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## **‘ain’t ya mama’s feminism’: Blogging, Generation and the Neoliberal Conjuncture**

### **Abstract**

This article explores the complex responses to intergenerational feminisms in three feminist blogs: *Crunk Feminist Collective* (2010-), *The Feminist Times* (2013-2014) and *The Vagenda* (2012-). I argue that although the category of generation is over-emphasised in relation to narratives about feminism, it still has theoretical purchase. Critical of linearity as a conceptual tool to define intergenerational feminisms, this paper explores generation through what Stuart Hall (using Antonio Gramsci) calls ‘the conjuncture’. More specifically, I look at how the conjuncture can shape the formation of one’s feminist politics – especially in digital culture – and how this might impact on intergenerational dialogue.

### **Keywords**

Generation, feminism, digital, neoliberalism, branding, postfeminism, blogging, conjuncture

## **‘ain’t ya mama’s feminism’: Blogging, Generation and the Neoliberal Conjunction**

### **Why Generation?**

Feminism is frequently talked about in terms of generation, both by feminists and the mainstream media. It is often framed as intergenerational conflict by deploying the familial metaphors of mothers and daughters – or more recently grandmothers (Walker, 2008; Henry, 2004). The wave metaphor is sometimes invoked in order to distinguish different generations of feminists: from the suffragettes, through the ‘second wave’ Women’s Liberation movement in the 1970s, to the ‘third wave’ in the 1990s, culminating in the contemporary resurgence in feminist activism, which has been called by some commentators, the ‘fourth wave’ (Cochrane, 2013). However, the use of waves to describe the multiplicity of feminist activism through history has been critiqued. Elena Vacchelli and Erin Sanders McDonagh argue that the “concept of temporal ‘waves’ of feminism serves to create a version of feminist activity that is presented as monolithic, and neatly ensconced in a clearly defined and delineated period of time.” [page ref.] They maintain that temporal metaphors should be replaced by “a more geographic understanding of feminist activism” (Vacchelli and Sanders McDonagh 2013). The wave metaphor is also viewed problematically by Kimberly Springer (2002) who asserts that the wave analogy is untenable when thinking about women of colour’s feminist activism; it obscures the historical role of race in women’s organizing during the antebellum and abolitionist periods, as well as in the **Civil rights [either civil rights or Civil Rights]** movement.

In addition, generation signifies differently depending on the feminist collectives imagining it. Springer suggests that for Black feminists, “The recuperation of the self in a racist and sexist society is a political enterprise and a Black feminist one that deprioritizes generational differences in the interest of historical, activist continuity” (Springer, 2002, 1061). On the other hand, Susan Faludi maintains – presumably in relation to feminist cohorts who are primarily white – that there are “seismic generational shifts” with “younger women declaring themselves sick to death of hearing about the glory days of Seventies feminism and older women declaring themselves sick to death of being swept into the dustbin of history” (Faludi, 2010). In response to Faludi, Jack Halberstam blogged that casting conflict “in the mother-[nline?]daughter bond” is “transhistorical, transcultural, universal”, and that it ignores “the

instability of gender norms, the precarious condition of the family itself” as well as “the many challenges made to generational logics within a recent wave of queer theory on temporality” (Halberstam, 2010). In her interviews with self-defined radical feminists Finn McKay (2015) argues that because women of different ages identify with radical feminism so conflicts between feminists should be discussed in terms of political differences rather than generational ones and Rosalind Gill argues that there are more important issues for feminism – including subverting the pervasive logics of postfeminism – than “the time that you were born” (Gill, 2016).

This article explores these complex responses to generational framing using three feminist blogs: the US-based *Crunk Feminist Collective* (2010-), the now defunct UK *The Feminist Times* (2013-2014) and the UK *The Vagenda* (2012-). *Crunk Feminist Collective* (hereafter referenced as CFC) is a resource “for hip hop generation feminists of color, queer and straight, in the academy and without”. It aims to create “a community of scholars-activists from varied professions, who share our intellectual work in online blog communities, at conferences, through activist organizations, and in print publications and who share our commitment to nurturing and sustaining one another through progressive feminist visions” (CFC, Mission Statement). A satirical take on women’s magazines, *The Vagenda* (hereafter referenced as TV) is run by two friends in their 20s, Rhiannon Lucy Coslett and Holly Baxter, who are working “out of our kitchens” [ref.?]. The founder of *The Feminist Times* (hereafter referenced as FemT) Charlotte Raven, also worked from her kitchen with her editors. *The Feminist Times* has a more formalized feminist agenda, offering a “pluralist platform for the stories and women often sidelined by the major magazines and newspapers” (FemT, About Us). It aims to address issues of age, generation, race, disability, sexuality, trans identity, among others, while seeking (and paying) feminists with a multiplicity of identity formations to write for them. Significantly none of these sites are funded through advertising or brand sponsorship, and in this way their online practice is coterminous with their feminist politics. However, **the obstacles** that online feminist writers and editors face in corporate run digital spaces **is [the obstacles are?]** part of the subject of this article.

The writers and editors of these online sites practice their feminisms in online and offline spaces so I am keen not to offer a reductive analysis which celebrates a ‘new’ kind of online feminism, one which is ontologically distinct from what can only be an imagined narrative of a coherent feminist past. As Jessalynn Keller argues in the context of girl blogging in the US,

online activist blogging is part of a lengthy tradition of feminist media production (Keller, 2015, 2). Rosi Braidotti's description of feminist timelines as "zigzagging" is pertinent here as I am also critical of using linearity as conceptual tool to define intergenerational feminisms (Braidotti, 2009, 4). Nevertheless, this article argues that the relative newness of these media platforms for feminist activism and consciousness-raising needs analysis. These three blogs must be situated within the current era of neoliberalism where corporate logics permeate the flows of online space. How does participating within what critics call 'the networked society' enable, transform, inflect or circumscribe the ways in which feminists can write to and about each other? How does the platform of the blog or online magazine affect the kind of dialogues that feminists can have? How do feminists write in tension with pervasive branded cultures?

### **Generation Y?**

Out of the three, *Crunk Feminist Collective* defines itself most succinctly in relation to a feminist history. In their manifesto, they invoke their "feminist big sister Joan Morgan" who invited us to "fill in the breaks, provide the remixes, and rework the **chorus**", [','] but maintain:

While our declaration of feminism pays homage to our feminist foremothers and big sisters, Hip Hop generation feminism is not just a remix but also a remake that builds on the beats and rhythms from the tracks already laid down, but with a decidedly new sound, for a new era. This, in other words, ain't ya mama's feminism. This is next generation feminism, standing up, standing tall, and proclaiming like Celie, that we are indeed Here. We are the ones we have been waiting for (CFC, Manifesto). **[place final punctuation before ref. in inset quotes throughout: for. (CFC, Manifesto)]**

Significantly, the time in which they were born – which signifies their generation rather than feminist waves – is crucial to the political thrust of *Crunk Feminist Collective*. Their concerns are specific to their generation and being women of colour in America:

We are members of the Hip Hop Generation because we came of age in one of the decades, the 1990s, that can be considered post-Soul and post-Civil Rights. Our political realities have been profoundly shaped by a systematic rollback of the gains

of the Civil Rights era with regard to affirmative action policies, reproductive justice policies, the massive deindustrialization of urban areas, the rise and ravages of the drug economy within urban, semi-urban, and rural communities of color, and the full-scale assault on women's lives through the AIDS epidemic. We have come of age in the era that has witnessed a past-in-present assault on our identities as women of color, one that harkens back to earlier assaults on our virtue and value during enslavement and imperialism (CFC, Manifesto).

*Crunk Feminist Collective* define themselves and their politics as part of a specific historical moment. Their feminism is exhilaratingly marked against the neoliberal white supremacist and patriarchal “past-in-present”, as well as being located in an identification with Hip Hop because “our connection to Hip Hop links us to a set of generational concerns, and a community of women, locally, nationally, and globally” (CFC, Manifesto). Indeed, Springer usefully distinguishes between the concepts of ‘generation’ and ‘waves’. For Springer generation is a key part of understanding Black feminism, as its histories can be, and have been, subsumed under the mainstream and established narratives of white feminism.

It is this understanding of generation – one that is located in what Stuart Hall [**and Massey? Throughout?**] defines as “the conjuncture” as opposed to waves – that I examine in this article. Hall and Massey define the conjuncture as “partly about periodization”; each conjuncture marks a period when “different, social, political, economic and ideological contradictions are at work in a society and have given it a specific and distinctive shape come together, producing a crisis of some kind” (Hall and Massey, 2015, 60). Thinking about generation through this intersectional approach, and in relation to political, economic and ideological contradictions rather than as a familial metaphor or part of a distinct and feminist linear teleology, is productive because it allows for co-existing dissonance, inconsistencies, and incongruities when writing feminism. As Clare Hemmings argues, the stories that are told about feminism (whether they are narratives of progress, loss or return) “sustain one version of history as more true than another, despite the fact that we know that history is more complicated than the stories we tell about it” (Hemmings, 2011, 15-16). Indeed, she argues that “feminist theorists need to pay attention to the amenability of our own stories, narrative constructs, and grammatical forms to discursive uses of gender and feminism we might otherwise wish to disentangle ourselves from if history is not simply to repeat itself” (Hemmings, 2011, 2).

For the purposes of this article I follow Hall and Massey's use of the conjuncture as they describe the UK postwar settlement followed by an era of neoliberalism. The period that partly enabled the conditions of feminism in the 1960s [**re. Hall and Massey's "a society," are you talking about the UK? The UK and US? Please specify throughout**] onwards was defined by the welfare state, public ownership and wealth distribution through taxes. Following **a crisis [what to specify?]** in the 1970s we have witnessed a rollback of these gains as a consequence of neoliberal policies which have been bolstered by a complicit media. Those coming of age in the neoliberal era are conventionally known as Generation Y, or the Millennials. In the UK these young people are witnessing the breakdown of the NHS, dwindling and insecure pensions, the withdrawal of state aid in the form of higher tuition fees, the imposition of bedroom tax, decreased levels of housing benefit and the withdrawal of **EMA [bear in mind that the collection and its audience are international, they might not know about the UK]**; and at the same time they are caught up in circuits of debt and what David Graeber (2013) calls 'bullshit jobs'. Of course, generation Y are not a homogeneous group, and their socioeconomic and cultural location is dependent on vectors of gender, race, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, religion, place. Ken Roberts (2012) argues that working class young people in the UK experienced the devastating impact of neoliberal policies before those protected by their middle class status. Diane Negra and Yvonne Tasker (2014) maintain that although the recession has been branded a 'mancession' it has disproportionately affected women. In their manifesto – and throughout their content – *Crunk Feminist Collective* articulate how the present neoliberal moment in the US is experienced differently by women of colour because the socioeconomic, cultural and legislative forms of white supremacist patriarchy intersect to impact disproportionately on them.

Keeping this intersectional approach in mind, I argue that we are seeing a generational shift in terms of the political agency conferred to young people. The conjuncture defines the subjective possibilities, or agency, that a group of people can have dependent upon their political formation; the conjuncture sets the conditions by which they can act. Those born in the United Kingdom after the Second World War – particularly if they were middle class – had more political representation in mainstream politics, partly because of the demographic bulge at this time, but also because of the influence of the 1960s' **counter cultural [one word]** movement, as well as the supportive framework of the social democratic settlement. In contrast to this, young people forming their political consciousness under neoliberalism are

alienated from the political process and tend not to vote, with the result being that the government can ignore them in terms of state aid, thus alienating them still further. The terrain where the so-called Millennial generation forges their feminism is influenced by these contradictions. Similar devastating issues are affecting young people in the United States, as described in such texts as *Generation We* (2009). And, of course, *Crunk Feminist Collective* locate their generation as coming of age in a time when the gains of the Civil Rights movement have been retracted, and where women of colour are blamed as ‘welfare queens’ as the structures of welfare support are being decimated.

It is important here to emphasise that I am not pitting two generations against each other. Rather I am trying to show how coming of age in different conjunctures – dependent on one’s experience of intersecting forms of oppression – can shape the formation of one’s politics. Significantly, this generational shift has been used by conservative forces to transfer the blame[**comma?**] justifying so-called ‘austerity’ on to those born in the postwar conjuncture. In this way, the neoliberal government [**again, in this about UK, UK + US?**] reconfigures class divisions as generational (Little, 2014). A culture of blaming the baby-boomers – as evidenced for example in books by David Willetts (2010) and Neil Boorman (2010) – seeks to divert attention from socioeconomic problems that are driven by neoliberal policies. One of the reasons for framing the baby[**hyphen throughout**]boomers as beneficiaries of privileges is to shift the blame for the austerity cuts from the financial corporations which caused the recession, and to recast them as a familial or generational issue. Narrating the recession and its resultant cuts as familial is also a strategy to normalise young people’s dependency on their parents when they can’t afford to set up their own households, while delegitimizing their complaints about their circumstances being a regression from the previous modes of transition into adulthood.

Feminists also criticize each other using generation. These instances are often picked up in the mainstream media and exploited. For example, the media reports and foregrounds moments when feminists disparage each other; homing in on moments of generational hostility in order to amplify it. Using the trope of the catfight between women of different ages is a key way that feminism is reported as it is effective in locating feminism in the past, as no longer relevant, while simultaneously framing differences between activists as **unsurmountable [insurmountable?]** (McRobbie, 2009). This has the function of personalising feminist politics, locating it in the private sphere. Moreover, domesticating



feminism in this way means that political difference is recast as a bicker or a row, rather than the performance of adversarial politics; adversarial politics being (still) a legitimate male performance. This is not to say that feminists themselves do not use generation as a call to arms or as admonishment. Indeed, generation is debated in different ways in all three blogs that I am looking at here. This article explores conversations that these feminists hold around generation, it locates digital feminist writing as both a continuation of and distinct from other modes of writing feminism, and it examines the productivity of looking at how historical periods shape one's feminist politics and what effect this might have on intergenerational dialogue.

### **Intergenerational Conflict?**

A blog is networked; it is in constant process. Its content is frequently updated, amended, commented upon, reworked. Furthermore, the design, layout, embedded links, and comments are intrinsic to the way that digital feminisms are read, as well as influencing how they are written. A blog can function as a hub and in this way can facilitate dialogue between multiple sites. Blogposts can spread very quickly through users' networks via microblogging platforms like Twitter or Facebook. An individual blog – unlike the relatively static medium of the book – can become untethered from its host website and flow through social media networks. Users can discuss the content on a variety of platforms in the context of plural online and offline feminist conversations, and these discussions in turn impact on the way that blog might be reworked and subsequently responded to. Moreover, a blog needs to be understood in terms of the brands that host and enable it.

The writers for *Crunk Feminist Collective* practice their feminism offline and online; they give talks, participate in protests, teach in universities, speak in churches, make films, among other political activities. It is also crucial to locate their blog within a wider context of feminists of colour working towards social justice. *Crunk Feminist Collective's* [deitalicize] website has embedded links to Hip Hop artists, locating their feminist project within a broader generational culture that is not necessarily feminist but which shapes and reshapes their feminist practice. By integrating links to Hip Hop artists, the collective forge direct connections between the cultural forms that define their generational identity, and their writing. In addition, their content is inflected with Hip Hop – in its rhythms, lyrics, frequent intertextual allusions, and the socioeconomic and generational terrain that is held in common.

In their Mission Statement they define ‘crunk’: “As part of a larger women-of-color feminist politic, crunkness, in its insistence on the primacy of the beat, contains a notion of movement, timing, and of meaning making through sound, that is especially productive for our work together” (CFC, Mission Statement). Alongside the right-hand side of the website there is a blogroll linking to other blogs and websites run by people of colour and feminists. In this way, *Crunk Feminist Collective* positions itself as part of a wider online network of activists. Embedded links to Facebook and Twitter enable the spread of content, and the comments section **mean [means?]** that users can engage in dialogue with the **blogs’ [blog’s?]** writers.

Blogs are usually intensely personal and written in the first person. This mode of writing is amenable to Black feminist autobiographical poetics as well as an intellectual politics that is grounded in experience. As Patricia Hill Collins argues, Black feminist writing is less about mastering white male epistemologies “than in resisting the hegemonic nature of these patterns of thought in order to see, value, and use existing alternative Afrocentric feminist ways of knowing” (Hill Collins, 1990, 267-268). Although *Crunk Feminist Collective* are forging their own feminist writing – “ain’t ya mama’s feminism” – experience and alternative configurations of writing feminist politics are fundamental. Sometimes writing in the vernacular of the Black South, the writers of *Crunk Feminist Collective* inscribe their collective identities against a white hegemony. Denied a voice in the mainstream media, this is an example of radically networked media production. **[obviously, Black, African-American and “of colour” are not interchangeable]**

The visuals of the website are purple and white. On the home page there is a photograph of four members of the collective wearing purple hooded tops, their backs to the camera and their hoods up. This locates the collective’s writers and editors while simultaneously speaking against the conventional commodification and scrutiny of the Black female body. Tabs allow users to search through the archive for past posts, as well as finding more information, including the mission statement, appearance in the media, and future events. Significantly, and unusually, there are no advertisements, pop-ups or brands sponsoring the site. This is a site devoted to feminist activism without the compromises that inevitably come from having to refrain from talking about certain topics – sex and politics – in order to conform to the dictates of advertising companies. *Crunk Feminist Collective* maintain the site through donations (there is a click button for potential donors) and it is sponsored by Media Equity Collaborative.

Participating in the online discussion around bell hooks calling Beyonce a “terrorist”, Brittney Cooper, writing for *Crunk Feminist Collective*, invokes the complexities of generational difference to explain her mixed response:

[bell hooks and Cornel West] both make our work possible. But if the rhetoric continues, the two of them may also become a cautionary tale in what it means for revolutionaries not to age well.

[move up? do you need all these line breaks in this inset quote and throughout] (Yeah, I said it.)

And with regard to their speaker’s fees, “I ain’t sayin they golddiggers, but...” (And check it: I think they should make their paper, because I don’t believe revolutionaries should live in poverty.)

Anyway, we are all just trying to find our way here. My generation of intellectuals definitely could benefit from a more radical edge to our critique.

But if the argument is that we have to violently mow down our icons, leaving a trail of their blood on the way to this new “radicalism,” then you can keep it. Because something about that sounds alarmingly like the patriarchal, black male-centered, radical Black radicalism of old (CFC, **On bell, Beyonce and bullshit [throughout, should such titles appear in inverted commas and capitalized, like article titles? And should they appear in Biblio?]**).

The writing delineates its contradictory responses: it is a homage to bell hooks; an allegiance to Beyonce’s music as pleasure and as a Black female cultural icon; a critique of the hierarchy of Black academics indicated through their fees, gender and age; anxiety over ‘my generation’s’ radical politics; a treatise against neoliberalism; among other insights. Cooper reveals the structures of her intellectual and emotional working through of a painful intergenerational moment. The invoking of Black Southern culture, Hip Hop references, brackets, asides, interwoven with the language of academia, **layers [layer?]** the palimpsest of this particular online Black feminist rhetoric. Intergenerational feminist **dialogics [dialogue? dialogism (Bakhtin)? is “dialogics” someone’s term?]** is positioned as contradictory, shaped through miscommunication and difference, but also in process and open to conversation – both because it is networked but also because Cooper’s response, which exposes its own paradoxes, is not closed.

*The Vagenda* also articulate a complicated relationship with previous generations of feminists, but their stance is less nuanced. Above, I discussed how the prevalent Tory political narrative in the United Kingdom stokes generational divisions between baby boomers and the Millennials. This has the added benefit of associating so-called second-wave feminism with the apparently privileged and selfish postwar generation. This division is invoked by *The Vagenda* when they ask, “Does feminism have a generation gap? And is that a problem?” [ref?] *The Vagenda* is a satirical take on women’s magazines, an industry where both Coslett and Baxter have interned. *The Vagenda* is open to contributors but, because it is not funded by public or third sector bodies or by advertising, they do not offer money or employment. The tagline for their blog is ‘King Lear for girls’ and in their editorial they state that:

It is not, as the tagline says, like King Lear for girls (that is just a quote we nicked from Grazia that was so CRINGE – as they’d put it – that we totes had to use it, tbh). What the Vagenda is is a big ‘we call bullshit’ on the mainstream women’s press (TV, Editorial).

They appropriate the hyperbolic language of postfeminism as circulated in women’s magazines in order to critique and disrupt the power of the magazines themselves, as well [as] the branded landscape of the neoliberal girl and its feminine constructions (Negra 2009; Winch 2013). But what they call their “sweary” feminism is also part of a counter-discursive “loud, proud, sarcastic” feminist sensibility used by young online feminists (see Keller, 2015, 76). *The Vagenda* write about issues as diverse as female Shakespeare characters, through to marriage and abortion, but their main source of material is popular culture and more specifically magazines targeting a female demographic.

One contributor to *The Vagenda* with the initials ‘VH’ (**The Vagenda [ital.]** do not credit their authors with full names) explicitly locate themselves as a “new wave” and they pit this against a more austere one:

One of the things I love (and I mean LOVE) about this new wave of feminism, is that it features a range of women campaigning on different, varied issues. A war on many fronts, if you will. I see it as progress, as the feminist movement moving on from a

time where you were essentially supposed to sign up to some kind of bullshit feminist charter in order to join the club (TV, **How To Tell If You're Feminist Enough [here every word is capitalized; please be consistent]**).

Feminism is cast here teleologically, moving from a “bullshit feminist charter” and exclusive “club” to a freer, wittier and more plural feminism. The editors note that they as young women experience generational hostility from older feminists:

As writers of The Vagenda book, we (and from what our friends/colleagues say, young feminists in particular) have come to see being criticised by our elders as an occupational hazard when writing about women's issues. **[please inset quotes of 60 words and above]**

(TV, Girl Trouble: What is Everyone's Deal With Young Women)

They write in another post that:

Here's a manifesto I can get on board with: feminism isn't a sliding scale. You don't get rated out of 10 or have to sit an oral exam at the end of it. So just do whatever the fuck in your noble quest for gender equality, and don't attack other women people for doing the same (TV, I am Sexy. I am Funny. I am a Fucking Feminist).

Interestingly they locate this “new” feminism against one that is imbued with hierarchical educational signifiers. Indeed, elsewhere they situate their generational difference in terms of privilege:

Much of this criticism (well, what which [sic] didn't come from journalists who completely coincidentally ALSO WRITE FOR WOMEN'S MAGAZINES) came from middle class women in their late middle age who were lucky enough to have benefited from much feminist consciousness-raising when they were attending their progressive Russell Group Universities – talk to a state school educated girl who grew up in the feminist vacuum of the nineties (hiya!) and it is, of course, a different story (TV, On Bikini Body Bullshit).

Second wave feminism is located in an historical period that **has [is?]** now past and was enacted or produced in the spaces of elite universities. These privileges are framed as distinct from the conditions which inform young women's feminism today. A political schism is enacted, based on hierarchy, and there is a hurt tone to the statement "don't attack other women people for doing the same".

Random House published *The Vagenda: A Zero Tolerance Guide to the Media* in 2014, and it was poorly reviewed in the mainstream press. (The front cover sports a supportive tagline from Jeanette Winterson which demonstrates that not all "elders" turned against Baxter and Coslett.) In fact, the book's reviewers – typically it was women who were tasked with doing the write ups – were of different ages. However, and significantly, Germaine Greer condemned the book in *The [the?] New Statesman*, casting its writers as "two young experts" who "yelp" their hyperbole but who reveal "a level of ignorance that is positively medieval" (Greer, 2014). Asking Greer to review the book could have been a tactical manoeuvre by the **newspaper's [magazine's?]** online editors as she is frequently used to invoke a nostalgic feminism. Moreover, she can be relied upon to critique other feminists, thereby depicting both herself and those under attack as ridiculous. Because she has come to stand in for second[**hyphen throughout**] wave feminism – a clearly ahistorical positioning – she is symbolically harnessed as a divisive means to mock the feminist movement.

Part of the problem that *The Vagenda* faced when their book was reviewed, and which was not foregrounded, was that their writing originated in the blogosphere and its popularity sprang from a connection with this digital genre. However, their book was put under the journalistic scrutiny usually given to a book review. *The Vagenda's [deital.]* writing is particular to a "networked counterpublic" (Keller, 2015) of feminist activists, and this is quite a different form of communication from journalism, essay-writing, non-fiction or even a feminist newsletter. Hosted by the free platform Wordpress, the editors upload posts which are later archived and still accessible. Simultaneously they microblog on feminist issues using Twitter. They have a comment function which is open to all so that there are loops of feedback which in turn affect the activism they practice; their writing is part of a larger feminist conversation. Their language is the brash, sarcastic and "swear" language of some digital feminisms that talk back to postfeminism by using and amplifying its tone, partly to render the object of their critique absurd. It also creates affective links between feminists who are both beguiled but also oppressed by the power of women's magazines. Their blog also

needs to be understood as part of the online feminist ‘phatic economy’ (Miller, 2012). That is, a networked feminist consciousness is performed online through such contentless activity as the ‘like’ button and pokes, as well [as?] retweeting, links, memes, gifs; the objective is social rather than the imparting of information. Furthermore, as women in their 20s they are also operating in a precarious labour market where they must continuously promote themselves to garner attention and receive free-lance paid work. In a creative economy, labour is largely dependent upon using strategies of self-branding and blogging is a way to cultivate recognition from potential employers. Indeed, *The Vagenda* attribute their subsequent work for the mainstream press, television and other media outlets directly to their blog.

It would be easy to criticize *The Vagenda* for their linear and myopic description of feminism. However, it is important to situate these feminist blogs within the neoliberal conjuncture in order to unpack generational dissonance. For example, their antagonisms reveal how Generation Y must forge their life trajectories against a scarcity of resources, and within the structures of self-marketing. The term ‘generation’ can fit neatly into pervasive discourses of nostalgia or fear of the new. In other words, anxieties over a neoliberal networked society and the commodification of women by brands can be easily projected on to younger feminists who practice their politics online and who operate within (and against) the discourses of popular culture. Similarly, worries about the authenticity of one’s feminism or one’s authority as a feminist might be glossed over by blaming those who formed their feminism in a conjuncture with more resources and more political optimism. In other words, behind antagonistic narratives about ‘older’ and ‘younger’ feminists could lie tensions engendered by the movement from one conjuncture to another. Moving the focus away from the age differences of the feminists involved, and looking at the broader political contradictions at work would allow for a more nuanced understanding of patriarchy and the way it functions.

The problem with invoking generation in the way that Greer does in her review and *The Vagenda* in their hurt response is that it dovetails with media representations of feminist catfighters, as well as with cultural articulations of ageism. When I talk about generation I want to distinguish this from age. Age can be a structure of oppression in a different way from generation. For example, ageism in the workplace and the fetishisation of youth as beauty attest to the public erasure facing aging women, even if some of them – as I have

argued – formed their politics in an era preceding the current attack on the welfare state, and therefore hold a relatively fortunate position in relation to pensions or home ownership. Lynne Segal, who formed her feminism in the 1970s, participates in online feminist networks; she writes for feminist magazines and is also very prolific on Facebook. In an article for *The Feminist Times*, Segal argues, in relation to aging women, that these “frightening figures are not incidentally female, but quintessentially so, seen as monstrous because of the combination of age and gender.” [ref.] Including age in her critique of patriarchy, Segal notes how feminist movements have always alienated older women: “In this country the Older Feminist Network was founded in 1982 by feminists, who felt that the women’s liberation movement took little notice of them or the challenges they faced as women in an ageist culture (including, so it seemed, the women’s movement itself).” [ref.?)

### **Feminist Burn Out**

*The Feminist Times* attempts to address age and generation as part of a multiplicity of issues facing diverse cohorts of feminists. The online magazine has an art director and the website is professionally and colourfully designed. Like *Crunk Feminist Collective* and *The Vagenda*, it is a brand free space; their tagline is “life not lifestyle”. Branded spaces benefit from the unpaid labour of users who participate in the creation of content, as well as offering up lucrative data (Taylor, 2014). This inevitably feeds into issues of funding and ethical dilemmas about how to sustain a website and forge feminist connections while being dependent on business and advertisers (Winch, 2015). Feminists campaign against the ways that corporations exploit people and land for profit, so how can they rely on these companies to fund their projects? *The Feminist Times* funded themselves through crowdfunding and a membership policy which was generated through direct debits. They were committed to paying contributors. However, because they refused to compromise their politics, they were forced to “put the project on ice”. They were not able to continue the project while being “both ethical and sustainable” (FemT, My Feminist Times ‘journey’).

Similarly, in July 2015 *The Vagenda* posted that they were having a “summer hiatus” and there have been no blogs since although the website is still live. They cite the fact that “it’s a lot of work. It’s a full time job, actually, and one that we’re not actually paid for. And that is part of the problem – the amount of time this blog needs is not time that either of the two of us can afford.” Situating themselves within a community of “feminist labour” they state that “you’re in it for love, not for money”:



And we are tired. We are ever so, ever so tired, and in order to prevent the burnout that afflicts so many feminist writers and to quote our mothers: we need a lie down (TV, We Need a Lie Down).

Inevitably feminist writing takes place online and offline and there needs to be a funding infrastructure so that feminists can write and be paid for it, as well as the inevitable administration involved in sustaining a website. These case studies are evidence that sustainable and ethical models of online publishing that do not rely on corporate sponsorship, PR, or advertising revenue, and where work is remunerated, **is [are]** essential. Interestingly both *The Feminist Times* and *The Vagenda* participated in *Elle Magazine*'s feminist rebranding exercise for *Elle*'s **[de-ital.]** November 2013 issue. Working with advertising companies as well as *Elle*, both blogs created brief campaign logos designed to flow through social media. For *The Vagenda* this was a positive experience. However, Raven found this a deeply uncomfortable experience that revealed how far magazines like *Elle* were circumscribed and held to account by commercial enterprises. For Raven it revealed how far brand domination inevitably **stifle [stifles]** politics and creativity.

*The Feminist Times* was also embroiled in what might seem like an intergenerational conflict. Raven wanted to revitalise the feminist magazine *Spare Rib* (1972-1993) by using its name instead of *The Feminist Times*. However, this resulted in a legal dispute with *Spare Rib*'s **[de-ital.]** founders, Marsha Rowe and Rosie Boycott. Reading Rowe's and Boycott's position in *The Guardian* and in their blog, alongside Raven's narrative of the case, it seems that the conflict was not so much about generation as about misunderstandings, missed communications and miscommunication. It is pertinent to note, however, the different ways in which *Spare Rib* and *The Feminist Times* were funded, and how this links to a conjunctural analysis of generation. *Spare Rib* (which is now available through **The [the]** British Library's digital archives) was partly funded by the Great London Council. It also had a price tag for each issue. That is, it was not free or expected to be free because it was a print magazine, competing in the print magazine market. Furthermore, it was able to exist because of the counter-hegemonic project of municipal socialism. *The Feminist Times*, however, exists in the corporate spaces of digital culture where the assumption is that things are 'free'. Of course, like much offline writing, online content is not free. Google and Facebook's shareholders must be paid with users' content and users' data which is sold on to third party

organisations. In the neoliberal conjuncture there is an ideological belief that not-for-profit political organizations and collectives should give away their labour without a fee, while corporations' bottom line is to make profit; in this case from the networked society's participatory culture. Nevertheless, the writers of the blogs discussed here are not remunerated for their labour, although they might be paid in other ways. For example, *The Vagenda* editors are paid for the book and their journalism but not their blog and many of the writers for *Crunk Feminist Collective* are connected to universities. This is clearly an untenable situation leading to frequent online feminist burn out (Martin and Valenti, 2012).

Another crucial issue facing feminism is archival. Feminist writing is part of the creation of feminism; it constructs in Kimberly Springer's words "*our reality*" [ref? page? You **italics?**]. Springer argues, in relation to her worries about leaving the preservation of activist material to corporations like Facebook: "This shaping and documenting of our reality means that activists are building a foundation *today* that will allow future organizers to not have to reinvent the wheel" (Springer, 2015 [page?]). Working towards a more ethical way of hosting and enabling online feminist writing is also a means to preserve memory for future generations. Protecting feminist archives is fundamental because they have the valuable potential to run counter to the mainstream media's one-dimensional and divisive feminist narrative. They would allow for the plurality of feminist collective writing to be accessible. Claire Colebrook maintains that "any feminist claim in our present is in harmony and dissonance with a choir of past voices" and we read **these feminist texts [a feminist text? see "it occurred"]** "not according to the time within which **it occurred** but to a time it might enable" (Colebrook, 2009, 14, 13). It is for this reason, and not because we should reify an imagined past feminist history that we are indebted to, that paying attention to and discovering ways of archiving online feminist writing is vital.

To conclude, one of the useful things about thinking in terms of the conjuncture is that, as **Hall argues [Hall and Massey argue?]**, "history moves from one conjuncture to another rather than being an evolutionary flow. And what drives it forward is usually a crisis" [ref.? page?]. For Hall and Massey using a conjunctural analysis is important – or understanding the structural character of the current conjuncture is important – because "it's not predetermined what the outcome will be, or what will happen. And this kind of analysis gives us some purchase on understanding the range of potential outcomes" (Hall and Massey, 2015, 61). For my purposes, thinking of feminism and generation in terms of the conjuncture

enables a looking outwards. It locates feminist activism within the structures of a complex political terrain, including the misogynist discourses of [on?] the aging woman, as well as the corporate-driven spaces which both host and circumscribe online feminist activism. It also sets up the possibilities of forging interventions. As I have argued above, generation is over-emphasised when feminism is discussed. Nevertheless, it is still a useful tool when we analyse it in relation to other vectors of oppression; for example, it does a lot of work when explaining differences in the formation of one's politics. I am keen not to argue for a sisterhood (and the gender identity and familial metaphors inherent in this term); feminists are not the same and do not face the same issues. Nevertheless, neoliberal governance and the branded logics of online space – which is our public space – are pernicious; they restrict and shut down feminist practice. It is imperative to join forces against them.

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