

'Social kettling' and the closure of domestic violence shelters are amongst the new challenges for feminists in 2011: they are responding with a new activism, using social media and collective action

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As women take on the brunt of the coalition government's spending cuts, activist groups from all over the country are campaigning for gender justice through collective actions such as street protests, online media campaigns and community support groups. [Mary Evans](#) argues that we need to extend models of female dissent, and to do this we may need to extend our readings of the political to the fictional.

Over the past year, various studies have concluded that the present cuts in government spending in the UK will have a greater impact on women than men. A detailed audit undertaken by the House of Commons library showed that women would be shouldering [three-quarters of the financial burden](#), a report by the Trades Union Congress noted that women would come to suffer disproportionately under [public sector job losses](#), and the [gender pay gap](#) in the UK continues to represent a persistent injustice.



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But far from accepting these damaging changes as unavoidable, a major resurgence in collective grassroots activism has emerged, representing a new form of female dissent that challenges new and ongoing forms of social inequality. The forms of resistance that women take today are far reaching and highly varied; a key example is the [Women Against the Cuts](#) movement which aims to fight spending cuts from a distinctly feminist perspective through campaigning on the street, online and at community levels. The ever growing [London Feminist Network](#) has also been

vocal in the fight for fairer cuts, hosting '[feminars](#)' on the impact of the recession on women, whilst the [Million Women Rise](#) campaign has brought the issue of domestic violence to the fore at a time when women's shelters are having to close due to a [lack of funding](#). All of these campaign movements and many more like them take advantage of a variety of new media and social networking platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, to get their message out. Whether tweeting the location of the next campaign meeting or blogging on cuts in the local area, activists are making an impact and their campaigns are growing.

These strategies for dissent do of course differ from the key actions of feminist movements in the twentieth century but we can still identify these new collective actions as part of a longer history of female political dissent. Historically, women's collective actions to secure full citizenship have been [recorded and celebrated](#) and these records are of course a powerful and important part of our collective history. The vocabulary of feminism in the 1970s invoked ideas about women as 'hidden' and 'oppressed', suggesting identifiable structures of power which exclude or marginalise women. Fighting battles around sexual rights, employment rights and reproductive

rights, the vocabulary of second wave feminism centred on women as concealed or obscured, and actions concentrated on attempting to be heard.

Forty years on, there are new challenges to be faced in the policies of the present government. The first is the way in which many of the cuts in government grants to local authorities have been greater in [existing areas of deprivation](#), and in areas of high Labour support such as [Manchester](#) and [London](#). This 'social kettling' threatens to confirm, for future and present generations, the poverty of those women who are dependent on various forms of state provision, be it through funding or access to other services. At work is a conservative attitude to the state that prioritises the interests of the wealthy: namely that the state is a source of loss rather than gain. But feminist-driven activism is meeting this challenge, often at the forefront of [campaigns highlighting the impact of cuts](#) for those already suffering in poverty.

Secondly, it is important to challenge that domestication of the state and of politics that has been taking place since Margaret Thatcher: an account of national politics in which the state is transformed into a 'household', whose efficient management should be given to 'good housewives'. This apparent identification of the state with the traditional role of women re-affirms, rather than lessens, gender divides since it presents a social model in which women's dissent will only disturb the orderly household. An example of this is the Fawcett Society's [attempt to overturn the emergency budget](#) of June 2010, which ended with them being refused permission to challenge the legality of the budget, despite the fact that an Equality Impact Assessment had not been carried out.

Thus in 2011 it is vital to consider new forms of dissent. Amongst those forms of dissent might be an engagement, not just with particular policies that will have a greater negative impact on women rather than men, but also with those models of the state that allow both entirely fictitious PR constructions of wealthy individuals (for example, that David Cameron is an '[ordinary bloke](#)') and policies in which the interests of women are being systematically ignored.

This blog is based on the lecture 'Gender, Words and Power: meanings of inequality at a time of neo-liberalism', given by Mary Evans on Monday 17th January at the LSE. Click [here](#) for more details. [Click here](#) to download a podcast of the event (MP3, 33 MB)