined to be engaged with the welfare state has worked to demonise those seen as reflecting modes of dependency — disabled people, single mothers, and under or unemployed people. The sustained cultural politics of vulnerability within austerity sheds critical light on the often-cited narrative of austerity as a necessary, universal, or collective process of “belt tightening” (Evans 2015:147). A focus on vulnerability in the UK austerity context thus provides a lens to the politics behind vulnerability, the variety of conceptualisations of vulnerability mobilised in its application, and the interaction with simultaneous state processes of “destitution” (Bhattacharyya 2015:126) and regulation.

This thesis works to establish how affective, explicit, and implicit claims to vulnerability in the austerity discourse contribute to what Vanessa Munro and Jane Scoular have termed “the politics of vulnerability” (2012:196). Munro and Scoular track the “explosion” (2012:191) in the use of vulnerability in UK sex work and criminalisation policy discourses, going on to argue that vulnerability is “a profoundly political label and strategy for legitimation, the meaning, parameters and import of which fluctuate across time, space, structure and context” (2012:202). Following their attention to the discursive work that vulnerability performs in relation to these policies, this thesis extends this framework to consider how such politics operate in relation to affective, implicating, and emotional registers in political and cultural spheres. In this way, I suggest that an account of the affective and cultural politics of vulnerability furthers an analysis of austerity processes and their relationship to power.

My analysis of the politics of vulnerability explores how this politics manifests not only through discursive mechanisms of meaning production, reiteration, naming, and marking; but also through affective structures: How do claims about austerity implicate others through feelings of, feelings for, and feelings about vulnerability? As both a theoretical focus and method, this thesis seeks to establish a reading of what might be considered a cultural politics of vulnerability. Borrowing from more recent queer feminist scholarship in cultural and affect theory, I establish how the politics of vulnerability — a politics perhaps always embedded in the relationality of subjects and bodies with each other — affectively emerges in the austerity moment. It is my argument that this emergence has implications for feminist efforts to resist conditions which produce gendered, classed, and racialised inequality and differentiation, both within austerity, and beyond it. In doing so, this thesis joins with many more recent theorists explored in Chapter 1, to suggest that vulnerability remains a crucial, if “vexed” (Murphy 2012:70) concept for feminist theory to unpack. This thesis seeks to extend these more recent interdisciplinary feminist literatures which explore the ethical, ontological, and political possibilities of vulnerability, in specific relationship to affect.

Centrally, this thesis is concerned with making sense of what I see as a tension for feminist informed politics around vulnerability both within and beyond the recent austerity context. That is, vulnerability when understood both as an ontologically shared

but politically differentiated experience is an integral and central term for feminist and social justice politics seeking to challenge the numerous and differentiated effects of inequality. In this sense, vulnerability remains a necessary and often effective concept to employ in efforts to confront and address exposure to, and inequality produced through, differentiated access to state support and care. Yet at the same time, I argue that vulnerability is a historically and conceptually “risky” (Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay 2016:2) term for a feminist-informed political discourse. This is in large part because vulnerability is charged with longer historical and contextual gendered, racialised and bodily meanings — particularly in relationship to violence, agency, care, frailty, and protection. These meanings have long concerned, and often been resisted within, feminist politics itself. Indeed, the politics of vulnerability is a vexed one precisely because mobilisations of vulnerability, and the enactment of responses to vulnerability, are not isolated to feminist claims. Just as vulnerability might be a necessary construct for addressing and resisting differentiated, gendered, classed, racialised, and bodily conditions of precarity, it also holds historic and contemporary power for “the furtherance of moralistic and regressive agendas” (Munro and Scoular 2012:189) — a point I will develop further below.

In working to contribute an analysis of aspects of the cultural and affective work that vulnerability does in a specific political moment in UK history, this thesis argues that vulnerability is a concept that implicates cultural and social affective registers, emotions, and feelings. These feelings sometimes sustain, but in other ways challenge, the historical and cultural understandings of vulnerability in relation to protection, dependence, impairment, and risk of harm. Thus, on one level, this thesis asks: How vulnerability as a concept ‘works’ within the discourse of austerity and how is it understood, applied, and circulated? But it also considers what the implication of vulnerability within discourses does; and how it produces and renders intelligible (or not) ‘vulnerable subjects’ or ‘vulnerable populations’ in opposition to a supposedly “invulnerable” (Gilson 2011:316) norm. Furthering Munro and Scoular’s (2012) attention to the politics of vulnerability, this thesis seeks to make sense of the emotional significance of vulnerability as a concept for social justice politics. In this way, it asks: What does it mean to feel for vulnerability or ‘vulnerable people’ under austerity; and what are the possibilities and limitations of feeling our own, or others, vulnerability in these moments?

Finally, it asks: What does it feel like to engage in, and be addressed by, a politics of vulnerability in the austerity moment? How is this politics affectively sustained through feelings, whether they be ‘good’ feelings, negative feelings, compromised, or ambivalent feelings? In doing so, this thesis argues that a situated analysis of the discursive, affective, and intersubjective work that vulnerability performs in the UK austerity discourse can speak back to the social justice we imagine as being enabled, or prohibited, by calls to vulnerability within and outside of feminist politics. I argue that a feminist politics and theory which engages with the feelings and emotions that go along with performing, reproducing, challenging, and resisting this discursive politics of vulnerability under austerity offers important ways of both conceptualising the transformative possibilities and limitations of the concept.

### **Vulnerability for feminist theory**

A guiding assumption in the remainder of this thesis is that vulnerability is an important concept for feminist politics, theory, and social justice projects more broadly and that it is one deeply implicated in feeling. My own ‘discovery’ of feminist theory and politics is entangled with feelings about, and desire to find articulation for, gendered conceptualisations and experiences of vulnerability. My initial movement towards feminism then, was a hope to find the political salience in a feeling (Ahmed 2017). Yet as my engagement with feminist theory has developed, I have grown increasingly hesitant with, and even suspicious of, my initial orientation *to* feminism through vulnerability. I now often feel apprehension rather than familiarity with many articulations of feminist claims to vulnerability as the basis of a political recognition around violence and care from the state. And along with many others, I feel a ‘knowing’ wariness to feminism’s history with the term (Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay 2016:2).

Indeed, the critical reading of vulnerability politics that I take in this thesis responds to a reenergised feminist interest in the ethical possibilities of vulnerability, introduced in Chapter 1 (Butler 2004, 2009, 2016; Fineman 2013; Gilson 2014). Like many of these authors, this thesis is aligned with efforts to disentangle vulnerability from its

conceptual associations with incapacity and protection, where I argue that vulnerability (and associated ideas around agency, care, resistance, and recognition) remains integral to, if always loaded within, past and present articulations of feminist theory and politics. It is certainly the case that experiential, embodied, and social associations with vulnerability (whether oriented towards violence, poverty, isolation, exclusion; or to care, solidarity, and resistance) have arguably always been a motivating force behind claims for political recognition, including feminist ones (Butler 2016). Moreover, counter to the suggestion that this recent theoretical interest presents a ‘new’ turn towards vulnerability for feminism, this thesis suggests that a long history of queer, feminist, anti-poverty, anti-racist, and disability activism have variously worked to shed light on forms of *differentiated* vulnerability, at the same time as they have sought to challenge the paternalistic and negative designations of vulnerability to particular population groups in opposition to an “invulnerable” norm (Gilson 2014:316). Indeed, while Butler (2016:23) identifies that resistance to conditions of precarity is often understood as leading to the overcoming of vulnerability, this thesis is deeply influenced by crip, queer, and feminist approaches that have sought to radically affirm the political possibilities of vulnerability, and that complicate the consequences and possibilities of such imagined overcoming. My thinking in this thesis is thus indebted to an interdisciplinary theoretical tradition, which critically address differentiated experiences and applications of vulnerability, whilst also working to affirm its ethical, social, and transformative *value* within situated political articulations — including many in the austerity context.

Importantly, articulations of vulnerability have also been increasingly emerging in a variety of medical, social, political, environmental, and policy discourses. ‘Vulnerable populations’ is now a broadly understood designation for those conceptualised through frames of risk, poverty, violence, and displacement (Munro and Scoular 2012:189; Ziarek 2013). My awareness of the politics of vulnerability emerged from a short time working in a sector that often adopted this conceptual language, and through the growing hesitation I felt to the malleable and often contradictory politics that seemed to develop from this usage. Based on a more engaged reading in the field, this thesis now contends that the emergence of vulnerability in these multiple discourses is not a neutral one. Indeed, because vulnerability remains understood broadly in relation to exposure to harm, violence, poverty, and danger — and as a quality or experience of

some people or groups and not others (Gilson 2014) — the temporal *potential* of vulnerability often incites, rather than undermines, violent or exclusionary policy and political claims oriented from it (Butler 2004; Munro and Scoular 2012).

This tension within vulnerability is also one of the reasons that the concept has remained so contentious for feminist theory. We might, for example, immediately register resistance to the claim that women are inherently vulnerable, yet recognise that the claim that women are disproportionately vulnerable to gendered violence is politically necessary at times. Certainly, much critical — particularly black and postcolonial feminist writing — has been complexly imbedded within challenging *both*: the conditions through which such differential vulnerability is broadly normalised and framed as inherent; alongside challenging the continued mobilisation of such a framing *within* feminist theory and politics in ways that perpetuate such racialised and transnational differentiations (Davis 1981; Mohanty 1984; Ware 1992). Applications of vulnerability to some population groups but not others continue to perform changing modes of feminising, racialising, and ableist work, both within and outside of feminist politics. This resistance to the pathologisation of vulnerability as akin to essential dependence and risk of harm remains key in the current moment. At the same time, calls for the recognition of differential experiences of vulnerability remains central to contesting conditions of precarity enabled, or deployed by, the state in the context of UK austerity.<sup>2</sup> What should and does the state do for ‘vulnerable people’? And how and

---

<sup>2</sup> A literature around the concept of precarity has developed recently as a critical response to changing labour market conditions and activist use of ‘precariat’ in Europe. In conceptualising conditions of *precarity*, these works analyse global post-fordist labour transformations of ‘flexible’ labour markets (see for example: Casas-Cortés 2014; Castel 2003, 2016:162; Jørgensen 2016; Neilson and Rossiter 2008; Standing 2011). Isabel Lorey defines precarity as the “differential distribution or symbolic and material insecurities” (2015:21), as distinct from a shared human precariousness (ontological vulnerability). Lorey furthers this conception with her analysis of *precarization* — governmental logics of regulation through perpetual exposure. Whilst I do not follow this terminology throughout my thesis, the distinction between precarity (political conditions of exposure) and vulnerability as developed by Butler (2004; 2009) is adopted. This allows for a conceptualisation of *power* within the differential distribution of vulnerability, pertinent to the austerity context. I do not adopt *precariat* (Standing 2011) as a class analysis and wonder whether the concept may underplay, as much as highlight, the intersecting causes of the differential distribution of vulnerability in the austerity context.

when might the recognition of vulnerability by the state become both desirable and dangerous — and for whom?<sup>3</sup>

Building on these tensions in this thesis, I share Ann Murphy's understanding of vulnerability as "above all, a figure that concerns potentialities" (2012:98). This framing amplifies the *shared*, perhaps tentatively called 'universal', aspects of vulnerability as a marker of our interrelatedness and as a key component of a politics around social justice and care. At the same time, it recognises the temporal and differentiated experience and application of vulnerability in social and political frames. Such universality is in my understanding an inherently temporal one, because whilst vulnerability may be a consistently shared part of human embodiment, we experience an awareness of, or exposure to, such embodiments over temporal frames. This temporality speaks to the experience of vulnerability over and within a life course: in different moments and in different periods, we will find ourselves more aware of our interdependency than others. But as well, this thesis also seeks to emphasise that the *potential* for us to experience such temporality in prohibitive and violent frames is a question of political location and recognition. In marrying vulnerability with temporality and an account of the political aspects of time — which disperse inequality in uneven forms, frames, and recognitions (Berlant 2011:100) — I argue that investigating such temporalities can raise two sets of questions. The first of these relate to vulnerability and vulnerability politics as experienced *in* and *through* time. The second relate to how temporal embodiments of vulnerability are unevenly recognised as meaningful (Kafer 2013). Based on the contention that any claim to the universality of vulnerability must hold questions of politics and potentiality as central, this thesis focuses on this *politics of vulnerability* itself. It thus seeks to highlight the often contradictory, always necessary, but centrally ambivalent politics at work within, and beyond, any claim to recognising vulnerability in the recent austerity context.

---

<sup>3</sup> I thank Jacob Breslow for raising the question of vulnerability as a 'desired' political subjectivity when reading an early draft of my thesis proposal.

## Key interventions of this thesis

### *An affective politics of vulnerability*

Central to this thesis is the notion that the temporal potential and interrelatedness of vulnerability imbues any claim to it with certain political, social, and structural expectations — an imagined response, a hope for better conditions, the risk of intrusive intervention, or exploitation. Hence, I argue that there exists an always ambivalent affective politics within any call to vulnerability within feminist and non-feminist approaches alike. I seek to centre and analyse these affective and emotional investments in the concept of vulnerability. I argue that *if* vulnerability is a key concept for political and theoretical movements, including feminist ones, this is not only because it captures the differential distribution of social precarity, but also because it is a deeply loaded concept which implicates those that perform a politics around it and those that politics names. Thus, in attending to the affective mobilisations of vulnerability in later chapters, this thesis seeks to focus on the ways in which vulnerability is mobilised through association, feeling, emotion, and implication. It examines how *feeling for* vulnerability, *feelings of* vulnerability, and *feelings like* vulnerability are central to, and travel within, austerity discourses and cultural texts.

As a result, this thesis treats vulnerability as both a discursive and affective concept in the current political moment, and tracks vulnerability as a concept that both works on political discourses and invokes feelings through this work. In centralising an interest in feelings about, for, and of vulnerability in this thesis, I argue that a politics of vulnerability in the context of UK austerity might also work through the circulation of these emotions (Ahmed 2004). These include emotions which circulate around conceptualisations of vulnerability, but that also encompass the nation, activism, and the welfare state in the past. In this regard, this thesis seeks to extend an understanding of the political work of vulnerability by exploring its circulation in proximity to anger, fear, suspense, recognition, and narratives about vulnerability politics of the past and present. Thus, the first conceptual intervention of this thesis is to develop an argument for addressing the *cultural* politics of vulnerability.



A key theoretical aim of my thesis is then to contribute to the current work on vulnerability from a queer and feminist cultural studies perspective on affect. In following the work of Sara Ahmed (2004, 2010), Lauren Berlant (2011) and others working with what Ann Cvetkovich labels “public feeling” (2012:13), my thesis argues that attention to affect and feeling within the politics of vulnerability can extend and reveal new aspects of understanding — specifically the temporality of vulnerability and its political responses and effects. In this way, my thesis asks: What might a focus on feeling vulnerable in relation *to* austerity, over, through, and in relationship to time mean for conceptualisations of vulnerability in feminist literatures? It further asks: How might ambivalent feelings about claims to vulnerability be incorporated within feminist theorisations around the term? In doing so, it considers how emotions that circulate within discourses of austerity such as fear, limitation, and crisis might also reveal the limits of feeling *for* the vulnerability of others in the context of UK austerity and beyond it. In this way, a central contention of this thesis is that in linking an analysis of affect and vulnerability further workings of power within austerity discourses are revealed. My intention in this thesis is not just to exemplify *that* feeling is mobilised within discourses of austerity, but to argue that feelings become central to revealing the ways in which the apprehension of vulnerability is unevenly distributed and through which normative attachments are sustained (Berlant 2011; Cvetkovich 2012; Pedwell 2014). In joining an analysis of austerity, vulnerability, and affect in this thesis, I argue that feelings are not just the *effects* of austerity conditions and discourses, but rather reveal the political processes through which austerity operates.

### ***Mapping vulnerability as an interdisciplinary concern***

In working to trace and respond to a longer feminist and non-feminist engagement with vulnerability, this thesis also contributes an interdisciplinary mapping of the concept. My efforts to draw out the stakes of vulnerability for more recent feminist literatures has meant drawing together works on agency, disability, care, violence, the state, and the nation, so as to make sense of the cultural and political complexity of recent austerity discourses. In approaching this temporally diverse set of literatures throughout these chapters, this thesis draws out points of similarity and continuing tension that occur when dealing with these concepts together. It is a contention of this thesis that

such interdisciplinarity is necessary to fully grasp the malleability of vulnerability within the present political context, and to assess its consequence for feminist theory.

Initially, this thesis drew together these disparate literatures because I regarded them as being motivated by a certain shared belief in the significance of vulnerability for political or social justice. Over time, the thesis has also come to argue the conceptual limitations of these theoretical formations when held as disparate claims. Notably, tracing a shared interest in vulnerability across contextual sites, experiences, political positionalities, and literatures reveals that vulnerability is employed within, and for, often opposing political or theoretical objectives. In working to draw together histories and fields of feminist literature and politics which engage with, or grapple to ascertain, the political importance of vulnerability, the stakes, problems, and possibilities of such a linking are made clear. Indeed, given the complexity of recent austerity processes and the multiple and intersecting subjectivities which the austerity discourse mobilises, this thesis contends that an analysis of vulnerability and gender must draw from these interdisciplinary traditions to adequately ascertain this politics. I argue that it is only through conversations with disability studies in Chapter 4, returning to feminist tensions around gendered violence in Chapter 5, and pursuing the limitations of mobilisation around national institutions in Chapter 6, that the critical necessity of thinking about vulnerability politics simultaneously with agency, care, interdependency, representation, citizenship, and the state, becomes apparent.

As such, this thesis seeks to explicitly challenge the framing of a more recent feminist theoretical investment in vulnerability as a new turn, arguing instead that theoretical traditions across political theory, legal theory, the humanities, political activism, and social advocacy have *always* been embedded in addressing and unpacking the possibilities and limitations of vulnerability. Here, I argue that taking insight from, and bringing together, these literatures in conversation not only bolsters a feminist conceptual understanding of vulnerability, but also becomes integral to ascertaining its risks and promises in the diffuse and co-produced context of austerity.

### ***A situated analysis of vulnerability politics in UK austerity***

This thesis argues that an analysis of the workings of vulnerability within, and in relationship to, *specific* and *located* political articulations is necessary to grapple with the ethical and emotional possibilities and limitations of the concept. In doing so, the thesis develops an analysis of the more recent context of UK austerity, addressing how and where vulnerability appears in this context and the significance of such mobile and changing appearances for a feminist politics invested in challenging austerity's outcomes.

My reading of located sites and 'debates' within the broader UK austerity discourse raises cautionary questions for more recent US-based literatures on vulnerability; many of which imagine a transformative possibility in the kind of institutional frameworks (such as universal healthcare) currently being reshaped in the UK. In this way, this thesis argues that forming an understanding of vulnerability *from within* a situated analysis of specific and located 'scenes' of austerity politics, raises questions and tensions that are not visible through general understandings of the term. In this sense, extending an analysis of vulnerability in relationship to the temporality of recent disability policy, feminist history of activism around domestic violence refuges, and the cultural imagination of the NHS, reveals changing hesitations, temporalities, and cultural resonances to the claiming or performing of vulnerability politics under austerity. In doing so, this thesis develops a methodological approach to reading for vulnerability in UK austerity discourses — one which I argue is revealing of significant critical and generative insights into the changing and malleable possibilities of vulnerability for challenging regressive political projects. I argue that broad claims to vulnerability's 'usefulness' must be explored within the contextual specificities of the politics of vulnerability as it plays out.

As such, while the key objective of this thesis is to explore the relationship between affect, vulnerability, politics, and theory, it also contributes a critical reading of austerity policies regarding the framing, exploitation, and mobilisation of vulnerability in the contemporary political context. Indeed, austerity has received significant attention in more recent feminist and cultural theory: much of which has drawn attention to the disproportionate effects of austerity policies and its discursive production around

gender, race, class, and citizenship.<sup>4</sup> For those exploring austerity from the perspective of its co-produced gendered effects, logics, and narratives, the simultaneous retrenchment of the social welfare state and increasing governmental practices of surveillance, pathologisation, and border practices are of genuine feminist concern. Austerity processes have encouraged the dissolution of social supports and institutions, such that practices of austerity employ foundationally normative gendered and sexual expectations for such supports to be ‘picked-up’ by non-state actors (Gedalof 2018:17). But as well, austerity practices of destitution and disenfranchisement advance processes of differentiation through racialised, gendered, and classed categories of entitlement and responsibility. Thus, this thesis contends that austerity policies and logics are highly relevant to a study of the differentiated distribution and apprehension of vulnerability in UK society. This is because these are differences which the welfare state has been historically imagined to respond to. In this way, this thesis is intended to contribute to this more recent critical work, seeking to deconstruct austerity discourses and their relationship to emerging and ongoing forms of inequality.

## **Thesis Outline**

### *Chapter 1: Vulnerability and Feminist Theory: Conceptual Framework*

In the following chapter, I address the recent attention given to the transformative possibility of vulnerability as a basis for a feminist ethics of justice (Fineman 2008; Mackenzie, Rogers, and Dodds 2013), and the challenges to this framing from within feminist philosophy and political theory (Butler 2004, 2009; Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay 2016; Gilson 2014; Murphy 2012). As part of this discussion, I address the recent literatures on vulnerability in feminist political theory, legal theory, and literatures on care — tracing the major contributions and questions raised by these literatures in relation to care, recognition, and power.

This chapter also introduces the interdisciplinary theoretical concern of this thesis: pointing to the significance of vulnerability as a malleable concept prior to and beyond this recent work. In doing so, this chapter draws across literatures working with

---

<sup>4</sup> See: Bhattacharyya (2015); Brah, Szeman and Gedalof (2015); Bramall (2013); Evans (2015); Gedalof (2018); Jensen (2014); and Tyler (2013).

questions of autonomy, agency, care, and dependency as concepts which become central to my analysis of the politics of vulnerability in later chapters. Finally, the chapter introduces key conceptual concerns of this thesis: specifically addressing my theoretical approach to affect, temporality, and resistance that I take forward in subsequent chapters.

*Chapter 2: Reading for Vulnerability Politics: Methodology and Methods*

In this Chapter, I address the key methodological considerations of my approach to reading for vulnerability in the austerity context. I establish the methodological approach I take to archiving case studies, and further situate the work I do in bringing the recent vulnerability literature together with queer and feminist cultural studies frameworks. The chapter also includes a discussion of my role as researcher.

*Chapter 3: Protecting the 'Most Vulnerable': Dependency and Care in the Austerity Context*

In this Chapter, I make the case for why it is necessary to think of the politics of vulnerability as performed through, and generated within, the UK austerity context. This chapter thereby serves as an initial analysis of austerity discourses between 2010 and 2015. It establishes the tensions of politicising around the 'most vulnerable' that this thesis takes as a central starting point. It argues that while differential vulnerability is a central consequence of the practice and discourses of recent UK austerity, understanding the risks of mobilising against such differentiation requires applying an interdisciplinary lens to austerity logics and their outcomes.

*Chapter 4: Vulnerable Temporalities: Public Feeling and Disability Assessment under Austerity*

This chapter provides an analysis of the public feeling that circulated the assessment process of disability (namely the Workplace Capability Assessment), which has been central to the reframing of disability policy under austerity. Rejecting the contemporary discursive formation that constructs debate about whether disabled people might be argued to be more vulnerable under austerity, I argue that a consideration of feeling vulnerable to these "welfare reform" policies might offer important insights on disability and vulnerability together. Whilst in many literatures the relationship between disability and vulnerability is assumed, here I work to refute the historic propositions

that vulnerability has a unique relationship to disability. Instead, I argue that a focus on feeling vulnerable to the austerity moment is integral to the political and structural conditions of austerity and being vulnerable within it.

Closer attention to the critically under-visited contextual and theoretical site of disability reveals not only a commonality of questions of care, resistance, temporality, and potential across these literatures, but also crucial epistemological insight into current feminist claims about vulnerable temporality. Here I argue that the temporal imagination of current vulnerability theory can be extended by a consideration of the specific embodied experience of disability produced through austerity policies. My consideration of feeling vulnerable to the temporality of austerity policies takes insight from feminist disability literatures and, specifically, Alison Kafer's (2013) reading of "crip time". Here, the experience of disability produced in relation to austerity policies makes the minor, momentary, and changing experiences of vulnerability within time visible.

#### *Chapter 5: Feminist Feeling: Telling the Story of Domestic Violence Services under Austerity*

This chapter considers the question of state recognition, representation, and gender by focusing on the marked visibility of a politics of vulnerability around the funding and closure of domestic violence services in the austerity context. Focusing on the story of the refuge told by feminist advocates and activists in recent years, this chapter returns to the "vexed" (Murphy 2012:70) site of gendered violence in the more recent vulnerability literature. In particular, it considers how feminist mobilisations around the refuge are invoking of, haunted by, and refusing of, a longer history of feminist politicisation around violence. Considering ambivalence and affect within the story of domestic violence services under austerity, this chapter examines the long-held feminist concern over representations and recognition of gendered violence within the broader context of funding and provisioning issues that austerity policies has hastened.

In this chapter, I explore the history of feminist work around gendered violence alongside the establishment of women's refuges in the UK to argue that present day claims for recognition of these refuges under austerity come up against loaded questions in regards to the state, agency, victimhood, essentialism, and the 'feminist subject'. In returning to feelings about disparate temporal political moments for

feminism I argue that contemporary vulnerability politics is produced through feelings about this vulnerability politics of the past.

*Chapter 6: 'Fund our NHS Instead': Vulnerable Institutions in an Atmosphere of Limitation*

This final analysis chapter of this thesis looks at questions of ontology, universality, and differentiation as they are developed within more recent feminist theory on vulnerability. It focuses on the discursive circulation of unsustainability, limitation, competition, and impossibility in the “crisis” claimed to be facing the NHS. Unpacking this crisis narrative, this chapter considers how an atmosphere of scarcity and compromise surrounds the NHS, relates to the suspended feelings for universal vulnerability, care, and obligation. Yet paradoxically, these same features are simultaneously claimed as central to the NHS as an institution.

In addressing the question of whether vulnerability might act as an ethical device for feminist politics and one which might serve as the basis on which claims to responsibility and care can be made, this chapter considers a further important feature of this investment in the NHS. That is, that despite being imagined as a response to universal medical vulnerability, its present-day challenges under austerity produce feelings of fear, loss, and compromise in relation to the literal and figurative borders of the NHS. Here, political claims to ‘save’ the NHS thus reveal the foreclosing imaginations about the nation, the citizen, and the borders of responsibility in the NHS which serve to limit feeling for the vulnerability of others.

*Conclusion: Vulnerability politics in uncertain times*

My concluding chapter approaches the affective and political exceptionality of 2016/17 within a tide of transnational, Party political and discursive shifts that occurred over the time of writing. This final chapter looks at some particular implications for vulnerability in conditions of perceived rapid social and economic change, uncertainty, and exceptionality. In marking the discursive ‘end’ to my case study of austerity in this thesis, the chapter notes the heightened mobilisation of vulnerability within discursive and affective frames of exceptionality. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the continued paradox of vulnerability within situated and changing articulations of contemporary politics.

## **Conclusion**

In this introduction I have outlined the major contributions of this thesis and the trajectory the following chapters take. Over the course of this thesis, I hope to make a convincing argument for considering vulnerability as a loaded political term, and one which offers both pause and promise for feminist theory and politics. As the discourse and context of UK austerity continues to pose ever-changing processes of precarity, it is my hope that this analysis goes some way in getting to the heart of how and why often violent and subjectifying processes of vulnerability have been key to the reshaping of the UK welfare state; as well as offering caution in our attempts to unreflexively reconstruct it. Indeed, through the important scholarship on vulnerability introduced in the following chapters, I argue that an ambivalent politics of vulnerability is at the centre of many social justice causes. In working to unpack the affective and political stakes of this ambivalence, this thesis seeks to contribute to a broader feminist politics which holds vulnerability central to its theoretical and political work. Because this thesis is centred within a contemporary political moment in the UK in which justice for differentiated vulnerability can seem far from guaranteed, I argue that attention to our investments in the politics of vulnerability remains crucial to moving towards a future in which it might be.



## Chapter One

### **Vulnerability and feminist theory: conceptual framework**

A guiding assumption of this thesis is that vulnerability has always been a significant concept for feminist theory and politics. Yet, as a concept that holds specific significance within feminist philosophy, justice, and politics, vulnerability has received growing attention in recent years. This thesis posits that this more recent intensified interest in vulnerability remains illustrative of a central tension within the term. That is, much ethical and social justice import is placed in vulnerability as a shared, potential condition — the relational, temporal, “radical dependency and capacity” (Sabsay 2016:279) in which all bodies can affect, and are affected by others. And yet, to be understood *as* vulnerable remains more commonly attached to specific groups or bodies through a “spectre of violence” (Murphy 2012:65). In this way, vulnerability is often associated with ‘population groups’ (such as women) within efforts to highlight the differential distributions of harm, violence, or precarity (Gilson 2014). Moreover, because this use of vulnerability has become an increasingly — and largely uncritically — employed concept regarding broader social, economic, and political articulations of national inequality and global harms (Ziarek 2013:67), this tension gains significance through the often paternalistic and prohibitive responses invoked, or sustained, as a necessary amendment to such vulnerability. Ann Murphy suggests that while vulnerability remains overwhelmingly understood in relation to the possibility of violence, it is “above all a figure that concerns potentialities” (2012:98) — a temporally significant articulation that I argue makes it particularly malleable to a diverse set of political and social discourses and intentions. And because these changing articulations of vulnerability have appeared throughout the policies of, and resistance towards, recent UK austerity measures, this tension is a central concern of this thesis.

The recent investment in the concept of vulnerability within some feminist philosophy and political theory has been labelled by Murphy as a “return to vulnerability”

(2012:67).<sup>5</sup> While this investment does not equate to a single ‘turn’ in feminist thinking, vulnerability, positioned as a shared *potential* corporeal condition, is seen to raise newly framed ethical questions for feminist theory and highlight the limits of (or in some cases, the need to transform) liberal political and justice frameworks.<sup>6</sup> In many ways, this attention to vulnerability in feminist philosophy and politics is not surprising. As Murphy (2012) identifies, claims to differentiated forms of gendered vulnerability and dependency have perhaps always been central to feminist politics concerned with gendered inequality, violence, and the law. Nonetheless, the more recent “amplified interest” in corporeal vulnerability has featured as an “increasingly charged discourse not simply on corporeal vulnerability itself, but more precisely, what ethical provocation, if any, might be sought in an appeal to the vulnerable body” (Murphy 2012:65). Catriona Mackenzie, Wendy Rogers, and Susan Dodds label this recent interest in vulnerability as an “ontological approach to vulnerability” (2013:1). Such an approach is said to be largely concerned with questions of responsibility, recognition, and the state, and can be drawn from a heuristic framework that centres vulnerability (as opposed to independence) as a social and bodily norm. In this chapter, it becomes necessary then to address how questions of the vulnerable body are being conceptualised within these more recent feminist frameworks, particularly as this relatively recent investment has at the same time spoken to, and drawn from, significantly distinct ontological and epistemological influences within feminist theory more broadly. Thus, adjacent literatures on autonomy and agency, dependency, and universality remain central to these newer articulations of vulnerability and are further explored below.

In what follows, I outline the key theoretical interventions around vulnerability that I engage with in this thesis. These works span an interdisciplinary feminist field, ranging

---

<sup>5</sup> Throughout this thesis, I occasionally refer to work that investigates the ethical and political provocations of corporeal vulnerability as the *vulnerability literature*. This is not to suggest that a single ‘turn’ has been taken on corporeal vulnerability within feminist theory, but does allow me to reference the shared concerns of these texts.

<sup>6</sup> It is necessary to acknowledge the parallel emergence of popular literatures that situate vulnerability as a relational asset in intimate and business life — positioned as a source of ‘good’ openness to others with individual rewards. Brene Brown’s (2015) use of vulnerability as a positive feeling is marked by what I consider to be depoliticised notions of both feeling and risk and should not be considered as akin to the attention to feeling within the politics of vulnerability I address in this thesis. See: Ziarek (2013) for a critique of these literatures.

from legal and political theory (Fineman 2008; FitzGerald 2012; Munro and Scoular 2012), philosophy and ethics (Butler 2004, 2009; Gilson 2011, 2014; Murphy 2012), as well as renewed efforts to consider vulnerability in relationship to autonomy and care (Mackenzie, Roger and Dodds 2013), and agency and resistance (Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay 2016).<sup>7</sup> Introducing the key stakes of many of these more recent literatures in this chapter, I go on to outline the different theoretical and conceptual course I take in the remainder of this thesis — that is, centring a queer and feminist cultural studies approach to the politics of vulnerability itself. This thesis hopes to broaden theorisations of vulnerability from within a queer and feminist cultural studies framework, and in doing so, draws on an interdisciplinary feminist literature in which I argue vulnerability has always been articulated and pressing.

My understanding of the politics of vulnerability seeks to centre vulnerability as performing changing political work in different spheres of UK austerity, depending on the debates through which it is articulated and the subjects, bodies, and political outcomes to which it is attached. My initial discussion of the recent interest in vulnerability as an ontological or bodily condition which may invite a feminist ethics, moves towards the more critical suspicion with which I afford the transformative possibilities of vulnerability in the remainder of the thesis. Such suspicion is grounded in what I see as the necessity of attending to the ways in which vulnerability works in relation to specific sites of power and differentiation within the recent austerity discourse. As such, this chapter traces how vulnerability has been taken up in recent feminist theory alongside the broader theoretical influences (Ahmed 2004; Berlant 2011; Cvetkovich 2012; Pedwell 2014) I employ to unpack the politics of vulnerability in UK austerity in later chapters.

### **An amplified interest in corporeal vulnerability**

---

<sup>7</sup> I largely engage with feminist texts which have sought to consider the import of vulnerability within and for gender theory. This is a deliberate narrowing of the field, given that these texts more generally engage with feminist concerns around gender and its intersections, violence, care, and agency, which this thesis also takes as central.

### ***Vulnerability as a ‘universal’ condition***

Most explicitly, within feminist political and legal theory, Martha Albertson Fineman (2008, 2013) has advocated for a radical investment in a “universal vulnerable condition”, posing that recognition of universal vulnerability is a necessary challenge to the rational, autonomous subject of liberal justice models.<sup>8</sup> For Fineman, universal vulnerability as a social justice heuristic works to articulate the limits of identity-based charges for equality, in which autonomy is presumed and “in which impermissible discrimination is cast as the discoverable and correctable exception” (2013:16). For Fineman, recognition of the shared fallibility of bodies instils a consistent state obligation to recognise and respond to human interdependency, rather than relying on individual and identity driven demands on an inconsistent state to *return* subjects to a place of supposed autonomous capacity.

In this sense, Fineman articulates vulnerability through its embodied “constancy”, carrying “with it the imminent and ever-present possibility of harm, injury and misfortune” (2013:20). In my reading, Fineman’s account of such constancy also introduces the importance of temporality within this constancy where “we are born, live and die within a fragile materiality that renders all of us constantly susceptible” (2008:12). For Fineman, vulnerability can “manifest itself in multiple forms” (2013:20) over time in relation to bodily illness, to institutional harms, to the neglect or violence of others. But as well, vulnerability is experienced in relation to temporal dependencies. Perhaps most obviously in infancy, ageing, and illness, over and in time, our vulnerability will manifest through our inevitable dependency on others. In positioning vulnerability as a temporally and differentially manifested, but nonetheless consistent potentiality of human experience, Fineman argues that vulnerability can act as a feminist heuristic device through which demands for a state “responsive” (2013:4) to such differentiated inevitabilities can be made. It is significant that Fineman’s

---

<sup>8</sup> Fineman’s earlier work *The Illusion of Equality* (1991) and *The Autonomy Myth* (2004) reflect earlier articulations of her concerns with liberal frameworks of equality. Fineman’s more recent works on “The Vulnerable Subject” (2008, 2013), and the edited collection *Vulnerability: Reflections on a New Ethical Foundation for Law and Politics* (2014), alongside her work as the Director of the *Vulnerability and the Human Condition Initiative* at Emory University, reflect the development of these themes.

investment in vulnerability is developed within the context of legal and political theory and responds to the notion of an autonomous liberal subject where frailty or dependency have been figured as the exception.<sup>9</sup> It is this disciplinary backdrop that informs Fineman's wariness to notions of autonomy and independence in relation to gender and gendered care processes, and her preferred focus on "resilience" (2018:6) through structural and institutional supports.

Importantly, Fineman (2013) is clear in stating that universal vulnerability used as a heuristic device is not to suggest that resilience is therefore equally distributed, or that differential treatment in policy and law may not be necessary or preferable to address this. But for Fineman, universalist conceptualisations of vulnerability nonetheless act as an orientation through which to move away from individualised discourses of equality as they are currently framed in a liberal model of justice, which, she argues, requires the presentation of limited, and fixed models of grievances in order to be addressed.

Universal vulnerability is positioned as a turn away from methods that seek to address gendered and social inequality and injustice through modes of individualised harm. For Fineman, these methods sustain associations of vulnerability with specific populations in paternalistic ways — a question I follow further in Chapter 3.

Fineman thus offers a considerable thesis on universal vulnerability and its relationship to modes of political or legal recognition, but does so in ways in which the state remains the central figure through which demands for recognition, or in her framing, "resilience building", can and should be addressed. Fineman's positioning of the state and social institutions as "assets" (2013:23) or rather, a set of institutions that provide capabilities and resilience, means that while "the state itself is vulnerable and can and has been abusive" (2013:26), it is also the primary focus of redress. For Fineman, resilience is the accumulation of social, economic, and environmental assets that provide individuals with the resources to respond to "specific times of crisis and opportunity" (2013:22). Thus while figuring these resources as provided through a set of entities, institutions, relationships, and individuals, Fineman's "responsive state"

---

<sup>9</sup> For Fineman: "nested safely within the rhetoric of 'individual responsibility' and 'autonomy', discrimination doctrine enshrines the notions that America generally provides equality of access and opportunity" (2013:16).

could work in an “egalitarian manner” (2013:26) to distribute such resources fairly. This approach to the state contrasts with those that figure it as less benevolent or rather, see state recognition as one of the processes through which differentiation is enacted (Brown 1995; Butler and Athanasiou 2013). Acknowledging such, Fineman argues that because states are “simultaneously constituted by, and producers of vulnerability, [social justice efforts] must continually challenge these institutional practices and meting of these resources” (2008:13).

Arguably, Fineman’s interest in highlighting universal vulnerability in opposition to liberal concepts of autonomy promotes a model of *reform* through a recognition of interdependency. And while redressing fallacies of independence and liberal autonomy have indeed been central to feminist concerns around care, structural inequality, and dependency, Fineman’s optimism in the responsive state as alleviating this inconsistent recognition is particularly limited. Indeed, Fineman’s concerns with identity-based claims to recognition share some terrain with Wendy Brown’s (1995) critique of injury as a limiting model within liberal justice. But while for Brown, progressive attachment *to* the state as a restorative figure is the core of this problem, Fineman seems to confirm Brown’s assertion that progressive agendas nonetheless remain attached to the state by figuring it both as the cause and cure for injury. Whilst Fineman does acknowledge that the state can, and does, act in exploitative ways, her focus on resilience building implicitly assumes that differential exposure to harm occurs through the *absence* of regulatory protections rather than, as in Brown, through the extension of regulation through and within modes of state engagement.

Vanessa Munro and Jane Scoular have questioned Fineman’s approach to the state as an “asset” (Munro and Scoular 2012:201) in social justice, which is largely unable to account for the multitude of instances where methods of protection or state intervention have enhanced or exploited the differential vulnerability of populations. This tension is also reflected in the feminist critique of normative recognition more broadly. For Athena Athanasiou, conceiving of subjects as “pre-existing human agents” who seek recognition, obscures “the regulatory power” (Butler and Athanasiou 2013:79) that produces such subjects as intelligible. Whilst Athanasiou’s discussions with Judith Butler develop from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s formulation to figure

recognition as something we “cannot not want” (1993:50), for Athanasiou it remains “one of the most crucial challenges that we face today” to consider modes of justice where the state is not simply assumed as the “natural mechanism of recognition” (Butler and Athanasiou 2013:83).<sup>10</sup> For Fineman the consequences of these tensions are not fully explored, since recognition of universal vulnerability is sustained as a largely restorative or redemptive approach to “restructuring” (2008:13) the limitations of institutions.

The tensions of this position are, however, particularly relevant to my thinking in this thesis. This is precisely because, as I later argue, the UK welfare state could be understood as a historic mode of responsive recognition of vulnerability, one that has been radically transformed under modes of austerity. Indeed in Chapter 3 of this thesis, I argue that an increased and changing political distribution of vulnerability might be figured as the outcome of recent austerity policies. Moreover, discourses of austerity often work to amplify *both* shared and individualistic (or populations based) conceptualisations of vulnerability. Thus, Fineman’s conclusions seem somewhat less certain in a context in which what might be considered as modes of state resilience building (social benefits, tax credits, social services, universal healthcare) are being increasingly and deliberately reframed. Through austerity policies, I argue that vulnerability is mobilised by the state in the service of these “regressive” (Munro and Scouler 2012:186) agendas. As such, while there is some shared terrain between Fineman’s intention to conceptualise vulnerability outside of individualised and paternalistic frameworks and my own concerns, her implicit preference to figure institutional frameworks as performing largely a restorative role in redressing vulnerability remains far more questionable.

### ***Corporeal Vulnerability and precarity***

---

<sup>10</sup> Throughout this chapter I frequently refer to modes of *recognition*. In this way, I am responding to a concept of recognition by the state — i.e. legal and political recognition through state mechanisms, interventions, law and policy, which I consider as tied to power; as well as a sense of social or political recognition – to be seen, acknowledged, in the social sense of the term. Following Butler, Gilson (2014) distinguishes between these modes as recognition (formal) and apprehension (social/psychic). I take up these distinctions in this thesis, but also consider that they are demonstrative of the complexity of vulnerability as thought of in terms of recognition — by the state, social or otherwise.

Though often linked with Fineman in this turn towards vulnerability, Butler's ongoing engagement with the concept is critical of the idea that a universal corporeal vulnerability might engender such an unambiguous social justice framework. In *Precarious Life* (2004), and *Frames of War* (2009) Butler develops an articulation of interdependency and vulnerability through a discussion of the psychic dimensions of being "undone" by mourning the loss of others. Butler's theorisation of the political dimension of mourning serves her to consider "the way in which we are, from the start and by virtue of being a bodily being, already given over, beyond ourselves, implicated in lives that are not our own" (2004:28). Butler builds on her earlier articulations of gendered intelligibility, subjectivity, and recognition (1990, 1993a) to ask whether, to the extent that the "bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever only our own", this universal vulnerability and interdependency to others opens up space for "normative aspirations within the field of politics" (2004:26).

In these works, Butler weds a universal or ontological conception of vulnerability to discursive political processes and power, by framing vulnerability in relation to a broader conceptualisation of "precarity" (2009:2) — the differential distribution of grievability and violence. For Butler, it is only where, and for whom, this vulnerability is apprehended, grieved, and recognised that a precarious condition is secured. Butler's interest in universal corporeal vulnerability as an issue of recognition, intelligibility, and grievability extends her earlier writings on gendered and sexual subjectivity as formed through frames of normative intelligibility. While sustaining that corporeal vulnerability might well be universal, Butler argues that vulnerability is ultimately framed by precarity — that it is a political condition made visible or invisible through political processes of apprehension and recognition in which differentiated experiences of power and violence materialise. In referencing forms of gendered, sexual, and global violence and persecution, Butler acknowledges that the apprehension of vulnerability is not universally secured in that not all vulnerable bodies find "fast and furious support and will not even qualify as grievable" (2004:32). In this sense, for Butler it is "difficult, if not impossible, to understand how humans suffer from oppression without seeing how this primary [vulnerability] is exploited and exploitable" (2004:31).



Developing her framework through a focus on modes of US state violence and claims to sovereignty in the post 9/11 climate, Butler argues that the apprehension of national vulnerability after 9/11 led to a discursive terrain in which state violence could be both figured through, and exacerbating of, the vulnerability of those deemed as ‘threats’ to the nation state. Butler argues that the exposure of national vulnerability served the capacity to situate those in need of preservation as part of the nation state, in opposition to those whose precariousness rendered their lives ready to be lost at the expense of security. A case in point is Butler’s (2004) consideration of modes of indefinite detention and torture enacted by US military in the name of protecting the US state *from* future acts of violence. Here vulnerability, though a normatively shared certainty, did not resolve, but worked to further, the enactment of state power and violence over those in detention. Butler’s central ethical concern in this work is with the ways in which shared vulnerability is unevenly distributed in relation to political violence. Thus, for Butler, a corporeal vulnerability is always imbricated in political acts which expose vulnerability through differential forms of precarity. It is the politics in how subjects are apprehended as grievable or not, which raises hesitation for vulnerability’s necessarily normative resolutions.

Erinn Gilson (2014:43) argues that it is Butler’s important distinction between apprehension of vulnerability and recognition of vulnerability that is central to this work. For Gilson, Butler’s distinction between a less formal and less tangible apprehension of another’s vulnerability or life, proceeds, and can occur without, formal or tangible modes of recognising ones *right to life*. According to Gilson, this is central to Butler’s argument that a shared corporeal vulnerability does not in itself engender modes of non-violence or grievability. Perhaps for Butler, contrary to Fineman, apprehension of the constancy of vulnerability can also be the basis of regressive claims to secure the state, or state practices. Acknowledgement of shared vulnerability may not itself provide a *way out* of complex implications of power, mostly when considering that “each of us is constituted *politically* in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies” (Butler 2004:20 my emphasis).

It is in this way that Butler does not recount either the theoretical potential of universal vulnerability, or the significance of vulnerability in producing, sustaining, and forming

collectives based on this differentiation (Butler 2009, 2016). Arguably, Butler's investment in developing a critical notion of vulnerability works to extend a critique of the limits of liberal modes of recognition as explored by Fineman, as well as the limits of abstract rights based on them (Hekman 2014:461). Indeed, while Butler remains cautiously engaged in the ethical possibilities of vulnerability and vulnerability's centrality to resisting oppression, she asserts that "recognition is not in itself an unambiguous good, however desperate we are for its rewards" (Butler and Athanasiou 2013:82). Butler's more general suggestion that the state is a field of "conflicting trends" (Butler and Athanasiou 2013:85) speaks to the ambivalent ways in which vulnerability politics might be tied to state recognition. Butler's more recent attendance to vulnerability as a "relation to a field of objects, forces, and passions that impinge on, or affect us in some way" (2016:25) sustains her framework of vulnerability as pertinent to resistance to unequal modes of precarity. But in her consideration of non-violent protest and the mobilisation of vulnerability in some forms of street politics and public action (discussed further below), Butler (2015a; 2016) sustains the duality of vulnerability within modes of political assembly and violent political conclusions and outcomes.

For Gilson, Butler's work makes clear the problems of an assumed normative responsibility or ethical response within the apprehension of vulnerability. For Gilson, a focus on the certainty of ontological vulnerability must occur alongside an analysis of its conditions of apprehension and recognition. As she states, a "critical investigation of why responsibility does not follow [from apprehension] and of the conditions that prevent responsibility from being assumed is crucial" (Gilson 2014:59). In this way, Gilson argues the need to further situate Butler's analysis of the ethical possibilities of vulnerability within a narrowed or situated account of the ways in which such responsiveness, violence, or precariousness is sustained, "generated and perpetuated" (2014:61). For Gilson "it is only through attention to the specific historical, social, economic, and political conditions and practices that produce the faulty postures of sovereignty and persecution" (2014:63) that responses to this asymmetry can be formed.

Leticia Sabsay similarly argues that theorisations of vulnerability that do not take at their centre its political content and distribution both decontextualise the “murderous governmental logics of coloniality and neoliberal securitarian and austerity policies” (2016:280) and “participate in the expansion of the biopower exercised over those populations declared in need of protection” (2016:281). Shared with my concerns in this thesis, there is an argument to consider both the politically differentiated frames of precarity that emerge through this universal vulnerability, and the ways in which claims to this vulnerability do not in themselves produce unambiguous ethical responses. These authors highlight the situated and diffuse ways in which such frames of apprehension are sustained, performed, and experienced through both disavowals and avowals of vulnerability, and to what ends. In my own project, this means accounting for the multiple ways in which a politics of vulnerability is articulated in relation to the apprehension and reframing of the vulnerability of particular population groups, institutions, and histories within UK austerity. My argument thus further emphasises vulnerability as a centrally ambivalent concept to *both* resisting and sustaining current austerity conditions.

For Gilson (2014), corporeal vulnerability remains central to transforming and resisting actions of institutions and states against and over populations declared as vulnerable. Yet for Gilson, theorising the sustained and wilful *attachment* to vulnerability as a state of exception, rather than a norm, is key. Gilson agrees that it is an “ideal of invulnerability” (2014:73) that allows vulnerability to be employed or co-opted into liberal individualising frameworks. Perhaps like Fineman, Gilson suggests this occurs by the equation of vulnerability with violence rather than an openness to a multitude of relational experiences. Indeed for Gilson (2014), it is the taken-for-granted assumption that vulnerability is experienced as a negative condition that imbues many ethical claims to vulnerability with problematic resolutions. In highlighting vulnerability as a concept still largely associated and theorised in relation to negative and gendered conditions of violence and dependency, Gilson is concerned with how conceptions of an invulnerable, liberal subject are sustained, and why universal vulnerability is disavowed.

In this way, Gilson considers that the fact that universal vulnerability always operates within discursive norms of invulnerability, which she defines as an “ignorance”

(2011:308) centring autonomy or invulnerability as a social and political norm. This sustains vulnerability as largely undesirable, over-determined or over-associated with risk of violence, and always within the individualising discourse of ‘vulnerable populations’. Speaking specifically to anti-immigration rhetoric in the US context, Gilson explores how vulnerability, when factored as a limited and contained condition, refuses an apprehension of the relationality to, and the vulnerability of, others. She suggests this ignorance sustains the mobilisation of vulnerability *to* job insecurity in the context of migration and the possibility of protection of currently *but not always* vulnerable citizens and borders. But further, this rhetoric is sustained by an ignorance of *both* the relational dependency of citizens on migration, and the differentiated and specific forms of precarity and vulnerability “of those who cross national borders to find work” (2014:89). In light of this reflection, Gilson argues for the importance of holding onto vulnerability as a mode of openness, rather than an already situated condition of life, alongside exploring the “variability” (2014:67) of experiences through which vulnerability is politically manifested. Perhaps echoing Butler’s (2016) more recent interest in articulating the centrality of vulnerability *to* resistance, rather than a condition to overcome — the desire for imaginations of invulnerability is integral to Gilson’s understanding of the ambivalent transformative potential of philosophical accounts of corporeal vulnerability itself.

Thus, implicit in Butler, and more explicit in Gilson, is a push towards calls to analyse the affective nature of political investments in conceptualisations of vulnerability, alongside the importance of thinking through vulnerability as a mode of investment and implication within the politics of vulnerability itself. And as I see it, while highlighting universality as a position on which to refigure these frames of differentiation, both Gilson and Butler indicate the importance of maintaining vulnerability as a differentiated temporal experience that can be resisted in the name of challenging structural, material oppressions, whilst refuting the possibility for such vulnerability to ever be “overcome” (Butler 2016:13; Gilson 2014:89).

Indeed as in Fineman, I read these calls to see how vulnerability is “manifested in concrete relationships and practices” and as an “open-ended condition” (Gilson 2014:37-38) as implicit nods to an analysis of the experience of vulnerability in, over,

and in relationship to time. To me, these readings of the ontological consistency of relational interdependency, alongside its political manifestations, invites a more direct analysis of the temporality of vulnerability. That is, whilst we might share our vulnerability as consistent across a lifetime, within time this consistency manifests in changing forms. As well, such times in life will be encountered through the “variability” (Gilson 2014:67) of structural and material questions of power in daily ways. It is thus this second aspect of temporal vulnerability that is key to the political conception of vulnerability I take forward in this thesis. The temporal potentiality of experiences of vulnerability are at no time, and in no space, evenly distributed.<sup>11</sup> Explicating on this temporal insistence in a framing of vulnerability — that bodies are differentially placed, understood, and encountering of vulnerability *over the time of their lives* — raises significant questions of not only how a politics of vulnerability performs time, but also whose vulnerability is recognised as occurring in sync with recognised forms of a meaningful life and politics (Baraitser 2017; Kafer 2013).

Moreover, this need to sustain both a temporally differentiated political account of vulnerability, and a conceptual account of ontological vulnerability (and perhaps avoid the collapse between the two), marks what I consider to be a travelling tension within these conceptualisations of vulnerability, and a sustained concern in relation to wider austerity discourses. Indeed, this move between the normative significance of vulnerability, and the specific discursive and material enactments of it, remains a tension at the heart of much feminist politics around vulnerability, agency, injury, and the state. Similarly to the ways in which vulnerability is employed in widely diverse contexts more generally, it necessarily moves between ideas of universal, temporal potentiality, whilst most frequently describing and identifying specific subjectively experienced conditions that are not always shared — particularly in relation to gender and experiences of disability and illness.<sup>12</sup> Here, a politics of vulnerability is revealed in responses that mobilise vulnerability to address differentiated and intersecting political

---

<sup>11</sup> Berlant’s conceptualisation of the affective attachment of cruel optimism, discussed below, argues that structural inequalities “are dispersed and the pacing of experience is uneven” (2011:100) in ways that challenge both the temporality of the future and the “event” of dependency, life cycles, and care.

<sup>12</sup> Ulrika Dahl suggests: vulnerability to racism is rarely seen as a “starting point” (2017:43) for theorising the term.

and social oppressions (Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay 2016), and progressive efforts to invoke vulnerability as a universal certainty outside, or in spite of, these modes of differentiated, temporally diverse political precarity. In positioning vulnerability as a transformative thesis because of its universality, like Butler, Gilson maintains this concept of universal interdependency alongside acknowledging the political nature of affixed vulnerable circumstances. This desire to explore “how we perceive vulnerability’s ambiguity” (Gilson 2014:179) is taken up in the remainder of this thesis. Gilson’s suggestion that such universality can be seen only as a wilful ignorance to universality is challenged more explicitly in Chapter 6 of this thesis, in which the politics of both articulations of vulnerability are explored.

### ***Universality and differentiation***

Responding to this tension, Murphy’s (2012:68) work on philosophical approaches to violence surmises that vulnerability’s ambiguity makes it an ambivalent prescriptive concept for feminist politics. Following Butler’s caution that the exposure of vulnerability does not necessarily give rise to justice or generosity, Murphy maintains that at the core of a recent feminist interest in vulnerability is nonetheless a belief that the experience of one’s own vulnerability is tantamount to a responsibility to another’s. Murphy thus labels this work as an “aspirational” and “redemptive” (2012:68) turn in feminist theory, but one that carries risky universalising tendencies.<sup>13</sup> Informing my own concerns with the way in which vulnerability emerges within and through situated sites, debates, and bodies in the austerity context, Murphy argues that “an ethical appeal to the reality of vulnerability is an appeal to a ‘reality’ that is always already circumscribed by the interests of some but not all” (2012:69).

What is implicit here is that vulnerability is a concept always and already culturally, discursively, affectively, and psychically interpellated in relation to politically differentiated experiences. The desire to counter the prescriptive and prohibitive gestures that come from vulnerability recognises this — vulnerability is a feminised, racialised concept, assigned in prohibitive gestures to some bodies and not others. For

---

<sup>13</sup> Stark also labels the theoretical vulnerability thesis “highly seductive” (2014:95) because it intimately seeks a “core” of human relationality, abandoned in liberal individualism.

example, claims to women's disproportionate experience of sexual violence clearly structure understandings of women's vulnerability in often prohibitive ways. Yet, *paternalistic* mobilisations of vulnerability often exclude many women from protection discourses, including women of colour, disabled women, trans women, and gender non-conforming women (Butler 2004:33). Indeed, attitudes and responses towards sexual or domestic abuse to which disabled women are exposed raise this tension of apprehension and recognition. Disabled women are often exposed to specific forms of abuse through encounters with medicalised and paternalistic care arrangements. At the same time, the frequent ignorance to disabled women's sexuality and familial capacities produces barriers for them to be recognised as vulnerable *to* such experiences (Keywood 2001; Nixon 2009), as opposed to *intrinsically* vulnerable because of disability. Moreover, paternalisms in response to women's vulnerability have both historically and currently served as the basis on which vulnerability to gendered, racist, and ableist violence is enacted (Cole 2016; Crenshaw 1991; Davis 1983; Nixon 2009; Ware 1992). There exists a sustained mobilisation of 'women's' vulnerability to sexual violence to both exclude trans women's vulnerability *to* gendered sexual and non-sexual violence from conceptualisations of the term, and limit their access to 'women's' services and spaces via this limited conceptualisation of women's vulnerability (Enke 2012:11). As well, I am thinking here of Kimberle Crenshaw's (1991) exploration of feminist politics in relation to gendered and sexual violence in the US, and the myriad ways that women of colour and migrant women with insecure legal status face vulnerability to violence and criminalisation through processes that ostensibly address women's vulnerability to partner violence — taken up further in Chapter 5.

It is for this reason that Noemi Michel claims that calls to the ethical capacity of corporeal vulnerability might not adequately grapple with the particular manifestations of precarity that emerge for "subjects enacted by injury" (Michel 2016:244) of racism. Drawing on Frantz Fanon, Michel argues that race is produced through the exploitation of bodily vulnerability and its materialisation through the white gaze. For Michel, "constitutive vulnerability emerges as an asymmetric ambivalence generated by the modern production of racialized difference" (2016:256), where "there remains a necessity of inquiring into vulnerability beyond ontology and for the importance of outlining the historicity of different vulnerable states and their respective materializations" (2016:257). While I am cautious of re-framing Michel's insights about

the contingent relationship between vulnerability, racism, and subjectivity into a generalised account of the politics of vulnerability, her consideration of vulnerable bodies as constituted through these histories and resistance to them (2016:257), points to the need to conceptualise bodily vulnerability in relation to the dual capacity I referred to in the previous section. That is, the exploitation of a bodily vulnerability that occurs through subjection and interpellation to historicised modes of power, *which at the same time* constitutes some as affectively “suspended” (2016:250) from an intelligible vulnerability.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Alyson Cole argues that the necessary semantics of the Black Lives Matter movement — *against* death, not for vulnerability — “suggests that the project of vulnerability studies constitutes an effort to address the epistemological ignorance of the privileged [...] It remains unclear what benefit the acceptance of constitutive vulnerability offers the disadvantaged” (2016:274). I would challenge Cole’s broader proposition that this question of differential politics and resistance is sidelined for a redemptive view of vulnerability in Butler’s work. Yet, the call to consider the specific capacity for racialised and gendered groups to mobilise claims to this shared vulnerability seems pertinent. Indeed, a focus on where and what claims to this shared vulnerability can *do* within politics requires further theorisation.

Largely, this points to my broader concern of how a conception of universal vulnerability, even if critical of any universalist claim, may align with the multiplicity of meaning of vulnerability in the austerity discourse. How can we resist, and also work within, the changing and inconsistent application of vulnerability in political and everyday spheres, while at the same time figuring vulnerability as a transformative orientation around which claims to obligations of justice might be built? My sense is that there remains an affective component to a thesis such as Fineman’s that offers a radical reorientation by which to challenge liberal and state conceptions of vulnerability as *rare*. However, I agree that it is necessary to avoid lapsing into “purified” (Murphy 2012:87) discourses in which vulnerability is posited as singularly redemptive within all social justice frames. Especially in the context in which this thesis is based, abandoning claims to the very specific connections of experience that produce the ableist, classed,

---

<sup>14</sup> Michel’s paper centralises questions of resistance and goes on to consider accounts of the injuries of racism as those which “nurture and prolong the long history of resistance to subjection of racial difference” (2015:257).



racialised, and gendered differentiations to the experience of, and claims over, vulnerability in austerity becomes difficult. At the same time, challenges to austerity *as a* political experience often question the broad withdrawal of the state by asserting both universal frames of obligation and need, and specific population based claims against precarity. Borrowing from the recent articulation of vulnerability by Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay (2016) as central to, and ambivalently drawn through, articulations of conditions of precarity *and* resistance, this thesis works to trace how both universal and specific claims to vulnerability are put to work in both resistance towards, and the enactment of, UK austerity politics.

### **Expanding the framework of vulnerability**

This chapter has thus far engaged with a relatively new set of literatures that have worked to formulate vulnerability as a feminist concern. In doing so, it risks suggesting that vulnerability exists as a particularly new concept for feminist theory, where it in fact shares much with a broader feminist terrain — most obviously in relation to agency, autonomy, care, and dependency. In what follows, I seek to address some of these connections, also pointing to their theoretical significance to the analysis of vulnerability politics I perform in the rest of this thesis. Indeed, in many of the case studies and contexts I explore under UK austerity, vulnerability performs a role in the displacement of concepts like dependency, just as in others, it becomes central to frameworks of care and autonomy they mobilise. As a result, it is also through the related concepts of agency, resistance, dependency, relationality, and care that my feminist concern with vulnerability becomes apparent. In the next part of this chapter I situate these literatures as distinct, but nonetheless foundational frameworks to more recent work on vulnerability.

### ***Vulnerability, agency, and resistance***

What haunts the more recent work on vulnerability is whether it returns feminism to previous articulations over agency and victimisation, which are particularly animated through feminist accounts of sexual and gendered violence. Indeed, one of the concerns in relation to this renewed feminist interest in vulnerability is whether agency

and autonomy can be figured into conceptualisations of vulnerability, or whether such conceptualisations might hinder necessary theorisations of resistance (Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay 2016).<sup>15</sup> Much of the feminist resistance *to* vulnerability as a feminist claim is the “vexed” (Murphy 2012:70) discourse around victimisation and agency in which feminism has historically, and continues to be embroiled (Stringer 2013).<sup>16</sup> It is thus necessary to highlight that while often understood as contradictory to vulnerability, agency and autonomy remain key to the analytical work I do in this thesis. This is precisely because, following Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay (2016), Sumi Madhok, Kalpana Wilson and Anne Phillips (2013), and Rebecca Stringer (2014), I am less convinced that a dichotomous theorisation between agency and coercion, vulnerability and resistance, dependency and autonomy, is helpful.

Moreover, much of the broad transnational feminist literature on agency responds to very similar concerns to the tension I have earlier identified. That is: How to attend to persistent, intersecting modes of gendered oppression, whilst resisting the pathologising and prohibitive projects that are enacted on groups/populations/individuals designated as vulnerable because of their exposures to such oppressions? A feminist interest in agency has similarly been centred in efforts to respond to the pathologisation of oppression, where focus has been “directed at the creative ways in which the seemingly powerless nonetheless exercise their agency and the possibilities for resistance and subversion” (Madhok, Wilson and Phillips 2013:5). Feminist theorists working on agency have been critical of liberal frameworks of autonomy and agency, which have failed to account for questions of political or structural oppression and instead centred agency as akin to “choice” (Wilson 2013); alongside feminist accounts of systemic, structural, and political oppression, which fail to account for resistance and agency

---

<sup>15</sup> While agency, autonomy, and resistance are both multiply and differently theorised in feminist theory, I take them to be related, though not conflatable terms. Crucially, the concept of relational autonomy centres a shared human interdependence and differently afforded recognition of autonomy (according to social, political, familial, cultural supports). I similarly understand agency as a temporal, relational phenomenon occurring alongside and through a consistent vulnerability to others, which does not require one to be without, or outside of, experiences of dependence. This follows Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay (2016) in their more recent articulations of the duality of resistance in relation to vulnerability and Madhok, Wilson and Phillips (2013) in their work to theorise the relation between agency and conditions of oppression.

<sup>16</sup> See Chapter 5 for an exploration of these debates in relation to gendered violence.

within coercive circumstances. Yet as Sumi Madhok, Kalpana Wilson and Anne Phillips (2013) argue, efforts to ‘uncover’ agency in response to pathologised concepts of vulnerability have often reified binaries between vulnerability/invulnerability, agency/structure, and autonomy/dependency — what Stringer (following Gudrun Dahl 2009), labels the “victims-bad/agents-good” formulation (Stringer 2013:125). It is for this reason that efforts to develop an ontological notion of vulnerability as outside of negative connotations of victimisation have been central to the more recent vulnerability literatures (Gilson 2014).

In this thesis, I align more closely with approaches to agency that seek to consider it in relationship to, and as intrinsically formed through, power (Butler 2016; Madhok 2014; Sabsay 2016) and argue that such theorisations are complementary to the vulnerability literatures that seek to refuse such dualistic thinking. In this way, I position agency as contingent on and simultaneous with experiences of vulnerability — importantly, refusing the suggestion that experiences of differentiated vulnerability exist in contrast to experiences of agentic action or autonomy. For Madhok, Wilson and Phillips, such a theorisation of agency takes us “away from simpler oppositions of agent and victim, and towards the complex ways in which agency and coercion are entwined, often in a non-antithetical relationship” (2013:3). In my thesis, I consider agency as being better understood as that which allows negotiation through conditions of power (Hemmings and Treacher Kabesh 2013:30). Here, Avery Gordon’s affective and effective account of what she calls “complex personhood” seems relevant to my hope that a politics of vulnerability might confer “the respect on others that comes from presuming that life and people’s lives are simultaneously straightforward and full of enormously subtle meaning” (1998:4-5).

Indeed, it is fundamental that critical engagements with agency have developed strongly from a transnational, postcolonial feminist tradition, which has grown a “discernible wariness of ‘agency’ as a suitable thematic replacement to ‘victim’ in the representation of subaltern subjects” (Stringer 2014:120). These works broadly posit that Western feminist accounts of victimisation *and* agency have failed to grapple with the complexity of power, subjectivity, and oppression, particularly through the travelling of accounts of agency (Madhok 2013:105, 2014) within and towards transnational contexts in which

binary understandings of oppression and agency are “better thought of as the product of a Western imagination” (Hemmings 2011:207). Moreover, of interest to this project, I would argue that a significant emphasis in these literatures has been on the *malleability* of discourses of agency within and to imperial and imperial feminist projects. For Madhok, feminist accounts of agency that do not figure agency’s emergence in relationship to power risk multiple “misdescriptions” (2014:7) in their application. These can both overemphasise oppression in ways that fail to conceptualise agency, or overemphasise resistance in ways that under-theorise its development through constraint.

Indeed, accounts such as Spivak’s (1988) *Can the Subaltern Speak?* and Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s (1988) work on the “third world woman” are often presented as essential texts in terms of a feminist accounts of agency. Mohanty does challenge the movement of accounts of sexual oppression through the category of ‘woman’ when conferred onto “third world women”, in ways that assume “a homogeneous category — or group — called ‘women’ necessarily operates through such a setting up of *originary* power divisions” (1988:79 emphasis original). However following Stringer (2014), I agree that what is central to Mohanty’s argument is unpacking the discursive workings of a “third world victimhood” in relation to Western feminism’s self-presentations as a bounded, subject of agency. Indeed, in her discussion of the production of a “monolithic ‘third world woman’”, Mohanty argues that the implicit primary “referent” (1988:65) of the western feminist author through these prefigured frameworks of “women’s oppression”, conflated with constructions of the “relative ‘underdevelopment’ of the third world” (1988:80), constructs a passive victimhood on to “third world women” sustaining imperial perceptions and projects in which the western feminist author remains the “subject”(Hemmings 2011:208). Perhaps like Spivak’s (1988) consideration of the subaltern woman as caught between imperialist and postcolonial representational desires to *locate* agency *and* victimhood in the practice of Sati, Mohanty highlights the discursive and representational *investment* in victimhood when it is constructed through Western imaginations of an originary sexual oppression. These frameworks work to refuse and ignore “the material and ideological specificities that constitute a particular group of women as ‘powerless’ in a particular context” (Mohanty 1988:66).

This scholarship has given attention not just to what agency *is* (Madhok, Wilson and Phillips 2013:12), but also to how it is employed or represented in imperial, neoliberal, and feminist discourses, such that gendered subjects come to be recognised as passive, agentic, vulnerable etc.<sup>17</sup> Stringer argues that while accounts such as these are often understood as being “against victimhood” or *for* agency, “the real object of critique in this work is not the ‘victim’ but, more broadly, the victim/agent dichotomy, with ‘agency’ actively critiqued as a racialized concept and nowhere posited as an unproblematic alternative to ‘victim’” (Stringer 2013:125). My analysis therefore pays attention to the ways in which agency is employed and the work that agency performs in feminist and non-feminist political discourses under austerity. Following Clare Hemmings and Amal Treacher Kabesh (2013:29), it becomes important to consider how uses of agency “extend the very oppositions and exclusions (victim/agent; margin/centre, self/other, active/passive, recognised/unrecognised) that they purport to ameliorate” (2013:29).

In this vein, Kalpana Wilson charts the ways in which the incorporation of agency into development discourses has served to further, or sustain, racialised and gendered notions of ‘good’ citizenship and ‘good’ subjects of development processes. In her discussion of “smart economics” in feminist and neo-liberal development discourses, Wilson laments that such a depoliticised concept of agency:

[S]hifts emphasis away from any systemic analysis of specific oppressive social structures and institutions (particularly material ones), but it also — by equating ‘oppression’ with ‘victimhood’ fails to acknowledge the possibility of those who are oppressed themselves engaging in struggle for structural change. (2013:87)

Importantly, Wilson contends that agency, when conflated with individual choice rather than collective action against oppressive conditions, fails to capture that collective agency is performed exactly in and through intense experiences of constraint (2013:96). In Wilson’s argument, oppression or victimhood is not equivalent to the conceptualisations of differential vulnerability I have earlier introduced. And yet,

---

<sup>17</sup> See also: Chow (1994) for an account of desires for authenticity and to uphold the “other” as the “non-duped”; and Carby for accounts that establish “third world women” “only as victims” (1982:222) of gendered oppression.

Wilson draws out the important task of sustaining agency as a political and relational concept, one that must be thought about in relation to ontological conceptions of vulnerability to others, bound to both political experiences of oppression and resistance to them.

Responding to the need to unpack this further in relation to vulnerability, Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay have similarly turned their attention to resistance and vulnerability in relationship to “collective agency” (2016:6). Similarly to Wilson, the authors highlight that many forms of collective agency “develop under duress” (2016:7). For the collective authors in the most recent *Vulnerability in Resistance*, disentangling agency from presumed independence:

[A]llows us to see vulnerability is part of resistance, made manifest by new forms of embodied political interventions and modes of alliance that are characterised by interdependency and public action. (2016:7)<sup>18</sup>

Taking forward these formulations in my own chapters, I maintain that those who experience manifested vulnerability in relation to austerity measures do often resist the terms of their subjectification within them (Tyler 2013), and mobilise vulnerability (both as a relational and differentiated condition) in ways that resist practices and policies that otherwise seek to exploit it. In my analytical chapters, I have sought to centre the kind of resistance that is being formed through the experience of precarity to austerity, at the same time as sustaining relational conceptions of agency that do not eschew interdependence, or forms of dependency, as overcome. In this vein, I agree that vulnerability is both integral to the very formation of such collective agency, and not antithetical to its performance (Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay 2016; Madhok 2013; Wilson 2013).

---

<sup>18</sup> The concept of resistance, similarly to agency, is a complex one — often imagined as the ‘good’ or productive of agency, rather than tied to power (Abu Lughod 1990). Saba Mahmood’s (2005) work on the Piety movement in Egypt, argues that central to addressing the binary, imperial workings of western feminist accounts of agency is unpacking the association of agency with subversion. For Mahmood, feminist accounts must be cautious of a slippage between agency and resistance, or what Madhok differently calls the “action-bias” (2014:38). It is for this reason that, while I do adopt the language of resistance in this thesis, I do not suggest that it is only through resistance that vulnerability can be marked as agentic.

Indeed, following Butler (2004; 2016), central to my formulation of vulnerability is neither the possibility, nor the desirability of existing outside interdependent, relational forms of sociality. Not only is vulnerability central to these formulations of resistance, but reifying forms of resistance that imagine overcoming vulnerability is not an ideal (Butler 2016). Informed by a feminist disability studies critique I take up in Chapter 4, it has been necessary to my project that a politics of vulnerability be imagined as occurring through voices, bodies, and practices not seen as resistant or resisting at first sight, and bodies that experience often multiple forms of dependency. In this way, my analysis chapters hope to privilege everyday practices of care and refusal within differentiated vulnerability, or “the often invisible and unacknowledged forms of resistance people use to survive” (Piacentini 2014:184). It is in this way that the resistance I refer to in my chapters moves between street demonstrations and activist actions, artist works in local community spaces, and daily practices of providing and demanding care. Attending to the differential, discursive, and affective ways in which agency, resistance, and vulnerability are *all* mobilised within the politics of vulnerability, whilst holding on to the inherent impossibility of overcoming such vulnerability and interdependency as an ideal outcome of political practice, remain here as central concerns.

### ***Vulnerability in care and dependency***

On the other side of vulnerability’s relationship to agency is its often presumed and equally ambivalent relationship to care and dependency. Care remains a central focus for many theorists working with vulnerability — although it has often been theorised through the related, but not commensurable question of responsibility for dependency. Much of a feminist ethics around care carries what Mackenzie, Rogers and Dodds (2013:2) refer to as an under-theorised relationship between care and vulnerability. That is, while care for ‘the vulnerable’ — its forms, its responsibilities, and its provision — is a clear feminist theoretical and political concern, what vulnerability *is*, and how it critically and distinctively occurs in relationship to care, has received less attention.

An earlier interlocutor for many of the writers working with vulnerability is Robert E. Goodin’s *Protecting the Vulnerable* (1985), which considers the relationship between care and vulnerability. Goodin proposes that care for vulnerability is foundational to all

“special relationships” (primarily within the family and social care), an ethics that he argues could serve as exemplary for a non-individualist care ethics within a comprehensive welfare state. Goodin posits that “we bear special responsibilities for protecting those who are particularly vulnerable to us” (1985:109) and so, directly links interdependency to the responsibility for care and the state. Yet Goodin’s work sustains a view of vulnerability in line with that which the vulnerability literature directly critiques. His understanding of protecting the vulnerable relies on what Gilson (2014) frames as a negative view of vulnerability and dependency, and a largely unquestioned relationship to power within protection.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, Goodin’s work also demonstrates the central import of vulnerability to an ethics and performance of care — one that feminist theory has critically engaged with.

Eva Kittay’s (1999) *Love’s Labor* furthers the question of care and dependency as a question of social justice. Kittay signals that dependency (in illness, in childhood, through disability) exists as a temporal but not exceptional circumstance, and that what she calls “dependency work” is “indispensable to the maintenance and productivity of any society” (1999:40). Crucially, Kittay identifies the cultural and political dependency faced by carers (their socio-economic status, the devaluation of care work, the familial privatisation of care) as “secondary dependency” (1990:46). While nonetheless focussing on dependency as a specific condition that arises out of human vulnerability, Kittay figures this non-exceptional dependency in relation to the interdependent political and social circumstances through which such need is provided for and extended.

Much of this work focusses on what Kittay labels the secondary dependencies of care workers, importantly broadening conceptions of dependency outside of paternalistic notions of ‘the vulnerable’. Kittay extends understandings of caring relationships to include the significance of reciprocity through forms of dependency. Through a discussion of the care practices she and others performed and received in relation to supporting her disabled daughter Sesha, Kittay draws out the interrelated and reciprocal

---

<sup>19</sup> Goodin concludes that the central prescriptions of his work are that “we” have an ethical responsibility to “prevent exploitable vulnerabilities” and “protect the vulnerable” (1985:206), mobilising the paternalistic language that much of the feminist vulnerability literature challenges.



nature of their lives shared through differentiated, but consistent, modes of interdependency with others. Her thesis, while taking *maternal* relationships as its main referent, establishes care and care work as a social justice issue (Mackenzie, Rogers and Dodds 2013:15), sustaining the feminist critique of the ways in which unacknowledged care is central to racialised, gendered, and classed inequalities.<sup>20</sup> Importantly, dependency here is also implicitly framed as emerging from a temporal vulnerability. This framework in some ways prefigures the vulnerability literature's implicit invocation of the relational certainty of dependency for and with others as of political concern, whilst also addressing the processes through which such interdependencies are managed and manifested in relation to care practices.

Indeed, feminist concerns for the politics of care and the distribution of care work remains central to understanding and critiquing austerity in relation to vulnerability through a feminist lens. Implicit in the retraction of the social welfare state are expectations of care to be performed elsewhere, primarily within the family (Rubery and Rafferty 2013:133). Due to both the increasing privatisation of care — itself a contributor to modes of gendered, classed, and racialised vulnerability under austerity — and the invisible forms of care in communities that the breakdown of services will necessarily facilitate, feminist theorisations of care and reproductive labour remain central to formulations of vulnerability politics in the following chapters (Fraser 1997; Lorey 2015).

While these literatures are somewhat adjacent to the work on vulnerability I perform in this thesis, they remain deeply relevant to both my theorisation of care in Chapters 3 to 7, and why care remains central to social justice issues around vulnerability under austerity. Indeed, claims to care and the moral centrality of care and vulnerability feature prominently in many of the cases I look at in this thesis. Demands for, and

---

<sup>20</sup> See Friedman's (1993:45) discussion of the dangers of communitarian philosophies that centre sociality in moral theory, and feminist care ethics and the limitations of centralising already feminised practices of care within normative moral theory without critically evaluating the gendering of care through social, cultural, and institutional practices. See also Joan C. Tronto (1993) for a need to disassociate the notion of "women's morality" whilst situating care as a political "ethic". See Clifford-Simplican (2015) for care theory, Kittay and Butler's work together and for a consideration of complex dependency.

critiques of care in many ways structure feminist responses to violence and the state, welfare more generally, disability politics, and healthcare debates, which my analysis chapters engage. Many of the discourses of austerity I engage with also uncritically echo a presumed relationship between care, care work, and the *protection* of vulnerable people. Others centre a more critical conception of reciprocal care practices as intuitive to a vulnerability politics — asking how and in what ways austerity measures fail to figure the practice and politics of care regulates the interdependency of all lives.

Much of the cautionary approach I take to a supposedly neutral politics of vulnerability under UK austerity reflects these literatures of care, and the limitations in framings of care, care work, and dependency as neutral modes of engagement outside of the bounds of the state (Ticktin 2011). At the same time, this thesis is conscious of the risky terrain in which feminist politics has often assumed an obvious or uncritical relationship between vulnerability and care. Or rather, that care for ‘dependents’ is a normative certainty — where conceptualising care as a mutually constituted relational and political frame might be preferable (Lorey 2015). And yet, central to my interest in austerity policies is their explicit materialisation through discourses around social or state care and support — or the reframing and removal of social care despite what many would position as the “central role of state institutions [that] is to protect citizens from the vicissitudes of misfortune” (Mackenzie, Rogers and Dodds 2013:15).

At the same time, while I agree that vulnerability is intrinsically linked to questions of care in multiple ways, I take a more critical view of the state’s relationship to care, or rather, of the idea that forms of social care might be understood only as reparative in the politics of vulnerability under austerity. Indeed, a central point in Butler’s (2004) work on vulnerability is to complicate this presumed relationship between vulnerability and care, and the ways in which care and/or vulnerability related professions can produce prohibitive frames if uncritically understood in relationship to negative views of dependency. This is particularly pertinent in the context of disability, in which negative conceptualisations of dependency, frailty, and vulnerability are left to stand uncritically as the *example* of the significance of care, and in which power relations and exploitation within care for disabled people are rarely explored (Barnes 2011; Wood 1991).

Indeed, the sustained tendency for dependency to be understood as an uncritically negative condition in relation to care is highlighted by feminist disability studies critique and intersectional critique more generally. In this thesis, I take forward the claim that the discursive assignment of dependent, and especially ‘welfare dependent’, must be critically approached (Hill Collins 1990:81; 1998; Tyler 2013; Wearing, Gunaratnam and Gedalof 2015), particularly given its prevalence within the austerity discourse. Thus, while sustaining care and support as relationally significant to human vulnerability and political practice, this thesis suggests that critical accounts of how, where, to whom, and by whom care and dependency are attached and performed cannot be abandoned within this analysis. It is for these reasons that this thesis posits that questions of vulnerability and care (who performs it, how it is performed, and who is cared for, and significantly *about*) remain central to a critical feminist conceptualisation of the politics of vulnerability in the UK austerity context.

### ***Being cared for: dependency and autonomy together***

Concerns around interdependency, agency, responsibility, and care are brought together by the authors of the edited volume *Vulnerability: New Essays in Ethics and Feminist Philosophy* (Mackenzie, Rogers and Dodds 2013). In this work, the authors share a concern for the dualistic thinking that suggests vulnerability must be thought of as contradictory to concepts of autonomy. In their view, “taking ontological vulnerability seriously requires us to rethink, rather than discard, the concept of autonomy” (2013:16). As such, the authors centre a conceptual turn towards relational autonomy as crucial to overcoming paternalistic logics of dependency and care as they relate to vulnerability.

Their perspective on relational autonomy — or an *interdependent* view of autonomy — is positioned as both constituted by corporeal vulnerability, and a necessary additive to particularly Fineman’s work. In this sense, the authors suggest they are “committed to the view that the obligations arising from vulnerability extend beyond protection from harm to the provision of social support necessary to promote autonomy” (2013:17). This commitment goes in parallel to the literatures raised above, which are cognisant to the symbolic and cultural paternalism in which vulnerability, understood in contradiction to agency, has politically, structurally, and culturally befallen ‘vulnerable

groups'. Importantly, Mackenzie (2013:46) counters that ontological accounts of shared vulnerability might underplay especially structural, embodied, and political experiences of dependency in lieu of highlighting ostensibly shared modes of human dependency (such as childhood or ageing). In this regard, Mackenzie suggests that accounts of shared vulnerability must recognise that vulnerability can be inherent (universal), situational (context specific and temporal), and pathogenic (brought about through conditions of care for vulnerability). In this way, the collective author's ethics of vulnerability attempts to account for the relational and layered way that daily vulnerability is experienced in relationships of care, through assumptions of the opposition of dependency and autonomy that reify imaginations of independence.

While the breadth of the volume's multiple authors' analyses of relational autonomy cannot adequately be addressed in this chapter, I am particularly alert to the concept of pathogenic vulnerability — where situational vulnerability is exacerbated by practices of care imagined as responding to situational dependencies. In this regard, Mackenzie argues that pathogenic vulnerabilities are experienced by those for whom the status of 'vulnerable' or 'dependent' renders their autonomy unrecognised and thus open to violation, or by those who are responsible for the care of others and who are made vulnerable by the absence of recognition of their mutual dependency on forms of care (what Kittay above calls secondary dependencies). I would argue that a conception of pathogenic vulnerability also reflects Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay's (2016) interest in theorising the relationship between vulnerability and agency more thoroughly. At the same time, this framework, and pathogenic as a term, emphasises these as largely *unintended* consequences of paternal conceptualisation of dependency and care. In Chapters 3 and 4 and 6 the positioning of these consequences as unintended is more explicitly questioned, where vulnerability experienced to state processes of care often appears as an intended aspect of such policies, even as these policies explicitly value a language of independence.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> I would like to thank my colleague Aura Lehtonen for encouraging me to draw out this distinction through my work.

Jackie Leach Scully (2013:206) asserts that the risks of under-theorising autonomy become visible through the lens of care for disability. For Scully, both universalist and assigned understandings of vulnerability carry limitations. On the one hand, overly determining disability and its association with negative dependency obscures the transitional, or temporal nature of dependency and restates autonomy and invulnerability as the norm. On the other hand, a universal vulnerability thesis obscures that for many disabled people, the particular manifestations of support required to live relationally autonomous lives continue to “demand conscious efforts of moral and political will” (2013:219), in ways that do not manifest in universally similar ways and thus require specified theorisation and attention. In this regard, Scully suggests that a “more comprehensive notion of ontological vulnerability which includes vulnerabilities that develop through all forms of dependency, may be ethically and politically preferable” (2013:206).

Through the lens of disability, and both its constructed and structural relationship to modes of specific dependency, Scully highlights the variable nature of vulnerability as experienced as both an ontological, symbolised, and political experience. While a broad ontology of vulnerability may necessarily disassociate the symbolic negativity associated with assigned understandings of dependency, a framework that highlights these only in regards to particular phases of life (illness or childhood) obscures the specific conditions in which many disabled people’s lives are impacted by prejudiced and limited frameworks of dependency and care. In this way, Scully highlights the need for recognition of the “particular manifestations” (2013:219) of universal vulnerability in relationship to practices and constructions of care, autonomy, and dependency.

Attention to the specific or particular manifestations of frameworks of vulnerability, agency, dependency, and care remain crucial to unpacking the role of vulnerability in the austerity discourse. These particular manifestations of vulnerability, agency, dependency, and care become central to the maintenance of austerity as a political project and its differential outcomes. Indeed, Scully’s work points to the significant (yet I would argue otherwise under-theorised) relationship between vulnerability and disability and the politics of care approached in Chapter 4. Especially figured through more recent work on debility (Puar 2013; Shildrick 2015; Wearing Gunaratnam and

Gedalof 2015), efforts to incorporate conceptualisations of disability in line with an analysis of global and intersecting forms of precarity and care have worked to put pressure on the frames that rely on the binary between disabled/abled bodies. Yet, Margrit Shildrick draws a comparison between recent work on debility and Butler's approach to vulnerability, and argues that there remains a risk of losing sight of the cultural or social specificity of disability in these approaches. According to Shildrick, "while the concept of debility works in a positive way to disrupt the binary distinction between disabled and non-disabled embodiment, it may do so at the cost of failing to distinguish what is unique to disability" (2015:29).

Thus, echoing critiques of the vulnerability literature and Shildrick and Scully's attention to the site of disability more generally, in this thesis I insist it is pertinent to take these discussions on vulnerability, dependency, autonomy, and care as examples of the significant tension and malleability of these terms. Indeed, they are subjected to changing theoretical and contextual understandings as they emerge within specific subjective, embodied, and political materialisations and discourses. Whilst the ethical and political significance of vulnerability is thus fundamental to both the theoretical and political framework of this thesis, my argument going forward suggests that such malleability is not a neutral or interdisciplinary *effect* of the concept's multiple take ups, but rather key to unpacking the politics of vulnerability itself.

### **Interdisciplinary concepts**

It is significant at this point to recognise that this chapter has mobilised a dialogue between a not necessarily or easily intersecting set of texts and concepts — including liberal critique in political philosophy, and feminist debates grounded in dependency and care theory — to establish a conceptual framework to analyse the politics of vulnerability.<sup>22</sup> Importantly, while I have traced these literatures to find moments of

---

<sup>22</sup> For the most part this chapter traces the concept of vulnerability through feminist literature specifically. The concept is also used widely in sociological, development, and medical ethics texts where significantly different questions and applications are raised. Within sociology, the term is often used in regards to conditions of modernity, whereas in development theory it applies to populations. While these applications are not irrelevant to my project, my interest in the topics of recognition and subjectivity are

commonality and difference in regards to vulnerability as a concept, it is necessary to acknowledge the significance of the different theoretical traditions in which many of these literatures are based, and the importance of this to the versions of autonomy, agency, recognition, and the state they render significant.

For example, Butler's and Gilson's critical development of vulnerability is grounded in their approach to political questions of subjectification to gendered and racialised frames of grievability, focusing on the *differential recognition* of lives as the stake in normative vulnerability. This critical approach is often associated with others working on the concept of vulnerability, though I am not convinced that Butler's concept of universality is amenable to the practical frameworks intended in Mackenzie, Rogers and Dodds' (2013) ethical exploration, or Fineman's (2013) work. Indeed, the development of the "vulnerable subject" by Fineman speaks largely, though not exclusively, to the North American legal context.<sup>23</sup> These works enhance an explicit notion of reform within liberal justice systems, while Butler's framework does not. Moreover, Fineman's model of reform refers to a context in which normative vulnerability — and the recognition of the state's obligation in regards to alleviating unequally distributed vulnerability — does not share the UK history of state welfare as a redistributive method, which I approach in my work. While in this chapter my analysis of Butler's work followed that of Fineman's due to their shared engagement with vulnerability as a theoretical object, this is not to suggest that the two share an investment in its normative possibilities.

In more direct conversation with Fineman's work, Mackenzie Rogers and Dodds (2013) and those who take up relational autonomy are particularly influenced by dependency and care theory in a mostly western context where accounts of autonomy have often

---

particularly explored in feminist literature on vulnerability (for examples of other uses: see Kirby 2006; Beck 1992).

<sup>23</sup> Fineman's framework has been applied to a far more diverse set of justice contexts through the associated work of the *Vulnerability and the Human Condition Interdisciplinary Initiative* based out of Emory University.

supported state paternalism and methods of institutionalisation.<sup>24</sup> Thus, questions of relational autonomy are centralised in their critique, where they highlight vulnerability particularly as it is understood as a subjective position, rather than a universalist condition or one which operates through subjectivisation (Madhok 2014). Their engagement with the universal vulnerability thesis is thus cautious of ethical frameworks that assume obligation for care, as well as the potentially neutral relationship between recognised vulnerability and the state. In contrast, the authors I have engaged with in regards to agency such as Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay (2016), Stringer (2014), Wilson (2013), and Mohanty (1988) are especially (though not exclusively) concerned with the travelling of these concepts within and through feminist, transnational, neoliberal, and colonial governmental and disciplinary contexts. Indeed, while it is my sense that understanding the pervasiveness of vulnerability in political and cultural discourse requires a movement between the various ways in which it is taken up by these authors, and that in linking these literatures I can complicate the taken-for-granted aspects of the concept within them, there is a need to acknowledge that these theories are not always ‘in conversation’ in the way that this thesis may suggest and that there are many places in which this conversation is not entirely drawn out.<sup>25</sup>

My argument is that precisely because vulnerability can and does move across these approaches within feminist literature and wider political discourse, it is crucial to take this ‘unspoken conversation’ forward in accounts of vulnerability. Indeed, the certain optimism of universalist accounts of vulnerability and justice (Fineman 2008) becomes tested only through these conversations with a broader theoretical framework that poses multiple challenges to the usefulness of such universalist categories. But, rather than attempt to resolve these definitions and distinctions (in relationship to agency for

---

<sup>24</sup> See Madhok (2014:14) for a discussion of the way in which relational accounts of autonomy assume “a subject who exhibits the authority to speak” and that thinking agency in the context of oppression requires thinking autonomy in relation to power through which persons “craft their responses” (2014:60). See: Davy (2015) for a critique of autonomy in relation to intellectual disability.

<sup>25</sup> The absence of psychoanalytic accounts of vulnerability, particularly given Butler’s engagement with this literature, points to this chapter being framed around my own concerns with vulnerability politics, rather than accounts of what vulnerability might be. For discussion of this see: Drichel (2013).



example) in order to embrace or reject vulnerability's transformative possibilities, I suggest it is both possible and necessary to conceptualise these tensions and investments as proximate and important to understanding the politics of vulnerability itself.

### **Developing a framework for the cultural politics of vulnerability**

Thus far, I have sought to foreground my argument for the need to examine vulnerability in relationship to the discourses, bodies, and modes of differentiation through which it materialises — furthering my consideration of this politics in later chapters. In the final part of this chapter I work to situate this approach, highlighting the focus of this thesis on the politics of vulnerability in UK austerity. Here, I also work to establish the conceptual and theoretical framework in which I examine the link between vulnerability and feeling. In this regard, I extend Gilson's charge that "for vulnerability to have the kind of normative significance that we aspire for it to have [apprehending vulnerability] requires embodied, imaginative capacities" (2014:179). To this end, I suggest that foregrounding feeling for, feelings about, and feelings of vulnerability and vulnerability politics in conceptualisations of the term can raise important avenues for thinking through the power, possibilities, and limitations of its mobilisation.

### ***Discursivity and vulnerability***

Munro and Scoular's (2012) and Sharon FitzGerald's (2012) approach to the universal vulnerability thesis within broader UK sex work and sex trafficking discourses has been central to the formulation of my theoretical frame. Echoing Gilson's (2011) insistence that the assumed relationship between vulnerability and harm needs to be challenged, Munro and Scoular nonetheless note that in political discourses of sex work, vulnerability remains emphasised as a subject position prescribed to certain groups, namely 'vulnerable women'. Such vulnerability is highlighted through regulatory policy and securitisation regimes that emphasise protecting women from sex work, at the same time as bolstering "the image of the state as a benevolent force in providing these responses" (Munro & Scoular 2012:191). In their discussions, they highlight the way that vulnerability operates as a descriptive political device used to explain or justify

multiple and conflicting conceptualisations of vulnerability and responses to it — most of which limit the future mobility of identified vulnerable subjects across national borders. Here, critiques of the limits of the vulnerability thesis in necessarily addressing an ethical instruction are echoed (Butler 2004; Murphy 2012; Sabsay 2016).

For Munro and Scoular (2012:197), by understanding vulnerability only as a tool towards reforming frameworks of state recognition, universalist approaches do not account for the way in which vulnerability can be used *by* the state to exclude recognised vulnerable subjects (Munro and Scoular 2012:197). Similarly, FitzGerald (2012) highlights that vulnerability is a highly *emotive* concept in sex trafficking and sex work debates, one that activates feelings of disgust around sexual exploitation of women to justify a variety of state actions that have dubious impact on alleviating, or even addressing, forms of violence. In this way, FitzGerald similarly explores the instrumentalisation of the “vulnerable female” within sex trafficking debates, where “the UK government instrumentalises the idiom of the vulnerable female, trafficked migrant, to extend its border and immigration control capacity overseas” (2012:228). For FitzGerald, what emerges in these discourses of “foreign women’s’ sexual vulnerability to foreign men is the idea of the UK border as a response to racialized and gendered discourses of what is ‘in place’ in the UK, and how the UK appropriately responds to vulnerability” (2012:235).<sup>26</sup> In their introduction to the special issue in which both articles feature, FitzGerald and Munro note that vulnerability must be seen as a discursive and affective political concept encompassing “fear, anger, marginalisation, pain, poverty or danger” (2012:186).<sup>27</sup> In the remainder of this thesis I follow this critical insistence on seeking “to uncover how those who govern use, or could use, discourses of vulnerability to frame an issue, and how such uses might further regressive as well as progressive political and legal agendas” (2012:186) within the context of UK austerity.

---

<sup>26</sup> Here, Spivak’s discussion of the representation of criminalising Sati in India and representations of “white men seek[ing] to save brown women from brown men” (1988:306) as central to colonial imaginations of agency remains pertinent.

<sup>27</sup> See also Carastathis (2015) for a discussion of hostility, vulnerability, and austerity in Greece.

In my own theoretical framework, it is key to attend to the discursive potentialities of the concept of vulnerability understood as a “politics of vulnerability” (Munro and Scoular 2012:196), where the ethical possibility of a universal vulnerability thesis is fraught because vulnerability being “shared does not, therefore, entail that it is mutual or symmetrical” (Munro and Scoular 2012:196). This discursive asymmetry is key to the way in which vulnerability can be employed or mobilised to extend paternalistic, nationalistic, and punitive policy platforms. It is this call to investigate the politics of vulnerability that my project extends in relationship to UK austerity. And similarly, not abandoning the potential of vulnerability within transformative political agendas, but simultaneously attending to how vulnerability is mobilised within often regressive political frameworks, becomes central.

In later chapters, I argue that a broader UK austerity discourse is simultaneously formulated and sustained through ‘debates’ or situated discourses around ‘vulnerable populations’, such as disabled people in relationship to work and welfare, or women in the context of domestic violence. Moreover, I argue that a broader narrative about the vulnerability of national institutions such as the NHS, the border, and the state becomes central to efforts to both challenge and maintain austerity conditions. In light of this ambivalence, I agree that there exists an “inevitable ‘politics of vulnerability’ regarding who is, and is not, recognised to be vulnerable, and in what conditions; and this in turn makes the concept a far less easy ally for feminist agendas than it may at first appear” (Munro and Scoular 2012:196). This reading of vulnerability as a multiple and changing set of concepts with associated emotional cues, lays ground for my approach to considering austerity policy debates in the current UK context in which the mobilisation of vulnerability operates.

But extending on this attention to emotion in FitzGerald and Munro (2012), I argue it is central to explore not just *how* feeling is mobilised within discourses of austerity, but also how feelings about vulnerability become central to the uneven apprehension and recognition of differentiated vulnerability under austerity. My understanding of affect and emotion in discourses of austerity becomes central to explaining the significance of vulnerability as a political concept within the current UK context. It also suggests that attention to the affective qualities of vulnerability, as it is mobilised and felt within the

circulation of UK austerity discourses, works to extend an analysis of the workings of power within austerity practices.

### ***Affect and cultural politics***

My interest in affect in this thesis began as a speculative hope for the possibilities of attending to the temporal, relational, and affective nature of vulnerability (Gilson 2014:67), and its significant role in sustaining solidarity and resistance to austerity conditions. I draw on affect literature in two ways in this thesis. Firstly as above, I suspect that vulnerability is mobilised through affect in austerity discourses, and that this affectivity is powerful in part because it invites and elicits affects (apprehension, empathy, or denial) in others (Gilson 2004:179). Secondly, this thesis sustains an interest in what participating in a politics of vulnerability might feel like: How do feelings for, feelings about, and feeling addressed within particular frameworks of vulnerability, both challenge and contribute to austerity politics and the discourses through which they operate? Thus, I am drawn to linking vulnerability together with what has broadly and imperfectly been called queer and feminist affect theory in this thesis, in order to consider vulnerability a mobilised concept, a relational experience, and a condition that invites implication or *feelings* in others.<sup>28</sup>

Unlike Munro and Scoular, my approach is not just to take vulnerability as a discursive concept, the emotional and affective use of which enhances the power of its mobilisation. Though attention to the rhetorical performance of emotion in relation to vulnerability is sustained in this thesis, I am also certain that when vulnerability politics is done — it produces affects. This may be *feeling* vulnerable most obviously, but may also be feelings of anger, resentment, empathy, or hesitation in a political climate in which vulnerability circulates and “sticks” (Ahmed 2004) in contradictory ways. Thus, my interest in affect is to both focus on how affects and emotions around, and of,

---

<sup>28</sup> As Hemmings (2005; 2012) and many others who write about affect have suggested, theories of emotion have been central to feminist and queer theory (Cvetkovich 2012; Pedwell 2014). Positioning affect as a particular ‘turn’ muddies the significant distinctions between these literatures, for example those who figure affect as a pre-cognitive materialisation (Clough 2007; Massumi 2002), and those who figure it in line with emotion, feeling, and discourse/power (Ahmed 2004, Pedwell 2014; Wetherell 2013), as I do in this thesis.

vulnerability ‘do’ something in austerity discourses, as well as how the feelings that circulate and appear via these discourses work on, or within, the politics they represent or produce.

Indeed, having argued in this chapter that vulnerability occupies such a significant place in feminist theory in part because it is malleable to a bodily, relational, political, and temporal figuration, theories of affect that consider how ideas are implicated and implicating allow me to move between these intersubjective and mobilised elements of vulnerability politics. In what follows, I point to some of the literatures within the field of queer and feminist cultural studies that have been central to my formulation of emotion and feeling in my framing of the politics of vulnerability in future chapters. Importantly, few of these literatures deal with vulnerability as a concept explicitly in the way I later do. Rather, these literatures have informed my endeavour to think through emotion within my theoretical framing and analysis, and consider the different ways in which attention to emotions and affective scenes have been used to reconsider other, often similarly ambivalent political concepts as vulnerability and feminist investments in them (Stacey 2014).

Returning to the way in which Munro and Scoular (2012) and Fitzgerald (2012) discuss the emotive use of vulnerability within discourses of sex trafficking, I am particularly interested in the way they note that feelings about gendered sexual vulnerability (fear, anger, disgust), exploitation, *and* immigration are mobilised in proximity to each other to produce specific policy implications in regards to criminalisation of sex work and border control. Here, a focus on the politically implicated, circulatory or “economic” (Ahmed 2004) nature of emotions is significant, and particularly advanced through the work on the cultural politics of emotions and subject figuration as securing political investments.

Sara Ahmed’s (2004; 2010a) work on the cultural politics of emotion are texts which prove helpful for thinking about emotions that circulate around the concept of vulnerability. Ahmed’s work, which insists on the thinking together of emotion and cultural politics, has been influential in attending to the emotional and cultural dimensions of racialised and gendered sexual politics, particularly in the context of

political mobilisations of otherness, the nation state, and national subjectivity. In approaching cultural texts to think through the implicating nature of “emotion as [an] economy” (2004:45) within discourse, Ahmed attends to how gendered, queer, and racialised subjects are surfaced by the circulation of affects, such that they can become intelligible figures in discourses of the nation, and most often understood as the source of such affects. In much of Ahmed’s work, the conception of emotions as externally circulated and produced through proximity, but felt as internal or natural, is central. For Ahmed, political feelings of outrage, hate, disgust, and love might be felt as internal, but circulate around and through political objects, bodies, and spaces — sticking to people, debates, and focus points and surfacing these ideas while presenting themselves as innate feeling. For example, in her consideration of fascist nationalist propaganda and British multiculturalism discourses, Ahmed (2004) discussed the way that all at once, emotions of love, hate, loss, and fear are mobilised around racialised subjects and spaces, orienting and surfacing racialised ‘others’ as the *cause* of these feelings, whilst producing nationalist and anti-immigration positions as orientations that can ‘resolve’ these feelings of loss, anger, and change. In this way, Ahmed considers emotions not only as feelings, but feelings *with intent and direction*, and integral to understanding the maintenance of structures of privilege.

In the later work *The Promise of Happiness* (2010a), Ahmed argues that happiness (or cultural and political expectations of what happiness *is*), similarly surface and mark subjects as worthy or unworthy citizens. For Ahmed, “the feminist killjoy”, “the unhappy queer”, “the melancholy migrant” are marked out of place within the nation for their refusal to “let go” (2010a:144) of complaints and perform normative happiness as a sign of citizenship. In this way, Ahmed’s interest in the cultural politics of emotions draws attention to the surfacing of subjectivity through affects, and the work of emotion between and within intersubjective encounters. More recently, Ahmed (2017) has drawn attention to the way in which emotions also figure in attachments and performances of a feminist politics.<sup>29</sup> This later work extends these considerations of

---

<sup>29</sup> Here, feminist politics, notably claimed by Ahmed as a “sensational” one, is a queer/anti-racist/anti-classist feminist politics, in contradiction to forms of feminism that preclude an intersectional understanding (2017:5). At the same time, as in the *Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), Ahmed’s theorisation of feminism and emotion could also be usefully applied to attachments to imperialist, trans-exclusionary, or liberal feminist politics, though she does not specifically address this in *Living a Feminist*

economic emotions and subjectivity to consider how reiterated negative feelings associated with sexism, racism, homophobia, violence, or otherness are bound up and given direction through “finding feminism” (2017:31). This insistence on thinking political attachment, feeling, and emotion as an orienting practice or process, one productive of subjectivities and apprehensions, has influenced my attention to questions of how resistance, investment, and feeling work through and direct the politics of vulnerability in the austerity moment. It also leads me to consider how this politics of vulnerability is sustained by the daily feelings and work of many addressed by, or figured through, broader austerity discourses.

Imogen Tyler (2013) similarly engages with the mobilisation of emotion and figuration within cultural political discourse in her approach to racialised, gendered, and classed antagonism within neoliberal projects in UK welfare and immigration politics. Tyler argues that the affective *abjection* of classed and racialised groups and representations of the “*culturalization of poverty*” (2013:162 emphasis original) aided the implementation of punitive welfare and border regimes, by mobilising fear, disgust, and abjection towards racialised and classed subjects, who materialise in the figure of the “chav” and the “bogus asylum seeker”. For Tyler, these affectively surfaced “national objects” come to be figures so “enmeshed within the interpellative fabric of everyday life” that they become “ideological conductors” (2013:9) that come to perform the discursive work of inciting and legitimising further retrenchment of the welfare state. For Tyler, emotions thus appear as politically and historically contingent psychic and political operations, in which classed and racialised bodies are “constituted, in interactions with others” (2013:202) feelings, as dangerous, fearful, or abject. Indeed, for Tyler, the work of emotions does not just shape fields of intelligibility, but also “materialises in subjectivities” (2013:203). As for Ahmed, emotions do work through politics in ways that surface and reiterate overdetermined figures of abjection, such that they are affectively and discursively ‘outside’ of the nation.

Thus similarly to Michel (2016) discussed earlier (and indeed, sharing a referent in Frantz Fanon), Tyler’s account of racialised and classed abjection speaks to the

---

*Life*. This question is taken up by Clare Hemmings (2011) in the analyses of affect in western feminist narratives and attachments.

differentiated materialisations of bodies within and through a politics of vulnerability. An investigation of subject formation through emotional “economies” (Ahmed 2004) allows me to consider how circulating feelings about austerity, vulnerability, and the nation come to surface subjects as vulnerable *or not* in the context of UK austerity. It also allows this thesis to consider, as in Tyler’s and Ahmed’s emphasis on resistance and collectivities, how such a politics is performed and resisted in relation to feelings about, and of, these modes of subjectification.

While focussing her work on the mobility of the particular emotion of empathy, Carolyn Pedwell (2014) similarly argues that a politics of empathy materialises *within and through* intersubjective and transnational encounters. Pedwell reveals the mobility of empathy as a relation by theorising the interconnections and overlaps between disciplinary, colonial, national, and advocate notions of empathy and their emergence through situated locations, discourses, and intersubjective encounters in geopolitics. Pedwell considers that empathetic intimacy and proximity, while seen as a transformative relationship *between* differently situated groups or populations in ways that overcome differential vulnerability and power, most often works to secure the emotional transformation of the *empathiser* in proximity with the ‘other’, whilst securing, or failing to move, the position of the empathised (2014:90).<sup>30</sup> For Pedwell, claims to the transformative work of “fellow feeling” obscure the “transnational circuits of power in which ‘subjects who feel’ are *differentially* embedded and produced” (2014:90 emphasis original).

My discussion of Pedwell’s work here, pointing at her insistence on the relationality of feeling, discourse, and power, should not be taken to suggest that vulnerability can be understood as a humanising emotion like empathy (Berlant 2004; Pedwell 2014). Indeed, Butler’s work makes clear that vulnerability, as the exposure to and of the other, does not always lead to humanising emotions — empathy is often a disavowed

---

<sup>30</sup> Clare Hemmings (2011) argues that within the narrativisation of empathic feelings in western feminist storytelling, empathy works to produce a “feminist subject” who is affectively embroiled in structures of privilege and assumed reciprocity (for example who is empathised with, and who is empathetic). Amit S. Rai (2002) differently explores how sympathy as a form of power works through governmentality in the making of British colonial agents and subjects, and discourses of gendered and racialised difference in which “sympathy produce[s] the very inequality it [seeks] to bridge” (2002:163).



‘resolution’ to vulnerability in the austerity moment. Indeed, in Chapter 6, I discuss this disavowal in relation to the borders of the NHS and ‘debates’ around non-citizen care. Faced with medical vulnerability of non-resident patients in the NHS, refusal of empathy, and disavowal of their vulnerability, also appears as a remarkably salient political ‘resolution’. What does seem pertinent, however, is that like Tyler and Ahmed, Pedwell also considers that economies of feelings can reproduce, perform, as well as contour historical, political, and cultural modes of subjectivisation. Because feelings emerge within relations of power and discourse, emotions can also become “clues to the affective workings of power in a transnational world” (Pedwell 2014:98).

The question is not then just *that* feeling is mobilised within discourses, narratives, and relationships of austerity, but rather that these mobilisations are revealing of orientations, powers, and subjects through which the apprehension of vulnerability becomes possible. In this way, emotions might (but not always, and not always in the same ways) be thought of as orientations or relations to particular political investments, outcomes, and structures. This resonates with the critique that Cole (2016) and Michel (2016) make of the ethical assumptions in the vulnerability literature I referred to earlier, which may not, for Michel, adequately grapple with the differentiated affective subjectivisation and materialisation of vulnerable bodies within political encounters and discourses. It also resonates with the critical approaches to vulnerability politics more broadly, which argue for its centrality as a concept that emerges through power and governmental logics (Sabsay 2016).

Thus, in my chapters I consider how emotions are mobilised in changing ways to secure an expected orientation, relation, or feeling towards and for vulnerability. That is, within the affective cultural politics of vulnerability, the discourses, spaces, and debates in which vulnerability is invoked, considered central, or denied are also those in which affective and subjective orientations and responsibilities for or about vulnerability are performed and produced. Thus, while vulnerability may not be (or may not always be) an emotion, as exemplified by feminist debates over dependency, care, and recognition discussed above, it is a condition that raises questions of relationality and emotion for others — feeling *for*, or feelings *about* another’s vulnerability. But if, as these authors suggest, the affective orientations assumed to ‘go with’ vulnerability in the austerity

discourse are not in themselves resolutions, but sustaining of relations of power and subjectification, then it becomes necessary to consider how mobilisations and representations of vulnerability work to both differently and changeably produce feelings of, feelings about, and feelings for vulnerability and vulnerable subjects in the austerity context. In what ways do these orientations of feeling challenge, sustain, and make visible the power of austerity politics?

Such a framework of emotions as political, circulating, and relational, allows this thesis to ask: How are conceptions of the ‘most vulnerable’, and those with the ethical imperative to act for, towards, or against such vulnerability, produced, sustained, and oriented in the austerity discourse through feeling? Where and how do austerity discourses allow, or disavow, accounts of vulnerability by reproducing historic and cultural affective relations of protection, care, or denial? These theories also open the possibility of considering how particular figures — the “most vulnerable” (Chapter 3, 4), “vulnerable women” (Chapter 5), the “welfare dependent” (Chapter 3, 4), the migrant “health tourist” (Chapter 6) — work through historically and culturally contingent associations, proximities, and emotional circuits within the politics of vulnerability in ways that both sustain and resist austerity processes. They also help me to consider how discourses of austerity become invested in, such that the apprehension of vulnerability within them becomes possible, or impossible.

Further still, my consideration of affect in the narrativisation of a past feminist politics past in relation to the domestic violence refuge in Chapter 5, and the NHS in Chapter 6, leans on these authors in its consideration of the way in which competing, often simultaneous emotions (loss, compassion, hesitation, limitation, fear) work to refigure the frames, narratives, and subjects through which vulnerability can be recognised. Similarly to Tyler and Ahmed, my analysis also touches on the proximities between these situated debates about vulnerability and imaginations and investments in the nation state. Here I ask: How are emotions of love and fear for the nation, national borders, or national institutions formed through the circulation of feeling, such that figures such as the migrant “health tourist” or the “welfare dependent” can figure as threats to it? Indeed, in approaching emotions as performing this relational and orienting work, this thesis considers the ways in which vulnerability politics under

austerity can be animated by feelings about, or for the nation, the vulnerable, the welfare state, the NHS, and the domestic violence refuge, such that the apprehension of vulnerability is shaped, or made impossible, by these emotional frames.

In returning to the critical contention that bodies become differently apprehended in relation to vulnerability as Butler (2004) and Gilson (2014) argue, the affective dimension of this apprehension becomes central. Indeed, a consideration of the mobilisation of emotions through stories and debates pertaining to the austerity moment allows me to consider the materialisation of relations, circulating feelings, and subject formation through which vulnerability may be rejected, denied, valued, or honoured, and through which the subjects of vulnerability politics under austerity emerge.

### ***Public feeling in austerity***

A further aspect of my thinking of the politics of vulnerability in relation to affect follows from Berlant's suggestion that the political present might be "perceived first, affectively" (2011:4), and therefore points to what participating, performing, and living through vulnerability politics might feel like. Berlant's insistence on capturing the slow, minor intensities of affective environments, spatial practices, and daily living under neoliberalism echoes Ann Cvetkovich's intention to consider "what capitalism feels like" (2012:8), and their shared work through the *Feel Tank Chicago* project, which thinks of feelings as publicly, culturally, and politically significant. I bring together these "diagnostic" (Love 2007:13) approaches to emotion within the politics of vulnerability under UK austerity. Public feeling under austerity becomes of interest to this thesis in the ways that it might reveal the minor, momentary, sometimes seemingly apolitical gestures that both challenge and sustain the politics of vulnerability. For Berlant, attention to such feeling allows for a consideration of the ways in which "intimate publics work in proximity to normative modes of love and the law" (Berlant 2011:3). This points to my intention to consider how the politics of vulnerability might be understood as not just occurring through the rhetorically claimed, but also endured relationalities within austerity politics, where, as Ratna Kapur suggests, "the everyday affective and aesthetic experience of the present provides a more complex understanding of how justice and injustice operate" (2015:286).

In Lauren Berlant's consideration of the "good life" in *Cruel Optimism*, she argues that neoliberal *structures of feeling* bind people to normative ideals of "common interestedness" (2011:226) — ideals that orient daily cultural and political scenes to reproduce normative labour, sexual, and gendered material attachments. It is to the daily, ongoing and affective maintenance of these attachments that Berlant draws her attention. These everyday forms of maintenance are considered to sustain the unequal conditions of capitalism, through which the promised good life remains cruelly out of reach. In Berlant's account of "slow death" (2011:96) and what she terms "lateral agency" (2011:114), these sustained attachments lead to the material and bodily wearing out of populations within an affective and temporal field of "ordinariness" (2011:10). For Berlant then, apprehending the affective qualities and materialities of political life and power means making sense of "activities of maintenance", "sentience without full intentionality", "inconsistency", "and embodying" (2011:100) the everyday ordinariness of living within and through conditions of neoliberalism.

Ann Cvetkovich more explicitly works to centre "public feeling" (2012) as a concept that can be used to conceptualise the political significance of daily experiences and emotional states. Like the previously discussed works, Cvetkovich's approach does not eschew a consideration of discursive or representational articulations of sexuality, class, gender, and race, but shares an interest in the implication of these within the politics of intimate daily encounters. Taking her starting point as the political salience of depressed feelings (not dissimilarly to Berlant's engaging with the temporally experienced *impasse*), Cvetkovich grounds her reading of depression between the physical and everyday experience of illness, which reveals the cultural and political inconsistencies and structures in which the recognition and experience of illness are embedded.

Cvetkovich thus considers depression not only as an embodied and painful experience of immovability, but also one that *reveals* political and structural legacies, attachments, and recognitions. In this turn, Cvetkovich highlights depressed states not just as *effects* of cultural discourses but also conduits through which political predicaments are revealed and revealing. These and other works, such as Avery Gordon's (1998) earlier efforts to trace haunting through histories of slavery, gendered, and sexual violence and trauma in

the present; and Sianne Ngai's (2005) discussion of "ugly feelings" as entangled sites of feeling that reveal the everyday "ongoingness" (2005:3) of structural and emotional predicaments; become central to the way in which I trace feeling within vulnerability politics in the present, as well as the methodology (discussed in Chapter 3) that I use to access these possibilities.

My engagement with public feeling attends to the "affective sensorium" (Berlant 2011:54) that is developed in the cultural and political performance of a politics of vulnerability under austerity. Therefore, my chapters consider how advocates, activists, care workers, and 'vulnerable people' within the austerity moment respond to the politics of vulnerability within and through everyday feeling and actions, to ask whether these feelings are revealing of other aspects of the politics of vulnerability outside of its representational, or represented forms. Indeed, in developing a framework to understand the cultural politics of vulnerability, I am concerned with not just how vulnerability is mobilised through emotion, feeling, and emotionally saturated figures; but also what it feels like to engage in, be addressed by, and reproduce a politics of vulnerability within the present. Extending an understanding of the politics of vulnerability as something that is felt, as well as performed, asks whether examining the political nature of everyday articulations of feeling vulnerable, or feelings about another's vulnerability in the austerity moment, might offer insight into how a politics of vulnerability politics "gets inside" (Tyler 2013:214) daily cultural politics and life under UK austerity.

In this way, I hope to attend more fully to Gilson's (2014) and Butler's (2004) assertion that vulnerability is a relational condition — one always centred in the implication of, and openness to, others. Transient moments of *feeling* vulnerable, or feeling about the politics of vulnerability under austerity, become important to these questions of apprehension — who feels vulnerable, when, and against whom? — but also: How might vulnerability be shaped by this openness? The aim of my approach to feeling is to consider the mobilisation of vulnerability in political discourses in line with how we may think about feeling for and feeling vulnerable in austerity times.

A cautionary note to this is, of course, that feelings under austerity cannot be read as fixed or solid categories — both feelings themselves, and recognition of the feelings of others, occur within and through modes of power (Anim-Addo 2013; Pedwell 2014; Rai 2002). In this sense, *finding* feelings in the context of austerity discourses, or professing to know the content of the feelings of others, risks suggesting that public feelings in UK austerity exist outside of the readers' and my own capacity to politically understand and employ them. It risks suggesting I can know not only what the subjects of these discourses feel, but also the content, causes, and shape of those feelings (Gunaratnam 2012:19; Page 2017).<sup>31</sup> I take up this tension in the following Chapter, *Reading for vulnerability politics in the UK austerity context: methodology and methods*. While I am not suggesting that public feelings are useful, or stagnantly identifiable within a politics of vulnerability, I nonetheless argue that speculative attention to them might touch on examining a politics of vulnerability that is both performed and lived through.

---

<sup>31</sup> Sneja Gunew has attended to the European readings of affect and the need to critique the supposed universality of emotion, gesture, and the face to “decolonise affect theory” (2009:27).

## Chapter Two

### **Reading for vulnerability politics: methodology and methods**

The aim of this thesis is to develop an analysis of the affective and discursive work that vulnerability performs in the context of UK austerity. My methodology has sought to analyse this politics of vulnerability as it emerges through several case studies within the broader scene of austerity. In this way, austerity is understood as one political scene through which the theoretical stakes of vulnerability are revealed. I question: How vulnerability is mobilised in the austerity discourse, what understandings of vulnerability appear, and to whom are they assigned? How are changing frames of vulnerability taken up, or resisted and what theoretical or conceptual tensions for vulnerability do these mobilisations point to? And how do feelings for, of, and about vulnerability sustain and challenge the political possibilities and limitations of the concept? In this chapter, I outline the approach I have taken to building case studies from austerity through which I respond to these questions. I then outline the creation of a methodological approach based on cultural studies methods. I follow with a discussion of my reading method and ethical considerations and conclude with reflections on my role as researcher.

#### **Building an archive of vulnerability in austerity**

In the first year of my thesis, I struggled with the ‘how’ then the ‘what’ of my argument. Motivated by the theoretical intention to explore the affective and discursive work that vulnerability performs politically, I knew it would be impossible to argue this in the UK context without attention to broad and rapidly evolving circumstances in which ‘new’ forms of austerity were being maintained and continuously introduced (Brah, Szeman and Gedalof 2015; Evans 2015; Gedalof 2018). A central contention of the thesis is that a *situated* analysis of the malleable work that vulnerability performs in different contexts is necessary. That is, that theoretical conceptualisations of vulnerability — approached

in the previous chapter — might not reveal the same stakes in the context of austerity measures effecting disability benefits, as they do in relationship to the broadly understood institution of the National Health Service. The theoretical intention of my thesis is to respond to this politics of vulnerability. That is, to consider how and in what ways accounts of vulnerability play into, sustain, and challenge the situated and intersecting enactments of UK austerity.

When I moved to the UK from Australia in 2012, concerns about the effects of the first years of the Coalition Government's austerity plan were increasingly being voiced. Claims by activists, journalists, and politicians about a growing or changing national, population based, and individually felt vulnerability were emerging. This thesis, which had originally intended only to explore feminist theoretical questions around vulnerability in relation to gendered violence, took on a broader political framing. This was because it became necessary to consider how vulnerability was operating in both the broader austerity discourse and in relation to the differently articulated sites of specific austerity policies.

In attempting to capture the atmosphere of this political moment, I was consistently confronted by the longer memories and investments that seemed to be required to make sense of these “public feelings” (Cvetkovich 2012). Or, if “mediated affective responses exemplify a shared historical sense” (Berlant 2011:3), I had to learn it in the UK context. While discourses within advocacy, activism, and policy in Australia were the first locations where I became alert to the affective, theoretical, and epistemological stakes of vulnerability politics, making sense, and capturing the senses of, specific iterations of policy in the UK demanded significant efforts on my part to develop alertness to this rapidly changing political context, and a methodology which responded to these theoretical concerns.

My initial approach to developing a methodology for this thesis was to build a map of the broader discursive, Party political, and historical landscape of recent UK austerity measures. In this regard, I collected and collated news articles in major UK media outlets such as *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *The Mirror*, *The Telegraph*, *BBC News* online, and *The Independent* online regarding the broader theme of austerity — reading backwards



from contemporary contestations to make sense of their historical, political, and cultural resonances. I watched UK TV comedies, documentaries, current affairs programmes, panel shows, and political interviews. I read policy documents, Parliamentary committee transcripts and reports, and followed Parliamentary debates and budget announcements in relation to the broader frame of UK austerity, “the cuts”, and inequalities in the UK. I followed demonstrations and social media accounts of UK activist and advocacy groups, often using articles and statistics they shared as a starting point for the framing of a debate or scene around specific austerity policies. This broad approach to updating myself on the content and responses of UK austerity policies was one I maintained over the four years of writing.

As I collected opinion pieces, news media and MP speeches in relation to broader UK austerity context — many of which are drawn through the contextual analysis in Chapter 3 — I also decided to centre my analysis around three, necessarily incomplete, but focused case studies which had featured as prominent ‘debates’ over the first year of my research. These debates were disability policy under austerity, the funding of domestic violence services, and the cumulative effects of spending changes on the NHS. Narrowing my focus in this way, I worked to build a picture of major policies and Ministers and track the publications, research reports, and advocacy groups that would remain relevant to each topic. This collection process allowed me to draw on articles, quotes, programmes, pamphlets, and research reports to construct my later chapters – and formed the basis of what I refer to as an ‘archive’ in the remainder of this chapter.

Importantly, in contrast to methods which might have sought to follow every deployment of vulnerability in austerity related media over a specific period, or produce a discourse analysis of several media outlets over a period of time, my collection process followed a less systematic method than this. The approach I took might better be considered as one of tracing or following scenes of debate, one which presumed certain gaps and detours in its construction. As such, this might better be considered a cultural studies approach to tracing an emerging cultural and political scene. Thus, while practically, I began this process over 2014 and completed it in early 2017, following these case studies sometimes meant collecting new media or policy examples from

before these dates, and included research publications by expert bodies and journals, theoretical literatures and historical overviews. This collection process hopes to reflect the theoretical approach I take to the austerity discourse which is addressed further below. That is, that the cultural and political salience and meaning of austerity is not considered to have always clear temporal boundaries. Moreover, the cultural and political significance of austerity is understood to precede and exceed the policy period to which it refers.

Having roughly defined a case study for each of the discussion chapters, I focused my work on narrowing my focus to media texts and cultural objects through which vulnerability was being positioned as key to these debates. Indeed, these case studies were chosen in part because these policy changes directly affected recognised ‘vulnerable groups’, as in the case of domestic violence refuges or disability policies, or because the institutions experiencing these changes were shrouded in a language of vulnerability, as in the case of the declared “crisis” (Blackburn 2017) facing the NHS. This narrowing also meant that I began to focus the analysis of each chapter on particular objects within these debates. As example, it was through building a broader archive on the coverage of disability policy that the Workplace Capability Assessment emerged as a central conduit for these concerns. It was through collecting political news media examples on the funding of domestic violence services that contestations *within* the sector appeared to me as particularly resonant to the theoretical significance of vulnerability within feminist framings around violence. And, it was in trying to make sense of the seeming resonance of the affective investment of the NHS within political mobilisations about its funding, that the role of NHS-themed television appeared as a site through which these cultural and political imaginations came together. As such, it was through this approach to tracing political scenes that certain ‘objects’ – television programmes, art exhibitions, and activist narratives – became ways in which to analyse the theoretical implications of these broader contestations.

I began working on these case studies by collecting materials on the changes to disability benefits and assessment which are centred in Chapter 4. Disability policy, and disabled people in relationship to “worklessness”, featured as a central way in which several “welfare reform” policies were narrated over the years of research (Gedalof

2018). In much media, advocate and activist discussion, the WCA often acted as a conduit to exemplifying the broader effects of austerity policies on disabled people, and was one of the most prominently featured *examples* in the media of the unequal effects of austerity policies over the time of writing. In following this example, I drew together opinion pieces, news stories, advocacy documents, and activist responses to the WCA up until 2016. I then worked to place these within the broader discursive framework of, and public feelings in response to, these recent changes to disability policy. These included collecting explanatory documents from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP 2015, 2018), journalist responses to these changes (O’Hara 2015a; Ryan 2016a, The Great Benefits Row 2015), and advice for applicants produced by advocacy groups such as Disability Rights UK (2016). Yet, while this broader textual archive was central to the framing of that chapter, it was through the smaller exhibition *Shoddy* – which was both based within these discourses, and a response to them – that the theoretical argument of Chapter 4 is extended.

The second site, the funding and provision of domestic violence refuges, was closer to my initial focus on vulnerability in feminist responses to gendered violence, yet emerged as a surprisingly public site over the course of collecting materials. As above, the effects on domestic violence refuges appeared as one of the few ways in which the cumulative gendered effects of austerity were being represented in media I collected. Having followed budget announcements and debates in news and social media, I narrowed my analytical focus towards advocate and activist responses to the austerity context — specifically Women’s Aid and Sisters Uncut — rather than developing an archive around the broader tensions and articulations of vulnerability in relation to gender and austerity as I had initially intended. Indeed, whilst the analysis of the multiple intersecting gendered effects of austerity have been largely taken up by scholars (Bassel and Emejulu 2017; Brah, Szeman and Gedalof 2015; Rubery and Rafferty 2013), research units (LSE 2015) and organisations (Fawcett Society 2012; Women’s Budget Group & Runnymede Trust 2017), the funding of domestic violence refuges frequently featured in media portrayals as *indicative* of the gendered effects of austerity, and pressures on not-for-profit support services more generally. Moreover, Sisters Uncut and Women’s Aid were also often involved in the production of, or used as sources in, many of these media representations I found. As such, I narrowed my focus to several responses by these two groups – namely the Women’s Aid *Save Our*

*Services* campaign, the All Parliamentary Party Group report on *The Changing Landscape of Domestic and Sexual Violence Services* in 2016 and several demonstrations by Sisters Uncut over the same period. I use these as a lens through which to examine the feminist history and investment in vulnerability politics around gendered violence. Thus, as in Chapter 4, while a broader alertness to the discourses around shelter funding led towards this focus – it is through selected representations and narratives by Sisters Uncut and Women’s Aid that the analysis of the chapter is developed.

Finally, the “crisis” of the NHS escalated over the time of writing — in many ways becoming one of the most “sticky” (Ahmed 2004) institutional symbols in claims both for and against austerity spending policies. In building this case study, I traced the appearance of this crisis discourse in proximity to discourses on Brexit, social care, and migration, following this mobility of the NHS beyond and outside of healthcare discourses in news and entertainment media, alongside collecting materials on the history of the NHS and changing public attitudes to it over time. Following this, I chose to focus my chapter on the BBC2 series *Hospital* which was filmed in 2016. This choice was made given what I identified was the unique cultural and historical role of NHS themed television in producing cultural imaginations of the NHS in the UK which had been so frequently referenced in the other examples I collected, and the place of NHS themed television in both reflecting and contributing to how the politics around the NHS is negotiated (Holland, Chignell and Wilson 2013:4). Moreover, *Hospital* aired in early 2017 and both reflected, and at times reframed, the broader conventions of the “crisis” debate. As such, Chapter 6 provides a reading of *Hospital* as a way into this broader cultural and political investment in the NHS. It performs a close reading of the way in which storylines and framings within the 6-episode series speak intertextually to the broader focus on NHS funding and entitlement over the period of austerity.

Following news media in relation to the theme of each chapter — disability and the WCA; domestic violence shelters and funding; NHS spending — I maintained this process over the months of writing and again through the editing process, allowing me to update these case studies as time went on. As each chapter provides a necessary contextual mapping for each topic, at the same time as collecting specific materials

from news and entertainment media, I researched into the implementation and histories beyond the current context. As example, my archive included expert journals and bodies such as the *British Medical Journal* (Lacobucci 2015) and *British Medical Association* (Blackburn 2017), the *Fawcett Society* (2012) and *Demos* (Wood 2012), and recent scholarly work on the austerity context. These were used to both build the case studies, and provide context to contemporary contestations.

Finally, because these case studies are explored for the theoretical stakes of vulnerability, this collection took place alongside a more dedicated reading of the theoretical literatures related to each site. At the same time as I collected materials on the WCA, I researched disability rights histories and scholarship in the UK and more broadly. At the same time as I collected news articles on the funding of domestic violence refuges, I read backwards into feminist engagements with the issue of gendered violence both in the UK and elsewhere. As I collected an archive on the NHS under austerity, I read backwards into the history of the NHS and its development within the post-war welfare state. This process of performing a historical and theoretical reading of literatures alongside exploring their current contextual materialisations, provided detail and borders to my reading and analysis process. It has also become central to the theoretical arguments I make about the politics of vulnerability itself.

It is possible that the case studies followed in these chapters might initially appear as disparate points of analysis. Indeed, beyond the shared context of UK austerity and their allied institutional or structural functioning, they might not always speak to each other in obvious ways. Yet within the sprawling, coproduced, and ongoing changes taking place, these sites became central to my sense of the changing, malleable, and situated affective and cultural work of vulnerability in broader discourses of austerity. These choice of case studies reflected both the public nature of these three sites within a broader discourse of austerity, and their broader contextual relationship to the politics of vulnerability. Particularly because it was not feasible (and not necessary preferable) to address all austerity policies, map their interrelatedness, or do justice to all their effects, these three sites worked as examples around which the theoretical and political stakes of vulnerability can be read. They have allowed me to hold onto the broader political

and cultural shifts that austerity policies have facilitated and developed from, alongside the everyday specificities of their contemporary execution. Moreover, my method of tracing these case studies over the time of writing, hopes to reflect the never wholly contained ways in which the politics of vulnerability, in any political moment, emerges.

As well, this reading process hopes to reflect the way in which broader public feelings about austerity circulate and stick to locations, policies, figures or populations in uneven and changing ways (Ahmed 2004). These three sites also drew out, and on, historic gendered, ableist and racialised imaginations of what vulnerability is and who is vulnerable. This archive quite deliberately returns (and cannot avoid returning) to population groups for whom vulnerability has historically and problematically circulated — women in relation to violence (Murphy 2012), disabled people in relation to social care (Scully 2013), citizenship in relation to birth, illness, and death (Gunaratnam 2013; Ticktin 2011). It is important to highlight in this regard that it is not my intention to take for granted or reassert these framings, and my work should be understood as broadly suspicious of the assignment of vulnerability to specific ‘populations’. But in focusing my reading on smaller, momentary, sometimes incidental aspects of vulnerability politics within contexts of precarity that might lead to otherwise obvious conclusions, my working through these sites is intended to challenge the limited and paternalistic framing of some groups as more vulnerable, alongside sustaining a critical view of the differentiated distribution of precarity in relation to austerity policies.

In doing so, my methodology intends to consider how these specific figurations, subjectivities, and histories of vulnerability are discursively reiterated and produced within and around specific sites within austerity. This is because the visibility of these sites within the austerity discourse highlights the ambivalent nature of vulnerability that this thesis seeks to work through. Moreover, these case studies also reflect the broader disciplinary interventions to which the vulnerability literature responds. Questions of gender and violence (Murphy 2012), disability and care (Mackenzie, Rogers and Dodds 2013; Scully 2013), and a more extensive welfare state which accounts for temporal dependency (Fineman 2008; Gilson 2014), implicitly or explicitly structure the interventions of this more recent literature on vulnerability introduced in the previous chapter. In this sense, my hope is to generate an analysis from within specific political

context of austerity, in ways which provide insight into the differentiated cultural and political workings of vulnerability more broadly.

In working to interpret both the specific development of vulnerability politics in relation to these three sites and link them to longer and broader historical, cultural, and symbolic attachments to the welfare state, feminist activist politics, and figurations of deservingness in the UK, it is not my suggestion that this offers a complete picture of the cultural politics of vulnerability, or a complete picture of the politics of UK austerity. Indeed, in reading across these three political locations as though vulnerability links them explicitly, or that vulnerability is key to understanding them, my research seeks to develop one strand of theoretical analysis of vulnerability in the context of UK austerity, and is not intended to be taken as an *explanation* of it. In this sense, my interest in the object of vulnerability in these case studies, is not to suggest that an analysis of austerity politics, or even these same representations, examples and scenes, might not also begin from their mobilisations of gender, race, class, citizenship, or that this does not feature in my reading.

A restraint this methodology faced relates to choosing an ongoing issue in UK politics — one that has rapidly unfolded over the course of writing and for which the consequences of its discursive enactments are never entirely visible or complete. While in collecting an archive I faced the necessary constraint of concluding at the beginning of 2017, the context and consequences of an ongoing reframing of the welfare state has developed over the course of this research and will outlast it. Writing each of these chapters developed out of an engagement with these three sites over limited periods of time. I undertook the writing of these chapters over time, something that is reflected in the shape of this thesis — from 2014 when I began, to 2017 when I finished collecting primary materials. This process of research and writing each chapter also means that the context of UK austerity builds over the course of these chapters. Chapter 3 draws from news media primarily based over 2014/15, Chapter 4 and 5, primarily from 2015 and 2016, and Chapter 6, early 2017, by which time austerity had largely slipped out of usage within the Government framework.

Over the period of writing, the UK saw the end of the 2010 Coalition Government between the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives which introduced the austerity platform, and the election of the 2015 Conservative Government which continued it.<sup>32</sup> The election of Jeremy Corbyn as shadow Labour leader later introduced an oppositional Party position on austerity policies from 2016, and the 2016 Brexit referendum, followed by the election of a new Conservative Government in 2017, undoubtedly altered discourses of domestic social policy. Building these case studies has thus required an awareness to the open and changing nature of contemporary politics in the UK as well as the open nature of the sites I address. Furthermore, the idea of ever being able to ‘resolve’ these political histories is not in line with my approach to discourse or vulnerability — a point I develop further below. In line with this methodology, my approach should be read as reflecting the potential and ongoing tensions of vulnerability within idiosyncratic moments in the austerity context, rather than an effort to *explain* austerity as such. My efforts to build case studies and archives which move backwards and forwards between historical and recent articulations of UK politics, and engage with specific, and necessarily limited objects of cultural analysis, thus hopes to better display the performative and cultural resonances through which any “appeals to ‘the reality’ of vulnerability” (Murphy 2012:69) in any historical moment are produced, performed, and sustained.

### **Reading cultural texts**

My initial methodological approach to these case studies was influenced by a cultural studies approach to discourse, with a focus on the ways in which vulnerability as a concept was discursively applied and produced in the context of UK austerity. In this vein, my methodology is more generally grounded in insights from post-structuralist approaches to discourse, which seek to unpack the role of discourse and representation in relation to power (Foucault 1978; Hall 1997; Wetherell 2001). I borrow from this framing to argue that claims about vulnerability under austerity and the representation of ‘debates’ about austerity policies in relation to differentiated experiences of

---

<sup>32</sup> See Chapter 3 for more direct engagement with these events. In Chapter 7, I return to the question of capturing public feeling in 2017, 2018 and beyond.



vulnerability, do not merely exist as contained sites or *truths* about austerity, or vulnerability within it (Wetherell 2001). Rather, these cases, and claims about vulnerability and austerity within them, are considered productive of both the meaning of austerity and meanings of vulnerability.

From this perspective, discourses, narratives, and representations of vulnerability, and the way in which vulnerability is employed in speech and policy in these case studies, are seen as integral to the way in which austerity processes play out, and who is conceptualised as vulnerable to it (Wetherell 2001:16). I borrow from a long history within critical feminist cultural studies to attend to the wider, intertextual, socially constructed, and implicated narratives, categorisations, and representations of any issue (including representation of these discourses as coherently forming ‘debates’) and thus take a performative approach to discourse. That is, discourses of UK austerity as larger than, and formed through, the perspectives, speech acts, or representations of austerity that are made (Butler 1993a, 1997; Fairclough 1992; Hall 1997:6). From this framing, the austerity discourse cannot be conceptualised as a direct line of texts or objects which refer to austerity and explain what austerity is. Following Rebecca Bramall (2013:1), I suggest that austerity is perhaps better understood as a cultural and political scene of co-produced, changing, performative rhetorical, visual, and cultural articulations, which come together to form a set of knowledges about what austerity means and is. It is in this way, that the cultural studies methodologies I adopt in the following chapters hopes to consider that the texts, representations and performances I engage with exist intertextually with each other, and within a broader discursive and cultural scene which comes to produce an understanding of austerity as a distinct political and cultural moment. Moreover, it is through the production of austerity as a distinct cultural and political moment that is one of the ways in which vulnerability can be regulated within it.

Following this approach, the archives I built in relation to each case study are understood to be made up of cultural and political texts. This understanding of texts includes what might be typically understood “semiotic activity” (Fairclough 2001:240) such as spoken rhetoric and spoken or written news media examples, as well as film, art, and public acts or performances. This inclusion of cultural articulations alongside

media texts, reflects what Lauren Berlant (2011) and Ann Cvetkovich (2012) consider the more ordinary cultural practices of living, making, and engaging with culture in ways that might question where “the political” (Cvetkovich 2012:168) resides. My interest in these cultural forms, performances and texts is on one level what they say, or what meanings of vulnerability they perform. But as well, to consider: How are these practices, demonstrations and performances engaged with processes of subjectivity and sense making? And how do they borrow from and help to construct what austerity is and who is vulnerable within it? My understanding of a discourse of austerity then, refers to both the rhetorical domain through which austerity is talked about, but as well, the loose terrain of broader social, cultural, and political objects and practices through which austerity takes a coherent and lived frame (Berlant 2011; Bramall 2013; Cvetkovich 2012). In this way, my approach to these case studies and the objects of my reading reflects a longer tradition in cultural studies and queer and feminist critical works, which has broadly posited that gendered, racialised and classed subjects are produced and interpellated through cultural narratives, discourse, representations and experience. And, that it is through examining these objects that the theoretical implications of concepts such as vulnerability are revealed.

This formulation of discourse is influenced by the concepts of power, regulation, and subjectivity worked through by Michel Foucault, whose approach to discourse and power in the *History of Sexuality, Volume 1* (1978), and regulation in *Discipline and Punish* (1977), extends an analysis of power from that which is enacted *onto* subjects by actors with power such as sovereigns, governments, state agents. For Foucault, power is instead productive — something which shapes all subjects relationally through normative regulation (Gilson 2014:100). Foucault’s theories of power and its relationship to subjectification, centre the ways in which power can act to regulate the practices and intelligibility of life. For Foucault, discourses of sexuality (1978) and processes of criminalisation (1977) are seen as mechanisms through which power enacts its regulatory, bio-political effects.

In the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault explores the “discursive fact” surrounding sexuality — “the way in which sex is ‘put into discourse’” (1978:11), by holding apart rhetoric, or what is *said* about sex and sexuality, with how knowledges about sexuality collectively

shape social life by giving meanings to sexual practice (Hall 2001:72). Drawing on this tradition, in this thesis I hold apart what is *said* in speech, narratives, and representations in the articles or examples I have collected, with the way in which they are organised through, and productive of, understandings of vulnerability and austerity.<sup>33</sup> Put another way, within the case studies that I approach in these chapters, vulnerability is considered a regulatory concept in which the production of a discrete vulnerable population in relation to austerity is formed through discourses of austerity. But as well, being marked *as* vulnerable (or not) under austerity is one of the mechanisms through which vulnerability can be regulated through austerity policies (Munro and Scoular 2012).

Influenced by this approach, my reading for vulnerability in the austerity discourse is alert to how and where vulnerability appears in stories of, debates about, and representations of the austerity discourse. It attends to the ways in which particular figures, population groups, associations and proximities come together to form seemingly coherent ideas of what vulnerability is, who is vulnerable, and how vulnerability relates to the scene of austerity (Ahmed 2010a; Tyler 2013). Similarly, I look for linguistic and subjective repetitions, absences or denials case studies I have collected, and am particularly attentive to moments in which a concept of vulnerability stands in for subjective descriptions or categories (for example, ‘the most vulnerable’), or when notions such as dependency or frailty stand in place of, or become conflated with, vulnerability. The discursive production of vulnerability (what vulnerability is, who is vulnerable) becomes central to exploring the introduction, rationalisation, and maintenance of austerity policies as a form of regulation over and through vulnerable bodies. As Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay suggest, attention to the discursivity of vulnerability helps to address why “the unequal distribution [of vulnerability] often works in tandem with the management of ‘vulnerable populations’ within discourse and policy” (2016:5).

---

<sup>33</sup> For Wendy Brown, Foucault’s best known example of the relationship between discourse, knowledge, and power can be found in his account of the “construction of the homosexual” (Brown 2006:41) in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. For Foucault, what had been a contingent sexual act became a subjectivity, through medical, psychoanalytic, and religious discourses about sexuality and what sexuality was. It was through a discourse of sexuality, that sexual subjects, and sexual practice were regulated (Foucault 1978).

Questions of power and discourse have been widely necessary to feminist, queer, critical race, and postcolonial projects which seek to unpack the relationship between subjectivity and regulation, or the normative workings of power.<sup>34</sup> Judith Butler's (1990, 1993a) insights into the performativity of sex *and* gender as reiterated through cultural, political, and social discourses explore these questions of normativity and power through her discussions of how gender becomes intelligible *as* gender if "power acts *as* discourse" (1997:225 original emphasis). For Butler (1993a), sex, rather than a static material condition of a body, is achieved through reiterated norms of what sex is. As for Foucault, the gendered subject and sexed body emerges through the norms through which gender and sex become culturally intelligible, and in turn, invested in. In this way, discourses of sex and gender are not just constructions enacted onto individuals, who might otherwise refuse them. There is a psychic life to such performative claims — the emergence of embedded, attached, and gendered subjects through the internalisation of power (Butler 1990, 1997; Bell 2012). For Butler, discourse "*accumulates the force of authority through the repetition and citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices*" (1993b:19 emphasis original), what she elsewhere calls "chains of iteration" (1997:187). For Sara Ahmed (2004:92) performativity thus takes on a temporal connotation. The performativity of gender is "futural" — in that it generates effects and meanings in the future. At the same time, gender's performativity relies on reiterations of the past — "its power and authority depends on how it recalls that which has already been said" (Ahmed 2004:93).

Thus, in my understanding, what is said about the production of vulnerability in austerity policies is not merely contained to the austerity discourse or moment. Rather what counts, or is read as vulnerable under austerity is reliant on histories of gendered reiteration about what vulnerability is and who is vulnerable, such that these make 'sense' within the austerity discourse. The power of vulnerability to be a regulating concept is obscured by its naturalisation within, and beyond, the austerity discourse itself. Along these lines, claims to or about vulnerability, and who is vulnerable under

---

<sup>34</sup> As example, works which engage with a critical approach to discourse referenced in this thesis include Brown (1995); Butler (1993a, 1997); Gilson (2014); Lamb (1999); Munro and Scoular (2012); Ticktin (2011) and Tyler (2012).

austerity, must be understood as drawing their authority from that which “precedes and conditions its contemporary uses” (Butler 1993b:19). It is for this reason that my reading of these case studies seeks to consider present day articulations of vulnerability alongside their cultural and historical resonances. These readings draw out the co-produced “chains of iteration” (Butler 1997:187) within present day articulations of vulnerability — such as the case of disability, frailty and vulnerability, or the ‘known’ feminised and racialised ‘vulnerable woman’ addressed in Chapter 1. In this sense, I argue that those who can be apprehended *as* vulnerable under austerity can be apprehended because of the performative way in which vulnerability has been reiterated in relation to those subjects in the past. Moreover, for Butler (1997), it is also the culturally reiterative performativity of gender through which the norms of power become internalised. Whilst this leads towards Butler’s analysis of the psyche and power which is not explicitly addressed in this thesis, the intention to think through the question of implication in the politics of vulnerability — how discourses and representations “get inside” (Tyler 2013:214) — informs the second methodological direction of this thesis that I address below.

### **Performative emotions and feeling**

My work to think through implication in the politics of vulnerability was compelled by precisely the seemingly contradictory necessity that the concept of vulnerability maintained, despite its known tensions for feminism (Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay 2016:2; Murphy 2012). Even in moments when I worked to critically unpack the contradictions of a vulnerability politics performed under austerity, my sense that it must also operate through an implicated set of feelings, hopes, investments, and attachments remained pressing. My sense of something missing in my own analysis was compounded by the flattened disappointment I felt on finishing a draft of an earlier chapter of this thesis. Having spent months drawing out a primarily discursive analysis of the work of vulnerability within the broader case study of austerity, with the shrug of the shoulders I concluded — “well, I already knew that”.

In *Limits of Critique*, Rita Felski (2015) suggests that a critical approach to research is also about attachment. A critical stance requires the affective distancing of the researcher as a “detective” — a “procedurally” necessary, yet nonetheless

institutionalised claim to “analytical distance, autonomy and expertise — qualities that critics reproduce in their own discourse, even as they question them” (2015:46). Felski’s attention to the affective requirements for sustaining the researcher as a critic resonated with my feelings of disappointment. I remained troubled by a sense that the distance required to unpack the discursivity of vulnerability in austerity failed to touch on what I sensed was most effective about it — the feelings it produced, the political attachments it sustained, and the embeddedness I felt when I approached it. Why was it that my critical “suspicion” (Sedgwick 2003:125) towards the workings of vulnerability in discourse did not disperse my attachment to activist or advocate performances of vulnerability politics — their ability to enrage me, to delight me, and move me nonetheless? Wasn’t the distanced looking over of these performances as texts a somewhat contradictory affective and methodological stance, given that my thesis saw the key political potential of vulnerability being grounded in its necessary interdependency and relationality (Butler 2004; 2009)? That is, the implication of the self in relationship to others that vulnerability makes visible.

This search to articulate what was behind my disappointment in finding what I *already* knew has motivated the second methodological direction of this thesis. What I had hoped to sustain in my reading is a focus on what might be behind the ambivalence and even resignation of this sense, the frustration or haunting awareness that takes place as one knowingly attaches to a political claim that is “vexed” (Murphy 2012:70).<sup>35</sup> Thus, the second direction of this methodology has been to take up the vexed character of vulnerability itself. That is, that a feminist theory and politics (and myself as a feminist) might remain attached to the potentially emancipatory value of a politics of vulnerability, despite *knowing* simultaneously that such a politics remains historically and contingently fraught *for* feminism (Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay 2016:2). Hoping to extend on my initial intention to label such an attachment as a paradox, my project has instead sought to capture the affective workings of such a vexed character, and to think through the affects which surround — resisting and yet often ambivalently employing

---

<sup>35</sup> Jackie Stacey, understanding ambivalence through Melanie Klein, suggests reparative methods may provide “a conceptual model for reading that is *grounded in ambivalence*” (2014:47 my emphasis).

— “binary” (Butler 2016:25) conceptualisations of vulnerability and invulnerability within the austerity moment.<sup>36</sup>

My methodology then, has sought to draw together critical and generative reading processes to ascertain these different levels, attributes, and possibilities of a vexed concept. In some way, it reflects what Gail Lewis identifies in relation to paranoid/reparative reading in Sedgwick (2003) as “the problem of how to contribute to the work of laying bare for examination and eradication the patterns and processes which give life to and sustain the toxicity of racism, misogyny, homophobia, class hatred and disablism” (Lewis 2014:31) whilst simultaneously remaining flexible to the possibilities of vulnerability, openness, and potential in research encounters and contexts.<sup>37</sup> In attending to vulnerability as a performative cultural concept in the austerity, my methodology has sought to balance the discursive centrality vulnerability holds *within* processes which “sustain” and “give life” (Lewis 2014:31) to toxic justifications of inequality, at the same time as remaining open to its necessary centrality in highlighting and challenging these processes (Butler 2016). Capturing this ambivalence within the cultural and political scene of austerity becomes a necessarily incomplete and speculative process, but one that I think becomes necessary, particularly when facing a conceptual hesitation in vulnerability which might be recognised, but not always named.

Indeed, unlike Munro and Scoular’s (2012) tracing of the discursive uses of vulnerability within sex trafficking and migration policy, which initially drew my attention to the site of a politics of vulnerability, my approach is not just to take vulnerability as a discursive concept, whose emotional and affective use enhances the power of its regulation. Certainly, I am largely convinced by this, and Fitzgerald’s

---

<sup>36</sup> I have noticed the consistency with which I have been drawn back to Wendy Brown’s work on the *Paradox of Rights* (2000), and her quoting of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1993:50) in suggesting rights are what “we cannot not” want. While I would identify vulnerability as a paradoxical concept for feminist and social justice projects, much of my thesis seeks to unpack the political or public feelings sustained and produced through such paradoxes. See my Conclusion for a discussion of paradox in relation to this and Joan W. Scott’s work (1996).

<sup>37</sup> Eve Sedgwick’s much cited chapter on “paranoid reading” approaches the “methodological centrality of suspicion” (2003:125) in queer and critical theory as a reading method of negative affect.

critical approach to the way in which vulnerability is mobilised within the regulatory frameworks of criminality and sex work, and in which the “vulnerable female, traffic migrant” (2012:227) is mobilised to both produce vulnerability and responses to it. At the same time, Fitzgerald’s (2012) attention to the work of emotion in relation to this politics was something I have hoped to take forward. My interest in feeling and emotion within vulnerability politics in these chapters seeks to focus on how we can imagine that affects and emotions around, and of, vulnerability ‘do’ something in political discourses, or work in performative ways (Ahmed 2004:82). As well, I consider how these feelings in these discourses work on the politics they represent or produce. That is, how emotion and feeling may link questions of the discursivity of vulnerability to its subjective investments. How emotions in the enactment and effects of austerity can both “sustain new relationships of power”, but also “disrupt” or work to challenge “governance regimes” (Pykett, Jupp and Smith 2017:3).

A turning point for my methodology has been discovering the work of Sara Ahmed (2010a), Lauren Berlant (2011), Ann Cvetkovich (2012), Sianne Ngai (2005) and Imogen Tyler (2013), and others in feminist and queer theory working between “reparative” and “critical” cultural studies methods. These works attend to questions of feeling, emotion, and the ‘everyday’ of the political present – what Robyn Wiegman (2014) identifies in her critique of the reparative reading as a focus on “the condition of the present through the converging analytics of affect and time” (Wiegman 2014:5). These engagements are often speculative in as much as they are critical, and I have drawn on them to produce an admittedly haphazard method in response to a sense that “available critical vocabularies were failing [me]” (Gordon 1998:8) and that there was something more about the performance of a politics around vulnerability to be said.

Influenced by Ahmed’s (2004) account of “affective economies” and Berlant’s attention to the “affective components of citizenship and the public sphere” (2011:3), I have performed a reading for the way in which emotion and subjectivity emerge in relation to austerity, or what Ahmed (2004:11) labels as the affective “stickiness” of emotions in cultural and political life. As introduced in the previous chapter, for Ahmed, attention to the emotionality of political, social and cultural discourses, or the way in which they are animated by emotion, goes some way in establishing “how subjects become



invested in particular structures” (Ahmed 2004:12), a key interest of this thesis in relation to investments in a politics of vulnerability.<sup>38</sup> In my view, such a focus on investment within and through austerity is not contradictory to the critical view of subjectivity and power discussed above, in which the subjective *investments* in modes of regulatory power are central to understanding the ways in which they operate (Butler 1997:91, Sabsay 2016:289).

Ahmed’s consideration of investment and emotion in politics has been central to my analysis, particularly where I have tried to unpack the ways in which austerity, and the production of vulnerability within it, is sustained, invested in, and reproduced in the advocacy literatures and activist performances I address. Indeed, like Ahmed (2004) and Imogen Tyler (2013), I am interested in how particular figures within these case studies become loaded with often conflicting emotions (disgust, empathy, worry, threat), as well as how texts “name or perform” (Ahmed 2004:13) different emotions, such as *love* and *fear* for the NHS, or *loss* of the feminist politics of the women’s refuge of the past (see also: Hemmings 2011). In examining the affective dimensions of vulnerability in these discourses, with particular interest on how they move, or are mobilised via feelings such as fear and worry, or empathy and care, I suggest that emotions are performative — they are historical and generative of the feelings they reflect. My methodology thus considers attention to the “emotionality of texts” (Ahmed 2004:12) in the austerity discourse, as complimentary to an understanding of the performativity of vulnerability in relation to power.

I have also been drawn to the work of Clare Hemmings (2011) on reading affect within feminist narratives and storytelling, and Avery Gordon’s (1998) influential text on sociological haunting, to consider how emotions, histories, and reiterated disavowals travel as *affective citations*, *symbols* and *presumptions* within the politics of vulnerability. Within this framework, unspoken histories or tensions are traced through hidden or obscured citations, tone or narratives. In this way, I have tried to trace not only the appearance of vulnerability as a concept in the articles, speeches and media

---

<sup>38</sup> While much focus on affect has sought to emphasise it as outside discourse and the subject (Clough 2007; Massumi 2002; Thrift 2007), in this thesis I more closely follow Ahmed (2004; 2010); Hemmings (2011), Pedwell (2014), Tyler (2013) who do not.

representations I have collected, but also follow what Hemmings calls “technologies of the presumed” (2011:16). That is, I trace absences, invocations of tone and feeling to suggest that affective and narrative technologies might also *animate* claims to vulnerability under austerity. I trace how emotions might be performed, traded, and travelling in the vulnerability politics performed under austerity, such that they may give the mobilisations I look at meaning and “*texture*” (Hemmings 2011:24 emphasis original).

Indeed, in extending my understanding reading to include cultural objects, films, performances, and narratives in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, the earlier consideration of power and knowledge in the construction of discourses is applied. But following Hemmings (2011) in understanding narrative as a way in which stories about feminist politics are told, I consider how associations, proximities, and subjectivities come together through their repeated associations as explanations of austerity. Similarly, in approaching art works, and performances in Chapters 4 and 5, I consider how these work as representations of austerity. To me, the scene of austerity thus takes further shape between and through these multiple performances and practices. That is, in relation to the stories that are told about it, the public responses to it, and the way in which images, art, and protest engage with, and refuse, meanings of austerity and vulnerability within it. As Carolyn Pedwell argues in relation to theorising empathy through varying representational forms, “literature, art, media, photography and film” (2014:4) can “activate” responses, thoughts, and feelings that may not be available through critical readings of texts alone. Indeed, in Pedwell’s work, it is through analysis of the emotional possibilities, refusals, and frameworks of postcolonial literature that other versions of empathy that resist its regulating functions can be found (2014:104).

As such, just as this thesis is engaged with an analysis of the discursive or representational nature of the archive I constructed (speeches, research documents, media texts), I am at the same time encouraged to interpret these smaller sites, moments, and cultural objects (stories, art pieces, demonstrations), and hold on to the generative, maybe even cautiously hopeful, political possibilities within them. Buoyed by the discovery of queer and feminist cultural literatures which, in my view, sustained, rather than sought to draw conclusions about the ambiguity of politics and feeling in

the austerity moment, my readings have continued to develop through an interest in the ambiguous, sometimes heartfelt affective work of public feelings about vulnerability in the austerity moment. In this way, my project has sought to “describe the current state of the political economy, in affective terms” (Cvetkovich 2012:11) with attention to what it *feels like* to live through it. These are methodologies of the “descriptive” over the “diagnostic” (Love 2007:13), and my choice of art, protest, and minor forms of representation are efforts to reflect this process of cultural and political meaning-making that living through the present might contain. In seeking to read aspects of vulnerability politics for ambivalence, haunting, frustration, humour, and knowing, I am influenced by these approaches to emotion as revealing not just the production of political orientations (as in Ahmed’s 2004 work), but also the effects and affects of “predicaments” (Ngai 2005:3). In this way, I also consider what kinds of feelings might circulate through, and beyond, portrayals of vulnerability in austerity politics, and whether reading for these excesses may be important for understanding the affective and subjectifying work that vulnerability politics performs. My reading works to trace questions around feeling vulnerable *to* austerity, feeling *for* vulnerability in austerity, and feelings *about* the performance of this politics in both public and personal ways. It is my hope that these might point to what Butler notes are “the historical events, action, passion, and vulnerability *in* forms of resistance” (2016:27 my emphasis).

Of course, my attempt to read for feeling in vulnerability politics through these chapters raises unique methodological concerns. In suggesting that vulnerability can be felt as well as recognised in others, I consistently face the difficulty of how I can ‘capture’ these affects. Because my approach is not only to consider vulnerability as a discourse in which emotional and affective use enhances its power, but to argue that when vulnerability politics is done, it creates or produces affects, I have faced the questions of how and when (if at all) I can read for and know that these investments and feelings are present or measurable. Such a discussion raises a number of questions about feeling with others. This is particularly as much feminist and postcolonial literature has pointed out that feeling for, or with others, sustains rather than overcomes a politics of positionality and hierarchical relations (Gunaratnam 2012; Mohanty 1988; Pedwell 2014; Ticktin 2011). My desire to see feeling as revealing the stakes of a politics of vulnerability was necessarily, and undoubtedly informed by what I, as a researcher, could *feel for*. As Yasmin Gunaratnam writes in relation to “learning to

be affected” by her ethnographic research on migrant death and dying, whilst the content of research and its theoretical breadth can be extended by an engagement with feelings — “we cannot claim to fully understand the sources, routes, levels, temporality and meanings of [another’s] pain” (2012:119). It is for this reason that the approach to feeling taken in this thesis should be seen as sustaining questions of politics, hierarchy, and positionality — feelings are not removed of their political content, performativity, or effects. My methodology seeks to centre, rather than avoid this difficulty, hoping, as in Clare Hemmings’ discussion of the co-constitutive nature of *both* writing and reading reparative and paranoid work, to in some way touch on, rather than ignore, “the entangled nature of representation and experience” (Hemmings 2014:28) that develops through and within the writing process.

My moving between this generative and critical reading of the austerity discourses thus reflects Lewis (2014) and her discussion of holding on to a critical affect towards the broader site in which research is based, at the same time as remaining open to its multiple possibilities. And like others who consider these questions of reparative/paranoid reading, I am perhaps keen to see these approaches as complimentary to a necessarily critical approach to the political present introduced above (Stacey 2014; Wiegman 2014). In this way, I treat them as further interpretative strategies which might introduce reflection on the more critical reading of the work that emotions and feelings do in the neoliberal moment (Stacey 2014). This methodology works to sustain both a critical “unveiling” (Sedgwick 2003:139) of power in the austerity discourse, whilst also examining how political discourses are “rendered meaningful” (Pykett, Jupp and Smith 2017:6) through feeling, engagement and experience in cultural and political life.

Sustaining such criticality makes it less possible to lose sight of a broader political context in which the claims I analyse occur. Unpacking and unveiling the discursive and affective workings of vulnerability in the austerity discourse has felt a necessary project precisely because “commitments to social justice on grounds of gender, race/ethnicity, sexuality and disability [...] have been under assault worldwide in times of economic crisis and state austerity” (Gedalof 2018:4). In this sense, this methodology has allowed me to sustain that there is much to be critically alert to in the contemporary moment.

But, having argued in Chapter 1 that vulnerability occupies such a significant place in feminist theory in part because it is malleable to bodily, emotional, social, and temporal understandings, a methodology that attends to emotion and feeling has allowed me to move between these intersubjective and discursive elements. In this way, my method has sought to perform a kind of bridging between what I see as the interconnected bodily, relational, *and* political performances within vulnerability politics under austerity.<sup>39</sup> The tensions of this approach in relation to research ethics are taken up further below. In the following section I explain more specifically my method of reading the archive used for this thesis.

### **Reading method**

My method was approached in stages alongside the collection of each archive. In many ways, my method developed in relation to the particular case studies chosen, was overlapping with the collection of materials, and changes over each chapter. Having selected the general case studies for this thesis as outlined above, more particular reading methods developed through this process. In this sense, an emergence within particular debates, and the discovery of particular cultural objects, was combined with a closer reading of particular representations or texts — such as the approach to framing, narrative, pace and tone in *Hospital* in Chapter 6; feeling and response to particular art pieces at the *Shoddy* exhibition in Chapter 4; and citation, narrative and memory in Chapter 5. In what follows, I outline these reading methods, as well as the importance of chance to the final shape of my analysis chapters.

My reading began with attention to the uses of vulnerability as a concept — tracing when, and how explicit calls to the vulnerability of particular groups, populations, or institutions appeared in the texts I had collected. Here, I traced how vulnerability was presented or represented in media debates, MP speeches responses to these policies — noting for whom, and how, such a concept was being attached. For example, in relation

---

<sup>39</sup> See: Sabsay for a discussion of affect, permeability, biopower and vulnerability which attends to Butler's reading of Foucault as diverging "from those interpretations that presume it is possible to separate affect from discourse" (2016:285).

to justifying or challenging “the cuts” more broadly in Chapter 3, vulnerability was mobilised not as a potential or shared condition, but as the specific identity or subject positioning of some populations and not others. In this sense, vulnerability appeared as the explicit but obscured figure of ‘the most vulnerable’ in both journalists’ and Ministers’ claims. In Chapter 4, vulnerability appeared as a feeling in association to processes of disability assessment, and I traced how vulnerability appeared as both the explicitly presented, and implied feeling of being subjected to the Workplace Capability Assessment. In Chapter 5, vulnerability appeared as the specific position of those moving out of immediate experiences of domestic violence, made vulnerable by the closure of domestic violence services. In this way, I traced representations of both ‘vulnerable women’ in the texts I had collected, as well as the representation of refugees as themselves vulnerable to closure. Linking these two chapters, in the context of the NHS in Chapter 6, vulnerability was most often mentioned as a universal condition, one experienced by all citizens in moments of illness or ageing; as well as the status of the NHS as an institution. A reading for these differences and consistencies of vulnerability on this discursive level (Potter and Wetherell 1987:168) — noting to whom, and to what vulnerability was being applied — built the initial stage of my reading method.

The next stage of my reading was to take note of the political or cultural framing of vulnerability in relation to the policies approached. In this way, I considered how a story, or policy change was narrated or framed in relation to the conceptualisation of vulnerability within it. For example, in Chapter 3, on the broader austerity discourse, and Chapter 4 on disability assessments, vulnerability was being conceptualised in relation to individuals or groups experiencing poverty or impairment, within a frame which considered how specific or broader austerity policies, amended, or exaggerated this vulnerability. In other words, these chapters pay attention to vulnerability as it is framed in relation to the limited and negotiable responsibility of the state to measure and provide for specific population groups in contrast to an independent or “invulnerable” (Gilson 2011:316) norm.

Conversely in Chapter 5 and 6, in relation to the NHS and domestic violence refuge, vulnerability was more often framed as a temporal condition to which the NHS and

domestic violence refuges were explicitly engaged. In both these cases, the interplay between temporal circumstances of vulnerability and historic responses remained integral to this framing. The historical establishment of the domestic violence refuge, and the NHS as a *response* to temporal moments of vulnerability, were used to narrate the cultural and material worth of these institutions in the present. This encouraged my secondary approach to reading backwards into literatures on the establishment of the UK welfare state, the development of the NHS, and the development of the UK domestic violence refuge network to find historical precedence to a framing of vulnerability as a temporal condition through which specific services, or institutions could respond.

Reading for these frames became central to my later argument about the *malleability* of vulnerability as a concept and allowed me to analyse the related, sometimes unresolvable tensions of vulnerability when invoked in both specific and universal frames. My secondary readings in this regard focused more on drawing links between these articulations and other, historical or previous articulations of vulnerability in relation to these debates. In this sense, Chapter 4 considers the longer history of engaging with relationality and care in disability activism, whilst Chapter 5 moves back into feminist literatures engaged with the topic of gendered violence and the development of the refuge network. Chapter 6 refers to the history of representing the NHS within a broader development of the post-war welfare state and ideas of citizenship.

The more speculative reading for vulnerability was in relation to vulnerability as a feeling, or as a politics which produces feeling. In reading for feeling in these sites, I traced firstly *explicit* representations of feeling (Ahmed 2004). These explicit examples of emotion included feelings of fear or vulnerability about undergoing the WCA, speaking about austerity measures in relation to compassion or empathy, and love for working in the NHS. But many of these chapters also try to trace what might be better called affective resonances or “hauntings” (Gordon 1998). That is, the “internal resonances across narrative [which] enable strong affective relationships [...] in the moment of reading or writing” (Hemmings 2011:133). In this way, my reading looked for “proximities” (Ahmed 2004) or citational tactics and couplings (Hemmings 2011)

within and across these texts. In Chapter 4, the assessment was coupled with anticipation and worry; in Chapter 5, the refuge was coupled with second wave feminist politics; and in Chapter 6, the NHS was coupled with responsibility, fatigue, and debates about the national border.

In other ways, I traced textual absences (Gordon 1998), or “technologies of the presumed” (Hemmings 2011:16) in which I as a reader knew or was expected to know something else — something that was taking place behind, beyond or before the text. In Chapter 3, this was the implicit referent in the phrase “the most vulnerable”, in Chapter 4 the work of the word “perception”, in Chapter 5 the work of the citation of “40 years ago”, and in Chapter 6 the reiteration of citizenship with access to the NHS. This reading also centred myself as a participant in these readings and prompted me to think through my own feelings, be they of recognition at an art exhibition in Leeds analysed in Chapter 4, or disappointment and disbelief at an article in *The Sun* I discuss in Chapter 5. My own responses undoubtedly structured the way I did, or didn’t, engage with objects I had collected. As such, my own preoccupations and immediate reactions are sometimes foregrounded in these chapters.

One of my hesitations in writing out this method has been the need to apply certainty to a process which have often felt accidental or intuitive — a process akin to what Cvetkovich labels as “follow[ing] the trail of breadcrumbs” (2012:116). Sometimes, my writing has been sparked by a single image, article, a quote, or response — the culmination of months of collecting materials, which seemingly suddenly reveal their stakes.

Mariam Fraser and Nirmal Puwar note that:

the sense of adventure, drama, mystery, fear — and sometimes, let’s face it, the boredom — which produces research is not easily articulated in part because it risks revealing, perhaps even ‘exposing’, the so-called unscholarly, anecdotal, irrational and unscientific dimensions of the research process. (2008:5)



Indeed, I have worried that it risks such exposures to acknowledge that the central focus of analysis in Chapter 4 drew from a coincidental encounter — the result of a day-trip I made to an exhibition that a friend suggested was “possibly related” to my work. Yet it was on arriving at the *Shoddy* exhibition in Leeds that a perspective that had been hidden from my readings of news media and advocate responses seemed to emerge as I stood in the ground floor community centre that the short-term exhibition was housed in. It was precisely the artist’s *engagement* with the politics of vulnerability which resonated with me, and I found myself hastily capturing my argument on the single train ride home. It seems unlikely that this chapter would have taken shape had I never attended this exhibition, just as my prior reading informed the way my responses to the exhibition took shape.

Similarly, Chapter 5 was written largely through a failed attempt to write about feelings of anger and frustration within feminist mobilisations around violence. Having spent months looking for explicit claims about such vulnerability politics by feminist activists and advocates, and finding only coded hints and references in the advocacy literature, and news media I had catalogued, I prepared to abandon this chapter altogether. Encouraged by my supervisor to give the analysis another try, I began to read backwards into the history of the refuge movement, using this history to read beside the contemporary texts I had collected, and to imagine, recreate, and find ways of voicing what appeared only as a hesitation that I felt dominated present day iterations of such a politics. In the end, it was the sense of hesitation I felt within my own archive that became the focus of this chapter, in which these absences became objects through which I could write about the refuge movement itself.<sup>40</sup>

In discussing the use of the anecdote and experience in relation to work on the maternal “encounter”, Lisa Baraitser (2009:17) suggests such anecdotes touch on the phenomenological, spoken and everyday practice that provide substance to the experience of encountering a child. Revealing the emotional, the experiential, the retold,

---

<sup>40</sup> Hemmings, in her recent discussion of archival work on Emma Goldman, tracks her own responses to Goldman’s personal communications and political opinions. Hemmings’ affective distancing and pleasure in both problematic, and surprising aspects of Emma Goldman’s writing, reveal to Hemmings as a reader, her own political attachments and displacements (2018:28-29).

fragmentary, and ultimately paradoxical nature of such encounters, Baraitser positions anecdotes as “investigating something extra” (2009:152). While I am not suggesting my method was anecdotal, and only once again, in Chapter 5, use anecdotes in this thesis, these encounters within my research process — an event, the shock of a response — do feel central to the “investigating” that took place. These gaps and accidents cannot be formed into “quasi-method” (Baraitser 2009:17), nor can they be separated from this method. They not only point to my inescapable influence within and over my analysis — this thesis comes together as the product of the associations and links I make as a researcher (Ahmed 2004) — but as well, my own relationship to the case studies I have collected (as well as, no doubt, the parts of those case studies that I did not collect).

In this way, I am particularly taken by Avery Gordon’s (1998) insistence that the obsessions and distractions within her own research were significant to her analysis. That is, that the detours in research can reveal new and unexpected analytical terrain. Similarly, my method for reading for vulnerability is not intended to, nor could, produce a complete picture of vulnerability or the politics that surrounds it in the current moment. Rather, my method of developing theoretical analysis in response to specific documents, representations or performances, hopes to demonstrate that to vulnerability exists as a complex, affective, and mobilised concept or feeling — one that might be theorised in relation to the specific conditions of emergence within any cultural or political moment, and through differently staged approaches to reading.

### **Research and vulnerability**

A key concern that has followed me throughout the thesis is not resolved through this claim to an incomplete, speculative reading of vulnerability. The ongoing ethical concern of my work has been to highlight the uneven distribution of precarity under austerity, whilst working to challenge the discursive containment of vulnerability to certain bodies and not others. But in a work in which I try to undo the very assuredness of assignments of vulnerability, I have returned to many places and people to whom that label has been most prohibitively assigned. I return to gendered violence, to experiences of disability, to ill health, ageing and migration, to contest the malleability

of the label of vulnerability, at the same time as trying to highlight its political application and effects. Earlier, I cautiously claimed this tension, arguing that I was following vulnerability to critique the ways that a politics of vulnerability attaches itself in uneven ways. Yet, as I came towards the end of this research, I often wondered what it might have meant to read for vulnerability in austerity around those not presumed to *be* vulnerable to it? That I still cannot imagine what such a project might have looked like, or how it would have maintained access to the specific political effects of austerity, says much about some of my own sustained investment in frames of vulnerability.

Conversely, given the unquestionable appearance of precarity within my archive, it is perhaps surprising that I do not centralise policy in terms of its economic or legal consequences, or perhaps situate austerity as its own political or economic starting point for research. Certainly, my intention in this thesis has never been to develop a full account of austerity policies *per se*. However, because I do contextualise this thesis by suggesting that vulnerability is mobilised to support, implement, and produce austerity policies, a level of policy detail and its historical and current implications is an ethical responsibility of this work, and provides the framing for each of these chapters. In this regard, I have worked to be responsible for the gravity of the material, cultural, and emotional consequences of austerity policies, within a thesis that selectively follows its own theoretical object — vulnerability — through them. Tracing vulnerability and hoping to demonstrate the integral and discursive nature of vulnerability in these settings has involved a certain mapping of my concerns *onto* a current situation, rather than identifying the myriad of ways in which these discourses might take effect (Ahmed 2004). It has been necessary at times to confront my own preoccupation with the appearance of vulnerability and to be attentive to how my project produces, reproduces, and invests in it. These preoccupations, which are a partiality reflected in the “starting points” (Dahl 2017:43) I have chosen for my chapters, also reflect my ability to see (or not see) a politics of vulnerability in those moments.

It is certain that I have often felt a dissonance between the approach to vulnerability that I take in the thesis, and the vulnerability politics that is performed to highlight current conditions. Specifically, an ongoing sense of uncertainty that has followed in writing this thesis has been that I risk undermining, or taking something away from

some of the recent activist, journalist, and advocacy work I hold as vitally necessary in attending to inequality. As such, this thesis has hoped to be attentive to the ways in which my research occurs within a context in which vulnerability is already widely mobilised, exploited, and denied and that my focus may not be seen as strategically useful to groups working to make visible the grave differentiation of precarity through a language of vulnerability. While agreeing with Wiegman (2014) and others that the reparative elements of my reading need not be thought as oppositional to such politics, I have often wondered if they might at times maintain attachments to a curiosity that seems contextually contradictory.

Responding to these ethical responsibilities has meant keeping present the question about the kind of politics I imagine as crucial in the current moment and questioning whether my writing might be amenable to projects that may seek to depoliticise or marginalise this work. It has also been a process of resisting at times, but also accepting the necessity, of my own slippages into discursive formulations of vulnerability. That I am not outside the malleability of the term, or its affective implications, that I too might feel *for* vulnerability in uneven ways, and that sometimes I am moved by claims that some *are more* vulnerable than others in the austerity moment. In these instances, it becomes even more necessary for me to unpack where my own apprehensions of vulnerability are imagined to resolve and to confront that my research may not necessarily produce avenues towards a 'better' or more constructive way of responding to such differentiated modes of apprehension (Page 2017).

Indeed, I agree with the broader ethical horizon of the vulnerability literature, to attend to vulnerability as a temporally and potentially shared experience (Fineman 2008; Butler 2004). However, I do so by writing about practical experiences and material conditions which I currently experience some distance from. My choice to write about a situation in a country that is legally, but not always emotionally my home, and the personal affective and political interest I maintain in such social policies to which I am not presently subjected, exposes this claim to a shared vulnerability as an imperfect one. While the partiality of my research would not be overcome by a longer attachment with the UK, or by a more 'systematic' approach to these sites, it does speak to the politics

of vulnerability this thesis seeks to highlight. That is, that affective and political enactments and investments in vulnerability do not manifest in symmetrical ways.

This also returns me to my nagging suspicion that some of the affective pull towards these more recent accounts of universality in the vulnerability literature has been based on that it can be read, if incorrectly, as offering a way out of these complex questions of location.<sup>41</sup> Yet, while I have much interest in the ethical claim that such an ontological vulnerability might produce (in that this sharedness is embedded in a political responsibility to care), the loaded context in which we research, write, and analyse experiences which may not be our own remains ever pressing. These relational questions may inform *my* emotional attachment to vulnerability as a research topic. Yet the very capacity I currently have to make a claim to this feeling *for*, reveals the partiality and limits of my methods and words. Bringing these broader ethical questions together, Tiffany Page suggests a methodology of *vulnerable writing* which:

involves questions of ethics: the ethics involved in modes of telling, the sensory and affective responses to the material production of research, and the forms of violence committed in narrating the stories of vulnerable others. (2017:14)

### **Emotions in research**

A good friend once told me after completing her PhD that her research had been about making sense of the pressing thoughts and experiences that she could only now translate. Mine has perhaps been making sense of a set of emerging feelings — sharedness, empathy, frustration, hesitation or discomfort — when vulnerability as a concept, feeling, or claim to recognition is made.

---

<sup>41</sup> See (Alcoff 1995; Haraway 1991) for a discussion of research standpoint. Here, I am extending my argument in Chapter 1, that if “appeals to the ‘reality’” (Murphy 2012:69) of vulnerability are already political in their differentiation – how do these frames impact the ethical questions of standpoint, partiality, and apprehension within the research process? These questions are brought together by Tiffany Page who suggests that modes of distance and intimacy are part of critical writing in which “what may occur is continual movement between forms of vulnerable and invulnerable methods according to context and need, and where invulnerability as protection encompasses the potential to make way for reflexive, localised practices that open up space for vulnerable responses” (2017:27).

My initial alertness to the concept developed through policy work in which I was engaged for a short time in my early twenties, and through conversations over the years with friends and colleagues who are involved in social sector work in the relatively small city in which I grew up. My alertness to the malleability of the concept was sustained through these knowing conversations. We often shared, though perhaps differently defined the stakes of, the ethical limitations and contradictions of such work. My interest in the politics within vulnerability developed through these sometimes serious, often casual, funny, and painful discussions around the negotiation, strategic refusal, complicity, and compromises that such work so often required. This thesis developed as an effort to incorporate these feelings into theorisations of vulnerability.

My limited participation in a politics of vulnerability in relation to this earlier policy work pushed me further towards the reading method with which I now consider this politics in the context of UK austerity. With time, the sense that drew me towards this method has developed from a nagging frustration and a felt sensitivity to a voiced intellectual framing or alignment. In doing so, it has lead me towards a set of literatures through which this thesis now engages and gains from — being motivated to continue by feelings of recognition, when I found alliances or points of familiarity across disciplinary distinctions, concerns, and contexts. These literatures have given me a language in which to name the *politics of vulnerability*. They also provide me with insights and arguments which draw from personal to cultural and social frames.

But the context in which I now explore this politics places me in a different, though equally laden, subject position to the archive I analyse. Throughout this thesis, I move between feeling the subject of particular claims to significantly outside the discourses I am referring to — and my changing archive and interpretative strategies have been an attempt to reflect these shifts (Page 2017). Certainly, I remain attached to a politics around, and am frequently imagined to recognise the call within, a feminist politics around gendered violence. I do not presently identify as disabled, or experience an

impairment for which I require recognition through state mechanisms.<sup>42</sup> Despite my relatively recent move to the UK, my racialised and classed positionality as a white Australian PhD student means I have never had to imagine (nor once been imagined by others) as outside of the mandate of the NHS. This means I stand in a likely positionality of being included in the *our* of the NHS claims I critique in Chapter 6.

This positionality is important for this research, in part because in attempting to trace feeling within discourses of austerity, those feelings at times reflect my own, or feelings I might be assumed to share in. At other points, I am required to try and capture a sense of feeling, attachment, and experience, which I have never had. This affective and positional closeness or distance from the contexts to which I write likely travel through this thesis in the ways in which I narrate, or perhaps cannot narrate, feeling in this current context. These points of identification have also meant drawing myself forwards and backwards in time, to points in which I, or my loved ones, might have more clearly been the subjects of these discourses in different locations, different times or ways, and the epistemic and affective limit of such a process. This is of course an always deeply incomplete temporal exchange of empathy with differential experiences of vulnerability, as if the intention of feeling *for*, *or with*, could resolve, rather than structure the unequal power of such engagements (Hemmings 2011; Pedwell and Whitehead 2012; Page 2017).

At times, particularly as my project has developed, and my positioning within the process of the PhD has felt more secure, it has been harder to remember why I was so certain that politics, feeling, and vulnerability needed to be thought of together. I forget that it was at first witnessing, and then in other ways sharing the frustrated exasperation with political and personal enactments of the politics of vulnerability in Australia, that drew me towards this way of thinking. Ahmed argues that “becoming feminist” might begin with feeling — “a sensation that begins at the back of your mind, an uneasy sense of something amiss” (2017:27). Yet on occasion, having reduced these feelings to a

---

<sup>42</sup> My phrasing here hopes to reflect significant work of feminist disability studies in placing pressure on the category disabled identity — and to be specific about the ways in which experiences of impairment interplay with the social, medical and political processes of disability (see: Garland Thompson 2011; Kafer 2013, Samuels 2013, Wearing, Gunaratnam and Gedalof 2015).

*problem* for a PhD proposal, I had forgotten the embodied sense that led me there, just as I continually wonder how I might have confidently argued that those embodied senses had resonances for anyone else.

As I was writing this chapter, I sat in on an event between activists and academics on human rights and sex work — an area which I do not engage in my own work and was curious to learn more about. I found the conversation feeling unexpectedly familiar as the tension in the room rose. Without exploring the language of vulnerability specifically, loaded and assigned words of *exploitation*, *victimhood*, *consent*, *capacity*, and *protection* filled the lecture hall. Struggling to intervene in the dominance of this framing, I watched one speaker pulling away from the microphone and rolling her eyes.

I remembered then that my thesis is perhaps an incomplete attempt to ascertain the feelings in that eye roll. Or rather, to take seriously, if only in speculative ways, the frustration, success, haunting, hesitations, fear, risk, and resistance that the politics of vulnerability so often requires.



## Chapter Three

### **Protecting ‘the most vulnerable’: dependency and care in the austerity context**

Anyone who cares about well-funded public services such as the NHS and schools knows we have to control the costs of a welfare system that has become unsustainable and risks crowding out other areas of government spending. (Osborne 2015b)

The British people have always believed in the principle of contribution, rewarding those who pay in, helping people get back on their feet, and providing support in times of need. (Labour Party 2015:62)

The notion of the ‘most vulnerable’ has never been a genuine attempt to protect the members of society who are struggling but a way to excuse the policies that hurt them. This is the reason the v-word has long been favoured by Duncan Smith and co. It is a pivotal part of the austerity agenda — creating the comforting illusion that a safety net still exists while casting doubt over the need for one. (Ryan 2015)

---

In debate around austerity in the UK, competing notions of vulnerability were pervasive. On the one hand, continuing “welfare reforms” were argued as necessary for restoring the market and national institutions from positions of financial vulnerability — where “unsustainable” (Osborne 2015b) welfare systems were frequently located as the *cause* of such instability. At the same time, the “most vulnerable” people appeared on all sides of these debates. For critics, they were made *more* vulnerable by harsh and ideological welfare cutbacks. In the Coalition and Conservative and Labour Party rationales of “welfare reform” they acted as a disclaimer — protected from the arguably disproportionate cuts to social spending. In a discourse in which vulnerability could act as both the object and effect of austerity politics, unpacking how, where, and to what ends vulnerability was variously mobilised and recognised becomes significant.

This chapter works to situate the broad context of UK austerity as an example of the politics of vulnerability in practice. Austerity processes that began under the Coalition Government in 2010 as a supposed short-term response to the Global Financial Crisis have since been positioned by consecutive Conservative Governments as permanent processes of “welfare reform”. These processes have produced a deeply contested discourse around the obligations and role of the state in both creating, and responding to, differentiated vulnerability.<sup>43</sup>

In previous chapters, I established the literatures in feminist theory with which this thesis engages and my theoretical and methodological framework for understanding the politics of vulnerability in the austerity context. In this chapter, I work to situate why the recent UK austerity context might be read as revealing a politics of vulnerability and a context to which these emerging feminist theorisations have relevance. Through the growing literature responding to the recent context of austerity in the UK I introduce this context as one in which differentiated experiences of vulnerability have been gravely relevant. Through a contained analysis of the framing of the “most vulnerable” within debate about the Coalition and Conservative Government’s articulations of “welfare reform” up until 2015, this chapter then argues for the importance of critically engaging with the mobility of vulnerability through these discourses. It suggests that limited, supposedly neutral understandings of who is and who is not vulnerable become central to the maintenance of austerity logics.

In later chapters, I argue that debates around specific social institutions and spending — changes to disability benefits occurring through the Workplace Capability Assessment, the funding of domestic violence refuges, and the “crisis” facing the NHS — emerge as affectively saturated sites, which can be further unpacked in relation to

---

<sup>43</sup> It is important to distinguish between the Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition Government that formed in 2010, the 2015 Conservative Government under David Cameron, and the 2016 Conservative Government under Theresa May. While austerity policies were positioned as a response to both Labour’s economic management (Cameron 2013) and the Global Financial Crisis (Brah, Szeman and Gedalof 2015), these policies have since been positioned as permanent “welfare reforms” (Wiggan 2017). The SNP in Scotland and Jeremy Corbyn’s selection to the Labour leadership has meant that from the end of 2015 the “welfare reform” narrative has become more fragmented on the level of Party politics. See: Corbyn (2015) for changing rhetoric in this regard.

the politics of vulnerability. Over this thesis, I argue that they must be analysed for the conditional ways in which an affective politics of vulnerability is produced and performed through these situated sites, in ways I suggest can raise new questions for feminist understandings of vulnerability in relation to temporality, relationality, affect, and care. But, in this chapter, I outline why a reading of the context of austerity between 2010-2017 might be considered as an important site of analysis within this thesis. Indeed, while the uneven consequence of seven years of austerity policies suggest that the context of UK austerity is one in which differential vulnerability might appear as deeply present, this chapter lays the groundwork to suggest the way in which these changes emerged within a *politics of vulnerability* matters.

Drawing from an archive of news media, political speeches, and advocate responses to austerity measures until mid 2015, in this chapter I argue that the concept of vulnerability became integral to the sides, formulations, and solutions around changes to the state and austerity within it. As such, this chapter sets out the larger context that my later case studies cannot be separated from, as well as offering analyses of the ways in which my framework for investigating the cultural politics of vulnerability might be necessary for understanding austerity's regulatory logics and maintenance. In this sense, this chapter responds to my earlier insistence on considering in what ways the tensions of vulnerability as a concept are mobilised. In turn, it reflects the stakes, questions, and limitations that a situated politics of vulnerability in UK austerity raises for feminist theories of vulnerability more broadly.

Specifically, this second half of this chapter focuses on the recurrence of the term the “most vulnerable” as it was presented in the discourse of austerity in early 2015 — significantly prior to the Brexit referendum and the resultant changes to both the Conservative Government and Labour Party leaderships. I suggest that the repetition of this phrase in both political and journalistic speech over this period signalled that the recognition of vulnerability was politically claimed in austerity, where the ability to *recognise* and *respond to* individualised understandings of vulnerability formed the basis on

which austerity policies were both justified and challenged.<sup>44</sup> I suggest this malleability remains a significant tension within the politics of vulnerability in this context. Vulnerability performed an affective, privileged, and often problematic role in both enhancing and diminishing avenues of challenge to austerity policies as a political experience. In this way, the final half of this chapter serves to suggest why refusing this framing of the “most vulnerable” to austerity becomes important in the remainder of this thesis.

### **Austerity as a research context**

#### ***Reflecting on austerity as a distinct context***

Creating a selective archive in relation to austerity policies in this thesis attaches a fragile coherency and distinction to the period of UK austerity. In fact, current UK austerity processes reflect a long-term reshaping of the welfare state from the 1980s and 1990s under successive Conservative Governments, and sustained under New Labour prior to 2010, as part of an emerging cross-party narrative of “welfare reform”. These periods of governance had already radically reframed both the placement of the post-war welfare state in UK politics and its imagined place in attending to differentiated modes of vulnerability (Bhattacharyya 2015; Evans 2015; Tyler 2013). As well, current UK austerity policies reflect the broad liberalisation and reduction of state social spending in many European countries (Karamessini 2013:4), alongside the increased privatisation (both as a sector, and in the so called ‘private sphere’) of reproductive care — animating the gendered and feminist stakes of austerity policies. These changes have taken place through a contested cultural politics around the UK welfare state, and more specifically who, in their differentiated vulnerability, the state is obliged to support. Along with many others, I argue such a cultural politics plays a significant role in the

---

<sup>44</sup> The textual examples in this chapter come from the representation of “the cuts”, “austerity” and “welfare reform” by major news outlets such as *The Guardian*, *The Mirror*, *The Telegraph* and *The Times*. I have also included commentary and opinion pieces from advocacy groups and activists, research papers produced by UK policy centres, Party manifestos, and published speeches by Conservative and Shadow Labour MPs. In large part, these texts are sourced from 2013/2014/2015, until just following the May 2015 election.

substantial ideological reconfiguration of the role of social welfare as a response to unequally distributed vulnerability in the UK context.<sup>45</sup>

However, Mary Evans has cautioned that situating austerity as a coherent moment in contrast to these longer-term trends, risks suggesting that austerity policies have “produced poverty” (2015:146) rather than intensified the effects of these cultural and political manifestations. As such, while I argue throughout this thesis that the current UK austerity discourse can be positioned as a site through which to analyse the politics of vulnerability, I do not suggest such a politics is inconsequential to other economic and policy enactments that do not occur under the banner of austerity. Nonetheless, the recent context of UK austerity poses a significant case study for vulnerability and feminist theory. This is because the figurations, consequences, and effects of austerity provide a situated contextual site that is revealing of the classed, gendered, and racialised political differentiation of precarity within the UK context.

Within this thesis, I draw on an archive of austerity from 2010 until early 2017. Here I focus on the specific emphasis on reductions in state spending and provisioning of volunteer services, social benefits, and social healthcare, especially beginning with the election of the Coalition Government in 2010 and the subsequent *Welfare Reform* and *Health and Social Care Acts* of 2012, and continued through the announced policies of the Conservative Government until early 2017.<sup>46</sup> Certainly representations of austerity as a distinct policy process were reflected in media and activist struggles against these changes over this time, with the discourse of “the cuts” forming the basis on which many readings of emerging economic and social predicaments were made.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, austerity has rarely been the language adopted by Conservative Governments or the Labour Party (prior to 2015), where while the rhetoric of collective

---

<sup>45</sup> For examples of cultural approaches to such processes see: Duggan (2003); Gedalof (2018); Helms, Vishmidt and Berlant (2011); Jensen (2012); Tyler (2013).

<sup>46</sup> In the case of the NHS, the austerity process has seen stagnant proportional funding alongside the impacts of other social welfare reductions. See Chapter 6 for an analysis of these processes.

<sup>47</sup> See for example, Belgrave (2013; 2015), Disabled People Against Cuts (2018), O’Hara (2015a), Sisters Uncut (2018), UK Uncut (2018). For deployment of “the cuts” in media supportive of measures see The Times (2015).

“belt tightening” (Evans 2015:147) may have initially circulated, austerity policies have largely been figured as permanent “welfare reform” processes (Bramall, Meadway and Gilbert 2016; Wiggan 2017).

While replicating and reflecting on UK austerity as a set of coherent discourses and policies is necessary for this thesis, it is important that many of these debates refer to policy enactments that were in place before austerity policies were instigated under the Coalition Government, and may even sustain the narrative of distinctness *to* Labour that Conservative narratives rely on (Evans 2015; Gedalof 2018:11). Framing the recent political context as distinct also risks simplifying the longer political histories of labour, welfare, inequality, and the state that it is produced from (Bhattacharyya 2015:2). It also risks overstating the uneven economic practices (both temporally and practically) that consecutive Coalition and Conservative governments have enacted (Bramall, Meadway and Gilbert 2016:119). I am thus particularly conscious of Evans’ argument that replicating a view of austerity policies as exceptional serves to bolster the discursive production of austerity as a necessary response to economic crisis, where understanding the effects of austerity as a “new form of old poverty” (2015:147) might be preferable. Indeed, the specific example of the Workplace Capability Assessment for disability benefit entitlement that I take up in the following chapter was introduced under a Labour Government and extended through the Coalition and Conservative welfare frameworks (Rubery and Rafferty 2013:127). Moreover, the cumulative and coproduced effects on domestic violence refuges I discuss in Chapter 5, and the “crisis” in the NHS I explore in Chapter 6, would incorrectly and unhelpfully be figured as singularly *caused* rather than exacerbated by the last ten years of social spending policies. Nonetheless, following many other authors working to track the significant political upheavals of the last years of UK politics, I suggest that the cultural, political, and economic shifts taking place over the period of UK austerity make it a significant case study through which to analyse the discursive and affective work of vulnerability.

### ***Austerity and its effects***

When the Coalition Government introduced a narrative justification of austerity to reduce public sector expenditure in 2010, the costs of this ‘recovery’ were widespread (Clarke and Newman 2012). The broad and explicit prioritisation of reducing deficit

through cutting social spending has been argued by many to both ignore and exacerbate the intersecting inequalities that make some more affected by these measures than others. These uneven effects must also be understood as cumulative and combined. Reductions or changes to specific areas of state welfare spending combined with processes of benefit slim-lining and penalisation: cuts to local council budgets which impact on social care, health, and support services; changes to multiple tax credits; and increasing pressures on public healthcare. The combination of reductions in state spending and reshaping and the associated models of benefit conditionality currently in place will likely continue to produce an increased reliance on volunteer and community-based services, which are themselves already stretched by longer term policies of competitive privatisation and tender processes (Davis and O’Callaghan 2017; Kane and Allen 2011; Vacchelli, Kathrecha and Gyte 2015). While austerity policies thus began as an ‘emergency’ response to deficit following the Global Financial Crisis (Rubery and Rafferty 2013:133), the “welfare reform” narrative of the austerity period combined public sector cuts with a growing emphasis on individual responsibility for social care and increased benefit conditionality (Wiggan 2017). Thus, Gargi Bhattacharyya suggests that austerity processes were increasingly being positioned as long term and necessary “‘correctives’ to longstanding unfairness in the welfare regime” (2015:6) — a narrative that was largely sustained by both the Shadow Labour, Conservative, and Coalition Governments over this period.<sup>48</sup>

Indeed, inherent to the entrenchment of austerity policies was the intention through which the state should ‘roll back’ social care responsibilities, which will be filled by the not-for-profit sector and volunteer labour — “the Big Society” for which women remain as the primary “labour supply” (Rubery and Rafferty 2013:133; see further: Davies and O’Callaghan 2017). As such, women have been argued to be disproportionately affected by austerity measures — both because they tend to have a stronger engagement with the state in relation to employment, benefits, child tax

---

<sup>48</sup> At this point, the Labour Party had not substantially challenged this austerity narrative (Wiggan 2017). Whilst Ed Balls, the later shadow Chancellor, posed early that there “*is an alternative*” to “shrink[ing] the state and leav[ing] the vulnerable relying on charity” (Balls 2010 original emphasis), the Labour Party manifesto under Ed Miliband in 2015 reflected the austerity narrative in suggesting: “To get the benefits bill under control, we need to tackle the root causes of rising spending, by making work pay” (Labour Party 2015:62).

credits, and services, and on account of their sustained predominance as workers (both paid and unpaid) within the service sector and care (Rubery and Rafferty 2013; Davies and O’Callaghan 2017). Maria Karamessini (2013) thus argues that austerity is an intrinsically gendered process. Women are both more likely to be employed in, and benefit from, social service expenditures, and austerity policies also implicitly and explicitly favour normative sexual and gender roles in employment and care work. Jill Rubery and Anthony Rafferty (2013:136) thus point to the sexual and gender politics of austerity narratives, in which the family is increasingly represented as a private concern (through reductions to child benefits, domestic violence services, and legal aid for custody disputes). This is a positioning that sustains imaginations of a (heterosexual) harmonious unit to which social reproductive labour can be privatised.

Over time, the anticipated uneven intersecting gendered effects of austerity have been increasingly foregrounded. Much research has demonstrated that the combined effects of austerity measures disproportionately affect Black and Minority Ethnic [BME] and migrant women, and lone parents, low income earners, and disabled people.<sup>49</sup> In 2017, *The Women’s Budget Group* and *Runnymede Trust* reported these intersectional affects — “for BME women, gender inequalities intersect with, and compound, racial inequalities. This sees many BME women occupy a socio-economic position that makes them vulnerable to benefit and public service cuts” (2017:9). Disabled and unemployed people have been both implicitly and explicitly targeted by austerity measures through a combination of cuts and changes to incapacity benefits, living allowances, the closure of volunteer and not-for-profit services, housing, and punitive sanctioning for benefit conditionality in relation to welfare and work (Goodley, Lawthom and Runswick-Cole 2014; Shildrick, 2015). As volunteer and not for profit services are increasingly placed under the pressure of spending cutbacks (Vacchelli, Kathrecha and Gyte 2015), migrant women and those with insecure access to government funds are further impacted by the broader pressures on these services (Lonergan 2015).

---

<sup>49</sup> For further reading into austerity policies’ differential intersectional effects, see: Bassel and Emejulu (2017); Butterworth & Burton (2013:29); Duffy (2013); EHRC (2011); Fawcett Society (2012); Khan (2015); LSE (2015); Williams-Findlay (2011).



Importantly, while these effects mark at face value a withdrawal of the state and the ‘privatisation’ of responsibility to care, austerity measures are enacted through an increasing (and often punitive) presence of the state in many people’s lives. Absorbed within the narrative of individual responsibility and welfare conditionality are directed policies of state intervention and spending on the surveillance of groups engaged with social welfare on both a symbolic and practical level.<sup>50</sup> Austerity measures sustain the growing cultural and political stigmatisation of groups who are the “behavioural” (Loneragan 2015:134) focus of “welfare reform”. This has produced an intensified social, political, and practical policing of these groups — single mothers, disabled people, racialised migrants, and underemployed or unemployed people — in their engagements with the state.<sup>51</sup> Bhattacharyya argues that austerity processes must be thought of as intimately tied to racialised immigration politics and border securitisation processes. Policies of “destitution” (2015:126) work with and alongside a politics of criminalisation, deportation, and surveillance.

The cultural and political climate of austerity has contributed to the production of an increasing visibility and stigma against those who receive (or are perceived to receive) social supports. The increase in racist and disability hate crimes (Meier 2017) must be understood in the context of both the intensification of nationalist discourses in the austerity and Brexit climate and the gendered, racialised, classed, and ableist “benefit scrounger” and “chav mum” narrative that Imogen Tyler labels as central to the “*culturalization* of poverty” (2013:162 emphasis original). Indeed, Tyler’s discussion of the culturalisation of poverty through the period of New Labour remains ever relevant to the austerity climate. Here, the narrative that poverty was a culturally transmitted rather than a structural experience allowed for both the vast scapegoating of those variously affected by austerity as deserving of punitive interventions, and of behavioural

---

<sup>50</sup> The DWP contracts welfare to work programmes to private companies and NGOs, and participation in work-readying programmes and placements is often a condition of benefit entitlement.

<sup>51</sup> I would like to thank Aura Lehtonen for marking the need to draw out this important distinction in my work. I take up this cautionary distinction between material roll-backs and sustained presence when I address the NHS in relationship to border discourses in Chapter 6, and my analysis of temporal *processes* of state recognition in relation to disability assessment in Chapter 4.

interventions via sanctioning and work-for-welfare programmes (Brah, Szeman and Gedalof 2015; Wood 2012).

Importantly, Irene Gedalof (2018) argues in her recent exploration of narratives under Coalition and Conservative policies, that rather than being the unequal *consequence* of austerity processes, these cultural articulations of difference are central to the affective narrative terrain through which austerity policies have been played out. Austerity was never a ‘shared’ process with uneven effects. Foundational to its political and cultural maintenance are these intersecting conceptions and figurations of difference, the family, nation, and productivity. For Janet Newman, the cultural and emotional politics of UK austerity is unhelpfully separated from the technocratic governance of its instigation. For Newman, “austerity governance reaches deeply into the emotional lives of citizens” (2017:31) in ways that require a thinking together of an affective cultural politics and the day to day experience of subjection to austerity governance.

Thus, joining these authors, I agree that a critical suspiciousness to the ‘newness’ of the cultural politics and effects of austerity remains central. Gwyneth Lonergan (2015:125) argues that the British welfare state has always been a deeply racialised and gendered construction — its development in the post war period centred a view of gendered *citizens’* rights to healthcare, education, and a basic standard of living, and the sustained excesses of care within the nuclear family at home.<sup>52</sup> Taking this further, Ben Pitcher speculates that narratives of a *return* to “the golden age” (2016:49) of the welfare state within anti-austerity responses risk downplaying and reproducing the racialised exclusions that the national welfare state was founded on and sustains. While Pitcher does not thoroughly consider intersectional experiences that might explain a more varied engagement with the welfare state throughout its history, sustaining a critical approach to both austerity policies’ enactments in relation to differential vulnerability, and thus their uncomplicated restoration through processes of state recognition, becomes central to my chapters. While in my project I seek to understand the

---

<sup>52</sup> See also Lewis and Fink (2004:39-83) for a discussion of the *citizen-worker* construct as central to the development of the post-war welfare state; and Bivins (2015) for figurations of race and migration as central to the development of the NHS, which I explore further in Chapter 6.

relationship between vulnerability and discourses of austerity, this cultural politics of vulnerability perhaps becomes ever more pressing, rather than newly emerged within, the recent politics of the UK welfare state.

### **Vulnerability politics in austerity**

In the remainder of this chapter, I work to draw more explicit connections between the context of austerity and the politics of vulnerability within it. Indeed, in many ways, it might seem obvious that the austerity might reflect differentiated experiences of vulnerability in the UK. That is, that both the welfare state as a construct, and its reshaping under austerity, work through a politics of vulnerability in relation to recognition and care in multiple ways. But, in taking a broad approach to austerity discourses in this chapter, my intention is not to analyse the effects of austerity policies on vulnerability *per se*, but rather the mobility of vulnerability as a discursive concept within them. My interest in this archive is to ask: Where and why do the “most vulnerable” appear at the forefront of the austerity debate? What does their presence obscure or make clear? Does the mobilisation of the “most vulnerable” work to amend the unevenness of austerity through better state recognition? Who claims to speak for the “most vulnerable” within austerity discourses, and how is vulnerability apprehended in these claims? In considering these questions, I make the argument that vulnerability becomes a central concept to the regulation and maintenance of austerity practices, where laying out the tension of these mobilisations is necessary for interrogating the role (and critical possibility) of vulnerability in later chapters.

In what follows, I develop analysis of what could broadly be considered a discourse of “the cuts” that developed in response to the upheavals to social services and welfare under the Coalition Government over the first 5 years of austerity (Clery, Lee and Kunz 2013; Adkins 2015; Vacchelli, Kathrecha and Gyte 2015). That “the cuts” was frequently used in the media as shorthand for the multiple and intersecting changes to social spending under austerity seems itself to demonstrate that discussion around austerity policies is productive of certain mobile frames. Indeed, while I am suggesting that “the cuts” formed the basis of a set of discourses in the UK over this period, such a conception was employed specifically within *challenges* to modes of austerity — by

activist groups and journalists — arguably because it is a term that carries with it the harshness and finality that such processes are seen to accelerate. In contrast, the Conservative Party (and supporting) adopted terms such as “reform” and “restoration” (Duncan Smith 2015b). What was typically referred to as “welfare reform” implied, and was intended to convey, a permanent process of transition, by positioning these as *reparative* policy process (Bhattacharyya 2015; Jensen 2014; Wiggan 2017).

In reflecting a focus on the discursivity of vulnerability I introduced in Chapter 1, I am interested in finding moments when vulnerability and its presumed response of protection, care, or recognition appear in these discourses, and what work these appearances ‘do’. At times, these appearances are deliberate and spoken: for example, Mary O’Hara’s (2015a) critique of austerity measures, which situates “the cuts” as acts against “the most vulnerable” (2015a:1), and vulnerability at the forefront of her polemic against austerity. In others, it is the effects that surround vulnerability that become integral, such as when then Chancellor for the Exchequer, George Osborne, claimed “unsustainable” welfare spending must be reduced to save national institutions that are currently at “risk” (2015b).

It is for this reason that Rebecca Bramall argues for “understanding austerity as a site of discursive struggle between different visions of the future” (2013:1), which travels:

beyond party politics and debates about economic policy into environmental, anti-consumerist, and feminist politics, into the terrain of media, consumer and popular culture, and into people’s everyday lives. (2013:1)

For Bramall, suggesting that there are ‘sides’ of austerity debates (*for* or *against* austerity) underplays many of their mutually reinforcing historical and nostalgic claims, or the historically intertextual discourse by which both of these ‘sides’ construct their claims through a shared site of contested meaning (2013:31). Indeed, it is because the presence of vulnerability in these discourses is multiple and contradictory, and because vulnerability gains intertextual meaning through the often-mutual mobilisations within it, that it seems necessary to unpack this relationship critically. And because these mutual mobilisations render feminist theoretical conceptions of vulnerability both necessary and complicated, the aim of this chapter is to argue for the need to consider

how else we may conceptualise vulnerability outside of the frames of recognition, subjectivity, and care, through which, in the austerity discourse, it was often produced.

### **Recognising ‘the most vulnerable’ with care**

Against a backdrop of hardening attitudes towards people on benefits and a tougher welfare regime, there appears to be little empathy left for the most vulnerable in society. (Scott-Paul 2013)

Efforts to challenge austerity’s intersecting effects have often situated welfare changes as a project against vulnerable people, or a project that is making people *more* vulnerable. Above, vulnerability is understood in relation to the individuals — the “most vulnerable” — who have been left behind or targeted by the *backdrop* of lost empathy that precedes austerity measures. Austerity processes become a targeted *regime* — a hardened approach towards the vulnerable. Because empathy and care for the “most vulnerable” has either been absent or lost, the “most vulnerable” appear as the assigned groups and populations that could and should have been cared about. Care and *empathy* for the vulnerable are thus situated as resolutions to their differential vulnerability under austerity, where highlighting their vulnerability becomes a necessarily redemptive step towards such care.

Aside from the fear that we or our loved ones will struggle to survive this time around, it’s also all the people out there in this country who did not want this government, whose hearts, whose empathy, whose compassion have all gone to waste. (Cosslett 2015)

In the above, an absence of care, or *wasted compassion*, sustains differentiated vulnerability under austerity. Here, vulnerability remains ascribed to specific population groups or subjects who should be cared about, particularly in the absence of a caring government or state. This lost compassion or empathy sustains the structural processes through which the vulnerable *struggle to survive*. In both accounts, a draining of empathy performs a certain “stickiness” (Ahmed 2004) between the different subjects and orientations of care within these discourses. These relations are situated as being between the “most vulnerable” and their need for care, and those whose *hearts* recognise this necessary relation.

Within challenges to austerity existed a narrative trend in both speaking for and highlighting the experiences of the “most vulnerable”, who were presumed to be unrecognised or misrecognised under austerity measures. This approach, which worked to humanise those targeted or affected by austerity processes, attempted to attach an embodied location and specificity to austerity effects. It was explicit in its attempt to repair the broader narrative that there were subjects who were the deserving focus of these policies, a point I pick up further below (Gedalof 2018).

‘We used to have our own home a few miles away,’ says Stacey, a single mum. ‘We had two bedrooms and a little bit of space.’ But it was in outer London, and the benefit cap means large families in social housing are no longer welcome in the capital. (Wynne-Jones 2015)

For four months – including Christmas 2012 – David was sanctioned by Jobcentre staff for failing to turn up for an appointment. His jobseeker’s allowance payments were immediately suspended and with it his housing and council tax benefits. His pre-existing rent arrears rocketed. ‘Christmas was bad,’ says David. (Cowburn 2015)

These articles in *The Mirror* and *The Guardian* personalised accounts of austerity. They told individualised stories of vulnerability as being representative of the broader experience of cuts to welfare and social services. For Stacey, austerity was experienced through her inability to provide *a little bit of space* and sustain care within her family. For David, the process of being penalised through the Job Centre was foregrounded by his inability to celebrate Christmas.

In Lauren Berlant’s *Cruel Optimism*, she explores the everyday and ordinary aspects of living under the “fraying” fantasies of the “good life” (2011:3). For Berlant, these fantasies are fraying because of the “retraction” of the “social democratic promise” to “upward mobility, job security, political and social equality, and lively, durable intimacy” (2011:3) under neoliberalism. But for Berlant, the fraying conditions of capitalism are also often defined by the sustained attachment to their promises. That is, the normative family, the possibility of full employment, and upward mobility remain as affectively loaded investments despite the diminishing protections they provide. These attachments are cruel for Berlant not just because they fail to provide the conditions in which life might ever come good: it is because sustaining optimism in these normative

attachments is also an ongoing “labour” (2011:48) which suspends subjects from the achievement of a good life, whilst depoliticising that suspension.

In the above articles, experience of vulnerability under austerity was signalled precisely through the inability to sustain gendered and classed familial patterns of intimacy. These approaches worked to convince the reader of austerity’s effects within daily, ongoing, intimate experience — the inability to maintain a home, the inability to celebrate Christmas. These articles demonstrated the suspension of the “most vulnerable” to austerity in the form of intimate crisis. Being subjected to welfare processes was an experience of interruptions to the normative good life that others presumably still enjoy. These articles thus translated political suffering under austerity into a language that becomes “comprehensible but also ethically acceptable for the spectator” (Chouliaraki 2006:3). These individualised stories become ways of translating the ongoing experience of poverty and benefit conditionality into shared attachments to the good life, which might otherwise be restored.

Indeed, arguing for the necessity of this individualised approach, Mary O’Hara, in her interview manuscript *Austerity Bites*, suggests that it was individualised accounts of austerity that were obscured from mainstream debates. Personalised narrative accounts such as O’Hara’s thus attempted to voice “the lived experience and ‘real time’ reactions of those most affected [...] the poorest and those most reliant on public services [...]” (2015a:1). And certainly, in bringing forward the “most vulnerable”, their vulnerability *to* measures of austerity were highlighted as a political experience. Moreover, the language of these articles was particularly emotive. Disproportionate effects are *heaped* onto populations who are not only not protected from them, but are the victims of such effects.

[T]he experience of austerity so far means we know a few things for sure: the cuts will come, they will be brutal and disproportionate, and heap yet more hardship on millions of poorer and disabled people. (O’Hara 2015b)

In addition, for sick and disabled people, who were especially vulnerable, poor, or perhaps not as well educated or informed as others, the stress induced by many of these changes could be truly devastating. (O’Hara 2015a:163)

In one *Guardian* headline, Conservative welfare policies were labelled an “assault” (Toynbee 2015). Below, disabled people were “whacked” (Chakrabortty 2015) by the effects of austerity. The language of individualised devastation was central to these challenges to austerity processes, where Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne and Prime Minister David Cameron were argued to have “trained their sights” on the “most vulnerable” people (Chakrabortty 2015).

Disability rights campaigners are calling on GPs to help prevent Scotland’s most vulnerable being ruthlessly targeted by Iain Duncan Smith’s cruel welfare regime. (The National 2015)

Those with severe disabilities were whacked 19 times harder. And now those same people are about to be devastated all over again. (Chakrabortty 2015)

These affects of harshness, brutality, and hardship *heaped* onto “poorer and disabled people” (O’Hara 2015b) operated to assert that austerity policies were worn by bodies, and particular bodies at that. Exemplifying disabled people, “the poor”, and the “less educated” (O’Hara 2015a) as the “most vulnerable” to these attacks challenged that austerity was an equally felt “belt tightening” (Evans 2015:147). These affects of denial and harshness reproduced the emotions of vulnerability as being felt, and reiterate experiences of austerity as intimate and material. They centred harshness, fear, and frustration in their structure, as well as language — enacting the affects of austerity through the text of its representations.

But despite highlighting the “asymmetry” (Chouliaraki 2006:4) of suffering in austerity, and the intimate events of daily suffering, the “most vulnerable” in these articles are almost always mobilised as if already in place. The welfare regime exacerbated, but did not necessarily create, their vulnerable positionality. Rather it was through the already apprehended figure of the “most vulnerable” (so frequently poor or disabled people) that the uneven cruelty of austerity became visible. Indeed, it is because of the recognisability of “the most vulnerable” as a frame within these statements that care, empathy, and protection as the correct and obvious response to their vulnerability could be affectively sustained. Thus it is only the state’s practices of care towards these populations through austerity policies that was being challenged.



As such, by representing those affected by austerity policies through a concept of individualised vulnerability, these texts also reiterated a historic and sentimentalised “vulnerable subject” (Fineman 2013) through reiterated normative frames of gender, class, and the family. If austerity was suspending the “less well educated or informed” (O’Hara 2015b) and “those with severe disabilities” (Chakraborty 2015) from these normative frameworks of the good life, a better, caring, and specifically individualised protection remained the obvious resolution to this currently penalising welfare state. Activist Kate Belgrave and journalist Frances Ryan addressed this framework specifically when they argued that the use of “most vulnerable” in relation to austerity measures underplayed both the universal nature of need and depoliticised the temporality of vulnerability. Deploying the “most vulnerable” suggested a certain inevitability to these experiences under austerity, and thus downplayed their political effects:

A requirement for decent housing and support services, and a shot at education, health and a reasonable retirement does not make people ‘vulnerable,’ or ‘poor.’ It makes people human [...] It certainly doesn’t tell the story of the political class that has robbed people of wages and services. (Belgrave 2013)

It’s often said the cuts are an attack on the ‘most vulnerable’, but it’s a term that suggests an inevitability to all this. Fear is not a guaranteed result of disability; desperation does not have to come with long-term sickness, just another natural symptom amongst pain and fatigue. (Ryan 2014)

Indeed, while the political and structural stages through which vulnerability is augmented may be developed in these accounts, vulnerability frequently remained affixed to loaded and recognised groups and not others. To be especially vulnerable became a subject position, largely emphasised as consistent (or worsening) in the context of new changes and in contrast to an unaffected “invulnerable” norm (Gilson 2011:316). These claims thus constructed vulnerability as something that could be individually recognised — most often in relation to disability, employment status, and feminised practices of care. Within these accounts, vulnerability was not a differentiated political or temporal concept in relation to subjectification through austerity, but an ascribed condition in which one was *inevitably* vulnerable within it. Thus, while employed to highlight the structural effects of austerity, these already assigned vulnerable groups were mobilised in ways that prefigured their status as vulnerable in relation to historic and gendered articulations of what vulnerability is and looks like.

But if compassion and empathy towards the vulnerable had not been “wast[ed]” (Cosslett 2015), these vulnerable groups would not be invulnerable or less vulnerable. Rather, their vulnerable status would not be exacerbated. This reflects Martha Fineman’s (2013) suggestion that a framework of ‘vulnerable populations’ reifies liberal modes of recognition in which the state must respond to individual moments of grievance, where such accounts affirm paternalistic apprehensions of vulnerability in relation to better or more abundant care. By using the “most vulnerable” to exemplify the effects of austerity, amendments to such experiences remained tied to a reevaluation or realignment of the state’s categories of recognition. Implicit here was that the adequate recognition of the “most vulnerable” individuals would restore the differentiated effects of austerity policies.

Maintained in the above articles was the optimistic fantasy of the good life — the suggestion that with a little bit more support, a little bit better defined recognition, and a renewed empathy, what was cruel about austerity processes might be overcome. In explicitly framing the figure of the “most vulnerable”, the “poor and the frail” (Guardian Editorial 2015) as wearing the effects of austerity, these challenges centralised resolutions to vulnerability as the *better, more caring* recognition of the consistency of these specific populations’ largely non-normative and inevitable need. Thus, following Berlant, the good life from which the “most vulnerable” were currently suspended was sustained as an optimistic attachment through the temporality of immediate crisis of austerity conditions. But this temporal understanding of the crisis of austerity as effecting the “most vulnerable” *more* failed to mobilise either the ongoingness of precarity under austerity conditions, or the more than inevitable differentiation of vulnerability that was sustained and regulated through these subjective and affective mobilisations.

In Carolyn Pedwell’s (2014) work *Affective Relations* she argues that feeling for — or empathy towards — the suffering of another is often prescribed as an affective ‘resolution’ to the differential experiences of inequality. Indeed, the writers above often suggested that more empathy, better empathy, or empathy’s renewed allocation to the “most vulnerable” might better secure their protections from austerity measures. But for Pedwell, empathy might instead be understood as a *relation* between differently

positioned subjects — feelings that primarily contour subjectification within power. Pedwell's attention to the emergence of empathy within relations of power suggests that the empathiser's apprehension of another's pain is often assumed as transformative. But in fact, the 'other' often "remains simply the object of empathy, and thus, once again, fixed in place" (2014:85). Caring for, caring about, and expressing care towards the "most vulnerable" in the context of austerity might indeed have alerted readers to its differentiated effects. But it may not have destabilised the "hierarchical affective relations" (Pedwell 2014:90) in which the regulatory work of vulnerability within austerity processes was challenged.

Indeed, for the authors introduced in Chapter 1, apprehending vulnerability as associated only with the risk or harm to vulnerable 'populations' risks sustaining and perpetuating paternalistic logics in which *better* recognising vulnerable subjects becomes an end point in progressive politics. For these authors, these apprehensions sustain negative frameworks of vulnerability in unique relationship to risk and harm (Gilson 2014). This emphasis on better recognising differentiated precarity through a language of the "most vulnerable" both fails to counter the relations of power that are distributed and enacted through modes of state care and recognition (Munro and Scoular 2012). And, following Pedwell, locating empathy, compassion, and care as being resident within those that can recognise the effects of austerity on vulnerable populations also implicitly constructs empathy as being the ideal relation towards them. The "most vulnerable" to austerity were not the subjects of these anti-austerity challenges: rather they act as affectively saturated signs within these discourses that rendered the differential effects of austerity visible. And because these frameworks positioned austerity's effects as enacted by a state that had forgotten to care about vulnerability, the appropriate response to vulnerability as protection, and vulnerability as a marker of differential risk or harm, became a recognisable, but not necessarily transformative, political frame.

While an argument against the recognition of the contextual inequalities that arise from welfare policies is not what I am making here, as Vanessa Munro and Jane Scoular (2012) suggest, there is a risk in centralising the role of *identifying* vulnerable subjects accurately as the end point of progressive agendas. In their work, which examines the

mobilisation of vulnerability in specific relation to the transnational regulation of sex work, they suggest that, by mobilising vulnerability to destigmatise sex work practices, advocates highlight sex workers as “vulnerable women” in ways that sustain a larger logic of intervention in the name of *protection*. For Munro and Scoular, this mobilisation promotes “a close and mutually reinforcing engagement between criminal justice and welfare systems” (2012:119), sustained through an individualised discourse that does not interrogate the broader logics of state regulation and subjectification. And because these forms of identifying vulnerable subjects already rely on gendered, racialised, and classed frames of apprehension (Butler 2004), the tactical emphasis on normative, ideal, and individualised suffering sustains the question of when, for whom, and in what forms such apprehensions become possible. Moreover, they elide, as Bhattacharyya (2015) suggests, that modes of austerity often work in tandem with interventionist policies in which criminalisation, protection, and surveillance are the mutually constructed consequences of recognition. Mobilising “the most vulnerable” on the assumption that they are not yet *visible* ignores the differential, classed, racialised, and gendered political ‘resolutions’ to which such visibility might subject them. Thus, echoing my previous chapter’s emphasis on Judith Butler’s distinction between apprehension of vulnerability and its formal recognitions (Butler 2004; Gilson 2014), protection or care for the “most vulnerable” in these discourses remains oriented as a singularly ‘good’ affective relation in these statements, in ways that obscured how modes of protection, and the apprehension of need for protection or care, is already enacted through power (Pedwell 2014; Ticktin 2011).

These challenges to “the cuts” implicitly resolved the differentiation of vulnerability through the notion of a better or more abundant state by highlighting the unfairness to specific groups through a concept of vulnerability specifically. The construction of a “vulnerable subject” (Fineman 2008) within the cuts discourses fixed vulnerability to state care, and fixed vulnerability to an idea of consistent population groups that might be recognised *more* appropriately. But the transformative possibility of recognition was directly challenged by the framing of vulnerability in very similar ways within the “welfare reform” justifications discussed below. As Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay argue:

governmental practices that designate [others as] ‘in need of protection’ not only negate[d] the capacity of those declared vulnerable to act politically, but also expand[ed] biopolitical forms of regulation and control. (2016:4)

## Vulnerability and compassion

Claims to the recognition of the “most vulnerable” were not unique to challenges to austerity. The malleability of this framing around welfare and the “most vulnerable” was revealed in claims to the *same* empathy and capacity to recognise vulnerable subjects *through* processes of “welfare reform”.

It is that same sense of fairness that should make us want to help rebuild and restore those in this country who have been left behind [...] by the simple, yet difficult act of helping to restore their lives to be the best they can be through determination and not dependency — that is genuine compassion. (Duncan Smith 2015b)

A claim to this *compassionate* response to vulnerability was made above by the then Secretary of State for the Department of Work and Pensions, Iain Duncan Smith, in his efforts to justify austerity’s unemployment and disability policies. Duncan Smith, who took up the post with the DWP in 2010, held a central place in “honing the narrative” (Gedalof 2018:53) of welfare dependency under the Coalition and Conservative Governments. Benefit conditionality, sanctioning, and work-programmes for benefit entitlement were explained by Duncan Smith through the same emotional investment in *fairness* and *compassion* that the above articles had mobilised. But in Duncan Smith’s quote, compassion was claimed as being resident within Coalition and Conservative welfare models. These programmes were *helping to restore* the lives and agency of those most vulnerable within them.<sup>53</sup> But I argue that austerity policies and welfare penalisation could be mobilised here as an act of compassion and fairness only because the relationship between vulnerability and care was a mobile frame. Demonstrating that the orientation of, or relation between, vulnerability and care does not necessarily demand a non-violent or ethical promise (Butler 2004), Duncan Smith claimed the very same “affective resolutions” (Pedwell 2014:42) to differential vulnerability in the service of a starkly different political agenda.

---

<sup>53</sup> See Kathryn Woodward for a discussion of “compassionate conservatism” in the United States, where “compassion is deployed predominantly as an adjective, one that characterizes an ideological stance, policy, or program” (2004:73).

Sustained in Duncan Smith's narration of policies on "work, health and disability" (2015a) was the apprehension of individualised vulnerability in relation to disability and illness. This association then served as the basis for ableist and classed modes of 'resolution' through the introduction of work-programmes and sanctioning that were argued to "incentivise" people into work. Deploying, or appropriating, the same rhetoric of empathy for disabled citizens as the articles above, Duncan Smith sustained the relationship between vulnerability and regulatory protections and care. Yet in professing that the government cares about these populations and their (presumed negative) relationship to dependency, Duncan Smith positioned work programmes and benefit conditionality as the central means of state support, where:

the sooner someone gets treatment, the better. And we know the longer you are out of work, the more chance you have of worsening mental health, even if the original reason for your ill health was a physical one. (Duncan Smith 2015a)

The work programmes, welfare sanctioning, and assessment of disability that were extended under the Coalition and Conservative policies to which Duncan Smith was referring faced sustained criticism by activists, advocates, and claimants over this period. Yet here, what had largely been experienced as punitive entitlement measures were introduced through the language of positive, helpful, and 'knowing' intervention. The *treatment* and care for these same vulnerable subjects was sustained by the relationship to work-programmes, which *we know* were good for others. Stagnant and isolated understandings of physical impairment — and an individualised suspension from the normative frames of a good life — appeared central to these justifications, in which the state would intervene to protect these individuals from their conditions of *worsening* unemployment. The same identification of vulnerable subjects, and similar frames of suspension from the good life, thus served to enhance arguments for the removal or re-evaluation of material supports. Unmoved within these contrasting articulations were the "most vulnerable" — the object 'others' over which the Government's empathy was extended.

While it is necessary to sustain that Duncan Smith's rhetoric of care does not mean that these promises to care or to provide routes into work must be taken in good faith, the

malleability of the affective deployment of empathy and compassion for vulnerability suggests that the identification of the “most vulnerable” can become a dually and proximally produced frame within contrasting regulatory articulations. As in challenges to austerity, the apprehension of the “most vulnerable” operated to enhance both the gravity, and inherent rightness, of engagements between the government and these citizens. Thus, returning to Munro and Scoular (2012), it was only that the regulation of these subjects occurred through welfare reductions and governmental discipline that differentiated Duncan Smith’s claims from those above. Indeed, these policies became compassionate here by replacing “the grand gestures of the Great Society welfare state” with a sustained focus on the unemployed “whose dignity must be restored to them by tax cuts and welfare-to-work programs” (Berlant 2004:2). But the politics of vulnerability emerged as both these ‘sides’ on austerity policies constructed meanings and enactments of care, compassion, and regulation over the “most vulnerable” to them.

### **Invulnerability and deservingness**

We will protect the most vulnerable — disabled people, pensioners, who cannot change their circumstances, and those most in need. (Osborne 2015a)

And more than that, we are continuing to devote a greater share of state support to the most vulnerable. (Osborne, 2015a)

The repetition in the lead up to the 2015 election of the Conservative Party’s near-verbatim promise to “protect the most vulnerable” at first seemed striking, particularly as it usually preceded a discussion of the very reductions in spending that challenges to austerity highlighted. Certainly, George Osborne’s claims to the Party’s capacity to “protect the most vulnerable” served to pre-emptively dismiss these multiple criticisms — austerity policies were not an intended targeting or carelessness towards the vulnerable of society. But this disclaimer also produced the same largely unspecified vulnerable subject that enhanced a framework of those not protected from “welfare reforms”. Thus, while I have argued that the “most vulnerable” were on one level employed to secure the work of reform through the affect of compassion, this mobilisation also acted as an exclusionary device, producing a binary concept of

vulnerability/invulnerability that helped to sustain the narrative of undeservingness which had otherwise become central to “welfare reform” (Gedalof 2018).

Gedalof explores the “welfare reform” narrative under austerity in relation to the renewed emphasis on welfare as providing “something for nothing” (2018:59). For Gedalof, the incessant reiteration of benefit recipients as “workless” presented unemployment as the pathology of individuals — a choice of those who refused the responsibilities of active citizenship. Indeed, the affectively saturated, gendered, and racialised figure of the dependent “skiver” or “benefit cheat” has been well documented in feminist literatures (Jensen 2012, 2014; Tyler 2013).<sup>54</sup> In *Revolting Subjects*, Imogen Tyler (2013) makes the careful case for the affective figure of the “benefit cheat” who became central to justifications for New Labour welfare policies in the early and late 2000s, where the value of work over state support, and the reiterated suggestion that those receiving benefits didn’t share this national value, were central to the justification of welfare reshaping and the broader demonisation of classed and racialised subjects. Narratives of culturally and familiarly reproduced welfare “dependency” have continued to position unemployment or poverty as the “transmission of worklessness across generations” (Gedalof 2018:77), a cultural vulnerability to which “welfare reform” intervenes. These narratives of welfare dependency called forward the failures of single mothers, disabled people, and the under or unemployed to maintain normative relationships of care within the home — reframing expectations of the welfare state as in part intervening in the inequalities produced through normative care arrangements (Fraser 1997). This negative conception of dependency in contrast to employment became central to the behavioural logics of the “welfare reform”. But for Gedalof, understanding the pervasiveness of these narratives becomes key to exploring the manufacture of consent for austerity, where it was through the combined mobilisation of “worklessness” and “fairness” that consent for austerity policies was constructed.

I would contend that further circulating within these rationales was the Government’s (and often Labour’s) common-sense ability to recognise the “most vulnerable” citizens

---

<sup>54</sup> See Hill-Collins (1998) for a discussion of these figurations in the US context.



in opposition to the presumably less vulnerable citizens whose behaviour was the intention of “welfare reforms”. In situating the obligation to the “most vulnerable” at the forefront of any discussion of austerity policies, these statements usually occurred alongside an absence of explanation as to whom was recognised as “most vulnerable” or how the Government would define or enact such protections. But in contrast to challenges to austerity I have discussed above, the “most vulnerable” were not those who experienced the effects of austerity more than others, but those who were immune to them. As in Osborne’s disclaimers, vulnerability was presented as an identifiable, politically neutral, and most importantly *rare* condition, where the “most vulnerable” were held apart from the widespread benefit slim-lining and penalisation in ways that enhanced the emphasis that those who were effected were deserving of such:

There will be exceptions made for vulnerable people and other hard cases, but young people in the benefit system should face the same choices as other young people who go out to work and cannot yet afford to leave home. (Osborne 2015b)

Indeed, in Osborne’s above formulation, vulnerability was presented as inherent to rare *cases*, with the resolution being to protect these *hard cases* through exceptional state mechanisms. This “most vulnerable” subject thus worked in tandem with the mobile figuration of an underserving, unproductive, and uncaring benefit claimant — the central figure that both Gedalof (2018) and Tyler (2013) position as key to “welfare reform” narratives. As in Gedalof’s discussion of “workless” benefit claimants, Osborne suggests that those exposed to the welfare changes faced the *choice* to become productive in the face of them.<sup>55</sup> Thus, in sustaining the narrative of benefit claimants as contradictorily responsible dependent subjects of choice, “welfare dependency” was produced as both the target and purpose of austerity measures in contrast to these *exceptional* vulnerable cases.

Thus, it was in securing a *distinction* between vulnerability and dependency that Osborne’s disclaimers took effect, where a politically neutral and agency-less vulnerable subject was positioned as separate to, or in opposition to, the majority *in the benefit*

---

<sup>55</sup> See discussions of the potential to refuse benefits to “obese people” and those with “drug and alcohol addictions” if they are unable to sustain or seek employment (Wintour 2015).

*system*. Unemployed people, disabled people, young people, those on low incomes were separated from both the *hard cases* of vulnerability and those that sustain human interdependency within the normative family home. Producing a distinction between a chosen dependency and a vulnerability without choice was later situated as the foundation — or purpose — of “welfare reform”, where: “The goal of welfare reform should be to reward hard work and protect the vulnerable” (Conservative Party Manifesto, 2015:25).

If we are to consider who the state did not consider vulnerable within this narrative, it becomes clear that this version of vulnerability proposed was a subject without any temporal inconsistency. When the Conservative Manifesto defined the ends of state obligation as being such an inherent or total vulnerability, this worked to further moralise the temporal vulnerability of “workless” benefit claimants who might be imbricated in the negotiations of family care, state support, and other relations of interdependency and power. Within this, modes of shared and inevitable interdependency — the normative significance of support and care — were relocated to the private sphere to which Osborne expressed an explicit divestment. Welfare dependency was a negative condition, contradictorily defined by the individual *agency* to seek state support for the responsibilities of human interdependency. To be in work, and independent of the state thus became a category emptied of its relation to modes of care and interdependency, whilst reliant on the valorised ‘privatisation’ of these mechanisms. These frameworks of chosen dependency, total vulnerability, *and* independent responsibility thus worked together to invisibilise and privatise the certainty of care and support as irrelevant to the state. Contradictorily, these policies at the same time extended the likely inequality and necessity of such care within the private sphere (Rubery and Rafferty 2013). But what I am seeking to emphasise here is that highlighting the “most vulnerable” did not challenge, but worked within, these binary frameworks of dependence/independence. The “most vulnerable” became the rare and obscured few whose dependencies did not exhibit capacity or agency to enact themselves out and through these interdependent relationships separately to the state.

Indeed, it is notable that the capacity to make choices, to participate in caring relationships, to demonstrate agency and autonomy, or the suggestion that one might,

all became then central to denying vulnerability to such groups — alongside any responsibility the state may indeed have in acknowledging them:

The fourth principle we will apply to our welfare reform is this: the benefits system should not support lifestyles and rents that are not available to the taxpayers who pay for that system. (Osborne 2015b)

Above, central to justifications for cuts to welfare was thus this reference of a ‘real’ vulnerability alongside the figure of a temporally dependent benefit claimant of choice, one who was supported in their *lifestyle* of dependency and *rewarded* for it. More broadly, “welfare reform” was sustained as that which intervenes in this active dependency alone. Benefits and social care became that which encouraged this (chosen) dependency, rather than something that support modes of interdependent autonomy. These seemingly contradictory individualised conceptions of agency as indicative of welfare dependency thus furthered figurations of an agency-less vulnerable subject that the Government would “protect”. The dependent subject of bad *choices* could at best be encouraged to assert their determination (in Duncan Smith’s accounts), or else be prohibited from expecting state care or immunities (in Osborne’s).<sup>56</sup>

But returning to Gedalof’s insistence on the manufacturing of consent, I am suggesting here that it is also through the mobilisation of a “most vulnerable” subject to whom the state does have compassion that the “fairness” (Gedalof 2018:13) of “welfare reform” was sustained. Employing the “most vulnerable” enhanced the figuration of a welfare recipient that was unnecessarily and unfairly supported by the state at the expense of these vulnerable others. This inherently agency-less vulnerable subject was again a sign that rendered those who receive Government supported “lifestyles and rents” (Osborne 2015b) visible. This further enhanced the affective distance and disgust for the underserving “workless” claimant by mobilising the unfairness of that *choice* in contrast to the global need of these exceptional “vulnerable few” (Duncan Smith 2014). Thus, further implicit in this rationale is that the Government was seeking to protect and sustain compassion towards the “most vulnerable”, a desire that was hampered by

---

<sup>56</sup> Jensen crucially notes that dependency narratives locate “fail to recognise how important the welfare state has become in supplementing low paid and precarious work” (2012:7).

those who chose not to make themselves productive and effected the unsustainability of the welfare system. Such a formation was equally mimicked within the (then) Labour Party position: “where benefits are too easy to come by for those who don’t deserve them and too low for those who do” (Miliband, 2011).

It was here that Gedalof’s discussion of the most “insidious” (2018:14) aspect of the “welfare reform” narrative became visible. Because the abjection of the “benefit cheat” (Tyler 2013) occurred alongside the construction of austerity as acting for the “most vulnerable”, in “its simultaneous appeal to a sense of fairness and social justice, together with its invitation to disavow the stigmatised” (Gedalof 2018:14) the “welfare reform” narrative appropriates the language of those critical within justifications of those same policies. Indeed, in setting up vulnerability as the distinction between deserving subjects and dependent ones, the temporality, and thus universality, of vulnerability was significantly underplayed. The “most vulnerable” appeared as both the ‘proof’ of compassion and fairness and the reason alterations to welfare must be further entrenched. Once again, the “most vulnerable” remained the affectively mobile and overly paternalised individuals — the loaded objects of regulatory protections discourses, and never their subjects (Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay 2016:4).

### **Temporality and interdependency**

I have suggested in earlier chapters that much of the recent vulnerability literature responds to these paternalistic frameworks of the “most vulnerable” by emphasising the relational and temporal character of vulnerability. Broadly, the authors suggest that vulnerability can be considered as temporally and relationally entwined with agency and autonomy — that capacities are informed, and augmented over time, in relation to an always present interdependency with others (Butler 2016; Gilson 2014; Mackenzie 2013). The vulnerability literature’s account of temporality and relationality echoes a Social Model of Disability that I explore more thoroughly in Chapter 4. These frameworks both explicitly challenge the stigmatising and paternalistic effects of figurations like the “most vulnerable”, emphasising the social conditions that which enable or disable relational autonomy. Such a reading thus draws attention to the relational nature of vulnerability *within* and *to* mechanisms of state support. That is, that

state care practices, relationships, and structural provisions might better reflect the experience of vulnerability as a shared interdependency within structural and social environments (Fineman 2008, 2013; Mackenzie, Rogers and Dodds 2013).

In mobilising the “most vulnerable” as those with inherent and exceptional circumstances, the claim to protect the most vulnerable in opposition to active welfare dependents in one sense rejected the temporality and relational nature of vulnerability proposed by these literatures. But I want to suggest that rather than disavow temporality and relationality in favour of a paternalistic view of vulnerability all together, Osborne and Duncan Smith’s claims also worked to *reframe* or mobilise these temporal relationalities within the antagonistic conceptualisation of chosen dependency.

A system that is better geared towards helping people prepare for work they may be capable of, rather than parking them forever beyond work [...] We need a system focused on what a claimant can do and the support they’ll need — and not just on what they can’t do. (Duncan Smith quoted in Swinford, 2015)

Indeed, it is the mobilisation of relationality and temporality within the “welfare reform” narrative that makes Duncan Smith’s above quote noticeable. Here, he employs a concept of temporality and relationality *within* the justification for sanctioning and the Workplace Capability Assessment. The WCA is a form of assessment for impairment that people applying for the Employment Support Allowance must undergo. The assessment assigns points based on (largely physical) “capabilities” in relation to work, and has emphasised the necessity of such assessments to honour the *relational* and temporal capacities of disabled people in relation to work. I address these assessments more specifically in the following chapter. The WCA was argued as not only ineffectual in supporting people into work, but has also been subject to intense criticism for exploiting vulnerability through penalising modes of state engagement. But, in Duncan Smith’s quote, the otherwise not objectionable position that social support systems might recognise the temporality and relational nature of vulnerability serves to enhance the ‘rightness’ of the work programme imposed by outcomes of the WCA. It is thus this mobility of relationality within the “welfare reform” narrative that I am seeking to emphasise.

Gedalof (2018) also attends to this adoption of relational autonomy in her exploration of the disability and work narrative. Once again emphasising how public consent for austerity was manufactured, Gedalof suggests that under Labour (who introduced the WCA) the positive language of support, relationality, and interdependency was mobilised in relation to newer work assessments and work programmes for disabled people. For Gedalof, the emphasis on relational autonomy within disability reform narratives constructed ableist accounts of disabled people as “overcoming” their dependency on the state through embracing their “workability” (2018:91). The narratives appropriated the language of relational autonomy through the positive affective resonances of neoliberal “self-actualization” (Gedalof 2018:107). Here, historic activist and theoretical emphasis on vulnerability and disability in relation to state processes were depoliticised — relational accounts of autonomy instead worked to enhance the individualised narrative of achieving independence through work. Indeed, by employing the concepts of relationality and temporality to characterise subjects of presently negative dependency who may be relationally supported to prepare for work in contrast to the “most vulnerable” subjects who cannot, Duncan Smith’s above notion of dependency in relation to worklessness appropriated a language of relationality and temporality *within* the individualised narrative of behavioural reform. This application of a temporality to undermine the need for a comprehensive state support was enhanced in the quote by the affect of positivity and possibility within the government’s work-programme. Benefit conditionality was couched in an optimistic language of empowerment and access — autonomy, agency, and relationality all become part of the individualised discourse of good citizenship, sustaining the position of the “most vulnerable”, non-autonomous, few. Returning to the vulnerability literatures emphasis introduced above, temporality, relationality, and interdependency did raise a certain universality to autonomy and vulnerability. But it did so *within* individualised justifications for reducing material and symbolic entitlement to state support.

I argue that it is precisely because these mobilisations of temporality and relationality occurred within a welfare narrative that was already undermining the state’s obligations to interdependency that these limited temporal accounts of vulnerability and autonomy could emphasise the parameters of entitlement to state support. More broadly, autonomy, agency, relationality, and choice were conflated within individualised binaries

of dependence/independence from the state, thus further contouring the distinction between vulnerability and chosen dependency. But, more than that, autonomy, relationality and temporality became markers of this chosen dependency and the ability to develop one's self into independent work. Once again, both the supposed invulnerability of most and the total vulnerability of few were maintained, where the expanded figure of the *actively dependent* benefit claimant becomes one who can be relationally supported into work. Following Pedwell (2014), the “most vulnerable” remained the unmoved empathetic objects of these discourses — affectively loaded figures who served to limit, rather than expand, meanings of deservingness and care.

### **Moving beyond the ‘most vulnerable’ to austerity**

Throughout the contained analysis in this chapter, I have held challenges to austerity processes together with their justifications. The “most vulnerable” became central to all of the claims introduced in this chapter, where an ascribed or fixed vulnerability was not only predictably mobilised in the austerity discourse — it was central to its regulatory effects. Indeed, who could best recognise and respond to the “most vulnerable” became an orientation through which both anti-austerity and “welfare reform” narratives politically constructed their claims. I have argued that the “most vulnerable” sustained problematic modes of protection and normativity, alongside reworking relationality and temporality within the negative figuration of “welfare dependency”. Thus, whilst agreeing that temporal and relational accounts of vulnerability remain central to a feminist ethics of vulnerability and care, I have also suggested that mobilising the temporality and relationality of vulnerability does not in itself resolve the subjectifying effects of austerity discourses, and might in other ways work to enhance them. In this way, I argue that claims to “protect the most vulnerable” in opposition to welfare “dependents” did not just deny the temporality and relational nature of vulnerability in favour of recognising only an inherently vulnerable few. In fact, these accounts reframed interdependencies and relationality through the concept of negative, but surmountable, dependency. As such, this chapter suggests that while highlighting vulnerable subjectivity may be seen as a necessary challenge to policies that deny inequality and political differentiation, these claims

contribute to a discourse in which the negotiation and denial of differential vulnerability can be produced.

In this way, I have argued that the politics of vulnerability in austerity discourses constructed a limited and specific view of vulnerable subjectivity which did not allow for the development of a temporal or relational consideration with which its transformative conceptualisation has been credited. But it also suggests that not only were these temporal conceptions of vulnerability not always highlighted by opponents of UK austerity practices, they might not necessarily have resolved the ambivalent nature of their claims. Because the recognition of “the most vulnerable” was not unique to challenges of austerity, care for “the most vulnerable” became amenable to austerity claims “in the interest of maintaining dominant social and economic forms” (Pedwell 2014:183). In following Pedwell’s insistence on considering subjectivities as emerging through historic and present day affective power, my argument did not just suggest these were strategic performances of care, but were rather central to the ways in which differential vulnerability materialised (Pedwell:2014:183). This joins Butler (2004; 2009), Munro and Scoular (2012), and Gilson (2014), who have considered the recognition of vulnerability as an ambivalent certainty within the endurance of unequally distributed precarity. Analysing the claims to recognising vulnerability in this chapter, I have suggested that an ambivalent discourse of *most* or *more* vulnerable highlights the tension that is reached when trying to negotiate a situated vulnerability politics with more recent theories of vulnerability’s transformative effects. Conceptions of temporality, care, relationality, dependency, autonomy, and vulnerability were all mobilised in these claims. They served to respond to, but not necessarily undo, the subjectifying discourses of UK austerity.

As such, my future chapters are premised on a speculative hope of thinking about vulnerability outside of this bind. In the following chapters I place an emphasis on considering what vulnerability to austerity might feel like, or what it might be to be the unmoved vulnerable subject to which this politics of vulnerability is applied (Pedwell 2014:33). I ask: If attachment to the “most vulnerable” reproduces frames of recognition that can be employed to both deny state obligation and introduce regulatory processes based on this recognition, might we find other ways to highlight the political



nature of vulnerability and remain hopeful about its role in transformative justice frameworks? Particularly as I have suggested that an attachment to the “most vulnerable” produces a heavily critiqued model of protection at best, and detachment of state obligation at worst, the rest of this thesis considers the possibilities of refusing to read vulnerability as a subject position of exposure, and instead read for politics that negotiates, and works through, these very tensions.

I consider what this ambivalent politics of vulnerability about state mechanisms and discourses performs, feels like, and produces. What emerges from these chapters is the possibility of framing vulnerability as a mode of being oriented and open to this politics and these political processes. My reading thus hopes to avoid a narrowly inherent view of vulnerability as a bodily condition of some but not all, instead emphasising the political effects of being constituted through these frames of apprehension. In focussing on “public feeling” (Cvetkovich 2012) within austerity politics I think through the investments, ambivalences, and disruptions that challenging the state through a vulnerability politics must maintain. Such a line of thinking hopes to move away from a subjective, bodily conception of vulnerability as highlighted in this chapter, one I consider as privileging what the body is/isn’t exposed to and the value of choices/decisions/actions in relation to individualised subjectivity. Instead, I consider that it is being open to such negotiations, process of subjectification, and conceptual tensions that might be centred within feminist theorisations of the term. In centring the ambivalence of the politics of vulnerability under austerity in the following chapters, I ask if we might think reflexively about the frames through which we read for and conceptualise the feminist investment in vulnerability in constructive ways.

## Chapter Four

### **Vulnerable temporalities: public feeling and disability assessment under austerity**

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of March 2016, just days after a new Government budget announcement, Iain Duncan Smith, Secretary of State for the Department of Work and Pensions, unexpectedly resigned. Frequently represented in the UK media as the face of Conservative welfare policies, Duncan Smith cited the then most recent announcement of £4 billion in cuts to the Personal Independence Payment, a significant part of the Government's reframing of disability benefits, as a "compromise too far" (Duncan Smith 2016a).<sup>57</sup> In a subsequent interview, Duncan Smith claimed he could no longer defend to the public that these cuts were necessary rather than ideological. Against a backdrop of intense incredulity, Duncan Smith gave voice to what many would agree was the targeting of disabled citizens to meet "an arbitrary budget agenda" (Duncan Smith 2016b).

Substantially undercutting his criticism in a media-circulated resignation letter, Duncan Smith wrote of an overriding sense of pride for his role in "welfare reform", stating that his difficulty in justifying the cuts did not mean that they were indefensible "in narrow terms" (Duncan Smith 2016a). In it, there was no distancing from the ideology behind the cuts or their outcomes. Rather, Duncan Smith acknowledged the loss of "the *narrative* that the Conservative Party is a one nation party" (Duncan Smith 2016b my emphasis), and the public perception of the unique vulnerability of disabled citizens to the cuts. Duncan Smith stated that: "juxtaposed as it came through in the budget, that is deeply unfair and was perceived to be unfair" (Duncan Smith 2016b), which indeed

---

<sup>57</sup> An already controversial payment to replace the Disability Living Allowance, the PIP was rolled out from 2013 (DWP 2015).

did reflect the calls that activist and advocates had made for some time (Cross 2013; DPAC 2018; Goodley, Lawthom and Runswick–Cole 2014; Stanford 2014).

Yet despite this public perception, Duncan Smith maintained that these policies had not only been well intentioned and compassionate (“I am passionate about trying to improve the quality of life for those in difficult circumstances” Duncan Smith 2016b), they had been largely good for the people they most effected (“we’ve done a lot to get them into work and change their lives” Duncan Smith 2016b). In referencing the enormity of public criticism, fear, and anger in first-hand accounts of recent disability policy as *perceptions*, coupled with his expression of pride for Conservative welfare policy more broadly, the resignation both managed to respond to, and dismiss, the “public feelings” (Cvetkovich 2012) that had apparently compelled it.

*Shoddy* took place in the Arts Bistro centre in Leeds in April 2016.<sup>58</sup> A small exhibition in a large ground floor room, *Shoddy* combined the work of several textile artists taking up dual the meaning of “shoddy”: to combine and recycle fabric in textile craft; and bad or poorly implemented as an indictment of disability policy. Many of the pieces reflected on disability policy explicitly. Lesley Illingworth’s (2016a) *Story Telling Coat* listed the names of Government MPs alongside a shocking list of “RIPs” — the names of individuals whose deaths the artist (and many others) attributed to the cutting of individual disability support payments. Other artists engaged less explicitly with this theme and instead highlighted concepts of agency, empowerment, and stigma, as in the D4 collaborations work on supported decision making and creativity, or the “backpack of feelings” about stigma and capability produced by the Wednesday Textile Group.

The exhibition occurred in a targeted historical and spatial location. Most of the work was influenced by the location of Leeds and its history of textile industrialisation, and so intervened in the politics of disability, making, labour, care, gender, class, and the

---

<sup>58</sup> Parts of the exhibition were later shown at the Tate Modern, London, in part of a “guerrilla art” action by Disabled People Against Cuts.

state in a variety of ways.<sup>59</sup> The organiser Gill Crawshaw (2016) claimed the exhibition had two messages. Firstly, of the value, capacity, and skill of disabled people as worthy in an austerity context when the measurement and scepticism to such worthiness was so pronounced. Secondly, *Shoddy* gave space to the feelings of anger, disappointment, and fear about the treatment of disabled people as a group under austerity policies, many of which directly affected the artists.<sup>60</sup>

---

These two points of public feeling — Duncan Smith’s response to public *perceptions* and *Shoddy* — and the context of disability policy under austerity more broadly, make up the case study for this chapter.<sup>61</sup> In this chapter, I centre the feelings that the *Shoddy* artists articulated through their work as a conduit through which to examine the broader

---

<sup>59</sup> By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, sustained by the expansion of British colonial practices, clothing production was the staple industry in Leeds — one which began declining only through the 1960s. By 1891, 70 percent of the industry labour force were women, a group inconsistently protected through the broader labour movement (Honeyman 1997). Conditions in textile factories were notoriously poor — such that theorisations of labour conditions as debilitating, and the relational boundaries of disability and work gain historical resonance through this location.

<sup>60</sup> The exhibition included work by artists with experiences of chronic illness, mental illness, physical impairment, and cognitive disability. This appeared to reflect a broad view of disabled identity that does not define itself by medical notions of disability or diagnosis — rather a collective affiliation of people who may experience the political context as disabling. For further discussion of the contested site of disability and identity see: Erevelles (2011) on gender, race and transnationalism; Hall (2011) on feminist disability studies; Kafer (2013) discussed throughout this chapter; Lukin (2013) on the history of disability activism and blackness; McRuer (2006) for the relationship between able-bodiedness and compulsory heterosexuality; Samuels (2013) for the limits of ‘coming out’ narratives in relation to disability; Siebers (2013) for critique of identity as injury; Wendell (1996, 2013) for a discussion of chronic illness and disability.

<sup>61</sup> Later in 2016, the film *I, Daniel Blake* followed the fictionalised account of Daniel Blake and his cruel quest to be eligible for the Employment Support Allowance. The film captured many of the circulating feelings of fear and frustration which I explore in this chapter. While I have not incorporated an analysis of this film in this chapter, the unprecedented response that the film garnered (both critical and supportive) points further to the salience of these public feelings. My colleague Aura Lehtonen and I have explored these questions in a forthcoming article (Gibbs and Lehtonen 2019).

outcry of public feeling that disability policy under austerity made visible.<sup>62</sup> I work to consider such public feeling as revealing of the stakes of vulnerability in the recent discourse of UK austerity, resolutely positioning them as revealing of the practical and affective workings of austerity policies, rather than excess perceptions of it.

At first reading, works from a local art exhibition and details of policy practice might seem significantly far apart. I situate them together deliberately in this chapter to think about some of the different components that produced an ongoing discourse of austerity in the UK. Indeed, while I argue that they reveal different aspects of the politics of vulnerability that occurs around austerity, these sites certainly carried significantly different perceived value in this regard. Duncan Smith's resignation was explained to a public which was assumed to largely perceive and not experience the policy. The policy framing of the Workplace Capability Assessment and responses by advocates more generally, detailed a myriad of practical and changing adjustments to the implementation and practicalities of such policies, though the process of assessment became a dominant mode of representing disability policy both by advocates and critical media.<sup>63</sup> Conversely, art works in the *Shoddy* exhibition reflected contained sites of feeling which might have otherwise been dismissed as explicitly activist and anecdotal experiences of such a context — voices which were largely side lined in policy debate (Ryan 2016a). Indeed, within the sustained activism organised over disability policy under austerity, the exhibition was an effort to respond to the absence of voices from the debates when reflected in media discourse.<sup>64</sup> I believe this makes it deeply relevant to a feminist investigation of the issue.

---

<sup>62</sup> For just some reflections of this in news media and activism see: Calum's List (n.d); DPAC (2017); Just Fair (2014); Rankin (2014); Sherman (2014b); The Times (2015); West Dunbartonshire Citizens Advice Bureau (2014); Williams-Findlay (2011); Wood (2012).

<sup>63</sup> The content and specificity of the Workplace Capability Assessment is discussed in detail from Page 147.

<sup>64</sup> My inclusion of this site also responds to the work I am influenced by in writing this chapter, and is deliberately reminiscent of Cvetkovich's approach to craft in *Depression* (2012); Ngai (2005) in *Ugly Feelings*; and Stewart (2007) in *Ordinary Affects*, all of which address the assumption of sites or perspectives as political/not political.

Given the growing feminist interest in attending to the gendered politics of illness, frailty, disability, and care, it seems necessary to reflect this intention through the sites which I locate as exemplary of discourses of austerity.<sup>65</sup> Here, one line from the online essay *Sick Woman Theory* by Johanna Hedva (2016) seems apt. Hedva, in responding to Judith Butler and Hannah Arendt on what makes an act political asks: “How do you throw a brick through the window of a bank if you can’t get out of bed?”. It seems to me that particularly in a chapter about illness, disability, vulnerability, and their connections, it is important to avoid reflecting on politics as if it is only ‘on the street’ which, as is particularly exemplified by the politics of vulnerability and an intersectional understanding more broadly, not everyone arrives to with the same protections or rights to speak (Butler 2015a). The choices I have made in this chapter are then a response to the tendency to consider austerity politics only in relation to policy and economic debate, and instead highlights the daily practices of resistance and relationality through which disability policies are experienced and challenged.

### **Temporality, vulnerability and public feeling**

In my last chapter I argued that discourses of austerity produced ‘vulnerable’ and ‘invulnerable’ subjects within current UK policy discourse, and established a limited and obscured version of vulnerability as a political condition. In this chapter, I want to draw out the possibilities of thinking about vulnerability through its relationship to feeling, in line with much recent work on affect and feeling that can contribute to thinking about vulnerability as a political experience. Here, I borrow from Ann Cvetkovich’s (2012) attention to “public feeling” as a site of cultural analysis, as well as Sianne Ngai’s (2005) consideration of negative feeling as revealing forms of “obstructed agency”. In this chapter I borrow from these conceptualisations of feeling as revealing of political predicaments, to consider whether it is possible to approach vulnerability as an ontological condition which is also *felt* because of, or as, political differentiation.

---

<sup>65</sup> See for example: Cvetkovich (2012), *Depression: A Public Feeling*; Puar (2013) on the concept of debility, Ahmed (2017) on fragility; Gunaratnam (2013) *Death and the Migrant*; and Wearing, Gunaratnam and Gedalof (2015) in the special issue of *Feminist Review* issue on “Frailty and Debility”.

In this regard, I intervene in what I see as a significant aspect of the vulnerability literature discussed in Chapter 1. That is, the significance of temporality and potential as it relates to an ontological vulnerability. As I have argued previously, I see temporality as a key component of the imagined transformative potential of vulnerability within more recent feminist theory, in the sense that the *shared* temporal certainty of vulnerability over a life span is understood as that which imbues vulnerability with its ethical obligation, role in recognition, and social justice (Fineman 2008; Mackenzie, Rogers and Dodds 2013). Reflecting this framing, these literatures explore questions of dependency, care, and autonomy and frequently present infancy and ageing as states in which the universality of vulnerability, in a temporal sense, becomes clear. Such a call stakes a claim to the universality of vulnerability if considered through a temporal lens — that over a lifetime, our vulnerability will reveal distinct and changing passages of care and dependency which the state may normatively anticipate. And yet, this framing neither accounts for a wider temporal understanding than one of temporality over a lifetime, the differentiated manifestation of vulnerability as a potential experience within such time, nor crucially, accounts for how recognition of vulnerability by the state can itself reveal and perpetuate modes of vulnerability (Munro and Scoular 2012).

Perhaps best marking the distinct relevance (and often unwritten engagement) of vulnerability theory to experiences of disability, disability activism has a much longer history of engaging with the obligation of universal vulnerability as a basis for a political recognition. Some disability activists have taken such an explicit approach to temporality through the language of Temporarily Able Bodied (TAB) to reframe a focus on disabled bodies as outside of the ontological norm. A conception of TAB thus employs a social and universal notion of disability to make demands of access, participation, and care (Garland Thompson 2011; Kafer 2013; Puar 2013; Shildrick 2015). Yet as in the vulnerability literature, it remains less straightforward what kinds of attentiveness to universality an ontological recognition such as TAB invites, raising similar questions of how differentiated potential across gendered, classed, and racialised life courses, links with this temporality which may be shared. Jasbir Puar thus argues that the concept of TAB and its efforts to re-signify disability as the norm, may appropriately orient a framework towards recognising shared interdependency. And yet Puar argues through the example of US working class communities of colour that if “disabilities and debilities may be socially and visibly ‘the norm’” (2013:180), a political

agenda which targets access and exclusion may ignore the practices of hyper surveillance and institutionalisation, rather than invisibility, which the intersections of race, class, and disability can make pressing. Thus, similarly highlighting the limitations of such universalist claims, Puar's caution makes it necessary to consider that such universal conceptualisations of temporality and interdependency often assume a specifically linear and 'good' outcome of state recognition and representation, rather than critically considering how such a temporal framing might implicate the state in far less restorative ways.

Taking a different track to Puar and this extensive work on transnational questions of debility in this chapter, I want to engage more fully with the question of temporality whilst holding on to the category of disability. In doing so, I situate my discussion within queer and crip theories of temporality, and feminist and queer approaches to affect. In joining these works, I consider how *feeling vulnerable* in, or because of, approaches to disability assessment such as the WCA, may reveal something more about the temporal experience of vulnerability *within* and *to* state mechanisms. In this way, I argue that by attending to the public feelings which circulated the articulations of disability policy in this chapter, a temporal understanding of vulnerability may be extended. By considering feeling vulnerable over, through, and to time in relation to forms of state engagement that experiences of disability might make pressing, I argue that frameworks of both vulnerable temporality and recognition of vulnerability in relation to the state can be extended.

To develop this argument, I focus particularly on the crip approach to temporality taken by Alison Kafer (2013) which I think substantially extends the understanding of a linear, or lifespan temporality as it is posed in the vulnerability literature. Kafer's conceptualisation of disability as a political and relational experience gives specific attentiveness to the experience and embodiment of disabled identity, and in my view, also offers reflection on how the vulnerability literature might better approach the politics of vulnerability that occurs in relation to disability under austerity. Kafer considers her writing "fundamentally coalitional" (2013:17), taking insight from feminist, critical race, and queer work on the body, political categories, identities, and normative narratives. While she cites her project as bringing disabled identity into



feminist readings, her work also seeks to address how “disability is figured in and through these other categories of difference” (2013:15). Kafer thus offers a reflexive approach to feminist, queer, disability studies, and activism and the moments in which these intersections and departures become evident.

Kafer’s work on crip temporalities is particularly influenced by work on temporality within queer theory, where relational approaches to time, experience, memory, and futurity have been investigated as modes of both imagined and theoretical obstruction and resistance (Cvetkovich 2003; Edelman 2004; Freeman 2010; Love 2007; Munoz 2009). In this chapter, I specifically approach Kafer’s interventions in relation to “crip time” which are informed by a cultural, relational approach to disability and impairment. I argue that this relational conceptualisation of the body *in* time and in *relationship to* time, can extend questions of temporality beyond the potential for us all to be vulnerable, by considering how such temporalities are felt through differentiated modes of embodiment.

Kafer’s discussion of “strange” (2013:37) temporalities also resonates with what Lisa Baraitser (2017) has labelled as “qualities” of time in relationship to care. Baraitser considers how practices of collective and private care present a focus on time that is *endured* through relational bonds. Differently distributed conditions of existence — precarious labour formations, gendered expectations and demands to perform care — are also productive of embodied relationships *to* time, as well changing qualities of time that is spent, passing, static, or lost. In her exploration of temporal modes of repetition and maintenance and “maternal time”, Baraitser works to reformulate what she considers to be the collapse between mothering and the labour of social reproduction through time — asking whether the process and quality of care “can tell us something about time itself” (2017:74). For Baraitser, attending to the qualities of time raises reflection on differently situated modes of vulnerability, care, and dependency.

In this chapter, I suggest that public feelings around austerity policies may reveal something about what vulnerability to austerity measures might feel like and so allow a different understanding of vulnerability as a political condition. Importantly, in approaching feelings of hopelessness, anger, and fear which circulated disability policy,

I am not suggesting that these feelings were, or are necessarily, useful or productive (a thinking which I worry suggests they are somehow necessary to have). But I do want to challenge the suggestion, as at the beginning of this chapter, that such feelings were only perceptions — as if perception of a political predicament occurs in excess of its material aims and outcomes. Rather, in taking influence from queer and feminist methodological work on feelings, and these approaches to thinking through time, I consider how the enormity of public feeling in relation to the WCA might be revealing of the specific cultural and relational obstructions through which the assessment process occurs. I argue this offers the potential to consider how key aspects of the politics of vulnerability work through ongoing forms of engagement with the state. Or, if feelings provide access to the qualities of time made available in the context of UK austerity: What do these qualities reveal? And: How might they be significant to the politics of vulnerability *and* disability in relationship to recent austerity policies?

Of course, such an analysis must be cognisant to the oftentimes uncritical association of vulnerability with disability, particularly when punitive figurations of vulnerability and disability have been so central to austerity measures in the UK. It is certain that disabled people as a ‘group’ have been rendered unequally precarious through austerity measures, such that it is impossible to consider the politics of vulnerability in the austerity discourse without acknowledging the way in which conceptions of disability and illness in relation to welfare and work have been central to this discourse (Briant et. al. 2013; Gedalof 2018:83). Yet in a broader sense, disabled people have historically been, and frequently remain, singled out as especially, or intrinsically vulnerable as a ‘population’. Many of the paternalisms that such population approaches to vulnerability extend, have been experienced in relationship to disability, the state, and related practices and definitions of care (Barnes 2011; Wood 1991). Thus, while Irene Gedalof (2018:83) argues that austerity policies marked a distinct *shift* in uncritical associations between disability and protection, I suggest that theoretically and contextually, the austerity discourse remains deeply embedded within contested and performative figurations of dis/ability, vulnerability, invulnerability, and care — rather than one in which these discursive formulations are no longer pressing.

What troubles this analysis however, is the risk of reiterating that disability and vulnerability ‘go together’ in obvious ways. Indeed, while the more recent literature on vulnerability often raises gendered figurations of women as vulnerable to mark vulnerability’s “vexed” (Murphy 2012:70) character, considerations of disability and gender and disability are often absent. In other texts, disability is left to stand uncritically as an example of the significance of interdependency and care, such that paternalistic figurations of disabled people as ‘especially’ vulnerable go unchallenged.<sup>66</sup> As such, my argument that the vulnerability literature is relevant to austerity’s disability politics in this chapter, should not be taken as a conflation of the two terms. Yet in accepting Butler’s (2009) argument, that the apprehension of vulnerability is differentiated through political frames of grievability and value, the austerity context exemplifies this politics. Because of disabled people’s vulnerability *to* historical, medical, and social forms of stigmatisation, exploitative social policy, and social and legal recognition, the WCA can reframe and reiterate these notions of protection and value. As such the figuration of disability within the politics of vulnerability under austerity remains pertinent.

Enduring failures of care or support, stigmatisation, medicalisation, intervention, and surveillance, continue to be highlighted and exacerbated through the WCA. Through the process and outcome of assessment, disabled people have been exposed to political and structural conditions which manifest their vulnerability through this politics. Thus, whilst ever critical of the assignment of vulnerability to ‘population’ groups as a uniquely intrinsic quality of some bodies and not others, there remains a political need to think about vulnerability and disability in the WCA together. Bringing together these literatures further responds to some substantial epistemological concerns within feminist theories which have sought to uncritically value questions of agency and resistance, and where enduring forms of interdependency are disavowed (Garland Thompson 2011; Wearing, Gunaratnam and Gedalof 2015). In this sense, a focus on disability in relation to the WCA offers important insight and caution to frameworks of vulnerability that perpetuate conceptualisations of “overcoming” (Butler 2016)

---

<sup>66</sup> Scully’s work is an exception to this, in which she draws out the stakes of vulnerability theory in relation to disability and complex “manifestations” (2013:219) of dependency. See also: Shildrick (2015) and Clifford-Simplican (2015) for efforts to consider feminist disability studies and Butler’s work together.

interdependency, or similarly replicate dependency as the negative opposition to independence, as in the case of the WCA.

### **The WCA and the politics of vulnerability**

Vickie Orton (2016a) reflected on disability policy as a maze in her work at the *Shoddy* exhibition. Sewn from raw felt onto squares of rough cloth produced in the Leeds mill in which Orton's family had worked, the lines of the maze are grey and sharp. As Orton explained, her choice to represent disability policy as a maze reflects making her "way through the benefit system: 'so often you're faced with dead ends or turnings that look promising but lead nowhere'" (2016b). The route is impossible to get through. Structural and figurative obstacles are formed via stairs, dead ends, closed boxes, and empty space. Orton said that the mottled grey lines reflect the process of assessment, where lives that are not "black and white" (2016b) attempt to fit a strict categorisation.

Despite mounting evidence that disabled people were particularly effected by the interconnecting and cumulative policies of the austerity framework (Butler 2017; Cross 2013; Wood 2012), much Government rhetoric maintained a promise to protect the 'most vulnerable' — a claim which disability activists and advocates explicitly challenged.<sup>67</sup> Within changing forms of disability benefits and especially in relation to specific changes to the Employment and Support Allowance via the Workplace Capability Assessment, were references to what are not neutral conceptions of illness, impairment, disability, capacity, and imaginations of the future of disability that disability scholars have labelled a "curative imaginary" (Garland Thompson 2011; Kafer 2013).

The discourse of austerity policies as centrally concerned with the "behavioural" adjustments to "lifestyles" of "worklessness" and non-productivity, explicitly and implicitly mobilised scepticism and stigma about disabled people and multiple forms of

---

<sup>67</sup> See: Cross (2013); Goodley, Lawthom and Runswick-Cole (2014); Malick and Butler (2015b); Shildrick (2015); DPAC (2017).

relational dependency that disability might involve (Gedalof 2018). Within this discourse, how the state should attend to differentiated vulnerability (and when), as well as what structures of support may look like or be required in the future, frequently disavowed the specificity of experiences of disability, or reframed these questions in relation to working capacity and imaginations of independence. The discursive formulations and practical implementations of disability policy under austerity thus appear deeply relevant to a feminist investigation of vulnerability as an ethical concept introduced in Chapter 1. These discourses speak to questions of care, interdependency, and state recognition of vulnerability in significant and expansive ways.

Perhaps the most crucial and heavily critiqued component of austerity's disability policy was the process of assessment of disability via the WCA, and assessments for eligibility for the PIP.<sup>68</sup> The PIP assessment coincided with the closure of the Disability Living Allowance, and operates as an assessment of impairment for the purposes of receiving a benefit in support of extra expenses or services. But the WCA, introduced under the Labour Government and extended through Coalition and Conservative Government austerity processes, fundamentally tied conceptualisations of disability to paid employment, where its explicit representation was to:

reflect an individual's capability and moves away from the previous concept of 'functional limitations' [...] In ESA, the assessment process aims to identify what an individual can achieve in terms of function [...] to enable people to return to the workplace. (Gov.uk 2016)

The largely computerised assessment awards points to individual claimants in relation to mobility, concentration, and the capacity to carry out everyday tasks without assistance, with the explicit overall aim of assessing individual's ability to *work* in some way (Disability Rights UK 2016; DPAC 2017). These points in relation to capacity place

---

<sup>68</sup> While there are clear distinctions between both the intention and outcome of the two assessments, in this chapter I am focussing on the WCA because of its relationship to work and "worklessness" (Duncan Smith 2015a; Swinford 2015), but also take examples of the two together. This reflects the frequent representation of disability policy as experienced through assessment. Moreover, the two function in similar ways and make similar demands on those being assessed to produce an account and proof of their condition.

individuals into one of two streams of the Employment and Support Allowance. Those moved into a Support Group are considered unable to work. Those in a Work-Related Activity Group receive the Employment Support Allowance, but are required to complete mandatory training, interviews, and job applications — argued to be initiating a way back into work in the future. Those who do not meet the points required for the ESA are found “Fit for Work” and are required to apply for Jobseekers Allowance (and begin looking for work) or stop receiving benefits if they do not meet the requirements of the JSA (Gov.uk 2016). WCA assessments require the submission of evidence and face to face interviews and were heavily criticised for being carried out by medical assessors employed by private companies such as Capita and Atos, rather than personal General Practitioners as had occurred in the past (Gedalof 2018:84). Assessments comprise of both known and unknown elements, or questions which directly and indirectly correlate to measurements of capacity. In the WCA individuals are assessed on their ability to perform tasks on, or to give a reflection of, a standard day.

The points awarded through capability in the WCA largely attend to medicalised notions of impairment and predominantly physical impairment. Such criteria were critiqued for failing to address conditions which change over time and conditions which might not effect individual’s mobility in the strict ways the assessment suggests. The point based system which measures capability according to criteria such as “cannot mobilise unaided for more than 50 meters without discomfort; cannot pick up and move a one litre carton full of liquid; cannot use a pen or pencil to make a meaningful mark” (Disability Rights UK 2016) without assistance. Here the concept of without assistance, opens a variety of critiques of medical conceptions of capacity that emphasise individualised independence, autonomy, and mobility. The WCA thus reflects a broader refusal of interdependency and relational autonomy introduced in Chapter 1, in which the invisibility of (gendered practices of) support and care are sustained through the limited measurement of productivity via the framework of “capacity to work”. Vicki Orton thus contrasted her representation of the “black and white” assessment with a colourful, flowing and interconnected weaving which represents “the disabled community” (2016b). Through her contrasted mazes, the process of measuring capacity is revealed as obscuring the forms of complex and relational interdependency and agency, which otherwise sustain and give meaning to most people’s lives.

Indeed, the WCA reiterates longstanding concerns and conceptualisations that have been taken up both within disability politics, feminist disability theory, and crip theory. While in the UK, the political and social take up of a broad Social Model of Disability (SMD) was highly significant in attending to the social and political structuring which enables or disables people from full civic participation, some of the issues raised by such a model become clear in relation to the WCA. Because of the need to work against medical or individual models of disability within the conceptualisation of the SMD, the model in its clearest form, strictly distinguishes between the body (or experiences of impairment) and the political (the social and structural mechanisms which augment disability). This is a distinction that receives sustained criticism (Davis 1995, 2013; Kafer 2013; Marks 1999; Shakespeare 2013). While offering a radical challenge to perceptions of disability as an issue of capacity/embodiment which can be isolated from the social context, the model has been critiqued for failing to acknowledge lived experiences of impairment and the body, and in doing so, ignoring experience of disability that might not easily be ‘resolved’ by structural rights and recognitions (Shakespeare 2013).<sup>69</sup> Certainly, the problem of failing to engage with the cultural imagination of *both* disability *and* impairment (Kafer 2013) is particularly revealed through the WCA, where the attempts to assess capability through medicalised notions of impairment, become integral to the denial or removal of social and financial supports based on a cultural and political idea of what disability means and does. Medicalised notions of capacity are thus centralised in the WCA, in which the centrality of networked, relational, and financial supports to most people’s feelings of autonomy or capacity are side lined.

And yet, the explicit intention of the WCA — to measure an individual’s capacity to work, or work in the future — was often represented in an affirmative language, through a discourse of rights and access to full participation (Gedalof 2018:84). Recognition of the right to work most certainly reflects a claim to civic participation via the removal of social barriers — a central call established within the SMD (Just Fair 2014). Yet the WCA, which makes individuals eligible either for support allowances or

---

<sup>69</sup> Such a model locates the amendment of inequality as participation within the political and economic centre, meaning it is a particularly liberal approach to the political/rights/participation (Garland–Thompson 2011), which may “fail to break the devaluation of [...] difference” or challenge normative regulations of embodiment (Shildrick 2012:38).

placement in a work programme, highlights these ideas of structural access and economic participation, by assessing functional impairment through individual, medical conceptualisations of capacity.<sup>70</sup> What emerges within both the practical modelling and justification for the WCA are ideas of *what kind of intervention* the state should make towards structural experiences of disability, by understanding disability as a question of *individual capacity* in explicit relation to work and “worklessness”.

As Kafer (2013) argues, the difficulty that any political or policy intervention that seeks to measure and define disability as a category faces reflects the inherent instability of cultural and historical ideas of *what disability is*, and perhaps, what “manifestations” (Scully 2013:219) of vulnerability may be claimed to arise from it, how, and why. Through the WCA, questions of relational autonomy, vulnerability, and the state support are brought together, meaning that understanding vulnerability as it relates to this framework, requires specific engagement with the experience of disability. Arguably then, a study of the politics of vulnerability within austerity discourses cannot be fulfilled without considering the unique and intersecting questions that these conceptualisations of disability in relation to notions of vulnerability and productivity open up.

### **The WCA and negative ‘perceptions’**

Experiences of navigating the WCA were overwhelmingly represented as fraught. Following a barrage of reports relating to months long backlogs of claims and appeals, ATOS, the company initially tasked with carrying out the WCA, lost monopoly over the contract.<sup>71</sup> Yet little quelled the sustained sense of anxiety, fear, and injustice which

---

<sup>70</sup> It is important to consider that work programmes are not the same as support into and within work, such as provisions for affirmative employment practices, bias training, or adjustments to workplace organisation which prioritise accessibility. Participation in “work readying” programmes is a condition of receiving benefits. These programmes have largely been characterised as punitive requirements for benefit entitlement. Thus, the *expressed* desire to see disabled people in work, cannot be separated from the punitive figurations of disabled people *as* “workless”.

<sup>71</sup> See for example: Gentleman (2013); Malnick (2014); Malick and Butler (2014); Nutt (2014); Sherman (2014a); Sherman (2014b); Siddique (2014); The Times (2011).



circulated the WCA over this period. Appeals remained common and frequently overturned. Those undergoing the process labelled it as bureaucratic, overlong, poorly communicated, and deliberately opaque.

Moreover, the centrality of the WCA to the ESA occurred alongside the extension of a controversial programme of benefit sanctioning, which removes support should people not attend or meet the requirements of support sessions, assessments, interviews, or other appointments under their ESA agreement (Gov.uk 2016). Sanctioning received sustained criticism and public feelings of disdain and fear, where month long delays in receiving benefits based on often minor infringements left many particularly at risk of, or plunged into, poverty (Cowburn 2015; Hale 2014; Ryan 2016a). The logic and representation of sanctioning as a method of helpful ‘incentivisation’ within these emerging forms of benefit conditionality, particularly in relation to mental health conditions, was criticised as especially disingenuous (Rawlinson and Perraudin 2015). Sanctioning replicates and works together with the behavioural understandings of disability and unemployment within the WCA — in which structural experiences of unemployment and disability, and physical and emotional experience of impairments, are translated into failures to adjust to the demands of productive citizenship. Anxiety and the sense of being under surveillance were feelings represented as going hand in hand with the process of the WCA (Belgrave 2016; O’Hara 2015a), such that these feelings frequently became descriptive of the process itself.

Vanessa Munro and Jane Scoular’s (2012) suggestion then, that exposure to and experiences of vulnerability must be read as occurring within processes and practices of care, is reflected within the enactment and rationale for the WCA and the enormity of public feelings which expressed the process as a punitive one. Increasingly, the WCA was claimed to be *inducing* ill health (The Great Benefits Row 2016; O’Hara 2015a), as well as an intrusive and unrealistic measure of variable experiences of disability and sickness more broadly. Advocates provided materials giving detailed instructions of how to get through the WCA, demonstrating how applicants could give an account of changeable experiences of impairment or illness which the assessment might not immediately acknowledge (Disability Rights UK 2016). These pamphlets seemingly anticipated the likelihood of many conditions being inaccurately measured under the

assessment process — as in Orton’s maze, the assessment was represented as an *obstacle*, rather than *enabler* in a longer-term process of state recognition and care.

The gravity of these feelings bears repeating when family members and advocates claimed that the process of the WCA (and its outcomes) were directly related to the deaths of many found “Fit to Work” under its conditions (BBC 2015; Butler 2015b; Burgess 2013; Cowburn 2015; McVeigh 2015; Ryan 2016a). Particularly in the case of mental illness, chronic illness, or “hidden” disabilities with changing (day to day) experiences of impairment<sup>72</sup>, the strict temporal nature of the WCA — that a claimant is assessed on that day, to see where they will be in the future — raises questions about temporality, disability, and vulnerability *to* state interventions and conceptualisations of support.

In my view, the expansiveness of representations of public feeling in relation to the temporality of the WCA, affords space to more thoroughly interrogate the ends of political recognition. Indeed, these feelings of vulnerability in relation to the WCA, reveal an opportunity to extend on a conception of vulnerable temporality in specific relation to the state under austerity. Rather than seeing these feelings as merely perceptions of policy as claimed by Duncan Smith in the beginning of this chapter, I argue that these feelings can be situated as revealing something about the WCA. They reveal the experiences of being vulnerable to, and required to participate within, the temporal orientations of state processes. These experiences might be described as what Ngai calls “obstructed agency” (2005:3).

Perhaps these public feelings of fear, anticipation, and worry which circulated disability policy, exist as “signs that not only render visible different registers of a problem (formal, ideological, socio-historical) but conjoin these problems in a distinctive manner” (Ngai 2005:3). In Ngai’s analysis of “ugly feelings” (expressions which are seen as hopeless or uselessly negative) she argues that the ongoingness of such feelings can reveal layers of ongoing, structural disavowal, particularly when subjects are

---

<sup>72</sup> See Ellen Samuels (2013) for a discussion of the complexities of disabled identity, “coming out” narratives, non-visible disability, the politics of “passing”.

racialised and feminised. For Ngai, ugly feelings such as anxiety are often dismissed as apolitical. Yet these ongoing forms of feeling bad are, in a diagnostic sense, revealing of ongoing structural predicaments.<sup>73</sup> Similarly, Ann Cvetkovich in her work on political depression, asserts that reading for negative public feelings are a way of “mediating between the personal and the social, [where] violence takes the form of systematically making us feel bad” (2012:5).

What can be made then, of the multitude of expressions of feeling vulnerable to, and through, the process of assessment? Did such bad feelings reveal something of the systematic forms of violence enacted through the WCA? How did the circulating anticipation of worry or fear about undergoing continuous assessment, render different aspects of vulnerability to the assessment process and structural obstructions to care visible? These feelings of negative anticipation, exhaustion, worry, and dread about the WCA may not have revealed themselves as expressly political and they may not always have been voiced as political claims. Nonetheless, the enormity of feeling that circulated the WCA raises important questions for how the temporality and effects of seeking state recognition might be an aspect of the politics of vulnerability which is otherwise under theorised.

Certainly, Duncan Smith both responded to and discounted such feelings as perceptions, in the context of otherwise “compassionate” (2016b) policy. Yet Ngai argues that representations of emotions as misplaced, unhelpful or apolitical might work to obscure their political or historical content, where feelings are “stripped of their critical implications” (2005:130). Thus for Ngai, political questions of subjectification might not only lead to obstructed feelings — they produce and reiterate intersecting frames of value through which such feelings are culturally and socially discounted. In taking seriously then, the suggestion that these feelings might exist as more than simply perceptions of a predicament, rather than revealing of it, I am asking: How was obstructed agency articulated, felt and experienced within modes of ongoing

---

<sup>73</sup> It is important to note that Ngai is cautious also of redeeming “ugly feelings” when she suggests that feelings are easily recuperated by both the left and the right — something I will reflect on further in Chapter 6. This also marks the need to be cautious in suggesting that ‘feeling vulnerable’ might be understood as marking a secure *cause* of such feelings.

assessment and subjectification to the WCA? If Vikki Orton's (2016a) tapestry reveals the figurative and literal obstructions within the process of assessment as one of an ongoing maze, an ultimately obstructing process of "black and white" — it is significant that these practical and political obstructions were manifested as negative feelings.

### **Feeling and time**

The stress of going to the assessment, waiting for generally a good hour, then being subjected to the assessment which is sometimes substandard, is very stressful for most people. Home assessments are now rare for ESA, and there are many instances we find where people wait often months after the assessment to get a decision, leading to many months of further anxiety. (DPAC 2017)

It is pertinent that much of the fear and anxiety that circulated the WCA, referred to the timing and temporality of the assessment process itself.<sup>74</sup> Assessments are undergone hastily in the immediate sense. In a single hour, the outcome of the claim and nature of disability is decided, and *the quicker the better* when there is a monetary value on the assessment process itself. On the other hand, the time of waiting for an appeal (a frequent follow up to assessments), is slow.<sup>75</sup> The temporality of conditions was said to often be experienced at a different rate to that of the appeals process. This means that people frequently found themselves in conditions of poverty faster than an appeal was assessed — particularly when a mandatory "reconsideration period" delayed applicants receiving any disability benefit until an appeal was processed. The WCA in this sense, might be considered a pausing or delaying of time (Baraitser 2017). Practical benefits might be paused while the process is undergone, such that recovering from the outcome of the assessment might be lengthened. It is these aspects of time that were frequently credited with the feelings of anxiety and frustration in undergoing the WCA, and which led me to consider how feelings of anxiety and frustration may themselves

---

<sup>74</sup> This does not include what I can only assume is the at least ambivalent feeling of overtly discussing (under an initial sense of suspicion) personal experiences of impairment or illness through a language of limitation to meet a basic level of care.

<sup>75</sup> According to the DWP quarterly statistics, within September 2017 to January 2018, 62% of appeals were overturned (DWP 2018).

reveal the condition of obstructed agency that being vulnerable to such a process entailed.

Responding directly to the questions raised by such an engagement with feeling and time, Alison Kafer's (2013) approach to crip temporalities intervenes at this intersection between a feminist and queer cultural studies framework and the specific embodiment of disability. In *Feminist Queer Crip*, Kafer considers how approaches to non-normative temporality within queer theory can be used to consider the changing, competing, and productive temporality of disability, which she discusses via the methodology of "cripping time". Taking as a starting point, the assumption of "no future", or lost future that circulates in relation to disability (and the gendered and racialised lenses which imagine disability as *the* embodiment of a lost future), Kafer considers that to "crip time" means to do more than acknowledge the universality of frailty.<sup>76</sup> For Kafer, criping time means understanding the temporal modes of *living in the present* that experiences of disability make evident. Kafer's attention to crip temporalities as living in the present, thus reflects Ngai and Cvetkovich's attention to the felt experience of predicaments. Ngai and Cvetkovich's analysis of expressions which reveal themselves as outside the boundaries of normative political feeling, resonates with Kafer's conceptualisation of crip time and asks for a thinking between feeling, the body, and normativity.

Indeed, Kafer's consideration of disability and time examines how experiences of disability present the need for thinking through different temporalities of living. Or rather, how political obstructions might be figured in relationship to everyday experiences of the body. In this way, Kafer argues that experiences of disability often present themselves through needing more time, slowing time (resting), and shifting or dissecting time (little tasks, over longer periods of time), or the speeding up of time (in panic or mania). These are frames which also challenge normative gendered and sexual figurations of time *well spent*. Indeed, where a curative imaginary might figure overcoming disability as the temporal relationship of disability to the future by linking

---

<sup>76</sup> Kafer introduces her work through the memorable opening to her book "I have never consulted a seer or psychic [...] but people have been telling my future for years" (2013:1). Kafer's framing of "no future" responds to Edleman's (2004) work on queer futurity and childhood.

the WCA and work, Kafer's conceptualisation of crip time poses a consideration of everyday time as composed of shifting, transient, and contingent qualities, experienced in relation to and between such policies and their imagined outcomes.

He told me that as someone with a 'hidden' and fluctuating disability, he was terrified about being pushed back into work before he was ready by back-to-work 'tests' 'not fit for purpose' that assumed because he was having a good day or a good week he was capable of work. (O'Hara 2015a:150)

In the above extract from an interview with Mary O'Hara in her manuscript *Austerity Bites*, a man undertaking the assessment reflects on disability and temporality. In the quote, it becomes clear how the fractured, changing time of the body, or illness *the good days* or the *good weeks*, can be considered as occurring alongside and within the temporality of benefit conditionality itself. To be pushed into work faster than a body has recovered, signals an important interplay between the body and the processes of assessment ostensibly designed to recognise it. Where assessments were feared for failing to consider the temporality of individual impairments, the kinds of temporality that Kafer highlights in her analysis of crip time become pressing. Because the assessment pauses experiences into a single *on this day* time frame, (did you make a cup of tea *this morning*, did you walk or catch public transport to *this appointment*), the temporality of experiences of disability are assumed to be consistent or unchanging. Of course, many conditions, such as chronic or mental illness, are changeable both over time, and in relationship to time. What may be possible one day, may not be possible the next. Conditions may be worsened by rushing, or improved by slowing down. They may be maintained (unchanging yet precarious) through the temporality of repetition and routine.

Thus, the decisions that are made in the WCA according to a *standard* day, also set in place a changed relationship with the future. What happened on *that day* prescribes what benefits individual's will receive, or can do, in *the future*, and that prescription for *the future* will likely augment the decisions individuals can make in, and the material conditions of, the *present*. Waiting for an appeal might mean the pausing of supports that provide the structure and routine that make movement (both physical and emotional) in the present, possible. Whether someone can imagine working *in the future*

might depend on the material supports in the present. Spread out, the *standard* day not only fails to assess most bodies in complex circumstances, but it also acts to change those circumstances within a day, such that the body of the future might not always be adequately anticipated.

It is here that Kafer discusses the “time of prognosis” as a “strange temporality” in which “past/present/future become jumbled” (2013:37). The time of prognosis opens room to consider experiences of illness or impairment through the time of support seeking and diagnosis — and the critical intersections which augment for whom and in what ways, these “repeated attempts” may be recognised. For Kafer, these interrogations into crip time thus reveal the “time of undiagnosis” too. The time of undiagnosis includes “the shuttling between specialists, the repeated refusal of care and services, the constant denial of one’s experiences, the slow exacerbation of one’s symptoms [...] the waiting” (2013:37). Reframing this through the language of vulnerability, I want to argue that this means taking seriously the temporality of fighting for, or waiting for, state recognition. In other words, the time of undiagnosis reveals the time within, or felt through, the differentiated politics of vulnerability that occur through the WCA. Negative feelings about the WCA — worry it would not measure a condition, and dread of the process itself — might be seen as revealing the temporal predicament of bodies out of place with modes of assessment. These are not just perceptions of a process, but the feelings of participating in the politics of vulnerability *as a* process that has political and temporal “qualities” (Baraitser 2017) that are lived.

But it is also through this lens that Kafer critiques the “curative imaginary”, in which time is experienced in relation to ableist imaginings of “getting better”, overcoming disability, or mourning for a “non-disabled” past. For Kafer, ableist assumptions about disability as lack, thus interplay with racialised, sexualised and gendered imaginings of good, long lives — in which disability intersects with these other normative frameworks for the future.<sup>77</sup> For Kafer, the curative imaginary is figured through ableist and heteronormative imaginings of reproductive futures without disability, where the “future’ is deployed in the service of able-bodiedness and able-mindedness” (2013:27).

---

<sup>77</sup> See also: McRuer (2006); Puar (2013); Shildrick (2015) for explorations of normativity.

Such a curative imaginary seems to resonate with Gilson's (2014) intention to challenge frameworks which figure vulnerability in the negative and which underplay the productive relational circumstances which vulnerability makes visible.

This consideration of a curative imaginary is thus particularly relevant to the language of the WCA and the good policy (in Iain Duncan Smith's assessment) of getting people "back to work" (Duncan Smith 2016). While again, the practical outcomes of both the JSA and ESA raise compelling hesitations in reproducing the narrative that the WCA facilitates a relationship to being *in* work, that this curative imaginary and association with productive work could nonetheless travel through these policy justifications, requires interrogating the logic through which a return to work, whether possible or practical, can be mobilised as an ideal.

In this sense, the WCA is a smaller component of a relationship to the future, the state, and individuals within it, as expressed within "welfare reform" more broadly. Duncan Smith summarises the broader project of "welfare reform" in his resignation letter as being one through which:

A nation's commitment to the least advantaged should include the provision of a generous safety-net but it should also include incentive structures and practical assistance programmes to help them live independently of the state. (2016a my emphasis)

In Duncan Smith's quote, this curative imaginary is made clear. Within his framing, the most valued outcome for disabled people was a return to work, and a return to productivity where the *least advantaged* live lives *independent of the state*. The WCA thus performs what Kafer (2013) and Rosemarie Garland Thompson (2011) identify as a curative imaginative in which disability and forms of dependency, perceived only as a negative, are resolved in the future by individuals 'overcoming' barriers to productivity.<sup>78</sup> This conceptualisation of independence from the state has been substantially critiqued by feminists writing on vulnerability, dependency, and care, in which such a curative imaginary both underplays the largely gendered work that

---

<sup>78</sup> For a discussion of representations of disability, the "able-disabled" and "disability nationalism" see: Shildrick (2015), McRuer (2006).



provides most bodies with the illusion of independence, but also fails to consider the ways in which care as a process is productive of forms of interdependency (Fraser 1997; Friedman 1993; Kittay 1999; Tronto 1993). In this sense, frameworks such as the WCA which mark a distinction between dependent and independent subjects, fail to consider the changing forms of dependency through which care (both public and private) is augmented and lived (Kittay 1999). The framework of independence put forward in the resignation letter, was thus only possible to figure if we are to believe that returning to work — or being independent of the state — is an ideal, or a possibility, for anyone (Fineman 2008). Certainly, such an imagining of work as independence is based on an ignorance to vulnerability and relationality (and the hidden, gendered modes of care that such assumed independence relies on).

But here I am also suggesting that such an imagining of independence reveals, as Kafer would suggest, a curative future in which disability, or the individual barriers that disability is seen to occur from, is overcome. This binary construction — through which autonomy and work exist as oppositional to dependency and the absence of work — constructs a wholly negative view of disability and care, and the modes of resolutely productive practice which augment relationships of dependency and care. Particularly in relationship to gender and disability however, such a curative imagination in the WCA is particularly damaging in its imagining of disability as “no future” (Kafer 2013:10). It ignores the multiple ways in which disability can itself be a productive experience or relationship to knowledge. Or as Susan Wendell, the feminist scholar who has written extensively on her own experiences of chronic illness, health, disability, and identity writes:

Of everything I said in my book about disability, *The Rejected Body* (1996), readers have most often questioned or been shocked by my statements that, although I would joyfully accept a cure if it were offered to me, I do not need a cure and I do not regret having become ill [... Experience of illness, disability] creates different ways of being that give valuable perspectives on life and the world. (2013:171)

These modes of imagining the future as independent of care and autonomous through work, thus entail significant relational and valued closures. Where the ‘best’ outcome for the future is placed in closing oneself to relational interdependence as both a reality, and something that might be valuable, as well. I am reluctant to incorporate practices of

(private) care and relationality as essentially better or ‘ideal’ practices in ways that might sustain logics of a broader withdrawal of the state. At the same time, frameworks which figure disability and the manifestations of dependency it might involve as lack, both underplay the presence of such entangled dependencies, whilst at the same time figuring them as without social value. A focus on the temporal imaginings of the WCA in this way draws out substantial concerns about a wilful ignorance (Gilson 2011) to the gendered and bodily positionality and knowledge produced in relation to care, differentiated dependency, and disability. The framing of the future in the WCA assumes that the value of these experiences and interdependencies are already known, and negative. Feeling bad in the context of such “strange” (Kafer 2013:37) temporal figurations is thus revealing. Such bad feelings reveal both a process and an imaginary in which disability and interdependency are acknowledged and valued only in a negative relationship to a future idealised as without them.

### **Vulnerable bodies in time**

This discussion of temporality and futurity seemed implicit in Kirsty Hall’s (2016a) piece *Tatterdemalion* at the *Shoddy* exhibition. Produced over months, Hall presented 255 stones sewn into white fabric — each stone representing a month since her illness began. Touching on the ongoingness of chronic illness, the stones were softened by a white frayed fabric which represents Hall’s perceived and interpersonally recognisable vulnerability and the unrecognised agency within vulnerability — the hardness of the stones which is not immediately apparent (Hall 2016b). The variable temporality of Hall’s experience of chronic illness and her relationship to art practice was also made visible. The stones were broken and unique, because her illness was experienced changeably by the day — a collection of experiences of the body, over time. Hall represented her chronically ill ‘body’ as spread out within time and distributed in space. The white cotton allowed Hall’s work to look bounded from a far and viewed as a single body, the claim to her vulnerability became ‘obvious’. But such boundedness was made more complex when the audience narrowed in to see the changing day to day of Hall’s working method, and her body over and in time. Spread out across the carpeted floor, Hall’s work unsettled the body as capable *or not*, as ill, *or not*, as capable *in the future*. Hall’s body in relation to time, to the future was spatially and temporally dispersed in relation to individual months, days and practices.

The process of making *Tatterdemalion* reflected Hall's physical requirements of working bit by bit and slowly, which Hall described as a method of "little but lots" (2016b). Hall said that her approach to working little but lots was one which allowed her to continue making art alongside her life and illness, but this also demonstrates a temporality of creating that is not always recognised as productive work. Thinking through Kafer's approach to time together with the experience of disability and temporality in Hall's little but lots, brings in questions of how we might imagine the temporality of vulnerability differently. Where temporality remains in the vulnerability literature largely as the *inevitable* but *differentiated* decline of the body over time, the concept of crip time draws towards the different temporalities of that (maybe not always linear) potential, and considers that multiple temporalities occur around and through all vulnerable bodies. These questions are important in a context in which the curative ideals explicit within the WCA rely on figurations of a productive citizen and in which the explicit outcome for the state is to support citizens to overcome interdependence.

In Hall's work, this independent productive future becomes an overreaching imagining, when it is drawn through a productive *and* interdependent present. Hall's piece — her representation of her illness and the temporality of its construction — raises an intervention into this binary figuration of productivity and work, because the temporality of her work was already interplayed through the temporality and needs of her body. A bounded, definitive idea of "capacity for work" is challenged by the no doubt laborious, but temporally dispersed nature of Hall's self-described method of working little but lots. That little but lots reflected Hall's requirements of working bit by bit, slowly, challenges the framing of a singularly productive, unassisted mode of working.

Hall's work was produced through and within the flows between external and internal demands of her body, in relationship to different, presumably never standard days. This temporality of creating, this temporal mode of living, would not be recognised as productive work within the framework of the WCA. And surely it is not recognised by discursive interpretations of independent "capability", where capability here is embodied, changing and developed, alongside the knowing that comes from her

experience of illness. What if Hall had produced a piece for each *day* of her illness? Which piece could capture her illness on a standard day? What if she had made these pieces lying down, moving little, moving slowly? Or, conversely, made them quickly in the moments between the schedule for her day? Here, the temporal linearity and futurity of the WCA is extended, by the “strange” (Kafer 2013:37) temporalities that Hall’s working method introduces.

I am sick, I’ve been getting sicker since the process began. My doctors are no longer sure how to treat me since I can’t escape from the persistent threat that they are coming for me and the never ending acutely anxious state it creates [...] I am not getting better because the WCA is in the way (Just Fair 2014).

If feelings which surrounded aspects of disability policy, such as fear or uncertainty over the assessment process raise questions for how to think about the temporality of policies and bodies, then vulnerability in relation to the state can be understood differently. Such an analysis suggests that assessment is a process of being oriented by a limited temporal, spatial, and cultural understanding of invulnerability, productivity, and care. In the above quote, the process of assessment that is used to define and interrupt eligibility for state support, is argued to make particular subjects, or particular embodiments, vulnerable *to* the temporality of the assessment itself. In this way, feelings that surrounded this orientation within the WCA might not have referred to *perceptions* of a necessary process. Rather, they reveal or translate that process as an orientation — a temporally ongoing, “persistent” (Just Fair 2014) and vulnerable process of seeking recognition through the WCA.

The feelings of anxiety or fear that surrounded the WCA might not come necessarily from the subjective experience of illness and impairment itself, but instead from a felt or bodily experience of temporality that did not meet the ideals of such frameworks. Indeed, feelings of vulnerability to the WCA were frequently articulated as above, as fear. Fear that an illness, impairment or prognosis did not, or could not, allow people to work, but that they might be found “Fit to Work” anyway. What then, can be made of this feeling of knowing that one’s ability to work would not be measured accurately by the methods of the WCA, if it is this very awareness that produced feelings of vulnerability for the future? How can we make sense of these experiences as both a felt

process, and a felt process with effects, where a frequently claimed part of claiming such sickness benefits was becoming *more* sick because of it?

In arguing that we might think about the WCA as a temporal orientation, I am suggesting both that particular ideological attachments, such as a curative imaginary, can produce orientations of living or working in time that might not be sustainable (Berlant 2011). But as well, vulnerability in this example may be understood as being exposed to the “qualities” (Baraitser 2017) of such orientations. This language of openness and potential in vulnerability has been explored by Gilson (2014) and others in the vulnerability literature as discussed in Chapter 1. Here, they reiterate that vulnerability is not defined by susceptibility as an *event*, but by relational openness or interdependency to changing potentialities (Murphy 2012).

In Hall’s work *Tatterdemalion*, the audience were invited to pick up the pieces and move them, where Hall explicitly invited a relational or intersubjective engagement with her work.<sup>79</sup> In this sense, it was by virtue of the temporality of Hall’s working method (to work in small pieces over time) that the work could become open to presumably changing audience interventions and identifications. It was because of the process in which her work had to be made, that the audience could intervene in its appearance, shape, and content. In this sense, the piece became vulnerable to a changing set of apprehensions, recognitions, and relational encounters over time. In Hall’s work, vulnerability as a “figure that concerns potentialities” (Murphy 2012:98), was revealed as having tangible and changing possibilities and obstructions through its no doubt variable intersubjective apprehension.

---

<sup>79</sup> There exists a precedent for engaging the audience through relational art pieces and working with themes of temporality, the body, memory, and testament. See Rounthwaite (2010) for a moving engagement of time, memory and “surviving dying” in Felix Gonzalez-Torres’ use of sweets and poster piles to represent his late partner Ross Laycock, who died from AIDS related complications, and the depoliticisations of his work which have suggested its relational nature makes its political themes flexible. See: Munoz (1999:178) for a discussion of Gonzalez-Torres artworks as “disidentity” — work which explores the self and intersecting identities through non-identitarian representational forms. See: Bishop for a discussion of relational art pieces as “antagonistic”, in that the relational component demands an “exposure of that which is repressed” (2005:35). I thank Leticia Sabsay for drawing my attention to a comparison with Gonzalez-Torres’ art.

Hall's invitation thus opens some further insights into the changeability and significance of questions of temporality and orientation in relation to experiences of vulnerability. In the first place, the audience invitation to move these pieces could have been taken in a variety of directions — signalling the openness without direction in vulnerability and interdependency that Gilson conveys (2014). But as well, the temporality or relationality of particular and differentiated embodiments can open up changing and unique relational interactions. A consideration of Hall's own requirements for a balanced temporality of living and working in her piece invited a relational engagement that changed the future of that work itself. How then, do the differentiated “manifestations” (Scully 2013:219) of such a potential (through disability, or illness in this case), set some on a path in relation to the state that can further shape the manifestation of that vulnerability (in relation to care, illness, health) in the future? And, returning to Butler's (2009) central idea around intelligibility and grievability of vulnerability: How do the intensified figurations of disability as “worklessness” work to disavow the apprehension of this process as one of vulnerability? And for whom, in what ways, and when?

Hall's invocation of relationality and intersubjectivity thus complicates processes of recognition like the WCA as being independent or external to the encounter of being 'seen'. Here, such intersubjective interactions are not merely a process of confirming, but further producing the “ill”, “disabled”, or “capable” body in relation to the future. Challenging the suggestion that we can recognise these encounters as single (universal) moments — enablers or obstructions — Hall's representation of her body centred this openness as potentiality. Thinking about the politics of recognition that occurs within this moment of viewing and engaging with Hall's work opens the possibility of thinking about recognition as itself a temporal and relational process.

To reiterate, perhaps the most overwhelming commonalities in feeling reflected in relation to the WCA was the fear, worry, and anxiety that the questions of the WCA and their temporal framing might not recognise people's changing experience of disability, impairment, or illness, but that they might be found “Fit to Work” anyway. Vulnerability then, wasn't expressed as in the body, or in relation to impairment alone, but rather a felt condition produced in relation to the process of seeking recognition

from the state for that illness or impairment. What different questions of the subject, of the body, and of the state are posed if we think about recognition as itself a temporal, relational, and vulnerable process? Hall's work was in one sense a reflection on the relationality and temporality of her individual embodiment. But it was also an intersubjective piece that could be changed through the movement/relocation of others. This raises questions of how we think of embodiments in relationship to processes, technologies of recognition, and subject formation, including, but not limited to, those that occur through the WCA.

This opens the further question of how other forms of apprehension are at play within the relational encounters of the WCA. Certainly, the WCA recognises different forms of illness and impairment over others — cultural and social understandings of mental and physical capacity are *explicitly* at play within the point based categories of capability it employs. But as well, within the one on one relationship between an applicant and their assessor, other forms of apprehension are likely at play. A chronic, but non-locatable fatigue might not be apprehended in the way that physical effects of a permanent injury might be. The temporal interruptions, hesitations, and loss of time that occur through depression might conversely be apprehended through notions of pathologisation or 'choice' in a way that chronic pain might not. The categories of capability in these encounters interplay with figurations of agency, negative dependency, and responsibility that "accumulate force" (Butler 1993b:19) prior to and beyond them. And these categories are deployed within relational encounters between the assessor and the applicant, suggesting that differential modes of apprehension will take place through the performativity of figurations of agency and deservingness in the broader austerity discourse.

But as well, Hall's representation of her vulnerability as *recognisable as whiteness* raises a final question of the gendering and racialisation that occurs through these moments of apprehension. What other intersecting forms of apprehension are at play in the encounter of the assessment — such that vulnerability in the first instance, becomes visible or recognisable at all? For Kafer (2013), and Puar (2013) disabled embodiment and temporality occurs within and through forms of racism, sexism, and classism that mark disability as an "unexpected" future. Kafer argues that imaginations of a "loss" of

the future through disability, have always been gendered, sexualised and racialised in their meaning, or that categories of race, disability, illness and class “are constituted by and through each other” (2013:32).

Here I am returning to Puar’s (2013) caution that claims to recognise the normative significance of disability must account for the bio-political processes of *normative debilitation* which racism and classism produce. The question of whether vulnerability in experiences of disability can be ‘seen’ in the first instance is raised by Hall’s representation of her vulnerability as already, and always *apprehended* through whiteness.<sup>80</sup> Hall suggested that her vulnerability is apprehended in ways that obscure the recognition of her agency. But how does this factor into classed, gendered and racialised politics in which some disabled people might always have been figured as *responsible* for their disability? How do encounters with the state through the assessment occur alongside, within, and through processes of citizen entitlement checking and surveillance that the broader austerity agenda has hastened? How does the process of recognition within the WCA interplay with and through forms of racialised, sexual or classed subjectification such that some are already affectively “suspended” (Michel 2016:250) from an intelligible vulnerability in the first instance? Thinking about recognition as a relational, temporal, and vulnerable process thus demands consideration of the asymmetrically and co-constructed modes of apprehension and response. This raises the possibility of conceptualising the politics of vulnerability that occurs through each assessment encounter.

In considering the way that Hall’s work is open to audience recognition and interaction, I am developing on the potential to think about recognition as itself a temporal and relational process. By thinking about vulnerability in relation to a more complex understanding of temporality, this process of recognition is revealed. A framework of such a temporal, relational process challenges the suggestion that vulnerability can be understood as a single (universal) orientation towards recognition by the state as an

---

<sup>80</sup> It should be made explicit here that I am not aware of the artist’s identification in relation to “whiteness”, but rather, am raising a broader question of the ways in which intersecting modes of classed, racialised and gendered figurations of agency and vulnerability might play into the apprehension of vulnerability in the assessment encounter.



achievement. Rather, vulnerability might be felt within the changing intersections, orientations or experiences through which a disability occurs in relationship to processes of seeking recognition. If public feelings of anxiety about the WCA conjoined around fears that it would not recognise specific embodiments and that such failures would impact the future, this suggests that vulnerability can be a felt condition produced through these relational processes. In this sense, the assessment appears as a process of coming up against barriers to recognition, which requires consideration of the intersecting and coproduced forms of social apprehension that make such recognition possible, if at all.

Indeed, the potentially punitive response through recognition was raised by the artist Mow in *Shoddy*. Mow's piece *Not Lost* (2016a) was a carrier bag sewn together with "proof" of everyday expenses for, and steps taken to manage, her ESA. Receipts of her expenses and the experience of "living on a financial line of which the DWP requires proof" (Mow 2016b), was represented through reproduced receipts sewn onto to the old shirt that the bag is constructed from. Hanging from above, the receipt covered carrier bag was strained under the weight of what Mow said was the "DWP, in charge of the purse strings" (Mow 2016b). The experience of collecting receipts, documents, and information that was then claimed as "lost" by the DWP, is reflected in Mow's defiant statement of "Not Lost" printed in large font across the bag. Despite the daily and time consuming process of proving her most minor movements as figured through suspicion and incredulity, Mow was both vulnerable to, and refusing of, these processes of orientation.

Indeed, The WCA was often reflected on as the *beginning* of a process — which individuals were required to consistently, and continuously navigate. Individual and spatial aspects of this navigation were frequently focussed on: filling in paperwork, finding a way to the appointment, making meetings as the terms of the ESA.<sup>81</sup> In a *Dispatches* episode, "The Great Benefits Row" (2016), which aired on Channel 4 after Duncan Smith's resignation, shots frequently lingered on stacks of initial paper work

---

<sup>81</sup> The significance or reoccurrence of these public feelings is perhaps best reflected in the DWP having produced a pamphlet of (later found to be invented) counter quotations from people who had found sanctioning/navigating sanctions as helpful, clear cut, easy (Rawlinson and Perraudin 2015).

for the ESA, emphasising the burden of collecting such information individually. Participating in this process as a condition of support was emphasised as producing feelings of vulnerability and risk. It was not a neutral process of measuring ones already standing, stagnant vulnerability or need. The process of beginning or sustaining an agreement with the DWP was one which altered time through its maintenance and repetition. For Mow, managing the ESA became a daily, laborious process to stay in the *same* place of recognition. These were acts which might be “durational and repetitious [...] time that seems frozen or unbearable in its refusal to move on” (Baraitser 2017:51).

This could include adhering to strict and specific requirements to be seen at all:

Under the current system, no matter how ill [...] you may be, you are responsible for proactively gathering your own medical evidence [...] If you fail to do this, it simply won't be looked at. (Paul Jenkins, quoted in O'Hara 2015a:154)

As well as moments in which people could not categorically fit:

A client was appealing an ESA decision which deemed him/her fit for work. Whilst awaiting the outcome of the mandatory reconsideration request, the only source of income s/he could claim was the JSA. S/he advised the JCP of potential restrictions in jobseeking caused by her physical and mental health. S/he was then told that s/he was not fit for work under the JSA agreement. As a result, the client was left ineligible for payment of either sickness or job seeking benefits. (West Dunbartonshire Citizens Advice Bureau 2014)

I am returning here to Munro and Scoular's (2012) consideration of the way in which vulnerability, or the recognition of vulnerability, can set in path an orientation to the state (of surveillance, of support) that is not singularly, or necessarily 'good'. In considering the process of assessment, I am reading Mow's and other's feelings of anger, resentment, surveillance, and fear as revealing of a condition of vulnerability *to* such a process. Indeed, rather than secondary, or unimportant, these feelings might further reveal a relationship between orientation and vulnerability. In this way, the assessment does not just act as a singular moment, or obstacle in seeking recognition or the measure of *what comes next*. It is also a process of continuous orientation towards and away from state support, which becomes productive of the feelings and experiences of vulnerability, endurance, maintenance, and proving which Mow's work reflected.

In this way, I am leaning on Kafer's approach to temporality, to consider how we may see vulnerability as a felt experience of being moved through, or coming up against, structures of support, barriers or openings of recognition. These barriers and openings are thus relationally constructed through interconnected frames of identity, recognition and the encounter. They produce questions about the temporality of vulnerability itself. In suggesting here that vulnerability be considered as an orientation towards processes of recognition, I am arguing that vulnerability might also be thought of as part of a process of coming into repeated contact with frames, conceptions of value, normative temporalities and institutional obstacles that can both heighten or eliminate practical and emotional senses of *being* vulnerable. In this way, I want to suggest that this is not just an individually felt aspect of seeking appropriate recognition for vulnerability, but that these orientations around structures of state support, might be constitutive of being vulnerable both within, and to, state mechanisms.

In taking these feelings as not just representations, but constitutive of a vulnerable condition, I am suggesting that extending both a temporal understanding of vulnerability beyond over the lifetime, as well as extending a concept of vulnerability to include feeling vulnerable. This allows slowing down the thinking about recognition and the state, to think through what these (sometimes minor and sometimes major) orientations mean for understanding both the temporality of vulnerability over one's life, but also, the frames through which we recognise the process of being, or perhaps becoming, vulnerable at all. In this way, I respond to both Butler (2016) and Munro and Scoular (2012) who suggest caution in viewing a broad conceptualisation of recognition as an end point, as well as allowing space to take seriously the felt frustrations, ambivalences, and practices that the politics of vulnerability seems so often to encompass. In this way, engagements with the WCA become themselves vulnerable process of continuous orientation towards and away from state support — both productive of feelings, of subjectivities, and experiences of vulnerability, and perhaps importantly, as in Mow's work, simultaneously generative of moments of subversion, resistance, and refusal.

### **Interdependency, recognition, and care**

This chapter began with the suggestion that the vulnerability literature can be extended by an approach to thinking about vulnerability politics through temporality and feeling. Rather than a subject position or universal potential, I have argued for thinking about vulnerability in relationship to the feelings exposed as going hand in hand with the undergoing the WCA and the specific figurations of disability and “worklessness” within the politics of vulnerability under austerity. In this way, I have explored one aspect of the mutual engagement between feminist disability studies and the vulnerability literature. That is, a shared interest in questions of temporality and time within these literatures, via the feelings that surrounded the process of assessment in relation to disability benefit entitlement in UK austerity.

I argued that thinking on temporality and feeling can extend beyond the current framing of vulnerability as an essentially temporal condition, to reflect back on what such a temporal, or affective approach to orientations might mean for questions of recognition in the literature on vulnerability. In extending this thinking around temporality and vulnerability as a felt condition or orientation, I borrowed from Kafer’s approach to crip time to consider how we may think of vulnerable temporalities as shifting, breaking, momentary and spatial — occurring through and within processes through which some bodies can become differentially vulnerable to the dominant temporal framings of the disability assessment.<sup>82</sup>

Importantly, I see this discussion as intervening with some of the more conservative tendencies in some vulnerability literature which imagine a point of transformative state recognition. Here I questioned if the recognition of vulnerability could ever be a stagnant possibility, rather than one that occurs in relation to the politics of vulnerability as a process of engaging with, and investing in, the state. My analysis of public feelings that surrounded the WCA in this chapter not only points to the limits of

---

<sup>82</sup> My focus on temporality in this chapter is not exhaustive. There are many more ways in which the literature on vulnerability might be extended via an engagement with the specific work on queer temporality, debility, and crip theory, and importantly, many ways in which disability could (and should) be understood in the UK today (both outside of, and in relation to, current austerity policies).

state recognition (questions of surveillance, obstruction, and misrecognition), but also the various ways in which modes of achieving such recognitions become processes of vulnerability in themselves. In thinking through the state as experienced through an orienting set of processes in this chapter, I have argued for the need to consider this *process* of seeking recognition as part of conceptualising the politics of vulnerability. I believe this offers room to reflect both, on the kind of social justice imagined in state recognition, and on questions of where and how such processes of vulnerable subjectification intervene, and can be intervened with. I want to suggest that in situating vulnerability not as only as a feeling, but as a condition with affects, we may move further than a framing which posits bodies *as* vulnerable, and vulnerable (or not) *over time*.

However, in returning to Gilson's (2011) hesitation with the assumed negativity in vulnerability, I also want to caution that an approach to such orientations does not have to be understood only in the negative. Indeed, such processes of vulnerability can also lead towards other, or 'good' outcomes. These public feelings surrounding the WCA led to forms of resistance and relational knowledge — the formation of collectives of feeling such as the *Shoddy* exhibition itself. They opened the possibility to think through and make visible the differentiated politics of vulnerability that was highlighted by these artists. They serve as sites of feeling which can orient towards modes of activism, refusal, and care — undoubtedly necessary in the political present. Moreover, for many, maintaining an attachment to these processes is an undeniably necessary part of achieving outcomes of support that make life liveable. Refusing the *terms* of such subjectification, as for Mow, does not always mean refusing to take part in such a process. In this, there are ways to resist the logics of the current political moment without refusing the possibility or certainty of vulnerability. This I believe, is what Butler (2015a:140) insists on when she suggests that vulnerability is not contradictory to agency or resistance, in which vulnerability may be central to forms of resistance, rather than its hindrance.<sup>83</sup> Particularly in the context of writing about gender and disability,

---

<sup>83</sup> In Butler's (2015a) chapter *Bodily Vulnerability, Coalitional Politics*, she responds to an interpretation of vulnerability that does not allow for agency or resistance. This is similarly explored in Mackenzie, Rogers and Dodds (2013) through the concept of relational autonomy, and is more fully established in the recent edited volume *Vulnerability in Resistance*, which challenges the "basic assumption that vulnerability and

the ambivalence of seeking relational independence is clear. As Dan Goodley, Rebecca Lawthom and Katherine Runswick-Cole suggest in their discussion of slow death, disability, and poverty under austerity:

Disability then, offers opportunities for reconsidering our relationships with life, labour and slow death. Could care, rather than work, be a place to find identity and recognition? Why wear yourself out? [...] How do we support each other in times of austerity? (2014:983)

Indeed, what slips out of my focus on disability through the WCA is the reciprocal and interdependent care practices that continue through these struggles for state support. What are the temporalities of care and reciprocity that become central to both state and non-state modes of support? Or, what are the acts of maintenance and self-care that sustain and continue alongside and these engagements? How does temporality figure through the relationships of “dependency work” (Kittay 1999) or the “disavowed durational activities that sustain people, situations and phenomena [...] and thereby underpin the maintenance of everyday life” (Baraitser 2017:49)? Particularly in the context in which care from the state (as revealed by Mow) becomes one of violent observation and a draining practice of endurance through which to secure material forms of survival — how might we value, critically investigate, recognise, and sustain the enduring practices of care and reciprocity that occur in excess of these penalising activities?<sup>84</sup> For Mow, ‘care’ by the state is revealed as an ongoing practice on the part of the cared for to maintain proof of their eligibility. But, just as bringing these literatures together affords a certain lens on which to examine the temporal framing of vulnerability within the literature approached in Chapter 1 — it also points towards the mutual interest in the significance of relationality, care, and resistance and the stake of these conceptualisations within the current dismantling of the welfare state.

In the far corner of the *Shoddy* exhibition, the audience was invited to sit down (how artist Katy White said she spends her day) and listen (White 2016a). While we watched a film of White’s hands slowly dying fabric, a quiet recorded conversation between White

---

resistance are mutually oppositional [...] What follows when we conceive of resistance [as drawing from vulnerability[...] ?” (Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay 2016:1).

<sup>84</sup> These are questions we explore in the forthcoming publication (Gibbs and Lehtonen 2019).

and her mother began. Moving through craft as self-care, the politics of care (which included anger for the absence of care that has been provided to her by the state), White and her mother reflected on the importance, difficulties, and significance of relational care which had filled in the gap. Such care is exemplified by her mother's voice, whose hands, powerful in their absence, we never saw. White's discussion of her mother's support and family history of labour and illness drew a relaxing reflection on healing and relationality, or "the ways people are finding and sharing forms of care that are missing from the state" (White 2016b). Slowing the reading of vulnerability politics then, also makes visible the forms of reciprocity and care that are maintained and enduring alongside these processes of formal recognition. These relational care practices are overlapping with the politics of vulnerability under austerity. Thus, there remains room to explore the feelings and temporality of these practices of resistance and care that are undoubtedly integral to the politics of vulnerability as well.

## Chapter Five

### **Feminist feeling: Telling the story of domestic violence services under austerity**

While researching for this chapter on the visibility of domestic violence services within the austerity discourse, I found an earlier book by Rebecca Emerson Dobash and Russell Dobash (1992) that outlines the history of the refuge movement in the UK. Prefiguring Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti and Leticia Sabsay who position the refuge as developing from a diverse “grassroots” (2016:2) politics of vulnerability, the book provides an in-depth account of the refuge movement and its historic place within feminist responses to gendered violence. The authors situate the refuge “at the heart of the battered women’s movement” (1992:58), where:

the refuge itself [acts as] a fundamental means by which feminist politics is developed, sustained and rekindled within the context of the problem itself, and in close contact with the daily lives of its sufferers. (Dobash and Dobash 1992:58)

For Dobash and Dobash, the refuge was a site of positive feeling in the context of feminist responses to significant suffering. The refuge was thus the *heart*, or the affective centre, of 1970s feminist vulnerability politics.

Women’s Aid, the largest contemporary network of domestic violence refuges in the UK, developed from this 1970’s battered women’s movement. Under austerity, they sought to highlight the vulnerability of specialist domestic violence services to commissioning, tendering, and localisation processes, launching the *Save Our Services* campaign in 2014, and supporting the All-Parliamentary Party Group report on *The Changing Landscape of Domestic and Sexual Violence Services* in 2016. Sharing a call with academics and activists, Women’s Aid have addressed the need for local and central government to respond to the cumulative effects of austerity measures on the sector. While still “proud of” their “roots” within the women’s movement (Women’s Aid



2017), UK Media, Ministers, and researchers affirm Women's Aid as contemporary sector experts (Stewart 2016).<sup>85</sup> The position of Women's Aid as developing from, but beyond, the 1970s women's movement is important to this chapter. In that they are now explicitly divested of a feminist project, and largely act as an expert body (Matczak, Hatzidimitriadou and Lindsay 2011:21), their attachment to the "fundamental means" (Dobash and Dobash 1992:45) of a grassroots feminist politics is perhaps more hesitant.

In June 2016 i-D, a subsidiary of Vice Magazine, ran an online editorial on the work of the direct-action group Sisters Uncut, labelling them as a "reminder of what feminism really means" (Jackman 2016). Established in 2014, Sisters Uncut had become a recognisable face of direct action activism around domestic violence services under austerity. Over time, the group developed into a network of regional activist groups across the UK who organised around specific local decision making and broader centralised funding policies which compound local commissioning issues for the sector. They shared Women's Aid's diagnosis of the problems faced by the sector under austerity. Yet, Sisters Uncut centred the way in which specialist disabled women's, LGBT, Black and Minority Ethnic [BME], and migrant women's access to services had been especially impacted by austerity. They labelled themselves intersectional feminist activists and argued that issues of refuge provision interplay with modes of state violence and surveillance under austerity.<sup>86</sup> Extending Women's Aid's earliest framework of domestic violence as a question of gender and power (Dobash and Dobash 1992), Sisters Uncut explicitly considered gendered violence as including acts of "violence, abuse or oppressive discrimination" (Sisters Uncut 2016b) that occur through gendered, classed, and racialised forms of detention and criminalisation. They thus reworked a framing of *domestic* gendered vulnerability in relation to the refuge. Borrowing the signature green and purple of the 20<sup>th</sup> century UK Suffragettes, and producing materials with a 1970s reminiscent risograph logo and name, the group

---

<sup>85</sup> I focus on the SOS and APPG campaign over the *Give Me Shelter* campaign Women's Aid produced with *The Sun* (discussed below), despite the latter's reach. This is because the audience for the SOS campaign and the APPG report speak to the feminist subject I am concerned with in this chapter.

<sup>86</sup> See Okolosi's (2014) discussion of the crucial importance, difficulties and limitations of more recent claims to the label "intersectional activists".

engaged in demonstrations in public places, council meetings, and housing occupations between 2015 and 2016. Since their first major public intervention in which they disrupted the red carpet at the London film premiere of *Suffragette*, an archive of media references to Sisters Uncut as the “real” (Cliff 2016; Foster 2016b; Nagesh 2016) feminist response to austerity processes was building.

---

These responses to the state of domestic violence refuges by Women’s Aid and Sisters Uncut, in relation to the feminist history of the domestic violence sector that Dobash and Dobash (1992) illustrate, make up the case study for this chapter. In what follows, I argue that contemporary responses to the domestic violence refuge are of importance to an exploration of the politics of vulnerability in the austerity moment. As in Chapter 4, the topic of gendered violence exists as a particularly loaded site within vulnerability politics. Central to this chapter is this history of contestation within feminism over the issue of gendered violence and its various responses. Tracing claims by advocates and activists about the vulnerability of women’s refuges in relation to austerity measures, this chapter argues that feelings about a feminist vulnerability politics of the *past* becomes key to the broader visibility of this activism in the present. Considering how these mobilisations resonated with a wider articulation of feminist politics in relation to gendered violence, I argue that “public feeling” (Cvetkovich 2012) about the vulnerability of the domestic violence refuge under austerity, was drawn through and emboldened by these historically troubled contestations within feminism. I consider how an ambivalent feminist history affectively surfaces through these contemporary articulations.

Taking a different track to the previous chapter and its focus on feeling vulnerable under austerity measures, in what follows I argue that attention to the feelings invoked within feminist politics around the refuge can reveal important insights into the haunting of second wave articulations of gendered violence within contemporary vulnerability politics and literatures. Narrowing the frame of public feeling to consider the feelings mobilised within and through the gendered vulnerability politics under austerity, I consider that the campaigns of Women’s Aid and Sisters Uncut invoked a

feminist subject to tell the story of domestic violence services under austerity. In this chapter I borrow from Sara Ahmed's (2017) articulation of feminism as a politics of feeling, Clare Hemmings (2011) work on the presumed subject of western feminist storytelling, and Victoria Hesford's (2005) exploration of second wave feminism's ghosts. In doing so, I explore how the citational and representational work of a feminist politics within the context of 'vulnerable' domestic violence services, reveals the ambivalence and haunting within feminist articulations around gendered vulnerability more broadly.

From the starting point of Dobash and Dobash's (1992) articulation of the domestic violence refuge as at the heart of the 1970s women's movement, this chapter compares the mobilisations of Women's Aid and Sisters Uncut for the way in which they told the story of the domestic violence refuge under contemporary austerity. I compare these two groups despite their different strategic positioning within the sector, because of their shared orientation around the closure and underfunding of UK domestic violence services. I argue this shared diagnosis of domestic violence services as an issue of gendered precarity under austerity, located them both within a politics of vulnerability under austerity, and a politics of vulnerability within feminism. In addition, the frequent media focus on these groups to provide accounts of the gendered effects of austerity, makes their public visibility a concern of this thesis.

Initially, I was drawn to this comparison to consider why domestic violence services had come to stand as a shared focus under austerity, so much that it could be cared about in these differing strategic domains. But during the time of writing, Sisters Uncut and Women's Aid became the visible advocate and activist groups to which media representations of the austerity and women's services often exclusively circulated. This positioned them as both represented in, and actively representing, the scene of this debate. The media take up of these groups as articulating the gendered politics of vulnerability under austerity positioned them at an important intersection between a broader politics of vulnerability specific to the austerity discourse, and a history of feminist responses to the unequal gendered distribution of violence. Given the vulnerability literature's broader hesitation with the topic of gendered violence and agency discussed below, this chapter considers how the contemporary feminist activism

surrounding domestic violence refuges was animated by the contested feminist engagement with the concept of gendered vulnerability.

I am not comparing Sisters Uncut and Women's Aid together in this chapter to draw conclusions on the value of their politicising, or to argue that activism or advocacy is a more effective way of responding to domestic violence. To compare a direct-action feminist group, and the representative body for a network of funded services, and claim the former is explicitly feminist, and latter is not, would be a straight forward (and unfair) argument. Sisters Uncut were neither strategically invested in service provision, nor claimed to represent it, and so did not share the same responsibilities as the Women's Aid network in relation to sustaining funding or expertise within contemporary policy climates. At the same time, in performing an occupation-based form of assembly Sisters Uncut faced others. Direct-action activists risk criminalisation, violence, and dismissal (Butler 2015a).<sup>87</sup> I am holding these strategically diverse campaigns together in this chapter to consider how their mutual focus on the site of the refuge invokes, is cautioned by, takes up, or seeks to circulate feminist feelings about a vulnerability politics of the past.<sup>88</sup> In this way, I read the presence of these groups within the broader austerity discourse as part of the ongoing, productive discourse on the meaning of gendered vulnerability. In doing so my discussion draws on the sustained history, haunting, and meaning of 'women's vulnerability' within feminist articulations in the present.

### **A feminist politics of vulnerability**

The cost of government cuts isn't always visible. But there is no escaping it in Sunderland, where services to vulnerable women are under threat. (Ryan 2017)

---

<sup>87</sup> My positioning of the two as distinct representational approaches in this chapter does not take for granted that they share much terrain in relation to workers, service users, and researchers (Glasius and Ishkanian 2015).

<sup>88</sup> This chapter is not focussed on emotion within activism or advocacy — or the affective labour of advocacy and activist work. See: Kennelly (2014:256) for a discussion of emotion, guilt and "burn out" in activist organising and care work. See: Clayton, Donavon and Merchant (2015) for an exploration of emotion and care in the broader third sector under austerity conditions.

What does it mean that, as in the above *Guardian* article, a call to *vulnerable women* becomes a key way in which the gendered effects of austerity can be made *visible*? How does this focus on the refuge sit within the broader vulnerability literature which so hesitantly invokes the politics of gendered violence — the theoretical sticking point which Ann Murphy labels as “vexed” (2012:70) for feminism? The simultaneous necessity, and deep hesitation, that travelled through the visibility of this site in the austerity moment informs the broader questions of this chapter. How do feminist knowledges and feelings about the vulnerability politics of gendered violence travel under austerity? Who is the presumed subject that recognises their articulations? How does the vexed character of this vulnerability politics of the past, fill these contemporary articulations with meaning?

As I have argued in earlier chapters, within the austerity discourse certain policy changes, cuts, and processes came to stand in for the claim that austerity processes made population groups ‘more vulnerable’. In attempting to articulate the gendered effects of austerity processes, cuts to government spending and changed local commissioning practices around domestic violence services have held a particularly visible place.<sup>89</sup> While the gendered effects of austerity processes are intersecting and cumulative (Brah, Szeman and Gedalof 2015; LSE 2015), the closure of domestic violence services was often used to exemplify these multiple effects. A combination of local provisioning policies, competitive commissioning and tendering processes, non-ring fenced central funding, and cuts to housing benefits, left specialist domestic violence services, (particularly those providing accommodation), competing against larger general housing providers in tender processes (Bassel and Emejulu 2017; Sanders-McDonagh, Neville and Nolas 2016; Vacchelli et. al. 2015). Funding cuts to local councils, which did not ring fence funds for specialist services, alongside a move towards “value for money” commissioning processes (Ishkanian 2014:335), have been argued to leave specialist services especially “vulnerable” (Sanders-McDonagh, Neville and Nolas 2016:61). This diagnosis of the refuge as itself vulnerable by feminist advocates and activists, raises the question of the gendered politics of vulnerability around the site of the refuge and those that interact with it. If the “costs of government

---

<sup>89</sup>: See: Anonymous (2016); Bennhold (2012); Coyne (2016); Cooper (2012) Fawcett Society (2012); Gayle (2016); Mirror (2015), Neate (2015); Peacock (2013); Rogers (2016).

cuts aren't always visible" (Ryan 2017), why is it that the refuge was? Given the long feminist engagement with the issue of gendered violence and the subject of 'women's vulnerability' — the feminist stakes in this claim were not trivial.

It is likely that the closure of domestic violence services under austerity was a sticking point in part because gendered violence as a political issue was not invisible in the wider discourse. While Dobash and Dobash (1992) site Women's Aid's early achievements being in making gendered vulnerability *visible*, the austerity discourse posed a unique set of concerns. Indeed, there was a glaring contradiction of the issues facing the refuge sector given a broader government policy agenda on Violence Against Women and Girls (Home Office 2010; 2015). Despite the cross-party emphasis on addressing issues of violence against women, the vulnerability of an historic feminist response to this issue — the refuge — became a forceful reminder of the inadequacy of recognition of 'women's vulnerability' within the multiplicity of its mobilisations (Munro and Scoular 2012). Indeed, the closure of services was occurring within a broader political discourse in which mobilisations of women's vulnerability were sustained and employed in debates around policing, family policy, education, migration, housing, and religion, but in which situated feminist forms of care such as the refuge were facing closure.

Our goal is to work with local commissioners to deliver a secure future for rape support centres, refuges and FGM and Forced Marriage Units, whilst driving a major change across all services so that early intervention and prevention, not crisis response, is the norm. (Home Office 2016:10)

The ambivalent outcomes of a feminist politics around gendered vulnerability can be witnessed in the Governments *major drive* to move beyond and above *crisis response* and towards *prevention*. While many within the 1970s-feminist refuge movement sought to position gendered violence as a structural rather than intrinsic phenomenon (Ferraro 1996), understandings of violence as a "culturally transmitted" (Dobash and Dobash 1992:88) vulnerability of some women and not others was also central to many of these earlier frameworks. The racialised, classed, and normative sexual resonances within the idea of culturally transmitted approaches to violence haunt the opaque framework of *prevention* within the contemporary VAWG agenda. When thought in relationship to Imogen Tyler's analysis of the "culturalization of poverty" (2013:162) in which structural institutional causes of poverty are denied through the emphasis on poverty as

culturally transmitted — *early interventions* and *prevention* into domestic violence appear as troubling frames. These policy directions also stand as clues to the tension that emerge when a historically grassroots women’s sector now exists within regulatory forms of criminal control and response (Radford and Hill 2006). The classed, racialised, and normative gendered and sexual frames of early intervention and prevention mark the ways in which a feminist focus on domestic violence has often “collid[ed] with repressive mechanisms of state control” (Ferraro 1996:77).

Working within this contradictory moment in which ‘women’s vulnerability’ was mobilised within governmental logics, Sisters Uncut and Women’s Aid sought to emphasise the space of the domestic violence refuge as a tested, historical, and effective response to the violence the Government agenda ostensibly claimed to address. However, given that refuge services are also embedded within the political context in which funding is exchanged for contributing to the knowledge about gendered vulnerability that the government agenda mobilises, feminist responses to violence now stand more ambivalently as both challenging and contributing to the regulatory politics around gendered violence under austerity.

Reading the campaigns of Women’s Aid and Sisters Uncut for the way in which they told the story of the refuge in this contentious contemporary moment, I argue that their narratives were at once spirited by, invoking of, and are hesitant to return to the complicated feminist engagement with the subject of women’s vulnerability to violence. In mobilising feminist feelings for the grassroots history of the refuge movement, these campaigns reveal the ambivalent progression of the politics of vulnerability in relation to gendered violence for feminism. In this chapter I argue that feminist feelings for this historic and contemporary vulnerability politics thus imbue the story of the refuge under austerity with meaning. My approach to thinking about feminist feelings in this chapter is also influenced by a long tradition of thinking about emotion and feminist politics together. Audre Lorde outlined the “uses of anger” (1984:124) about racism as a means of analysing its presence within feminist politics. Sara Ahmed (2017) has more recently linked a sense of coming to feminism through feeling, in which feminist practice is linked to feelings about sexism, homophobia, and racism. Clare Hemmings

suggests that it is “affects of misery, rage, passion and pleasure — that gives feminism life” (2005:150).

### **Visibility and violence**

In May 2015, *The Sun* headlined an edition with a four-page campaign, informed and endorsed by Women’s Aid, called *Give Me Shelter* (Hendry 2015a, 2015b, 2015c). In the campaign, *The Sun* called on the Conservative Government to address the “emergency” facing women’s refuge services. This appeared as a surprising call given *The Sun*’s contentious history of representing domestic violence.<sup>90</sup> The campaign consisted of 48 profiles of women, represented both in text and photographs, who lost their lives to domestic violence in the previous year in the UK (Hendry 2015a). The contemporary emergency of the shelter was introduced through the stories of the “mums, sisters, daughters and granddaughters” who were “throttled” and “stabbed” by their partners (Hendry, Jackson and Sloan 2015). Representations of these deaths were largely left alone to tell the story of the refuge through sensationalist, sometimes implicitly racialised narratives of women’s vulnerability to violent deaths. While the necessity of domestic violence refuges was rhetorically centralised in the campaign, these images and narratives were also “highly mediatized in sentimental ways” (Ahiska 2017:213) to the effect of presenting women’s vulnerability to violence as a stagnant fact. Echoing Meltem Ahiska’s consideration of the paradoxical *visibility* of representations of women’s death to domestic violence in visual campaigns against such in Turkey, the images represented the victims as “petrified and fixed in time” (2016:213). Essentialised narratives of women’s vulnerability to violence were left unchallenged in the piece, in which “tragic victims” had left behind “motherless children” (Hendry, Jackson and Sloan 2015). For Ahiska, such representations in Turkey, affirm women as essentially vulnerable to death and work to reify gender and sexual norms. Despite the frequent contextualization of these forms of violence within the normative domestic sphere, such vulnerability is abstracted at the point of horrific and non-normative death. For Ahiska, such representations thus paradoxically present that for women to “survive”

---

<sup>90</sup> See Lloyd and Ramon (2017) for an analysis of “deserving” and “undeserving victims” in reports on domestic violence in *The Sun* and *The Guardian*.



they must “submit to the regime of gender in which female desire is equated with dangerous sexuality, and hence violently regulated to the point of death” (2016:223).<sup>91</sup>

On discovering this campaign by *The Sun* whilst collecting archival material, I immediately distrusted it, and as with many others, was quick to distance it from what I would understand as a nuanced account of the current “emergency” (Greenslade 2015; Ridley 2015). I was perplexed by Women’s Aid’s association with the campaign, and spent an afternoon trawling the internet to confirm whether they had merely endorsed or contributed to it. Moreover, because I felt I *knew* what the politics of these representations might be, I was discomforted by the call to the bodily vulnerability of women to make this claim about austerity. In this sense, it was my familiarity with the feminist writing on representations of women as ‘more vulnerable’ which informed my unwillingness to draw links between *The Sun*’s campaign and the *feminist* politics I was following.

However, in telling the story of domestic violence services under austerity, such representations of women’s vulnerability to death circulated widely. The disproportional vulnerability of women to partner violence was explicitly drawn through almost all the campaigns I discuss in this chapter. Both Women’s Aid and Sisters Uncut employed the statistic of “two women every week” — similarly highlighting the deaths of women to domestic violence. Issues effecting domestic violence services were said to “cost lives” (Women’s Aid 2014:6). Sisters Uncut campaigned around the reminder that “dead women can’t vote” and used representations of blood and gravestones in their public demonstrations. Was my discomfort with the broader politics of vulnerability around gendered violence being unfairly displaced onto *The Sun*? Weren’t these campaigns mobilising a similarly troubling language of women’s disproportional vulnerability (and a similar representation of their deaths), to establish the scene of the current debate?

---

<sup>91</sup> Feminist media studies presents an ongoing challenge to representations of rape and gendered violence in the media. See: Cuklanz (1998) for a review of some of these engagements.

As we know, there is always something both risky and true in claiming that women or other socially disadvantaged groups are especially vulnerable. (Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay 2016:2)

Feminist politics has historically grappled with the necessity and difficulty of politicising the subject of women's vulnerability to violence. For Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay, what has been *true* about such work, has been the need to politicise the multiple (and intersecting) reasons that women may be disproportionately those who experience sexual and intimate forms of violence.<sup>92</sup> But what *we know* is *risky* about this politics, is the difficulty of resisting the essentialising work that claiming women are vulnerable does, whilst also achieving apprehension of the intersecting forms of violence to which women might be uniquely exposed. As I have argued in Chapter 1, knowledge of this risky politics is implicitly drawn through the most recent literature on vulnerability. In *Violence and the Philosophical Imaginary*, Murphy (2012) argues that vulnerability is a vexed concept for feminism, precisely in relation to a politics around gendered violence. Heated contestations within feminism over the racialised, classed, and gendered implications of feminist accounts of 'women's' oppression, victimization, agency and sex/gender, are frequently narrated in relation to a feminist politics around violence. The known feminisation and racialisation of vulnerability introduced Chapter 1 cannot be separated from this feminist history through which claims to the differential distribution of gendered violence have been made.

Feminist articulations of rape and trauma are frequently tied to the 1970s Women's Liberation Movement and its "consciousness raising" (Cornell 2000:1033) ethos. Certainly, accounts of sexual violence as an essential experience of women's embodiment were drawn through works such as Susan Brownmiller's (1975) *Against Our Will*, where her account of rape as a political phenomenon also articulates rape in relation to her understanding of an embodied sexual difference. Articulations of trauma and 'wholeness' within feminist rape recovery discourses have received criticism for their articulations of gender, sexuality, the body, and sexual violence as a singular point

---

<sup>92</sup> I am following Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay to consider "women" here as a gendered category that must be thought of as once both inclusive and open-ended (2016:2). As well I consider the frame of women's vulnerability to domestic violence as itself a discursive one which often fails to articulate the differential exposure and apprehension of such vulnerability in relation to race, class, disability, sexuality, gender presentation, and its framing of the normative domestic sphere.

of women's trauma (Cvetkovich 2003; Lamb 1999; Murphy 2012). Given the intensified focus on rape and bodily violation within these accounts, many feminists have grown wary of the positioning of gendered vulnerability to violence as the basis of feminist claims. The question that these earlier activist and theoretical engagements with vulnerability raised was how to represent women as experiencing specific forms of embodied violence in ways which did not undermine the simultaneous "insistence on women as embodied subjects in their own right" (Robson 2015:46). Essential to articulations of agency I have introduced in Chapter 1, is the prevalence of accounts of sexual violence that risk presenting women as a 'vulnerable population' (Cahill 2001:25) which in turn discursively produce women as defined through vulnerability.

Angela Davis (1981), bell hooks (1984) and Vron Ware (1992) have also challenged these earlier movements for the universalism of their articulations of gendered vulnerability, and for failing to account for the historic, and contemporary place of white women's perceived vulnerability within colonial and racial violence. Davis (1981) responds to Brownmiller (1975), to argue that relating rape to an understanding of biological sex and power, reifies racist mythologies of white women's vulnerability to black men. Davis' account, which nonetheless sustains sexual violence as the "violent face of sexism" (1981:201) within capitalist patriarchy, critiques those working on the politics of rape for the implicit centralisation of white women's experience within these accounts. For hooks, the Women's Liberation Movement's focus on vulnerability or "powerless, passive victims" (1984:15) was the reason white members of the movement were unable to interrogate their racial privilege (hooks 1984; see also Adams 1989). Ware's (1992) account of racism within the history of the feminist movement throws question on the figuration of women's universal vulnerability, given white women's often active positioning in enacting colonial and racial violence. The politics of vulnerability around gendered violence is consequently a contested site through which understandings and the discursive production of universalism, agency, resistance, and 'women' become central.

At their strongest, critiques of feminist gendered violence politics have accused feminists of investing in versions of victimhood (Lamb 1999; hooks 1984). Sharon Marcus suggests that feminist discourses present a "rape script" of women as "already

raped and rapable” (1992:388), and thus reiterate women’s vulnerability as an essential quality of gendered bodies.<sup>93</sup> For Marcus, rape is better considered as a discursive construct which works within language to reiterate the gendered distribution of power (1992:387). Marcus’ account of an essentialised discursive vulnerability was thus key to her critique of the amenability of feminist violence discourses to gendered and racist regulation where:

To take male violence or female vulnerability as the first and last instances in any explanation of rape is to make the identities of rapist and raped preexist the rape itself. (1992:391)

Politicisation around women’s vulnerability has thus been argued to produce a ‘vulnerable subject’ open to protection and regulation and amenable to governmental “prevention” discourses (Hall 2004:1; see also: Murphy 2007). Moreover, forms of state protection (policing, protection orders) invested in by some feminist activists have been critiqued for ignoring how state violence is so often mobilised against people of colour (Crenshaw 1991). In turn, those that have questioned the fixed relationship between gendered vulnerability and trauma have been accused of trivializing the material reality of women’s experiences of vulnerability (Hawkesworth 1989; Nussbaum 1999). Just as the 1990s were animated by similarly dichotomous articulations of sexual violence and pleasure (Cvetkovich 2003, 2013; Murphy 2007), contemporary engagements with sex work, have at times sustained the ‘sides’ of these debates in their articulations of the vulnerability, violence, and agency of sex work (Andrijasevic 2007; Doezema 2010; FitzGerald 2012).

Narrating the place of these debates within presumed generational and epistemic positions, Hemmings draws on the frequent citation of the “sex wars” (2011:50) in western feminist progress narratives as one example of the haunting of these articulations. Vulnerability, sexual violence, and articulations of heterosexuality linked to women’s oppression appear as the spectres of a loaded political site of contestation around the victim, agency, and the category of ‘woman’. Second wave feminism, in which responses to sexual and domestic violence were certainly centred, now stand as

---

<sup>93</sup> See also Gavey (1999) for an account of the work of victim and survivor in feminist research on rape and her discussion of “unacknowledged rape victims” and “attempted rape victims”.

the historical locations in which accusations of anti-sex, racism, and transphobia lie (Hemmings 2011). Elizabeth Freeman in her attention to the queer work of “temporal drag” cites this period as one of “disavowed political histories” (2010:65). Hemmings suggests that progress narratives position the 1970s as “thoroughly unified in its aims, unreflexive in its theorisations, yet bold in its ambitions” (2011:39). For Rebecca Stringer, the rightly critiqued history of western second wave politics around violence has contributed to a “victim-bad/agent-good” (2014:59) formulation which does not allow a view of the way in which agency is also a category animated to perform feminising and racialising work in transnational and neoliberal discourses of gendered violence. Given the amenability of frames of victimhood and agency to both neoliberal and transnational figurations and displacements, Stringer places Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1988), bell hooks (1984) and Kalpana Wilson’s (2013) emphasis on figurations of agency and victimhood in conversation. Through these accounts of victimhood and agency in relation to ‘third world women’ and white women’s victimhood, Stringer argues it is attention to, rather than refusal of, the subjectifying and affective work that agency and victim in relation to gendered vulnerability perform that is necessary.<sup>94</sup>

Certainly, a focus on the development of the UK refuge movement locates these risks especially, given that in narratives of western feminist past, to borrow Hemmings (2011) phrasing, 1970s politicisation of gendered violence is often located as conversely: the source of an explicitly political feminist practice around violence; *and* the site of ‘victim-politics’. It is the place where both the overly wilful, political, feminist killjoy (Ahmed 2010a), and the inactive ‘victim-feminist’ (Stringer 2014; Cole 2016) are seen to live. Indeed, within contrasting accounts, the 1970s holds a paradoxical place through which the risks of vulnerability politics have been sustained. Critiquing this duality is central to Carine Mardorossian’s response to accusations of “victim feminism” in which she asks why “the radical and revolutionary” work of 1970s feminists:

have come to represent ‘victimhood’ two decades later? There is at least a paradox in this discursive development that requires a scrutiny of the very term victim and what it encompasses. (2002:767)

---

<sup>94</sup> For my understanding of agency in relation to vulnerability, see Chapter 1.

The history of the women's refuge movement in the UK thus travels alongside these vexed contestations and the engagements with the state that feminist grassroots responses to violence have both challenged and participated in. These theoretical contestations over the subject of women and violence, are often centred within empirical or anecdotal accounts of women's movements and refuge politics — their “bold ambitions” and its “unified aims” (Hemmings 2011:39; see also: Adams 1989). For Kimberle Crenshaw (1991), it is through the US domestic violence sector that the failure to think about the intersections of race, gender, and class is made apparent. For Crenshaw, feminist domestic violence organisations were too easy to invest and collaborate with state in forms of criminalisation because they failed to attend to the ways in which state intervention might be experienced by women of colour. These critiques were echoed in the framework of domestic violence proposed by Sisters Uncut in the contemporary moment. The group's attachment to the refuge was sustained within a critique of the intersecting and proximal austerity, border, and policing processes which might mark someone as vulnerable. These debates over agency/victimhood, sex/gender, the framework of ‘woman’, and the conceptualisation of vulnerability inform the risks of this politics that Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay (2016:2) refer to. I argue that given that *we now know* the risks of this activism of the past, the renewed visibility of the domestic violence refuge in the austerity moment offers an important opportunity to analyse the resonances of this politics in its contemporary forms.

Following Clare Hemmings (2011) exploration of progress and loss narratives in relation to western feminist storytelling, I explore how the memory and hauntings of this vexed feminist politics of vulnerability travel. Borrowing from Hesford's (2005) attention to “the ghost” of the second-wave “lesbian-as-feminist” in present day theory, my argument follows how the loaded question of gendered vulnerability within and beyond second wave feminism, can be explored by “return[ing] to the emergent moments of the second wave [to] trace their effects and affects in the present” (2005:245). Rather than leaving these as problematic representations — the kind that can only be figured through frames of paternalism and exploitation, or that necessitate a sensible refusal of vulnerability just in case they might be — I want to think through how they work within these contemporary campaigns around the UK refuge. Following Hemmings (2011), I want to critique the suggestion that the risks of mobilising against

gendered vulnerability are no longer sustained in the progression of present day feminist politics. As well, I want to suggest that the risks of this might in other ways be central to how that feminist politics acquires meaning. In the context of these contested histories and the feelings they engender, I consider how this knowledge is put to work in telling the story of the domestic violence service under austerity by Women's Aid and Sisters Uncut.

### **From vulnerable women to vulnerable refuges**

'We're simply focusing on how to survive.' Those are the words of a domestic abuse worker in Nottingham – but the survival [they are] describing refers to that of an organisation built to help women and girls in danger, rather than the women and girls themselves [...] (Ryan 2016b)

In the above *Guardian* article, the risky language of women's vulnerability is put to work. The text requires the reader to know something about representations of vulnerability. What the reader might know as they read the statement is that *women and girls* are vulnerable to violence. The reader might also know the way in which the stories of such vulnerability are told. That is, they might recognise, as in *The Sun*, that gendered violence is spoken through a language of *danger* and *survival*. And they might know what is both "risky and true" (Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay 2016:2) about this narrative. However, in the above passage it is through the changed and unexpected emphasis on the refuge — the *but* and the *rather* of the authors text — that the vulnerability in the text is not that of *women and girls in danger*, but the *organisation built to help them*. It is the familiarity the reader must have with the history of representing gendered violence which allows the absurdity of the contemporary situation to be felt.

Over a million women experienced domestic violence in the last year and approximately 750,000 children witness domestic violence every year. Refuge provision is an essential part of the support available to any woman or child who is fleeing domestic violence. (Women's Aid 2014:1)

They are literally life-saving services which provide safety and sanctuary. (Women's Aid 2014:2)

In the campaigns of Women's Aid bodily vulnerability was invoked to make a very specific claim about the services which respond to it. In the passages above, any claim to women's vulnerability acted as textual precursor to situating the refuge space as a way that differentiated vulnerability could be attended to. Equally maintaining this emphasis on the refuge as a response to violence, Sisters Uncut frequently campaigned around the question: "How can she leave if she has nowhere to go?" (Foster 2016b). These two-point statements referred to a bodily vulnerability to violence in relation to the circumstances *she* must *leave*. But significantly, vulnerability was not just secured as an event in these statements, but part of "the journey" (Bowstead 2015:327) away, or out of, a situation of violence. *She* may be more likely to be in need, but should, and could, have somewhere to flee to.<sup>95</sup>

In November 2016, Sisters Uncut blocked off access to public bridges throughout England. The demonstrations were synchronised events and organised under the promise that if "you block our bridges, we block yours" (Omonira–Oyekanmi 2016; Sisters Uncut 2016; The Daily Telegraph 2016). The demonstration took on the inability for migrant women without recourse to public funds to access already limited domestic violence services in the austerity context (Imkaan 2016; Southall Black Sisters n.d, 2008, 2014). Like the emphasis on having *nowhere to go*, blocking the bridges served to highlight the potential journey out of situations of violence, as well as the co-constitutive process of state criminalisation, immigration, and funding policies which prevented some from paths to structural support (Bhattacharyya 2015:126; Lonergan 2015).

I argue that the significance of this path towards the refuge is important in these campaigns. This is because securing the site of the refuge as a move away from experiences of gendered violence, might differently articulate the *temporal* understanding of vulnerable subjectivity in these campaigns. By not just calling for modes of state

---

<sup>95</sup> It is important to note that Sisters Uncut favour a language of "survivors" and explicitly frame their activism as working towards "inclusive and supportive spaces for all women (trans, intersex and cis) and all nonbinary, agender and gender variant people" (Sisters Uncut n.d), and challenge transphobia within feminist activism that is been increasingly animated in sexual violence narratives. Media portrayals of the group have not always acknowledged their intervention into these categories.



recognition for a ‘vulnerable subject’, these articulations also highlight a temporal and spatial frame through which access to non-state care becomes central to how this vulnerability is experienced. Because Women’s Aid and Sisters Uncut refer to a specific form of response to violence rather than an open-ended call to the recognition of women’s vulnerability in and of itself, the apprehension of gendered vulnerability in these moments might, if not always, work beyond the question of visibility and recognition alone. Rather than leaving images, or statistics of violence as the central claim to recognition, these campaigns mobilise this vulnerability to mark the potential for support out of situations of violence should they be better secured. They thus link recognition to the types of services, processes, and obstructions which seeking recognition for such vulnerability might require. As I have argued in my previous chapter, vulnerability in this instance becomes a temporal, spatial, and potential condition in relation to the responses to it. Emphasis is placed on the refuge as a tested response to such vulnerability, in ways which might intervene in the necessarily regulatory capacity over ‘vulnerable subjects’.<sup>96</sup>

In her efforts to link vulnerability with resistance, Judith Butler argues that by mobilising vulnerability in relation to specific social and economic obstructions a claim to unique vulnerability can also “resist [its] power” by enacting “a form of resistance that presupposes vulnerability of a specific kind, and opposes precarity” (Butler 2016:15). A differentiated vulnerability to violence can be centred in these claims, because as mobilised to perform a demand for the refuge service, the inevitability of persistent vulnerability to gendered violence is not necessarily sustained. Thus, in contrast to accounts of sexual or gendered violence which positioned it as a fact of gender (Brownmiller 1975), vulnerability here is not necessarily presented as (or as only) part of the “continuity of violence” (Ahiska 2016:224). Vulnerability here does not exist only as a differentially distributed fact — for which we might feel pity, or a desire for protection — it is one directly linked to questions of institutional structures which become central to its materialisation. In this sense, “vulnerability can emerge within resistance and direct democracy actions precisely as a deliberate mobilisation of bodily exposure” (Butler 2016:26), which works to challenge the unequal distribution of

---

<sup>96</sup> In my next chapter, I follow the question of whether marking services as vulnerable necessarily avoids the tensions of vulnerability politics.

precarity, at the same time as the practice of mobilisation undermines essentialised narratives of inevitability. This framing centralises the complexity of lives beyond experiences of violence, which as Ahiska argues, might create a “political memory of women — as vulnerable subjects” which embraces the multiple temporalities of vulnerability that can challenge the logic of gendered vulnerability as “fate” (2016:228).

In highlighting the refuge, rather than vulnerability alone, these mobilisations invited a consideration of temporality and potentiality within the event of violence itself. They left room to imagine the temporal “journeys” (Bowstead 2015:327) that do not necessarily end in death. Moreover, in the case of Sisters Uncut and the embodied activism that blocked bridges, the differential allocation of precarity — and the essential negativity of vulnerability — was challenged by the collective vulnerability that the street action entailed (Butler 2015a:90). These mobilisations of vulnerability in relation to the refuge raised the question of the differentiated potential, apprehension, and relationality of vulnerability, which does not end at the visibility of violence alone. The centring of the refuge as a site as a relational response necessarily challenged the inevitability of “tragic” (Hendry 2015a) deaths. But as well, this too raises the question of apprehension of vulnerability which occurs *within* these relational responses — the question central to my previous chapter.

In what follows, I want to consider how the refuge became the ideal relational response in these campaigns. Indeed, Vanessa Munro and Jane Scoular (2012) have drawn critical attention to the way in which women’s vulnerability can also secure regulatory processes in the name of protection, mobilising vulnerability in the name of prohibitive or paternalising forms of support. Following this critique, I want to consider how Women’s Aid and Sisters Uncut thus sustained the refuge as the ‘good’ mode of response in their claims through an affective call to the refuge’s role at the “heart” (Dobash and Dobash 1992:58) of feminist vulnerability politics of the past.

### **Returning to the refuge of the 1970s**

Over the past forty years an effective national network of refuges was established – yet this network is now at risk. (Women’s Aid 2014:2)

In narrating the story of domestic violence services, both Women’s Aid and Sisters Uncut drew on the historic place of the refuge to emphasise its disappearance under austerity. Key to this story was the framing of the refuge network as a project, one which was secured through the *40 years* of work it took to complete it. This citation of 40 years ago, also travelled back to a specific era of 1970s feminist activism. An emphasis on collaboration and knowledge building over 40 years, existed as clues to the “sustained and rekindled” (Dobash and Dobash 1992:45) feminist politics at the heart of the refuge movement. For Women’s Aid above, this citation worked within the story of the network itself, in which in the past, possibly even up until the contemporary period of *risk*, the refuge network was a progressive project.<sup>97</sup>

The role of Women’s Aid as representing a numerous and diverse set of independent services, was important to the way it campaigned around this implied loss. Women’s Aid’s place at the origin of this 40-year project, and its history as the feminist element of 1970s refuge politics, enhanced this narrative capacity. In their retelling of the history of the refuge sector, Dobash and Dobash reference the deep “split” (1992:33) in the 1970s UK refuge movement. The network of feminist-aligned refuge services which identified violence as a gendered, social problem, would go on to become Women’s Aid. Erin Pizzey, then head of the world’s first women’s refuge in Chiswick (now part of Refuge) viewed violence as predominantly an issue of “cultural transmission” (1992:85). Pizzey would go on to vehemently distance herself from what she considered to be the feminist dominance over understandings of domestic violence (Dobash and Dobash 1992; Ross 1997).<sup>98</sup>

---

<sup>97</sup> Women’s aid was launched in 1974 as a network of independent refuges across the UK (separate structural branches exist in Northern Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales).

<sup>98</sup> Pizzey now aligns with activism that derides both Women’s Aid and Refuge (Pizzey 2014). Perhaps demonstrating the amenability of affective loss narratives that Hemmings (2011) discusses — Pizzey tells her own narrative of losing domestic violence frameworks to the feminist movement.

The place of feminism within the origins of the UK refuge movement, and the orientation of Women's Aid as feminist at that point, travelled as a hesitant citation in their campaigns under austerity. Yet, the "stickiness" (Ahmed 2004) of this temporal citation was perhaps reflected in the verbatim repetition of 40 years work by media outlets, supportive politicians, and activists as below:

Domestic violence refuges are being closed across the country in a crisis that is putting support for the most vulnerable women and children back 40 years, leading charities have warned. (Laville 2014)

We thought we had won the argument that refuges need to be a national network but we are having arguments of 40 years ago all over again. (Polly Neate quote in Laville 2014)

Given that details of the establishment of these diverse services and their politics were at the same time obscured in Women's Aid campaigns, the citation of 40 years stood in place of this history. While domestic violence services are more than refuges and the *diversity* of the services was noted in the introductions of Women's Aid reports, details of the history of these projects — from therapy, crisis response, accommodations, and legal support — or the distinction between these methods of care were not spelled out. While the network took 40 years to establish, a recognition that was, as above, *won* then, it was not clear how, or where, that victory thrived, struggled, or was sustained. Citing the establishment of 40 years work, returned the reader to an achievement of the past, without contextualising those *arguments* that were had. Perhaps, having won the argument for the specialist refuge's necessity, a return to those arguments (or a return to their feminist politics) could only ever be a turn backwards.

In the Summer of 2016 — the "summer of housing action" (Sisters Uncut 2016a) — the East London, and South East London branches of Sisters Uncut occupied a commercial building on Peckham High Street, and an unoccupied council flat in Hackney. Preparing these occupations as comfortable, decorated, and collaborative spaces, they acted as feminist networking centres. Inviting experts from the sector such as Imkaan, advocates such as Southall Black Sisters, and members of the public to participate in talks, workshops, self-defence classes, and craft sessions, the occupations were self-promoted spaces of knowledge building on the groups' Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Significantly, they were explicitly articulated as continuing in the spirit of

1970s feminism, or the past establishment of housing and refuge spaces by those in the Women's Aid network:

'We're taking back space that's rightfully ours,' says Sarah, who compares the occupation to the first women's refuges in the 70s, which were reclaimed spaces and squats. (Hartley 2016)

Here, the work of establishing the refuge space, invoked by Women's Aid through a call to 40 years ago, was performed by Sisters Uncut. The substance of the victories that Women's Aid *won* and the collaborative network that went into sustaining them, was re-enacted through the explicit frame of 1970s feminist practice — described by a Sisters Uncut member as: “we roll up our sleeves and get to work” (Eloise 2017). The schedule of activities the group promoted was resonant of the “communities of practice” (Hemmings 2011:151) in radical feminism. Footage of the Sister Uncut East London occupation which accompanied the above quote, bared a striking familiarity to footage of the first Chiswick refuge. Indeed, in the TV documentary *Scream Quietly or The Neighbours Will Hear* (1974), Erin Pizzey narrated the experiences of the many women in the refuge who were filmed collectively taking care of the property, sharing meals, and organising children's activities. In the documentary, Pizzey labelled the centre as offering women the possibility of living lives outside of heterosexual marriage and within “communities of women”. The Chiswick refuge had also been notorious for refusing to turn away any woman who needed to stay. Public outcry over the intentional overcrowding performed by the refuge led towards early engagements with the UK government to address refuge provision in the mid 1970s (Dobash and Dobash 1992:62). This was the history of occupation, collaboration, and social disruption that the Sisters Uncut occupation performed.

Why did Sisters Uncut and Women's Aid return to this time and politics? What did the invocation of the 1970s do to secure the necessity of the refuge in their campaigns? Certainly, the development of the refuge network was an action against unevenly distributed vulnerability. It was, as Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay argue, a grass roots movement of “alternative resources for self empowerment, collective agency and protection” (2016:2). Not only did refuge networks at this time develop from articulations and practices which responded to the issue of violence separately to criminal justice, they employed the kinds of relational care practices that were absent

from structural forms of protection.<sup>99</sup> The refuge network in both its spatial and functional capacity, and its methods of support, challenged the conceptualisation of violence as an “event” (Bowstead 2015:330) on vulnerable bodies, by providing a relational response to healing, care, safety, and the future. The refuges existed as an initiative which differently articulated the causes and responses that should be taken to violence and as such, the temporality and relationality of vulnerability itself. Certainly then, there is reason that this site might be invested with ‘good’ feminist memory. An invocation of the 1970s might act as a warm affective reminder of where this contemporary politics of vulnerability began.

### **Women’s Aid and the loss of a victory**

Yet for Women’s Aid, the citation of 40 years ago stood in hesitant contention with their current statutory framework and their more ambivalent relationship to feminism in the present. Significantly, despite what happened 40 years ago informing the importance of the refuge and likely many of its practices now — feminist politicising went almost exclusively unnamed in the Women’s Aid documents. Because Women’s Aid are outwardly divested of a feminist project more broadly, the refuge as the heart of feminist politics was only embraced through a temporal call back to an argument that was won then. A call back to 40 years ago could animate the contemporary moment with the possible loss of a feminist project, without having to claim or denounce the feminist politics that informed it. Within the *SOS* campaign, the development of these services and their historically radical articulation of resistance, care, and vulnerability was what was precisely not made clear. The reiteration of the last 40 years of work in these texts brought with it affects for an achievement, work, and collaboration of an otherwise unnamed feminist allegiance.

---

<sup>99</sup> Many people interviewed in *Scream Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear You* (1974) recount the failings of local police to treat their partner’s violence as criminal. *The Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act* (1976) came into effect in England and Wales in 1977.

Arguably, this explicit absence of feminism is unsurprising. It certainly stands as a known political ambiguity informed by the strategic positioning of the sector today.<sup>100</sup> As many authors have argued (not least through Ahmed’s memorable work on the *feminist killjoy*), claiming feminism, or claiming to speak from a feminist standpoint, marks a project as especially, or distinctively political — it becomes the source of the problem it names (Ahmed 2004, 2010a). Given Women’s Aid’s contemporary framework, an explicit claim to a feminist history might challenge their more neutral position as sector experts. Speaking of the removal of feminist claims from the Women’s Aid platform by the 1980s, Dobash and Dobash suggest that it was a tactic adopted given that “MPs would reject proposals for change if they were seen to be embedded within feminist ideals” (1992:116). It was for this reason, that Women’s Aid’s founding intention to address the “*general position of women in society*” (1992:26 original emphasis), was removed when it disqualified them from charitable status. That Women’s Aid continues to work with Government on a variety of issues — not least in relation to criminal law — their divestment in an explicit feminist frame might be understood as a pragmatic one.<sup>101</sup> Or, it might articulate perfectly a post-feminist era of sector engagement — feminism was needed then, but not now.<sup>102</sup>

However, in Hemmings’ work on feminist narratives she cautions against assuming narratives require an explicit feminist subject to continue circulating. It is in following this assumption, she argues, that “the points of co-extensiveness of Western feminist narratives and the institutional sites in which gender is mobilised (both with and without a feminist subject) are more likely to be missed” (2011:139). Indeed, when Armine Ishkanian (2014) and Sisters Uncut members (Eloise 2017) make the explicit link between the domestic violence sector and contemporary activism in both practice

---

<sup>100</sup> For a discussion of contemporary issues facing privatisation and competition within the third sector see: Bassel and Emejulu 2017:55; Glasius and Ishkanian 2015; Matczak, Hatzidimitriadou and Lindsay 2011:21; Radford & Gill 2006; Tyler et. al. 2014.

<sup>101</sup> Addressing the “ill fit” of increased professionalisation of the sector, Radford and Gill argue that the place of feminist activism and research in the context of the increased partnerships between services and Crime Reduction policies has “brought a greater marginalisation of survivors’ voices, and loss of services for women and children who are the most socially excluded.” (2006:369)

<sup>102</sup> McRobbie (2008) has considered post-feminism to be a discourse which aspects of feminist discourse are presented as achieved or achievable, while *feminism* itself is no longer needed.

and members — imagining a sincere *loss* of a feminist subject from the Women’s Aid network becomes difficult. Certainly, it remains significant that Women’s Aid can no longer employ a feminist subject to tell the story of the refuge, whilst still working to invoke its feminist past. But instead of taking this absence as only an effect of postfeminist discourses (McRobbie 2008), I want to suggest that this feminist politics *is* invoked through the temporal narrative of loss from the 1970s if as a haunting hesitation.

Indeed, rather than a sincere disavowal of feminism in the Women’s Aid documents, a feminist history was borrowed from, invoked, and put to work through this call to the 1970s. Appearing indirectly as a *history of expertise, collaboration*, the work of *women for women*, a sentiment of a feminist allegiance was, in fact, invoked consistently. The naming of *our* services in the campaign title is significant here. A call to *Save Our Services* is a clue to the subject who is meant to identify with the campaign. It is a name that implicitly makes a claim to a feminist subject — a movement that as feminists, we might recognise as our own. The work of the *our* in the campaign title could be considered against the contrasting *me*, and objectifying approach of *The Sun’s* “Give me Shelter” campaign (Hendry 2015a). The *our* of Women’s Aid acted as a “technology of the presumed” (Hemmings 2011:16), an assumption which animated an implicit meaning for a feminist subject within the title. These hesitant citations implicitly mark the feminism that Sisters Uncut go on to name.

Echoing Hesford’s (2005) discussion of the second wave feminism as haunting present day theory and politics, this unclaimed feminist activist might mark a ghost in Women’s Aid history. Indeed, Dobash and Dobash quote Erin Pizzey as accusing Women’s Aid in the 1970s of using refuges as a “platform for Women’s liberation and Gay women’s liberation” (Dobash and Dobash 1992:26). But Hesford (2005) argues that the ghost of the feminist-as-lesbian haunts contemporary feminist theory precisely because of the “lack of singularity and unity” (2005:238) that can be found in the history of the second wave, especially when it is so often narrated as having been whole. This hesitant citation within the Women’s Aid documents is thus not just unsurprising. Between Pizzey’s intended accusation of the refuge as a cynical platform for “Gay women’s liberation”, and the broader representations of the 1970s-vulnerability politics as the place of an



essentialist feminism of the past (Hemmings 2011) — the disavowed feminist subject of Women’s Aid’s might “uncomfortably reinforce postfeminist accounts” (Hemmings 2011:54) of feminism as belonging to a previous, coherent generation.

Following Hemmings and Hesford’s work, I also want to suggest that the hesitation over claiming feminism worked to gloss over the lack of unity in the early refuge movement. Claiming these feminist origins too openly might have brought out the ghosts of the “lack of singularity and unity” (Hesford 2005:238) in the refuge movement I have discussed above. Because the Women’s Aid campaign was reliant on telling a story of a once collaborative project, one that was united until the divisive austerity context, it is possible that avoiding an explicit feminism worked to disavow a more vexed history within the movement itself.

Many professionals that work in the VAWG sector have built up a history of expertise in successfully supporting women and girls. The loss of this knowledge and skill is a huge detriment to the sector. (AAPG 2015:33 my emphasis)

They are typically run by women, for women. Independent specialist domestic violence services have evolved into a fluid network to enable women to move between services [...] learning can be shared and collaborative working facilitated. (AAPG 2015:11 my emphasis)

A temporal framing of a linear evolution and expertise was important, because it worked to frame the austerity context as exceptional. Whilst I would not dismiss the unique cumulative effects of the austerity framework (Sanders-McDonagh, Neville and Nolas 2016), for Women’s Aid, the contemporary moment was sustained as one of exceptionalism by obscuring the other histories within this *collaboration*.<sup>103</sup> The current funding situation was positioned as a point of departure from this linear evolution. Within the story of past collaboration, was the introduction of a new *divisiveness* brought in by *non-specialist* tenders for local commissions.

---

<sup>103</sup> I take up the question of exceptionality in the following two chapters. Here I consider Berlant (2011) and Ahmed (2004) engagements with the limiting of a frame that a crisis narrative.

The process [...] caused a divide in what had been a very positive sector. (Pathway Project, written evidence in AAPG 2015:19)

Local authority funders, health-based funders and Police and Crime Commissioners have reportedly been focused on reducing cost through competitive tenders without first understanding women's needs. (AAPG 2015:19 my emphasis)

Within the Women's Aid campaigns, it was the local authority funders and Police and Crime Commissioners who were focused only on reducing costs and did not share the knowledge of the sector, that contributed to the contemporary problem. Independent specialist providers might *know* the value of their services but would struggle to communicate this to *less informed* Commissioners. Facing an increasingly competitive climate, what was once a *positive* and *united* sector was *divided*. Some services could respond to the current challenges, and smaller services could not.

There is a danger that the knowledge and expertise in the domestic violence and sexual violence sectors will be lost forever. (APPG 2015:46 my emphasis)

Expertise is being lost, good quality services are being taken over and reduced, quality standards are ignored. Victims will not get the support they need by people who have the experience and knowledge to support them. (Domestic violence professional, written evidence APPG 2015:24 my emphasis)

[...] it is concerning that future commissioning arrangements will be based on value for money and therefore encourage non-specialist providers to tender for contracts. We believe this new approach may also have an impact on the gender specific services we provide. (Women's Aid 2014:7)

Yet while a history of expertise and specialist knowledge was reiterated and key to the Women's Aid narrative, specialist knowledge was only generally explained. Specialist knowledge referred to (the likely feminist-informed) practices of responding, counselling, and recognising the nature of domestic violence — the work of *general women's services*. Less often, specialisation referred to the knowledge and expertise in relation to intersectional experiences of violence — significantly absent in the *SOS* campaign, and underplayed in the APPG report as “specialist services for specific groups of domestic violence survivors (such as BME and disabled women)” (AAPG 2015:34). Thus, while specialisation was emphasised as that which would be lost in

competitive tenders, much like the history of the establishment, specialisation was a largely unexplored framework.

The opaqueness of specialisation is telling, given that Imkaan — the leading body representing BME specialist services — articulated longer running hierarchical issues that BME services have faced *within* the refuge sector.<sup>104</sup> Giving a very different weight to the ownership of specialisation — Imkaan argued that whilst BME women and BME services were at the centre of the sector 40 years ago, they “are often ignored within mainstream reflections of [that] sector” (Imkaan 2016:11). A call to specialist knowledge in the Women’s Aid documents did speak to the expertise of the refuge network in comparison to general recruiters. But in suggesting that this specialised knowledge was something the entire network had, specialised knowledge was both claimed and drained of the hierarchical and ambivalent history within that sector.

Indeed, when Imkaan argued that BME services were “disadvantaged within commissioning structures and approaches to funding because their specialism is often unrecognised, misunderstood and devalued” (Imkaan 2016:15) the stakes of claiming and diluting this category of its meaning becomes clear. Imkaan suggested the services it represents “compete with local and regional mainstream women’s organisation’s as well as large bodies such as housing associations” (Imkaan 2016:15), suggesting that the tendering and commissioning process exacerbated long standing issues within the sector, rather than uniquely producing them.

But in the *SOS* campaign and APPG report, in maintaining the narrative of the refuge network as one of previous cohesion through its 40-year development, it was only in

---

<sup>104</sup> The leading national body representing BME specialist domestic violence services. Imkaan represents “organisations in the UK have grown out of the feminist, anti-violence, anti-racist and black women’s movements [...] in direct response to the exclusion and lack of understanding many BME women faced from non-BME specialist services” (Imkaan 2016:10-11).

the present that the competition and divisiveness between independent services had begun:

As a result of recent adverse commissioning and funding trends there has been an additional and disproportionate loss of dedicated Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women's spaces and organisations. (APPG 2015:21)

The temporal allocation of *adverse commissioning and funding trends* to the contemporary moment, thus underplayed the content of these mainstreamed practices. In both the sentiments of a loss for a previous cohesion, and in positioning tender processes as the *cause* of divisiveness, the narrative of the sector as a once cohesive one was secured. But how do these undervalued, or unrecognised knowledges that Imkaan refer to, challenge the framing of expertise on vulnerability that the Women's Aid collective possesses? Might they raise the maintenance of a supposedly anachronistic feminist approach to 'women's' vulnerability which did not account for its differential materialisation in relation to the intersections of race, legal status, disability, sexuality, and class — the vexed nature of 'women's vulnerability' in feminism's present?

This location of divisiveness in the present, whilst at the same time obscuring the specificity of the specialist services on which the Women's Aid narrative depended, elided that many specialist services developed from and through a need to address failings within the mainstream women's sector (Imkaan 2016:10). The securing of *our* past thus worked to produce an affective investment in what was — a time when the sector was more political as an institution, but also, maybe, more collected in its understanding of the vulnerability to which it responded. But through the temporal framing of *knowledge building*, history, *expertise* and *independence* that was *ours* — clues to a more contested feminist past haunted the text. Hesford, in her discussion of the spectre of second wave feminism suggests that the second wave is not a "neatly packaged legacy" but:

a 'thing' — a not entirely comprehensible or articulable presence in contemporary US feminist discourse that is both unsettled and unsettling, and which, because of that unsettledness, produces ghosts or spectres that are the signs of what has remained repressed, forgotten, yet still alive about 'second wave feminism'. (2005:245)

Perhaps then, Women's Aid's hesitant invocation of the 1970s, and the unsettled and contingent politics that the narration of a united history ignored, served to disavow the "repressed" "yet still alive" (Hesford 2005:245) articulations of UK second wave feminism which instead appear as hesitant traces within the present. What is left unsettled is then which version — which understandings of gendered vulnerability — the sector's framing now took up? If the sector faced divisiveness in the present context, was this in any way tied to the general formulation of women's vulnerability that many organisations may still have taken, or the general understanding of women's vulnerability that still regulated the apprehension of the necessity of these services in the present? Was the essentialism of the 1970s really gone? And which side of the vexed politicisations did the Women's Aid narrative fall? What was the work of a narrative of previous cohesion in these documents, within the contemporary moment in which the effects of such framings appeared as especially fraught?

Importantly, in raising these questions here, my aim is not to suggest that the refuge network be understood as a limited one in framing or in practice. Nor is it to argue, critically, that the refuge network is not as valuable as the Women's Aid narrative claimed. But it seems central that the deeply contested nature of responding to violence as an issue, and the complexity of feminist responses to it, could not be raised in this general narrative of collaboration. Why is it that the narrative of loss for 40-years of work required the sector to have once been whole? Was this story the only way that a 'good' feeling around the refuge could be sustained? How did it obscure vulnerabilities within the sector that were both central to its formation and contributing to the kind of closures that ensure their continuation in the present?<sup>105</sup> As Leah Bassel and Akwugo Emejulu argue in their work on the broader minority women's third sector in UK austerity, hierarchical relationships within these sectors are not new. Rather, the "degrading" (2017:59) solidarity between these organisations within the austerity context occurs through the shrinking of opportunities "in which minority women activists [can] articulate and advance their intersectional social justice claims" (2017:75). But in what ways does this breakdown in solidarity point to the way in which

---

<sup>105</sup> Bassel and Emejulu discuss the ways in which minority women's third sector organisations are more impacted within the context of UK austerity. Importantly, their analysis suggests both hierarchical relationships in the pre-austerity era, but in which "austerity has further legitimised an enterprise culture that appears to erode solidaristic work between third sector organisations" (2017:62).

contemporary articulations vulnerability and gendered violence hesitate to explore the framings of the past? Perhaps the contentious politics of vulnerability through which gendered violence has historically been apprehended does not belong only to another generation after all.

Telling the story of the establishment of the refuge through a hesitant citation of history, and the temporal containment of collaboration and divisiveness was to tell a story of that feminist politics of the past as uncontested. To *still* have to make the case about gendered violence and the refuge is a conversation that can only be a step backwards. Contrasting the affective telling only between the then and now produced an original and secure feminist politics of vulnerability of the 1970s which gave weight to the loss it faced under austerity. But is also one that risked repeating the vexed history that was central to it, because it denied the conceptual and political vulnerability of feminist politics itself.

### **Sisters Uncut and a continued fight**

These were their tactics, and we feel proud and humbled to be carrying the flame in the continued fight for liberation. (Kwei 2015)

It is interesting that the generational citations of Sisters Uncut — *carrying the flame* of a *continued fight* — were often the same as those implicitly drawn on by Women's Aid. As I have argued above, the feelings of achievement and collaboration within past feminist organising and articulations of vulnerability, also travelled through Sisters Uncut's occupations and demonstrations. Referencing histories of feminism within their own activism, Sisters Uncut were often read as firmly located within a continuing feminist politics. The take up of 1970s feminist activism in their occupations served as a reminder of this 'good' collaborative past, in much the same way that Women's Aid hesitantly drew out this memory.

In footage of the East London occupation, the efforts to produce a memory of themselves within this history were clear (Hartley 2016). Images of the occupations showed the spaces as having been warmly decorated — handwritten instructions on

how to respond to a police presence on site, stood alongside photos, memorabilia, and costumes from their earlier protests. In archiving and referencing their political demonstrations on social and broader media (Sisters Uncut 2015; 2016), Sisters Uncut seemed to anticipate their wider reception as feminism's 'return' by actively producing their own "archives of feeling" (Cvetkovich 2003).

But while this history was embedded within Women's Aid's past (a past narrated as less ambivalent than the divested political present), for Sisters Uncut — a new activist group — this generational take up was less obvious. As Hemmings argues in relation to feminist narratives:

Different generations, we presume, are different ages, with the old being those 'left behind' and the young being the beholden or else the carelessly forgetful. When does one generation begin and another one end when describing communities of practice? (2011:151)

Was Sisters Uncut take up a sign of a *beholden* generation? Was it, as it was so often taken up in the media, a straight forward return of a previous politics — one which had been lost since the professionalisation of the refuge network? Or was it a community of practice that refused its allocation to a different generation? What was the work of this seeming anachronism within the contemporary moment?

I have argued above that a call to the 1970s does a lot of work in relation to gendered vulnerability. The citation of the 1970s draws an immediate recollection of a radical feminist communities, centred chiefly around a position of power as enacted through patriarchy (Hemmings 2011). The attention to violence in these 1970s frameworks was often tied to a version of women's vulnerability as directly connected to sex or gender, one which has rightly been critiqued for its assignment of vulnerability as a characteristic of gendered bodies. The kind of feminism at the heart of the refuge movement is also, as in Women's Aid, an era that is now frequently narrated as belonging to the past (Hemmings 2011). It is not surprising that Women's Aid drew hesitantly on this history when it is foundationally beholden to it. But for Women's Aid, such a citation also risked unravelling their collaborative story of the refuge, because it referred to a historically contentious politics of vulnerability *within* feminism that was sustained through the hierarchical effects on refuges today. Thus, admittedly, I was at

first surprised that an activist group from a ‘younger’ generation would seek to find such an uncomplicated, ‘good’ history there.

In their name alone, Sisters Uncut invoked the sufficiently questioned *sisterhood* of the 1970s women’s movement — calling themselves (and survivors of domestic violence) sisters. Through Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar the politics of vulnerability around the subject of ‘women’ is raised through a call to this 1970s sisterhood, where “the women’s movement has been unquestionably premised on a celebration of ‘sisterhood’ with its implicit assumption that women qua women have a necessary basis for unity and solidarity” (1984:49) in ways which failed to articulate the feminist investment in structures and enactments of racialised and classed power. Indeed, the frequency with which ironic calls to this sisterhood appear within black and lesbian feminist critiques to challenge the Women Liberation Movement’s essentialism haunts the contemporary take-up of the name.<sup>106</sup> The 1970s feminism that developed in this period of collaboration and knowledge building around gendered violence is also the temporal location through which, as Hemmings (2011) notes, accusations of feminist essentialism are seen (often exclusively) to reside.<sup>107</sup>

What did it mean then, that Sisters Uncut both cited their project as an intersectional feminist one, centring the experience of BME and migrant women in their analysis, alongside invoking this loaded ‘sisterhood’ as a feminist memory in their name? Moreover, in explicitly framing their activism as open to all women and non-binary people, they intervened in the ways in which the gendering of that sisterhood and ‘women’s vulnerability’ were (and often continue to be) defensively drawn (Gill, Heathcote and Williamson 2016). The very structure of their contemporary feminist project would seem to foreclose such an uncomplicated take up of the 1970s women’s movement and its conceptualisation of violence and gendered vulnerability. At the

---

<sup>106</sup> See also Carby (1982) “White Women Listen: Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood”; and Audre Lorde: “there is a pretence to a homogeneity of experience covered by the word *sisterhood* that does not in fact exist” (1984:116).

<sup>107</sup> ‘Sisterhood’, and ‘sister’ both have many lives outside of this feminist history — in ways which often ironically employ it. While not knowing whether, or how Sisters Uncut employ this name, I am reflecting their broader take up in positive media as adopting a 1970s WLM framing.



same time, in refusing the presumed ‘vulnerable woman’ of the 1970s in their analysis of austerity, Sisters Uncut also refused to locate a radical feminist activism as the property of an essentialising feminist past.

In critiquing contemporary progress narratives that suggest feminist theory has moved on from the 1970s, Hemmings goes on to question the citation of the 1970s as the location of all feminism’s ills. This is not because sexual and gendered essentialism and racism were not present in the 1970s Women’s Liberation Movement. But for Hemmings, these citational practices serve to suggest that these problems have been left behind in more recent feminist articulations. Centring and then disavowing a black feminist critique of the 1970s Women’s Liberation Movement, Hemmings argues that western feminist progress narratives often locate the 1970s as the reason ‘we moved on’ from a universal woman subject. These narratives thus present a black feminist critique as only a response to a previous era of essentialism — they too are left behind in the progression of feminist politics. The effects of this narrative are perhaps demonstrated by Imkaan (2015, 2016) in my discussion earlier, when they argued that despite the sustained presence of BME spaces and women *within* the development of the refuge network, these organisations remain rarely reflected in mainstream understandings of it. The risks of an essentialised understanding of gendered vulnerability as located as in the past was made clear by the sustained dynamics of the domestic violence sector under austerity.

But it is what was left as a relatively unexplored history of *specialisation* in the Women’s Aid campaign, that became the central frame through which Sisters Uncut politicised around the issue under austerity. Their framework of violence and vulnerability served to precisely interrogate the ‘vulnerable subject’ of the contemporary situation:

We are making the modern-day women’s movement our own, as intersectional feminism is at the very heart of Sisters Uncut’s work. This is because we see that black, working class, LGBT, mentally ill and disabled women are disproportionately burdened by cuts to domestic violence — with thirty-two of the domestic violence services that have closed since 2010 being specialist services for BME women. (Sisters Uncut 2016b)

Not only was the feminist project of the 1970s not left to stand in the past as a stagnant, or secure victory which risked being lost — it was a “continued” (Kwei 2015)

struggle against differentiated vulnerability. Moreover, the presumed understanding of ‘women’s vulnerability’ was interrogated in the groups refusal to generalise the *sister* of their claims. In both rearticulating the ways in which violence could be understood (in relation to the state, in relation to austerity) and in rearticulating the subject of that activism, it was through a point of seeming anachronism that Sisters Uncut worked to differently animate these feminist memories. Thus, whilst citing this same past to Women’s Aid, the group’s more explicit engagement with the vexed character of this citation, presented these “communities of practice” (Hemmings 2011:151) as neither forgotten, nor having been settled.

The take-up of the 1970s by Sisters Uncut within their framework which refused many of the articulations of vulnerability to violence which generated in that era, might have worked, as Hesford argues, as not a sincere citation of the content of these feminist claims, but rather reminders of a spirit in which feminists “became consciously, actively, and visibly strange in relation to the socio-cultural norms of their particular, historically bound moment” (2005:244). It is perhaps then the refusal of hesitancy around the 1970s, rather than the take up of the 1970s conceptualisation of ‘women’s vulnerability’ itself, that animated Sisters Uncut’s claims. In their explicit engagement with the feminist subject, and their explicit mobilisation of *domestic* violence as experienced within broader state processes of austerity, Sisters Uncut were already disrupting the presumed politics of their citational practice. By refusing to allow the 1970s sisterhood to sustain its place in the past, they disrupted the repetitions and hesitations which sustains the 1970s as *secure* within both progress and loss narratives (Hemmings 2011; Hesford 2005).

Through her discussion of building metaphorical “feminist shelters” within activism or theory, Sara Ahmed argues that sustaining feminist solidarity across distinctions and generations requires resistance to the desire to build “a shelter that would protect us from the exposure to the harshness of weather” (2017:175) or critique. Ahmed questions the work that a unity or sharedness of memory for the past might perform in feminist collective experience. For, Ahmed’s remembering feminism requires an insistence on the consistent fragility of feminist claims — the constant incompleteness of feminist ideals and projects. Ahmed notes that while feminists of colour who draw

attention to racism, sexism, and classism within feminist movements were (and are) often positioned as disrupting *collective* memory — these disruptions draw attention to the incompleteness of feminist memories (2017:186). For Ahmed then, feminist politics and its memory gains from engaging with its own points of vulnerability and fragility. Working to sure up memories, categories, or histories of feminism is an exercise in refusing the relationality or fragility that is central to feminism's foundations.

Ahmed's argument resonates with Hemmings attention to affective memory in feminism's past with an analysis of emotions for and within feminist practice. Building on her conceptualisation of emotions as circulating, rather than inherent in objects or bodies, Ahmed critiques what she suggests is a feminist futurity which abandons the objects of its past analysis — such as gender or sex. For Ahmed, an emphasis on progress needs to be central to feminist practice, because feminism is a politics invested in the transformation of future conditions. And yet, for Ahmed it is through a simultaneous and sustained attachment to its past, that feminism becomes better able to grapple with the persistence of the past within the present (2004:187). Ahmed here is responding to Wendy Brown's (2003) critique of feminist politics as mournful for the radicalisation of the 1970s since the distinction between sex/gender became an analysis it can no longer claim. But Ahmed suggests that leaving these histories behind is not necessarily a solution to this mourning. For Ahmed, a persistent return to feminism's transformative intention (and a recognition of the vulnerability or fragility of its original claims) is necessary. Leaning on Ahmed's theoretical consideration of feminist collectives, I would agree that the loss narrative of Women's Aid narrative was sustained by a hesitant refusal to return to its points of internal contention. And, it might be exactly the anachronistic citation of the 1970s within a politics that also refuses to mourn its presumed categories of gendered vulnerability and 'sisterhood', that Sisters Uncut reanimate the possibilities of such memories.

In this way, in drawing together the memory of 1970s refuge politics, at the same time as they refuse the articulation of gendered vulnerability that was taken up then, Sisters Uncut's citational tactics might have performed this work of persistent return and "shattering" (Ahmed 2017:186). Sisters Uncut's citation of the 1970s could have shared Women's Aid narrative for a loss of a more united time for a politics of gendered

vulnerability. But it is my feeling that the 1970s tradition was invoked here precisely because the presumed subject of that 1970s women’s movement — and its presumed cohesiveness — was not. Thus, while for Women’s Aid, the 1970s was invoked and settled in the past in ways which obstructed an analysis of the continued fragility of that politics within the present — for Sisters Uncut moments of ‘looking back’ served more as anachronistic interruptions. These anachronisms might have presented a feminist project as one vulnerable to change, reinterpretation, and engagement. At the same time, they sustained an affective hopefulness for a radical feminist politics that could challenge the differentiated distribution of precarity in the contemporary present and future. Returning then to Butler’s (2016) emphasis that articulations against precarity do not in themselves have to *refuse* vulnerability — it might be exactly by animating these fragile and vexed memories within feminism that the ‘good’ feeling in Sister’s Uncut campaign is sustained.

I want to develop this point of animated anachronism and vulnerability of political articulations, with a final consideration how Sisters Uncut took up of another point in feminist history. Indeed, much of the groups notoriety was based on their occupation of the red carpet at the premiere of *Suffragette* (2015) — a fictionalised account of the early British Suffragettes struggle to achieve the vote. Public sentiment around the film had been both celebratory and reflexive. The film was generally understood as a story of ‘how far we have come’, but it also provided an opportunity to consider the continuing problems of inequality in the present. The memory work of the film and its celebratory take up, provided an opportunity to question the way in which the progress since the British Suffragettes was narrated (Eric-Udorie 2015).<sup>108</sup>

At the premiere of the film, Sisters Uncut staged a sit-in protest on the red carpet, crossing the barriers, linking their arms together, and wearing the slogan “dead women can’t vote” across their bodies. The demonstration received substantial media coverage

---

<sup>108</sup> It is telling that the film received a substantial critique for a promotional photo of the predominantly white cast wearing Emmeline Pankhurst’s quote: “I’d rather be a rebel than a slave”, a phrase often cited as one of many which exemplified the racism of the suffragette movement (Gajanan 2015). See also Ware (1992) for an examination of race and racism within British feminisms and hooks (1983) for a discussion of the US suffrage movement.

after the event.<sup>109</sup> Using the tactics of the Suffragettes — crossing barriers, disrupting formal spaces, and mobilising their bodily vulnerability — to make a claim about the differentiated distribution of vulnerability under austerity, the demonstration was taken up widely as a return of this form of feminist resistance. The curated statement of the protest was quickly amplified by the response taken at the premiere. Scenes of the Suffragettes being violently dragged from demonstrations in the film, were immediately resituated in the contemporary context as security guards attempted to remove the protesters from the red carpet. Certainly, the staged protest relied on “the mobilisation of vulnerability, which means that vulnerability can be a way of being exposed and agentic at the same time” (Butler 2016: 24), and in doing so troubled the film’s take up as pertaining to a feminist collective agency of the *past*.

Women lay on the floor chanting ‘Dead women can’t vote!’ and were subsequently (wo)manhandled by security, in an ironic tribute to the sort of treatment the Pankhurst’s received from the authorities during their protests. (O’Hagan 2015)

I’m glad a group of activist women stormed that red carpet. I’m glad the great tradition of subversive women endures. And I’m very glad Sisters Uncut exists – I just wish it didn’t have to. (O’Hagan 2015)

This sense of Sisters Uncut as occupying a return of a feminist project, was reflected in the way in which the group were received in more supportive media. In the above *Guardian* article, they became an example of feminist activism *enduring*, where the groups use of anachronism was seemingly adopted by the author’s ambiguous addition of “wo” as a prefix to manhandled.

The groups citing of the British Suffragettes then continued throughout many of their 2015 and 2016 demonstrations, disrupting similar moments when narratives of progress might have been left to circulate. Deploying the very same “embodied subversions of emblematic figures” (Puwar 2010:302) as the Suffragettes, when Parliament celebrated the unveiling of a memorial artwork on the anniversary of Suffragette Emily Wilding Davison’s death, members of the group ‘chained’ themselves to the gates of

---

<sup>109</sup> See: Cohen (2015); O’Hagan (2015); Sisters Uncut (2015), Bannerman (2015), Krol (2015) as example.

Westminster. At a protest in Portsmouth Council in early 2016, Sisters Uncut performed a flyering of the council chamber reminiscent of Suffragette's protests in the House of Commons (Puwar 2010). Once again taking pleasure in this tactic of recitation, a *Guardian* description reads almost as though written in the era referenced:

The mayor walked out of the chamber as purple and green confetti rained down from a packed public gallery, where a group of women unfurled a banner and chanted in unison 'two women a week: murdered'. (Howard 2016)

But against this broader reading of Sisters Uncut as an uncomplicated return of British first wave feminism as above, I read these anachronistic citations as deliberately humorous disruptions. They neither dismiss, nor wholeheartedly claim, that feminist project of the past. It is rather in unsettling or disrupting narratives of feminist loss and progress — feminist politics as existing then and not now — that Sisters Uncut re-enacted these feminist memories in ways that disrupt it as both lost, ended, or settled. In this sense, these protests did not just remember the past to justify the worth of the refuge in the present as in Women's Aid. By adopting these citations, whilst at the same time redefining the terms of these feminist projects through their sustained interventions into the political category of 'woman' and the causes of gendered precarity itself, the contemporary politics of vulnerability around gendered violence became both, unexceptional within a broad feminist politics and as necessary as ever.

In the earlier analysis of Women's Aid, I have argued that despite the explicit lack of feminist allegiance in the Women's Aid campaign, certain textual, rhetorical, and affective technologies work to enhance the story of the current crisis with a feminist sentiment. That is, despite feminism's explicit absence, clues to a feminist past are invoked to fill the loss of the refuge with urgency and exceptionality. At the same time, I have suggested that the allocation of feminism *to* a settled past through such hesitant citations means that the ambivalences of organising around the issue of domestic violence are both denied, and sustained in the present. In doing so, resistance to returning to a vexed politics of vulnerability is sustained by this narrative — to return to the feminist politics of the refuge can only be a turn backwards.

But in performing a history that Women's Aid no longer explicitly names, Sisters Uncut's use of seeming anachronistic history, worked to de-exceptionalise this feminist politics within the present. By employing these seeming anachronisms through a political frame in which both the category of woman and the framework of gendered violence was extended, Sisters Uncut sustained the 'good' affect for a feminist politics of the past without necessarily redeploying the vexed objects of it. This might have worked to reanimate understandings of gendered vulnerability — who is vulnerable, why are they vulnerable, from what political locations does this vulnerability stem? But it also might have worked to represent a haunting feminist history as itself vulnerable to reengagement. In challenging both, the presumed subject of a feminist politics against gendered violence, and the imagined resolutions to gendered vulnerability itself, their demonstrations might be considered as challenging the frequent narrative that such politics is too difficult to return to. Or rather, perhaps it was by invoking or re-remembering *then*, to bring context to the present, that both Women's Aid and Sisters Uncut differently made the many contradictions of the gendered *politics of vulnerability* under austerity visible.

### **The vexed site of vulnerability**

[T]he recent revaluation of the motifs of dispossession and vulnerability is particularly provocative in the context of contemporary feminist thought. Especially in regard to the issue of sexual violence, this return to vulnerability appears precarious; it is a return to a theme that is deeply vexed in the context of feminist theory. (Murphy 2012:70)

When I returned to many of the feminist texts on violence for this chapter, I could not help but note the affect that gendered violence as a subject seemed to bring into a text. I was struck when, for example, Sharon Lamb introduced the otherwise careful discursive approach to sexual violence with the promise that the “victim-feminists” (1999:1) won't like her book — that it was not for *them*. Conversely, it is not by accident that Nussbaum's infamous dismissal of Judith Butler (and cultural theory more generally) ends with the promise that “battered woman were not sheltered by”

(1999:45) Butler's work.<sup>110</sup> Rebecca Stringer (2014) works to trace these positions in her recent book *Knowing Victims* where she argues that while accusations of victim feminism might haunt many feminist projects, this requires returning to and unpacking the category of victim, rather than its necessary refusal. In many ways, Stringer's work represents an effort to return to this vexed site of violence that Murphy articulates, in ways in which the authors of *Vulnerability in Resistance* follow in their unpacking of agency in relation to vulnerability (Butler, Sabsay and Gambetti 2016). But working through Hemmings (2011) attention to western feminist narratives of about its own past within this chapter, I have suggested that the broader hesitations I and others feel with the topic and feminist history around gendered violence, are also informed by the 'generational', epistemological, and theoretical investments we imagine we have otherwise made. How feminists feel about the politics of Women's Aid and Sisters Uncut campaigns around the refuge, might depend greatly on the kind of theoretical and political attachments to vulnerability, and vulnerability politics, that might otherwise inform our work. Or, to our attachments to conceptualisations of agency, oppression, experience, and the category of 'woman' which continue to travel through and beyond feminist politicisations around violence.

At first, the focus of my chapter was what these attachments meant for a vulnerability politics in feminism, asking *whether* politicising around the issue of violence and vulnerability under austerity could occur constructively despite them. Because my interest was in answering that question, I sought to locate the loaded character of vulnerability within debates around gendered violence, hoping to unpack, find the source, and so 'resolve' that which animated the more recent vulnerability literature with such hesitation. In contrast to the chapter which follows, my interest in this scene was not to dispute, nor analyse specifically, why refuge services were "vulnerable" (Sanders-McDonagh, Neville and Nolas 2016:61) under austerity. Nor was it to suggest that because Sisters Uncut took up an explicitly feminist label, their articulation of such politics was necessarily a 'better' one for responding to the austerity context. I wanted

---

<sup>110</sup> See also Hawkesworth's (1989) referencing of rape, domestic violence and sexual harassment to critique "post-modern" accounts of knowledge, and Haaken (2002) for a critique of Mardorossian and her conflation of post modernism, critical cultural theory, and psychology. See Sara Ahmed for her discussion of universalising accounts of "women's pain" which aim "to authenticate an ontological distinction between legitimate and illegitimate feminist" (2004:173).



to instead trace why and how the “public feeling” (Cvetkovich 2012) around the refuge service had been maintained in the context of a broader austerity agenda: What were the risks of mobilising this vulnerability within a broader discourse of austerity?

But what I have instead gone on to argue, is that the visibility of the refuge might be sustained precisely through a sentiment, memory, and narrative for a contentious feminist vulnerability politics of the past. It is my sense that the refuge came to stand in for the gendered effects of austerity more broadly, at least in part, because the vulnerability politics that occurs around the refuge exists within a longer and known feminist politics of recognition towards the issue of violence.<sup>111</sup> I have argued that both Women’s Aid and Sisters Uncut invoked feelings for this politics of vulnerability in their campaigns, despite their obvious strategic, political, and historical distinctions. And for all my frustration with the politics that Women’s Aid hesitantly invoked, and initial confusion for the citations that Sisters Uncut anachronistically remembered — my feeling for the urgency of these campaigns was left unchallenged. These mobilisations were not necessarily undermined by, or made impossible, because they differently invoke a vexed history. Rather, it is my sense they were enlivened precisely by their engagement with the ‘risky’ politics of it. But I have also argued the risks of this politics of vulnerability emerge when these memories are invoked alongside a hesitation to interrogate their content and forms. Thus, it might also be an open engagement with the gendered politics of vulnerability and an engagement with the riskiness of it, that such ghosts become less of a vulnerability *for* feminism, and rather, one of the many vulnerabilities within it. It is the reminder of, or the return to, this very vexedness — which might imbue the politics of vulnerability under austerity with meaning.

---

<sup>111</sup> Further marking these histories as far from resolved, they have continued to play out in the “Me Too” response to sexual violence in 2018.

## Chapter Six

### **‘Fund our NHS instead’: vulnerable institutions in an atmosphere of limitation**

[I]t’s where the ideology of Brexit strikes against the idea of ourselves as a people in the most intimate way possible. Because the NHS is where we are literally at our most naked and vulnerable. It’s at the heart of what we believe it is to be British. (Cadwalladr 2016)

In the run up to the Brexit referendum in 2016 the Vote Leave campaign travelled the UK on a now infamous red bus, painted with the slogan “We send the EU £350 million a week — Let’s fund our NHS instead”. In promising to cure the instability of the National Health Service by transferring the payments made for European Union membership to public services, the Vote Leave campaign was accused of misleadingly activating public investment in the NHS to influence the outcome of the referendum (Lichfield 2017; Mason 2016). Following the referendum, the Government was quick to distance itself from “the single most visible promise of the leave campaign” (Walker 2016). Promising that while the NHS would get “a really substantial amount” (Walker 2016) per week by 2020, the complexity of UK/EU funding in relation to the NHS itself made such funding far more complicated than the competitive “instead” of Vote Leave’s slogan.<sup>112</sup> Yet the “crisis” discourse surrounding the NHS has only been amplified since the Brexit result.

---

<sup>112</sup> According to the recent Health Committee Report into Health and Social Care under Brexit, areas of concern for the NHS following Brexit include: the UK health and social care workforce — which includes approximately 60,000 EU workers within the NHS, and 90,000 in wider social care (Parliament. House of Commons, 2017:13); reciprocal healthcare and cross-border health care arrangements; the availability of medicines, medical products, trials and research; and resources gathered through EU agencies, including funding and research networks (Parliament. House of Commons, 2017:5).

In the introduction sequence to BBC2's documentary series *Hospital*, the doors of an NHS ward open to a fragmented scene of emergency. The viewer makes sense of the chaos through the sound of ambulance sirens, crowded surgery orders, and the alarms of medical support machines. A staff member dresses in a plastic surgical cloak while running to a machine alert in another room. Medical staff crowd around a notice board. A close-up on a hand-written schedule tells the viewer that there are "No Beds". Staff run through the corridors of the hospital as the shaky hand held camera follows them to a suspenseful piano track. Audio of "red alert", the "worst ten days on record", "patients competing", "problems", and "pressures" hang above the shots of crowded wards and patient emergencies. The narrator promises an inside look at "what's really happening in our hospitals", where:

Every week more than 20,000 people are treated here. And the numbers, as well as our expectations, are rising. [...] But they are operating at a time when the NHS has never been under more pressure. It's very future, under scrutiny. Following the patients from the moment they are admitted, to the moment they leave, week by week we reveal the complex decisions the staff must make about who to care for next. (Episode 1 2017)

---

These mobilisations of the National Health Service under pressure, in relation to the NHS as responding to "our most naked" (Cadwalladr 2016) vulnerability, make up the case study for this chapter. In what follows, I consider how the Vote Leave campaign's competitive promise — to secure the stability of the NHS *over* the costs of EU membership — worked within the contemporary discursive framing of the NHS as in "crisis". I build the argument that the discursive circulation of a limit to state spending in the context of UK austerity produced a discourse in which the Leave campaign could successfully mobilise the ability to 'save' a vulnerable NHS by securing a stronger boundary to the nation itself. This promise borrowed from, and worked intertextually with, long-running sentiments over UK membership in the EU and the cross-party focus on border securitisation and migration. But in this chapter, I consider how these mobilisations of a certain national vulnerability — as a 'porous' border, or as experienced through, and by, a national institution such as the NHS — were affectively

sustained by an investment in a temporal framing of vulnerability which in other debates of austerity had been denied. That is, when the NHS is imagined as *the* national institution that responds to *our* shared temporal vulnerability in times of birth, illness, injury, and death — what happens when this institution is itself considered vulnerable?

In the previous three chapters, I have sought to understand the politics of vulnerability under austerity in relation to individuals or ‘populations’ marked as vulnerable *to* cuts in state spending. In Chapter 3, I considered the discursive work of the ‘most vulnerable’ in both challenging and limiting understandings of state responsibility under austerity. In Chapter 4, I considered feeling vulnerable in relation to the experience of undergoing assessments for benefit entitlement, which revealed the often intimate, daily, and relational ways that the politics of vulnerability manifested. In Chapter 5, I considered how vulnerability was mobilised in relation to refuge provision as a feminist response to gendered violence. I considered how the “vexed” (Murphy 2012:70) character of frameworks around gendered vulnerability both enhanced and diminished recognition of the necessity of the refuge itself. But in this final analysis chapter, I consider how it was the apprehension of a shared, temporal vulnerability in times of birth, illness, and death that was revealed through the “public feelings” (Cvetkovich 2012) that circulated around the NHS under austerity. I argue that the NHS became *ours* in the above articulations in part because it was understood as responding to the ever-present temporal vulnerability of UK citizens. Indeed, Roberta Bivins, in her discussion of racism, migration, and the NHS, notes that it is through the consistent use of the possessives (yours, ours) in relation to the NHS that the imagined “ideals of universalism” (2017:87) are constructed. But in this chapter, I argue that the austerity discourse positioned the NHS as itself a vulnerable institution — one in need of saving. As such, this chapter considers what the work the “crisis” of the NHS can do in elevating or delimiting the recognition of this universality of vulnerability through which the NHS becomes ours.

This chapter thus returns to the ethical potential of vulnerability, and to the questions of political differentiation and apprehension introduced in Chapter 1: that is, to an understanding of vulnerability beyond its negative assignment to ‘population groups’, instead viewing it in relation to its universal but temporal manifestations across a

lifetime, a depiction that has been argued to reframe limited conceptualisations of state responsibility and need (Fineman 2008, Gilson 2014). In this chapter, I argue that this apprehension of universal vulnerability is in some ways already at work in the discourse surrounding the NHS. Yet the affective mobilisation of the NHS as a loved institution *because* it attends to universal vulnerability is also what serves to limit the apprehension of vulnerability of others in relation to the national border. The capacity for the NHS to be mobilised as a loved object of citizenship entitlement sustains the politics of vulnerability within the institution itself. Bringing together my previous chapter's emphasis on the discursive and regulatory work that discourses of vulnerability can perform, alongside an exploration of the affective or ethical call within the *apprehension* of differently manifesting forms of vulnerability, this chapter considers how the "crisis" in the NHS raises questions for the necessarily redemptive work of vulnerability when understood in 'universal' frames.

### **Hospital and cultural imagination of the NHS**

This chapter reads for the way in which the NHS, understood as both a response to vulnerability and as itself vulnerable, was represented in the BBC2 documentary series *Hospital* in early 2017. Filmed at the end of 2016 and airing in January the following year, the first season of *Hospital* promised a look at NHS hospitals in a moment of *unprecedented* pressure.<sup>113</sup> Receiving largely positive reviews for its representation of the NHS "crisis", *Hospital's* positioning within the genre conventions of medical-themed documentary TV granted it further authenticity.

Indeed, whilst the genre of NHS-themed television acts as an enduring form of cultural text, the symbolic positioning of the NHS as a "national religion" (Elkind 1998:1715) is often assumed within, and produced through, the genre. The medical encounter in TV

---

<sup>113</sup> *Hospital* first aired at 9pm on Wednesday the 11<sup>th</sup> of January 2017, airing weekly until the 15<sup>th</sup> of February 2017. Episodes are 59 minutes long. All episodes have since been repeated on BBC2 at least three times over 2017 and 2018 at the time of writing. All have been intermittently available on BBC iPlayer over 2017 and 2018. Series Two began airing in June 2017 and series Three began airing in March 2018. The tagline for Series One of *Hospital* reads: "Hospital: The story of the NHS in unprecedented times".

exists as a long running and diverse genre, which nonetheless replicates certain structural formats, roles, performances, and themes (Karpf 1988). Anne Karpf (1988), in her comprehensive review of medical reporting, drama, and comedy in the US and UK from the 1930s to 1980s, argues that these characterisations and themes also shift in relation to changing political contexts.<sup>114</sup> Patricia Holland, Hugh Chignell and Sherryl Wilson (2013) work to trace changes in the roles and performances of NHS television over the health “crisis” of the 1980s and early 1990s. For these authors, NHS-themed television performed a certain intertextuality between cultural representations, political debate, and daily life. From this perspective, NHS-themed television thus becomes one of the cultural nodes in which the “crisis” in the NHS is negotiated. People “watch — and may well compare — both fictional and real medical staff” (Holland, Chignell and Wilson 2013:9) as they make sense of government policies. This genre thus works intertextually and affectively to reproduce and produce themes, figures, and sites through which a public investment in the NHS will be apprehended, negotiated, and challenged. Matthew Thomson and Roberta Bivins suggest that such programmes are interesting sites for cultural analysis precisely because “they tell us a lot about the hopes and anxieties projected onto the NHS; its social, cultural and political contexts; and its place in Briton’s daily lives” (2017).

My analysis in this chapter does not suggest that the representations in *Hospital* necessarily tell us how people *feel* about the NHS. However, I do agree that the endurance and popularity of NHS-themed television, and the intertextuality of *Hospital* with this genre, offers space to analyse the ways in which the NHS is represented and sustained as a public object of “national unity” (Toynbee 2016), and the ways in which feeling *for*, *of* and *about* vulnerability is produced and sustained through cultural forms. The popularity and endurance of this programming suggests that emotions for the NHS, and knowledges about it, are in part produced through *Hospital’s* widely accessible lens into the workings of the institution itself.

---

<sup>114</sup> In her analysis of UK and US medical-themed film and television from 1930s to the mid-1980s, Karpf (1988) notes a shift from an earlier explanatory “medical approach” to healthcare television, in which doctors remained the experts, towards in the 1980s a “consumer approach”, which aligned with the increasing neoliberalisation of the NHS under the Thatcher Government.

Moreover, *Hospital* was released within a resurgence of NHS-themed documentaries and dramas in the context of UK austerity (Hamad 2016). Hannah Hamad argues that “notwithstanding the longevity” of popular televisual representations of the NHS, discourses of crisis and controversy in social health care have “been accompanied by a renaissance in medical TV” (2016:137). Discussing the popularity in 2012 of the nostalgic drama *Call the Midwife* — a sentimental series about midwives working in London’s East End in the 1950s — Hamad argues the series served to produce the NHS as *the* institution capable of transforming the unequally distributed risks of vulnerability — poverty, work, birth, life and death— within a political context in which the value of the NHS was being widely questioned. In thinking of *Hospital* as part of this renaissance of NHS TV that occurred alongside debate over the NHS over the last ten years, I agree that it is perhaps the very conventionality of the NHS-themed genre that offers room to consider the changing political meanings and public feelings that circulate around an NHS when it is diagnosed as in “crisis”.

But unlike the soaps and comedies that Hamad (2016) references, observational documentaries such as *Hospital* are often afforded a sense of authenticity which enhances their broader take up. Reviewed as providing a “spot on” (Hyland 2017) look at the “frank” (Travis 2017) “reality behind the headlines” (Wollaston 2017; see also: The Sunday Times 2017), individual stories from *Hospital* were frequently used within articles which referred to the “crisis” more broadly (BBC 2017b; Borland 2017; Gentleman 2017; Walker 2017). Thus while Holland, Chignell and Wilson position observational documentaries such as *Hospital* as a form of television that deals with “above all, political debate” (2013:189), I would suggest that the familiar themes, content, and roles sustained that this version of ‘real’ TV operated intertextually with broader cultural imaginations and representations of the NHS in “crisis”.<sup>115</sup> In some ways, *Hospital* was but one example of a “renaissance” (Hamad 2016:137) of NHS ‘reality’ TV programmes — *One Born Every Minute*, *24 hours in A&E*, *Junior Doctors* —

---

<sup>115</sup> Tracing the emergence of a observational documentaries towards the end of the 1980s, Holland, Chignell and Wilson (2013:187) argue that the drama series *Casualty* (1986) and the documentary series *This Week: Casualty* (1989) worked intertextually to produce and reflect a “crisis” discourse about the NHS. Despite the substantial shifts in hospital presentation and treatments since 1989, the ‘fly on the wall’ look at an NHS “crisis” in *Hospital* in 2017 shares much with this predecessor, *This Week: Casualty*.

over the recent period. It is also the familiar conventions of the ‘reality’ genre that *Hospital* followed that may have enhanced its authority when it was released. Individual episodes of *Hospital* follow the stories of patients in St Mary’s Hospital, London, from “the moment they are admitted, until the moment they leave” (Episode 1 2017). It is from the history of representing the NHS through these ‘human interest’ stories that *Hospital* draws both its stylistic influences and its authority.

Yet, unlike these other contemporary docu-dramas, which for the most part present medical encounters through a lens of sentimentality and endurance, the familiar episodic structure, dramatic emphasis, and ‘characters’ in *Hospital* served to explicitly intervene with cultural imaginations of the NHS as *working*. In the case of *Hospital*, these genre conventions worked to both reproduce and then destabilise belief in the NHS within a broader narrative push which presented the NHS as in freefall. Further enhanced by the reiteration of stories from the series within news media and social media following each episode’s airing, the narrative of “crisis” that structured the series borrowed and reproduced long running conventions of NHS TV to place the “powerful belief” (Thomson and Bivins 2017) in the universality of the NHS in question.<sup>116</sup> The BBC’s positioning as an impartial and publicly funded service — also experiencing pressures towards funding and privatisation — makes this “crisis” an important one (BBC 2017a; Parliament. House of Commons 2015). While at times offering challenge to the widespread perception of the causes and solutions to the NHS “crisis”, *Hospital*, unlike the examples I have used in previous chapters, presents itself as a neutral observation of these effects. Like several other examples that appeared over the period — *NHS £2 Billion a Week and Counting*, *Confessions of a Junior Doctor* — *Hospital* adhered to documentary conventions to tell the story of the national institution that acts against vulnerability being itself exceptionally vulnerable. Despite, or because of, the conventionality of the miniseries, its airing in the middle of the 2016/2017 “crisis” made it both a reflection of, and contribution to, the crisis discourse itself.

---

<sup>116</sup> Holland, Chignell and Wilson (2013:169), speaking of BBC’s *Casualty* (1986), suggest the representation of a “crisis” resonates with the BBC as itself a “mythic” public institution, also being transformed through neoliberal policies.



In this chapter, I argue that *Hospital's* representation of “public feeling” (Cvetkovich 2012) in relation to the NHS thus reflected the feelings and emotions that circulated around the NHS in “crisis”. My reading traces the broader mobilisations of “crisis”, vulnerability, citizenship, and care in *Hospital's* episodes alongside the rhetorical and structural affect or the manufacture of dramatic emphasis within its stories, tracing how the NHS is linked to vulnerability across the first series episodes. Ending this chapter with a close reading of the narrative and representational treatment of “overseas” patients in Episode 4, I suggest that belief in the NHS, and feelings about *our* vulnerability, are also mobilised in *Hospital* to produce a limited frame to the universal vulnerability the NHS ostensibly responds to. *Hospital* thus reveals the border to framings of universal vulnerability in relation to national healthcare and the asymmetrical politics of vulnerability that the NHS continues to expose. I argue that this documentary series, in both representing and shaping public feelings and orientations of care around this “sticky” (Ahmed 2004) national symbol in “crisis”, became part of the broader politics of vulnerability around the NHS which augments, reproduces, and sustains public feeling in discourses of UK austerity.

### **Capturing public feeling in the NHS**

The NHS is a British glory, chosen by most as the best symbol of national unity. But it's an eternal source of national anxiety too. Is it ever good enough? Born out of a fraught ideological contest, it can never escape the heat of the political battlefield. (Toynbee 2016)

A starting question for this chapter is the assumed public investment in the NHS: How did it come to be so readily mobilised as a *symbol of national unity* within the crisis discourse of austerity? Indeed, this presumed public investment in the NHS seemed to operate both within and beyond (and could never have *escaped*) the more recent austerity discourse, where the public feeling that surrounds the NHS as an institution at first became visible through the variety of cultural and political claims that presumed such feeling existed. But how are such public investments sustained, produced, and revealed through feeling for the NHS — such that the NHS becomes an inherently loved object,

and an object of *British Glory*? In what ways do these feelings about the NHS play into the way in which the resolutions to its “crisis” within the austerity context are shaped?

In the rationale for “The People’s History of the NHS” — a *Wellcome Trust* project that worked to publicly archive the “cultural history” of the NHS leading up to its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2018 — the researchers echo this interest:

There is a powerful sense [...] that people ‘believe’ in the NHS. However, we know little about the nature, meaning and implications of this belief; the degree to which it has differed across time, between social groups, or in the various regions and constituent nations of the United Kingdom, or the relationship between this belief and a history of often harsh criticism. (Thomson and Bivins 2017)

Indeed, nods to the public investment in the NHS — grounded in its care for citizens’ vulnerability as in the opening of this chapter — were frequent throughout the austerity discourse. In 2015, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, claimed that austerity was necessary precisely to save publicly “cared about” (Osborne 2015b) institutions such as the NHS. This emphasis was echoed through the production of the Vote Leave and Stronger In campaigns in 2016. Here, saving the NHS became one of the key stakes of the vote to leave or remain in the EU. *Why* or *whether* such an investment existed was rarely challenged by even critical responses to the Brexit campaigns or austerity practices. Nor was the fact that the NHS was itself vulnerable. While often positioning these campaigns or policies as *disingenuously* mobilising feeling for the vulnerability of NHS, few have questioned whether this investment was, or should be, at the forefront of the political debate in the UK.

Indeed, this presumption of a public belief in the NHS was even centred within the “Case for Change” for the *Health and Social Care Act 2012*. This Act redefined the functioning and funding of the NHS in ways that “arguably swung the balance of power from the public to the private sector” (Lacobucci 2015:1), and as such facilitated the context from which much of the recent crisis discourse emanated. Yet, despite the Act’s reshaping of the NHS in ways that arguably challenge its place as a public institution, the “Case for Change” nonetheless promised the Government’s “commitment to the NHS’s founding Principles” (DHSC 2012:1), presumably referring

to the consistency of citizen access to healthcare.<sup>117</sup> This suggests that even as the NHS changes functioning and form, its positioning in relation to the national imaginary and the politics of vulnerability does not.

Certainly, much of the presumed investment in the NHS might be attributed to what Holland, Chignell and Wilson call its “myth” of origin: that is, the public service ethos that “remained live in the consciousness of those working within the NHS and those who used it” (2013:29). Many attribute the NHS’s esteem to its achievement in relation to the state redistribution of health and care, and development from the Beveridge report in 1942 as the precursor to the UK welfare state (Pater 1981, Klein 2001, Webster 2002). William Beveridge’s recommendations for citizens’ entitlements to public education, healthcare, housing, and social benefits “captured the public imagination in a way that was quite remarkable in the middle of a war for survival” (Pater 1981:45). Indeed for Beveridge, a nationalised health service was a necessary part of a broader welfare state, which was to insure against “interruption of earning power whether because of sickness, disability, old age, unemployment or injury” (Pater 1981:44), or provide a general subsistence of which healthcare was a central component. The nationalised health service that developed from Beveridge’s report was considered a radical departure in terms of health inequality in that era. Its development by Aneurin Bevan of the Labour Party in the lead up to its opening in 1948 was further influenced by the voluntary care systems that had developed within working class communities prior to World War 2 to address the inequalities of medical provision (Holland, Chignell and Wilson 2013:27). Yet a health service, comprehensive in scope and free at the point of use, was “a new principle, foreign to the practice of most other countries and to that of this country up to then” (Pater 1981:166).

---

<sup>117</sup> See A.C.L. Davies for a discussion of the *Health and Social Care Act 2012* and privatisation. Whilst discounting the Act as allowing wholesale privatisation in part because of the particularities of NHS functioning, Davis agrees that the Act compels NHS bodies to act as autonomous “market players” whilst limiting ministerial authority over the NHS. Davis thus argues that because “competition in the NHS is becoming a technical rather than a political matter, it is indeed possible that there may be gradual privatisation in the NHS without proper public debate.” (2013:587)

Under Bevan's influence the NHS was established in 1948, and is still often considered to reflect Bevan's democratic socialist principles.<sup>118</sup> While Bevan worked to overcome multiple oppositions to a nationalised health system (particularly from medical associations and medical professionals), the NHS is now more often cited as a *shared* political, cultural, and public object in which this myth of origin has become more secure (Holland, Chignell and Wilson 2013). Free at the time of need, where all citizens "were entitled to what they needed in health care and social support" (Rivett 1998:470), the NHS appears as a historic object that recognises human fallibility and need, or perhaps a relational articulation of interdependency, bodily vulnerability, and the temporal necessity of care.

However, through the NHS the guarantees of care in relationship to bodily vulnerability, illness, and frailty were defined in relation to citizenship. Normative vulnerability was thus recognised within a model of *citizenship* entitlement. This emphasis on access to the NHS and the broader welfare state as an entitlement of citizenship thus forthrightly links its functioning and myth to the *national* imaginary. Indeed, Bivins argues that from its very beginnings, access to universal healthcare was both part of the regulation of citizenship and one of its "rewards" (Bivins 2015:369).

For this thesis, it is of interest how this history of the NHS, its symbolism, exclusions, and relation to the national imaginary comes together to circulate around the meanings, investments, and imaginations of the NHS within the context of UK austerity and the "crisis" throughout 2016 and 2017. This investment in the NHS as a "symbol of national unity" (Toynbee 2016) is one I suspect travels precisely, or at least in part, because of the kind of recognition of vulnerability (and responsibility to vulnerability) that the instigation and endurance of a national health system might be imagined to maintain. Certainly, the NHS was not instigated through a language of bodily

---

<sup>118</sup> Beveridge and Bevan did not necessarily share socialist leanings. Beveridge's biographer, Jose Harris, labels him as a "semi-detached" (1997:482) member of the Liberal party, whose political views shifted from liberalist to socialist to assimilationist over his lifetime. Harris' biography suggests that rather than being dedicated to issues of vulnerability or inequality *per se*, much of Beveridge's philosophy was led by a concern for dependency and inequality as "social diseases". Beveridge's welfare state was centred around the rights and responsibilities of citizenship (1997:485). Harris thus suggests that Beveridge's political philosophies found their match in the wartime emphasis on responsibility to nation and reward for national sacrifice.

vulnerability *per se*. But the state responsibility to provide care and protection for citizens in times of injury, illness, birth, and death might be argued to resonate deeply with feelings for, and about, a shared and individual temporal bodily vulnerability — and its manifestation over the time of individual lives.

Erinn Gilson, writing of the significance of universal healthcare models in relation to the recognition of vulnerability, argues that entrenched attitudes *against* public healthcare in the US can only be understood because the universality of vulnerability is individualised through the logic of privatised risk. For Gilson, “the fundamental vulnerability to physical illness, disease, and harm that all people share” is obscured as a “wholly individual matter” (2014:113) through the logics of individualism that dominate US health insurance debates. I would cautiously agree that the NHS provides an anomalous recognition of temporal vulnerability — particularly when considered in relationship to the not so readily sustained investment in other aspects of the welfare state (such as unemployment benefits). But extending this analysis between healthcare and the politics of vulnerability, I consider that even the apprehension of a fundamental vulnerability can be put to work in relation to the other foundational premise of the NHS — its availability as a right of *citizenship*.

Indeed, Judith Butler suggests that while feminist challenges against political and physical precarity must always centralise state provision of health and social care because “such institutions are crucial to sustaining lives”, they also operate to reiterate forms of state “paternalism that reinstate and naturalise relations of inequality” (2015a:142). Indeed, speaking specifically to the universality of care and protection in both the instigation and intention of the UK welfare state, many authors have considered the way in which the ‘universality’ of care for *citizens* necessarily “takes its meaning from the implication that there is an outside” (Bhattacharyya 2015:26). Racialised and gendered regulation of entitlement to free and comprehensive care were central to the instigation of this ‘universal’ health care model. Thinking through the development of the NHS in relation to increasing post-war migration to the UK, and the UK’s colonial practices and imaginations, Bivins (2015) argues that the apparent universalism of the NHS was always based on discourses of regulating public health in the context of arrivals of racialised migrants from UK colonies who were becoming

settlers. The policy trajectory for developing the welfare state was thus “infused with racist ideologies that permeated both policy discourses and welfare practices” (Williams 2012:147). Charlotte Williams argues that the extensive and sustained difficulties that minorities have faced in accessing and benefiting from the UK welfare state is reflected in the “alternative welfare provisioning” (2012:147) histories such as sickle cell activism, the Black Housing Movement, and faith-based care organisations, which offer “a parallel story to [this] evolution” (2012:147) and universality of care. The necessity of this alternative provisioning, alongside the regulatory work of state healthcare discourses themselves, provides caution to the certainty of universal recognition within the NHS’s myth of origin and its present-day articulations.

Critical accounts of the UK welfare state suggest that ‘universal’ promises of care have always aligned with norms of ‘Britishness’, gender, and productivity, which become central to the politics of vulnerability that circulates around the NHS.<sup>119</sup> Imaginations of and investments in the ‘universality’ of the NHS must always be considered in relationship to the “hidden particularities” (Pitcher 2016:47) of exclusion, entitlement, and the nation itself. Thus, echoing the broader emphasis on the politics of vulnerability that this thesis offers as a whole, the recognition of a temporal vulnerability in birth, illness, and death within the NHS is considered in relation to the multiple regulatory frames through which this recognition manifests. I consider how such recognition or apprehension is sustained or limited in relation to asymmetrical figurations of entitlement, illness, urgency, and need, particularly in a “crisis” context.

At the same time, I would echo the broader sentiment of Butler’s (2015a) critique and the vulnerability literature more broadly — that an analysis of the ambivalent framing of vulnerability and citizenship within the NHS does not in itself undermine the *necessity* of social care, or necessitate a refusal of vulnerability in relation to a politics of care. Yet, in this chapter, I bring together the contextual and limited forms of apprehension and recognition that operate through feelings *for* and *about* this presumed universality. I consider how political, cultural, and social imaginations of state healthcare as providing

---

<sup>119</sup> For a work on exclusion and the broader UK welfare state see: Bivins (2015); Calder, Gass and Merrill-Glover (2012); Lewis and Fink (2004); Pitcher (2016); Williams (2012).

in moments of temporal vulnerability were also put to work in the “crisis” discourse in ways that sustained the differential apprehension and regulation of vulnerability in relation to national borders. In this sense, I consider the public feeling that circulates the NHS in “crisis” as one already tied to imaginations of the nation and the NHS’s myth of origin. Feelings of love for, fear for, and desires to save the NHS must be thought in relationship to both the ‘universal’ vulnerability to which it is imagined as responding and the national imaginary that frames the limits of this universality. Indeed, because the NHS is mobilised as a response to temporal vulnerability across political lines, I suggest that the NHS is also an object saturated with public feeling *about, of, and for* vulnerability. That is, feelings about vulnerability become visible through the belief and love mobilised in relation to the NHS itself. I consider how mobilisation of nostalgia, love, pride, and achievements of the nation more generally are shaped through the rhetorical and practical nods to the NHS as *our* institution. This framing borrows from Sara Ahmed’s attention to the way in which emotions “lack residence” (2004:64) in objects, but circulate as an economy that “sticks” to objects and institutions in changing ways. For Ahmed, the circulation and surfacing work of emotions produces proximities of feeling and recognition between bodies and objects which become loaded “as sites of personal and social tension” (2004:11). I thus consider the NHS as a “sticky” national object, over and through which the affective politics of vulnerability plays out.

For Holland, Chignell and Wilson, the NHS looms large in UK politics, culture, and history precisely because it draws these questions of vulnerability and nation together.

For these authors:

Issues of health and sickness demonstrate in a powerful way the manner in which public life is lived out at the very point when the vulnerability and interdependence of individuals becomes unavoidable. This is when whether ‘society’ exists and what form it takes, matters most. (2013:8)

Tying together this reading of the NHS and vulnerability, in relation to the shape that *society* takes within the NHS crisis discourse, this chapter works to explore the transformative potential of public feeling for a universal, temporal vulnerability through an analysis of the ways in which the ‘universal’ mandate for NHS care is affectively

sustained and consistently tested object “of personal and social tension” (Ahmed 2004:11).

### **‘It feels like the elastic is getting nearer to breaking’: the NHS in crisis**

In Episode One of *Hospital*, following an aerial scan of London city, we meet the site director of St Mary’s Hospital, Lesley Powls. Lesley is on a conference call with another hospital in the NHS Trust. It is a Monday morning and the narrator informs us: “the focus is always the same”. Lesley and the other hospitals in the NHS Trust need to know how many empty beds are available. As Lesley hears from the other hospital — the answer is none — and reports the same situation at St Mary’s, the camera scans the professionals in the room as they raise despondent eyebrows. We are to take it that this is a common occurrence. “All right, I think we will go out on red this morning then,” Lesley says. We are informed regularly throughout the series that it is Lesley who will make these “tough decisions”. As a slowly rising red indicator fills each level of a CGI impression of St Mary’s, the narrator informs us that:

Throughout the hospital, from the A&E department to the Intensive Care Unit, from the High Dependency Unit to the general nursing wards — there are not enough beds for the patients that need them. (Episode 1 2017)

Throughout the episodes of *Hospital*, the story of the NHS is narrated through this immediate temporal mode of “crisis”. The regularly reiterated status of red alert, and scenes of rushing staff and cancelled surgeries, convey a sense of immediate impossibility. Like the medical emergencies that structure the patient stories in the series, the hospital, the staff, and patients are consistently positioned as if in immediate threat from the structure of the NHS itself — “there are not enough beds” for the hospital to function.

The mobilisation of national institutions *as* vulnerable within the austerity discourse has been no more visible than the labelled “humanitarian crisis” (Campbell, Morris and March 2017) of the NHS. A crisis discourse surrounding the NHS has grown over the last ten years, specifically coming into focus following the inquiry into the failings of



Staffordshire NHS Trust in 2010 (Black 2013; Hamad 2016). This “crisis” acted as the backdrop to the fundamental changes to the NHS instigated through the *Health and Social Care Act 2012* (Hamad 2016). In 2015, the Conservative Party ran their election campaign with a promise to respond to the “major challenges” (Conservative Party 2015:37) faced by the institution, whilst the Labour Party considered the NHS as in “crisis” and “under threat” (Labour Party 2015:33). Both the Brexit campaigns in 2016 centralised their positions on the referendum through a ‘secure’ the border, save ‘our’ NHS duality (Stronger In 2016; Vote Leave 2016), even when suggesting contrasting relationships with the EU would perform these promises. News outlets and publications have consistently amplified this crisis discourse over the years. From 2014, *The Guardian* headed a series of articles from “the frontlines” of the NHS, mobilising a language of the funding cuts and pressures on the NHS as a war within (but not contained to) national borders (Guardian 2018).<sup>120</sup> Significant media attention was given to strikes and staff shortages and the demands placed on junior healthcare professionals to fix these problems through increased working hours (Campbell 2016b). Different figures were variously positioned as enacting the limits on publicly funded care. “Health tourists”, smokers, obese people, and the elderly became the emotively saturated bodies vulnerable to, or causing, the NHS “crisis”.<sup>121</sup> Shortly after the BBC2’s *Hospital* aired in 2017, the British Medical Association and British Red Cross shared in the explicit diagnosis of an NHS “crisis” (Blackburn 2017; Campbell, Morris and March 2017).

As Ahmed argues, the consolidation of a crisis discourse is not to “make something out of nothing”: [because] such declarations often work with real events, facts or figures” (2004:77). As such, the NHS as both, facing complex insecurity, and a core component of an institutional response to vulnerability, is not the focus of my critique. Rather, thinking with Ahmed, I am interested in how the crisis of the NHS has become a saturated emotional and political discourse. Indeed, the NHS *is* a major aspect of social spending in the UK, and is linked, either strategically or effectively, to almost all

---

<sup>120</sup> For further example: Boffey (2017); Campbell (2017a; 2017b; 2017c); FT View (2016); Hyland (2017); Travis (2017).

<sup>121</sup> From 2015, stories of proposed “lifestyle rationing” for surgery wait lists included suggestions that smokers, or those deemed obese, may face delays in receiving surgery or “changed access requirements” (Campbell 2016a; Campbell 2017d).

other areas of social policy and service (RCOP 2016). A focus on the effects of the austerity context and spending on the NHS is not necessarily unwarranted, given that the multifaceted effects of underfunding, understaffing, and underperformance within the NHS must be considered cumulatively within the broader context of austerity and beyond it (RCOP 2016:4). This is notwithstanding the actual small increases in the overall NHS budgets over the recent period (RCOP 2016; Appleby 2015).<sup>122</sup>

And yet, the very development of an *ongoing* crisis discourse over 10 years suggests a certain malleability to this “unprecedented” (Episode 1 2017) frame. Given that even before its establishment in 1948 the NHS has always existed as “lighting conductor” (Gorsky 2008:438) for contrasting political ideologies, responses to the *Health and Social Care Act 2012* have perhaps merely amplified this positioning. Moreover, the frequently shared mobilisation of a “crisis” does not serve to unify these ideological concerns, nor suspend the ideological orientations that are presented in promises to amend it. The issues facing health, mental health, and social care have been positioned by some as stemming from the austerity agenda, limited funding and staffing alongside increased working hours, hostile migration policies, and privatisation encouraged through the *Health and Social Care Act 2012*. Conversely, others have suggested that the “crisis” will be ameliorated through the *Health and Social Care Act 2012*, the increased privatisation and marketisation of the NHS, the increasable working hours of staff, and further restrictions on migration. As such, the declaration of a “crisis” has perhaps restyled the ideological and political stakes held within this major institution — it has not created them.

But it is because the declaration of a “crisis” becomes about protecting “‘what is’ in the name of future survival” (Ahmed 2004:72) that the widely circulated and politically shared diagnosis of this national institution *as itself vulnerable* serves to mobilise, sustain,

---

<sup>122</sup> It is important to think about the NHS as “highly connected to the social care system” (Morse 2017) such that the effects of austerity cannot be thought of as isolated to the overcrowding and under provision of healthcare. As Morse argues, “hospitals’ ability to discharge patients with care needs on time is affected when patients who are not supported to live independently tumble into A&E and acute health provision – a leading indicator of primary care and social care shortfalls” (2017:3). See also: Black (2013); RCOP (2016).

and alter the politics of vulnerability in complex ways. On an affective level, the “crisis” discourse surrounding the NHS becomes about more than just responding to the intersecting issues facing facets of public healthcare or the question of how best to resolve them. It becomes also about investments and meanings in the nation, the citizen, and the limit to an investment in universality or national healthcare — in part because it encapsulates an institution constructed, or imagined as embodying, these very same investments. The temporal articulation of the crisis discourse — that the vulnerability of the NHS is context specific, has direct causes, and can be saved — raises questions for the regulatory work of vulnerability when produced in relation to national institutions.

In the case of BBC’s *Hospital*, this diagnosis of crisis impacts the framings of state or individual responsibility and recognition of vulnerability — “the promise of care” (Johnson 2016:191) — in both measurable and affective ways. The surfacing of the NHS as a vulnerable national object, one that must be “protected in the name of future survival” (Ahmed 2004:72), reveals the political and regulatory work that the mobilisation of this institution *as* vulnerable can do. And because the NHS is seen as a universal and ongoing *response to* vulnerability, the politics of vulnerability that occurs through this site raises questions of the transformative work of vulnerability when mobilised in both temporally limited and universal frames.

### **Slowing down the crisis narrative**

My first turn in reading *Hospital* is to read against the popular take up of the series, and the more recent crisis discourse in general, and suggest that the NHS is already broken. Indeed, like the slowly filling CGI walls from Episode 1, the pressures on the NHS in *Hospital* are largely positioned as ongoing, expanding, and common — “the focus is always the same” (Episode 1 2017). Though introduced as unprecedented and certainly unravelling, the very sameness of this representation works against this certainty of a crisis. *Hospital* might better be argued as marking the days, months, or years before a crisis where “we need to think about what we do when we actually run out of beds” (Tim Orchard, Episode 1 2017). Indeed, in several episodes, the NHS is described as

stretching “elastic” (Episode 2 2017), where the elastic is *about* to break. Thus, whilst the “facts and figures” (Ahmed 2004:77) of pressure exposed in *Hospital* might indeed be ‘real’, the narrative of a crisis can be more thoroughly investigated. Indeed, because the declaration of a crisis is to Ahmed that which produces “the fact/figure/event and transforms it into a fetish object that then acquires a life of its own” (Ahmed 2004:77), it is of interest not just *what* these facts or figures are, but in *what ways* they produce emotional and political responses to the NHS in the present.

The majority of *Hospital’s* episodes present the dire problems of the NHS as cumulative, consistent, coproduced, and figured through the everyday and ongoing work of NHS staff. Episodes are structured around different sites of pressure within the NHS (bed shortages, outside patient use, surgery wait times) and the difficulty of sustaining operations amid administrative and funding shortfalls. Yet, despite the visual and narrative emphasis on urgency, we hear mostly of *anticipated* crisis, or limit, as the daily work of the hospital carries on. We follow individual doctors, nurses, administrative staff, and patients telling personal and professional stories of working around the struggles the hospital faces — the “living on” (Shildrick 2015:14) and living through the NHS under this ongoing potential vulnerability.

In Lauren Berlant’s *Cruel Optimism*, she argues that heightened social precarity might better be understood as “crisis ordinariness” (2011:10). Berlant argues that, in trying to apprehend the conditions of intense social and structural pressure, activists and others often declare a state of “crisis” to inflate the scene as an event that can be recognised. However, whilst for Ahmed (2004) the crisis discourse affords the room to explore its political mobilisation and effects, for Berlant (2011) a crisis discourse can also prohibit an understanding of precarity, which is neither exceptional or unprecedented, but rather “interwoven with ordinary life” (2011:102) for many. In trying to capture the affective experience of precarity through the temporal frame of “slow death” (Berlant 2011:96), Berlant argues that the scene of crisis is experienced in slow, minor, intimate, and uninflated ways. Tying with the emphasis on temporal vulnerability I have developed throughout this thesis, from this perspective, the vulnerability of the NHS might be better understood as an ordinary aspect of its working within the present. It is this “living on” (Shildrick 2015:14) in conditions of heightened threat, or the slow death of

the NHS and those working and healing within it, that the temporal frame of *Hospital* captures.

Whilst one surgeon explicitly intervenes in the question of funding and privatisation in Episode 3, for the most part *Hospital* does not locate a singular cause for breakdown within the present. Instead, the series largely maps the ongoing effects of a vulnerability, where the causes and resolutions to it are, for the most part, left pending. The urgent scene of the NHS crisis becomes disparate, dislocated, cumulative, and processual — and it “sticks” (Ahmed 2004) to different causes, bodies and consequences in different episodes, in different ways. Following Berlant (2011), the NHS crisis is thus not an event that can be apprehended, but a scene of ordinary living and vulnerability in which the cause and consequences of crisis ordinariness cannot be summarised or anticipated.

In Episode 1, a meeting in which senior staff detail these events, consequences, and effects is concluded with a sense of resignation to their very ordinariness. Professor Tim Orchard, divisional director of the NHS, interrupts a series of complaints from senior staff — “Yes, we know the problems. Does anyone have any solutions?” (Episode 1 2017). The NHS in *Hospital* is an atmosphere of cumulative, productive pressure points, stresses, and problems, such that the saving of the NHS appears as a ludicrously simplified task. *Hospital*'s representation of a scene of interwoven pressures through its episodic structure emphasises not an event of crisis but an frame of limitation, cataloguing the effects of this limitation on the staff, patients, and administrators, who are largely positioned as being on the same side in struggling to manage.

Esther Hitchen argues that UK austerity is better considered not as an economic event but as “a *multiplicity* that surfaces in numerous domains of people’s day-to-day” in “diffuse ways” with “varying intensifications” (2016:103 emphasis original). In considering the daily living through austerity in relation to disability policy, Hitchen draws on the language of “atmospheres”, which shape both everyday experiences and “future imaginaries” (2016:103). Drawing on interviews with families undergoing drawn-out engagements with the DWP that I discussed in Chapter 4, Hitchen

establishes the affective terrain of financial absence and anticipation as taking place in intimate and daily spheres. She argues there is an “atmosphere of austerity” (2016:103) that shapes daily living practices, decision making, and care in most people’s lives. Hitchen also considers the way in which these atmospheres culminate in daily events such as the receiving of a letter from the DWP. In these moments, atmospheres culminate in the “the paradoxical manner of ‘expected shock’” (2016:111). Hitchen’s discussion of atmosphere seems to resonate with Berlant’s (2011) frame of crisis ordinariness, the sticky objects of crisis in Ahmed (2004), and the temporality of vulnerable processes I established earlier in Chapters 4 and 5. An atmosphere of *anticipated* limit or limitation pervades the decision making, stresses, and, in Berlant’s phrasing, “wearing out” (2011:7) of staff and patient bodies and emotions in the context of crisis ordinariness. Thus, much like the temporal account of vulnerability I have developed over this thesis, a vulnerable NHS cannot be apprehended or resolved in singular and discrete ways. Vulnerability in the NHS is dispersed and augmented through the daily feelings, events, and relational engagements of an ongoing crisis ordinariness.

Reiterated in most episodes of *Hospital*, is the *shared* stake of everyone in this anticipatory atmosphere of vulnerability, a feeling which affects different bodies in different ways. For the medical staff, it is a physical and emotional exhaustion and frustration which culminates in daily arguments and experiences of professional failure. For the patients, this atmosphere surfaces in cancelled operations, bed shortages, and physical pain — *Hospital* frames tearful intimate close-ups between loving partners and families as they attempt to remain hopeful about the future of their care. The anticipatory narrative of crisis thus draws together collectivities and bodies who both share in this diagnosis and threat, and share in its effects (Ahmed 2004). Thus, more than just a representation of the NHS in “crisis” as it has been read in a wider discourse, *Hospital* also reiterates the NHS as a shared national object that brings staff and patients together in their exposure to its threat.

In the final scene of the series, another interview takes place with Lesley Powls. Here, the stakes of this slow death are directly stated. Seemingly responding to the broader discursive figuration of staff as at ‘fault’ for the problems within the NHS, Powls

emphasises this shared vulnerability through a call to humanity. To Powls, the hospital's atmosphere of vulnerability returns her precisely to the public imagination in the universal human need for care:

'I think there needs to be a shift in the expectation of what people want the NHS to deliver, because you can't keep on pulling and pulling on this system. We're all [pauses for breath, broken voice as if stifling tears] a bit tired. And we all have to dig kind of deep within at times to find that extra bit of strength. I mean, we're all only humans at the end of it, aren't we?' (Episode 6 2017)

Conveyed by both staff and patients, and presumed in the viewer, the suspenseful promise of the breaking point looms.

### **What happens to care?**

In an episode dealing with the pressures on Accident & Emergency at St Mary's, Chief Doctor Alison Sanders is filmed overlooking patient beds within the hurried pace of the ward. The rapidly edited scene features anonymous patient injuries and illnesses, reminding viewers that A&E deals in immediate and serious health crises.

Announcements of a "cocaine overdose" and a "gunshot wound" filter through the rapidly changing shots of staff responding to ambulance arrivals and unconscious patients being moved from stretchers onto beds. Discussing the situation on the ward, Sanders reiterates the daily anticipation of the limit that has not yet come. Speaking to the gradual wearing out of the "resilience" of staff, Sanders reflects:

'I think when everyone's working so hard, day in, day out, then eventually, you know, they get tired. You hope they don't get tired and make mistakes. You hope you've got enough resilience in the system for that. But it certainly doesn't make everyone more efficient.' (Episode 1 2017)

Fatigued and vulnerable staff make it through the *day in, day out* of the A&E requirements, "using their reserves to keep the system afloat" (Alison Sanders, Episode 1 2017). Sanders hopes for a *resilience* that won't eventually run out, but the vulnerable system, the vulnerable bodies of staff, are nearly at the point of "tipping over the edge of the cliff" (Alison Sanders, Episode 1 2017). And for Sanders, it is when the NHS

reaches this anticipated critical point that the care of patients will ultimately bear the costs.

Whilst following the convention of framing patient stories from “the moment they are admitted, to the moment they leave” (Episode 1 2017), in *Hospital* patient stories are the strategic way into this daily work of negotiating care. Behind the scenes, negotiations and pressures faced by medical and administrative staff largely dominate within the series. Strategic snippets of patients’ hopeful expectations for their recovery are interwoven with footage of doctors and staff sometimes arguing, but always struggling, to perform the basics of this care. Halfway through one of these stories, following a series of heated negotiations allowing a doctor to perform a surgery, he glumly asks the camera: “Why should I feel victorious that I’m actually just allowed to do what I should have started doing at eight o’ clock in the morning?” (Episode 1 2017). Watching these negotiations, edited through scenes of individual patient stories and intimate family histories, a certain temporal suspense befalls not just the hospital, but the patients as well. Will they survive not just the conditions of their personal vulnerability, ill health, or medical emergency, but the vulnerability of the hospital itself? *Hospital’s* suspenseful atmosphere thus mobilises vulnerability in two discrete ways. In the first instance, the hospital itself is experiencing and producing forms of unprecedented vulnerability. Staff are “only human” (Episode 1 2017) and the “walls are not elastic” (Episode 2 2017). But secondly, this atmosphere culminates in a broader affective anxiety for the care that the NHS performs. The vulnerability of, and within, the functioning of the NHS may lead to a decrease, or impossibility, of care. And “the edge of the cliff” (Alison Sanders Episode 1 2017) is ever closer.

As in other similar docu-dramas — such as *One Born Every Minute* or *24 hours in A&E* — *Hospital* represents NHS staff, particularly women, as naturally and vocationally drawn to perform this kind of caring work. “It’s in your heart,” says Lesley Powls in Episode 4. But much of the dramatic emphasis of the series is produced through the dilemma of performing a care that might one day become impossible, and the care of patients is explicitly and frequently contrasted as though in competition. Behind ‘closed doors’ we see doctors contesting and challenging the decisions made by others and intervening in the assignment of surgery times and beds. We meet patients who have



had their surgeries cancelled two or three times because of bed shortages, and the painful moments as patients and their families nervously prepare for surgery, only to hear later that it will not go ahead. Thus, unlike other contemporary examples, where intimate human interest stories serve as the ‘proof’ of NHS staff’s vocation to perform this work well (Hamad 2016:146), *Hospital* more frequently highlights moments in which care is delayed, cancelled, and fraught.

Throughout Episode 3, two doctors discuss the life-saving procedures they should both be performing on their patients. They are aware they are competing for the only bed in the Intensive Care Unit. As the episode continues, they are first seen politely questioning, and finally interrogating the reason that other patients are still in the ICU. Surgeons and administrators make frantic and terse phone calls, nervously giving the go ahead on surgeries based on the probability that a bed will become available. In a seemingly callous interaction at the height of the Episode, the surgeons question the seriousness of their patient’s ill health:

Surgeon 1: ‘Is yours a hot aneurysm?’

Surgeon 2: ‘I think mine trumps yours.’

Surgeon 1: ‘She’s been cancelled four times this month.’

Surgeon 2: ‘Mine’s been cancelled twice, so...’

Noticing the camera with seeming embarrassment, Surgeon 1 speaks directly to it: “It’s game of trumps, isn’t it? Because we all want to do the best for our patients”. Surgeon 2 then confirms: “Absolutely. Best of luck!”, and it seems the conversation will continue off screen (Episode 3 2017).

Frequently, the stakes of this game of trumps are conveyed to waiting patients. In Episode 2 we meet a laughing and self-deprecating Dolly “and her boot”, a 91-year-old Londoner who has been recovering from a broken leg whilst staff try (without success) to find her longer-term care in a community hospital. A staff member explains to the camera the difficulties in communicating with external social services so that patients like Dolly can be safely discharged. Later, Dolly expresses that as someone well enough to go home she feels she is “wasting a bed”: “It feels awful. Like I’m not supposed to

be here. Which I'm not. In a way [...] I feel guilty because I've got nowhere else to go" (Episode 2 2017).

By the end of the episode, this emotional guilt and wearing is again presented as shared, when Lesley Powls reflects on changes over her career. Narrating that her past career as a nurse for the NHS was "about making things right for people all the time", Lesley confirms that while she does her job to protect the interests of the hospital in this atmosphere of pressure, it is "really difficult, because that does mean that there will be people who today we haven't done the right thing for."

"The organisation chose me to do this role because I'm resilient. Don't get me wrong, it's not like I don't go home some days, walk through the front door, and start crying. Because I do." (Lesley Powls, Episode 2 2017)

In slowing down the scene of "crisis" to reveal an atmosphere of multiple forms of vulnerability that are managed, sustained, and exploited under the current conditions of the NHS, *Hospital* reveals the politics of vulnerability within the NHS crisis.

Consistently, St Mary's is presented as a place that people *care about* throughout the series, but their investment in this caring, and the public's reliance on such care, is often presented as impossible or cruel (Berlant 2011). Despite the universal mandate to care that sustains belief in the NHS, there are some days in which St Mary's won't do the right thing for everyone.

### **Sustaining belief within an atmosphere of limitation**

Having developed this framing of crisis ordinariness in *Hospital*, I now want to consider why it might be important to think about the politics of vulnerability within this atmosphere. Returning to Ahmed's (2004) discussion of crisis narratives and fear, I ask: What does this temporal suspense do to the object of the NHS in *Hospital*? Indeed, while positioned both *as* vulnerable and *as producing* vulnerability throughout the series through the frame of crisis ordinariness, this atmosphere sticks to the object of the NHS, and the vulnerable subjects within it, in different ways. How does the "crisis", "guilt", "belief", and "love" expressed in relation to this national object surface through

and around patients and staff within the *Hospital* narrative in proximal and changing ways?

In Ahmed's (2004:79) discussion of the cultural workings of fear, she argues that emotions such as fear, vulnerability, or threat also work to secure collectives around objects (such as the nation) as in need of protection, whilst demarking other objects or bodies as defined as threats to that object. More specifically, she argues that fear or vulnerability, in marking nations or populations as under evolving threat, operates within an affective economy that sticks fear and threat to particular bodies marked as outside the nation, as well as aligning others together through their love for it. Ahmed considers how the mobilisation of a crisis can thus further solidify moves to preserve what is "ours". Such an analysis resonates with Butler's (2004) framework for analysing vulnerability's ambiguous ethical potential. That is, that the apprehension of a bodily or national vulnerability is often at the centre of desires to restate, or recuperate, the boundaries of national sovereignty. Indeed, for Butler, it was precisely through the exposure to vulnerability that the US experienced through the events of 9/11, that anger, "a radical desire for security" (2004:39), racialised national imaginaries and exclusions could be "rationalised in the claim of self-defence" (2004:39). In what way then, does the broader crisis discourse, and the crisis ordinariness depicted in *Hospital*, align those working in the defence of the nationally loved object, as well as work to rationalise acts of exclusion in the name of its defence?

Whilst *Hospital* tells a broader narrative of the NHS as vulnerable, the shared object of the NHS is frequently secured (as the nation itself in Ahmed's example) through emotions of individual love or belief. Maintained in *Hospital* is certainly a fear or sense of anxiety about the vulnerability of the NHS. But this anxiety is coupled with the NHS being consistently loaded with 'good' affective sentiments of love, pride, nostalgia, and empathy. The NHS is presented as something that staff and patients *share in* their desires to protect. Doctors or nurses profess to doing their very best for the NHS, and patients, even when facing failures in care, most often profess their continued belief in the system. The representations of crisis ordinariness in the NHS thus works in tandem with mobilisations of a longer running nostalgia for the NHS as loved object. As in the broader crisis discourse in which the "principles" (DHSC 2012:1) of the NHS were

never in question, the vulnerability of the NHS is secured in *Hospital* in ways that continue to produce and reiterate the loved status of the object itself. This interplay between the belief in the NHS and the ordinary atmosphere of limitation is reproduced throughout each episode. Despite frequently reflecting on the impossibility of care, the value of the NHS as a response to *our* vulnerability is nonetheless sustained.

In Episode 2 (2017) we meet Sister Alice Markey, the seemingly long-employed NHS Discharge Nurse, for whom caring is presented as a vocation. Working her way around the limitations of the NHS by demonstrating strategic, covert ‘common sense’, Sister Markey appears as an archetypal NHS nurse. Her title, age, and humour mark her as instantly recognisable ‘character’ of NHS nostalgia TV (Karpf 1988; McHugh 2012).<sup>123</sup> Framed in ways that reflect the increasing representation of women nurses as the strategically skilled and empathetic frontline who sustain ill-working hospitals, Markey — in her vocational expression and sustaining of care through her individual labour *against the odds* — also resonates with nostalgia for an ‘earlier’ era of NHS provision. Just as Kathleen McHugh (2012) notes the intensified representation of nurses as the ‘good’ in hospitals in comedies such as *Nurse Jackie* (US Showtime) or *Getting On* (BBC), Markey becomes a reminder of why the NHS is loved.<sup>124</sup>

Throughout Episode 2 we follow Sister Markey as she tries to help her patient Tadeusz find accommodation when he leaves St Mary’s. Living in his car at the point he became ill, Tadeusz has been fit to leave hospital for several days. Markey has struggled to organise alternative housing or translation services to discuss this with Tadeusz. The audience is later encouraged to recognise and appreciate the ‘no-nonsense’ attitude of Markey in an unintentionally farcical scene in which she seemingly circuits the entire

---

<sup>123</sup> Markey’s preference for the title of Sister is significant precisely for its marking ‘older’ gendered nursing norms that are no longer employed in NHS hospitals.

<sup>124</sup> McHugh notes the development of a new gendered nursing trope in the 2009 US series *Nurse Jackie* — “a health care vigilante,” who “defies hospital procedure and the law; by her audacious and illicit actions, she ensures just outcomes that policy and due process cannot” (2012:16). McHugh’s reading of *Nurse Jackie* resonates with the characters in the BBC comedy series *Getting On* (2009), which while replicating comedy tropes of incompetent, career obsessed doctors, also highlighted the undervalued, under-recognised labour of two white, working class women nurses at the “heart” of an NHS elder care ward (Johnson 2016).

hospital, asking random members of staff if “anyone speaks Polish?”. Eventually Sister Markey finds an impromptu translator and after a successful resolution to the situation reminds us that her job is about recognising and caring for differentiated vulnerability, whatever form this takes. Asked if it wouldn’t have been reasonable to discharge Tadeusz the moment he recovered from his injuries, Markey concludes that the NHS cares for any patient, “whether they come from Buck Palace [sic] or the park bench” (Episode 2 2017). This is because Markey sustains hope that this is how the NHS would treat the “members of [her] family”. Both reflecting on Markey’s unrecognised labour at the frontline of this performance of care, and reiterating tropes of women nurses as the caring, if unrecognised, “angels” (Karpf 1988) of the NHS, the scene illustrates the sustained intention of care for vulnerability within, and through, the ordinary atmosphere of limitation. Indeed, as frequently as *Hospital’s* episodes question the very capacity for the NHS to perform care, this ‘universal’ belief in care is sustained through representations of individual workers’ passionate dedication to performing it.

It is in this way that the politics of vulnerability around the NHS *as itself* vulnerable is compounded by the political and historical significance of the NHS as a loved object that responds to differentiated vulnerability *with* care. Markey’s refusal to distinguish between “Buck palace [sic]” and “the park bench” speaks to this sustained myth of origin at whatever its personal costs. Certainly, the creation of a national, publicly funded, and free to access health service does respond to differentially distributed vulnerability — it is the very kind of service that writers in the US context such as Martha Fineman (2008) and Gilson (2014) imagine as accommodating a temporal conception of vulnerability and need. And in every episode of *Hospital* this mission to respond to vulnerability is restated. We are consistently reminded that it is the staff at St Mary’s that “work, to really try and make it right” (Lesley Pows, Episode 6 2017), that the staff believe in the NHS — that they, in both senses of the word, *care*. Yet, in the same episode in which Sister Markey appears to remind viewers that this promise to universality is enduring, we are later told by another staff member that the NHS has:

‘definitely changed. The last decade has got a lot worse. [...] There are more days that frustrate me. More days that upset me. More days that I leave work unsatisfied. Not that I haven’t done the best I can but that I wasn’t able to give the best to my patient because of the lack of resources.’ (Episode 2 2017)

When staff frequently address this public feeling in the NHS, specifically their “expectations” of it, it is often to remind the viewer that this universal mandate is striven for, but never simple. Signalling the interplay between this love for the NHS and its strategic organisation, a hospital administrator responds to such public feelings about vulnerability — “For Joe Public, as far as they’re concerned, you know, you come into a hospital, you receive treatment” (Terry, Episode 4 2017). Consistently, staff speak to the camera to express hope that *Hospital* will help “the public” to better understand the pressures on care in the NHS, and that they might be reminded to “cherish it a bit more” (Terry, Episode 4 2017) if they did. In showing us the “game of trumps” (Episode 2 2017) that this universal mandate of care becomes under pressure, the public is expected to be faced with the “difficult choices” that NHS staff face every day — even being invited on the BBC website to participate in a quiz and make these choices themselves (BBC 2017c). This duality is secured in *Hospital* by the mobilisation of the NHS as an object that cares about the public in moments of vulnerability, and one that is also *cared* about. In slowing down the crisis narrative to reveal the daily work and feelings of the NHS staff and patients, *Hospital* represents these sustained forms of daily labour and resistance to the funding crisis as further proof of why we “cherish” (Episode 4 2017) the NHS.

However, having sustained the sharedness of such ethics throughout the first three episodes, the universality of care and feeling is somewhat suddenly put under question in the narrative shift of Episode 4. Indeed, in Episode 4 the viewer’s presumed political and moral investment in the NHS’s universal mandate is suddenly and explicitly set up to be challenged through the explicit focus on “overseas” patient use of the NHS.

### **Competing vulnerability and universality**

In the final section of this chapter I turn to a closer reading of Episode 4 of *Hospital*, in which the limits of Sister Markey’s “Buck palace [sic]” to “park bench” promise are interrogated. In Episode 4, *Hospital* focuses on the treatment of non-resident patients within the NHS, or rather, the treatment and care given to patients who do not fall under the NHS-free-at-the-point-of-contact obligation. In this episode, *Hospital* follows

administrative staffer Terry, who is now employed to follow up on NHS treatment bills. In a remarkable temporal and narrative shift from Episodes 1 to 3, in Episode 4 we follow the slower, less urgent working pace of Terry as he locates “overseas” patients through the halls of St Mary’s. Terry walks the halls carrying a card machine and payment contract and appears at different bedsides throughout the day. Here, the conventional scene of the doctor’s reassuring bedside visit is replaced with often awkward and uncomfortable encounters between Terry and patients in various stages of recovery, as he makes requests for payment and signatures.

It is stressed early and frequently in the episode that Terry’s work is never a question of *whether* the NHS will be providing urgent care, as the NHS will respond to urgent suffering and need in any circumstance. We are told that this is merely a question of whether patients will be liable to pay for these services at the end of their treatment. Nonetheless, the public investment in universality of care in relation to national borders is frequently reflected on throughout the episode. That the NHS might *not* respond to vulnerability — that the limits of the border may be played out in a limiting of urgent care — is later dismissed by Lesley Powls when she says:

‘I think you’d have a huge argument trying to say to someone to stop now, because we’re not going to do this anymore because this patient isn’t entitled to treatment today. I think you get a lot of clinicians who just go: I’m really sorry, they need it, so I’m going to give it to them.’ (Episode 4 2017)

Indeed, repeatedly in the episode the idea of a *border* to the NHS universal mandate is rhetorically undermined. Clinicians would (and do) ignore it, and Terry reminds us the patients most often cannot or do not pay their fees.

However, in conversation with the atmosphere of limitation that that the series so regularly highlights, the framing of a “relatively small” (Terry, Episode 4 2017) question of deficit that exists due to this form of treatment is also the primary way in which the universal imagination of the NHS, and the cultural, affective, and physical borders of its response to vulnerability are set up to be challenged. In contrast to the framing of the *unquestionable* necessity of treating medical emergencies in Episodes 1 to 3, Episode 4 is structured around an ‘ethical bind’ that the viewer is asked, perhaps expected, to understand. Whilst in earlier episodes warmly narrated patient personal stories

encourage the audience to identify with the vulnerability and struggles of patients and staff, in Episode 4 the viewer is more forthrightly set up to identify with hospital staff in seeming *opposition* to many of the patients: that is, to share in the professional and ethical ‘dilemma’ created by non-resident vulnerability and care.

Despite Terry’s reiterated promise that urgent care for “overseas” patients will always be performed, the cost of this care, and its effect on hospital resources, is consistently contrasted with the current state of the NHS. Terry acknowledges that fees are rarely recouped and asks:

‘Well, what would £4 million provide in terms of treatments? It’s a no-brainer. How many nurses can you employ for £4 million? Again, it’s a no-brainer, isn’t it?’ (Episode 4 2017)

Moreover, in contrast to earlier episodes in which we hear of cancellations, surgery, bed shortages, and fears over failings in care, the four patients we meet in Episode 4 appear to receive care in a relatively pressure-free atmosphere. Beds are shown as available, surgeries are decisively performed, and two out of four of these patients are seen after they leave the hospital satisfied with their treatment.<sup>125</sup> Indeed, in contrast to the chaotic fashion in which (presumably resident) patient stories are told in other episodes, the limitation in this episode is never shown as being experienced by the patients, or in the timing or quality of care itself. The competitive vulnerability positioned in this episode exists only between the patients’ physical bodily vulnerability and need and the NHS’s overall financial ‘burdens’.

The episode focuses particularly on the story of a Nigerian woman, Priscilla. Having become pregnant in her 40s with quadruplets and having sought to stay with family and receive care that was not available to her in Nigeria, we are told that Priscilla was refused entry to the US early in her last term. Having gone into labour whilst on a

---

<sup>125</sup> One of the patients, who doesn’t initially appear to have been asked if he can be filmed, is being treated for kidney stones. Terry informs the camera that he will put in a request to the Home Office to check the patient’s asylum status, but the patient soon discharges himself from hospital. While it is not explored in *Hospital*, this story echoes with reports that people with insecure legal status are either failing to seek care or refusing follow up treatment, for fear of being exposed to punitive border agencies (Gentleman 2017).



stopover at Heathrow Airport, she was brought by ambulance to St Mary's in critical medical need. By the end of the episode we learn that Priscilla has lost two of her children, has spent significant time in intensive care herself, and is staying with a local charity as her two children are cared for in the neonatal ward. Yet while the gravity of Priscilla's medical emergency positions her and her children as unquestionably vulnerable, opportunities for the viewer to identify with her story are repeatedly foreclosed. In contrast to the stories in Episodes 1 to 3, in which the audience is introduced to intimate familial histories, stories of couples meeting, and patient lives prior to illness, in Episode 4 shots frame Priscilla alone in her private room at St Mary's, where the narrator restates that her care will cost £2000, per patient, per day. Starkly marking the suspension of these intimate frames for Priscilla, Terry, in a confronting conversation over fees, asks Priscilla for a second time whether her husband is "coming to see" her. Priscilla looks affronted before asking "And will you give him the visa and the money to come?" Repeated scenes show Priscilla being reminded of the charges in different stages of her recovery, and she is asked directly by the camera crew, on two occasions, if she is concerned about her bill.

Healthcare workers in the episode, and Priscilla herself, repeatedly refer to the NHS universal response to vulnerability — that this is about *more* than treatment costs. We also are reminded that Priscilla could only receive this kind of care in the NHS. We follow Priscilla as she meets and names her surviving babies for the first time, supported by many staff on the neonatal ward. We see her rest her head on the shoulder of a staff member as she thanks them for taking care of her children. And we meet emotional doctors who explain the extent, gravity, and meaning of their work on her case — it is cases such as these in which their vocation to care is renewed. Yet, unlike any other individual story of temporal medical vulnerability covered in the series, *Hospital* consistently places the quality of this care, the impossibility that Priscilla could receive it elsewhere, and the gravity of her and her children's vulnerability, in the context of an unpaid — and unpayable — NHS bill.

Unsurprisingly, Priscilla's story circulated widely following the airing of the episode, and was framed almost exclusively through this bill that would go "unpaid" (BBC 2017a). The figuration of Priscilla's vulnerability as a financial burden on the NHS operated so

seamlessly within a discursive field in which the figure of the “health tourist” and ‘porous’ borders more generally have been positioned as threats to the NHS in the austerity and Brexit discourse. Indeed, there has been increasing pressure on NHS staff to pursue the upfront costs of treatment from non-resident patients and perform identity checks for suspected “overseas patients” (Ross 2017). In 2017, then Minister for Health, Jeremy Hunt, claimed: “we have no problem with overseas visitors using our NHS — as long as they make a fair contribution, just as the British taxpayer does” (Ross 2017). This was a veiled message that requirements for NHS staff to work with UK Border Force would continue, and *Hospital* ambiguously ends Episode 4 with this fact.<sup>126</sup> As we watch Priscilla walking down the street alone at night, the text informs us that NHS Trusts “report unpaid overseas patient bills of more than £500 to the UK Border Force” and that “this debt is recorded against the individual’s passport”.

In Miriam Ticktin’s (2011) exploration of the transnational universalism of suffering and the “illness clause” in French asylum law, she argues that humanitarian claims to a universal vulnerability are often presumed to hold a moral rather than political content. Similarly, despite the centrality of the NHS to political debate under austerity, the staff in *Hospital* frequently present the obligation to attend to medical vulnerability such as Priscilla’s as a moral or vocational one. But in reading the politics of care in relation to French immigration policies, Ticktin argues that it is through the regulating figure of the “morally legitimate sufferer” — what in this thesis I consider the “most vulnerable” — that this universal obligation is opened to politicisation, governmentality, and power. Indeed, for Ticktin, it is precisely because universal conceptions of obligation to suffering are applied to moments of extreme illness or violence — the abstraction of universal obligation at the temporal point of intense, medicalised suffering — that the apprehension of the structural and political *content* and duration of differentiated vulnerability is suspended. Thus, while for Ticktin the construction of the “legitimate suffering body” in relation to biological illness defines the boundaries of humanitarian obligation within the “illness clause” in asylum law, “biological life is more malleable to

---

<sup>126</sup> Critique has been levelled at NHS being required to ask for upfront costs for non-urgent care, and to “collect, match and share data across Government agencies” (Steele et. al. 2017), which “by design will encourage racial profiling” (Luckes 2017). Many of these responses have signalled that migrant women without recourse to public funds are reluctant to seek antenatal care leading to avoidable birth complications and deaths (Gentleman 2017).

abstractness then those who insist on its universality may realize” (2011:99). Indeed, while Priscilla’s medical need or *suffering* may be agreed by all in the episode, the moral imperative to act on her behalf does not, as I have argued throughout this thesis, remove the political content from this care. Empathy for Priscilla’s condition does not necessarily work as a relation that removes Priscilla from the political position her medical vulnerability has placed her in (Pedwell 2014). Following Ticktin, it may even be the *gravity* of Priscilla’s vulnerability — its apprehension at this temporal point of intense, medicalised need — that suspends her and her children from the normative frames of grievability and identification afforded to others in the series, or the broader possibility of apprehending her entitlement as ‘universal’.

As Roberta Bivins explores in her historical reading of migration, race, and the public imagination of the NHS, the ostensibly universal mandate of the NHS has always been shaped by conceptions of citizenship and right to access. Tracking the development of the NHS alongside increasing attention to immigration from 1948, Bivins argues that the imagination of the NHS and universal access was foundationally tied to anti-migrant sentiment. New migrants “were perceived and represented as burdening the already-prized National Health Service and undermining the important but fragile health gains it had generated for the majority population” (2015:2).

Bivins further argues that “public and policy responses positioned female migrants as threatening the body politic through their uncontrolled fertility and their failed maternity” (2015:10), where racist colonial imaginings around sexuality, gender, and race positioned migrant women and their children as direct threats to the functioning of the NHS. Thus, against this backdrop of the enduring racialised, gendered, and sexualised figure of the “health tourist” and the “crisis” facing the funding of the NHS, Episode 4 reiterates many of these historic and ongoing tropes around “overseas” use. These figurations are echoed in the narration of Priscilla’s story, where the emphasis on her age, pregnancy with quadruplets, and her children’s now complex care needs position Priscilla as an example of exceptional suffering, which at the same time denies that Priscilla’s experience is already loaded and experienced through these figurations of entitlement, agency, and ‘burdensome’ need. Indeed, we are reminded that Priscilla’s children are filling many of the limited cots in the neonatal ward, and Priscilla’s story is

consistently framed through the exceptionality of her pregnancy and labour, and the exceptionality of its costs. And whilst the experts remind the viewer of Priscilla's absolute ill health and relative lack of agency in having been treated in the NHS — “I woke up in the NHS” (Priscilla, Episode 4 2017) — the repeated and consistent focus on the cost, and exceptional quality of Priscilla's pregnancy and treatment, is haunted by persistent colonial and racist figurations of black women's fertility as a ‘burden’ on the NHS and other social services (Bivins 2015).

The speed with which Priscilla's case (out of the four featured in the episode) would be understood through this frame was visible by *The Sun* and the *Daily Mail* repeatedly labelling Priscilla a “health tourist” in their discussion of the episode (Borland 2017; Pharo and McDermott 2017). These articles referenced her pregnancy in relation to her age, presumed use of IVF, and in one article, the pregnancy of other mothers “understood to have come from Nigeria” (Borland 2017). The ongoing reference to Priscilla's case in articles about “health tourism” and migrant women's use of the NHS more broadly reveals the performativity of this framing of Priscilla's exceptional circumstances within broader figurations of migrant women's fertility (Donnelly 2017; Gentleman 2017). These figurations of Priscilla as an agentic ‘drain’ on the NHS and the exceptionality of her circumstances thus worked to foreclose the apprehension of her or her children's ill health as one of ‘universal’ temporal vulnerability. Indeed, in a scene in which this figuration and failed apprehension of vulnerability becomes most clear — Priscilla, still in intensive care, must interrupt Terry's awkward questioning about payments to directly remind him that she is gravely ill. Terry later comments that it is precisely a relational apprehension of vulnerability that the job requires him to suspend — “you certainly have to distance yourself emotively, you know, turn your emotions off really” (Episode 4 2017). Feeling *for* and *about* temporal vulnerability, in contrast to the other episodes, is not a relational disposition that Terry can afford (Pedwell 2014).<sup>127</sup>

---

<sup>127</sup> In Yasmin Gunaratnam's (2011) exploration of *cultural vulnerability*, she suggests that narrativising the dynamics of intercultural care (racism, gender, misdirected care) can produce ways of discussing, rather than closing, the vulnerability inherent to cross cultural caring relationships. While it is not the focus of this chapter, this work could provide an interesting avenue of response to Terry's perceived need for empathetic closure, particularly given the resonance of Gunaratnam's (2013) broader exploration of the stories of post-war and more recent migrant experiences of healthcare and dying, many of which echo with Priscilla's treatment in the series.

It is in Noemi Michel's (2016) response to the vulnerability literature's emphasis on the corporeal universality of vulnerability in which this question of asymmetric apprehension is raised. In her consideration of how subjection to racism reveals the duality of consistent overexposure of the vulnerable body, which in turn produces the failure to apprehend bodily vulnerability, that subjectivities formed by "racialized injury" (2016:243) are suspended from universal frames. In this way, Priscilla's interactions with Terry, and the take up of her story more broadly, raise the question of whether the consistent exposure of Priscilla's exceptional experience of illness, when so readily figured through the persistent racist tropes of black women and the NHS (Bivins 2015), works to *suspend* the apprehension of her vulnerability as a corporeal one in both intimate relational encounters and broader political frames. Indeed, despite *Hospital's* narration of the *inappropriateness* of framing Priscilla as a "health tourist", this framing was nonetheless enhanced by the story being one of two in the entire series to be raised in terms of the cost, and question of whether treatment should be provided. Thus, echoing my arguments in Chapter 4 about the temporality of seeking recognition, and my emphasis in Chapter 5 on the regulatory effects of narratives of vulnerability and care, for Priscilla it appears that even when experiencing vulnerability in birth, illness, and death, her and her children's corporeal vulnerability remained outside of intelligible frames (Michel 2016). Following Ticktin (2011), perhaps it was precisely because *Hospital* attempts to consider Priscilla's suffering in relation to a 'universal' mandate of the NHS which at the same time refuses its own political history, that the broader suspicion, derision, and suspension of Priscilla's suffering in responses to the episode could be sustained.

Priscilla's case as being understood through the figure of the "health tourist", and a drain on NHS resources, is directly addressed by an unnamed health worker in the neonatal unit in the episode. Attempting to intervene in the "health tourist" framing, she suggests:

'Funds in the NHS are very, very finite. I think we would all feel that if you haven't put into the pot, you don't have an entitlement to take out of the pot, but then you look at somebody like Priscilla [...] What do you say? Do you pack her back on a plane to Nigeria in the condition she's in [...] Do you drag her away from those very, very tiny babies, who, you know, are still really fighting for their lives? Do you say to those tiny children who've had

nothing to do with it, ‘Sorry, you’re not entitled?’ You know, the reality [...] is very, very different to the kind of big headlines of, you know, people taking what’s rightfully ours, you know, people taking what they’re not entitled to. It’s really hard to make those decisions.’ (Episode 4 2017)

But though argued to be the *really hard* example in relation to a *finite pot*, this widely circulated *debate* and perceptions of Priscilla’s agency — as opposed to the *tiny children who have nothing to do with it* — loom over this assessment of her case. Given that *Hospital* only explicitly explores migration as experienced within the NHS from the position of patients (and not staff), the *really hard* decisions in the episode map neatly within the frames that those headlines allow. The atmosphere of limitation represented within the NHS in Episodes 1 to 3, and the limited framing of migration, movement, and citizenship entitlement within Episode 4, work together to legitimise an answer to the question that this staff member tries to refuse. The framing of Episode 4 aligns staff and the viewer together in this debate, in which Priscilla’s story becomes the ‘other’ exceptional case over which *we* might make a call. The framing of Episode 4 within historic and ongoing figurations of “health tourism”, and its wider circulation within the discourse of crisis, produces this previously foreclosed question as a suddenly legitimate one — What is the limit to *our* investment in universal care for vulnerability?

### **Saving ‘our’ NHS and the affective limit to universal vulnerability**

I introduced this chapter with a discussion of the infamous Brexit bus and its promise to save *our* NHS. In the remainder of this chapter, I have tried to consider the broader crisis discourse that presented the NHS as needing saving and to unpack the workings of this discourse in relation to the politics of vulnerability. In analysing how vulnerability differently circulates within the representation of the NHS in *Hospital*, this chapter has argued that the crisis discourse draws meaning, and is experienced through, an investment in the NHS as a public service. This investment, I argue, is based on public feelings *for*, *of* and *about* citizens’ temporal vulnerability in relation to birth, illness, and death, and state provided care.

In focusing on BBC2's *Hospital* as a way into this cultural and political discourse, I have noted how this explicitly impartial analysis of the "crisis" works to produce and represent multiple conceptions of vulnerability in relationship to the NHS. In doing so, I have argued that the presentation of the NHS as itself a vulnerable national object in the first instance is factored through, and serves to enhance, representations of the vulnerability of patients and staff who experience these limitations as an ongoing, daily, and ordinary. But in linking this discussion of the widely mobilised public belief in the NHS as a response to such universal vulnerability, through a closer reading of Episode 4 I have also suggested this 'universality' is centrally tied to the exclusionary framing of the NHS with which I began this chapter. In this I agreed with Bivins, who argues that:

rightful entitlement to the NHS maps the boundaries of Britishness at least as effectively as the nation's (porous) borders themselves. Legitimate access to universal healthcare, free at the point of need, has become both a marker of citizenship and its reward. (Bivins 2015:369)

In a smaller citation in Chapter 3, I argued that the NHS might be considered a key site in which to think about the ways public feeling for temporal and universal vulnerability can be mobilised within and through austerity politics. Indeed, that chapter opened with a quote from the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, in which "welfare reform" processes became necessary precisely to save "public institutions such as the NHS" (Osborne 2015b) *from* vulnerability. This mobile work of the NHS was in this way later replicated in the Brexit discourse, where public feeling for the 'universal' mandate to health care could be mobilised towards the prohibitive work of asserting sovereign borders.

Taking these citations as a starting point in this chapter, I argued that feelings about and for a temporally universal, if differentiated, personal vulnerability served to bolster the need to protect these national institutions from forms of ongoing and impending "crisis". In this way, I worked with Ahmed's (2004) discussion of emotions and national objects, and my broader attention to public feelings about vulnerability, to consider how the NHS could *both* be secured as a loved object through its role in ameliorating and responding to differentiated temporal vulnerability at the same time as it marked the boundaries of citizenship through a limited entitlement to care.

In this sense, this chapter has returned to frameworks of vulnerability to make two points about the politics of vulnerability. Firstly, the mobilisation of the crisis discourse produces the NHS as itself a vulnerable institution, in a limited and contextualised frame. This framework suggests that the vulnerability of the NHS can be amended — through the assertion of a stronger border, through increasing privatisation, through the reshaping of the ‘universal’ mandate to care. In this sense, the institution is mobilised *as* vulnerable in ways which sustain the negative, and ultimately surmountable, connotations to which the vulnerability literature directly intervenes. But secondly, I have argued that universal or temporal invocation of vulnerability in relation to “fundamental” (Gilson 2014:113) bodily needs are also at work in the crisis discourse. Arguing that public feeling *for* and *about* a shared vulnerability was at work in this discourse in ways which sustained belief in the NHS as a loved object, I suggested that these feelings about, for, and of temporal vulnerability did not, in this instance, necessarily challenge these exclusionary frameworks of care and entitlement. Thus, while in earlier chapters the invocation of a universal or shared vulnerability was explored as if absent — rather than implicated — in the politics of vulnerability in the current moment, here it was the temporal accounts of human vulnerability addressed in more recent feminist literature that were more ambivalently centred. Noting the work that ostensibly ‘universal’ accounts of vulnerability can do in sustaining exclusionary border politics, I questioned whether even feelings for a temporal vulnerability in birth, illness, and death necessarily resolved the stakes of the vulnerability politics made visible through the enactments and dilemmas over care.

In sustaining a focus on the “experience of the present moment” (Berlant 2011:192), or rather, the felt, everyday, or affective sense of limitation within “atmospheres of austerity” (Hitchen 2016), the relational foreclosures, refusals, and hidden maintenance of a ‘universal’ obligation to care became apparent. Through the figures such as the “health tourist” who is refused a place within *our* NHS, the ‘strategic’ nurses and worn out professionals who sustain the NHS through their labour against the odds, and the guilty patients who cannot get better and move on, the potential empathetic fractures within the politics of vulnerability were revealed. Slowing down the “crisis” narrative through this reading of *Hospital* revealed the sustained gendered, racialised, and sexual frames through which both the labour of ‘universal’ mandates and their limited application and apprehension were sustained.



Whilst this chapter sustains a hope for the maintenance of the NHS, and the non-discriminatory care that the NHS might provide, it also joins more critical approaches to the belief in the welfare state that suggest it has never been 'universal'. Indeed, in this chapter, public feeling for vulnerability, and public belief in the NHS, was revealed as contributing to a politics of care that acted as both a mode of recognition *and* refusal within the austerity crisis discourse. Feelings of, for and about vulnerability revealed the daily workings of the politics of vulnerability within the NHS, but they were not necessarily an antidote to it.

## Conclusion

### **Vulnerability politics in uncertain times**

Following the resignation of Prime Minister David Cameron in 2016, Theresa May entered Downing Street promising a renewed Conservative commitment to “social justice” and care for “just managing” families (May 2016). With two years to negotiate the Brexit deal once Article 50 of the Treaty of the European Union was triggered, post-Brexit speculations came to dominate domestic media discourses.<sup>128</sup> What some had called “austerity”, Theresa May called “living within our means” (Giles 2016) — austerity was a suddenly anachronistic buzzword for a Government now grappling with the task of Brexit negotiations.

The nationalist and anti-immigration rhetoric that had intensified around the referendum gained further resonance with the election of Donald Trump as US president and the continued growth of far-right movements across Europe (Gedalof 2018:210).<sup>129</sup> UK news media and cultural and political analysis seemingly struggled to provide a narrative to the “shockwaves” and “dramas” (Aitkenhead 2016) of the year’s political and social events. As the “tumultuous” events of a “year that changed history” (The Telegraph Reporters 2016) continued to roll out in 2017, the politics of

---

<sup>128</sup> David Cameron stepped down as Prime Minister following the vote. At the time of writing Theresa May’s Party is still negotiating the terms of a UK withdrawal. The uncertain consequences of the UK withdrawing having not secured a “deal” with the EU remains a tense point of political discourse (Harford 2018; Morris 2018; Sabbagh 2018).

<sup>129</sup> Trump’s explicit anti-immigration politics, opposition to trade agreements, and attitudes towards the press have featured heavily in UK media discourse about the growing normalisation of nationalist sentiment in contemporary politics (Buncombe 2018; Williams 2016). The growth of far-right parties in Europe (including Hungary, Germany, Austria, France, and the UK), against the backdrop of targeting the movement and resettlement of refugees across Europe has received sustained media focus (Guardian Editorial 2016; Foster 2016a).

vulnerability in the UK might be argued to have taken on a new, even heightened, temporal and affective order.

Austerity and “welfare reform” (2017:54) went almost unmentioned in the Conservative Party Manifesto for the snap election in June 2017, even if “working families” (2017:1) and the re-energised “national interest” (2017:84) continued to dominate the Party’s platform.<sup>130</sup> But as the election results came in, it seemed that public feeling about “living within” such “means” (May 2016) was more persistent than its rhetorical absence suggested. The fallout of Brexit, frustration with party politics, and the continuation of austerity’s effects on local councils and healthcare returned a hung parliament and an increase in seats for a Labour Party that had begun to challenge austerity explicitly.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of June, a devastating fire broke out in Grenfell Tower, North Kensington, killing at least 72 people. Most of the people living in Grenfell Tower were council housing residents — the fire, and the allegedly dismissed resident safety concerns that had predated it, brought inequality in the capital into horrific focus (Bowcott 2018; Rawlinson 2018a). Only days earlier, Theresa May had returned to Downing Street with the veiled acknowledgement that the Government must respond to those who had “been left behind” (May 2017b).<sup>131</sup> Echoing the much-maligned Conservative promise for “strong and stable leadership” (Conservative Party 2017:14), Theresa May had announced the new Conservative and Democratic Unionist Party agreement by suggesting that what “the country needs now, is certainty” (May 2017b).

Perhaps this promise of certainty acted as one of many warnings to internal factions within the Conservative Party that would resume their conflicts in debates over a ‘hard’ or ‘soft’ Brexit in the subsequent months. It also echoed the mobilisation of the deficit,

---

<sup>130</sup> The election was called on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April 2017, and held less than two months later on the 8<sup>th</sup> of June. The Conservatives had aimed to secure a stronger majority prior to Brexit negotiations, but ended up forming a minority Government. (Asthana and Walker 2017; House of Commons Library 2017)

<sup>131</sup> While inquiries remain ongoing, many have attributed the severity of the fire to the flammable cladding and inadequate fire safety measures since a recent council regeneration of its appearance (BBC 2018). Many surviving residents are awaiting permanent housing at the time of writing (Rawlinson 2018a).

the vulnerable NHS, and the “inflated” (Osborne 2015b) welfare state which previous Governments had highlighted. The claim might have worked to mobilise public emotions about the climate of polarisation, fear, and vulnerability that recent events of domestic politics had emphasised.<sup>132</sup> But uncertainty has only remained as Brexit negotiations have continued into 2018, as have the heavily publicised internal struggles of the Conservative and Labour Parties, and the shocks of global political and social events. Turbulence, division, crisis, and limitation appear as the rather ordinary language of UK domestic politics at the time of writing. In this concluding Chapter, I thus follow Theresa May’s claim to the redemptive capacity of certainty in relation to the politics of vulnerability. Tracing the arguments this thesis has made and the case studies it has centred, I question what is so ‘exceptional’ about the politics of vulnerability in recent times.

### **Vulnerability and uncertainty**

A major methodological concern of this thesis was capturing the broader political “sensorium” (Berlant 2011:3) of the present across chapters that have provided several snap shots of contextually specific, yet ongoing, life under UK austerity. While writing, I have frequently found myself trying to *keep up* with the broader political events of recent years — a feeling which has only been enhanced by the often apprehensive or frantic tone to domestic political discourses over the years of writing. Hoping to break away from this emphasis on crisis within broader points of political intensification, this thesis deliberately turned towards the daily maintenance of living under UK austerity. In

---

<sup>132</sup> Days before the Brexit referendum in 2016, Jo Cox, a Labour MP in Leeds, was murdered in relation to her campaigning for a remain vote. In March 2017, a combined knife and van attack killed five people in Westminster. Several weeks before the 2017 election, a bombing in Manchester Arena killed twenty-three people and injured many others. Less than a week before the 2017 election, a van was deliberately driven into pedestrians at London Bridge, killing eight people. Following the London Bridge and Manchester attacks there were reported sharp increases in racist hate crimes in the UK (Dodd and Marsh 2017), and later in June 2017 a van attack on the Finsbury Park Mosque killed one person and injured many others. Together, these events have been represented as political acts of an “extreme-right, white-supremacist” (Guardian Editorial 2016) character in the case of the murder of Jo Cox and the attack on the Finsbury Park Mosque attendees (Rawlinson 2018b), or “Islamist-inspired terrorism” (May 2017a) in Theresa May’s linking of the three other events. Literatures introduced in this thesis that consider the affective politics of fear following 9/11 and the relation between incidents of terrorism and intensified racialised border practices thus remain ever-relevant to this period in the UK (Ahmed 2004; Butler 2004).

many ways, I emphasised the striking consistency and the seeming familiarity of the politics of vulnerability in the contemporary context.

Indeed, despite the constitutive uncertainty of vulnerability as a corporeal and temporal condition, this thesis has often emphasised its paradoxical *consistency*: that is, the ever-present interdependency of bodies to changing political, relational, and temporal exposures (Fineman 2008). As well, I have frequently emphasised the consistency of austerity policies within day to day experience — the ongoing maintenance of “living on” (Shildrick 2015:14) beyond, and often despite, the discursive and practical shifts of social policies. Borrowing from Berlant’s framing of “crisis ordinariness” (2011:10) this thesis centred the temporal ongoingness of ordinary, precarious lives. Indeed, despite the frequent diagnoses of ‘new’ forms of national uncertainty over the time of writing, the daily living on for many most probably took shape in ways that were all too familiar and the same (Hitchen 2016). The disturbing persistence in food bank reliance has been dependably reported over the time of writing (Bulman 2018). Local council and health services have continued to announce crises and to close (Rhodes 2017). The roll-out of Universal Credit raises new — but not necessarily materially different — fears for those facing benefit conditionality (BBC 2017d). And governmental practices of “hostility” (Hill 2017) and suspicion towards racialised citizens or migrants have only strengthened in the post-Brexit moment. It is for this reason that this thesis heeded Mary Evans’ caution to consider austerity as a “new form” (2015:147) of consistent inequality as opposed to an emerging economic crisis. The daily pausing, slowing, and shifting of time for those affected by austerity policies takes on new forms of governmental consistency over this period of UK history.

I have argued that when measured through this temporal ordinariness, vulnerability is better captured in its constant, relational, and interdependent forms. This thesis has argued that it is also through minor, everyday locations and activities that the vulnerability politics of austerity might be most felt. This thesis centred austerity discourses as revealing feelings *of*, feelings *about* and feelings *for* vulnerability. Here, I suggested that the politics of vulnerability was revealed through the frustration, fear, and refusal about becoming or staying eligible for disability benefits; that feelings for a feminist vulnerability politics of the past contribute to the visibility of the domestic

violence refuge in the present; and that slowing down the crisis discourse in the NHS reveals the daily gendered practices of care that keep a hospital afloat amongst bed shortages, funding pressures, and bodily fatigue. Most often, I have found that the temporal diagnosis of ‘most vulnerable’ to ‘crisis’ does not produce *new* feelings around citizenship, care, entitlement, or need. I have argued that when vulnerability is articulated through a presumed exceptionality, such claims more often mobilise vulnerability’s historic assignments most prohibitively (Gilson 2014).

Following Judith Butler’s (2004, 2009, 2016) work on vulnerability, I agreed that the apprehension of vulnerability and national uncertainty is rarely neutral in its effects. For Butler, it was the apprehension of US national vulnerability through the events of 9/11 that the politics of vulnerability was mobilised. Butler’s distinction between apprehension and recognition of vulnerability was framed through this political moment of exceptionalism (Gilson 2014). Here the apprehension of the universality of vulnerability, or the consistent interdependency of bodies to others, was then disavowed through the political differentiation of precarity — for whom and in what ways protection would be asymmetrically sought. In many ways, Butler emphasised vulnerability as a temporal condition defined by the apprehension of uncertainty, or the differential potential for the body and the nation to be exposed to violence or danger, and protection or care. As such, vulnerability was, for Butler, also defined by precarity — the political conditions in which such vulnerability was recognised or honoured and where national and corporeal uncertainty was regulated through the precarisation of vulnerable others.

It is for similar reasons, and through similar events, that Sara Ahmed (2004) generated her analysis of emotions such as uncertainty and anxiety as proximal and surfacing. For Ahmed, fear and anxiety work not just to designate the objects of fear, but develop through an ever consistent and circulating anticipatory vulnerability. As for Butler, Ahmed considers that it is the desire to will away the anticipatory nature of vulnerability that emotions such as fear, love, and hate take on their regulatory effects. Fear forms collectives not just as a response to national uncertainty — it is an emotion that does work in differently securing, surfacing, and designating the objects and subjects of fear and nation. Indeed, central for Ahmed is that uncertainty or fear are not considered

“symptoms” (2004:72) of temporally changing events. Rather, such emotions are considered as circulating forms of feeling which “create a distinction between those who are ‘under threat’ and those who threaten” (Ahmed 2004:72). Or, it is because the national imaginary aligns fearing subjects into collectives against fearful ‘others’ that the promise to amend uncertainty can be politically regulated and enacted.

In Lauren Berlant’s *Cruel Optimism*, another key text for this thesis, uncertainty and vulnerability are figured as part of the durational condition of *impasse*. For Berlant, *impasse* is “a formal term for encountering the duration of the present, and a specific term for tracking the circulation of precariousness through diverse locales and bodies” (2011:199). The present for Berlant is defined by the durational nature of uncertainty as a paradoxically ongoing immovability. Her account of “slow death” (2011:96) under capitalism considers the drawn out and diffuse ways in which vulnerability takes shape and form through “lateral” (2011:114) experiences of agency. It is for this reason that Lisa Baraitser (2017) extends Berlant’s notion of *impasse* to think through the *qualities* of time. Baraitser emphasises the qualities of *impasse* as experienced in time as duration, maintenance, repetition, and delay — sustained forms of labour which challenge conceptions of linear productive time and progress.

Establishing and linking these authors and others, this thesis positioned vulnerability as the ever-present *potentiality* through which time was lived whilst normative progress was both suspended *and* enacted within the ongoing and unfolding discourse of UK austerity. Indeed, I have argued that that it is in this dual potentiality of vulnerability that we can comprehend the possibility for political collectives and resistance (Butler 2016); sustained relations of care (Mackenzie, Rogers and Dodds 2013); and durational forms of activity and agency that might refuse the normative narrative of productivity and progress (Berlant 2011; Kafer 2013; Shildrick 2015). But at the same time, this dual potentiality can inform the governance of vulnerability through displays of national sovereignty (Butler 2004); lateral agency and surveillance (Berlant 2011; Bhattacharyya 2015); and violent subjectification of outside ‘others’ (Ahmed 2004). Thus, in this thesis, uncertainty is part of the ambivalent potential through which vulnerability reveals its always political and mobile stakes. Moreover, these efforts further the attachment to the normative temporalities of progress and overcoming vulnerability,

which often sustain precarity and negative conceptions of dependency in some of their cruellest forms (Berlant 2011; Gilson 2014; Kafer 2013).

### **Vulnerability and cultural politics**

This thesis began at this point of contention, arguing that while vulnerability was a significant and necessary concept for feminist theory to unpack, it was also one loaded with a historic and ongoing ambivalence for feminist theory. Introducing the broader shifts in policy that had occurred alongside the Coalition and Conservative Government's austerity agenda between 2010 to early 2017, this thesis argued that the mobility of vulnerability within austerity discourses mattered to a feminist analysis of the concept. The co-produced forms of emerging precarity that were sustained through these more recent austerity policies were revealing of the gendered, racialised, and ableist *politics of vulnerability* that feminist theory must account for. But as well, challenging the uneven gendered effects of the retrenchment of the welfare state revealed the paradoxical and coproduced forms of differentiated vulnerability that emerged both within austerity discourses and political efforts to challenge them.

In Chapter 1, *Vulnerability and Feminist Theory: Conceptual Framework*, I unpacked this ambivalence in relation to the more recent vulnerability literature's investment in the ethical, political, and relational potential of vulnerability. I suggested that these literatures helpfully point to the ethical significance of vulnerability for feminist politics by establishing an understanding of vulnerability as a universally shared potential aspect of human embodiment, which does not necessarily occur in opposition to autonomy, agency, and resistance. These literatures also allowed me to emphasise the significance of human interdependency to questions of care (Mackenzie, Rogers and Dodds 2013), structural support and institutions (Fineman 2013), and political differentiation (Butler 2004) — key to conceptualising the UK welfare state. I also argued that these literatures raise the possibility of considering vulnerability outside of binary oppositions of agency and dependency — within which they were largely mobilised in the austerity discourse in relation to disability, illness, gender, and state responsibility. Together, I argued that these interdisciplinary literatures on vulnerability provided a theoretical grounding on



which to emphasise the significance of apprehending human interdependency in relation to UK austerity measures.

But I also argued that the literature on vulnerability emerged through longer running tensions within feminist scholarship, and worked to draw out the ways in which vulnerability gains much of its affective and theoretical energy through these ‘known’ interdisciplinary conversations. Thus, against the framing of the more recent literature on vulnerability as new terrain for feminist theory or politics, I argued that it is precisely by drawing together the ways in which these theoretical, cultural histories, and hauntings played out in the politics of vulnerability under austerity that this thesis developed its contribution. Working to explicitly map conversations across literatures on agency, autonomy, dependency, violence, disability, illness, the nation, and care, I argued that not only is the more recent literature on vulnerability informed by a longer history of contestation within feminist theory, but that it is this ambivalent history that is sustained through the ways in which the politics of vulnerability plays out in the present.

In Chapters 1 and 2, I approached Jane Munro and Vanessa Scoular’s insistence on reading the “politics of vulnerability” (2012:196) in relationship to historic and present day regulation of the state and emphasised the way in which vulnerability emerged within specific political sites and ‘debates’. Introducing feminist and queer cultural studies frameworks into my analysis, I extended this methodology to consider vulnerability as an affective and implicating term. I argued that by attending to affect, “public feeling” (Cvetkovich 2012), and the temporality of UK austerity discourses, vulnerability could be theorised as a concept that was felt as well as performed. I argued that these feelings were not just the excesses of austerity discourses and regulatory practices. Rather, they were revealing of the ways in which power over vulnerable bodies was enacted and regulated, and through which the differential allocation of vulnerability under austerity could take shape (Pedwell 2014).

In developing a methodological approach to the cultural politics of vulnerability, I paid attention to cultural, discursive, and affective traces that travelled through and beyond recent austerity ‘debates’. In Chapter 2, *Reading for Vulnerability Politics: Methodology and*

*Methods*, I developed a method for cultural analysis to the case studies of this thesis. I traced how feelings, figures, and emotions were “named and performed” (Ahmed 2004:13) in discourses about, and responses to, UK austerity, alongside attending to the signs of the affective present (Berlant 2011; Cvetkovich 2012). In Chapter 3, *Protecting the ‘Most Vulnerable’: Dependency and Care in the Austerity Context*, I drew this literature, method, and context together. I argued that moving outside of the binary conceptualisation of vulnerability either as an exception, or vulnerability as universally or temporally shared, was necessary for understanding the multiple affective and discursive workings of UK austerity. Together, these three chapters established my argument that attention to feeling, temporality, and relationality were key to understanding the changing forms of the regulation of vulnerability explored in the following chapters.

Chapter 4, *Vulnerable Temporalities: Public Feeling and Disability Assessment Under Austerity*, applied this framework to austerity’s reframing of disability and unemployment support and the Workplace Capability Assessment. This chapter emphasised that the historically loaded association of vulnerability with disability revealed the limitations of mobilising vulnerability politics to paternalising effect. Thus, rather than questioning whether disabled people could be understood as *more* vulnerable to austerity processes than others, I argued that the feelings explored within the art works of a small exhibition in Leeds — *Shoddy* — could be read as revealing a becoming vulnerable *to* the process of recognition for benefit entitlement. This chapter positioned feelings about disability policy, care, temporality, and surveillance revealed in the art pieces as indicative of the more broadly reported public feelings that had circulated around the assessments. I argued that a focus on feelings of dread, fear, and frustration about navigating the WCA revealed vulnerability as a political condition that occurred in relation to the disabling temporality of the assessment process itself. This chapter thus raised the possibility of considering feeling vulnerable *to* austerity processes over and in time as offering room to conceptualise resistance and refusal within the political experience of vulnerability itself.

Chapter 5, *Feminist Feeling: Telling the Story of Domestic Violence Services Under Austerity*,

furthered a consideration of agency, resistance, and vulnerability to austerity processes. Beginning with the somewhat surprising visibility of feminist responses to the closure of domestic violence refuges under austerity, this chapter returned to the “vexed” (Murphy 2012:70) character of vulnerability when conceptualised in relation to gendered violence. Exploring the implicit reluctance of the recent vulnerability literatures to engage with the loaded topic of sexual and gendered violence for feminism, this chapter sought to explicitly trace how this history nonetheless travelled through present day resistance in relation to the refuge. In exploring the take-up, recognisability, and unspoken “technologies of the presumed” (Hemmings 2011:16) within responses to the campaigns of Women’s Aid and Sisters Uncut, this chapter asked how the “know[n]” (Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay 2016:2) feminist ambivalence with victimhood/agency, the category of ‘woman’, and the subject of feminism imbued this contemporary site with meaning. This chapter thus argued that it was precisely the seemingly anachronistic call-backs to the 1970s that re-worked, sustained, and mobilised the ‘risks’ of that politics in the present. Through this attention to the work that anachronism and temporal or contextual disruption could perform, this feminist vulnerability politics of the ‘past’ was neither redeemed, nor refused. In following the haunting character of ‘women’s’ vulnerability for feminist politics through the present, this activism and theory emerged as of ever-pressing relevance and ambivalence within the austerity context.

Completing this analysis of public feelings, memory, and vulnerable institutions over time, in Chapter 6, *Fund our NHS instead: Vulnerable Institutions in an Atmosphere of Limitation*, I reflected on the highly public “crisis” facing the National Health Service within the austerity discourse. Taking my starting point as the public feeling that circulated the NHS as a national object, I suggested that love and care for the NHS was entangled with feelings for and about shared temporal vulnerability in birth, injury, and illness. Through an analysis of how feeling for the NHS was mobilised within the long-established genre of NHS-themed television, I slowed down the recent crisis discourse to explore its relationship to imaginations of care, responsibility, and universality narrated through BBC2’s documentary series *Hospital*. Hesitating to announce the redemptive capacity of apprehending vulnerability in relation to temporal illness and care, I argued that feelings for, about, and of vulnerability within the NHS also worked to undo the very universalism of these claims. In exploring *Hospital’s* tonal, visual, and

narrative shifts in an episode that explored the contemporarily loaded topic of “overseas” patient use within the shadow of the Brexit campaign, I argued that the gendered and racialised figurations that sustained the NHS as loved national object were also those that pointed to the imperfection of ‘universal’ recognition assumed as central to its loved status. In returning to the vulnerability literature’s emphasis on vulnerability’s universal, temporal, and relational aspects as imbuing a recognition of institutional care (Fineman 2013), this chapter thus acted as a critical caution to the more reparative readings of public feeling in the previous two chapters. Here, the transformative potential of a politics of vulnerability were thought in conversation with imaginations of citizenship where the tensions of universality and difference were not yet overcome.

Together, these chapters have insisted that not only is the mobility of vulnerability present in recent UK austerity discourses, but that grappling with the uncertain affective and discursive potentialities of such mobility matters for feminist theory. In identifying the stakes of the politics of vulnerability through an interdisciplinary reading of this politics in practice, these chapters have centred a theoretical framework and method that emphasises the complexity of vulnerability politics across different sites, scenes, and debates. I have argued that attention to the movement between the everyday affective and discursive ways in which vulnerability politics plays out must take place before broad claims to the heuristic or political usefulness of vulnerability for feminist theory and politics can be (if ever) drawn. In doing so I have hoped to balance critical alertness with a reparative hopefulness for the work that feelings about, for, and of vulnerability politics might do.

### **Returning to paradox**

In Chapter 2, I suggested that this thesis was an exploration of the affective workings of the vexed character of vulnerability, and the ambivalence that surrounds resisting and yet often employing “binary” (Butler 2016:25) conceptualisations of vulnerability and invulnerability within the austerity moment. Put in other terms, this thesis might be understood as an analysis of a paradox — vulnerability is a term that feminist theory

“cannot not” (Spivak 1993:50) employ, but can only ambivalently embrace (Brown 2000). Indeed, I identified vulnerability as a paradoxical concept for feminist and social justice projects, because vulnerability will remain an always necessary but centrally “risky” (Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay 2016:2) concept for feminist theory and politics to attach to. In this thesis, I have argued that to mobilise around, or against, differentiated vulnerability requires an investment in the politics of vulnerability which often sustains such differentiations — the ‘most vulnerable’, vulnerability and disability, gender, the border, illness, and violence. At other points, I have argued that often necessary mobilisations *against* vulnerability risk undermining the radical potential of vulnerability more broadly, attaching to its negative designations and conceptualisations (Butler 2016; Gilson 2014). But when vulnerability was considered as a ‘universal’ recognition in claims to the NHS, this claim to ‘universality’ was paradoxically what sustained its historic exclusions at the point of “crisis”.

In other words, recognition of universal vulnerability remains in many ways central to sustaining recognition of care, interdependency, and relationality, at the same time as it often provides the grounds for regulation on these same terms. Indeed, for Wendy Brown, the paradox of women’s rights exists because:

rights which entail some specification of our suffering, injury, or inequality lock us into the identity defined by our subordination, while rights that eschew this specificity not only sustain the invisibility of our subordination, but potentially even enhance it. (2000:232)

In this way, Brown links her conceptualisation of paradox to Joan W. Scott’s (1996) understanding of the feminist paradox of sexual difference. Scott argues that while feminism’s “goal was to eliminate ‘sexual difference’ in politics,” it was required “to make its claims on behalf of ‘women’ (who were discursively produced through ‘sexual difference’)” (1996:3). In many ways, the more recent literatures on vulnerability and their efforts to rearticulate the term outside of pathologisation have in some ways sought to move on from this tension. That is, in the effort to theorise vulnerability as instead a shared and temporal potential of human embodiment, they have made a claim to universalism to draw attention to the political, structural, and cultural conditions through which such universality was differentiated.

It is for this reason that this thesis focused attention to public feeling within the politics of vulnerability. Here, I hoped to explore the affective workings of these paradoxes in and through the contextual sites in which they emerged. I have explored the ways in which claims to a strategic universalism do indeed draw out theoretical questions about what universal vulnerability is, and how it unevenly apprehended and applied. In mobilising against such differentiation, a dedication to emphasising vulnerability's uneven assignment often paradoxically remains. But as well, in my attention to the feelings, emotions, and memories that travel through the cultural politics of vulnerability, I have argued that such paradoxes are rarely unfelt or unknown. Like Scott and Brown, I have considered that strategic claims to universalism or difference are often made despite or because of their risks. I have also suggested that performances of the politics of vulnerability are not only invested in because they capture the necessities of temporality, care, and interdependency, but that it is often ambivalence and feelings of paradox that become central to their affective workings and possibilities.

For Scott and Brown too, paradoxes are not simply conceptual impossibilities, otherwise understood as moments of impasse. For Scott, feminist agency, or rather feminism itself, emerges at the point of paradox — *both* feminism and a feminist subject are constituted by and through the discursive claims to recognitions which are predicated on their very exclusion (1996:5). For Scott, it was through “reading for paradox” in the history of French feminism that conceptual tensions and incompatibilities revealed the “subversive potential of feminism and the agency of feminists” (1996:16). Desiring for the paradox to be *resolved* if simply a strategic side was taken — universalism or difference — would imply “that closure or resolution” within the subjectification of gender “was and is ultimately attainable” (Scott 1996:17). It is for this reason that Brown emphasises paradox as something other than contradiction. Paradoxes are precisely what forces imaginations of linear progress, narrative, and history to be abandoned and through which openings for new political strategies and political imaginations can be formed (Brown 2000:240). In this sense, the paradox of women's rights is interesting for Brown because it highlights the injustice of the present, alongside what exceeds present formulations of justice. For Butler, if “what might seem like contradiction or impasse becomes paradox, and paradox itself is a mode or mechanism of historical change” (2011:15), then it is these points of

conceptual “contestation and convergence” that “produce the never fully predictable conditions of change” (2011:15). For Butler then, like Brown and Scott, a potential politics can be found in the disruptive temporality and imagination that the paradox demands.

In closer terms, the authors of *Vulnerability in Resistance* also grapple with the paradox of vulnerability in relation to agency. In their terms, mobilising vulnerability is a necessary but paradoxical practice precisely because mobilising against vulnerability (or for Butler, “mobilizing vulnerability” 2016:26), risks the reiteration of vulnerability’s uneven assignments. As their introduction articulates, in the context of neoliberal modes of power such as austerity the question is often as follows:

How, then, is the political demand to address these issues to be directed toward those institutions that should be responding to these conditions, at the same time that we seek to resist the models of power represented by those institutions? Are we stuck in the situation in which there are two opposing alternatives, paternalism and victimization? And in accepting those alternatives, do we not reinstate a gendered opposition? (Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay 2016:3)

Beginning with this paradox as the point in which feminist theory might work best to intervene, the authors do not reify a version of vulnerability that might better grapple with this political certainty — agency over vulnerability, or vulnerability as a political and universal good. Instead, their work begins precisely at this very point of seeming paradox to explore the political work, potential, and limitations that claims to vulnerability perform. For these authors then, it is vulnerability’s “contestation and convergence” (Butler 2011:15) with agency that provides intervention into both terms. Thus, rather than taking a side — vulnerability or agency — as if this tension can be resolved, Butler (2016) goes on to reconceptualise the two as not only interrelated but foundationally and necessarily linked. For Butler, mobilising vulnerability through protest against precarity might be assumed as moments of agency. These moments of agency are in turn reliant on a relationality to others. Thus, it is through the point of seeming paradox that both these terms can be refigured.

If the point of paradox is figured as a point of critical and reflexive alertness, it is for this reason that this thesis has hoped to consider how this paradox is at work within the

austerity discourse. What work does vulnerability politics do to articulate understandings of vulnerability and sustain its differentiation? And in what ways does mobilising vulnerability work — affectively, discursively, and intersubjectively — to challenge the conditions of precarity? But this thesis has asked these questions without assuming that a broader political usefulness of vulnerability might be resolved through this analysis. Of interest to me has been how this paradox is known, resisted, and taken up within a politics of vulnerability under austerity — what are the residual discursive and affective mechanisms at work when this politics is performed? It is then of interest how these affective resonances (frustration, fear, anachronism, loss) reveal the workings, logics, and fracturing of power under austerity's conditions and potential ways in which vulnerability, in spite of its risks, might be creatively invoked. Alertness to this point of seeming ambivalence makes claims to the certain redemption of vulnerability themselves vulnerable. And once again, vulnerability is here a moment not of negative incapacity, but an ongoing potentiality through which new forms of relationality and resistance might be recognised or formed (Butler 2016:27).

These chapters began precisely with the political intention of disability studies and some feminist politics to work through the paradox of dependency, agency, care, and power, and to consider how such tensions are mobilised within austerity's maintenance and forms of resistance to austerity practices. As a result, I have often taken up the risky terrain of thinking vulnerability with disability, or vulnerability and gendered violence, or vulnerability with nation, as the point in which the paradox of vulnerability becomes most clear. This is not because I agree with the differentiated assignment of vulnerability to experiences of disability, women, or the border, but because these ambivalent assignments are the spaces through which the politics of vulnerability are revealed. Rather than reiterating the risks that claims to unequally distributed gendered violence, disability and protection, or vulnerability and nation can lead to, or refusing vulnerability all together, this thesis asked how forms of activism and resistance to such violent assignments might be affectively mobilised within challenges to differential precarity which both sustain and subvert these risks.

In following hauntings, risks, memories, and fears that imbue these mobilisations with feeling, I agree with Butler when she suggests that these points of “contestation and



convergence” (2011:15) reveal a critical way through binary articulations of vulnerability. I centred an art exhibition that embraced bodily and temporal vulnerability to challenge its governmental exploitation, and a feminist activism that took up the disavowed history of politics around gendered violence to mobilise the continuation of its exclusions in the present. Turning to a cherished site in my final chapter — an institution in which claims to universalism might be seen as at their strategic best — I explicated on the risk of imagining such a paradox was resolved. While the NHS was a loved object precisely for its supposed refusal to bend to exclusionary logics of differential vulnerability even at a point of crisis, I argued that it was through the belief in having overcome this paradox that many of its most exclusionary logics could be put to work.

This thesis has not resolved the politics of vulnerability for feminist theory. Nor has it has offered a *better* version of vulnerability or made better its paternalising or prohibitive potentials. At its end, this thesis has argued for the need to methodologically and theoretically remain open to the multiplicity, ambiguity, complexity, and uncertainty of claims to vulnerability, through an analysis of their most minor workings in cultural politics and contexts. In making the case for considering vulnerability from within and in relationship to the bodies, discourses, and locations through which it was mobilised, both the risks and possibilities of vulnerability politics have been foregrounded but not overcome. At its heart, this thesis has hoped to hold on to the complexity of feeling and power within vexed concepts like vulnerability for feminist politics, rather than draw conclusions on their necessarily transformative role.

If this thesis has convinced that the politics of vulnerability is a mobile one, its theoretical contribution is to argue that it is necessary that feminist methods and readings might reflect and perform this kind of complexity in our analysis. If not, we risk repeating or reiterating the gendered logics that produce vulnerability’s most loaded connotations and effects. I have argued that within the affective and discursive politics of vulnerability, we do not always know what a claim to vulnerability will ‘do’. Thus, agreeing with Munro and Scoular, I suggest that vulnerability’s potential for feminism lies in the capacity to grapple with this “ever present contestability” (2012:201).

I hope that this thesis has demonstrated that this contestability matters for how vulnerability is understood and apprehended in conditions such as austerity, as my aim has been to argue that it is precisely vulnerability's temporal, subjective, and multiple shifts that make it such a central concept to engage with. Moreover, I hope that this thesis offers ways of engaging with that politics of vulnerability that might resonate with other social justice movements, or in other times and contexts. Considering vulnerability as part of the process of seeking recognition might offer room to conceptualise other simultaneously occurring methods of entitlement and denial within the expansion of hostile border and welfare policies in the UK and elsewhere – such as the use of secretive deportations, indefinite sentences of detention, and penalising welfare entitlement regimes. And as well, attention to the work of feeling and apprehension within the politics of vulnerability, might offer space for disrupting the mobilisations of vulnerability which sustain the exclusionary claims of an emboldened anti-trans and anti-gender politics within and beyond contemporary feminisms, or the unequally manifesting gendered, racialised and classed apprehensions that occur around the 'Me Too' claim as it travels across transnational institutional settings.

But I also hope that slowing down the reading of this politics of vulnerability, leaves space to recognise moments of pleasure, resistance and care which also occur within and through this politics, and the centrality of vulnerability to sustaining social justice efforts in both deliberately disruptive, and sometimes minor ways. It might offer room to explore the small ways in which people work with vulnerability to resist the exploitation of it, such as the reciprocal work of community based initiatives which support people through council cuts and closures, or the acts of public protest which assure such injustices do not remain hidden.

I raise the possibility of this thesis contributing to the analysis of other contemporary formulations of vulnerability politics, with the acknowledgement that they emerge asymmetrically, and sometimes overlap with many of those I have explored within this thesis. I bring them together here to emphasise what I think is the necessity of a transnational feminist politics that grapples with the tensions, terms and possibilities of vulnerability in any political moment. Attention to the feelings for, about, and of the mobility of vulnerability as they emerge in any political scene, might provide clues to the

sustained political possibilities of embracing complexity within social justice politics in future precarious times. Indeed, it is this that I think is at the heart of feminism's tentative 'return' to vulnerability. That is, an effort to hold on to the complexity of feeling and power within vexed concepts like vulnerability. To be wary of their limitations and impossibilities, at the same time as we hold onto the hope for tentative transformations within a precarious future.

This is because it does remain uncertain at the time of writing where the UK will be at the end 2018, 2019 or 2020, and what politics and policies will resonate then. Moreover, it strikes me as unsurprising that "certainty" (May 2017b) and "stability" (Conservative Party 2017:14) would be positioned as desirable affective dispositions, particularly within the context of the unknown future of Brexit. But this thesis has argued that discursive claims to exceptionality, uncertainty, and national vulnerability often mask the consistency of differentiated forms of gendered, racialised, and classed precarity, their maintenance and "stickiness" (Ahmed 2004) throughout broader political shifts. More importantly, it has argued that the desire to refuse vulnerability or to mobilise in its defence strengthens these governmental logics of differentiation whilst working against the subjects and locations that might (or might not) embody vulnerability in assigned forms (Ahmed 2004; Butler 2009). Thus, whilst the discursive terrain, subjects, and policies of the UK context will indeed change in coming years, feelings of, about, and for vulnerability will remain entangled with these multiple shifts. Grappling with the risks and feelings of vulnerability politics will remain central to social justice efforts in the future, and this thesis has suggested that it is openness to these potentialities — rather than certainty — that might be what we need to do so.

## Bibliography

*24 hours in A&E* (2012- present). UK: Channel 4.

Abu-Lughod, L. (1990) The romance of resistance: Tracing transformations of power through Bedouin women, *American Ethnologist*. 17(1), pp. 41-55.

Adams, M. L. (1989) There's no place like home: On the place of identity in feminist politics, *Feminist Review*. 31, pp. 22-33.

Adkins, L. (2015) What can money do? Feminist theory in austere times, *Feminist Review*. 109, pp. 31-48.

Ahiska, M. (2016) Violence against women in Turkey: Vulnerability, sexuality, and eros, in Butler, J., Gambetti, Z. and L. Sabsay (eds.), *Vulnerability in Resistance*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, pp. 211-235.

Ahmed, S. (2004) *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. London and New York: Routledge.

———. (2010a) *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

———. (2010b) The Other and other others, *Economy and Society*. 31(4), pp. 558 - 572.

———. (2017) *Living a Feminist Life*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Aitkenhead, D. (2016) So long, 2016: the year of the political earthquake, *The Guardian*, 24 December. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2016/dec/24/2016-in-review-world-news-syria-terrorism-brexit-trump-decca-aitkenhead>, [accessed 2 September 2018].

Alcoff, L. (1995) The problem of speaking for others, in Roof J. and R. Wiegman (eds.),

*Who Can Speak: Authority and Critical Identity*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, pp. 97-119.

All-Party Parliamentary Group [AAPG] (2015) *The Changing Landscape of Domestic and Sexual Violence Services*. URL: <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/appg-reports/>, [accessed 8 June 2018].

Amos, V. and P. Parmar (1984) Challenging imperial feminism, *Feminist Review*. 17, pp. 3-19.

Andrijasevic, R. (2007) Beautiful dead bodies: Gender migration and representation in anti-trafficking campaigns, *Feminist Review*. 86, pp. 24-44.

Anim-Addo, J. (2013) Gendering creolisation: Creolizing affect, *Feminist Review*. 104, pp. 5-23.

Anonymous (2016) I hate having to explain the housing crisis to women who feel life couldn't get worse, *The Guardian*, January 9. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/housing-network/2016/jan/09/housing-crisis-women-domestic-violence-survivors-refuge>, [accessed 9 June 2018].

Appleby J. (2015) *NHS Funding: Squeezed as Never Before*. URL: [www.kingsfund.org.uk/blog/2015/10/nhs-spending-squeezed-never](http://www.kingsfund.org.uk/blog/2015/10/nhs-spending-squeezed-never), [accessed 4 June 2018].

Asthana, A. and P. Walker (2017) Theresa May calls for general election to secure Brexit mandate, *The Guardian*, 19 April. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/apr/18/theresa-may-calls-for-general-election-in-bid-to-secure-brexit-mandate>, [accessed 9 September 2018].

Balls, E. (2010) *There is An Alternative: My Bloomberg Address*. URL:

<http://www.edballs.co.uk/blog/speeches-articles/there-is-an-alternative-my-bloomberg-speech-august-2010/>, [accessed 5 February 2018].

Bannerman, L. (2015) Activists dragged off suffragette carpet, *The Times*, 8 October.

Baraitser, L. (2009) *Maternal Encounters: The Ethics of Interruption*. London and New York: Routledge University Press.

———. (2017) *Enduring Time*. London: Bloomsbury.

Barnes, M. (2011) Abandoning care? A critical perspective on personalisation from an ethic of care, *Ethics and Social Welfare*. 5(2), pp. 153-167.

Bassel, L. and A. Emejulu (2017) *Minority Women and Austerity: Survival and Resistance in France and Britain*. Bristol and Chicago: Policy Press.

BBC (2015) More than 2,300 died after fit for work assessment — DWP figures, *BBC*, 27 August. URL: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-34074557>, [accessed 19 November 2015].

———. (2017a), Editorial Guidelines: Section 4: Impartiality, *British Broadcasting Association*. URL: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/guidelines/impartiality>, [accessed 6 April 2017].

———. (2017b) NHS overseas' patient's £330,000 unpaid bill, *BBC*, 1 February. URL: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-38809530>, [accessed 10 May 2017].

———. (2017c) What choices would you make when faced with complex healthcare decisions: take part in the OC quiz and find out how you would respond, *BBC*, 10 May. URL: <http://www.open.edu/openlearn/hospital#ethical-decisions-quiz>, [accessed 19 May 2017].

———. (2017d) What is universal credit — and what's the problem?, *BBC*, 3 October.

- URL: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-41487126>, [accessed 5 September 2018].
- BBC (2018) Grenfell Tower: What happened, *BBC*, 18 June. URL: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-40301289>, [accessed 7 September 2018].
- Beck, U. (1992) *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. New Delhi: Sage.
- Belgrave, K. (2013) *Long Term Unemployment: Four People in Their Own Words. And Why the Word Vulnerable Needs to Go*, 2 October. URL: <http://www.katebelgrave.com/2013/10/long-term-unemployment-four-people-in-their-own-words-and-why-the-word-vulnerable-needs-to-go/>, [accessed 19 November 2015].
- . (2015) *Workfare*. URL: <http://www.katebelgrave.com/category/workfare/>, [accessed 22 May 2016].
- Bell, V. (2012) Declining performativity: Butler, Whitehead and ecologies of concern, *Theory, Culture & Society*. 29(2), pp.107-123.
- Bennhold, K. (2012) Cuts in U.K. raise risks for women, *The New York Times*, 17 April. URL: [https://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/18/world/europe/18ihtletter18.html?rref=collection%2Fbyline%2Fkatrinbennhold&action=click&contentCollection=undefined&region=stream&module=stream\\_unit&version=search&contentPlacement=4&pgtype=collection](https://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/18/world/europe/18ihtletter18.html?rref=collection%2Fbyline%2Fkatrinbennhold&action=click&contentCollection=undefined&region=stream&module=stream_unit&version=search&contentPlacement=4&pgtype=collection), [accessed 8 June 2018].
- Berlant, L. (2004) Introduction: Compassion (and withholding), in Berlant, L. (ed.), *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion*. New York and London: Routledge pp. 1-13.
- . (2007) Slow death (Sovereignty, obesity, lateral agency), *Critical Inquiry*. 33(4), pp. 754-780.
- . (2011) *Cruel Optimism*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

- Bhattacharyya, G. (2015) *Crisis, Austerity and Everyday Life*. Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bishop, C. (2005) Art of the encounter: Antagonism and relational aesthetics, *Circa*. 114, pp. 32-35.
- Bivins R. (2015) *Contagious Communities: Medicine, Migration, and the NHS in Post War Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . (2017) Picturing race in the British National Health Service, 1948-1988, *20<sup>th</sup> Century British History*. 28(1), pp. 83-109.
- Black, N. (2013) Can England's NHS survive?, *The New England Journal of Medicine*. 369:1, pp. 1-3.
- Blackburn, P. (2017) Point of No Return, *British Medical Association*, 18 April. URL: <https://www.bma.org.uk/news/2017/april/point-of-no-return>, [accessed 8 June 2018].
- Boffey, D. (2016) Leaked report reveals scale of crisis in England's mental health services, *The Guardian*, 13 February. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/feb/13/mental-health-services-crisis-britain-revealed-leaked-report> [accessed 8 June 2018].
- Borland, S. (2017) Nigerian woman, 43, racks up £500,000 NHS bill after giving birth to IVF quadruplets in London hospital after going into labour on flight to Heathrow, *The Mail online*, 31 January. URL: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-4176406/Meet-Nigerian-cost-500-000-IVF-triplets.html>, [accessed 5 February 2018].
- Bourdieu, P. (1998) *Acts of Resistance: Against the New Myths of our Time*. Cambridge: Polity Press.



- Bowcott, O. (2018) Refurbishment made Grenfell Tower a death trap, inquiry hears, *The Guardian*, 5 June. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/jun/05/dangerous-building-works-turned-grenfell-tower-death-trap-inquiry>, [accessed 8 September 2018].
- Brah, A., Szeman, I. and I. Gedalof (2015) Introduction: Feminism and the politics of austerity, *Feminist Review*. 109, pp. 1-7.
- Bramall, R. (2013) *The Cultural Politics of Austerity: Past and Present in Austere Times*. Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bramall, R., Meadway, J. and J. Gilbert (2016) What is austerity?, *New Formations*. 87, pp. 119-140.
- Briant, E., Watson, N., and G. Philo (2013) Reporting disability in the age of austerity: The changing face of media representation of disability and disabled people in the United Kingdom and the creation of new 'folk devils.', *Disability & Society*. 28(6), pp. 874-889.
- Brown, B. (2015) *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent and Lead*. New York: Avery Publishing Group.
- Brown, W. (1995) *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*. Jersey and Oxfordshire: Princeton University Press.
- . (2000) Suffering rights as paradoxes, *Constellations*. 7(2), pp. 231-241.
- . (2003) Women's studies unbound: Revolution, Mourning and Politics, *Parallax*. 9(2), pp. 3-16.
- . (2006) *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*. New Jersey and Oxfordshire: Princeton University Press.
- Brownmiller, S. (1975) *Against our Will: Men, Women and Rape*. New York: Simon &

Schuster.

Bowstead, J. (2015) Why women's domestic violence refuges are not local services, *Critical Social Policy*. 35(3), pp. 327–349.

Bulman, M. (2018) Food bank use in the UK reaches highest rate on record as benefits fail to cover basic costs, *The Independent*, 24 April, URL: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/food-bank-uk-benefits-trussell-trust-cost-of-living-highest-rate-a8317001.html>, [accessed 4 September 2018].

Buncombe, A. (2018) Processing Trump's unprecedented first year in office, from fake news and crowd sizes to a full blown probe into collusion, *The Independent*, 16 January. URL: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/trump-first-year-president-inauguration-anniversary-fake-news-russia-investigation-a8162786.html>, [accessed 8 August 2018].

Burgess, K. (2013), Heart and lung transplant patient denied benefits dies, *The Times*, 29 May.

Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

———. (1993a) *Bodies that Matter: The Discursive Limits of Sex*, New York: Routledge.

———. (1993b) Critically queer, *GLQ*. 1(1), pp. 17-32.

———. (1997) *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York and London: Routledge.

———. (2004) *Precarious Life*. London: Verso.

———. (2009) *Frames of War*. London: Verso.

- . (2011) Speaking up, Talking Back: Joan Scott's critical feminism, in Butler, J. and E. Weed (eds.), *The Question of Gender: Joan W. Scott's Critical Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 11-30.
- . (2015a) *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press.
- . (2016) Rethinking vulnerability and resistance, in J. Butler, Z. Gambetti, and L. Sabsay (eds.), *Vulnerability in Resistance*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, pp. 12-27.
- Butler, J. and A. Athanasiou (2013) *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*, Cambridge and Malden: Polity.
- Butler, J., Gambetti, Z., and L. Sabsay (2016) Introduction, in J. Butler, Z. Gambetti, and L. Sabsay (eds.), *Vulnerability in Resistance*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, pp. 1-11.
- Butler, P. (2015b) Thousands have died after being found fit for work, DWP figures show, *The Guardian*, 27 August.  
URL:<<http://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/aug/27/thousands-died-after-fit-for-work-assessment-dwp-figures>>, [accessed 19 November 2015].
- . (2017) UN panel criticises UK failure to uphold disabled people's rights, *The Guardian*, 31 August. URL:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/aug/31/un-panel-criticises-uk-failure-to-uphold-disabled-peoples-rights>, [accessed 3 November 2017].
- Butterworth, J. and J. Burton (2013) Equality, human rights and the public service spending cuts: Do UK welfare cuts violate the equal right to social security?, *The Equal Rights Review*. 11, pp. 26-45.
- Cadwalladr, C. (2016) Could Brexit prove terminal for the NHS?, *The Guardian*, 16

October. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/oct/16/could-brexite-prove-terminal-for-the-nhs>, [accessed 8 June 2017].

Calder G., Gass, J. and K. Merrill-Glover (2012) Introduction, in Calder G., Gass, J. and K. Merrill-Glover (eds.), *Changing Directions of the British Welfare State*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.

*Call the Midwife* (2012-present), UK: BBC One.

Calum's list (n.d) *Welfare Reform Deaths: Memorial Pages*. URL: [calumslislist.org](http://calumslislist.org), [accessed 16 July 2018].

Cameron, D. (2013) *Lord Mayors Banquet: Prime Minister's Speech*, London, 11 November. URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/lord-mayors-banquet-2013-prime-ministers-speech>, [accessed 19 November 2015].

Campbell, D. (2016a) Smokers and obese people 'soft targets' for NHS savings, say surgeons, *The Guardian*, 22 April. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/apr/22/smokers-obese-people-soft-targets-nhs-savings-surgeons>, [accessed 8 June 2018].

———. (2016b) Jeremy Hunt to impose new contract of junior doctors, *The Guardian*, 16 July. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/jul/06/jeremy-hunt-to-impose-new-contract-on-junior-doctors>, [accessed 8 August 2018].

———. (2017a) 'The worst conditions in memory': NHS doctors describe a week in A&E, *The Guardian*, 8 January. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/jan/08/an-absolute-warzone-nhs-doctors-describe-their-week-in-ae>, [accessed 5 April 2017].

———. (2017b) NHS crisis: 40% of hospitals issue alert in first week of new year, *The Guardian*, 13 January. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/jan/13/nhs-crisis-hospitals-issue-alert-first-week-january>, [accessed 5 April 2017].

- . (2017c) Two-thirds of young hospital doctors under serious stress, survey reveals, *The Guardian*, 11 February. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/feb/11/stressed-out-doctors-anaesthetists-survey-nhs>, [accessed 5 April 2017].
- . (2017d) Smokers and obese patients face more curbs on NHS surgery, *The Guardian*, 22 April. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/apr/22/nhs-letter-more-rations-on-operations-obese-smokers>, [accessed 25 April 2017].
- Campbell, D., Morris, S. and S. Marsh (2017) NHS faces 'humanitarian crisis' as demand rises, British Red Cross warns, *The Guardian*, 6 January. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/jan/06/nhs-faces-humanitarian-crisis-rising-demand-british-red-cross>, [accessed 5 April 2017].
- Carastathis, A (2015) The politics of austerity and the affective economy of hostility: Racialised and gendered violence and the crisis of belonging in Greece, *Feminist Review*. 109, pp. 73-95.
- Carby, H. V. (1982) White women listen! Black feminism and the boundaries of Sisterhood, *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain*. London: Hutchinson & Co.
- Casas-Cortés, M. (2014) A genealogy of precarity: A toolbox for rearticulating fragmented social realities in and out of the workplace, *Rethinking Marxism*. 26(2), pp. 206-226.
- Castel, R. (2003) *From Manual Workers to Wage Laborers: The Transformation of the Social Question*. London: Transaction Publishers.
- . (2016) The rise of uncertainties, *Critical Horizons: A Journal of Philosophy and Social Theory*. 17(2), pp. 160-167.

- Casualty* (1986-present). UK: BBC One
- Casualty* (1989) *This Week*. UK: Thames Television, 25 May.
- Chakraborty, A. (2014) Today's Britain: where the poor are forced to steal or beg from food banks, *The Guardian*, 27 October. URL: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/oct/27/todays-britain-poor-forced-steal-food-banks>, [accessed 19 November 2015].
- Chakraborty, A. (2015) David Cameron, a champion of disabled people? Try telling Paula Peters, *The Guardian*, 8 June. URL: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jun/08/cameron-disabled-champion-paula-peters-cuts-most-vulnerable>, [accessed 19 November 2015].
- Chouliaraki, L. (2006) *Spectatorship of Suffering*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage.
- Chow, R. (1994) Where Have All the Natives Gone?, in Padmini Mongia (ed.), *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. London: Arnold, pp. 123-45.
- Clarke, J. and J. Newman (2012) The alchemy of austerity, *Critical Social Policy*. 32(3), pp. 299-319.
- Clayton, J., Donovan, C. and J. Merchant (2015) Emotions of austerity: Care and commitment in public service delivery in the North East of England. *Emotion, Space and Society*. 14, pp. 24-32.
- Clery, E., Lee, L. and S. Kunz (2013) Public attitudes to poverty and welfare, 1983-2011, *NatCen*. URL: <https://www.natcen.ac.uk/media/137637/poverty-and-welfare.pdf>, [accessed 19 November 2015].
- Cliff, A. (2016) Sisters Uncut are fighting for the rights of BME and migrant women in

the UK, *The Fader*, 21 November. URL:  
<http://www.thefader.com/2016/11/21/sisters-uncut-london-protest>, [accessed  
8 June 2017].

Clifford-Simplican, S. (2015) Care, disability and violence: Theorizing complex dependency in Eva Kittay and Judith Butler, *Hypatia*. 30(1), pp. 217-233.

Clough, P. T. (2007) Introduction in Clough, P.T and J. Halley (eds.), *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, pp. 2-34.

Cohen, C. (2015), Suffragette Premiere: Ann-Marie Duff backs 'inspiring' red carpet feminist protesters, *The Telegraph Online*, 8 October. URL:  
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/11919317/Suffragette-premiere-Mulligans-co-star-Anne-Marie-Duff-backs-protest.html>, [accessed 8 June 2018].

Cole, A. (2016) All of us are vulnerable, but some are more vulnerable than others: The political ambiguity of vulnerability studies, an ambivalent critique, *Critical Horizons*. 17(2), pp. 260-277.

*Confessions of a Junior Doctor*. (2017), UK: Channel 4.

Conservative Party (2015) *The Conservative Party Manifesto*. URL: <https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/manifesto2015/ConservativeManifesto2015.pdf>, [accessed 19 November 2015].

———. (2017) *The Conservative Party Manifesto*. URL:  
<https://www.conservatives.com/manifesto>, [accessed 19 August 2018].

Cooper, R. (2012), Has the economic downturn fueled domestic violence, *The Telegraph*, 6 December. URL: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/9725222/Has-the-economic-downturn-fuelled-domestic-violence.html>, [accessed 8 June 2018].

- Corbyn, J. (2015), The Tory's are taking us back to 1979 – We need a strategic state, *The Guardian*, 23 August. URL:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/aug/22/jeremy-corbyn-labour-leadership-strategic-state>, [accessed 8 June 2018].
- Cornell, D. (2000) Las Grenudas: Recollections of feminist consciousness raising, *Signs*. 25(4), pp. 1033-1039.
- Cosslett, R. L. (2015) Why it's ok to cry about this election, *The Guardian*, 11 May. URL:  
<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/may/11/cry-election-emotion-left-tories-empathy>, [accessed 19 November 2015].
- Cowburn, A. (2015) Suicides highlight the grim toll of benefit sanctions in austerity Britain, *The Guardian*, 3 January. URL:  
<http://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/jan/03/benefits-sanctions-leading-suicides-dwp-depression>, [accessed 19 November 2015].
- Coyne, A. (2016) Women's Aid says abuse funding must be restored, *The Times*, 16 June.
- Crawshaw, G. (2016) Exhibition Overview, *Shoddy Exhibition*, URL:  
<https://shoddyexhibition.wordpress.com/exhibition/exhibition-overview/>, [accessed 5 June 2018].
- Crenshaw, K. (1991) Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics and violence against women of color, *Stanford Law Review*. 43(6), pp. 1241-1299.
- Cross, M. (2013) Demonized, impoverished and now forced into isolation: The fate of disabled people under austerity, *Disability and Society*. 28(5), pp. 719-723.
- Cuklanz, L.M. (1998) The masculine ideal: Rape on primetime television, 1976-1978, *Critical Studies in Mass Communications*. 15, pp. 423-448.
- Cvetkovich, A. (2003) *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public*



*Cultures*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

———. (2012) *Depression: A Public Feeling*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Dahl, G. (2009) Sociology and beyond: Agency, victimisation and the ethics of writing, *Asian Journal of Social Science*. 37, pp. 391-407.

Dahl, U. (2017) Femmebodiment: Notes on queer feminine shapes of vulnerability, *Feminist Theory*. 18(1), pp. 35-53.

The Daily Telegraph (2016) News: City bridges blocked in domestic abuse protest, *The Daily Telegraph*, 21 November.

Davies, A.C.L. (2013) This time, it's for real: The Health and Social Care Act 2012, *The Modern Law Review*. 76(3), pp. 564-588.

Davies, H. and C. O'Callaghan (2017) Introduction: Boom and bust? Gender and austerity in popular culture, in Davies H. and C. O'Callaghan (eds.), *Gender and Austerity in Popular Culture*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, pp. 1-16.

Davis, A. (1981) *Women, Race and Class*. [Reprint 2011], New York: Vintage Books

Davis, L.J (1995) *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body*. London and New York: Verso.

———. (2013) Introduction: Disability, normality and power, in Davis L.J (ed.), *The Disability Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, pp. 1-14.

Davy, L. (2015) Philosophically Inclusive Design: Intellectual disability and the limits of individual autonomy in moral and political theory, *Hypatia*. 30(1), pp. 132-148.

Department of Health and Social Care [DHSC] (2012) *The Health and Social Care Act*

2012: *Case for Change*. URL:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/138257/A1.-Factsheet-Overview-240412.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/138257/A1.-Factsheet-Overview-240412.pdf), [accessed 31 May 2018].

Department of Work and Pensions [DWP] (2015) *Personal Independence Payment*

*Handbook*. URL:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/519119/personal-independence-payment-handbook.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/519119/personal-independence-payment-handbook.pdf), [accessed 18 May 2016].

———. (2018) *National Statistics: ESA: Outcomes of*

*Work Capability Assessments Including Mandatory Reconsiderations and Appeals: March 2018*. URL:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/687190/esa-wca-summary-march-2018.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/687190/esa-wca-summary-march-2018.pdf), [accessed 30 May 2018].

Disability Rights UK (2016) *The Work Capability Assessment, Disability Rights UK*

*Factsheet F71*. URL: <http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/work-capability-assessment>, [accessed 18 May 2016].

Disabled People Against Cuts [DPAC] (2013) *Work Capability Assessment Fact File*.

URL: <<http://dpac.uk.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/DPAC-Report-ATOS-WCA-Factfile.pdf?281986>>, [accessed 18 May 2016].

———. (2017) *The Work Capability Assessment*. URL:

<https://vimeo.com/211173348>, [accessed 5 June 2018].

Dobash, R. P. and E. R. Dobash (1992) *Women, Violence, and Social Change*. London: Routledge.

Dodd, V. and S. Marsh (2017) Anti-Muslim hate crimes increase five-fold since London

Bridge attacks, *The Guardian*, 7 June. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/jun/07/anti-muslim-hate-crimes-increase-fivefold-since-london-bridge-attacks>, [accessed 8 September 2018].

Doezema, J. (2010) *Sex Slaves and Discourses Masters: The Construction of Trafficking*. London and New York: Zed Books.

Donnelly, L. (2017) 'Health Tourists' to be charged upfront for NHS care, *The Telegraph*, 20 October. URL: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/10/20/nhs-ask-patients-bank-statements-check-qualify-free-health-care/>, [accessed 15 August 2018].

Drichel, S. (2013) Introduction: Reframing vulnerability: "so obviously the problem...?", *SubStance*. 42(3), pp. 3-27.

Duffy, S. (2013) A Fair Society?, *Centre for Welfare Reform*. URL: <http://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/uploads/attachment/354/a-fair-society.pdf>, [accessed 19 November 2015].

Duggan, L. (2003) *The Twilight of Equality: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics and the Attack on Democracy*. Massachusetts: Beacon Press.

Duncan-Smith, I. (2014) *A Welfare State Fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Setting out a vision for Britain's Welfare State*, London, 23 January. URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/a-welfare-state-fit-for-the-21st-century>, [accessed 22 August 2018].

———. (2015a) *Speech on Work, Health and Disability*, London, 24 August. URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/work-health-and-disability>, [accessed 19 November 2015].

———. (2015b), *Iain Duncan Smith Speech to Conservative Party Conference*, Manchester, 6 October. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tqh28wC9ikI>, [accessed 19 October 2015].

———. (2016a) A compromise too far: Iain Duncan Smith's resignation letter in Full, *The Guardian*, 18 March. URL: <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/mar/18/iain-duncan-smith-resignation-letter-in-full>, [accessed 18 May 2016].

———. (2016b) Interviewed by Andrew Marr Show, *Andrew Marr Show*, 20 March. URL: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03nd95b>, [accessed 18 May 2016].

Edleman, L. (2004) *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Elkind, A. (1998) Using metaphor to read the organisation of the NHS, *Social Science & Medicine*. 47(11), pp. 1715-1727.

Eloise, M. (2017) What women can teach us about protest, *Vice.com*, 8 March. URL: [https://www.vice.com/en\\_se/article/what-can-women-teach-us-about-protest](https://www.vice.com/en_se/article/what-can-women-teach-us-about-protest), [accessed 8 June 2018].

Enke, A. F. (2012) Introduction: Transfeminist perspectives, in Enke, A. (ed), *Transfeminist Perspectives: In and Beyond Transgender and Gender Studies*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, pp. 1-16.

Episode 1 (2017) *Hospital*. UK: BBC Two, 11 January.

Episode 2 (2017) *Hospital*. UK: BBC Two, 18 January.

Episode 3 (2017) *Hospital*. UK: BBC Two, 25 January.

Episode 4 (2017) *Hospital*. UK: BBC Two, 1 February.

Episode 5 (2017) *Hospital*. UK: BBC Two, 8 February.

Episode 6 (2017) *Hospital*. UK: BBC Two, 15 February.

- Equality and Human Rights Commission [EHRC] (2011) *Hidden in Plain Sight: Inquiry into Disability Related Harassment*. URL:  
[http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/documents/disabilityfi/eorc\\_hidden\\_in\\_plain\\_sight\\_3.pdf](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/documents/disabilityfi/eorc_hidden_in_plain_sight_3.pdf), [accessed 19 November 2015].
- Erevelles, N. (2011) The color of violence: Reflecting on gender, race and disability in wartime, in Hall, K.Q. (ed.) *Feminist Disability Studies*. Indianapolis and Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 117-135.
- Eric-Udorie, J. (2015) The seven priorities of young feminists today, *The Guardian*, 29 September. URL:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/sep/29/seven-priorities-young-feminists-suffragette>, [accessed 8 June 2018].
- Evans, M. (2015) Feminism and the implications of austerity, *Feminist Review*. 109, pp. 146-155.
- Fairclough, N. (1992) *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity.
- . (2001) The discourse of New Labour: Critical discourse analysis, in Wetherell, M., Taylor S. and S.J. Yates (eds.), *Discourse as Data: A Guide for Analysis*. Milton Keynes: The Open University, pp. 229-266.
- . (2013) *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)*. Oxon and New York: Routledge.
- Fawcett Society (2012) *The Impact of Austerity on Women*. URL:  
<http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/The-Impact-of-Austerity-on-Women-19th-March-2012.pdf>, [accessed 19 November 2015].
- Felski, R. (2015) *The Limits of Critique*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

- Ferraro, K. (1996) The dance of dependency: A genealogy of domestic violence discourse, *Hypatia*. 11(4), pp. 77-91.
- Fineman, M.A (1991) *The Illusion of Equality: The Rhetoric and Reality of Divorce Reform*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . (2004) *The Autonomy Myth: A Theory of Dependency*. New York: New Press.
- . (2008) The Vulnerable Subject: Anchoring equality in the human condition, *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism*. 20(1), pp. 1–23.
- . (2013) Equality, autonomy and the vulnerable subject in law and politics, in Fineman, M.A and A. Grear (eds.), *Vulnerability: Reflections on a New Ethical Foundation for Law and Politics*. Surrey: Ashgate, pp. 13-28.
- . (2018) Introducing vulnerability, in Fineman, M.A and J. W. Fineman (eds.), *Vulnerability and the Legal Organisation of Work*. New York and Oxon: Routledge.
- Fitzgerald, S. A. (2012) Vulnerable bodies, vulnerable borders: Extraterritoriality and human trafficking, *Feminist Legal Studies*. 20, pp. 227-244.
- Fitzgerald, S. A. and V.E. Munro (2012) Sex work and the regulation of vulnerability(ies): Introduction, *Feminist Legal Studies*. 20, pp. 183-188.
- Foster, P. (2016a) The rise of the far right in Europe is not a false alarm, *The Telegraph*, 19 May. URL: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/05/19/the-rise-of-the-far-right-in-europe-is-not-a-false-alarm/>, [accessed 31 August 2018].
- Foster, D. (2016b) How can women flee domestic abuse if they have nowhere to go?, *The Guardian*, 8 July. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/housing-network/2016/jul/08/women-domestic-abuse-social-housing-southwark-council-sisters-uncut>, [accessed 8 June 2018].

- Foucault, M. (1977), *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. [Reprint 1991], Camberwell: Penguin Books.
- . (1978), *History of Sexuality (volume 1)*. [Reprint 2008], Camberwell: Penguin Books.
- Fraser, M. and N. Puwar (2008) Introduction: Intimacy in research, *History of the Human Sciences*. 21(4), pp. 1-16.
- Fraser, N. (1997) *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Post Socialist" Condition*. New York: Routledge.
- Freeman, E. (2010) *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Friedman, M. (1993) *What Are Friends For?: Feminist Perspectives on Personal Relationships and Moral Theory*. Ithica and New York: Cornell University Press.
- FT View (2016) Britain's care crisis demands an all-Party approach, *Financial Times*, 27 December.
- Gajanan, M. (2015) Meryl Streep and co-stars attract backlash over Suffragette T-shirt slogan, *The Guardian*, 5 October. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/oct/05/meryl-streep-backlash-suffragette-t-shirt-slogan>, [accessed 8 June 2018].
- Garland-Thompson, R. (2011) Integrating disability, transforming feminist theory, in Hall, K.Q. (ed.), *Feminist Disability Studies*. Indianapolis and Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 13-47.
- Gayle, D. (2016) Housing benefit cap may force 67% of women's refuges to close — report, *The Guardian*, 5 September. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/sep/05/womens-refuges-housing-benefit-cap-domestic-violence>, [accessed 8 June 2018].

- Gedalof, I. (2018) *Narratives of Difference in an Age of Austerity*. London: Palgrave.
- Gentleman, A. (2013) Society: Interview Greg Wood: Why I blew the whistle on Atos: A doctor employed to carry out the controversial fitness-for-work test explains what made him speak out, *The Guardian*, 31 July.
- Gentleman, A. (2017) Pregnant women without legal status 'too afraid to seek NHS care', *The Guardian*, 20 March. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/mar/20/pregnant-asylum-seekers-refugees-afraid-seek-nhs-maternity-care>, [accessed 8 August 2018].
- Gibbs, J. and A. Lehtonen (2019) I, *Daniel Blake* (2016): Vulnerability, Care, and Citizenship in Austerity Politics, *Feminist Review*. 123.
- Giles, C. (2016) Theresa May commits to Balance Budget, *The Financial Times*, 20 July. URL: <https://www.ft.com/content/df2160f6-4e76-11e6-8172-e39ecd3b86fc>, [accessed 8 August 2018].
- Gill, A.K., Heathcote, G. and E. Williamson (2016) Introduction: violence, *Feminist Review*. 112, pp. 1-10.
- Gilson, E. (2011) Vulnerability, ignorance, and oppression, *Hypatia*. 26(2), pp. 308-332.
- . (2014) *The Ethics of Vulnerability: A Feminist Analysis of Social Life and Practice*. New York: Routledge.
- Glasius, M. and A. Ishkanian (2015) Surreptitious symbiosis: Engagement between activists and NGO's, *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*. 26(6), pp. 2620- 2644.
- Goodin, R.E. (1985) *Protecting the Vulnerable*. Illinois: University of Chicago Press.



- Goodley, D., Lawthom, R. and K. Runswick-Cole (2014) Dis/ability and austerity: beyond work and slow death, *Disability and Society*. 29(6), pp. 980-984.
- Gordon, A. (1998) *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Gorsky, M. (2008) The British National Health Service 1948-2008: A review of the historiography, *Social History of Medicine*. 21(3), pp. 437-460.
- Gov.uk (2016) *Employment and Support Allowance*. URL: <https://www.gov.uk/employment-support-allowance/eligibility>, [accessed 22 May 2016].
- The Great Benefits Row (2016) *Dispatches*. UK: Channel 4, 11 April.
- Greenslade, R. (2015) Praise for the Sun's domestic violence 'give me shelter' campaign, *The Guardian*, 18 May. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/media/greenslade/2015/may/18/praise-for-the-suns-domestic-violence-give-me-shelter-campaign>, [accessed 7 June 2018].
- The Guardian, (2018) Views from the NHS frontline, *The Guardian*. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/healthcare-network/views-from-the-nhs-frontline>, [accessed 8 June 2018].
- Guardian Editorial (2015) The Guardian view on benefit cuts: Cameron's menu of pain, *The Guardian*, 26 May. URL: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/may/26/guardian-view-on-benefit-cuts-america-menu-of-pain>, [accessed 19 November 2015].
- . (2016) The Guardian view on the Jo Cox murder trial: a killing of our times, *The Guardian*, 23 November. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/nov/23/the-guardian-view-on-the-jo-cox-trial-a-killing-of-our-times>, [accessed 10 September 2018].

- Gunaratnam, Y. (2011) Cultural vulnerability: A narrative approach to intercultural care, *Qualitative Social Work*. 12(2), pp. 104-118.
- . (2012) Learning to be affected: Social suffering and total pain at life's borders, *The Sociological Review*. 60(1), pp. 108-123.
- . (2013) *Death and the Migrant: Bodies, Borders, Care*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Gunew, S. (2009) Subaltern empathy: beyond European categories in affect theory, *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies*. 35(1), pp. 11-30.
- Haaken, J. (2002) 'Comment: Towards a new feminist theory of rape': The seductions of theory, *Signs*. 27(3), pp. 743-775.
- Hale, C. (2014) Fulfilling Potential? ESA and the fate of the Work-Related Activity Group, *Mind*. URL: <http://www.mind.org.uk/media/933438/2014-support-not-sanctions-report.pdf>, [accessed 19 November 2015].
- Hall, K. (2016a) *Tatterdemalion* [installation]. Live Arts Bistro. Leeds, 7 – 16 April 2016.
- . (2016b). *Tatterdemalion* [artist statement]. Live Arts Bistro. Leeds, 7 – 16 April 2016.
- Hall, K. Q. (2011) Reimagining disability and gender through feminist disability studies, Hall, K. Q. (ed.) *Feminist Disability Studies*. Indianapolis and Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 1-10.
- Hall, R. (2004) 'It can happen to you' Rape prevention in the age of risk management, *Hypatia*. 19(3), pp. 1-18.
- Hall, S. (2001) Foucault: Power, knowledge and discourse, *Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader*. [Reprint 2005]. London, California and New Delhi: Sage, pp. 72-81.

- Hamad, H. (2016), Contemporary medical television and crisis in the NHS, *Critical Studies in Television*. 11(2), pp. 136-150.
- Harford, T. (2018) Counting the costs of Brexit uncertainty, *The Financial Times*, 6 September. URL: <https://www.ft.com/content/906b945c-b064-11e8-8d14-6f049d06439c>, [accessed 7 September 2018].
- Harraway, D.J. (1991) *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge.
- Harris, J. (1997) *William Beveridge: A Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hartley, E. (2016) Sisters Uncut ‘reclaim’ empty council home and transform it into community centre, *Huffington Post*, 11 July. URL: [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/sisters-uncut-occupy-council-house-in-hackney-to-fight-gentrification\\_uk\\_57838055e4b0935d4b4b2a76?8kxirudi](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/sisters-uncut-occupy-council-house-in-hackney-to-fight-gentrification_uk_57838055e4b0935d4b4b2a76?8kxirudi), [accessed 7 June 2018].
- Hawkesworth, M.E. (1989) Knowers, knowing and known: Feminist theory and claims to truth, *Signs*. 14(3), pp. 533-557.
- Health and Social Care Act 2012*, c.7. URL: [http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2012/7/pdfs/ukpga\\_20120007\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2012/7/pdfs/ukpga_20120007_en.pdf) [accessed 8 June 2018].
- Hedva, J. (2016) Sick Woman Theory, *Mask Magazine*, January. URL: <http://www.maskmagazine.com/not-again/struggle/sick-woman-theory>, [accessed 18 March 2016].
- Hekman, S. (2014) Vulnerability and ontology: Butler’s ethics, *Australian Feminist Studies*. 29(82), pp. 452-464.
- Helms, G. Vishmidt, M. and L. Berlant (2010) Affect and the politics of austerity, *Variant*. 39/40, pp. 3-6.

Hemmings, C. (2005) Invoking affect: Cultural theory and the ontological turn, *Cultural Studies*. 19(5), pp. 548-567.

———. (2011) *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

———. (2012) Affective solidarity: Feminist reflexivity and political transformation, *Feminist Theory*. 13(2), pp. 147-161.

———. (2014) The materials of reparation, *Feminist Theory*. 15(1), pp. 27-30.

———. (2018) *Considering Emma Goldman: Feminist Political Ambivalence and the Imaginative Archive*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Hemmings, C. and A. Treacher-Kabesh (2013) The feminist subject of agency: Recognition and affect in encounters with ‘the Other’, in Madhok, S., Wilson, K. and A. Phillips (eds.), *Gender, Agency and Coercion*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 29-46.

Hendry, S. (2015a), Give me shelter, *The Sun*, 18 May.

———. (2015b) We see broken families leave here whole, *The Sun*, 19 May.

———. (2015c), Dad said if we left he would find and kill us, *The Sun*, 20 May.

Hendry, S., K. Jackson and J. Sloan (2015) Give me Shelter: sign our petition, *The Sun*, 17 May, URL: <https://www.thesun.co.uk/archives/news/233415/give-me-shelter-sign-our-petition/>, [accessed 15 September 2018].

Hesford, V. (2005) Feminism and its ghosts: The spectre of the feminist-as-lesbian, *Feminist Theory*. 6(3), pp. 227-250.

Hill, A. (2017) ‘Hostile environment’ the hardline Home Office policy tearing families

apart, *The Guardian*, 28 November URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/nov/28/hostile-environment-the-hardline-home-office-policy-tearing-families-apart>, [accessed 3 September 2018].

Hill Collins, P. (1990) *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. [Reprint 2000], New York: Routledge.

———. (1998) *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Hitchen, E. (2016) Living and feeling the austere, *New Formations*. 87, pp. 102-118.

Hochschild, A. R. (1983) *The Managed Heart: The Commercialisation of Human Feeling*. California: University of California Press.

Holland, P., Chignell, H. and S. Wilson (2013) Broadcasting and the NHS in the Thatcherite 1980s: *The Challenge to Public Service*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Home Office (2010) *Call to End Violence against Women and Girls*. URL: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/118150/vawg-paper.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/118150/vawg-paper.pdf), [accessed 8 June 2018].

———. (2015) *Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls, Progress Report 2010- 2015*. URL: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/409510/VAWG\\_Progress\\_Report\\_2010-2015.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/409510/VAWG_Progress_Report_2010-2015.pdf), [accessed: 8 June 2018].

———. (2016) *Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy: 2016-2020*. URL: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/522166/VAWG\\_Strategy\\_FINAL\\_PUBLICATION\\_MASTER\\_vRB.PDF](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/522166/VAWG_Strategy_FINAL_PUBLICATION_MASTER_vRB.PDF), [accessed 8 June 2018].

Honeyman, K. (1997) Gender divisions and industrial divide: The case of the Leeds

clothing trade 1850 -1970, *Textile History*. 28(1), pp. 47-66.

hooks, b. (1983) *Ain't I a woman? Black Women and Feminism*. New York: South End Press.

———. (1984) Sisterhood: political solidarity between women, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. [Reprint 2000], London: Pluto Press, pp. 43-65.

House of Commons Library (2017) *General Election 2017: Full results and analysis*, 22 September. URL:  
<https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7979>  
[accessed 15 September 2018].

Howard, E. (2016) The domestic violence protesters who won't take the cuts lying down, *The Guardian*, 17 February. URL:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/feb/17/domestic-violence-protesters-sisters-uncut-direct-action>, [accessed 7 June 2018].

Hyland, I. (2017) Heartbreaking documentary Hospital is spot on as NHS workers show immense dedication in face of crisis, *The Mirror*, 11 January. URL:  
<https://www.mirror.co.uk/tv/tv-news/moving-documentary-hospital-spot-nhs-9606304>, [accessed 8 August 2018].

*I, Daniel Blake* (2016). Directed by K. Loach. Sixteen Films, British Film Institute, Why Not Productions, Wild Bunch, BBC Films.

Illingworth, L. (2016a) *Story Telling Coat* [installation]. Live Arts Bistro. Leeds, 7-16 April 2016.

———. (2016b) *Story Telling Coat* [artist statement]. Live Arts Bistro. Leeds. 7-16 April 2016.

Imkaan (2015) *State of the Sector: Contextualising the Current Experiences of BME Ending*

- Violence Against Women and Girls Organisations. An Executive Summary*. London: Imkaan, URL: <https://www.imkaan.org.uk/resources>, [accessed 21 June 2018].
- . (2016) *Capital Losses: The State of the BME Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Sector in London*. London: Imkaan. URL: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B\\_MKSoEcCvQwdjJXQm5GVDBlSmM/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B_MKSoEcCvQwdjJXQm5GVDBlSmM/view), [accessed 19 June 2018].
- Ishkanian, A. (2014) Neoliberalism and violence: The Big Society and the changing politics of domestic violence in England, *Critical Social Policy*. 34(3), pp. 333-353.
- Jackman, J. (2016) London's Sisters Uncut march was a reminder of what feminism really means, *I.D/Vice*, 8 June. URL: [http://id.vice.com/en\\_gb/article/londons-sisters-uncut-march-was-a-reminder-of-what-feminism-reallymeans?utm\\_campaign=iduk&utm\\_medium=Social&utm\\_source=Twitter#link\\_time=1465384854](http://id.vice.com/en_gb/article/londons-sisters-uncut-march-was-a-reminder-of-what-feminism-reallymeans?utm_campaign=iduk&utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Twitter#link_time=1465384854), [accessed 7 June 2018].
- Jensen, T. (2012) Tough love in tough times, *Studies in the Maternal*. 4(2), pp.1-26.
- . (2014) Welfare commonsense, Poverty Porn and doxosophy, *Sociological Research Online*. 19(3). URL: <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/19/3/3.html>, [accessed 4 June 2018].
- Johnson, B. (2016) Getting on: Ageing, mess and the NHS, *Critical Studies in Television: The International Journal of Television Studies*. 11(2), pp. 190-203.
- Jørgensen, M.B. (2016) Precariat – What it is and isn't –Towards an understanding of what it does, *Critical Sociology*. 42(7-8), pp. 959-974.
- Just Fair (2014) Dignity and opportunity for all: Securing the rights of disabled people in the austerity era, *Just Fair Consortium*. URL: [http://media.wix.com/ugd/8a2436\\_c93c2482e8824eada18336ccdd219268.pdf](http://media.wix.com/ugd/8a2436_c93c2482e8824eada18336ccdd219268.pdf), [accessed 18 May 2016].

- Kafer, A. (2013) *Feminist, Queer, Crip*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Kane, D. and J. Allen, (2011) Counting the cuts: The impact of cuts on the UK voluntary and community sector London, *National Council for Voluntary Organisations*. URL: [https://www.ncvo.org.uk/images/documents/policy\\_and\\_research/funding/counting\\_the\\_cuts.pdf](https://www.ncvo.org.uk/images/documents/policy_and_research/funding/counting_the_cuts.pdf), [accessed 4 June 2018].
- Kapur, R. (2015) Precarious desires and ungrivable lives: human rights and postcolonial critiques of legal justice, *London Review of International Law*. 3(2), pp. 267-294.
- Karamessini, M. (2013) Women's vulnerability to recession and austerity: a different crisis, a different context, in Karamessini M and J. Rubery (eds.), *Women and Austerity*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 3-16.
- Karpf, A. (1988) *Doctoring the Media: The Reporting of Health and Medicine*. London: Routledge.
- Kennelly, J. (2014) 'It's this pain in my heart that won't let me stop': Gendered affect, webs of relations, and young women's activism, *Feminist Theory*. 15(3), pp. 241-260.
- Keywood, K. (2001) 'I'd rather keep him chaste' Retelling the story of sterilization, learning disability and (non)sexed embodiment, *Feminist Legal Studies*. 9(2), pp. 185-194.
- Khan, O. (2015) The 2015 budget: Effects on Black and Minority Ethnic People, *The Runnymede Trust*. URL: <http://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/The%202015%20Budget%20Effect%20on%20BME%20RunnymedeTrust%2027thJuly2015.pdf>, [accessed 19 November 2015].



- Kirby, P. (2006) *Vulnerability and Violence: The Impact of Globalisation*. London and Ann Arbor: Pluto Press.
- Kittay, E. (1999) *Loves Labor: Essays on Women, Equality and Dependency*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Klein, R. (2001) *The New Politics of the NHS (4<sup>th</sup> edition)*. Essex: Prentice Hall.
- . (2013) The NHS in the age of anxiety: Rhetoric and reality, *British Medical Journal*. 347(7922), pp. 13-15.
- Krol, C. (2015) Suffragette premiere: Carey Mulligan welcomes domestic violence protest on red carpet, *The Telegraph Online*, 8 October. URL: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newsvideo/celebrity-news-video/11918396/Suffragette-premiere-Carey-Mulligan-welcomes-domestic-violence-protest-on-red-carpet.html>, [accessed 7 June 2018].
- Kwei, S. (2015) Why I protested with Sisters Uncut at the premiere of Suffragette, *The Independent*, October 8. URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/why-i-proteted-with-sisters-uncut-at-the-premiere-of-suffragette-a6685686.html>, [accessed 7 June 2018].
- Labour Party (2015), *Labour Party Manifesto*, URL: [https://action.labour.org.uk/page//A4%20BIG%20\\_PRINT\\_ENG\\_LABOUR%20MANIFESTO\\_TEXT%20LAYOUT.pdf](https://action.labour.org.uk/page//A4%20BIG%20_PRINT_ENG_LABOUR%20MANIFESTO_TEXT%20LAYOUT.pdf), [accessed 8 June 2018].
- Lacobucci, G. (2015) Outsourcing the NHS, *British Medical Journal*. 350(h875). URL: <https://www.bmj.com/content/350/bmj.h875>, [accessed 19 June 2018].
- Lamb, S. (1999) *New Versions of Victims: Feminists Struggle with the Concept*. New York: New York University Press.
- Laville, S. (2014) Domestic violence refuge provision at crisis point, warn charities, *The*

- Guardian*, 3 August. URL:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/aug/03/domestic-violence-refuge-crisis-women-closure-safe-houses>, [accessed 7 June 2018].
- Lewis, G. (2014) Not by criticality alone, *Feminist Theory*. 15(1), pp. 31-38.
- Lewis, G. and J. Fink (2004) 'All that heaven allows': The worker-citizen in the post war welfare state, in Lewis, G. (ed.), *Citizenship: Personal Lives and Social Policy*. Milton Keynes and Bristol: Policy Press & Open University, pp. 39-83.
- Lichfield, P. (2017) Boris Johnson's £350 million claim is devious and bogus. Here's why, *The Guardian*, 18 September. URL:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/sep/18/boris-johnson-350-million-claim-bogus-foreign-secretary>, [accessed 13 August 2018].
- Lloyd, M. and S. Ramon (2017) Smoke and mirrors: U.K. newspaper representations of intimate partner domestic violence, *Violence Against Women*. 23(1), pp. 114-139.
- Lonergan, G. (2015) Migrant women and social reproduction under austerity, *Feminist Review*. 109, pp. 124-145.
- Lorde, A. (1984) *Sister Outsider*. [Reprint 2007]. Crossing Press: Berkley.
- Lorey, I. (2015) *States of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious*. London and New York: Verso.
- Love, H. (2007) *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- LSE Gender, Inequality and Power Commission [LSE] (2015) *Confronting Gender Inequality: Findings from the LSE commission on gender, inequality and power*. URL:  
<http://www.lse.ac.uk/genderInstitute/research/commission/home.aspx>, [accessed 19 November 2015].

- Luckes, E. (2017) This is how nurses like me will be resisting passport checks on our wards, *The Independent*, 16 February. URL: <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/passport-checks-immigration-nhs-how-nurses-will-be-resisting-checks-a7584156.html>, [accessed 11 August 2018].
- Lukin, J. (2013) Disability and blackness, in Davis L.J (ed.), *The Disability Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, pp. 308-315
- Mackenzie, C. (2013) The importance of relational autonomy and capabilities for an ethics of vulnerability, in Mackenzie, C., Rogers, W. and S. Dodds (eds.), *Vulnerability: New Essays in Ethics and Feminist Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 33-60.
- Mackenzie, C., Rogers, W. and S. Dodds (2013) Introduction: What is vulnerability?, in Mackenzie, C., Rogers, W. and S. Dodds (eds.), *Vulnerability: New Essays in Ethics and Feminist Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 1-33.
- Madhok, S. (2014) *Rethinking Agency: Developmentalism, Gender and Rights*. New Delhi: Routledge.
- Madhok, S., Wilson, K. and A. Phillips (2013) Introduction, in Madhok, S., Wilson, K. and A. Phillips (eds.), *Gender, Agency and Coercion*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1-13.
- Mahmood, S. (2005) *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Oxfordshire and New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Malick S. and P. Butler (2014) Atos may be ousted from fit-for-work contract: Controversial firm has come under political fire: Ministers want change when agreement ends, *The Guardian*, 18 February.
- Malnick, E. (2014), Academics warn against ‘privitisation’ of care services, *The Telegraph*

- online*, 17 May. URL:  
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/10837865/Academics-warn-against-privatisation-of-care-services.html>, [accessed 8 June 2018].
- Marcus, S. (1992) Fighting bodies, fighting words, in Butler J. and J. W. Scott (eds.) *Feminists Theorize the Political*. New York: Routledge, pp. 385-403.
- Mardorossian, C. M. (2002) Toward a new feminist theory of rape, *Signs*. 27(3), pp. 743-775.
- Marks, D. (1999) Dimensions of oppression: Theorizing the embodied subject, *Disability & Society*. 14(5), pp. 611-626.
- Mason, R. (2016) Claims Brexit could save NHS are ‘dangerous lie’, ex-health secretaries say, *The Guardian*, 3 April. URL:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/apr/03/claims-brexit-could-save-nhs-dangerous-lie-ex-health-secretaries>, [accessed 7 June 2018].
- Massumi, B. (2002) *Parables of the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Matczak, A., Hatzidimitriadou, E., and J. Lindsay (2011) *Review of Domestic Violence Policies in England and Wales*. London: Kingston University and St Georges, University of London. URL: <http://eprints.kingston.ac.uk/18868/1/Matczak-A-18868.pdf>, [accessed 5 June 2018].
- May, T. (2016) *Statement from the new Prime Minister Theresa May*, 13 July. URL:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/statement-from-the-new-prime-minister-theresa-may>, [accessed 8 August 2018].
- . (2017a) *PM statement following the London terror attack*, 4 June. URL:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-following-london-terror-attack-4-june-2017>

- . (2017b) *PM statement: General Election 2017*, 9 June. URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-general-election-2017>, [accessed 8 August 2018].
- McHugh, K. (2012) Nurse Jackie and the politics of care, *Nursing Outlook*. 60(5), pp. S12-S18.
- McRobbie, A. (2008) *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change*. London: Sage.
- McRuer, R. (2006) *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*. New York: New York University Press.
- McVeigh, K. (2015) Fit for Work assessment was trigger for suicide, Coroner says, *The Guardian*, 21 September. URL: <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/sep/21/fit-for-work-assessment-was-trigger-for-suicide-coroner-says>, [accessed 19 November 2015].
- Meier, B. (2017) Huge rise in hate crime across London, new figures reveal, *The Independent Online*, March 7. URL: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/brexit-hate-crime-eu-referendum-london-racist-religious-faith-victims-figures-statistics-a7615356.html>, [accessed 5 June 2018].
- Michel, N. (2016) Accounts of injury as misappropriations of race: Towards a critical black politics of vulnerability, *Critical Horizons*. 17(2), pp. 240-259.
- Miliband, E. (2011) Full text: Ed Miliband's Labour conference speech, *BBC*, 27 September. URL: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-15081234>, [accessed 5 June 2018].
- Mohanty, C.T. (1988) Under western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses, *Feminist Review*. 30, pp. 61-80.

- Morris, C. (2018) Brexit: What would ‘no deal’ look like?, *BBC*, 20 July. URL: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-44904619>, [accessed 7 September 2018].
- Morse, A. (2017) When ‘more for less’ becomes ‘less for less’: the implications of central decision making for the delivery of frontline services, *LSE blogs*, 17 February. URL: <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/the-implications-of-central-decision-making-for-the-delivery-of-frontline-services/>, [accessed 4 June 2018].
- Mow. (2016a) *Not Lost* [installation]. Live Arts Bistro. Leeds, 7-16 April 2016.
- . (2016b) *Not Lost* [artist statement]. Live Arts Bistro. Leeds, 7-16 April 2016.
- Munoz, J. E. (1999) *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.
- . (2009) *Cruising Utopia*. New York: New York University Press.
- Munro, V. and J. Scoular (2012), Abusing vulnerability? Contemporary law and policy responses to sex work in the UK, *Feminist Legal Studies*. 20(3), pp. 189-206.
- Murphy, A. V. (2012) *Violence and the Philosophical Imaginary*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Murphy, S. (2007) Traumatizing feminism: Prevention discourse and the subject of sexual violence, in Ball K. (ed.), *Traumatizing Theory: The Cultural Politics of Affect in and Beyond Psychoanalysis*. New York: Other Press, pp. 67- 100.
- Nagesh, A. (2016) Women’s refuges are being ‘forced to close’ by government, *Metro*, 6 April. URL: <http://metro.co.uk/2016/04/06/womens-refuges-are-being-forced-to-close-by-government-5800173/>, [accessed 7 June 2018].
- The National (2015) GPs urged to help most vulnerable from welfare cuts, *The National*,

4 September. URL: <http://www.thenational.scot/news/gps-urged-to-help-the-most-vulnerable-from-welfare-cuts.7165>, [accessed 19 November 2015].

Neate, P. (2015) George Osborne just invested millions in women's safety — but we still need more, *The Telegraph*, 7 July. URL: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/11723211/Budget-2015-OSborne-support-for-domestic-violence-victims-is-laudable.html>, [accessed 8 June 2018].

Neilson, B. and N. Rossiter (2008) Precarity as a political concept, or, Fordism as exception, *Theory, Culture & Society*. 25(7-8), pp. 51-72.

Newman, J. (2017) Rationality, responsibility and rage: The contested politics of emotion governance, in Jupp E., J. Pykett and F.M. Smith (eds.), *Emotional States: Sites and Spaces of Affective Governance*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 21-35.

Ngai, S. (2005) *Ugly Feelings*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press.

NHS: *£2 billion a week and counting* (2015). UK: Channel 4.

Nixon J. (2009) Domestic violence and women with disabilities: locating the issue on the periphery of social movements, *Disability and Society*. 24(1), pp. 77-89.

Nussbaum, M. C. (1999) The professor of parody: The hip defeatism of Judith Butler, *The New Republic*. 220(8), pp. 37-45.

Nutt, K. (2014) Move to speed up work assessments, *The Times*, 7 April.

O'Hagan, E.M. (2015) Groups such as Sisters Uncut are the modern Suffragettes, *The Guardian*, 8 October. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/oct/08/sisters-uncut-suffragette-film-premiere-women>, [accessed 7 June 2018].

- O'Hara, M. (2015a) *Austerity Bites*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- . (2015b) Tory Austerity will eat up the welfare state, *The Guardian*, 13 April.  
URL: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/apr/13/tory-austerity-welfare-state-conservative>, [accessed 19 November 2015].
- Okolosie, L. (2014) Beyond talking and owning intersectionality, *Feminist Review*. 108(1), pp. 90-96.
- Omonira–Oyekanmi, R. (2016) The end of domestic violence support for black and brown women in the UK?, *Open Democracy UK*, 6 December. URL: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/rebecca-omonira-oyekanmi/whats-race-got-to-do-with-it-fight-against-domestic-violence>, [accessed 7 June 2018].
- One Born Every Minute* (2010-present). UK: Channel 4.
- Orton, V (2016a), *Maze of Life* [installation]. Live Arts Bistro. Leeds, 7-16 April 2016.
- . (2016b), *Maze of Life* [artist statement]. Live Arts Bistro. Leeds, 7-16 April 2016.
- Osborne, G. (2015a) *Chancellor George Osborne's summer budget speech 2015*, 8 July, House of Commons: London. URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/chancellor-george-osbornes-summer-budget-2015-speech>, [accessed 19 November 2015].
- . (2015b) Calling all progressives: Help us reform the welfare state, *The Guardian*, 19 July. URL: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jul/19/george-osborne-progressive-reform-welfare-benefits-system>, [accessed 19 November 2015].
- Page, T. (2017) Vulnerable writing as a feminist methodological practice, *Feminist Review*. 115, pp. 13-29.



- Parliament. House of Commons (2015) *Future of the BBC Report – 4<sup>th</sup> Report*. HC 949 2013-14 (315). London: The Stationary Office.
- Parliament. House of Commons (2017) *Brexit and Health and Social Care: People & Process – 8<sup>th</sup> Report*. HC 2016-2017 (640). London: The Stationary Office.
- Pater, J. E. (1981) *The Making of the National Health Service*. London: King's Fund Publishing Office.
- Peacock, L. (2013) Domestic violence death toll will 'rise due to funding cuts', *The Telegraph online*, 3 December. URL: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/10489265/Domestic-violence-death-toll-will-rise-due-to-funding-cuts.html>, [accessed 8 June 2018].
- Pearson, R. and D. Elson (2015) Transcending the impact of the financial crisis in the United Kingdom: towards plan F—a feminist economic strategy, *Feminist Review*. 109, pp.8-30.
- Pedwell, C. (2014) *Affective Relations: The Transnational Politics of Empathy*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Pedwell, C. and A. Whitehead (2012) Affecting feminism: Questions of feeling in feminist theory, *Feminist Theory*. 13(2), pp. 115-129.
- Pharo, J. and N. McDermott (2017) 'My children are priceless' Tragedy of Nigerian health tourist who lost two of her newborn quadruplets after going into labour on plane to Heathrow when she was turned away from US – at £500k cost to Brit taxpayers, *The Sun*, 2 February. URL: <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/2753786/nigerian-health-tourists-tragedy-as-two-newborn-quadruplets-die-when-she-goes-into-labour-on-plane-to-heathrow-after-us-turn-her-away-costing-taxpayer-500k/>, [accessed 5 February 2018].
- Piacentini, T. (2014) Everyday acts of resistance: The precarious lives of asylum seekers

- in Glasgow, in Marciniak, K. and I. Tyler (eds.), *Immigrant Protest: Politics, Aesthetics and Everyday Dissent*. New York: SUNY Press, pp. 169-189.
- Pitcher, B. (2016) Race, debt and the welfare state, *New Formations*. 87, pp. 47-63.
- Pizzey, E. (2014) The situation for women's refuges is desperate - but we need to start admitting men too, *The Telegraph*, 6 August. URL: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/11014388/The-situation-for-womens-refuges-is-desperate-but-we-need-to-start-admitting-men-too.html>, [accessed 7 August 2018].
- Potter, J. and M. Wetherell (1987), *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour*. London: Sage.
- Puar, J. K. (2013) The cost of getting better: Ability and debility, in Davis L.J (ed.), *The Disability Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, pp. 177-184.
- Puwar, N. (2010) The archi-texture of Parliament: Flaneur as a method in Westminster, *Journal of Legislative Studies*. 16(3), pp. 298-312.
- Pykett, J. Jupp, E. and F. Smith (2017) Introduction: Governing with feeling, in Jupp E., J. Pykett and F.M. Smith (eds.), *Emotional States: Sites and Spaces of Affective Governance*. London and New York: Routledge
- Radford, L. and A. Gill (2006) Losing the plot? Researching community safety partnership work against domestic violence, *The Howard Journal*. 45(4), pp. 369-387.
- Rai, A. (2002) *Rule of Sympathy: Sentiment, Race, and Power, 1750-1850*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rankin, D. (2014) Nearly 1m benefits claimants found fit for work, *The Times*, January 25.

- Rawlinson, K. & F. Perraudin (2015) DWP admits inventing quotes from fake 'benefits claimants' for sanctions leaflet, *The Guardian*, 18 August. URL: <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/aug/18/dwp-admits-making-up-positive-quotes-from-benefits-claimants-for-leaflet>, [accessed 22 May 2016].
- Rawlinson, K. (2018a) 100 households around Grenfell still in temporary accommodation, *The Guardian*, 29 March. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/mar/29/100-households-around-grenfell-still-in-temporary-accommodation>, [accessed 8 September 2018].
- . (2018b) Darren Osborne jailed for life for Finsbury Park terrorist attack, *The Guardian*, 2 February. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/feb/02/finsbury-park-attack-darren-osborne-jailed>, [accessed 5 September 2018].
- Rhodes, D. (2017) North of England hardest hit by Government cuts, *BBC*, 21 November. URL: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-42049922>, [accessed 6 June 2018].
- Ridley, L. (2015) The Sun's 'Give Me Shelter' campaign for domestic violence shelters has left the internet seriously conflicted, *The Huffington Post*, 19 May. URL: [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/05/19/the-sun-give-me-shelter-domestic-violence\\_n\\_7311924.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/05/19/the-sun-give-me-shelter-domestic-violence_n_7311924.html), [accessed 8 June 2018].
- Rivett, G. (1998) *From Cradle to Grave: Fifty Years of the NHS*. London: Kings Fund Publishing Office.
- Robson, K. (2015) The subject of rape: Feminist discourses on rape and violability in contemporary France, *French Cultural Studies*. 26(1), pp. 45-55.
- Rogers, M. (2016) Funding Cuts could leave victims of domestic violence with nowhere to go, *The Conversation*, 22 June. URL: <https://theconversation.com/funding-cuts-could-leave-victims-of-domestic-violence-with-nowhere-to-go-61177>, [accessed 8 June 2018].

- Ross, A. (2017) NHS hospitals to charge overseas patients for non-urgent care, *The Guardian*, 5 February. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/feb/06/hospitals-check-patients-entitled-free-nhs-care-law-jeremy-hunt>, [accessed 5 June 2018].
- Ross, D. (1997) Battered? Erin Pizzey? Yes. A bit, *The Independent*, 10 March.
- Rounthwaite, Adair (2010) Split witness: Metaphorical extensions of life in the art of Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Representations*. 109, pp. 35-56.
- Royal College of Physicians [RCOP] (2016) Underfunded, underdoctored and overstretched, *Mission: Health*. URL: <https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/guidelines-policy/underfunded-underdoctored-overstretched-nhs-2016>, [accessed 5 June 2018].
- Rubery, J. and A. Rafferty (2013) Gender, recession and austerity in the UK, in Karamessini M. and J. Rubery (eds.), *Women and Austerity*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 123-143.
- Ryan, F. (2014) Government, not disability, makes us vulnerable. That's why we fight the cuts, *The Guardian*, 26 February. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/feb/27/government-disability-vulnerable-cuts-commons-debate>, [accessed 9 June 2018].
- . (2015) Conservatives promised to protect the 'most vulnerable'. How's that going?, *The Guardian*, 10 August. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/aug/10/conservatives-most-vulnerable-ian-duncan-smith-george-osborne-reforms> [accessed 25 August 2018].
- . (2016a) Take another look at the disability debate, who's missing?, *The*

- Guardian*, 22 March. URL:  
<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/mar/22/disability-debate-disabled>, [accessed 18 May 2016].
- . (2016b) The latest costly frivolity to be wound down? Domestic violence services, *The Guardian*, 29 September. URL:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/sep/29/domestic-violence-services-equation-nottingham>, [accessed 9 June 2018].
- . (2017) They've endured domestic violence. Now they're the victims of austerity, *The Guardian*, 26 January. URL:  
[https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jan/26/endured-domestic-violence-victims-austerity-sunderland?CMP=twt\\_gu](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jan/26/endured-domestic-violence-victims-austerity-sunderland?CMP=twt_gu), [accessed 9 June 2018].
- Sabbagh, D. (2018) Theresa May says no-deal Brexit 'wouldn't be the end of the world', *The Guardian*, 28 August. URL:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/aug/28/theresa-may-says-a-no-deal-brex-it-wouldnt-be-the-end-of-the-world>, [accessed 7 September 2018].
- Sabsay, L. (2016) Permeable bodies: Vulnerability, affective powers, hegemony, in Butler, J., Gambetti, Z. and L. Sabsay (eds.) *Vulnerability in Resistance*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, pp. 278-302.
- Samuels, E. (2013) My body, my closet: Invisible disability and the limits of coming out, in Davis L.J (ed.), *The Disability Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, pp. 316-332.
- Sanders-McDonagh, E., Neville, L., and S.M. Nolas (2016) From pillar to post: Understanding the victimisation of women and children who experience domestic violence in an age of austerity, *Feminist Review*. 112, pp. 60-76.
- Scott, J.W. (1996) *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press.
- Scott-Paul, A. (2013) Sanctions: Hitting the most vulnerable, *Joseph Rowntree Foundation*,

7 August. URL: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/blog/sanctions-hitting-most-vulnerable>, [accessed 19 November 2015].

*Scream Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear* (1974). Directed by M. Whyte. UK: Thames Television, 26 February.

Scully, J. L. (2013) Disability and vulnerability: on bodies, dependence and power, in Mackenzie C., Rogers W. and S. Dodds (eds.), *Vulnerability: New Essays in Ethics and Feminist Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 204-221.

Sedgwick, E. K. (2003) *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Shoddy Exhibition (2016) Live Arts Bistro. Leeds, 7-16 April 2016, [attended 12 April 2016].

Shakespeare, T. (2013) The Social Model of Disability, in Davis L.J (ed.), *The Disability Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, pp. 214-221.

Sherman J. (2014a) Benefits contractor pulls out, *The Times*, 28 March.

———. (2014b) Disabled and dying left to wait in benefits fiasco, *The Times*, 20 June.

Shildrick, M. (2012) Critical disability studies: Rethinking the conventions for the age of post modernity, in Watson, N., Roulstone, A. and C. Thomas (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Disability Studies*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 30-42.

———. (2015) Living on; Not getting better, *Feminist Review*. 111, pp. 10–24.

Siddique, H. (2014) Atos quits £500m work capability assessment contract early, *The Guardian*, 27 March. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/mar/27/atos-quit-work-capability-assessment-contract-early>, [accessed 9 June 2018].

Siebers, T. (2013) Disability and the theory of complex embodiment – For identity politics in a new register, in Davis L.J (ed.), *The Disability Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, pp. 278-297.

Sisters Uncut (n.d) *Feministo*, URL: <https://sistersuncut.wordpress.com/feministo> [accessed 22 May 2018].

———. (2015) Red carpet protesters: We stormed the Suffragette premiere – and that's just the start, *The Telegraph Online*, 8 October. URL: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/11919707/Feminist-protestors-Why-we-stormed-the-Suffragette-premiere.html>, [accessed 8 June 2018].

———. (2016a) *Summer of Action: How Can She Leave When She Has Nowhere to Go?*, 15 June. URL: [www.sistersuncut.org/2016/06/15/summer-of-action-how-can-she-leave-when-she-has-nowheretogo/](http://www.sistersuncut.org/2016/06/15/summer-of-action-how-can-she-leave-when-she-has-nowheretogo/), [accessed 8 September 2018].

———. (2016b) 'Suffragette' protesters Sisters Uncut: Why we blocked bridges around Britain – and you should care, *The Telegraph online*, 21 November. URL: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/life/suffragette-protesters-sisters-uncut-why-we-blocked-bridges-arou/>, [accessed 9 June 2018].

Southall Black Sisters (n.d) *Abolish No Recourse to Public Funds campaign*. URL: [http://www.southallblacksisters.org.uk/campaigns/abolish-no-recourse-to-public-funds\\_](http://www.southallblacksisters.org.uk/campaigns/abolish-no-recourse-to-public-funds_), [accessed 7 June 2018].

———. (2008) *Save Southall Black Sisters Campaign 2008*. URL: <http://www.southallblacksisters.org.uk/campaigns/save-sbs-campaign-2008>, [accessed 7 June 2018].

———. (2014) *35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Report*. URL: [http://www.southallblacksisters.org.uk/downloads/SBS-Annual-Report-2014.pdf\\_](http://www.southallblacksisters.org.uk/downloads/SBS-Annual-Report-2014.pdf_), [accessed 7 June 2018].

- Spivak, G.C. (1988) Can the subaltern speak? in Nelson, C. and Grossberg, L. (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, pp. 271-313.
- . (1993) *Outside in the Teaching Machine*. [Reprint 2009], New York: Routledge.
- Stacey, J. (2014) Wishing away ambivalence, *Feminist Theory*. 15(1), pp. 39-49.
- Stanford P. (2014) Cuts risk returning disabled to the shadows, says Baroness Campbell, *The Telegraph online*, 5 April. URL: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/10746199/Cuts-risk-returning-us-to-the-shadows-says-Baroness-Campbell.html>, [accessed 9 June 2018].
- Standing, G. (2011), *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Stark, H. (2014) Judith Butler's post Hegelian ethics and the problem with recognition, *Feminist Theory*. 15(1), pp. 89-100.
- Steele, S., Devlin, C., Stuckler D. and M. McKee (2017) Tougher charging regime for "overseas" patients, *British Medical Journal*. 358, pp. 1-2.
- Stewart, H. (2016) Theresa May Approves £20m funding boost for women's refugees, *The Guardian*, 2 November. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/nov/02/theresa-may-approves-20m-fund-womens-refuges-new-guidance-council-accomodate-domestic-violence>, [accessed 9 June 2018].
- Stewart, K. (2007) *Ordinary Affects*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Stringer, R. (2013) Vulnerability after wounding: Feminism, rape law and the differend, *SubStance*. 42(3), pp.148-168.



———. (2014) *Knowing Victims: Feminism, Agency and Victim Politics in Neo-Liberal Times*. London and New York: Routledge.

Stronger In (2016), *Why Britain is Stronger in Europe*, URL:

[https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/in/pages/688/attachments/original/1455814559/160111\\_Why\\_Britain\\_Is\\_Stronger\\_In\\_Europe.pdf?1455814559](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/in/pages/688/attachments/original/1455814559/160111_Why_Britain_Is_Stronger_In_Europe.pdf?1455814559), [accessed 8 June 2018].

*Suffragette* (2015). Directed by S Gavron. Ruby Films, Pathe, Film 4, British Film Institute, Canal France, Cine, Focus Features.

Swinford, S. (2015) Iain Duncan Smith vows to overhaul 'perverse' sickness benefits,

*The Telegraph online*, 24 August. URL:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/conservative/11819615/Iain-Duncan-Smith-vows-to-overhaul-perverse-sickness-benefits.html>, [accessed 19 November 2015].

*The Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act 1976*, c.50. URL:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1976/50/enacted> [accessed 8 August 2018].

The Guardian (2016) How do you report a year that changed the world?, *The Guardian*, 22 December. URL:

<https://www.theguardian.com/membership/video/2016/dec/22/2016-how-do-you-report-a-year-that-changed-the-world-video>, [accessed 8 August 2018].

The Telegraph reporters (2016) 2016 in review: World events that changed history, *The Telegraph Online*, 31 December. URL:

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/12/31/2016-review-world-events-changed-history/>, [accessed 8 August 2018].

The Times (2011) News: Disabled claimants shown the stairs, *The Times*, 20 October.

———. (2015) Cuts both ways, *The Times*, 20 March. URL:

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/opinion/leaders/article4387467.ece>, [accessed 19 November 2015].

The Sunday Times (2017) Wednesday: Critic's choice pick of the day, *The Sunday Times*, 8 January.

Thomson, M. (2017) Born in the NHS, *People's History of the NHS*. URL: <http://peopleshistorynhs.org/encyclopaedia/born-in-the-nhs/>, [accessed 5 June 2018].

Thomson, M. and R. Bivins (2017) The Cultural History of the NHS, *People's History of the NHS*. URL: <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/history/chm/research/current/nhshistory/>, [accessed 5 June 2018].

Thrift, N. (2007) *Non-representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect*. London: Routledge.

Ticktin, M. (2011) *Casualties of Care: Immigration and the Politics of Humanitarianism in France*. Berkley: University of California Press.

Toynbee, P. (2015) George Osborne's assault on welfare must not go unchallenged, *The Guardian*, 21 July. URL: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jul/21/george-osborne-welfare-labour-chancellor>, [accessed 19 November 2015].

———. (2016) For a clear view of the NHS, look past the politics and promises of a cure, *The Guardian*, 17 January. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jan/17/nhs-politics-promises-cure-analysis-health-service>, [accessed 8 June 2018].

Travis B. (2017) Hospital: BBC2 documentary offers a frank look at stretched NHS amid bed crisis, *The Evening Standard*, 11 January. URL: <https://www.standard.co.uk/stayingin/tvfilm/hospital-bbc-two-documentary->

offers-frank-look-at-nhs-stretches-and-bed-crisis-a3438321.html, [accessed 12 August 2018].

Tronto, J. C. (1993) *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*. New York: Routledge.

Tyler, I. (2013) *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neo-Liberal Britain*. London: Zed Books.

Tyler, I., Gill, N., Conlon, D. and C. Oeppen (2014) The business of child detention: Charitable co-option, migrant advocacy and activist outrage, *Race and Class*. 56(1), pp. 3-21.

UK Uncut (2018) Twitter Handle, URL:  
[https://twitter.com/UKuncut?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor](https://twitter.com/UKuncut?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor), [accessed 17 September 2018].

Vacchelli, E., Kathrecha, P. and N. Gyte (2015) Is it really just the cuts? Neoliberal tales from the woman's voluntary and community sector in London, *Feminist Review*. 109, pp. 180-189.

Vote Leave (2016) *Campaign Resources*. URL:  
[http://www.voteleavetakecontrol.org/campaign\\_resources.html](http://www.voteleavetakecontrol.org/campaign_resources.html), [accessed: 8 June 2018].

Walker, P. (2016) MPs urge chancellor to honour leave campaign's 350m NHS promise, *The Guardian*, 24 October. URL:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/oct/24/mps-letter-urges-chancellor-honour-vote-leave-campaign-350m-pound-nhs-promise>, [accessed 8 June 2018].

Walker, D. (2017) BBC2's *The Hospital* sparks huge reaction from viewers: 'Moving,

- Poignant, broke my heart', *The Mirror*, 11 January. URL:  
<https://www.mirror.co.uk/tv/tv-news/bbc-twos-hospital-sparks-huge-9606550>,  
 [accessed 8 August 2018].
- Ware, V. (1992) *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History*. [Reprint 2005], London and New York: Verso Books.
- Wearing, S., Gunaratnam, Y. and I. Gedalof (2015), Frailty and debility, *Feminist Review*. 111, pp. 1-9.
- Webster, C. (2002) *The National Health Service: A Political History*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Welfare Reform Act 2012*, c.5. URL:  
[http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2012/5/pdfs/ukpga\\_20120005\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2012/5/pdfs/ukpga_20120005_en.pdf),  
 [accessed 8 June 2018].
- Wendell, S. (1996) *The Rejected Body: Feminist Reflections on Disability*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Wendell, S. (2013) Unhealthy disabled: Treating chronic illnesses as disabilities, in Davis L.J (ed.), *The Disability Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, pp. 161-176.
- West Dunbartonshire Citizens Advice Bureau (2014) *Unjust and Uncaring: A Report on Conditionality and Benefit Sanctions and Their Impact on Clients*. URL:  
<http://www.cas.org.uk/system/files/Unjust%20and%20Uncaring.pdf>, [accessed 22 May 2016].
- Wetherell, M. (2001) Themes in discourse research: The case of Diana, *Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader*. [Reprint 2005], London, California and New Delhi: Sage, pp. 14-28
- . (2013) Affect and discourse – What's the problem? From affect as excess to affective/discursive practice, *Subjectivity*. 6(4), pp. 349-368.

- White, K. (2016a), *Kicking up a Dust* [film installation]. Live Arts Bistro. Leeds, 7 – 16 April 2016.
- . (2016b) *Kicking up a Dust* [artist statement]. Live Arts Bistro. Leeds. 7 – 16 April 2016.
- Whitney, S. (2011) Dependency relations: Corporeal vulnerability and norms of personhood in Hobbes and Kittay, *Hypatia*. 26(3), pp. 554-574.
- Wiegman, R. (2014) The times we're in: Queer feminist criticism and the reparative 'turn', *Feminist Theory*. 15(1), pp. 4-25.
- Wiggan, J. (2017) Contesting the austerity and 'welfare reform' narrative of the UK Government: Forging a social democratic imaginary in Scotland, *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*. 37(11-12), pp. 639-654.
- Williams-Findlay, R. (2011) Lifting the lid on Disabled People Against Cuts, *Disability and Society*. 26(6), pp. 773-778.
- Williams, C. (2012) A very 'British' welfare state? Race and racism, in Calder G., Gass, J. and K. Merrill-Glover (eds.), *Changing Directions of the British Welfare State*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, pp.141-159.
- Williams, Z. (2016) The dangerous fantasy behind Trump's normalisation, *The Guardian*, 15 November. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/15/dangerous-fantasy-donald-trump-normalisation-us-president-elect-barbarism>, [accessed 17 August 2018].
- Wilson, K. (2013) Agency as 'Smart Economics': Neoliberalism, gender and development, in Madhok, S., Wilson, K. and A. Phillips (eds.), *Gender, Agency and Coercion*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 84-101.
- Wintour, P. (2015) Obese people and drug users who refuse treatment should have

their benefits cut, *The Guardian*, 29 July. URL: <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/jul/29/benefits-drugs-alcohol-obesity-refusing-treatment-review>, [accessed 19 November 2015].

Wollaston, S. (2017) Hospital review — Shining a light on the NHS at breaking point, *The Guardian*, 12 January. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2017/jan/12/hospital-review-nhs-breaking-point-six-part-series>, [accessed 12 August 2018].

Women's Aid (2014) *SOS: Why we need to save our services: Women's Aid Data report on specialist domestic violence services*. URL: [https://1q7dqy2unor827bjls0c4rn-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/SOS\\_Data\\_Report.pdf](https://1q7dqy2unor827bjls0c4rn-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/SOS_Data_Report.pdf), [accessed 7 June 2018].

———. (2017) *Our History*. URL: <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/about-us/history>, [accessed 7 June 2018].

Women's Budget Group & Runnymede Trust (2017) *Intersecting Inequalities: The Impact of austerity on Black and Ethnic Minority Women in the UK*. URL: <https://www.intersecting-inequalities.com/copy-of-report>, [accessed 5 June 2018].

Wood, C. (2012), Destination Unknown: Summer 2012, *Demos*. URL: [http://www.demos.co.uk/files/Destination\\_Unknown\\_Summer\\_2012\\_-\\_web.pdf?1340294386](http://www.demos.co.uk/files/Destination_Unknown_Summer_2012_-_web.pdf?1340294386), [accessed 19 November 2015].

Wood, R. (1991) Care of disabled people, in G. Dalley (ed.), *Disability and Social Policy*. London: Policy Studies Institute, pp. 199-202.

Woodward, K. (2004) Circulating compassion, in Berlant, L. (ed.) *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion*. New York and London: Routledge, pp. 59-86.

Wynne-Jones, R. (2015) Mum and four kids forced to sleep in one bed thanks to

benefit cap, *The Mirror*, 5 November. URL:  
<<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/mum-four-kids-forced-sleep-6778038>>, [accessed 19 November 2015].

Ziarek, E.P. (2013) Feminist reflections on vulnerability: Disrespect, obligation and action, *SubStance*. 42(3), pp. 67-84.