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M2R LLCE Anglais.

The Representation of Women Activists in The Northern Star (1837 –
1852)

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Introduction

1. Britain after the Napoleonic Wars

Napoleon's campaign to conquer Europe had great consequences on Britain. The battle that defeated Napoleon for good, the Battle of Waterloo of 1815, killed and wounded more than 15,000 British men out of the 23,000 that went into battle. Casualties from Napoleon's campaigns were a disaster for Britain. Because the British economy was based on men's labour, the Napoleonic Wars left Britain in a state of economic depression. The British economy was based on trade, mainly with its colonies. Nevertheless, to invest in the war, Britain had to raise taxes and the cost of living increased. The unemployment rate grew, and many men joined the military. Nonetheless, most of these men who went to war died. People in Britain suffered from poverty, and many starved to death. Indeed, in his article entitled "The Effect of the Napoleonic Wars in Great Britain" published in 1919, William W. Everts explains that:

"Three hundred thousand soldiers and sailors returned to civil life, just when the ranks of labor were flooded, and wages were low, and staple goods had lost half of their value, Wheat fell to fifty-eight shillings a quarter. This caused distress to the farming population, who had succeeded in overproducing wheat. In 1816 ruin stared the farmers in the face. In 1819 Shelley cried: "No, in countries that are free | Such starvation cannot be | As in England now we see."¹

In this war, Britain did not lose everything because their army won at the final battle of Waterloo. France was a rival empire for Britain. After these wars, Britain became the predominant empire in the world, especially for trade.

Nevertheless, the Corn Laws were also introduced in 1815. People returning from the war faced the economic distress generated by the Corn Laws because it raised food prices by enforcing new tariffs and restrictions on the importation of corn to Britain. The price of food associated with corn, such as bread, increased so much that people struggled to afford them. This economic distress generated calls for political reform and especially the abolishment of these laws. In the context of rapid industrialisation in Great Britain, both the working class and middle class felt excluded from the political sphere because the lack of consideration from the Tory government of Lord Liverpool.

¹ Everts, William W., "The Effects of the Napoleonic Wars in Great Britain", *Review and Expositor*, Vol. 16, issue 4, 1919, 449.

2. Rapid industrialisation in the early nineteenth century

This economic distress stands in the Industrial Revolution of Great Britain that started at the end of the 18th century and developed more rapidly after the Napoleonic Wars. Indeed, from the late 18th century, heavy and manufacturing industries (cotton industry, coal mining, shipyard industries, railway industry, iron, and steel industries) started to develop. The end of the wars left Britain in peacetime, and the country could trade freely. The first sector that was heavily developed in Britain was the cotton industry. Britain depended on its colonies and particularly on North America where cotton was produced by black slaves, then sent to Britain. In the cottage industry system, rural working people benefited from cotton and developed processes of weaving. Industrial processes were developed, contributing to the changing way in which textile was produced. The industrial process began in these cottage industry families and weaving was developed in a factory system, characterised by new machines that were built in new industrial cities in standardized and specialized factories. Cities in the northern part of England mainly developed the cotton industry, especially Manchester often nicknamed “Cottonopolis”. This development was characterised by the industrial processes in the development of heavy industries. New machines were invented, such as the power loom of 1825, invented by Richard Robert an engineer, which standardised the weaving process and participated in the development of the new factory system.

Not only did the end of the Napoleonic Wars leave Britain in peacetime to develop, but Britain had all the resources it needed to develop. The textile industry made Britain one of the richest countries in the world. For the cotton industry, a development in the heavy industries was needed. Coal was the main source of energy for the Industrial Revolution. This resource was needed to power the new growing machines and factories. Britain had many coal mines for this purpose. Britain did not depend on other countries and trades to run its industries. The coal mines were dangerous places to work in and the conditions for the miners were dreadful. Many people died from lung sickness, explosions, collapses, etc. New developments occurred to avoid these issues. The iron and steel industries allowed the replacement of wood props with steel ones to avoid collapses. Humphrey Davy, a scientist, invented a lamp that could detect gas and people could

avoid explosions. These new ideas were part of the industrial processes that shaped the Industrial Revolution. The conditions were better to produce coal, better for the workers, but still not perfect.

The Industrial Revolution was characterised by three innovations. The cottage industry came to an end and was replaced by the factory system that standardized and developed the heavy and manufacturing industries. The factory system led people to move massively. Indeed, people living in rural places moved to developing cities where factories were booming. Manchester at the start of the 19th century had 89,000 inhabitants and grew to 400,000 in 1851.² Not only were people attracted by these cities, but they were also able to go there thanks to the development of the railway and shipyard industries. The development of these new cities and factories led to the development of a new social class, the industrial working class, which changed the structure of British society

3. The contested 1830s Whig reforms

The major legislation that had an impact on the economic distress of Great Britain was the Corn Laws introduced by the Tories, previously mentioned. Following the Tories, the Whig government of Lord Grey was notable because of the introduction of the Great Reform Act in 1832 and the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833 which abolished slavery in almost the entire British empire. The goal of the Reform Act of 1832 was to extend political participation. The act managed to bring the upper middle class into the electorate. Furthermore, there was a strong need to reform the boroughs where many MPs were elected but in very small towns with very few voters compared to the developing Manchester which had no MPs but a growing population. Most of the working class was excluded from the act because only part of middle class managed to be included in the political sphere, and with this reform, the electorate was extended from about 400,000 to more than 650,000 men.³ Women were still excluded as well as most working-class men. Moreover, Parliament did not pass the secret ballot either, which might have helped to stop MPs' corruption at elections.⁴ This reform was a way for the government to avoid threats of revolution.

² Griffin, Emma, "Manchester in the 19th Century", May 14th, 2014.

³ Philips, John A., Charles Wetherell, "The Great Reform Act of 1832 and the Political Modernization of England", *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 100, No.2, 1995, 413-414.

⁴ Philips, John A., Charles Wetherell, "The Great Reform Act of 1832 and the Political Modernization of England", *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 100, No.2, 1995, 414-415.

Nevertheless, because the act did not grant the vote to most of the industrial working class, they felt a lack of consideration from the government. Great protests occurred against the Reform Act which did not secure universal manhood suffrage.

Other protests occurred against the New Poor Law bill that was introduced in 1834 by the Whig government led by Lord Melbourne. The goal of the New Poor Law, qualified as a “cruel, unjust and atrocious, (...) miscalled amendment bill”⁵ by Chartist women’s associations, was meant to diminish the poor population of Britain. Poor people were sent into workhouses within which, in exchange for work, they were supposed to have access to commodities, food and clothes. Nevertheless, it did not go as expected by the working class who condemned the harshness of these laws passed by the Whig government. People died from starvation and sickness in workhouses; families were separated. Michael E. Rose describes the conditions within these workhouses in his article entitled “The Anti-Poor Law Movement in the North of England” published in 1966:

“Bull told a horrified Bradford meeting of a Union workhouse in which a young woman had been stripped and flogged “like a soldier”. The *Northern Star* reported that in the Warminster Union workhouse, a boy, locked in a room as a punishment, had become so hungry that he had gnawed his fingers down to the first joint. Many of these horror stories were at best half-truths as later forced to admit that the woman in his story had only been slapped by the workhouse matron.”⁶

Reverend Bull was a leading member of the Ten-Hour Movement, whose aim was to reduce working time per day for children under the age of 16. He was therefore concerned by the situations faced by children and families in the workhouses. Furthermore, tensions towards the Whig government that introduced the New Poor law grew and the Whigs were blamed by the Tories “to sell factory children to Mill owners.”⁷ Children under the age of 16 worked sixteen hours a day, with very little food and rest. The Whigs dominated the political landscape in the 1830s and were characterised by the numerous reforms they introduced which was a need considering the growing industrial working class and their growing demand for reform. Nevertheless, although hopeful reform as the Reform Act of 1832 was expected to broaden the electorate to the working class, the Whigs’ reforms were a disappointment.

⁵ *The Northern Star*, “The London Democratic Association to the Women of England, and Particularly the Women of the Metropolis”, May 11th, 1839.

⁶ Rose, Michael E., “The Anti-Poor Law Movement in the North of England”, 1966, 78.

⁷ Philips, John A., Charles Wetherell, “The Great Reform Bill of 1832 and the Rise of Partisanship”, *The University of Chicago Press*, Vol.63. No.4, December 1991, 640.

4. Early working-class radicalism and “working-class consciousness”

People who worked in factories started to develop what was considered to be “a working-class consciousness” in their effort in some historians’ view. For instance, E.P. Thompson in his book entitled *The Making of the English Working-Class* published in 1963, gives a long and detailed account of the creation of the working class. Nevertheless, it needs to be understood that he had a pragmatic view on the creation of a working-class consciousness that needs to be slightly qualified. His work is valuable for English historiography, gathering in details all the events that shaped the working class. Furthermore, he argues that a “working-class consciousness” was a consequence of the Industrial Revolution, which matured from the 1790s to the 1830s, while it was in fact a consequence of different experiences people lived through, in different sectors, at different times. These workers felt they were exploited for capital gain and felt excluded from the political sphere. He developed this idea according to Marxist theories: “From 1830 onwards a more clearly defined consciousness, in the customary Marxist sense, was maturing in which working people were aware of continuing both old and new battles on their own”.⁸ He, therefore, argues that the radicalism of the late eighteenth century was not clearly working class in character because it matured from the nineteenth century. For instance, he does not consider the London Corresponding Society as working-class: “The London Corresponding Society (TLCS) has often been claimed as the first definitely working-class political organization formed in Britain. [...] it may be more accurate to think of the L.C.S. as a “popular Radical” society than as “working class.”⁹ He acknowledges other historians call it “working-class” because this society was created by artisans. Nonetheless, considering the working-class consciousness that appeared in 1830, after forty years of maturation, the London Corresponding Society was not a “working-class”, but a “popular” society. Thus, while studying his book, it is important to take his pragmatic and Marxist perception of the conception of the working class into account.

In the 1830s, following the disappointing Whig reforms, the working class felt that they lacked representation in the political sphere. Indeed, most MPs were from the upper classes, and some middle-class man who could become MPs thanks to the 1832 Reform Act because owning land was necessary to participate in the political process. Most MPs did not understand the

⁸ Thompson, E.P., *The Making of the English Working Class*, Penguin Books, 1991, 712.

⁹ Thompson, E.P., *The Making of the English Working Class*, Penguin Books, 1991, 22.

problems felt by these new workers. Working class men, as well as women, were excluded from political participation because they did not own land and acknowledged constitutional concerns in Britain. E.P. Thompson mentions a constitutional crisis when he refers to the popularity of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* published in 1791. He describes *Rights of Man* as "a foundation text of the English working-class movement"¹⁰ and "that Paine established a new framework within which Radicalism was confined for nearly 100 years."¹¹ *Rights of Man* was a book in which Thomas Paine, as a supporter of the French Revolution, promoted a written constitution for Britain as well as a total democracy – universal suffrage – against the monarchy. Paine's ideas were indeed a seed for radicalism in Britain as for the London Corresponding Society which was led by Thomas Hardy, owner of a shoe shop, and lasted from 1790 to 1850. The main influence that led to the creation of this institution was the French Revolution in their will of social and constitutional reforms. This society was a starter in the creation of future radical associations which started to develop more and more following the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the arrival of the Industrial Revolution.

The growing concerns coming from the 1830s Whig reforms that did not fulfil the expectations of the working class for them to be included in the political sphere led to growing protests that led to the creation of the Chartist movement in 1836.

5. The Chartist movement

In 1836, in London, the London Working Men's Association was established by William Lovett, Henry Hetherington, John Cleave and James Watson. This association followed the tensions growing from the introductions of the Reform Act, the New Poor Law, and the Corn Laws. On October 18th, 1836, the London Working Men's Association wrote in a small pamphlet five points they asked Parliament. Three of these points had been drafted previously by the Birmingham Political Union, an association founded in 1831 to fight for the right to vote in the context of the Reform Bill crisis following the introduction of the Reform Act, led by Thomas Attwood, in a petition that asked for "universal male suffrage, secrecy by ballot, and annual

¹⁰ Thompson, E.P., *The Making of the English Working Class*, Penguin Books, 1991, 99.

¹¹ Thompson, E.P., *The Making of the English Working Class*, Penguin Books, 1991, 103.

Parliaments.”¹² The London Working Men’s Association added two points in their pamphlet: “the abolition of property qualification to become an MP; and the standardisation of constituency sizes to create equal electoral districts.”¹³ In 1837, this pamphlet was prepared for publication under the title of *The People’s Charter*, and the last point was added: payment for MPs. Malcolm Chase explains the reasons for the employment of “Charter” in the title:

“The punchy title was itself significant: one only has to contrast it with earlier political pamphlets to appreciate this. The allusion to Magna Charta of 1215 was one which all politically aware contemporaries would have understood. Indeed, radical interest in “the Great Charter of Liberties” had grown over the previous quarter of a century, fuelled by an explosion of radical publishing in the Regency years. At the French Revolution of 1830, the Declaration of Rights was widely referred to in English as “the new Charter”. (...) Magna Carta constituted the foundation stone for English liberties and the People’s Charter would complete the edifice.”¹⁴

The People’s Charter was indeed the edifice that started the Chartist movement in 1838. *The People’s Charter* was presented during meetings to collect signatures for the petition that was then presented to Parliament and containing the six points. This petition was signed more than a million times and was presented to Parliament in 1839. Nevertheless, the House of Common rejected it and tensions grew further. In fact, the *People’s Charter* also marked the beginning of the Chartist strategy which was petitioning. This petition was the first they presented and was followed by two other petitions signed by millions of people, in 1842 and 1848.

More than their demands, Chartists had many grievances. The first notable disappointment, that was very linked to the charter, might be the Reform Act of 1832. As William Lovett explained in the introduction of *The People’s Charter* of 1838:

“It was the fond expectation of the people that a remedy for the greater part, if not for the whole, of their grievances, would be found in the Reform Act of 1832. They were taught to regard that Act as a wise means to a worthy end; as the machinery of an improved legislation, when the will of the masses would be at length potential. They have been bitterly and basely deceived. The fruit which looked so fair to the eye has turned to dust and ashes when gathered.”¹⁵

¹² Chase, Malcolm, *Chartism: A New History*, Manchester University Press, 2017, 2.

¹³ Chase, Malcolm, *Chartism: A New History*, Manchester University Press, 2017, 4.

¹⁴ Chase, Malcolm, *Chartism: A New History*, Manchester University Press, 2017, 8.

¹⁵ Lovett, William, *The People’s Charter*, 1838; although authors of the *People’s Charter* were known mainly as William Lovett, Henry Hetherington, John Cleave and James Watson, Malcolm Chase states in *Chartist: A New History*, that William Lovett was the writer of the introduction.

The goal of the Reform Act of 1832 was to extend political participation by increasing the electorate. Following the disappointment of this act, most of the points coming from *The People's Charter* were shaped by what the people wanted from the Great Reform Act. Not only did the Chartists protest against the Great Reform Act of 1832, but also against the New Poor law bill. The fight against the New Poor law from 1834, explains David Ashforth in his article entitled "The Urban Poor Law" published in 1976, was then "absorbed into Chartism".¹⁶ It does not appear in *The People's Charter*, but the fight against the New Poor Law was going on in the Chartist press, as the *Northern Star* for instance, in reports of speeches and addresses. It was especially the case for Chartist women who fought against the New Poor law first as mothers willing to protect their children from the workhouses, but also because of the Bastardy Clause. The Bastardy Clause, introduced by the New Poor law, gave women full responsibility for their illegitimate children. Before the bill passed, fathers of illegitimate children had been financially responsible for their children, as well as the mother. From "an Act of 1733", women had to swear before two magistrates the name of the father of the child, and both were financially in charge of its well-being.¹⁷

Furthermore, the high cost of living the Chartists criticised was perceived as caused by the Corn Laws of 1815. Malcolm Chase explains that "The economic depression of 1841-42 was arguably harsher in the west of Scotland than anywhere in Britain. In such circumstances the appeal of cheaper bread through abolishing the Corn laws was considerable and it was a political objective to which all classes could subscribe."¹⁸ The anti-Corn Law movement was also part of the Chartist fight, banners such as "Universal Suffrage – No Corn Laws" were paraded in Chartist Demonstration such as in Kersal Moore, in May 1939.¹⁹ Although the anti-Corn law movement was associated with Chartism, middle-class manufacturers were concerned that their finished products would not be sold on European markets because of the tariffs imposed on corn. We then notice that the struggle against the Corn law was both middle and working class.

The inadequate standard of living of the working class caused by these several acts that implied the lack of action from the government in the interests of the working class spearheaded the

¹⁶ Ashforth, David, "The Urban Poor Law", *New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century*, 1976, 132.

¹⁷ Nutt, Thomas, "Illegitimacy, paternal financial responsibility, and the 1834 Poor Law Commission Report: the myth of the old poor law and the making of the new", *The Economic History Review*, Vol.63, No2, May 2010, 337.

¹⁸ Chase, Malcolm, *Chartism: A New History*, Manchester University Press, 2017, 203

¹⁹ Schwarzkopf, Jutta, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, Macmillan Academic and Professional LTD, 202.

Chartist movement. The Reform Act of 1832 was perceived as a betrayal, and the working class lived in dreadful conditions partly because of the Corn laws and New Poor law, therefore Chartism assembled these different struggles lived by the working class under a single banner. As Malcolm Chase explained, in “1838 Chartism was a *mood* rather than a movement.”²⁰ T

The movement accelerated with the following petition of 1842, presented to Parliament, which gathered “3,317, 752 signatures” and was nicknamed “the Chartist leviathan petition.”²¹ Nevertheless, although the petition was even more massive than the previous one, it was rejected by Parliament. Following the rejection of the petition, a strike wave was triggered by the movement. The year 1842 was the beginning of a new economic depression for the working class. The cost of living remained high, unemployment increased, and wages were cut. In the *Northern Star* of August 23rd, 1842, miners from Clackmannanshire declared: “never again produce a pennyworth of wealth till the *People’s Charter* be law.”²² Thus, the year 1842 was characterised by Chartists’ anger because there were denied political participation, and because of the economic depression of the country which men and women, as fathers and mothers, fought against for the well-being of their families.

From 1843 to 1848, the Chartist movement declined slowly. As depicted by Malcolm Chase: “The range of activities reported in the *Northern Star* was but a shadow of that early year.”²³ The Corn Laws were repealed in 1845 thanks to Prime Minister Robert Peel who reduced tariffs and taxes by stimulating trade contrary to previous Whig governments. Thus, people ate better because food became more affordable, and the tensions diminished. Moreover, Feargus O’Connor, who became certainly the protagonist leader of the Chartist movement by 1842-43, was involved in the creation of his land plan, and less in Chartism. Feargus O’Connor found a way to distribute plots of land to people so that they would be able to grow their own crops and free themselves from the economic domination of British trades. This proposition was accepted in a Chartist meeting in 1845 and became effective. Nevertheless, this land plan became effective at the same time Robert Peel began to find solutions for the recovery of the economy. Because the country

²⁰ Chase, Malcolm, *Chartism: A New History*, Manchester University Press, 2017, 35.

²¹ Chase, Malcolm, *Chartism: A New History*, Manchester University Press, 2017, 205

²² Chase, Malcolm, *Chartism: A New History*, Manchester University Press, 2017, 217

²³ Chase, Malcolm, *Chartism: A New History*, Manchester University Press, 2017, 242

became more prosperous, Chartists were not as militating as before, and the *Star*, as Malcolm Chase suggested, provides evidence of this loosening.

By 1845, we notice a renewal in Chartism. Tensions towards Parliament started to grow back because people still had no political representation, nor way to participate. Feargus O'Connor organised the draft of a petition, which was the final one. He collected more than 5,000,000 signatures and declared he would organise a demonstration in Kennington Common, London on April 10th, 1848. The year 1848 has been nicknamed by historians as “the Year of Revolution” because revolutions were going on all over Europe. The February Revolution of France gave much inspiration to the Chartists, as the French Revolution before. London prepared to welcome what was planned to be the greatest Chartist demonstration. Nonetheless, it was a failure. Although it was reported by the *Northern Star* that 250,000 participated, some papers like the *Daily News* reported 10,000 attendees. Moreover, most signatures of the petitions were proved to be fake. Even if the petition was still greater than the first one, genuine signatures were not as much as for the 1842 petition which certainly represented the height of Chartism. The rejection of the petition by 222 to 17 votes led the Chartist movement to its complete decline.

6. The Northern Star and Leeds General Advertiser, national organ of the Chartist movement

Feargus O'Connor, founder of the *Northern Star*, was an Irish MP from 1833 to 1835 and became a Chartist leader. He established his newspaper on November 18th, 1837 – stamped it to be legally published – and wanted it to become “a national organ; devoted to the interests of Democracy in the fullest and most definite sense of the word.”²⁴ The *Northern Star* became a political tool, and the heart of the Chartist movement. It became a Chartist platform, dedicated to Chartist events. As explained by Malcolm Chase: “the *Northern Star* quickly became a major force in radical journalism. O'Connor’s reputation helped. (...) The *Northern Star* gathered up news of local and regional activities and steadily promoted the idea that all were part of a coherent and vital whole.”²⁵ This newspaper was of major importance for Chartism by gathering all the Chartist events at the local and national levels. Thus, the newspaper contained letters, accounts, news,

²⁴ *The Northern Star*, “The Stamps Return”, May 26th, 1838.

²⁵ Chase, Malcolm, *Chartism: A New History*, Manchester University Press, 2007, 16-17

reports, and even poems that were published by editors and sent by the readers. The *Northern Star* united the movement; people gathered in associations throughout the country and could send their reports, speeches, and addresses to be published. It was the most bought and read newspaper. In 1840, the *Northern Star* was bought 18,000 times per week; Mark Crail explains in “Northern Star – the paper that made Chartism” that “at its very peak during 1839, the *Star* could sell 50,000 copies of a single issue”.²⁶ The working class being mostly illiterate, a single copy could be read to hundreds of workers during dedicated meetings to the reading of the *Star*. In fact, in an article entitled “Education, Literacy and Reading Public” written by Amy J. Lloyd in 2007, the author explains that: “In 1800 around 40 percent of males and 60 percent of females in England and Wales were illiterate”.²⁷ Then, more than being the leading newspaper in the Chartist movement, the *Northern Star* is also a great primary source to study to understand the movement. More particularly, it provides an insight into Chartist women’s activism in the struggle against the New Poor law, Corn laws and their political exclusion.

7. Women and Chartism.

Although Chartism was mainly a man movement because women were excluded from the six points, and especially from the demand for universal suffrage, many Chartist women participated in the fight. Malcolm Chase reminds readers that:

‘Female participation was a crucially important favour in shaping Chartism. The Nottingham FPU was one of well-over 100 women’s Chartist groups formed during 1838-39. To contextualise this, however, at least 430 non-gender-specific (and therefore predominantly male) Chartist organisations can be identified in the same period. Chartist activity short of formal organisation has been noted in over 200 further localities. In all, therefore, around 640 communities in England, south and mid-Wales, and Lowland Scotland witness some form of Chartist activity in the 18 months following the publication of *The People’s Charter*. (...) Female societies emerged early in 1838 from the anti-poor law agitation. (...) Some female associations for were very large; Birmingham FPU, for example, boasted 3,000 members.’²⁸

²⁶ « Northern Star – The Paper that made Chartism », Chartist Ancestors, Mark Crail, <https://www.chartistancestors.co.uk/northern-star-the-paper-that-made-chartism/>

²⁷ LLOYD, Amy J., “Education Literacy and Reading Public”, *British Library Newspaper*, Detroit: Gale, 2007, 1.

²⁸ Chase, Malcolm, *Chartism: A New History*, Manchester University Press, 2017, 42.

Although Malcolm Chase depicts women's participation in Chartism as "crucially important" few historians have studied the participation of these women. For instance, Malcolm Chase's *Chartism: A New History* depicts the Chartist movement in depth but fails to detail the participation of women. Nevertheless, in his work on Chartist families in his article entitled "Resolved in Defiance of Fool" published in 2010, Malcolm Chase gives evidence of Chartist women's role in their household as mothers educating chartist children. Nevertheless, although references to women's participation are to be found in *Chartism: A New History*, and "Resolved in Defiance of Fool", Malcolm Chase mainly gives evidence of the participation of women within a male movement.

Thus, it might be interesting to study the Chartist movement by focusing on women's radical participation as Jutta Schwarzkopf did in her book *Women in the Chartist Movement* published in 1991. Jutta Schwarzkopf wrote this book in the light of Dorothy Thompson's works. Dorothy Thompson was a historian of social history and studied mainly female radicalism within the Chartist movement. Jutta Schwarzkopf as Dorothy Thompson depicts women within a male movement and explains that women took part in the movement as much as men, although they were in fact even more oppressed because every woman of Victorian times lived in a patriarchal society. The oppression felt by Chartist women – but also most Victorian women – were the result of the grievances felt by the entire working class, but women were also oppressed by the patriarchal domination throughout the whole 18th and 19th century. In this case, Jutta Schwarzkopf, and Dorothy Thompson both considered the division of gender in their studies which is an important feature to understand the importance of female participation in the light of male oppression within a patriarchal society that denied women many rights because they were women. This male oppression was depicted in Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* as emphasised by Jutta Schwarzkopf:

"[Mary Wollstonecraft] insisted on their deficiency being the result of environmental impact mediated by education. Deprived of the exercise of their reason - which she regarded as the quintessential feature of humanity - women had become sexual beings, their character and behaviour moulded according to male notions of female propriety. Having been made to conform to principles exclusive to their sex, women had effectively become relegated to a position outside the realm of human beings."²⁹

²⁹ Schwarzkopf, Jutta, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, Macmillan Academic and Professional LTD, 63

To enfranchise themselves from the patriarchal oppression many women organized in associations and participated politically in the Chartist movement by themselves but also participated in men's meetings. This political exclusion was mainly noticeable by their exclusion from the six points of the Charter and especially in their demand for female suffrage. Their demand to be included in the Charter can be understood as a will to enfranchise from patriarchal rules but also to gain political power in the struggle against the different bills the Chartists wanted to repeal as the New Poor law and Corn law. Nevertheless, most Chartist men thought that including women in the Charter would discredit the movement. For instance, William Lovett, a Chartist leader, wrote in his autobiography that he was not against the introduction of women in the Charter but that the political inclusion of women would come after men's.³⁰

More than militating for the right to vote, women participated in the movement in many ways: by petitioning, demonstrating, or meeting in associations. Following the rejection of the first petition for the *People's Charter* of 1838, many women participated in the Newport Rising demonstration in which more than 20 Chartists were shot dead. This demonstration shows that women were not only passively participating in the Chartist movement in providing addresses or militating for the right to vote for instance, but also demonstrating among men. Indeed, women's presence was attested in the demonstration of 1842 and 1848, when Chartists presented the petitions of the *People's Charter* which were both rejected by Parliament.

Thus, there were many activist women that participated to the Chartist movement. Their participation can be acknowledged by the Chartist press such as the *Northern Star and Leeds General Advertiser* (the *Northern Star*).

Outline of my research question

Indeed, the *Northern Star* shows evidence of the different tendencies in the movements as well as numerous reports of Chartist events, speeches, addresses, meetings, etc. and provides much information on the movement as locally as nationally. More than being an informative newspaper, the *Star* lived through Chartist events. For instance, the height of its sale, as well as its decline,

³⁰ William Lovett, *Life and Struggle of William Lovett*, 1876, republished in 1967, 141.

was linked to Chartism's height and decline. From this perspective, this dissertation will focus on the various forms of women's activism reported in the *Northern Star* throughout the period of Chartism. The *Northern Star*, as the main source studied, provides proof of women's activism against the Corn laws, against the New Poor law, for the right to vote and for the six points of the Charter. This evidence is presented in articles from the creation of the *Northern Star*, which coincide with Chartism, in 1837-38, until 1852, when the *Northern Star* ended, and Chartism declined.

The *Northern Star* has not been studied by many historians for its own sake, and most work focuses more on its editor Feargus O'Connor than the *Star* itself. For instance, James Epstein's "Feargus O'Connor and the *Northern Star*" published in 1976 as well as Malcolm Chase's *Chartism: A New History*, give details of Feargus O'Connor's establishment of the *Star* and how he ascended as a Chartist leader thanks to it. More recently, Victoria Clarke in her dissertation *Reading and Writing the Northern Star, 1837-1842*, as well as her article *Time, Space and Gender in the Digitised Periodical*, both published in 2020, provides an in-depth study of the *Star*. Nevertheless, in this study, her primary goal was to identify the feature of the *Star* as a radical newspaper.

On the other hand, historians have not studied Chartist women's activism in the *Northern Star*. Jutta Schwarzkopf, as well as Dorothy Thompson, studied women's radicalism throughout the 19th century, and especially within the Chartist movement. Nevertheless, throughout their studies, women's struggles against the New Poor law for instance, are only briefly mentioned. On the other hand, the *Northern Star* testifies to their implication against these laws and can provide a different perspective on women's activism within the Chartist movement. This dissertation will focus on the representation of women's activism in the *Northern Star*. In the survey of reports contained in the *Star*, women's participation against the New Poor law, the Corn laws, as well as for the six points of the Charter in their campaigning for men's suffrage but also for women's suffrage, suggest that women were much more involved in the movements, and in a wider variety of forms, than it was portrayed by historians.

The *Northern Star* focuses on women's activism as seen within female associations for the Charter. The newspaper published addresses that were given locally as well as nationally. Most of their associations were based in the north of England, where Chartists were concentrated as it was

the most industrialised part of England. Feargus O'Connor was seeking to unite the movement by publishing these addresses. Women called for participation and support in their grievances, as well as to support the *People's Charter*. In their grievances, women also called for women's suffrage and their integration into the charter. Evidence of their calls for the right to vote, echoing Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* may suggest that female Chartists can be seen as precursors of later organized movements for female suffrage in the later nineteenth century.

Their participation in the Chartist movement, as well as their presence in the *Northern Star*, was debated among Chartist men. Indeed, because the *Northern Star* reported meetings and addresses, debates between men on the rights of women can often be noted. These men were sometimes in favour of women's rights and of their inclusion in the *People's Charter*. Among these men, some were in favour of woman suffrage but reluctant to their inclusion in the *People's Charter*, thinking it would discredit the petitions once presented to Parliament. Thus, some men and women thought it would only be a matter of time, that women's rights would follow men's rights. On the contrary, other men were completely opposed to women's participation. Their main reasons were representative of Victorian times and of the 19th century; they thought women's role was not to participate politically, nor to be too educated but to take care of their households.

Thus, the *Northern Star*, as a primary source putting forward Chartist events and especially women's participation in the movement, deserves to be studied in this light. The representation of women in the newspaper, going from the publication of addresses, speeches and reports of meetings needs to be studied to fill the gaps in most historians' studies, especially on their participation against the New Poor law for instance. Studies of anti-New Poor law movements are generally not studied in relation to Chartism while the *Northern Star* proves it was. On the contrary, the Corn Laws, which increased the costs of living is very linked to Chartism in most studies, as it was one of the main factors of the growing tensions among the working class. Finally, the *Northern Star* provides evidence of women's struggle to enfranchise in the patriarchal society of the Victorian era they lived in.

Chapter 1 - Radical women and the *Northern Star*

A. The place of women in the *Northern Star*

1. Women's participation in the *Northern Star*

The *Northern Star* reported women's participation in the Chartists movement, as well as Chartists' participation more broadly. The addresses published in the *Northern Star* became then a popularised form of participation. Indeed, among news, advertisements and columns, Chartist women's addresses are numerous. In the *Northern Star*, these addresses given by Chartist women that the editors of the *Star* choose to record as part of their editorial stance, are indeed their main publications as activists. These addresses could take two forms: they were speeches given within associations that were later reported in the *Northern Star*, or these addresses were written, signed by leaders of the associations, and sent to the *Northern Star* for publication. For instance, in the article entitled "An Address from the Male and Female Chartists of Birmingham to Feargus O'Connor" published on May 21st, 1842, the context in which the address was given is written at the end. It is stated: "Presented to Mr. O'Connor at a public dinner held at the Black Horse Inn, Prospect Row, Birmingham" which shows that this address was given orally and reported in the *Star*.³¹ On the other hand, in the article entitled "An Appeal to the Women of Great Britain" published on May 20th, 1843, it is stated: "Communication to be addressed to the secretary, Miss Iuge, 23, Great Warner-street, Clerkenwell", is also signed "I subscribe myself, Your democratic sister, E.J. Miles" which shows that it was a report, contrary to the previous address to Feargus O'Connor.³² By presenting these addresses, *The Northern Star* reveals how radical women's participated in the movement. Not only women did women have their own associations and gave addresses on their own while excluded from the charter, but they were also participating in these

³¹ *The Northern Star*, "An Address from the Male and Female Chartists of Birmingham to Feargus O'Connor", May 21st, 1842

³² *The Northern Star*, "An Appeal to the Women of Great Britain", May 20th, 1843

associations with men. *The Northern Star* thus provides numerous sources that reflect women's participation in these associations. These associations were, for Chartist women, the main way to participate in the movement and the *Northern Star* provides many details of their participation.

Nevertheless, the *Northern Star* fails to report on women's participation in the Chartist demonstrations. Indeed, Chartists often demonstrated for the charter, although the Seditious Meeting Acts made their demonstration illegal. In her interview on Chartism Day of 2016, on "Protest and the Politics of Space and Place", Katrina Navickas explains that: "Chartism (...) began in response to the new ideas of democracy and the rights of man coming out of the French Revolution".³³ However, although men were more largely present in these demonstrations, women were also participating in. Indeed, Marietta Crichton Stuart in his chapter entitled "Chartist Women and the Vote" in *Kennington 1848: Another Look* published in 2019, explains that: "women worked as organisers and attended meetings and demonstrations including Kennington Common".³⁴ Then, they did have an important role in these demonstrations as they were "organisers". Nevertheless, the lack of reports of women's attendance at these demonstrations shows a bias in the editing process and the lack of consideration by many Chartist men of their presence. In fact, women were excluded from the Six Points of the Charter because some men thought that it would discredit the movement. Some of them were completely against their inclusion in the Charter while many others thought that women's claims would be following men's. From this perspective, it is possible to understand that because the *Northern Star* was meant to reach a larger audience, most women were ousted from these reports by fear to discredit the movement. Nonetheless, addresses given by Chartist women implicitly testify of their presence in these demonstrations. In fact, in the article entitled "To the Female of Great Britain" published in the *Northern Star* on February 19th, 1842, Sarah Leatherbarrow, spokesperson for the Manchester-Road Chartist explains: "the necessity of uniting in the struggle that our husbands, our brothers, and our sons are engaged in"; "sisters, you can do all these, if you will but arouse yourselves from your lethargy, and shake off the chains of slavery".³⁵ From this address, we not only understand that these women are part of the Chartist movement, but that they also call for action to support

³³ "Protest and the Politics of Space and Place", Nivickas, Katrina, <https://www.chartistancestors.co.uk/katrina-navickas-on-protest-and-the-politics-of-space-and-place/>

³⁴ Crichton Stuart, Marietta, "Chartist Women and the Vote", *Kennington 1848: Another Look*, 2019.

³⁵ *The Northern Star*, "To the Female of Great Britain", February 19th, 1842.

their “husbands, brothers and sons”. These types of declarations need to be correlated to women’s participation in demonstrations as they were not only demonstrating to obtain more rights but also more rights for their family members. References to slavery are numerous in Chartist addresses and are revealing of the oppressions they felt and the urgent need to fight against the oppressive parliamentary laws. As it was shown by historians that women were involved in the Chartist demonstration, we understand thanks to the *Northern Star* the reasons for this involvement. The role of the *Northern Star* is then not only to show women’s participation in the Chartist demonstrations but mainly to understand the reasons for women to participate in them, and to understand their political beliefs and grievances. From this better understanding, it is subsequently possible to understand how the Chartist movement was shaped.

Indeed, it might be possible then, to understand that women’s participation in the Chartist movement differed from men ones. In this perspective, two movements in Chartism can be distinguished, as women were excluded from the People’s Charter, we notice that they did not participate the same way as men and did not have the same grievances. Indeed, in the *Northern Star*, their participation is either the support of men or of independent participation, but still as Chartists. Chartist women had grievances that affected them directly, and as men were not as supportive as they were for them, they fought for themselves. The New Poor law for instance, deeply affected women as it reformed their conditions as mothers with the Bastardy Clause.³⁶ Their exclusion from the Charter also led them to claim womanhood suffrage and their integration into the Charter which was something many men resented. In the article entitled “The London Female Democratic Association to the Women of England, and Particularly the Women of the Metropolis”, published in the *Northern Star* on May 11th, 1839, Elizabeth Neesom, secretary for the associations proclaims that:

“To those who may be, or rather appear to be, surprised that females should be daring enough to interfere with politics; to them we simply say, that as it is a female that assumes to rule this nation in defiance of the universal rights of man and woman, we assert in accordance with the rights of all, and acknowledging the sovereignty of the people our right, as free women (or women determined to be free) to rule ourselves”.³⁷

³⁶ Schwarzkopf, Jutta, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, Macmillan Academic and Professional, 1991, 31.

³⁷ *The Northern Star*, “The London Female Democratic Association to the Women of England, and Particularly the Women of the Metropolis”, May 11th, 1839.

This declaration shows that women, from the early Chartist period, were already determined to fight by themselves for the repeal of the New Poor Law, without necessarily involving men in the process. The *Northern Star* gives evidence that the women's Chartist movement could then be considered an independent movement. It also needs to be noted that historians have not yet studied in detail women's participation against the New Poor law for instance, whilst they were deeply affected by these laws and participated in their repeal.

Then, thanks to the publication of these addresses, the *Northern Star* gives an insight into a Woman Chartist movement that can be understood both as a united movement by participating among men for the People's Charter and as a divided movement as they also participated for grievances that affected them more closely. Because they were excluded from the charter and men put their grievances forward, instead of including women for the credit of the charter, women participated in the movement and brought their grievances on their own as chartists and radicals. It is therefore interesting to study the place of women activists within the newspaper and not only in the Chartist world.

2. The place of women activists in the *Northern Star's* articles

The *Northern Star* was a weekly newspaper published each Saturday whose most editions are composed of 24 pages on average. The paper gathered and published "accounts, meeting minutes, advertisement, letters, reviews and editorials collated from its own correspondents, as well as O'Connor, the editors, other newspapers, and its own readers" each week.³⁸ These publications were very densely published. A single page of the *Northern Star* could contain a dozen publications. Before 1840, the first page and most of the second page were dedicated to advertisements because the newspaper was not yet able to finance itself only by its sales and relied on these advertisements. Progressively, the advertisement pages disappeared and were replaced by the most important addresses or news. The most notable news to illustrate this argument might be the front pages dedicated to the trial of Feargus O'Connor on May 16th, 1840.³⁹

³⁸ Clarke, Victoria, *Reading and Writing the Northern Star, 1837 – 1847*, 2020, 12.

³⁹ *The Northern Star*, "Judgement upon Feargus O'Connor", May 16th, 1840.

From this perspective, it is important to note that every article that was studied for this dissertation was never present on a front page. Articles dealing with women are placed in the ocean of articles gathered in the newspaper. No article about women, any address or claim from Chartist women can be found on a front page. The only exception might be from the publication on December 22nd, 1838, in which the first article published after advertisements was the “Address of the Female Radical Association of Carlisle to Feargus O’Connor ESQ”. Nevertheless, this address was published at the very end of the second page which was filled with advertisements; readers who were not interested in them could then be tempted to turn to the third page, where the address ended. It is then difficult to understand whether it was an editorial strategy to avoid the issue of women’s rights, or whether the editors really wanted to put this article forward, as this article is praising and supporting Feargus O’Connor.

Nevertheless, Victoria Clarke, in *Reading and Writing the Northern Star* published in 2020, explains that there is “a peak of female presence in the column around 1840-41, and again in 1845 and 1847, and an enormous disparity in the gender balance of the column”.⁴⁰ Victoria Clarke gives evidence of peaks of women’s participation in the *Northern Star* which can be related to the moments when Chartism was the most active. Indeed, we notice that when the Chartist petitions were drafted, Chartists were more active than usual. The three petitions were presented in 1838, 1842 and 1845. We then note that Victoria Clarke links the peaks of Chartist activities and females’ presence in the *Star*. Nevertheless, she does not mention the presence of women in the genesis of Chartism in the years 1838 and 1839 in which addresses from Chartist women are numerous, especially in their fight against the New Poor law. However, she still gives evidence of women’s activism in Chartism that needs to be acknowledged.

The consideration of women’s presence in the *Northern Star* also gives an interesting insight into the editor’s choices. According to Victoria Clark, William Hill, editor for the *Northern Star* from 1838 to 1843: “did all he could to encourage [female poets]”.⁴¹ As he was the editor during the two first peaks Chartist activism in 1839 and 1842. We then understand that woman’s presence, from the beginning was not an issue for publication. We nevertheless notice that although he encouraged women’s literary skills, he failed to support their involvement in politics

⁴⁰ Clarke, Victoria, *Reading and Writing the Northern Star 1837-47*, University of Leeds, 2020, 78.

⁴¹ Clarke, Victoria, *Reading and Writing the Northern Star 1837-47*, University of Leeds, 2020. 79.

by excluding their efforts from coverage in the *Star*. William Hill was then succeeded by Joshua Hobson in 1843, a Tory radical who campaigned against the New Poor law. Although historians have not studied Chartist women's involvement against the New Poor law, many women's addresses in *Northern Star* acknowledge their participation against this bill. Joshua Hobson was finally succeeded by George Julian Harney in 1850.

Then, although articles that address the participation of women in the movement in the *Northern Star* are fewer than men's, the length of their addresses is not shorter. The address entitled "The Address of the Female Chartists of Manchester to their Sisters of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales" takes almost an entire column out of the six that are present on the page. The address is placed between local news which are little articles that do not take more than half a column each. It also needs to be noted that this address is placed in the second column, after the report of three cases, including one case on an attempt of forced abortion on a woman. This article calls for "justice", and for "what is consistent with the laws of God".⁴² The following article also reports from courts and news on rights and justice. This address then seems to be on a page thematically attributed to "justice" but it mainly needs to be noted that this is the last page of the newspaper. It is then possible to wonder whether this address was put here for editorial reasons as the common theme of justice stands out from the page, or the editor ousted this women's address by putting it on the last page. This question seems legitimate as the theme of justice is not the main theme of this address, which was mostly the living and working conditions of the working class and the New Poor law bill. This placement is even more questionable as this address is placed only two columns before the advertisements. A parallel can be drawn between this address and the article previously mentioned: "Address of the Female Radical Association of Carlisle to Feargus O'Connor ESQ" which is placed dubiously. From these observations, we notice that women's addresses are not shortened but seem, over time, to be placed in disregarded spots.

We can note further examples related to the issue that some addresses sent by women to the *Star* were not put forward in the newspaper. We can understand from the placing of women's addresses near the advertisement columns that were the less interesting ones a feeling of disregard. For instance, the article "Address of the Female Radical Association of Carlisle to Feargus O'Connor ESQ" does not even seem to appear to be an article as it was at the very end of a page filled with

⁴² *The Northern Star*, "The Address of the Female Chartists of Manchester to their Sisters of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales", July 24th, 1841.

advertisements, being the only article on the first pages, that could be missed by many people skipping them.

Thus, considering women were set aside in the *Northern Star*, it is common to find difficulties in the identification of many women that were published in the *Northern Star*. Victoria Clarke indeed explains that more than being a radical newspaper, the *Northern Star* was also a place where women were struggling to participate because of the patriarchal mood of the time.

3. The difficult identification of women in the *Northern Star*

After tackling how women's Chartist activities were portrayed in the *Northern Star* and that these women had difficulties for their claims to be considered, it needs to be understood that it was even more difficult for them to be considered as most of these women were not identified as such in the *Northern Star*.

Indeed, as they were sometimes published near advertisements because of a lack of consideration, Victoria Clarke explains in *Reading and Writing the Northern Star, 1837-47* that the identification of women in the *Star* is a difficult task as “all three editors of the *Star* use “he” as a gender-normative” and many women who published in the *Northern Star* used either “pseudonyms or given names.”⁴³ Victoria Clarke explains that more than being a radical newspaper, the *Northern Star* was also a place where women were struggling to participate because of the patriarchal structure of society of the Victorian era. The difficulty of identifying women in the *Northern Star* reflects their difficulty in the patriarchal Victorian era they lived in and their difficult participation in the political sphere. This laborious participation and identification can be seen in the column “Readers and Correspondents” in which women are always named in reference to their husbands by the terms “wife”, “widow”, “daughter”... which is reminiscent of the patriarchal aspect of the Chartist movement as these terms “demonstrate a tendency to see women within the movement as contingent on men”.⁴⁴ This aspect is particularly present in the *Northern Star*, and Jutta Schwarzkopf also explains that:

⁴³ Clarke, Victoria, *Reading and Writing the Northern Star, 1837-47*, University of Leeds, 2020, 77.

⁴⁴ Clarke, Victoria, *Reading and Writing the Northern Star 1837-47*, University of Leeds, 2020, 77.

“*The Northern Star* in particular published reports about local Chartist proceedings which were sent in by the local associations' secretaries. In the case of FCAs, these were often women, who thus formed a large contingent of female contributors, although usually remaining anonymous in their capacity as reporter.”⁴⁵

We understand from her statement that women's participation was indeed prominent in the *Northern Star* as many addresses were signed by the associations and not by the woman writing the address or giving the speech. Nevertheless, their difficult identification made studies of their participation through the Chartist press hard for historians.

Some women as Elizabeth Neesom, for instance, signed radical addresses by their names, as in the article previously mentioned: “The London Female Democratic Association to the Women of England, and Particularly the Women of the Metropolis”. By signing the London Female Democratic Association address with her name, Elizabeth Neesom demonstrated the necessity of enfranchising from the patriarchal Victorian society and the necessity to participate politically in the movement. Elizabeth Neesom, indeed, was recognized as a leading female Chartist figure as Malcolm Chase explains in *Chartism: A New History*: “we can but guess at the content of her “neat and spirited” speeches, her leadership of the key metropolitan female Chartist organisations reveals Elizabeth to have been a political activist in her own right.”⁴⁶ The identification of women is nonetheless sometimes difficult as they were not always identified as women as they used pseudonyms. These troubles in determining these women represent their struggle within the Chartist movement and in society as their movement is often discredited compared to their male counterparts. As explained by Victoria Clarke in *Reading and Writing the Northern Star 1837-47*:

“it is unlikely that there were so few women actually writing to the *Star*. Initials, or genderless pseudonyms, may have been used to protect their anonymity, though there are rare examples of these combined with female pronouns. Dorothy Thompson calls attention to a letter from “A Real Democrat” addressed to her “Fellow Countrywomen,” arguing for the “right of every woman to have a vote in the legislation of her country,” and citing Queen Victoria, as “head of government”, as her justification. A “Democrat” is not a gendered identifier, while the use of the intensifier “real” suggests that Democracy, including a Chartist Democracy, is not truly such unless it includes

⁴⁵ Schwarzkopf, Jutta, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, Macmillan Academic and Professional, 198.

⁴⁶ Chase, Malcolm, *Chartism: A New History*, Manchester University Press, 2007, 191.

women. Where women do identify themselves, responses range from condescension to chivalrous flattery.”⁴⁷

In this perspective, the difficult identification of women in the *Northern Star* therefore implies that historians struggled to identify women’s struggle to study the women’s chartist movement. As it requires further investigation because these addresses are not signed, the study on this movement might have been delayed and it may explain why most studies on the *Star* are missing to provide information on women’s participation. Paradoxically, although the *Northern Star* is difficult to study because of this identification issue, it is a valuable source to understand the numerous issues encountered by the Chartists. Victoria Clarke investigated this issue and her study helped to acknowledge that women were more published in the *Star* than primarily thought.

On the contrary, Elizabeth Neesom received support from her husband as explained by Malcolm Chase: “In its handsome obituary of Charles, the *National Reformer* said of Elizabeth: “she has been of the same views as her husband and has seconded his efforts throughout. She has been for a long period his right hand and main stay.”⁴⁸ Elizabeth Neesom took part in the Chartist movement and her addresses that she signed in her own name were published in the *Northern Star* which made her undeniably a representative of the female Chartists’ struggles as she fought for women’s education by opening her school, as well as militating for the charter and for better conditions of living for women.

Thus, the publication of addresses giving evidence of women’s militancy in the *Northern Star* is a microcosm that represents the struggle of their participation in the Chartist movement on a larger scale. Thanks to the works of historians such as Dorothy Thompson and Victoria Clarke, the identification of women through pseudonyms was possible as they recognised a larger participation than traditionally admitted. We might then want to question men’s perspective on women’s publications in the *Northern Star*, especially Feargus O’Connor, chief editor of the newspaper. Questioning male perceptions is also a way to understand how women struggled to participate in the movement as it was a male movement inscribed in a patriarchal society.

B. The attitudes to female Chartists among male members

⁴⁷ Clarke, Victoria, *Reading and Writing the Northern Star, 1837-47*, University of Leeds, 2020, 78.

⁴⁸ Chase, Malcolm, *Chartism: A New History*, Manchester University Press, 2007, 191.

1. Feargus O'Connor and women activists in the *Northern Star*

To understand the place that women had in the *Northern Star* it might be interesting to consider the attitude of its owner Feargus O'Connor, considered as one of the leaders of the Chartist movement. O'Connor was not against women's participation in the *Northern Star* because the newspaper was the organ of the movement among which women took part. In his article "Feargus O'Connor and the *Northern Star*", J.A. Epstein explains:

"In the Stars columns ordinary working people were accorded the status of men and women who mattered. Gammage noted: "the Star was regarded as the most complete record of the movement. There was not a meeting held in any part of the country, in however remote a spot, that was not reported in its columns, accompanied by all the flourishes calculated to excite an interest in the reader's mind, and to inflate the vanity of the speakers by the honourable mention of their names."⁴⁹

Robert George Gammage was a leading figure of the Chartist movement and from this testimony of the *Northern Star*, we can understand that Feargus O'Connor did not prevent women from publishing in the newspaper. However, as noticed before, women faced troubles when being published as they needed to be published under pseudonyms or signs with initials. Although it was not an issue for being published, the doubtful spots they were published at might be revealing of the consideration their male counterparts had. As most of them thought women's inclusion in the Charter would discredit the movement, it might be possible that most of them thought that their presence in the *Northern Star* would discredit the movement as well as it was meant to reach a broader audience. This statement then needs to be discussed as Feargus O'Connor was not in favour of women's inclusion in the charter. Indeed, according to Anna Clarke in *The Struggle for the Breeches. Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* published in 1995:

"Northern Star editorials denounced household suffrage because it would subsume radical sons' views under conservative fathers' votes, but they did not see any contradiction in excluding wives from the vote in order to "preserve harmony" in the family. Feargus O'Connor, for instance, on this ground opposed the vote for any woman, thundering that "it would lead to family dissensions."(...) As Chartism matured, it became more and more difficult to balance egalitarianism and domesticity, to draw upon the strength of women's activism while depicting them as helpless creatures in need of male protection. Like the radicals of the 1790s, Chartist men could not accept the full

⁴⁹ Epstein, J.A., "Feargus O'Connor and the *Northern Star*", *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 21. No.1, 79.

implications of Paineite egalitarianism because their notion of citizenship was so bound up with masculinity.”⁵⁰

Anna Clarke here seems to show that most Chartist men were seeing women as second-class citizens as she explains that “their notion of citizenship was so bound up with masculinity”. This argument might show the reasons they thought that women would discredit the movement if they had been integrated into the Charter. We notice that even Feargus O’Connor, certainly considered the main leader of Chartism, was against their integration into the Charter which can also be revealing of their difficult recognition in the *Northern Star*. Nevertheless, according to Anna Clark, Feargus O’Connor, like most Chartist men, recognized that women’s activism was necessary to boost the influence of the movement, but was against their inclusion in the political sphere. Indeed, he wanted his newspaper to become the “national organ” of the Chartist movement, as he explained in “The Stamp Returns” published in the *Northern Star* on May 26th, 1838.⁵¹ Then, we understand why women were not prevented from being published in the *Star*. They indeed were part of the movement without being included in the political sphere. Not only did women participate in the development of the *Northern Star* but also in the Chartist movement more largely, as they were published in what was considered a national hub for the movement. Thanks to the *Star*, they managed to share their personal claims and grievances to plead their causes while being a great support for male Chartists as well.

This paradox of exclusion of women while participating in the movement was explained by the patriarchal society, they lived in. This patriarchal aspect can be acknowledged in *Women and Chartism* published by David Jones in 1983, in which he explains that: “Other critics of O’Connor argued that women could scarcely make worse than their menfolk.”⁵² Indeed, because politics was related to masculinity (and property), women’s exclusion remained inscribed in the social order. Nevertheless, their participation was not considered unusual because they were part of the working class and were participating in the Chartist movement. Malcolm Chase, in his article “Resolve in Defiance of Fool” published in 2010 explains that: “In organising O’Connor’s visit to the town in February 1842, circulated extensive details of his processional route and instructed the

⁵⁰ Clark, Anna, *The Struggle for the Breeches. Gender and the Making of the British Working Class*, University of California Press, 1995, 231

⁵¹ *The Northern Star*, “The Stamps Return”, May 26th, 1838.

⁵² Jones, David, “Women and Chartism”, *History*, 1983, Vol.68, No.222, 1983, 2.

“Men & Women of Nottingham!! DO YOUR DUTY.”⁵³ This quote from O’Connor shows that although he was not in favour of their political inclusion in the Charter, it was a “duty” for both men and women to demonstrate which is revealing of both the necessity and the habit of women’s presence. Their participation was considered supportive of males’ struggles before their own. Women’s participation in the *Northern Star* was, then, before all, participation within a male movement as their political inclusion failed to be truly recognized. On the other hand, women in the *Northern Star* were not considered first as women but as Chartists supporting the movement. The supportive side of women was nevertheless not an issue for many as they believed that participating in the struggle of their male counterparts would benefit them. In fact, many women did not ask for their political inclusion and were before all Chartist mothers or Chartist wives. For instance, in the article “Address of the Bristol Female Patriotic Association to their Sisters of the West of England and South Wales” published on August 3rd, 1839, the association explains: “we call upon you to join us, and help our husbands, fathers, brothers, and children, to free themselves and us from our present political, physical, and mental bondage”.⁵⁴ This attitude was then consistent with what men as Feargus O’Connor thought for women: although they were reluctant to their political inclusion, women’s participation was necessary and was never contested as the movement needed their support.

Thus, as many historians illustrated, O’Connor was not in favour of women’s political participation and enfranchisement because, like many Chartists, he thought that it would delay men’s claims in the People’s Charter. Nevertheless, many Chartist men were reluctant to see the integration of women in the People’s Charter. From this perspective, it might be interesting to understand how debated the integration of women in the Charter was, as the *Northern Star* gives us reports of these debates.

2. Chartists’ attitudes towards activist women

⁵³ Chase, Malcolm, “Resolve in Defiance of Fool”, *Conflict and Difference in Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 2010, 133.

⁵⁴ *The Northern Star*, “Address of the Bristol Female Patriotic Association to their Sisters of the West of England and South Wales”, August 3rd, 1839.

Women's activism was often out of the bounds of the *People's Charter*, and they had personal claims such as the repeal of the New Poor law that particularly affected them. One of their demands was their inclusion in the People's Charter, which had been refused, while they nonetheless fought for it. As David Jones recalls in *Women and Chartism*: "[Julian] Harney wanted more evidence of female demand for the vote before he would fight for it in public."⁵⁵ Nonetheless, the reluctant attitude of Chartist men to women's integration in the Charter wouldn't have given them enough support for claiming this right. Their demand for integration in the People's Charter can be acknowledged in published addresses in the *Northern Star*. For instance, in an address given by Mary Brooke in 1851 entitled "The Rights of Women, Sheffield – To the Women of England" that: "females might, with the strictest propriety, be included in the programme of the People's Charter. (...) But there are some who will say, would you have woman to enjoy all the political, social, and moral rights of man? To this we most emphatically answer yes."⁵⁶ The question of their inclusion in the People's Charter must then be understood as the demand for the right to vote for all women. Integrating women in the People's Charter would mean including them in the political sphere by demanding universal suffrage for both men and women. The inclusion of women was a discussion theme from the first Chartist petition of 1838, but female suffrage was never included in the points of the Charter. Although some Chartist leaders like William Lovett were in favour of their integration, Jutta Schwarzkopf recounts that:

"The National Association of the United Kingdom for Promoting the political and Social Improvement of the People, which was established in April 1841 by William Lovett and his political friends in order to promote what was becoming known as knowledge Chartism, advocated the "equal educational, social, and political rights of woman as well as of man".⁵⁷

The question of female suffrage was then a subject of debate from the drafting of the People's Charter, and it kept being debated from then.

In fact, this debate is depicted in the *Northern Star*, in the column "Chartist Intelligence" published on October 24th, 1846, three positions can be drawn. First, we notice that some men were totally against granting women the right to vote, it was said that: "Mr. John Dowling agreed with the Lecturer, and thought if the suffrage was extended to women, - it would interfere with

⁵⁵ Jones, David, "Women and Chartism", *History*, 1983, Vol.68, No.222, 1983, 3.

⁵⁶ *The Northern Star*, "The Rights of Women, Sheffield – To the Women of England", February 22nd, 1851.

⁵⁷ Schwarzkopf, Jutta, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, Macmillan Academic and Professional, 1991, 61.

domestic happiness”.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, some men were not reluctant to give women the right to vote but questioned its necessity: “He could not perceive the necessity of giving woman the suffrage. He thought when their Charter enfranchised men, that their brothers and husbands would protect their rights”.⁵⁹ This question of necessity and political protection from men in their family gave a great representation of the patriarchal Victorian society. This statement shows that women were not independent in their beliefs as their husbands and brothers would participate politically for them. But finally, some men were in favour of granting women the rights to vote: “Would their lecturer venture to tell him, that highly intelligent, virtuous women like these, should be denied the right of the franchise, whilst it was given to the most stupid of men?”, “Mr. Wheeler gave way to Mr. W. D. Ruffy, who most eloquently and ably supported the right of woman to an equal share in the Elective franchise, and the affairs of government with man”.⁶⁰ Such declarations helped women legitimising their claim for the right to vote, as mentioned previously in the article entitled “The Rights of Women, Sheffield – To the Women of England”.

In this perspective, we notice that the *Northern Star* is in fact a microcosm of the different approaches that men had on women’s political participation. Thanks to the reported debate, we are given an overview of what Chartist males thought about the rights of women. Nonetheless, it is important to note that no women participated in this debate and that only men debated on this issue whilst it was their personal claim and struggle.

Thus, the articles from the *Northern Star* provide an insight into women’s participation in the Chartist movement. The newspaper plays an important role as it was considered a Chartist hub in which addresses, and reports of Chartist events were published. When we question the place of women in the *Star*, we understand that although Chartist men were not in favour of integrating them into the Six Points of the Charter, they nevertheless actively participated in the movement. Their presence in the movement was mainly considered supportive but also necessary. This idea is in fact paradoxical because most Chartist men thought that their inclusion in the Charter would discredit the movement but saw their presence in the movement as necessary to give credit to their militancy. In that respect, we understand that their activism was at first inscribed in a male and

⁵⁸ *The Northern Star*, “Chartist Assembly and Reading Room, 83, Dean Street”, October 24th, 1846.

⁵⁹ *The Northern Star*, “Chartist Assembly and Reading Room, 83, Dean Street”, October 24th, 1846.

⁶⁰ *The Northern Star*, “Chartist Assembly and Reading Room, 83, Dean Street”, October 24th, 1846.

patriarchal movement. The argument in favour of their exclusion then relied on the natural order of Victorian times that women needed to be housewives and not to participate in the political sphere which was thought to be a man's role. Nonetheless, many men recognised women's claim for suffrage and supported it, giving them credit and legitimacy in the society for such demands. The study of women's participation in the Chartist movement through the lens of the *Northern Star* is important as it helps to understand their place in the movement as it was mainly a male movement. Moreover, their presence in the *Northern Star* is also revealing the limits of their participation as they were sometimes implicitly discredited. Indeed, the *Northern Star* reveals that most men were reluctant to their integration into the Charter and this reluctance can be paralleled to their place in the *Northern Star*. Most articles, as women's addresses that were published, were indeed doubtfully placed and most women chose to be published under pseudonyms or anonymously. The difficult identification of women resulted in difficulties for historians to identify their grievances and activism. Nevertheless, a study of the *Northern Star* in depth helps to see that women had many grievances and participated actively in the Chartist movement. The early period of Chartism saw an active militancy from women against the New Poor law for instance, which not only affected the entire working class but also women especially because of the Bastardy Clause. It is then important to study their grievances and political activism as it failed to be studied in depth by historians.

Chapter 2 – Chartist women’s contribution to the Chartist movement and to the Northern Star

A. Chartist women’s activism against the New Poor law

It needs to be understood that the Chartist movement was not exclusively a fight for the six points of the People’s Charter. Many struggles were added to the movement as the working class not only suffered from the lack of political representation and participation, but also the numerous laws that affected their daily lives as the Corn laws and New Poor law. David Ashforth, in his article entitled “The Urban Poor Law” published in 1976 explains that: “the popular Anti-Poor Law movement was soon absorbed into Chartism”.⁶¹ This idea of absorption can also be understood for the Corn laws, as “Other banners simply reiterated common Chartist slogans, such as “Universal Suffrage – No Corn Laws”, which was paraded by Bolton FCA at the Kersall Moor Demonstration in May 1839” according to Jutta Schwarzkopf.⁶² Considering these two statements, we understand that the Chartist fights were not only made fights for the political inclusion of the working class but also of fights against parliamentary laws. Yet, the fight against the Corn laws was considered by historians as tightly linked to the Chartist movement. This is explicitly patent when Jutta Schwarzkopf characterises the Chartist banner against the Corn laws as “common”, but on the contrary, the fight against the New Poor law by Chartists failed to be studied in depth, especially concerning women’s fights against it. Studies of the New Poor law as a Chartist fight are few especially studies of women’s movements against the New Poor law although numerous articles mention them briefly, such as Michael E. Rose’s article “The Anti-Poor Law Movement in the North of England” published in 1966, in which he mentions that: “Elland, Middleton and Barnsley even had separate female Anti-Poor Law Associations”.⁶³ Nicholas C. Edsall also mentions briefly that “as the inmates were being taken from the Beaconsfield workhouse, a crowd, largely made up of women, gathered and started throwing stones”.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Ashforth, David, “The Urban Poor Law”, *New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Derek Fraiser, 1976, 132.

⁶² Schwarzkopf, Jutta, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, Macmillan Academic and Professional, 1991, 202.

⁶³ Rose, Michael E, “The Anti Poor Law Movement in the North of England”, *Northern History*, Vol.1, 1966, 74.

⁶⁴ Edsall, Nicholas C., *The Anti-Poor Law Movement, 1834-44*, Manchester University Press, 1971, 95.

Historians have therefore acknowledged that Chartists, but also women fought against the New Poor law. This is also confirmed in the publications of the *Northern Star* reports, in the article “A Meeting of Females” published on September 1st, 1838: “A very large meeting of females was held on Tuesday evening last, for the purpose of adopting a memorial to her Majesty, praying her to use her influence to repeal the Poor Law Amendment Act”.⁶⁵ The *Northern Star* indeed provides evidence of a coherent female struggle against this bill. For instance, in the article “The London Female Democratic Association to the Women of England and Particularly the Women of the Metropolis”, Elizabeth Neesom calls for “co-opera[tion] with our patriotic sisters in the country, to obtain Universal Suffrage in the shortest possible time, to annihilate the cruel, unjust, and atrocious New Poor Law, miscalled Amendment.”⁶⁶ In this perspective, this study of the *Northern Star* helps reveal that Chartists women fought against the New Poor law as the Women Anti-Poor Law movement was much more prominent than admitted by historians and that these women were active in Chartism as well. Thanks to the *Northern Star*, it is possible to acknowledge a crossover between both movements. In fact, male universal suffrage was seen as a possible way to mitigate the effects of the New Poor law as Chartist men would obtain enough political power through the vote and the working-class representation in parliament for the New Poor law to be repealed. This call was not only personal because Elizabeth Neesom used the term “patriotic” and calls for unity among women which shows that the New Poor law might not only be only a class issue but an issue for women and their rights. The term “patriotic” can then be considered as a call to every woman in the country to participate in the fight against the New Poor law, and to Chartism, as the New Poor law bill targeted the working class and women without distinction.

1. The Bastardy Clause

The Bastardy Clause, introduced by the New Poor law, affected women deeply. Jutta Schwarzkopf explains that: “one of the most marked effects of the New Poor Law on women’s lives was exerted by the Bastardy Clause it contained.”⁶⁷ Indeed, the New Poor law was not only

⁶⁵ *The Northern Star*, “A Meeting of Females”, September 1st, 1838.

⁶⁶ *The Northern Star*, “The London Female Democratic Association to the Women of England and Particularly the Women of the Metropolis”, May 11th, 1839.

⁶⁷ Schwarzkopf, Jutta, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, Macmillan Academic and Professional, 1991, 31.

a working-class issue because it also specifically affected women. The Bastardy Clause gave women full responsibility for their illegitimate children while before the bill passed, both parents were responsible for their children. As discussed at an Anti-Poor Law Meeting in Rochdale, reported in the *Northern Star* on February 3rd, 1838: “That the Bastardy Clause holds out inducements to seduction and infanticide, and is insulting and degrading to the female sex”.⁶⁸ Indeed, the Bastardy Clause had great consequences on women’s daily lives as women were granted full responsibility over their illegitimate children if the father would not recognize it. In this perspective, some women could not provide for their children. For instance, in the *Northern Star*, in the article entitled “The Bastardy Laws Again” published on July 27th, 1839, it was stated that: “the *humanizing* operation of the Bastardy Clause was manifested in its natural colours. On Saturday, Ann Kelly, a poor domestic servant, from Ireland, was brought up before the Mayor for refusing to maintain her bastard child.”⁶⁹ This article nonetheless seems to recognize that the fault needs to be put on the Bastardy Clause and not on Ann Kelly. The article is very critical of the New Poor law and highlights the effects that this measure had on vulnerable women who could not provide for their children. Moreover, the title “The Bastardy Laws Again” as well as the sarcastic expression “*humanizing* operation” in italics shows the disapproval of these laws by the Chartists and that this fight was linked to their cause. This mood is transcribed throughout the *Northern Star* especially in the early period of Chartism, in the years 1838 and 1839, especially in addresses given by women and kept being criticized all over the Chartist period. This mood is transcribed throughout the *Northern Star*, both by men and women in addresses and reports of meetings in which the New Poor law is criticized extensively. For instance, the *Northern Star* reports a meeting in an article entitled “The Poor law and the Charter” published on June 12th, 1847, in which it is reported that: “There was a small band whose hatred of, and whose opposition to the poor law was unabated, and who would never cease battling for its repeal”.⁷⁰ This article shows that Chartism and the fight against the New Poor law are linked as the title of the article shows. Moreover, it shows Chartists’ hatred for the New Poor law until 1847, which corresponds to the ending period of Chartism. The fight against the New Poor law, although it showed a peak in 1838 and 1839 in the *Northern Star*, it kept being a Chartist fight until the end of the movement.

⁶⁸ *The Northern Star*, “Anti-Poor Law Meeting, Rochdale”, February 3rd, 1838.

⁶⁹ *The Northern Star*, “The Bastardy Laws Again”, July 27th, 1839.

⁷⁰ *The Northern Star*, “The Poor law and the Charter”, June 12th, 1847.

Although it was deeply contested, the bastardy clause was inscribed in the patriarchal society in which women lived. The bastardy clause indeed affected both the working class and women without distinction which shows a clear disparity between the sexes. In fact, Jutta Schwarzkopf explains that:

“This theme came to the fore again in the movement against the implementation of the New Poor Law. “Sophia”, the Birmingham Chartist, exposed the preconceptions about woman’s character and social position that underlay the Poor Law’s Bastardy Clause. In her view, this assumed woman to be a reasoning being able to reflect on the consequences of her loss of “virtue” and prepared to take the penalty for it. Yet in the entire setup of society, this was the only instance in which woman was made independent of man”.⁷¹

Sophia Sturge was a famous Chartist woman who fought for women’s rights and abolition in the Female Society of Birmingham. As Jutta Schwarzkopf recalls, she made a parallel between women’s place in society and the Bastardy Clause. The Bastardy Clause then targets women as second-rank citizens without any other justification than their social position. Jutta Schwarzkopf also seems to ironically mention that while women fought for independent rights from men as they wanted to be on equal footing with them while being recognized as women, they were in fact “made independent of men” but with their rights being targeted directly instead. Thus, as explained by Jutta Schwarzkopf, the Bastardy Clause results from the patriarchal time of the Victorian era as Parliament introduced the New Poor law bill to confirm women’s second-rank citizen position at the time. This particular targeting explains that many women decided to fight against this bill by themselves. As reported in the *Northern Star* in the article entitled “Lancashire News” published on January 20th, 1838, it was explained that: “the women also declared their determination to petition themselves, before they’ll be parted from their children or their lads.”⁷² This article shows that women organised to participate against the New Poor law and that one of their strategies was to petition themselves. It shows that the *Northern Star* provides evidence of women’s participation and strategies against the New Poor law. Moreover, it also shows that women were in direct action rather than in passivity which clearly shows that they were politically active as citizens and Chartists.

⁷¹ Schwarzkopf, Jutta, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, Macmillan Academic and Professional, 1991, 104.

⁷² *The Northern Star*, “Lancashire News”, January 20th, 1838.

We also see that more than a division of society, there was also a division in the movement as women decided to fight by themselves against the New Poor law. Although men were against the New Poor law, we understand that women suffered more from them, because of the bastardy clause notably which explains their heighten involvement in fighting against this Bill. It is then possible to call into question the statement in “Chartist Intelligence”, in which it was mentioned that women’s “brothers and husbands would protect their rights”.⁷³ Indeed, because women were targeted directly and not men, most men prioritised the fight for the Six Points of the Charter, giving few interests to the women’s fight against the Bastardy Clause. Thus, women had to fight against the New Poor law by themselves, as Chartists, but without much support from men. In this perspective, the argument from the article “Chartist Intelligence” can be debated, as men were not present to fully support women when it was necessary.

The patriarchy from which women suffered in this fight was detailed by R.Q. Henriques, in his book *Bastardy and the New Poor Law* published in 1967, in which he explains: “When the militant female Chartist Mary Ann Walker spoke at length before a mixed meeting, the *Northern Star* reporter rhapsodized about her “very graceful bust” before alluding to her political views.”⁷⁴ What R.Q. Henriques reports is telling of the men’s consideration on women’s political integration. Rather than considering women as participating equally with them in the political sphere because Victorian women were not supposed to participate in politics according to the social conventions of the time. Again, this example shows that women could not count on men’s support. Their speeches and actions were discredited because they were women. We then understand that because they were discredited, women had no choice but to make the fight against the New Poor law their own. The *Northern Star* gives evidence of these two aspects, and we notice that women were extensively participating against the New Poor law on their own. In an article entitled “Female Public Meeting” from February 17th, 1838, among women gathered, Mrs. Grasby, an attendee, declared that: “They might be asked why women should interfere in public matters. She should answer at once, it was a woman’s duty to be there; for women had more to fear from this bill than men.”⁷⁵ Then, we both understand from this statement that the New Poor law targeted

⁷³ *The Northern Star*, “Chartist Intelligence”, October 24th,

⁷⁴ Henriques, R.Q. *Bastardy and the New Poor Law*, Oxford University Press, 1967.

⁷⁵ *The Northern Star*, “Female Public Meeting”, February 17th, 1838.

women because of their sex, and that women also needed to fight by themselves to protect their own condition as the society they lived in would not help them. This article is then telling of why women fought against the New Poor law. Mrs. Grasby also suggests through this declaration that women occupied their place in the domestic sphere and do not usually interfere in political matters although the New Poor law had a direct impact on the domestic sphere this time.

Thus, we understand through a study of the *Northern Star* that women needed to fight against the New Poor law by themselves without men's support. This aspect is rarely studied by historians while the *Northern Star* provides evidence of this aspect.

More than the bastardy clause, women suffered from the workhouses that were instituted by the New Poor law bill in which families were separated and harshly treated. Evidence of how women struggled in the workhouses shows their necessity to fight against them. Moreover, because many Chartists were mothers, they were also willing to protect their families. They were even more targeted by this Bill as they were both working-class people, and women.

2. Family and the workhouses

Although some aspects of the New Poor law targeted women, the New Poor law also targeted families more generally. The conditions of the workhouses instituted by the bill were harsh. Families in the workhouses were divided, people worked for no salary and were poorly fed and clothed in exchange while being closely monitored. Because of these dreadful conditions, people in the workhouses were often compared to slaves. For instance, Michael E. Rose in his article explains that: "Oastler and his followers (...) pointed out the obvious parallels with negro slavery and warned the workers that the whole scheme was designed to reduce their wages."⁷⁶ The philosopher and politician Richard Oastler was a Chartist figure politically active against the New Poor law and who reported its similarities with slavery as stressed by Michael E. Rose. In fact, the theme of slavery is usually related to the workhouses. Families were separated without the possibility to see each other; children were taken apart from their mothers. Moreover, people were very badly fed and poorly maintained which led to many deaths from starvation and illness. This

⁷⁶ Rose, Michael E, "The Anti Poor Law Movement in the North of England", *Northern History*, Vol.1, 1966, 80.

aspect can be linked to the numerous mentions of slavery in Chartist addresses. Indeed, in Chartist women's addresses in the *Northern Star*, the vocabulary of slavery can usually be found when their subject is related to the New Poor law. For instance, in the address given on February 19th, 1842, entitled "To the Female Chartists of Great Britain", Sarah Leatherbarrow starts with "Sisters in political bondage" and calls: "Sisters, you can do all of these, if you will but arouse yourselves from your lethargy, and shake off the chains of slavery."⁷⁷ This address is revealing of the controversial link between slavery and working-class women's conditions as women did not experience the same conditions as chattel slaves. They compared them to slaves mostly because they were oppressed as working-class women and wanted to free themselves from this condition, metaphorically. In such addresses, women not only show that they are victims of the law as most historians depict, but that they also want to fight against them and also encourage other women to fight them. Such addresses published on the *Northern Star* were indeed meant to reach a larger audience. Indeed, the sufferings felt by the working class, and especially felt by women, were described by Elizabeth Neesom further in her address entitled "The London Female Democratic Association to the Women of England, and Particularly the Women of the Metropolis":

"If females removed from the sphere of our order could but see the privations, the squalid misery, the incessant, ill-requited toil of thousands of their own sex, the hitter pangs of the mother parting with her offspring because she cannot support them, to be sent she knows not where, never to see them again - to see the wife torn from her husband when reduced by poverty to become the inmate of a Poor Law bastille, who perhaps, but a few years before was told by the parson, that "whom god hath joined together no man should put asunder," what would they think of such unchristianlike, inhuman laws, and institutions?"⁷⁸

Instead of mentioning the "New Poor law", Elizabeth Neesom mentions the "Poor Law bastille". This term is highly significant as it directly refers to the oppressive Ancien Regime of France and the Storming of the Bastille, a turning point from the French Revolution from which most Chartists were inspired. This reference clearly shows their revolutionary and radical will to fight against the New Poor law. Moreover, Elizabeth Neesom also used Christian terminology in her address. Because the parish system and the workhouses are overseen by the Church, it is usual for Chartists

⁷⁷ *The Northern Star*, "To the Female Chartists of Great Britain", February 19th, 1842.

⁷⁸ *The Northern Star*, "To the Female Chartists of Great Britain", February 19th, 1842

in her addresses to criticize the Church regarding the New Poor law. This shows their need to fight against these parliamentary laws as they felt betrayed by every institution, even the Church.

In this perspective, the *Northern Star* is in fact revealing the oppression felt by Chartist women regarding the New Poor law as well as their disappointment regarding the institutions surrounding the New Poor law bill as even the Church oversaw the workhouses. These numerous disappointments show that women were on their own in the struggle against the New Poor law and could not count on any institutional support. This aspect shows the necessity for women to fight against the New Poor law but also shows how the anti-New Poor law was integrated in the Chartist movement.

Indeed, some references to women's fights are given by historians but are never studied in detail, such as women's struggles against the New Poor law. In the report of a riot in Bradford against the New Poor law, "the shrill voices of many females, who were present, were distinctly heard."⁷⁹ This report shows that women were present in the riot and particularly active, which is proving of their involvement. Moreover, Nicholas C. Edsall in his book entitled *The Anti-Poor Law Movement, 1834-44* published in 1971 states that: "near the end of May, the first incident took place; as the inmates were being taken from the Beaconsfield workhouse, a crowd, largely made up of women, gathered and started throwing stones."⁸⁰ The evidence shows that women were heavily involved in actions against the New Poor law and mobilized methods that were similar to Chartism in the campaigning against the bill. Although women were petitioning against the New Poor law, they also demonstrated that they used direct and violent actions in demonstrations, as this report shows. Nevertheless, this prominent role for women is understated in studies of the movement. The Chartist press and especially the *Northern Star* suggest that women's role in the Anti-Poor law movement was much more prominent than thought. For instance, in an article reporting a "Female Public Meeting" in Elland, published on February 17th, 1838, in which women were willing to petition Queen Victoria against the New Poor law, it was reported that:

"The New Poor Law was not concocted by men but by fiends in the shape of men. [...] They might be asked why women should interfere in public matters. She would answer at once, it was a

⁷⁹ "Poor-Laws. Riot at Bradford", December 11th, 1837, U.K. Parliament, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1837/dec/11/poor-laws-riot-at-bradford>

⁸⁰ Edsall, Nicholas C., *The Anti-Poor Law Movement, 1834-44*, Manchester University Press, 1971, 95.

woman's duty to be there; for women had more to fear from this bill than men. (Cheers.) [...] Women have still more to do with this cruel measure than men.”⁸¹

This quote is again revealing of the need for women to defend their own interests. We notice that women see their fight as a “duty” which shows that they were active citizens fighting not only for themselves as women but also for working-class men. She explains that “women had more to fear from this bill than men” which means that men nevertheless have to fear from this bill implicitly. In this perspective, women were not fighting only in their own interest but also in the interest of the working class. This address is also revealing of their disappointment towards the institutions and especially MPs that they characterise by “fiends” which might both refer to an enemy or to the devil which would be close to a religious theme that is recurrent.

Moreover, we notice that in this report of the petition, these women explain: “It is long since the females of England had an opportunity of addressing a ruler of their own sex, they humbly hope, therefore, their Petition will not be disregarded”.⁸² In this report, we can notice that these women seemed to hope that a Queen would be more receptive to their demand as she was also a woman. This petition is highly significant as it shows that Chartist women began by trusting the institutions before being disappointed as they did with Queen Victoria. Furthermore, as Queen Victoria acceded to the throne in 1837, we might wonder whether the numerous addresses and petitions in 1838 and 1839 against the New Poor law were not meant to reach her somehow. The numerous reports and addresses that were published in the *Northern Star* are then valuable to understand women's position in the fight against the New Poor law and the place of their fight in the Chartist movement. We indeed notice a crossover between the Anti-Poor law movement and Chartism and that the strategies used by women remained petitioning and demonstrating. Moreover, these articles are revealing of the particular position of women regarding the New Poor law as they cannot trust the institutions anymore and feel oppressed by this betrayal. Both the Church and Parliament were overseeing the New Poor law and the workhouses. We notice that they turned this trust to Queen Victoria who acceded the throne in 1837 but who did not answer their petitions.

⁸¹ *The Northern Star*, “Female Public Meeting”, February 17th, 1838.

⁸² *The Northern Star*, “Female Public Meeting”, February 17th, 1838.

Furthermore, in the fight against the New Poor law, it is important to take into consideration that most Chartist women were mothers. In fact, Chartists were particularly involved in the family as depicted by Malcolm Chase in his article “Resolved in Defiance of Fool” published in 2010. He explains that: “Child rearing then, was not just a biological or personal and emotional process, it was a political act. Chartist parents took pride in raising their children to share in their principles.”⁸³ This aspect of pride in parents raising their children under Chartist principles can be found in the *Northern Star* for instance in the article entitled “To the Female Chartists of Great Britain” published on February 19th, 1842, in which Sarah Leatherbarrow, on behalf of “the female Chartists of Manchester-Road, Bradford”, explains:

“Then sisters, and not till then, will the working classes obtain justice. It is said what can woman do? she can do a deal in her domestic capacity, she can instil the holy principles of the Charter into the minds of her children - in her daily occupation she can commune with her husband, and while all others toil she can persuade.”⁸⁴

Sarah Leatherbarrow gives evidence of the role Chartist women had as mothers. Indeed, more than being mothers they were Chartist mothers, and their role was to educate their children as Chartists. As we can note, the Charter is made of “holy principles” as if Chartist education was replacing the Christian one, and as if the Charter was replacing the Bible. In that respect, we notice that Chartist mothers had an important role in the movement. Sarah Leatherbarrow also shows that it is a woman’s role to be a mother as she explained that what she can do is to “a deal in her domestic capacity” which is reminiscent of Victorian conventions. Then, Chartist women were not only given the role of mothers but of Chartist mothers.

Moreover, it needs to be taken into consideration that more than including their role as mothers to legitimize their political claims, Chartist mothers were also worried for their families and children regarding the New Poor law. Malcolm Chase explains that: “Female Chartists emphasised their role as educators in order to reinforce their own claims to participate in the

⁸³ Chase, Malcolm, “Resolve in Defiance of Fool”, *Conflict and Difference in Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 2010, 130.

⁸⁴ *The Northern Star*, “To the Female Chartists of Great Britain”, February 19th, 1842.

political arena.”⁸⁵ In each address previously mentioned, women mention their role of mother and raise their worry about their family. For instance, in the article entitled “Meeting of Females” published on September 1st, 1838, they mentioned that: “She said there never was a law in existence compared to [the New Poor law]; except in the days of Pharaoh, when the young children were torn from their mothers and put to death.”⁸⁶ Another time, Chartist women expressed the harshness of the New Poor law with “the days of Pharaoh” which can be interpreted as the time of slavery in Egypt. From this perspective, not only women legitimized their political participation and claims against the New Poor law, as they were threatened and suffered from the workhouses and the Bastardy Clause, but also used the worries they felt for their families as a weapon to popularize the struggle because it can be noticed that their struggle was given formal recognition through publications in the *Star*.

Thus, although historians have provided few mentions of the fight of women against the New Poor law, the *Northern Star* gives evidence of their participation as well as the reasons they fought against this law. Indeed, the *Northern Star* helped to publicize their struggle and to convey it to a wider audience giving it credibility. With closer attention, we understand that Chartist women used strategies from the broader Chartist movement such as petitioning in this fight which affected them particularly. Indeed, although many men participated in the Anti-Poor Law movement, such as Richard Oastler for instance, we understand from what Chartist women declared in the *Northern Star* that it affected them deeply, and even more than men and that they were militating actively against it.

However, although women actively participated against the New Poor law and made it a woman’s fight as most men were not much supportive of the cause, we also need to consider that the Chartist movement was a platform that allowed them to fight it. In this movement, broader Chartist strategies were used and more than participating in an isolated movement, women also participated

⁸⁵ Chase, Malcolm, “Resolve in Defiance of Fool”, *Conflict and Difference in Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 2010, 137.

⁸⁶ *The Northern Star*, “A Meeting of Females”, September 1st, 1838.

in the established Chartist movement and fought for the Six Points. It then needs to be understood that both movements were linked and that the Six Points of the Charter remained the first pursued achievement.

B. Radical women's participation in a male movement

1. Women's supportive role in the Chartist movement

In the Chartist movement, it must before all be understood that Chartist women were seen by most men as supportive of the movement and were not considered on equal terms by most men. Nevertheless, according to Malcolm Chase in *Chartism: A New History*, "Female participation was a crucially important factor in shaping Chartism". In fact, he also explains that:

"The activities of women's Chartist groups were not confined to parades and petitioning. Most followed the format of local WMAs, i.e., regular, formally chaired meetings for lectures and discussions. Chartist men were often the lecturers, but women were seldom reported speaking at "male" group meetings, and hardly were nominated to Chartism's delegate bodies. However, women fully participated at open-air rallies, often enthusiastically."⁸⁷

We understand that in their fight against the New Poor law, they used strategies from the Chartist movement as they managed to fight against this bill thanks to this very platform. Their participation in the Chartist movement was not seen as personal as it was in their participation against the New Poor law. Indeed, their role was principally seen by most Chartist men as a role of support in the movement as it was mainly a male movement. Jutta Schwarzkopf explains that: the "rigid division of the world into a public and a private sphere served at the same to define masculinity and femininity respectively. In the public sphere of the economy and politics, men wielded power, while in the private one of home and family, women exerted moral influence."⁸⁸ Moreover, she adds that:

"The women's special task was seen to consist in lending male Chartists the moral support deemed indispensable to the victory of the movement. Again and again, they were called upon along the following lines: "Lend us then your powerful assistance, animate us in the glorious struggle, cheer

⁸⁷ Chase, Malcolm, *Chartism: A New History*, Manchester University Press, 2007, 41-42.

⁸⁸ Schwarzkopf, Jutta, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, Macmillan Academic and Professional, 1991, 3.

us by your approbation, enliven us by your presence, and we cannot, we will not fail of success”.

Women were exhorted to lend men moral support by “smiling them on to victory”.⁸⁹

We can note from Jutta Schwarzkopf’s book that men needed women’s help to assist them, and we notice that they participated actively in the political sphere among men. These addresses show a separation in society that was applied to the Chartist movement as well. Indeed, the movement was patriarchal and although women were participating on their own against the New Poor law, for instance, their participation in the fight for the People’s Charter can be considered as supportive as it is revealed by historians. Evidence from the *Northern Star* also reveals this supportive aspect. For instance, in the article entitled “Address of the Bristol Female Patriotic Association to their Sisters of the West of England and South Wales” published on August 3rd, 1839, it was reported that:

“These are the times that try men's souls. Our country is on the verge of the mightiest revolution that ever occurred in the annals of history, ancient or modern; and we call upon you to join us, and help our husbands, fathers, brothers, and children, to free themselves and us from our present political, physical, and mental bondage. We have been told that the science of politics belongs not to woman—that her province is her home; but have we not been compelled to leave that home, and toil within the walls of a manufactory, not because our husbands, fathers, and brothers refused to labour, but in consequence of the legislative enactments of the drones of society.”⁹⁰

The first sentence “These are the times that try men’s souls” is a quote from Thomas Paine’s pamphlets published between 1777 to 1783 entitled *The American Crisis*. We notice that the Chartists were inspired by the previous revolutionary movement as the French one, mentioned before. In that article, this is a direct reference to the American Revolution as the word “revolution” is present in the following sentence. Moreover, this reference to revolution is another time linked to slavery as the word “bondage” is mentioned, revealing again the oppression they felt. Then, we notice that they significantly refer to “themselves and us” by placing themselves as their equals in the fight. It shows that, as in their fight against the New Poor law, their will was not only to repeal the parliamentary laws only because they felt oppressed as women but also for the entire working class. In fact, they also explain that they are fighting for the same purpose as men, they are fighting

⁸⁹ Schwarzkopf, Jutta, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, Macmillan Academic and Professional, 1991, 174.

⁹⁰ *The Northern Star*, “Address of the Bristol Female Patriotic Association to their Sisters of the West of England and South Wales”, August 3rd, 1839.

because of the consequence of the “legislative enactment” which forced them to work and warned them from fulfilling their role in society. The word “home” is very significant as it may both refer to the proper sense of the place, meaning that they needed to work to survive. But this word may more implicitly also mean that they could not fulfill their role at home as mothers and as women as well. In this perspective, the *Northern Star* helps to understand women’s grievances and the reasons that led them to participate in the Chartist movement as they felt oppressed by laws that made it hard for men to provide for their families, leading women, and children, to work. This quote is then significant as it is showing of why women decided to support men in the Chartist movement. We then notice that in the Chartist political fights, women’s role was mainly seen as supportive. This address is reminiscent of the address given by Sarah Leatherbarrow previously mentioned who explained that: “We, the female Chartists of Manchester-road, Bradford, address you on the necessity of uniting in the struggle that our husbands, our brothers, and our sons are engaged in; ‘tis a holy struggle of right against might” who is using another time Christian vocabulary to refer to Chartism. Moreover, she also asked to support men in the struggle.⁹¹ These Addresses in the *Northern Star* shows that the role of women in the Chartist movement was mostly linked to their role in the family. These addresses are in fact revealing that they participate in the struggle for the Six Points as mothers, sisters, or daughters, if we take their words conversely. Nevertheless, we notice thanks to this address that women’s role was not only supportive. Many men saw this as such, but the *Northern Star* shows evidence that they participate politically with them for the Six Points as they mention “themselves and us” jointly. This is the case in what reports Malcolm Chase in “Resolve in Defiance of Fool”, he explains that: “In organising O’Connor’s visit to the town in February 1842, circulated extensive details of his processional route and instructed the “Men & Women of Nottingham!! DO YOUR DUTY, Prepare Flags for your Children, and let us have a glorious demonstration”.⁹² The fact that O’Connor, a Chartist leader, referred to “Men & Women” jointly as well is significant, showing that women’s role was not only secondary or supportive. In *Chartism: A New History*, Malcolm Chase explains that: “It is clear that the majority of male Chartists saw women as fulfilling a subaltern role in the movement. (...)

⁹¹ *The Northern Star*, “To the Female Chartist of Great Britain”, February 19th, 1842.

⁹² Chase, Malcolm, “Resolve in Defiance of Fool”, *Conflict and Difference in Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 2010, 133.

Ostensibly, women activists accepted the patronizing stance of their male counterparts.”⁹³ He indeed shows that this supportive role was only most Chartist men’s vision but was not true. However, most women did not call into question this discredit according to him.

The *Northern Star* then provides and matches the vision provided by historians such as Malcolm Chase and Jutta Schwarzkopf on the role of women in the Chartist movement. The *Northern Star* shows further evidence that women had a keen sense of their duty to take part in the Chartist struggle as active citizens and in fights against parliamentary laws that affected their own rights. Moreover, the *Northern Star* also shows that although women were actively participating in the Chartist movement, their participation was seen as a supportive action. Nevertheless, their participation against the New Poor law bill, which was part of the Chartist platform, but also their participation in the broader movement shows that they were not only supportive but as active as men.

The Six Points of the Charter were meant to integrate the working class into the political sphere mostly thanks to manhood suffrage but also with the possible representation of the working class in Parliament. The Six Points of the Charter were firstly articulated in the 1810s and the mass platform movement with long-standing demands such as universal suffrage for men. Moreover, it can also be stated that the Six Points were drafted after the disappointment of the 1832 Reform Act which was the end of a hope for the working class to see the right to vote extended to them. Because of the Reform Act, the right to vote was mostly extended to the richest part of the middle class, and women were still refused the right to vote.

The *Northern Star* then provides other evidence of women’s participation not for their own rights as in their fight against the New Poor law, but evidence of their participation in the Chartist movement being mostly a male movement within which their role was seen by Chartist men to support their actions. Moreover, although women claimed their support for their male counterparts, there are only very rare addresses or reports from men supporting women. Nevertheless, we notice that they were participating in commune action for the People’s Charter. Malcolm Chase indeed explains in a chapter dedicated to the life of Elizabeth Neesom in *Chartism: A New History* that Elizabeth and her husband Charles were actively participating in the Chartist cause, and were

⁹³ Chase, Malcolm, *Chartism: A New History*, Manchester University Press, 2007, 43.

imprisoned together because they were charged with sedition and conspiracy but that they also participated in the movement in different manners. For example, Elizabeth Neesom “ran newsagent and a school” whereas her husband “spoke in meetings across London and was away for weeks.” which shows that although men were seeing women’s participation as supportive, women were actually extensively participating in the Chartist movement, but also in their own ways and this shows that this role of support was only partially true.⁹⁴ The supportive participation of women was part of the broader Chartist movement as they fought for the Six Points in which they were not included. But their participation in the Chartist platform could also be personal as they did against the New Poor law, and they also found manners to make the movement move forward such as Elizabeth Neesom who taught in schools.

Thus, it needs to be understood that this division did not mean that women were excluded from participating in the Chartist movement and that they could not participate in the movement alongside men. In fact, the movement was a male movement as women were not integrated into the People’s Charter and their claims were sometimes discredited and disregarded by some of their male counterparts. The reason they supported men in these fights is mainly because the reforms implied by the People’s Charter would have a direct impact on their daily lives as the household was the main unit of the time and therefore the whole family would see their rights extended from men.

Then, women’s fight against the New Poor law can be recognized as a Chartist fight as they participated on the Chartist platform. Historians such as David Ashforth recognized that the fight against the New Poor law became a Chartist fight, but it also became more a Chartist women’s fight as they were targeted by this bill in many different ways, such as by the bastardy clause. The *Northern Star* shows that the few references to this fight given by historians might be supplemented as they were active participants. This active participation can then be linked to their participation in the broad Chartist movement as men were mostly considering women as supporting them. They were indeed supporting men as they were militating for the Six Points, but this role of support must be contrasted as they did not have a secondary role. They actually participated in different manners than being supporters of the Six Points. This participation can be

⁹⁴ Chase, Malcolm, *Chartism: A New History*, Manchester University Press, 2007, 187.

seen in their struggle against the New Poor law on the one hand but can also be seen in their participation in the Chartist movement as teachers in schools and associations, or when they petitioned themselves to claim new political and social rights on the other hand.

Furthermore, it is also important to note that although “women activists accepted the patronizing stance of their male counterparts” as acknowledged by Malcolm Chase, many women fought for their inclusion in the Charter and for the rights of women and their enfranchisement in society.⁹⁵ Women were active in defending their own rights and saw themselves as legitimate actors in the political sphere. These fights may be considered as proto-feminist echoes as they fought for their right to vote which was innovative in the early 19th century.

⁹⁵ Chase, Malcolm, *Chartism: A New History*, Manchester University Press, 2007, 43.

Chapter 3 – The Advancement of women’s rights by Chartist Women

A. Enfranchisement of women from nineteenth century patriarchal conventions

As mentioned above, women participated in the Chartist movement in two manners, either as support within a male movement, or for women’s rights, militating against grievances that affected them directly. First, although women were confined to their role in the family, they used that role in a political fashion. This aspect gives evidence of a first political experience that shows a tendency of woman enfranchisement from the Victorian patriarchal conventions which considered that it was not women’s role to participate in politics. Ellen Dubois in her article entitled “The Radicalism of the Woman Suffrage Movement: Notes toward the Reconstruction of Nineteenth-Century Feminism” published in 1975, explains that “the family [was] a central institution in women’s oppression”.⁹⁶ Therefore, their political enfranchisement needs to be considered in accordance with the role they had in the Chartist movement. Indeed, as it was explained by Malcolm Chase in his article “Resolved in Defiance of Fool”, the role of Chartist women in Chartist families was central as “Female Chartists emphasized their role as educators to reinforce their own claims to participate in the political arena”.⁹⁷ In this perspective, we understand that women’s role in the family was socially assigned and did not allow them to enfranchise themselves politically because they were too absorbed by this role. Nonetheless, Malcolm Chase shows that, although it was oppressing them as it was stated by Ellen Dubois, they used this role in the family as a political tool to participate in the political sphere by educating their children as Chartists. This enfranchisement could be seen in the *Northern Star*, in which Chartist women called to participate in the Chartist movement as mothers. From this point of view, we understand why numerous occurrences of words referring to their families are present such as in the article “Address of the Bristol Female Patriotic Association to their Sisters of the West of England and South Wales” published on August 3rd, 1839, in which the association states: “Here is thο right acknowledged: interest and duty call upon us to exert that right by stimulating, by all means in our

⁹⁶ Dubois, Ellen, “The Radicalism of the Woman Suffrage Movement: Notes toward the Reconstruction of Nineteenth-Century Feminism”, *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 3, No. ½, 1975, 63.

⁹⁷ Chase, Malcolm, “Resolve in Defiance of Fool”, *Conflict and Difference in Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 2010, 137.

power, our husbands, fathers, brothers, and children, in their endeavour to obtain the People's Charter" after having called for woman enfranchisement by stating: "to aid in our own enfranchisement from a state a of worse than Egyptian bondage".⁹⁸ The notion of "enfranchisement" might be surprising as this article was published in 1839 which is the early period of Chartism. Nevertheless, this notion of enfranchisement was used in different ways. In this context, we might wonder whether this enfranchisement is political or social, and whether "our own" means women's enfranchisement or Chartists' enfranchisement. This article helps to understand that women's enfranchisement was at stake in this context. Indeed, if we consider that call when they mention their "husbands, fathers, brothers and children" and their will to "free them from present political, physical, and mental bondage", we are led to understand that not only they were militating to enfranchise form Victorian norms, but also for the political enfranchisement of their male counterparts which would result in the approval of the People's Charter.⁹⁹ Therefore, it also can be considered that these women played on the ambiguity surrounding this notion. In fact, although many women participated politically in the fight for the Charter, we noticed from articles, especially in their fight against the New Poor law, that many of these reforms impacted them directly and not many men were concerned by the Bastardy Clause, for instance. This article is then proof of an early mention of women's enfranchisement as use this term to emphasize that they want to enfranchise from a state of political servitude. Moreover, we notice that the notion of slavery with the reference to "Egyptian bondage" is directly linked to the notion of enfranchisement in this article. Egyptians were known for having slaves from the 7th century to the 20th, and Chartist women in the *Northern Star* articles often compare their political marginalisation to slavery.

Indeed, the notion of slavery is repetitive and seems to be a common feature characterising women's will to enfranchise. For instance, in the *Northern Star*, in an address published on February 19th, 1842, given by Sarah Leatherbarrow, she states:

"Then, sisters, you can do all these, if you will but arouse yourselves from your lethargy, and shake off the chains of slavery, and imitate the Spartan mothers of old; then arouse yourselves, and sign

⁹⁸ *The Northern Star*, "Address of the Bristol Female Patriotic Association to their Sisters of the West of England and South Wales", August 3rd, 1839.

⁹⁹ *The Northern Star*, "Address of the Bristol Female Patriotic Association to their Sisters of the West of England and South Wales", August 3rd, 1839..

the National Petition, and every one of you join the National Charter Association of Great Britain. [...] Then, sisters, you can do all these, if you will but arouse yourselves from your lethargy, and shake off the chains of slavery.”¹⁰⁰

On the one hand, Sarah Leatherbarrow calls Chartist women to “imitate the Spartan mothers” which is representative of their will to be free. Indeed, Spartan women, as explained by Anton Powell in his article “Sparta: A Modern Woman Imagines” were “exerting influence on their husbands”, “were trained to talk in public”, “were armed”, “were trained to carry weapons”, “could drive or ride out to survey their property”, and then had many social and political powers and were seen as free women.¹⁰¹ On the other hand, this notion of freedom is then put in opposition with the notion of slavery when she states: “arouse yourselves from your lethargy and shake off the chains of slavery” which is a problematic aspect of Chartism regarding slavery. Indeed, in 1838, James Bronterre O’Brien, an Irish Chartist Leader defined “white slavery”. Tom Scriven, in his article entitled “Slavery and Abolition in Chartist Thought and Culture, 1838 – 1850”, discusses this definition and explains that:

“O’Brien’s definition of “white slavery” formed the abstract structure of a virulent anti-slave sentiment after strikes in the West Indies and agitation in Britain ended the apprenticeship system in August 1838, and slaves were ostensibly freed into wage labour with stronger legal protections and shorter working days than in Britain.”¹⁰²

Chartists then considered themselves as “white slaves” as in the English tradition men and women were free and should not submit to any kind of submission. Nevertheless, this was problematic as black slaves could not express themselves on their oppressions. But the use of the terms “white slavery” also led Chartists to “routinely interrupt abolitionist meetings in 1838 and again in 1840 to plead the case of the “white slaves”.”¹⁰³ We notice that more than calls against oppression, Chartists had an anti-abolitionist tendency and compared their oppression to slavery. In fact, many aspects of the oppression that Chartists faced could be compared to slavery, especially when we think about the workhouses and their harshness. Tom Scriven also notes that the “British society had become more racist, as Frederick Douglass noted during his second visit in 1859”. “White

¹⁰⁰ *The Northern Star*, “To the Female Chartist of Great Britain”, February 19th, 1842.

¹⁰¹ Powell, Anton, “Sparta: A Modern Woman Imagines”, *The Classical Review*, Vol.54, No.2, 2004, 466.

¹⁰² Scriven, Tom, “Slavery and Abolition in Chartist Thought and Culture, 1838-1850”, Cambridge University Press, December 14th, 2021, 6.

¹⁰³ Scriven, Tom, “Slavery and Abolition in Chartist Thought and Culture, 1838-1850”, Cambridge University Press, December 14th, 2021, 6.

supremacy” was anchored in British society because of its colonial and slave system past, and we notice that the “white slavery” amalgam was also born from ignorance of the living conditions of slaves. Indeed, Tom Scriven explains that:

“Douglass’s entry into the Chartist literary canon was important since the *Narrative* directly countered misconceptions at the “white slavery” comparison. Documenting the realities of physical brutality, sexual exploitation, and familial separation, Douglass also explained how holidays and food allowances were forms of social control and tortures.”¹⁰⁴

Frederick Douglass was an American runaway slave, before becoming an intellectual and abolitionist and writing his memoir *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* which was one of the most influential works in the abolitionist movement at the time. His memoir demonstrates the misguided use of “white slavery” which was problematic as black slaves were living a different experience.

The numerous uses of notions linked to slavery by Chartists in the *Northern Star* need to be understood in this context. Whereas these terms were used in a will of enfranchisement, and especially for women when they used these terms, the comparison was dubious. Nonetheless, it still reveals that Chartists had grievances that affected them deeply, especially women. The address given by Sarah Leatherbarrow is revealing that women were not only adopting political independence and freeing themselves to take part actively on the public stage to fight against the New Poor law but also for the Charter and help their families in the common working-class fight. The political enfranchisement of Chartist women was then more radical than admitted by historians as they used different levels of political strategies that were first seen by men.

Indeed, it is also important to understand that their gathering in associations and sending addresses or being published in the *Northern Star* were early politicizing experiences for women, especially for working-class women. It is possible to recall the first women’s radical societies that were created before the Peterloo Massacre of 1819 as well as the fight for slave abolition and the 1833 petition drafted by women although they were mainly from the middle class. In these women’s radical societies, women managed to use a platform to gain experience in voting and taking part in small-scale political activism. Therefore, the nineteenth century marks news

¹⁰⁴ Scriven, Tom, “Slavery and Abolition in Chartist Thought and Culture, 1838-1850”, Cambridge University Press, December 14th, 2021, 6..

attempts by women to enter the political sphere and we also notice from their addresses and messages the political and discursive strategies that characterized their fight for new political rights as the right to vote, or their inclusion in the People's Charter for some. This enfranchisement was not only political as they developed their own strategies and way to participate politically, but also against patriarchy as they participated politically on their own and for their own grievances, especially when we consider their fight against the New Poor law, for instance.

The *Northern Star* is revealing of this aspect as women gathered in female associations in which they participated actively in politics and their addresses and speeches were published. The address from August 3rd 1839, from the Bristol Female Patriotic Association gives evidence of their participation and states: "We have been told that the science of politics belongs not to woman-that her province is her home; but have we not been compelled to leave that home, and toil within the walls of a manufactory."¹⁰⁵ It was also stated in January 20th, 1838, by men who reported a meeting in the town of Colne and explained that: "The women also declared their determination to petition themselves, "before they'll be parted from their children or their lads."¹⁰⁶ We notice that not only women were willing to participate in politics to support the Charter but it was also necessary as most of these laws were targeting them and as they were excluded from the Charter, and then men would not fight for them. It was the case for instance considering the New Poor law and especially the Bastardy clause that came with it. The *Northern Star* reveals that women participated actively against this bill as previously mentioned. Nevertheless, very few Chartist men defended the cause of women's inclusion in the political sphere and in the Chartist movement. Women were not integrated into the six points of the People's Charter although they demanded it and we notice that although women were not mentioned in the People's Charter, they still managed to find ways to claim new rights and denounce the society they lived in. In fact, the address from August 3rd, 1839, in which it is mentioned that "the science of politics belongs not to woman" reveals the patriarchal mood of the time, especially when this woman considers "her home" as a "province", referring to women's role in their family, as mothers and educators. This aspect first shows that many women were conscious of their role in society and accepted it as in the address previously mentioned. Most of these women then fought as Chartists mainly for the rights of their male counterparts.

¹⁰⁵ *The Northern Star*, "Address of the Bristol Female Patriotic Association to their sisters of the West England and South Wales", August 3rd, 1839.

¹⁰⁶ *The Northern Star*, "Lancashire News", January 20th, 1838.

Nevertheless, this also shows the nineteenth-century patriarchal society in which these working-class women lived. Moreover, many women were also willing to free themselves from patriarchy and for women's cause, as it was shown in previous addresses, for their inclusion in the People's Charter or against grievances that affected them directly.

The *Northern Star* then highlights that the Chartist period was an early period in the battles for female political freedom. Nonetheless, two aspects of this fight need to be detailed as women campaigned to gain more political rights and free themselves from the stranglehold of male domination. The political participation of women was triggered by their own will. Indeed, as men did not agree to include them in the Charter, we notice that women participated politically by themselves and shows an early politicizing experience in society. This politicizing experience in the context of Chartism and their will to be included in the People's Charter led these women to campaign. Furthermore, within these political campaigns, the *Northern Star* also gives us evidence that women actively campaigned for their own rights and freedom, and this included the right to vote.

B. The struggle for female suffrage

Indeed, Chartist women's radicalism also needs to be linked to the fight for political freedom. From the start of Chartism, some women campaigned to be integrated into the People's Charter petition, but it was refused by men as they thought it would discredit the movement. The first point of the Charter is the demand for the right to vote for every man. Chartist women nevertheless kept militating to obtain this right and the *Northern Star* provides evidence of their fight. For instance, in the address from May 11th, 1839, the London Female Democratic Associations explained that:

"We the Members of the London Female Democratic Association, consider it our duty to co-operate with our patriotic sisters in the country, to obtain Universal Suffrage in the shortest possible time, to annihilate the cruel, unjust, and atrocious New Poor Law, miscall ed Amendment (!) Bill-to

support with every means in our power any patriot engaged in the great struggle for freedom who may need our assistance.”¹⁰⁷

From this call, we understand that these women wanted to obtain “Universal Suffrage” to obtain political power to repeal the New Poor law. We can wonder if this call was meant to support Chartist men’s demand to obtain manhood suffrage, or whether these women were claiming universal suffrage for both men and women. This sentence is nevertheless unclear as they did not specify whether their demand was for men, women, or both. This ambiguity is reminiscent of the previous mentions of enfranchisement which shows that it might be possible to think that these ambiguities were a political strategy to enforce their claims. We notice that this demand was in the context of the fight against the New Poor law bill. In this perspective, the demand for female suffrage would be coherent as these women were certainly asking for enough political power to repeal this law thanks to democracy. Moreover, this address does not mention men in this part which is focused on women, and this might show this play on ambiguity. Nevertheless, since addresses and statements in the *Northern Star* also shows that they wanted to assist and support manhood suffrage as well as repealing the New Poor law which affected them particularly, both claims are possible to consider. For instance, Jutta Schwarzkopf explains that:

“O’Connor believed it to be sufficient for wives to bring their influence to bear on their husbands over the issue of which candidate should receive his vote. Moreover, he argued, female suffrage would enfranchise women of bad character as well as the female staff at the command of masters, who would consequently support tyranny, prostitution and oppression, thus impeding the improvement that Chartists fought for.”¹⁰⁸

Most Chartists, like Feargus O’Connor, believed that giving the right to vote to women would lead to family dissension and that husbands and wives could discuss the man’s vote and that it would be sufficient. This statement shows another time that women were considered second-rank citizens because men like Feargus O’Connor thought that it would be enough to give women political power through their husbands. The problem then remains that many Chartist men were not involved in women’s fights such as against the New Poor law. Thus, because women’s fights were not on the first plan, they needed this political power to be heard. Nevertheless, we previously mentioned that women were not supported in some political fights as against the New Poor law in

¹⁰⁷ *The Northern Star*, “The London Female Democratic Association to the Women of England and Particularly the Women of the Metropolis”, May 11th, 1839.

¹⁰⁸ Schwarzkopf, Jutta, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, Macmillan Academic and Professional, 1991, 60.

which they showed the need for political power to fight against such bills. In this perspective, we notice that Feargus O'Connor's belief of women to "bring their influence to bear on their husbands" would not be enough as many men were not supporting women's fights. Women then needed as much political power as men to fight because men would not fight with them. Women gathered in associations and undertook political strategies and petitions, but almost no male political power or political support was notable in their fight against the New Poor law, for instance. In fact, in the article entitled "Female Public Meeting" published on February 17th, 1838, against the New Poor law, it was stated that: "Mrs Susanna Farnley having been voted to the chair, opened the business meeting, by exhorting the females to present to take their affairs into their own hands (...) at once to assert the dignity and equality of the sex."¹⁰⁹ Moreover, she adds that "it was a woman's duty to be there; for women had more to fear from this bill than men", and that "women have still more to do with this cruel measure than men".¹¹⁰ This article shows a dichotomy between men and women's grievances and the necessity for women to gather against this common cause as men were not involved. Some points in this quote are necessary to mention such as the reference to "the dignity and equality of the sex". This mention can be linked both to their desire for the greatest freedom as well as the right to vote. This early mention of the equality of sex must nevertheless not be understood as the fight for equality of present times and had no such impact but it still reveals their will to gain more political rights and freedom. Their will to gain political rights and freedom is clearly depicted through their activities in associations and in this particular article in which it is mentioned that Mrs. Susanna Farnley was "voted to the chair" which shows that Chartism allowed women to experiment democracy and roles of responsibility. This article goes contrary to what Feargus O'Connor argued when he explained that "female suffrage would enfranchise women of bad character" as most women whose most declarations addresses were published in the *Northern Star* sought female suffrage to gain enough political power to fight their grievances. This aspect is noticeable in the context of the fight against the New Poor law which legitimized women's claims.

On the other side, other Chartist leaders were in favour of granting women the right to vote such as Reginald John Richardson and William Lovett.¹¹¹ Leaders' support gave legitimacy to

¹⁰⁹ *The Northern Star*, "Female Public Meeting", February 17th, 1838.

¹¹⁰ *The Northern Star*, "Female Public Meeting", February 17th, 1838.

¹¹¹ Jones, David, "Women and Chartism", *History*, Vol.68, No. 222, 1983, 1-21.

female suffrage but because an overwhelming majority was against female suffrage for various reasons, they were not included in the Charter.

Furthermore, following new experiences in the political sphere through their participation in associations and Chartism, women fought for their integration into the People's Charter in a clear manner which is noticeable in the *Northern Star*. This was the case, for instance, in the article published on February 8th, 1851, the article "Meeting at Sheffield – The Rights of Women" in which it was explained that Chartist women of Sheffield met "for the purpose of reading the Queen's speech, and also to adopt a petition to parliament for the enfranchisement of adult females."¹¹² This article can be related to an article from February 22nd, 1851, describing another meeting in Sheffield, in which Chartist women explained: "we have come to the conclusion, that females might, with the strictest propriety, be included in the programme of the People's Charter. [...] Our especial object will be the entire enfranchisement of our sex."¹¹³ From this article we understand that female suffrage is inextricably linked to the notion of enfranchisement but their demand to integrate into the People's Charter is a specific point of political freedom. Some Chartist women were indeed attached to the fight for women's political freedom in the patriarchal society they lived in.

In fact, women's political involvement can be related to the fact that these working-class women had an active role in wage-earning in the industrial economy. In this respect, some working-class Chartist women did not only want political power but political representation as well, which can be legitimised as they had an active role in society as workers. David Jones, in "Women and Chartism", quotes R.J. Richardson in his book entitled *Rights of Women* published in 1840 and explains that: "To encourage this political role, Chartist leaders, their press and associations called upon workmen 'to make them (women) equal companions in knowledge and happiness, and not, as at present, the mere domestic drudges, and ignorant slaves of our passions'."¹¹⁴ This quote shows that some men nevertheless tried to offer them support for their role in society. It was the case for instance of William Lovett that was in favour of women's inclusion in the People's Charter and then did not consider them as second-rank citizens.

¹¹² *The Northern Star*, "Meeting at Sheffield – The Rights of Women", February 8th, 1851.

¹¹³ *The Northern Star*, "The Rights of Women, Sheffield – To the Women of England", February 22nd, 1851.

¹¹⁴ Richardson, R.J., *The Rights of Women* (1840), quoted in full in D. Thompson *The Early Chartists* (London, 115-27) in Jones, David, "Women and Chartism", *History*, Vol.68, No. 222, 1983, 39.

Nevertheless, Jutta Schwarzkopf explains that, on the contrary, “Chartists viewed the suffrage as a natural right belonging to men by virtue of their human capacity. By denying women the vote, Chartists turned them not only into second-class citizens, but they also even reduced them to the status of second-class human beings.”¹¹⁵ Despite the fact that some Chartist men and leaders were in favour of supporting the political and societal roles of women, the patriarchal mood was still present and seemed inextricable. Thus, this overview allows historians to understand why some Chartist women fought for their political and social enfranchisement and their integration in the People’s Charter as they were actively involved in the mass platform and were affected directly by numerous laws such as the New Poor law.

On the other hand, we notice that many women did not only fight for womanhood suffrage but male suffrage as well. Indeed, as we discussed before, women were excluded from the People’s Charter but were not excluded from the Chartist movement. Thus, many women participated in the movement politically alongside their male counterparts and took on the role of mothers in families. While it shows the patriarchal mood of the time, it nevertheless shows that women managed to experience early political events and, as we discussed, undertook political strategies by themselves for women’s rights only, as well as for the working-class movement as a whole. These early political events seem to be inscribed in the heritage of nowadays feminism and in the struggle for women’s rights and the equality of sex. Then, it might be interesting to study these Chartist women’s fights as proto-feminist fights in that respect.

In this regard, this part of this dissertation seeks to advance the claim that the *Northern Star* provides evidence of a woman’s radicalism that is more radical than traditionally admitted by historians. Indeed, most historians do not inscribe Chartist women’s political role in the heritage of feminism nor consider their early emancipated political participation, especially against the New Poor law and for womanhood suffrage.

C. Proto-feminist echoes

¹¹⁵ Schwarzkopf, Jutta, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, Macmillan Academic and Professional, 1991, 62.

Women's involvement in Chartism could be tentatively situated in a proto-feminist tradition for women's rights as it could be considered as part of the heritage in the fight for female suffrage. Moreover, these political events need to be inscribed in the feminist heritage of the fight for women's rights. The term "feminism" needs to be distinctly defined as it would be anachronistic to use in periods before 1895. As Barbara Taylor explains in *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* published in 1983:

"The term "feminism", it should be noted, was a late nineteenth-century creation. (According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "feminism" in the sense of the "advocacy of the claims and rights of women" was not employed in English before 1895). So, its use in this book is an anachronism, justifiable on the ground that for at least a century prior to the entry of the actual word into popular political discourse there existed the ideology which it described – a distinct and identifiable body of ideas and aspirations commonly known as "the rights of women", the "condition of women" question, the "emancipation of women", and so on."¹¹⁶

In this respect, the term "feminist" is ambiguous as Chartist women were militating for "the rights of women" and the "emancipation of women" as they wanted to be integrated into the People's Charter and needed political power to enfranchise from the patriarchal society of Victorian times. Nevertheless, their struggle can be considered "feminist" as their fights constitute a part of the History of feminism and its heritage. Nevertheless, we notice most historians' research do not render the impact of Chartist women's actions in the History of feminism as they do not use this term to place women's fights in the heritage of feminism but in a larger scale that does not precise Chartist women's impact. For instance, Jutta Schwarzkopf explains that:

"Within Chartism, O'Connor, as the national leader, received great deal of female praise. In his reply to an address by Sunderland FCA, he put forward his view of women's entirely secondary role within Chartism. He began by stating his pleasure in perceiving the identity of feelings that prevailed between men and women in their struggle for political rights. Although, he maintained, women were unable to help men in the battlefield, they could give them courage. He confirmed his wish to keep the women's respect and reiterated that he was more please by a female address than by a male one.

¹¹⁶ Taylor, Barbara, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century*, Virago Press, 1983, 10.

This speech was another instance of O'Connor's anti-feminist views, which have already been noted (in Chapter 2) with regard to female suffrage. Underlying his explicit high appreciation of female Chartist activities was his belief in women's inherent political backwardness."¹¹⁷

O'Connor was in fact against the rights of women as he was against female suffrage as he thought women should be confined to the domestic sphere and were not capable of dealing with political matters. Moreover, this aspect is revealing of the patriarchal society of the time as these leaders, such as O'Connor, were "praised". In this regard, Jutta Schwarzkopf in *Women in the Chartist Movement* does not inscribe the struggle for "rights of woman", womanhood suffrage or woman enfranchisement in the context of a proto-feminist movement inscribed in the History of feminism according to this particular definition of "feminism".

Furthermore, although Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication for the Rights of Woman* certainly did not reach working-class women, we notice that it still shows a visionary aspect. Indeed, Mary Wollstonecraft's book tackles woman's education, and that both men and women should receive the same education or women would be slaves by ignorance. The subject of education was in fact a Chartist subject for women. Many Chartist women's associations started to give classes in associations' rooms. According to Jutta Schwarzkopf: "The Radical Association of Elland, for instance, decided to start classes in their associations' room. Women were to be taught free".¹¹⁸ Women's education was a subject of debate as the working class had almost no access to education and most people were illiterate. The *Northern Star*, for instance, was read to people during worker's meetings by a single literate man to hundreds. In an article entitled "Education, Literacy and Reading Public" written by Amy J. Lloyd in 2007, the author explains that: "In 1800 around 40 percent of males and 60 percent of females in England and Wales were illiterate".¹¹⁹ Access to literacy and education was even more limited for women, and the few women that had access to education were taught not to read too much as they would appear too masculine because of Victorian social conventions, they were then mainly taught about art. Indeed, the patriarchal oppression over women's education was depicted by Mary Wollstonecraft in her treatise. Jutta Schwarzkopf emphasised that:

¹¹⁷ Schwarzkopf, Jutta, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, Macmillan Academic and Professional, 1991, 221.

¹¹⁸ SCHWARZKOPF, Jutta, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, Macmillan Academic and Professional, 1991, 195.

¹¹⁹ LLOYD, Amy J., "Education Literacy and Reading Public", *British Library Newspaper*, Detroit: Gale, 2007, 1.

“[Mary Wollstonecraft] insisted on their deficiency being the result of environmental impact mediated by education. Deprived of the exercise of their reason - which she regarded as the quintessential feature of humanity - women had become sexual beings, their character and behaviour moulded according to male notions of female propriety. Having been made to conform to principles exclusive to their sex, women had effectively become relegated to a position outside the realm of human beings.”¹²⁰

We see that in the struggle for more social freedom, the necessity of education was also a stake as it also defined women’s positions in society. Educated men had then more resources and legitimacy to place women at a lower rank in society because they were more educated. As mentioned by Jutta Schwarzkopf, because women were “deprived the exercise of reason”, the patriarchal order in society felt only natural, for both men and women. This is in this perspective that we notice the birth of a proto-feminist movement as we notice the first approach to women’s enfranchisement for the social and political norms of the Victorian era.

Indeed, from 1815, at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the mass platform development led to the development of the working class and new radical movements. Women took an active role in the mass platform movement. Still, their work was not valued as much as men’s as they were paid less and had even fewer political rights and legitimacy. By 1819, Female Radical Reform Societies were formed and as explained by Ruth Mather in her article ““Much Wanted a Reform among Females!”: The Female Reformers of Peterloo” published in 2019: “Women had been involved in bitter cotton industry strikes and food riots, and already attended and voted on motions at radical meetings”.¹²¹ Then, we understand that those female radical movements did not start with Chartism but even before, and these Female Radical Reform Societies are evidence of a new form of working-class women’s radicalism on new issues that appeared with their participation in the mass platform movement. Among these demonstrations, riots in Saint Peter’s Field in Manchester on August 16th, 1819, were particularly known and nicknamed the Peterloo Massacre as soldiers open fire on the rioting crowd. In that crowd were many radical women that participated actively to demand parliamentary representation for the working class. In his article entitled “The Women at Peterloo: The Impact of Female Reform on the Manchester Meeting of 16 August

¹²⁰ Schwarzkopf, Jutta, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, Macmillan Academic and Professional LTD, 63

¹²¹ ““Much Wanted a Reform among Females!”: The Female Reformers at Peterloo”, Ruth Matter, 2019, <https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/>.

1819”, published in 2014, M.L. Bush describes Richard Carlile’s reaction to women’s participation in the Peterloo demonstration:

“the freethinking republican Richard Carlile emphasized the prominence of women at the meeting, both in his reporting of the vent and in a print depicting the massacre. The latter was dedicated to “the Female Reformers of Manchester and the adjacent towns” (...). For the *Manchester Comet*, the activity of women at the meeting had been a disturbing horror that fully justified the military action taken; for Carlile, it was the revelation of a new source of political power that converted him to feminism.”¹²²

The early 19th century then showed progress in women’s radicalism as many of them started to participate politically in societies and demonstrations, among men. As most men, and many women, were not in favour of women’s participation and political inclusion, many others like Richard Carlile saw progress in these demonstrations. This support certainly allowed women to gain more political and become more radical. These radical demonstrations were then followed later by Chartism in 1838 thanks to which they managed to participate in the political sphere more openly.

Women’s political participation was also encouraged thanks to the support from some Chartist men on the “rights of woman” questions as the *Northern Star* reports. For instance, in a letter written by John Walkins on July 28th, 1848, sent to the *Star*, he wrote: “I am also happy to inform you that a Female Chartist Association is being formed in London, so that if the men won’t lead, the women will, and then see if the men won’t follow.”¹²³ Although the social norms in Victorian society were to place women as second-rank citizens (as explained by Jutta Schwarzkopf mentioned above), some men such as John Watkins, a Chartist man, placed women on equal terms and even above men. We can then understand why most historians such as M.L. Bush, Jutta Schwarzkopf and David Jones categorize these men and women as “feminists” as we notice emerging progress on the question of the “rights of woman”. The *Northern Star* proves this aspect many times as women Chartists were actively participating in the political sphere. In an article from September 8th, 1838, entitled “To the Unrepresented People of Great Britain and Ireland”, James Bronterre O’Brien, a Chartist leader was published saying:

¹²² Bush, M.L., “The Woman at Peterloo: The Impact of Female Reform on the Manchester Meeting of 16 August 1819”, *History*, Vol.89, No.294, 2004, 210.

¹²³ *The Northern Star*, “Mr. Richardson and his Appeal to the Public Against the Chartists of South Lancashire”, July 31st, 1841, 5.

“Let the women of the manufacturing districts only make common cause with the men, as they are now doing in Birmingham, and I will venture to say that within twelve months they will have done more for Universal Suffrage than the men have done for the last twenty years. (...) The very *eyes* of the women would decide the victory without a blow on either side.”¹²⁴

This article gives evidence of Chartist men supporting and recognizing women’s participation in the movement. This aspect is nevertheless not much studied by historians although these men participated in the proto-feminist fights for the rights of women. In fact, it became a general idea that men were against women’s political inclusion while many were in favour. The *Northern Star* gives evidence that there were men supporting women’s political inclusion and which shows that women’s political participation constituted first experiences of democracy in the heritage of feminism.

¹²⁴ *The Northern Star*, “To the Unrepresented People of Great Britain and Ireland”, September 8th, 1838.

Conclusion

The *Northern Star* then provides evidence of women's participation in the Chartist movement. Nevertheless, their participation can be discussed because the Chartist movement was considered a male movement. Women's participation could then be separated into two movements. Women were in fact seen as militating for the People's Charter alongside men, but they were also participating on their own against grievances that affected them particularly. A study of the *Northern Star* helped to reveal that their participation, although important, was also criticized. A first aspect of this criticism can be seen in their place within the newspaper. Some of their addresses can be found in dubious places such as next to advertisements, for instance. Moreover, many Chartist men stated that it was not a woman's place to participate in politics and were against their participation, and their inclusion in the People's Charter. From this aspect, Victoria Clarke stated in *Reading and Writing the Northern Star, 1837-47* that most women were in fact publishing under pseudonyms to avoid these criticisms and censorship.¹²⁵ A study of the *Northern Star* then helped to understand the struggle women faced to participate in the Chartist movement. This struggle can be seen through the *Northern Star* as a microcosm of the movement overall. The *Northern Star* shows that most men were against women's inclusion in the People's Charter because of the gender division that operated during the Victorian era. It was indeed considered to be a man's duty to participate in politics. Nevertheless, we noticed an early reversal in this tendency as they were also men that saw women's participation as necessary in the Chartist movement, but without agreeing to include them in the People's Charter. In fact, Chartist men's main argument was that integrating women into the People's Charter would delay working-class men's political inclusion. This study then shows a parallel between Chartist women's place in the *Northern Star* and their place within the Chartist movement.

Nonetheless, this discredit did not prevent women from participating in the Chartist movement as the *Northern Star* reports their participation in associations through multiple addresses and reports of meetings. This aspect shows that women participated in the movement as much as men and were militating for the People's Charter alongside men. In this perspective, it is then important to consider that although women were considered second-rank citizens as they were

¹²⁵ Clarke, Victoria, *Reading and Writing the Northern Star, 1837-47*, University of Leeds, 2020, 77.

not supposed to participate politically, they nevertheless did in several manners. For instance, they participated in demonstrations with men, but they also participated as Chartists in the family sphere by keeping a “woman’s role”.

Moreover, more than participating alongside men, we also demonstrated in this study that Chartist women fought by themselves against grievances that affected them particularly. This can be principally represented by their fight against the New Poor law. Historians such as David Ashforth in his article “The Urban Poor Law” explained that the movement against the New Poor law was absorbed into Chartism.¹²⁶ In fact, as the New Poor law focused essentially on the working class, Chartists could not ignore the impact of this bill on their daily lives. Most of all, women felt directly targeted – because they were women – by this bill and especially the Bastardy Clause it contained. The *Northern Star* is revealing this aspect as women gathered and participated politically by themselves to petition for political rights to gain more political power to repeal the New Poor law. The *Northern Star* reports women’s struggles against the New Poor law and often compares their situation to that of black slaves showing the impact it had on their daily lives. Most historians that studied the Chartist movement as a male movement nevertheless failed to study women’s involvement against the New Poor law whereas their participation against the New Poor law was central in the movement as it affected deeply their daily lives and the daily lives of their families.

Many Chartist women were indeed mothers and the patriarchal and social conventions of the Victorian era required them to be mothers. We notice that their role of mothers adapted to the Chartist cause and with their fight against the New Poor law. Many poor women were separated from their children in workhouses and were deeply affected by the harshness of the Bastardy Clause. The *Northern Star* proves that Chartist women were involved in the family sphere and that the bill impacted their daily lives as many references to the family sphere could be found in their addresses. This involvement in their family can be considered as a way to participate in the movement that was their own as they were raising their children in a Chartist way as Malcolm Chase explained in “Resolved in Defiance of Fool”.

¹²⁶ ASHFORTH, David, “The Urban Poor Law”, *New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Derek Fraiser, 1976, 132.

This study of the *Northern Star* then helped to show that Chartist women participated against grievances that were their own, on the same level as men for a Chartist cause. They participated in that way against the New Poor law, for instance, but also in the Chartist movement more generally. Moreover, we notice by their participation in the movement through their families that they also managed to differ from Chartist men in their situations, as women.

These aspects were not studied by historians in depth. Chartist women's fight against the New Poor law is present in the *Northern Star* but rarely mentioned by historians in their studies. Then, it might be interesting to study in depth their implication in the fight against the New Poor law as it represents an early political experience that was mostly exclusively a woman's fight. The *Northern Star* provides evidence that this early political experience also led to early political demands from women for social rights and freedom. Indeed, we notice for instance that women in the *Northern Star* fought for the People's Charter as well as for universal suffrage to obtain enough political power for the repeal of the New Poor law. Although universal suffrage usually referred to universal suffrage for men at that time, we wondered whether women did not play on the ambiguity that surrounded this notion to implicitly ask for it. This aspect reveals that the political participation of Chartist women can be inscribed in the heritage of feminism as many Chartist women asked for their inclusion in the People's Charter, the right to vote as well as more social and political freedom.

Indeed, these demands for political inclusion need to be coupled with women's enfranchisement from the nineteenth-century social and patriarchal convention. We notice from the end of the Napoleonic Wars, with the active participation of women in the mass platform, that progress in their political and social freedom developed as well. Indeed, we notice from the *Northern Star* that women experienced political events in which they participated actively showing that they gained more political freedom. This development can be linked to the notion of "enfranchisement" that can be found in addresses given by women published in the *Northern Star*. Nevertheless, these mentions are ambiguous as they may both refer to the Chartists' or women's enfranchisement. This ambiguity is even more questionable as it is usually linked to reference to slavery that characterises the oppression both felt by Chartists and by women. This oppression was mainly political as both Chartists and women had no political power to fight against their grievances which led the Chartists to draft the People's Charter. Therefore, as women were

excluded from the People's Charter, we noticed in the *Northern Star* that there are early mentions of women demanding female suffrage. Women's demands for more political power and freedom can be linked to their fight against the New Poor law in particular. Indeed, with more political power, women declared that they would be able to repeal the law thanks to democracy. As most Chartist men were not in favour of women's inclusion and were not supporting them in their fight against these laws, women's demands were thus made in this direction so they could fight on their own. This was then explained by the oppression they felt as women, mothers and working-class people. This dissertation then tried to show that women had in fact more grievances than Chartists men to fight against and that their militancy led them to demand political power and freedom in the Chartist period although it was early and might be studied in depth to reveal the particular involvement of women in the working-class fights.

This early political involvement and these demands can then be considered proto-feminist echoes. Reports from the Chartist women associations in the *Northern Star* that were formed in the country revealed an early politicizing experience that was coupled with early and new political demands such as female suffrage, and women's integration into the People's Charter which means political representation and participation on an equal footing with men. Women's participation in the Chartist movement was often called "feminist" by historians and constitutes indeed a part of the heritage of feminism. From the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the development of the mass platform, we notice active participation of women and the development of radicalism in the political sphere. Chartist women's impact on the claim of women's rights was of huge importance while this aspect was neglected by most historians. Indeed, because the studies on Chartist women's movement against the New Poor law are almost absent, historians rarely studied most of their claims for political power and representation. In this study, the *Northern Star* provides resources that prove this aspect as women gave addresses to denounce the impact of the New Poor law on their lives and how they were willing to repeal them: by gaining enough political power such as obtaining female suffrage. Nevertheless, articles from the *Northern Star* in which women referred to universal suffrage can be discussed because they are prompting ambiguity considering that universal suffrage was related to universal male suffrage. Therefore, by considering that it was not specified by those women, as well as when the notion of "enfranchisement" could be found, we can thus consider that it was intentional when we consider later articles after 1848 that specify their will to be integrated to the People's Charter and to obtain female suffrage.

Finally, in this study of women's activism during the Chartist period, we noticed that women participated in the Chartist movement in several manners that were not usually studied traditionally by historians. For instance, there are only a few studies on women's fights against the New Poor law while they actively took part in this fight, which could be considered their own on several levels. This fight also shows that many women took part in early political experiences that shaped their political demands for more rights and freedom. Later feminist studies on Chartist women's activism revealed their fight against the New Poor law such as Jutta Schwarzkopf's "Women and Chartism". Nevertheless, these studies do not inscribe this fight in the history of feminism while we notice that these early political demands and participations could be considered a proto-feminist activism. A study of the *Northern Star* helped to reveal this aspect thanks to several articles that reported women's meetings as well as addresses in which women directly stated their will to obtain more political and social freedom. Indeed, these articles revealed ambiguities in specific demands for "universal suffrage" and "enfranchisement" but also explicit demands for the right to vote and the inclusion of women in the People's Charter. These demands were linked to their fight against the New Poor law for instance as they needed political and democratic power for these laws to be repealed. Then it is important to recognize that women did not only participate in the Chartist movement as a male movement but also in a larger movement in which they had personal implications. In fact, although they participated in a movement to repeal laws that affected them directly, many women participated in the broader Chartist movement alongside men and were fighting for universal male suffrage and the People's Charter. On this common ground, it is also important to acknowledge that many Chartist women were mothers raising their children as Chartists. From this perspective, it might in fact be interesting to study women's involvement as Chartist mothers and the education of their children as Chartists and how these children were involved in the Chartist movement. Malcolm Chase did study this aspect in his article "Resolved in Defiance of Fool" for instance. Nevertheless, his study is too focused on fathers' relationship with their sons but gives a first insight into children's participation in the Chartist movement.

Although the Chartist movement slowly declined after the 1850s, we notice that at the end of the nineteenth century, women kept on struggling for women's rights and especially female suffrage but still they used similar political strategies over time. This accordance in these different radical movements throughout the nineteenth century shows a continuity in the birth of what was

claimed to be “feminism” by historians, and at the end of the century. Indeed, in we take the example of female suffrage, which was only obtained in 1928 in the United Kingdom. Therefore, we can consider Chartist women’s movement as an early politicizing movement in the history of feminism.

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