THE POLITICS OF ENGAGEMENT:
RACIALIZED WOMEN BUILDING ALLIANCES ACROSS DIFFERENCES IN A WOMEN'S CENTRE

by

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ABSTRACT

The following thesis explores relationships between racialized women in their efforts to rebuild an existing women's centre in Vancouver, British Columbia. Eleven women, including myself, with differing histories and life experiences came together as a collective to create a women's centre committed to working on issues of anti-racism. State policies and practices instrumental in shaping women's lives and work sequentially affected group processes.

Emergent themes indicate that racialized women's efforts at group formation are influenced by socio-political constructions of 'race' and other markers of identity that are constituted through state policies and practices. Women's efforts to bridge divides through the use of terms such as 'marginalized women' conceal inequities and shifting power dynamics within the group. Developing a women's centre committed to ideals of anti-racism necessitates identifying commonalities and differences, negotiating inter-group relationships through ongoing dialogue, and pushing for state accountability and support.

Keywords:

Women--Canada, racism, racialized women, women's centres, alliance building

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Cam, Deliah, Kathy, Janice, Lourdes, Maria, Maya, Parvin, Rekha, Vanessa, and other women involved with rebuilding FWC. Your commitment to re-imagining feminist group process was the impetus for this work.

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CHAPTER 1   INTRODUCTION

Reconstructing the agenda of predominantly white women's centres to

acknowledge and work on issues of racism has proven to be an arduous task.

Immigrant women, refugee women, women of colour, and Aboriginal women[1] in

Canada have laboured very strongly to bring issues of racism to light in the

feminist movement and women's centres (Bannerji, 1993; Carty, 1999; WRC,

1995; Dua & Robertson, 1999). These women have illustrated the shortcomings

of a western feminist discourse that has historically marginalized their interests

and needs. Their calls for accountability pushed white women to eventually

conduct internal organizational reviews and audits in the early 1990s around

issues of race and racism. Women's centres implemented employment equity

policies that led to hiring practices favouring women marginalized by race and

other issues.[2] Women's centres in BC and across Canada have documented

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[1] I use the terms white women, immigrant women, refugee women, women of colour, Aboriginal and First Nations women, and racialized women as that is the language used by both theorists and the women in the research project. I am not wholly comfortable with these terms and apply them cautiously, noting that such categorizations frequently fix women into falsely perceived homogenous groups.

[2] The Employment Equity Act was designed to remove barriers and provide equal opportunities for employment by federally regulated employers to four groups: women, Aboriginal people, people with disabilities and visible minorities (Abella, 1984). Additionally, women of colour activists articulated their interests and demanded change in women's centres. This led women's centres to implement employment equity policies. However, the hiring of women of colour and Aboriginal women without an internal review of organizational processes has led to allegations of tokenism.

their adoption of such policies and the resulting changes that ensued.[3] It appears, however, that few women's centres published their findings.

The racist underpinnings and shortcomings of western feminist thought have been well-noted[4]. Whether such arguments and other efforts by marginalized women have led to sufficient integration and inclusion into women's centres warrants greater study. In particular, this reassessment of women's centres to include issues relevant to non-white women has neglected to examine inter-group relationships among different women. Professional and personal experiences as a woman of colour influenced my desire to work on a research project that would examine these relationships. In particular, what are the prospects and limits when immigrant women, refugee women, women of colour and Aboriginal women gather together to create a women's centre that forefronts issues of importance to them? Do white women have a role in this centre? What types of alliances are possible between women?

My involvement with a group of women in their efforts to reconstruct a local women's centre illuminates that group development was affected by issues of race and other markers of identity shaped by state policies and practices threatening to divide us. A variety of state policies and acts were detrimental in shaping women's lives. These included citizenship and immigration in the case of immigrant and refugee women; the effects of the Indian Act and subsequent Bill C-31 on status rights of First Nations women in Canada; and employment

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[3] Local women's centres such as Vancouver Status of Women, Battered Women's Support Services and other centres across Canada include these developments in their archived material.
[4] See hooks (1984); Mohanty, Russo and Torres (1991); Bannerji (1993); Dua and Robertson (1999).

equity affecting all women in the group. In particular women's socio-political construction of 'race' based on their personal life experiences with these policies and practices influenced group processes and interactions.

My theoretical orientation draws on critical feminist standpoint epistemology (Smith, 1987, 1989, 1990; Collins, 1990; Bannerji, 1991, 1993, 1995), and identity politics (Hall 1996; Khayatt, 1994; Bakhtin, 1981) and intercategorical complexity (McCall, 2005). Participatory action research methodology was employed to conduct the research project. I have blended interviews, a focus group, and field notes with my personal experience to gain insight into the major changes affecting a twenty-five year old women's centre moving towards expanding its membership to be more reflective of the communities it purported to serve.

Setting the Stage – Contextualizing Personal Interest

In July 1998 I was invited to participate in two workshops with a local feminist centre in Vancouver called Feminists Working for Change (FWC). Note that I have replaced all names of research participants, organizations, and funding bodies with pseudonyms to protect identities and maintain anonymity. The focus of the workshops was the personal experiences of South-Asian women working in community organizations. This was the beginning of my two-year relationship with the centre. My involvement in these workshops gradually translated into working collectively with a group of immigrant women, women of colour, refugee woman, and an Aboriginal woman (and to a lesser degree, white women) to redesign the centre to forefront issues of racism. This research

project is a result of the collective's work together from September 1998 –

November 2000, when I left the centre. Although the data was collected some

time ago, an assessment of current feminist centres and organizations signals

the continued timeliness of the topic.

Similar to many women I had gravitated to a women's centre based on a

critical feminist politics[5] and desire to work in a decidedly feminist space. In

particular I wanted to focus my efforts on the racialization and subsequent

exclusion of women of colour in women's centres. Ng (Armstrong & Ng, 2005),

outlines the difference between racialization and racism as follows:

> *Racialization* refers to the process whereby groups of people are
> 'reified' as different races based on their biological and
> phenotypical characteristics. Racialization can lead to *racism*,
> which refers to a process of inferiorization, exclusion, and
> marginalization of the other. (p. 42)

The racialization of Canadian women has led to inequities and racism

against immigrant women, refugee women, women of colour and Aboriginal

women. This racism permeated the social fabric of women's lives and seeped

into spaces such as women's centres (Kholi, 1993; Amrit, 1995; Gutierrez-Diez,

1995; Monture-Angus, 1995). My own struggles in community organizations that

paid little attention to the issues and interests of racialized women influenced my

decision to focus on how, if at all, women's centres responded to racialized

women. I use the term racialized women with a sense of trepidation as

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[5] I refer here to arguments put forward by feminist scholars and activists such as hooks (1984), Bannerji (1993) and Mohanty (2003) and women's organizations such as National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) and Status of Women Canada (SWC) outlining the sexism entrenched in patriarchy and the struggles to recognize gender, race, sexual orientation, ability, and age.

throughout the research project women struggled with agreeing to a common name with which to identify themselves. I will elaborate on the limits and possibilities of this term when I outline theoretical frameworks and identity.

FWC caught my interest as it was in the process of conducting an internal review on issues of racism, change and greater inclusion of racialized women. In my naivety I expected such a space to be utopia, and different from the commonly discordant inner-workings of a mixed community organization. A critical feminist politics, I reasoned, would be sufficient in creating an ideal organization. On the contrary, what I encountered at FWC was the complex inner-workings of a feminist centre with problematic and painfully divisive inter-relationships between women positioned differently along the lines of race, class, sexual orientation, and ability.

Eleven women, including myself, came together to rebuild a feminist centre (see biographies in Appendix 1). Our diverse identities, interests and agendas created a dynamic political space. We agreed to work within a flexible collective structure and make decisions using a consensus format[6]. While women may have been united in their efforts to work on issues of racism for themselves and their communities, there were points of conflict between them that influenced group processes and functioning. The simple question of how to include the issues of immigrant women, refugee women, women of colour and First Nations women in a predominantly white women's centre fundamentally changed. Based on our experiences within and outside of FWC, we decided that

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[6] We established that we would be a feminist collective without a Program Manager. We would all take on various tasks and be involved in making decisions at FWC.

we wanted to explore how racism (and other types of oppression) affects inter-group relationships and whether it is possible to build alliances between us to create a women's centre reflective of our multiple issues and needs. A review of FWC's history will help contextualize developments that led us to this question.

Historic Overview of Feminists Working for Change (FWC)

FWC formed in the early 1970s in Vancouver, BC to investigate how corporate development and environmental exploitation, sexist labour standards, and male violence all affected women (Field Notes, 1999). The organization was founded by white feminists interested in exploring the lives and experiences of women (read all women) in order to facilitate social change. While many of these women came from academic backgrounds, they were firmly committed to working with women 'on the ground' and in community. Early FWC women firmly believed in, and practiced, the feminist principles of standpoint epistemology as articulated by scholar Dorothy Smith:

> ...standpoint cannot be equated with perspective or world view and does not universalize a particular experience. It is a method that creates a space for an absent subject and an absent experience that is to be filled with the presence and spoken experience of actual women speaking of and in the actualities of their everyday worlds. (1987, p. 107)

Predominantly white women from various occupational backgrounds came together at FWC to create a feminist collective that would address myriad issues of concern to women. There were a few paid staff members, several working committees consisting of volunteers who assisted staff with funded projects, and a Board of Directors (Field Notes, 1999). Union women, community workers,

and women working within post-secondary/academic institutions exchanged

knowledge and skills in a dynamic space (Field Notes, 1999). Their efforts were

largely orchestrated around philosophies of feminism that questioned patriarchy.

From its inception, FWC was one of a few women's centres in Canada

that challenged policies and practices as they adversely affected women.[7]

Funding from federal, provincial, and municipal levels was used to implement

projects that focused on issues such as: the mental health system's

ineffectiveness in meeting women's needs; sexual discrimination; women with

disabilities; economic inequities; unfair immigration policies; and violence against

women (Field Notes, 1999). Similar to other feminist centres, FWC was strategic

in forming collaborative partnerships with other grassroots women's

organizations locally, provincially, and nationally. Pairing feminist-centered

theoretical knowledge with current ongoing social and political happenings for

women in the community, allowed FWC to give critical commentary and create

work that challenged dominant structures in a timely manner. FWC writers used

an eclectic blend of the feminist standpoint epistemology of Dorothy Smith

(1987); reports on women's un/paid labour and the economy by Pat Armstrong

(1984), P. Armstrong & H. Armstrong (1978), Zillah R. Eisenstein (1981) and

others; and theses, reports and writings on stopping violence against women.

The centre also used many unpublished and self-published reports using the

above-outlined in keeping with its feminist standpoint epistemology.

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[7] For a comprehensive breakdown of women's organizing during the 1970s see Policy Action
Research List (PAR-L), Milestones In Canadian Women's Histories at (http://www.unb.ca/par-
l/milestones.htm , n.d.

Staff and board members' skills and areas of interest, coupled with the expectations of funding bodies, led to projects that resulted in written material, documents, and workbooks that were later available to the public for a small fee. These resources were well-used. Government bodies such as Status of Women Canada used FWC findings to inform their work (Personal Communication, 1999). Community organizations such as women's transition houses and employment centres applied the information to improve their work environments (Field Notes, 1999-2000). And community workers used the resources to enhance their self-knowledge and assist them with their work in the community (Janice & Vanessa, Personal Communications, 2000).

The breadth and scope of FWC's work and the vast resources it produced created a rich knowledge base which continues to be used by academics and community organizations alike. I continue to see the centre's old resources on the shelves of many community organizations. In particular, the centre's work on self-evaluation and participatory action research methods of inquiry has helped bring these practices to the forefront. Indeed, during the transformation of the organization several of us noted that FWC had done very important work both with and for women. Certainly upon my own study of the history of the organization, I became well acquainted with the tremendous energy and painstaking volunteer-hours women had devoted to projects (Field Notes, 1999-2000). Volumes of typed minutes of meetings and notes scribbled long-hand on dinner napkins on file are testimony to the commitment women had to the projects.

Out of the approximately 50 women who participated in the collective during its history (it is impossible to get an accurate estimate due to inaccurate records of numbers of volunteers), 45 were white and the remaining five identified as mainly immigrant women and women of colour. Only one First Nations woman participated in the collective during the centre's 25 year history (Interviews, 1999). The minimal involvement of immigrant women, refugee women, women of colour and First Nations women in FWC was particularly problematic when projects being initiated by FWC often involved issues that affected these women in significant numbers. Thus, the impact of issues such as poverty, violence, sexist immigration policies, disability, sexual harassment etc. on women marginalized by race was documented predominantly by white women for other women. There was a continued lack of critical feminist analysis along the lines of race and a re-marginalization of the interests of immigrant women, refugee women, women of colour and First Nations women.

Several key events led to FWC moving from a predominantly white women's space to one foregrounding the issues marginalized women. The eventual involvement of racialized women in the centre subsequently led to greater dialogue between women. White women began to seek more inclusion of racialized women in the Centre. These developments will be explored in Chapter 4.

Mapping the Course of the Work

In order to answer the research questions outlined above I have done a literature review of the historical development of women's centres in Canada and

integrated theoretical frameworks that speak to multiple experiences of immigrant women and refugee women, women of colour, and Aboriginal women as they are affected by state policies. FWC women's experiences articulate how policies affected their personal experiences and organizing efforts at FWC.

Delving into the research question and working collectively with women at FWC on re-building the centre required that I use a participatory action research (PAR) methodology. As noted in the chapter on methodology, I had difficulty in choosing the 'best' tools and techniques to do the research. This was coupled with personal dilemmas that I encountered as a participant-researcher and insider-outsider in the research project. I often felt that juggling the role of part-time centre employee, researcher and participant was challenging and overly ambitious. These issues and my own race and class affiliations are also detailed in the methodology chapter.

This research project is intended to demystify conceptualizations about PAR. In particular, PAR was hypothesized as being a collaborative venture that equalizes power relations between researcher and participant in its efforts to produce social change (Kemmis & McTaggart 2000). My experiences during the course of the research project suggest the contrary: I was given a great deal of responsibility, trust and power by FWC women to document the process of the evolving centre. While women sat for interviews, participated in the focus group, and both supported and approved the emerging work, we did not collectively write this piece.

Furthermore, a combination of structural barriers such as the practical demands of developing a new centre, time, and women's different positions within FWC affected how the research unfolded. Rebuilding a centre meant that we were often setting priorities amidst looming deadlines such that any requests I had with relation to university requirements often fell to the bottom of the list. This made it difficult to complete the research in a timely fashion. Additionally, differences in skill level coupled with women's familiarity with FWC often led to an unequal distribution of work. Women who had previously been involved with FWC and those more fluent with the English language and the dynamics of women's centres (including myself) were given more responsibilities.

Two themes emerged at FWC in the research project. Firstly, the issue of in/excluding white women at FWC was a divisive point that underscored the need to reassess our understandings of racism and ability to focus on effective inter-group processes. The chapter on in/excluding white women delineates how women were divided on this topic.

Interconnected to this is the second theme of the research project: the issue of marginalization. Data show that our use of the term marginalization inadvertently reinforced the concept and there was a silence and re-marginalization of issues of racism, sexual orientation, and ableism in the group. While we successfully noted our own marginalization within a racist system, we struggled (somewhat unsuccessfully) to keep from marginalizing the interests of fellow collective members.

An analysis of the research findings point to the difficulty immigrant women, refugee women, women of colour and Aboriginal women experience in forging alliances due to the implications of historical policies which affect how women are currently positioned and hence relate to each other. The findings also point to strategies that women can use in working together to forge new alliances grounded in, as Armstrong & Ng (2005) state, concepts such as the Okanagan First Nations idea of Enowkin where, "...we need to look at, engage, solicit, incorporate and strengthen difference" (p. 31).

In the concluding chapter FWC women point to strategies on strengthening alliances between racialized women. It involves a re-imaging of state involvement and support for alternative spaces rooted in process and relationship-building.

FWC women noted the differences between their communities as defined by state policies and practices but also acknowledged commonalities that could potentially strengthen our efforts. We recognized, as Reagon (1983) has noted, limits and possibilities when forming political alliances. Painfully divisive issues of class led to our forging a way of working together that challenged us in different ways to engage in dialogue. Working together, we noted, was not always easy or comfortable. Excluding white women from the group and adopting the term marginalized women would not remove the differences between us. Furthermore, FWC women recognized that working across these differences was essential if we were to forge a dynamic centre that opened itself up to the possibilities of dialogue and alliance-building (Armstrong & Ng, 2005).

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CHAPTER 2   LITERATURE REVIEW

While much has been written about racism and other types of oppression within the area of women's and gender studies, there is little on the inter and intra-group processes in women's organizations and centres. Racialized women have outlined their personal experiences of racism both with the feminist movement and women's centres (Kholi, 1993; Monture-Angus, 1995; Amrit, 1995). Their efforts to organize and introduce race, class, sexual orientation, ability and age into different arenas was either cut short by the state (Carty & Brand, 1993) or by women's centres themselves (Gutierrez-Diez, 1995; Kang, 1995).

Feminists have written about the dynamics of racialized women organizing (Combahee River Collective, 1982; Ng, 1988; Reagon, 1983; Agnew, 1996; Brodribb, 2002; Mohanty, 2003). They have contextualized the racist systems under which they are organizing and examined how this organizing is affected by state policies invested in maintaining a hegemonic state order (Carty & Brand, 1993; Ford-Smith, 1997). However, while many have suggested that the state has affected racialized women's organizing (Ng 1988; Agnew 1996; Brodribb, 2002) and suggest ways in which to organize (Reagon, 1983; Mohanty, 2003), they have not explored inter-group processes between racialized women organizing across difference.

I begin by contextualizing racialized women's historical organizing within Canada and describe similarities in responses from both the state and white women's centres. I propose that understanding racialized women's efforts to organize across difference requires analyzing and interpreting overlapping theoretical frameworks such as standpoint epistemology and identity politics. FWC women's efforts throughout the course of the research project demonstrate that these frameworks only partially describe their experiences. Inter-group relationships between racialized women are also influenced by women's life experiences and the state frameworks they have integrated in their lives.

Women Organizing for Social Change

Largely Eurocentric, patriarchal and colonial forces have controlled and curtailed the rights of women in Canada throughout history. Policies of national expansion were rooted in developing a political economy dependent on migrant labour and a hegemonic discourse designed to divide and silence Aboriginal, white, and immigrant women in the process. Racist strategies such as the displacement and genocide of Aboriginal people and women (Carter, 1996 & 2002; Stevenson, 1999), exploitation of migrant labour (Ng, 1988; Bannerji, 1995), and the patriarchal and religious use of white women's sensibilities (Valverde, 1992), all effectively kept women from forming alliances. Male domination was exerted through the dynamics of gender, race, and class to create a particular national philosophy rooted in white male power.

The colonization and settlement of Canada by Eurocentric patriarchal forces affected the lives of white, Aboriginal, and immigrant women in complex

and detrimental ways. White male nation-builders used white women's allegiance to develop the nation. This colonization of Aboriginal women, re-colonization of immigrant women and control of white women warranted a response of resistance expressed in varying degrees and multiple forms. Women fought on separate and unequal fronts to defend themselves and their communities.

The first wave of feminism in Canada during the late 1800's and early 1900's had white women fighting for public health, education and employment, and suffrage (Status of Women Canada, June 2001). White women struggled against sexism and sought to gain voting power to affect public policy and be seen as 'equal citizens' in the new nation. Organizations such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), and the National Council of Women of Canada all worked at the turn of the twentieth century to gain additional rights for white women (Status of Women Canada, 2001). They also adopted a colonial agenda similar to their male counterparts to assist with the gate-keeping of the emerging nation (Carty, 1999; Agnew, 1996). These predominantly middle-class, Christian women were interested in keeping what little measure of power and control was allowed them within the scope of their domestic duties and religious practices. White women used their Christian sensibilities to assist with the development of the 'model Canadian citizen' by supporting public health campaigns and the eugenics movement (Agnew, 1996).

Thus, white men were able to strategically use white women to etch out a

nation according to the racist discourse of the time. Carty writes:

> Together with their men, [white women] carried out the exploitation
> and subordination of the resources and peoples of the colonies.
> They were full, if not equal, participants in the creation of white
> supremacy. They then set themselves up as helpers of women of
> colour (1999, p. 37).

Aboriginal and immigrant women reacted and actively resisted the policies

and programs established by white men (and advocated by white women) that

created dire living conditions for them. Aboriginal women fought against both

white men and women in the colonization of their land. Winona Stevenson

(1999) has written about how First Nations women in particular struggled to

maintain their culture in the midst of Christian conversion. First Nations

matriarchal communities were seen as a threat to White patriarchal rule and

destroyed through a number of different exercises including the introduction of

diseases, alcohol, and, perhaps most strategically, patriarchal systems and the

Indian Act (Monture-Angus, 1995; Stevenson, 1999, Napolean, 2002). However,

women fought for the livelihood of their communities. Stevenson (1999) and

Forsyth (2005) have shown how some First Nations women resisted monogamy[8],

hid their children, and refused to give up their native language. First Nations

women continued this resistance through struggling on the frontlines during the

Oka uprising in Canada (Goodleaf, 1993), demanding recognition of their rights

through the overturn of the Indian Act (Welsh, 1994; Huntley & Blaney, 1999),

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[8] Monogamy accompanied the European expansionist policies that were rooted in patriarchy and male domination and control. Historically, Aboriginal communities had different social systems allowing for polygamous relationships with matriarchal lineages (Stevenson, 1999; Forsyth, 2005).

and, more currently, seeking justice for the disappearance and murder of First Nations women in Canada (Sisters in Spirit, n.d.).

In addition to white and Aboriginal women, the first wave of immigration introduced working class Eastern European women into Canada (Agnew, 1996). Eastern European women initially entered Canada out of economic necessity. This tradition would continue with the successive migration of different groups to fill Canada's need for cheap, exploitable labour (Brand 1993 & 1999; Agnew, 1996). However, while early immigrant women encountered racism and discrimination here, they escaped the forced separation and genocide that Aboriginal women had to struggle with. Immigrant women organized and fought back by joining political parties that would represent their working-class interests (Agnew, 1996; Leah, 1999).

First Nations and immigrant women's resistance through what has been termed 'cultural work' such as maintaining language, cultural traditions and spiritual practices of origin (Anderson, 2000; Stevenson, 1999; Agnew, 1996), and more subversive actions of organizing, provide a glimpse into how women re-imagined the boundaries of the Canadian nation. Concurrently, immigrant women, refugee women, women of colour, and First Nations women historically created informal ethno-specific spaces to gain support for themselves around common issues and agendas. Women found support within their communities and proceeded to strategize ways to re-map the Canadian nation to be more reflective of their needs. They established autonomous groups outside of settlement organizations and the women's movement (Agnew 1996). Immigrant

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women organized groups such as Black Women's Congresses, South Asian Women's Groups and the Immigrant Women's Centres (Carty & Brand, 1993); and Aboriginal women both established the Native Women's Association of Canada and Pauktuutit-the Inuit Women's Association (Status of Women Canada, 2001), and also worked in less structured ways (Monture-Angus, 1995). These groups, it has been noted, were not funded and therefore lacked government control, input and expectations. This resistance and organizing for both community and self interest was dangerous and posed a threat to the state. Through informal community organizing women gained strength, articulated their situations and positions, and demanded change (Carty & Brand, 1993; Dua & Robertson, 1999).

Backlash against Women's Organizing

The Canadian state effectively suppressed this type of informal organizing out of self-interest and a desire to maintain control over racialized women. It created strategies to divide women's interests and eventually claimed ownership of community organizations and women's centres and organizations (Carty & Brand, 1993; Agnew, 1996; Ng, 1988; Lee & Cardinal, 1998). Funding became available for specific government prescribed projects. This re-marginalized the interests of women according to the state agenda. Women's accountability to their communities was superseded by that demanded by government funding bodies.

The Canadian state developed organizations such as Status of Women Canada (SWC) in 1967, the National Action Committee on the Status of Women

(NAC) in 1972, and the National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women (NOIVMW) in 1986 to speak to the interests of 'Canadian women'. While they have tackled some issues of pertinence to women, these national organizations have also proven to be less than successful in meeting the needs of diverse groups of women in the country. As Carty and Brand (1993) have noted: "...State policy around race, class, or sex can be characterized as policies of containment and control." (p. 219).

As these national women's organizations were being formed, state funding was also being poured into settlement organizations to meet the needs of immigrants and refugees. Community organizations became involved in controversial relationships with government funding bodies. Ng (1988), Lee & Cardinal (1998) and Monture-Angus (1995) have demonstrated at length how state expectations and accountability measures leave little room for organizations to do social justice work and advocacy for women.

Ng provides a critical analysis of how state funding of programs and services helped socially construct the term 'immigrant woman' according to the demands of the Canadian labour market (Ng, 1988). Immigrant and refugee women's labour continues to be exploited in a growing environment of globalization. Furthermore, Lee and Cardinal (1998) have articulated how hegemonic nationalism has effectively created a divide between feminism and multiculturalism to the detriment of developing a solid feminist movement that would allow for a more critical inquiry into feminist discourse. Multiculturalism and feminism are seen as two distinct, equally dangerous ideas. And Monture-

Angus (1995) has demonstrated how the interests of First Nations women have been erased under nationally funded ventures that kept the interests and welfare of First Nations women in the hands of the government and predominantly male-led Aboriginal band councils. During her interview for this research project Vanessa noted:

> ...patriarchy has infiltrated Aboriginal communities right through. Our leadership is male. The band councils are male, predominantly. So the ways of working are male. Whose honoured are mostly men, instead of the matriarchy. (Interview, June 1999)

Thus, women's efforts to mobilize and resist state policies were cut short by the Canadian state's support for specific types of organizing efforts and organizations.

FWC women worked within state-funded organizations and, it can be argued, frequently assimilated the state's mandate and agenda to various degrees. However, although women may have depended on state funding for programs, services, and personal wages; they also questioned these mandates and advocated for their separate communities with legal, welfare, health and education systems. For example, Maria was seeking refugee status in Canada and stated that she had argued with colleagues about the suitability of current programs and services to meet people's needs:

> They have beautiful brochures that say 'oh, we can give you everything'. And it wasn't true...as for myself they didn't even offer me a cup of coffee when I got here. We should not say that we are going to give them the sun, moon, stars and then don't give them anything. People need English classes, help filling out their SIN (Social Insurance Number) application forms, and access to computers and printers to find employment. (Interview, June 1999)

FWC Women named that racist state policies surrounding immigration and settlement, the definition of status Indian, and how different systems responded to women experiencing violence, all affected the lives of women in their separate communities (FWC Meetings, 1998-1999). We reasoned that the state cared little about our interests. Lourdes talked of how the budget for the Latin American women's program she coordinated had not changed over the course of twelve years—it was 'ridiculous and she was forced to count every penny she spent' (Interview, July 1999). Both Kathy (Interview, June 1999) and Rekha (Interview, July 1999) spoke of how the system and even women's organizations demanded that you use 'their tools' to be able to access programs and services. During her interview Rekha shared the experiences of a South Asian woman she had worked with who was misdiagnosed as being depressed, suicidal, and having a split personality by a mental health team that did not assess or interview her, but simply passed her on to an immigrant serving agency. Rekha's brief chat with the woman yielded that she was simply a woman 'struggling with different issues in life':

> The doors are pretty well closed and if you wanna get in there to access any services you better act like a white woman and you better have all your tools and everything and the worst thing is that once you get in there, acting like a white woman, then you should— your behaviour, better be one of a (woman of colour). Because if you act like a white woman then they look at you and say 'well that's not your culture, aren't you going against your culture?'. And psychologically they say 'well if a woman should go against her culture then there must be something wrong with her. (Interview, July 1999)

The situation was equally bad, Vanessa reiterated, for First Nations people and women. She talked about the efforts of First Nations women to

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secure core rather than project funding for programs in the Downtown Eastside

for First Nations communities. There was a lack of substance abuse programs

and advocacy available for predominantly First Nations women:

> *There's been some improvement for women who are pregnant at Sunnyhill Hospital and Sheway in the Downtown Eastside. But it's a spit in the bucket because women have so many more issues than men in terms of the power imbalance and violence and if you're addicted and you're in a relationship and you need your drugs you're more prone to take battering, you know. Women might be in detox and he has access or gets in. Also, women might not know they're pregnant–particularly if they're high, they don't know. They're not in touch with their bodies so they might not know they're pregnant for three months. So they're using and using and they've got this little baby in there. So treatment for women is a priority.* (Interview, June 1999)

Women's centres had also either erased or marginalized the interests of

racialized women in their spaces. Several women have referred to how racism

was either denied by white women, or added on as a 'special interest issue' to be

examined outside of purview of gender (hooks, 1984; Bannerji, 1995; Monture-

Angus, 1995). In particular, the experiences of racialized women in self-

proclaimed feminist organizations and women's centres in Canada have re-

emphasized the racism women encounter in these spaces. The backlash

against Professor Sunera Thobani both when she stepped in as President of

NAC and suggested another woman of colour to replace her upon leaving is one

example of this (Rebick & Roach, 1996).

Additionally, women have written about their personal experiences of

racism from their white colleagues in women's shelters (Kohli, 1993; Amrit,

1995). A lack of support from colleagues, management and board when

addressing issues of racism within these reputed 'safe spaces' is problematic (Amrit, 1995; Kholi, 1993).

Thus racialized women have been bounded on one side by limits in state recognition and funding, and another by white women in women's centres who are reluctant to examine and work on issues of racism. Their interests were not a priority for either state bodies that focused on maintaining a particular hegemonic discourse, or women's centres that concentrated on issues of concern predominantly for white women.

Theoretical Frameworks

> *Because the state in capitalist society, by virtue of its goals and interests, does not operate within the interest of the working class— to which most immigrant and visible minority women belong—the limitations of any state-formed organization with a mandate to do so must be recognized and questioned.* (Carty & Brand, 1993, p. 208)

What has been commonly been referred to as the 'second wave' of feminism has created an abundance of critical writing by racialized women on their experiences of racism and other forms of oppression within Canada. Feminists have elucidated how the hegemonic state has created inequities for women marginalized by race, class, sexual identity/orientation, ability and age (Bannerji, 1995; Monture-Angus, 1995; Brand, 1994; Maracle, 1996). However, little exists on the subject matter of this research project: how state-generated policies and processes and women's centres position women in ways that affect collaborative work and alliance-building between racialized women in Canada.

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This lack of literature may reflect funding priorities for research and a lack of interest by researchers themselves.

Some women (Personal Communications, 1998-9) have stated that they do not want to place women's centres under further scrutiny. Women's centres, they argue, are already at risk of cuts to funding and an anti-feminist backlash from those that see women's demands for greater rights as suspect to breaking up the family order and patriarchal systems (Personal Communications, 1999). Others argue that such exercises take energy away from the focus of fighting against patriarchy and capitalism.

I have turned predominantly to feminist scholars in an effort to understand this absence and void of inter-group processes between women. Theoretical frameworks such as standpoint epistemology and identity politics offer partial insight into understanding the dynamics of one women's centre. Together these two frameworks point the way to methodological techniques such as intercategorical complexity that proposes new ways of comprehending the work of FWC.

Standpoint Epistemology – Beginning on the Ground

In her ground-breaking work *The Everyday World as Problematic* (1987) noted sociologist Dorothy Smith addresses how we may be enmeshed in social relations and unable to discern what generates tensions and conflicts. She formulated standpoint epistemology to explicate context: "...our experience is necessarily local and historical and our everyday world is organized by social

relations not observable within it" (1987, p. 89). Urging us to move beyond

limited understandings based on single moments of inquiry, Smith encourages us

to examine people's ongoing relationships where they are:

> ...competent practitioners of their everyday worlds, active in definite
> material and social contexts, desiring, thinking, feeling, and actively
> engaged with others in producing the actualities of the world they
> have in common with one another. (p. 125)

Smith's critical analysis of research and sociological discourse has both

disrupted and transformed research. Beginning from the standpoint of women,

Smith challenged readers to critique what may be termed textually-mediated

discourses stemming from patriarchal bases that are a product of relations of

ruling. Smith's 'method of inquiry' does not privilege a knower but rather shifts

the ground of knowing from existing discourses to the standpoints of women

which have not yet been (or are being) articulated (Smith, 1987). Women's

standpoint "...situates inquiry in the actualities of people's lives, beginning with

their experience of living, and understands that inquiry and its product are in and

of the same actuality" (Smith, 1987). Furthermore, using a political economy

framework (1989), Smith begins to question the validity of categories such as

gender, class, and to a lesser extent race that are largely a product of theoretical

discussion and textually-mediated discourses and encourages us to begin from

the reflexive standpoint of women (1990).

Although Smith's work was key in beginning the dialogue from the

standpoint of women, her critique of Marx's class theory that focuses

predominantly on a patriarchal standpoint fails to integrate the analysis of gender

with other types of oppression such as race. Building on Smith's work, African-American feminist Patricia Hill Collins examines how the unique standpoints and knowledge of Black feminist activists and intellectuals in the U.S. has identified an 'outsider-within' phenomenon (Collins, 1990). She urges us to abandon simple either/or, additive notions of race/gender/class to seek more complex methods of looking at oppression such as interlocking systems of oppression within a matrix of domination (1990, p. 225). The result is a paradigmatic shift which focuses on context and social relations of domination. This re-shifted focus considers not only race, gender and class, but also allows space for factors such as ethnicity, spirituality, sexual orientation, ability, and age within a self-defined standpoint (1990, p. 226-7). Collins (1990) writes, "...placing excluded groups in the centre of analysis opens up possibilities for a both/and conceptual stance, one in which all groups possess varying amounts of penalty and privilege in one historically created system" (p. 225).

Anti-racist, Marxist feminist scholar Himani Bannerji has engaged with Smith's work to examine the specific situation for women of colour in Canada. Bannerji uses a subjective lens as a point of entry to outline the hostile and violent experiences that immigrant woman of colour frequently experience within Canada (1991; 1993; 1995). She predominantly examines relations of race, gender, class and age within a Canadian context and challenges simple definitions of political economy used by both Marxists and Marxist-feminists to re-define the particular realities of women of colour (Bannerji, 1991). Rather than giving primacy to one domain, be it race, gender, class or age which "...subsume

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all other social relations and renders them invisible" (1995), Bannerji seeks to understand the position of women of colour that integrates these dimensions.

Concentrating on structural limitations evades the issue of women's personal power and agency in disrupting state hegemonies. Smith, Bannerji, and Hill-Collins, speak of women's standpoint within hegemonic structures but fall short of examining how on the ground praxis transforms hegemonic discourse in women's centres. Furthermore, although the issue of identity/ies is alluded to there is little interrogation of how women's identities conflict in building alliances to create change.

Standpoint epistemology spoke to the situation of racialized women at FWC. FWC women frequently talked about the disconnect between state-generated concepts of themselves and their personal experiences. Group process and dialogue in rebuilding FWC resulted in women bringing their individual and community identities into the group. Aspects of identity politics offers some insight into understanding how FWC women struggled with personal and group identity in rebuilding FWC.

Discourses of Identity – The Politics of Naming the Self

Key to understanding and analyzing the multiple positions of FWC women in this research project is identity politics. We were cognizant that race is a socio-political phenomenon experienced at a personal level (Fanon, 1963). The socio-political construction of race was, FWC women agreed, structured on the

inter-relationship between self and other created by an "othering" discourse supported by cultural hegemony (Said, 1979).

Similar to what early feminist theorists had argued (Moraga & Anzaldua, 1983; hooks, 1984), racialized women fell outside the margins of a women's movement that worked largely for the interests of middle-class white women. Once in the margins, we were seen as a homogenous group, frequently categorized as visible minority women or women of colour, and presumed to carry similar issues and interests.

Racialized women's struggles with self-definition within a predominantly white women's movement echoes what philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin has referred to as the tension between authoritative and internally persuasive discourses (Bakhtin, 1981; Casey, 1993). Pertinent to this research project are the authoritative discourses reflected in a colonizing patriarchal culture and white middle class feminist movement. These authoritative discourses demand an unwavering allegiance to hegemonic ideals and affect the limits and possibilities for racialized women defining themselves (Bakhtin, 1981).

Racialized women have wrestled with these authoritative discourses from their personal standpoints (hooks, 1984; Brand, 1994; Bannerji, 1995). Dialogues between the self and wider expected rules of engagement have helped shape internally persuasive discourses (Bakhtin, 1981). These new ideologies offer potentialities for seeing and remaking theoretical frameworks such as those imposed on racialized women by a colonizing patriarchal culture and white middle class feminist movement. Wrestling against authoritative

norms frequently brings up internal dialogues with the self in relation to both that of an authoritative state and a historically racist feminist movement. Bakhtin (1981) writes:

> ...the internally persuasive discourse is not so much interpreted by us as it is further freely developed, applied to new material, new condition and enters into interanimating relationships with new contexts. More than that, it enters into an intense interaction, (and) a *struggle* with our ideological development is just such an intense struggle within us for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions and values. (emphasis his, p. 345-6).

It is challenging for racialized women such as women at FWC to negotiate identities within political-economic frameworks that are frequently designed to keep us marginalized. Balancing internally persuasive discourses with privileged ones that dictate one's everyday world means struggling against oppressive structures (Yee, 1993; Gutierrez-Diez, 1995; Brand, 1994; Anderson, 2000). Racialized women's struggles with authoritative discourses includes wrestling with state imposed policies and practices; a predominantly white feminist movement; and expectations of community/ies. Mediating these discourses in defining the self frequently requires racialized women to confront complex issues of community and belongingness when reconstructing the self (Monture-Angus, 1995; Kang, 1995). There is a push-pull tension between what may be termed patriarchal community expectations (both within the wider community and one's ethno-specific community/ies), personal experiences, and feminist politics. FWC women wrestled with all of these to various degrees during the research project (Field Notes, 1999).

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Similar to Khayatt (1994), FWC women recognized that our identities were socially constructed dialogues with our socio-political environments and affected by the political climate we lived in, our life circumstances, and the personal choices we made. Wrestling with authoritative discourses that frequently mistook our interests to be similar; we agreed that our personal identities were forged at intersections of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, ability and age. Through our personal interactions and group meetings we established that these identities were fluid, forming, and negotiated rather than prescribed (Field Notes, 1998-2000). They echoed Hall's (1998) statement that identities are:

> ...never unified and increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. (p. 4)

Contextualizing the situation to FWC, further complexities emerge when we recognize and engage with these discourses with racialized women who carried different backgrounds, histories and experiences from ourselves. Varied personal experiences of racialization and marginalization by the state may have created grounds for alliances but also threatened to divide us along various lines. Leslie McCall's work (2005) on intersectionality provides some useful insight in understanding the situation of FWC women. To understand the nuanced complexities of categories and acknowledge their dynamic nature McCall suggests we surrender both historic anticategorical arguments that equate categorization to a simple homogenization, and intracategorical approaches that focus solely on group differences (2005). Instead, McCall (2005) urges us to consider intercategorical complexity: "...the complex texture of daily life as it is

informed by relationships of inequality between constituted social groups" (pp. 1782 &1785).

The nuanced points of analysis proposed by intercategorical complexity provide a beginning point of analysis for the work FWC women undertook. We sought to recognize the multiple and often conflicting identities between ourselves based on our varied historic experiences with state policies and practices and a wider women's movement. Our experiences and interactions, we noted, were enmeshed with larger socio-political forces: all of us had to contend with racism and other forms of oppression. However, historic and present-day intergroup relationships between immigrant and refugee women, women of colour, and Aboriginal women (informed by state policies and practices) were inequitable both outside and within FWC (Field Notes, 1999-2000). We struggled to create a new discourse and way of engaging with the world by negotiating internal discourses in a reforming FWC with authoritative ones authored by the state and women's organizations. What we sought to better comprehend was how to work across differences in reforming FWC.

Our efforts to work across different identities and find a common ground on which to rebuild FWC were affected by standpoint epistemology and identity politics. Our personal standpoints witnessed us mediating between authoritative and internally persuasive discourses in establishing a group identity. Categorical assumptions created by state policies and practices, the various communities we lived in, and our personal beliefs, mediated FWC women's relationships with each other.

However, our experiences only partially mirrored the theoretical frameworks noted above. Similar to what Mohanty (2003) has outlined, we learned that identities cannot be assumed to equal political consciousness and resistance. They are forged FWC women found, similar to what McCall (2005) proposes, in the nuanced interactions racialized women form and reform with each other against socio-political backdrops in their everyday worlds.

Noting inequity and negotiating across these differences are very different exercises. Much has been written about how racialized women have struggled with the state and in community organizations (Ng, 1988; Yee, 1993; Agnew, 1996; Lee & Cardinal, 1998; McIvor, 1999; Monture-Angus, 1995; Dossa, 2004). However, there is very little that speaks to the tenuous relationships between racialized women. FWC women hoped to fill this void as we came together at a time when many women's organizations and centres were beginning to work on internal issues of racism and other forms of oppression. Using a self-reflexive gaze, we wished to apply a lens onto ourselves to begin to better understand group processes. In a proposal to funders we stated:

> FWC proposes to improve the situation for marginalized women by examining, analyzing, and documenting the experiences of women of colour and aboriginal women within the women's movement. This initiative will focus on issues of systemic privilege and racism, without the presence of white women, in order to identify methods of communication and decision-making that are inclusive of traditionally marginalized groups. The FWC initiative will provide opportunities for marginalized women to reflect and learn from the lessons and implications of past experience and future action. (FWC Proposal to Funder for 1999-2000)

Our differing histories, identities, and past relationships with white women (and to a lesser degree other racialized women) affected both our desire to in/exclude white women from the centre, and to forge a common identity under the umbrella of 'marginalized women'. Differences between us suggest that any alliances between us were tenuous and fragile. A reformed FWC would require negotiating new ways of working together.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

'...I would like to see research done with a real representation of minority women, women of colour, and marginalized women' (Kathy – Interview, June 1999).

Defining the parameters of the research project within FWC was both exciting and challenging. All of us were excited at the prospect of working together on this research project in order to better understand how group processes would shape and affect this work. Many women echoed what Kathy articulated above. They became involved with FWC in order to create something that would meet the needs of their communities—immigrant women, refugee women, women of colour and First Nations women.

Challenges in making a commitment to a research methodology involved juggling the daily demands of work to be done at FWC with a fear of 'getting it right' in working with colleagues that I had a great deal of respect for. I knew I wanted to engage in research with women of colour working on anti-oppression issues, but the nature of the inquiry and most effective methodology remained elusive.

Colleagues and peers both within and outside FWC shared that women marginalized by race had repeatedly been questioned, queried and over-studied by both funding bodies and academics working on programs and policies which resulted in little or no socio-political change. I was extremely self-conscious of doing a research project in this context. I wanted to use a critical method of

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inquiry that would shift from doing research on women, to doing research with them. However, I worried about women's perceptions of my documenting potential conflicts between us as we rebuilt FWC.

I approached FWC about documenting the process at a time when the centre was undergoing a great deal of change. The demands of a newly emerging organization required countless volunteer hours, last-minute meetings, and juggling priorities that would fundamentally alter its philosophy. I was cognizant of the additional pressure my suggestion and request to do the research project would place on women who were in a process of coming together, familiarizing themselves with each other and the old organization, and redefining the mandate and goals of FWC. This research project, it seemed, was a low priority for women. My patience was tested between university guidelines and expectations, and the women's commitments both within and outside FWC. It therefore took several months to get the project approved by FWC women.

I decided early on that I wanted to use a participatory action research (PAR) approach. PAR is suggested as being critical, emancipatory and recursive and, perhaps most importantly, a social process (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000). I chose to use it as it was defined by the Women's Research Centre and the Bus Riders Union (BRU). In their document Research for Change (1992), the Women's Research Centre suggests that PAR is:

> A way of collecting information as community activists to learn about how people actually experience a specific issue or problem, provide descriptions of situations and communities, and develop effective strategies to make a difference in people's lives. (p. 9)

In "Women in Transit, Organizing for social justice in our communities"

(2005), the Women in Transit Team extrapolates on these ideas and suggests

that PAR was originally created by oppressed people in the Third World to:

> ...counter First World hegemony and the stealing of community-based knowledge for projects that ultimately exacerbated colonialism and the impacts of capitalism. PAR builds community power with the goal of furthering the struggle for social and economic justice. (p. 9)

Amalgamating the ideas of the Women's Research Centre and the BRU

resonates with a decidedly critical feminist vision of PAR. My decision to use

PAR was influenced both by FWC's mandate to work on community-led

approaches to social change, and my desire to do the type of community-based

research done by other women's organizations. My romanticization of PAR

became evident once I began the research and had to juggle the roles of part-

time employee (some other women and I had administrative tasks at FWC),

collective member, and researcher-participant.

The Feminizing of Research Methodologies

Feminist social scientists (Smith, 1987; Harding, 1991; Mohanty, Russo &

Torres, 1991) have interrogated historical methods of scientific inquiry. They

have questioned traditionally male-dominated scientific methods of inquiry with a

desire to shift the focus to be more inclusive of the multi-faceted effects of an

integrated feminism. They argue that conventional research practices have been

guilty of colonizing and exploiting researched communities and producing biased

research (Harding, 1991; Smith, 1987; Wolf, 1996; Mohanty et al., 1991).

Harding wrote: "...It is necessary to decentre white, middle class, heterosexual, Western women in Western feminist thought and yet still generate feminist analyses from the perspective of women's lives" (1991, p. 13).

Epistemological frameworks rooted in largely patriarchal and colonial ways of observing and interpreting the world resulted in problematic research practices. Feminist social scientists reasoned that the nexus inherent in the researcher/researched relationship must include reflexivity and relationality (Smith, 1987; Mies, 1991). Smith wrote:

> It is this essential return to the experience we ourselves have directly in our everyday world that has been the distinctive mode of working in the women's movement—the repudiation of the professional, the expert, the already authoritative tones of the discipline; the science, the formal tradition, and the return to the seriously engaged and very difficult enterprise of discovering how to begin from ourselves. (1987, p. 58)

Feminist scholars challenged positivist[9], rational, and patriarchal scientific methods of investigation. Marxist theoretical frameworks coupled with early positivist methodological approaches focused on income and education disparities as seen through a male lens. These positivist methodological approaches largely marginalized women's experiences (Kirsch, 1999; Wolf, 1996). Women were denied the opportunity to articulate their experiences and perspectives, and make suggestions as to how they might be transformed.

Several feminists have explored the complexities in conducting research using a feminist, anti-oppression consciousness. Diane Wolf has outlined how

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[9] Smith (1987), Weedon (1987), and Harding (1991), have argued that historical conventional research practices based on scientific and observable facts have been guilty of colonizing and exploiting researched communities and producing male-biased research.

post-colonial feminist researchers have examined conventional methods of field-work and worked to alter previous methods which may be termed suspect at best (Wolf, 1996). Feminist researchers have explored such issues as power, aspects of identity, insider-outsider status, and participant-researcher relationships in an attempt to demystify research. Ambitious in scope, Wolf's critical analysis of feminist research practices encourages researchers to continue deconstructing these practices and "...strive to do politically meaningful work" (1996, p. 38).

Shulamit Reinharz documented the rise in alternative methodologies frequently used by women conducting research on women and commented that "...to the extent that feminism is change-oriented by definition, all feminist research has action components" (1992, p. 196). Lastly, Daphne Patai has concluded that, within White, Eurocentric-influenced research practices, it is virtually impossible to do ethical research:

> In addition to the characteristic privileges of race and class, the existential or psychological dilemmas of the split between subject and object on which all research depends (even that of the most intense 'participant observer') imply that objectification, the utilization of others for one's own purposes (which may or may not coincide with their own ends), the possibility of exploitation, are built into almost all research projects with living human beings. (1991, p. 139)

Questions of context and identity within discourse that ask what is considered to be 'valid' scientific research were further explored by post-colonial feminist writers who explored what is worthy of study; the position of researcher

versus researched; the type of methodology used; and intent of the research itself (Narayan, 1997; Lal, 1996; Mohanty et. al, 1991).

In addition to standpoint epistemologies, the work of post-colonial feminist writers has been pivotal in further examining the colonial nature of 'research' and what is worthy of inquiry. They have used a reflexive gaze to explore how scientific inquiry rooted in characteristically white, male, hegemonic practices have focused on, and affected, racialized women. Mohanty et. al (1991) suggest that the reconfiguration of feminism can occur only when "...we develop more complex, nuanced modes of asking questions and as scholarship in a number of relevant fields begins to address histories of colonialism, capitalism, race and gender as inextricably interrelated" (p. 3). Thus the objects of our inquiry must shift to include interrelated processes of marginalization.

Several feminist researchers (Smith, 2002; Mohanty, 1991; Collins, 1990) have identified inequities between researchers and subjects of inquiry. Post-colonialism informs the efforts of feminists to develop feminist-based research strategies such as PAR. They have used PAR to engage in community-building that pushes for social justice and change. Maria Mies employed the guiding principle of 'in order to understand a thing, one must change it'. She was committed to working with women in the community on issues such as violence against women to shape research that leads to addressing issues of oppression in the lives of marginalized women (1991). Further to this, white researchers Linda Archibald and Mary Crnkovich have strategically used their own positions of privilege and power and applied a reflexive gaze to work with Inuit women to

demand systemic accountability on the issue of violence in the lives of Inuit

women (1995). Archibald and Crnkovich draw on Mies' work to outline the

positive aspects of participatory research such as:

> concepts of conscious partiality achieved through partial
> identification with those being studied; a double consciousness
> rooted in being able to stand outside the process and observe
> oneself; research being integral to emancipatory change in the lives
> of women; the inevitability of praxis in research; and collective
> involvement and engagement leading to greater affiliation and
> understanding. (1995, p. 114 -118)

I realized early on that choices in methodology were inextricably linked to

the intent of the research itself. I had considered other types of methods before

committing myself to PAR. Mohanty's critique of the "production of third-world

difference" created by racist and sexist Western thought that frequently situates

third-world women as typical objects of inquiry to be studied and manipulated

(Mohanty, 1991) assisted in pointing me towards looking at storytelling and oral

narratives.

The power of storytelling historically used by Aboriginal cultures in

teaching and learning and now advocated by feminist scholars (Razack, 1993;

Dossa, 2004) was attractive to me. Dossa's most recent work is testament to

how Iranian immigrant women have used storytelling to name systemic inequities

on their own terms in Canada (2004). The potential for naming inequities and

reclaiming personal power would have illustrated the multiple histories and

stories of FWC women.

I had also thought about using oral narratives in examining group

processes at FWC. The potential behind this methodology is evident in the work

of Rizwana Jiwa. Jiwa's multi-method approach of "third world feminist methodology" has yielded powerful narratives from Ismaili women (Jiwa, 2003). These narratives have been used by Jiwa to elaborate on Homi Bhabha's earlier concept of 'third-space' (1994), suggesting that immigrant women of colour are actively redefining their lives in Canada in response to racism (Jiwa, 2003). This active engagement and participation by women in disclosing how they respond to, and resist, racism demonstrates the effective use of oral narratives.

However, upon greater reflection it seemed that neither of these methods would suffice. FWC women had made it clear that they did not want their identities to overshadow or supersede group process. Taking the lead from women, I chose to use PAR as it is action-oriented and would allow us to examine ongoing group processes in developing a document that could be used by other women's centres struggling with similar issues. FWC women used PAR to examine group processes for themselves along the lines of race and class oppression.

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

Despite its commitment to engaging in research that attempts to do respectful work with communities that leads to social change, PAR has been criticized by many social scientists for a number of reasons. Theorists have suggested that issues such as time, cost-effectiveness, lack of attention to homogenous needs, and scant evidence of sincere fundamental change make participatory action research a rather unattractive model (Wolf, 1996; Kirsch,

1999). I encountered some of these challenges in implementing and documenting the research findings using PAR.

The issues of time and cost-effectiveness within this research project were points of conflict for me. Women's lives—consumed by work, family, and community obligations—frequently kept matters from progressing in as timely a manner as either the university expected or I wanted. University requirements and deadlines surrounding research projects had little understanding of collective group processes that were necessary for FWC women to make decisions surrounding the research. And my own impatience often left me wanting to document FWC group processes much earlier than the women approved it.

Virtually all of the women involved with the newly emerging space had other commitments, including full-time jobs, family and motherhood responsibilities, and committee and social justice work outside of their regular work hours. Urgent meetings to handle day-to-day matters at FWC were frequently squeezed into over-crammed schedules. Thus, FWC approval for the research from both Board members and the women on the collective took time due to women's lack of availability, the all too often slow workings of a collective structure, frequent lack of quorum in making decisions, and women's desire to take time to think about the research idea in terms of what it would mean for the centre and themselves. As this was a PAR project and would require input and involvement from all the women involved in the collective, the group wanted to negotiate how much time they could and would grant this project.

Further to this, at the time that I submitted my application for research to the Office of Research Services, the university was conducting a review of existing research practices. The office was implementing more stringent guidelines with regards to research with human subjects. The result was a letter with a series of queries about the application I had submitted; specifically my use of the term 'marginalize':

> As the term 'marginalized' is a pejorative label I am wondering whether the participants will be asked in advance to consent to its use. You mention in the first page of your proposal that it is 'a self-chosen descriptor by collective members'. Will the participants be chosen from among the collective members who had already chosen or accepted the label? (Ethics Consultant, 1999)

As it is my understanding that it happened on more than one occasion, assumptions underlying the descriptor 'marginalized women' demonstrated the consultant's lack of familiarity with the term. It seemed that the term marginalized was seen as a negative label that demeaned 'research subjects' in the proposed piece of work. This was frustrating for me as it pointed to the continued rift between the language of community (FWC women had chosen the label themselves) and that of the academy. The academy frequently does not recognize, and is not familiar with, the language used by activists. The office preferred academic-friendly jargon. I responded with the following statement:

> There is extensive research and literature that illustrates that women of various ethnicities and backgrounds (commonly labelled women of colour etc.) use 'the margins' to signify the multiple worlds/localities they inhabit and claim the 'the margins' as an active site of resistance. All the research participants will be chosen from the collective members who have already chosen the label 'marginalized women'. (Morgan, 1999)

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Simultaneously, I had to contend with the concerns of a FWC woman who challenged the very basis of the methodology I proposed. Within PAR, the researcher's time and efforts are frequently dictated by the community being researched. Ideally, the research is designed, guided and implemented by the community which is defining and leading the project. Deliah, a professor at a local post-secondary institution, challenged the research proposal I had drafted for its use of the term 'participatory action research'. She claimed that it was not a pure PAR project. She clarified that her concerns stemmed out of a "lack of involvement" of women in drafting the research project and my eagerness to "rush the process" to have the research approved. She extended herself to help with my re-evaluation of the proposal. My own struggles of researcher-participant and insider/outsider to the work were permeated by doubts raised by Deliah's arguments about the 'pureness' of the proposed research project. I would not be wholly honest if I did not acknowledge that I was eager to get on with, and complete, the research due to my own financial constraints of being a full-time student.

However, to be accountable to the women, throughout the project I had checked in with them prior to submitting the application to ethics. FWC women had tried to set up a small committee to meet with me on a regular basis to review the data, discuss issues that might arise for participants, and give me feedback and support. Unfortunately women's personal schedules made it impossible for us to schedule these meetings.

Fortunately, any doubts raised by Deliah's comments were quelled by women in the collective who continued to support the research project. Women reiterated that they wanted me to document the evolution of, and current processes in, the centre (FWC Collective, 1998). In response to Deliah's claims that I was 'rushing the process', I argued that in my estimation I gave women ample time to consider their interest and level of involvement in the project.

There have been some questions about the narrow scope of such research which focuses on a specific, confined, local issue, and doubt its effectiveness in meeting the needs of a more general community. Wolf argued that since participatory action research has generally focused on poor people wishing to enact change that it may fail to identify and effectively integrate issues of class, gender, race etc. (1996). I question the accuracy of this as there are examples of community and feminist groups doing participatory action research projects through an integrated and inclusive framework. The Aboriginal Women's Action Network's document "Bill C-31: Its Impact, Implications and Recommendations for Change in British Columbia"; Vancouver Status of Women's "A New Era: The Deepening of Women's Poverty"; and the Bus Riders Union "Women in Transit, Organizing for social justice in our communities" all speak to how feminist organizations have successfully integrated concepts of gender, race, class and other types of oppression into PAR projects. The work we planned to undertake at FWC similarly identified how important it was to explore issues for racialized women who, we reasoned, were often marginalized. As mentioned earlier, we knew this material was welcome by other feminist

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organizations and centres through our telephone and in-person survey with women working in feminist organizations and post-secondary institutions across Canada. There was little material on the topic of group processes when addressing issues of marginalization within feminist collectives (FWC Meeting, 1999).

Lastly, social theorists have also questioned the likelihood of sincere fundamental change occurring under participatory action research projects. They argue that the commitment of participants may dissolve once the researcher has left the field (Patai, 1991). The group's decision to investigate group processes in a collective manner speaks to the amount of time and energy they were willing to invest in the project (FWC Proposal, 1999). FWC women were concerned with changing the course of the centre and creating a blueprint for other women's organizations interested in implementing internal processes of social change. Many of the women were familiar with the length of time it took for fundamental change to occur in areas of racism and inclusion. Some were continuing to fight for the recognition of foreign professional credentials and others were working on issues of systemic violence and racism within women's centres and community organizations (FWC, 1998-2000). These struggles for feminist equity and social justice, women stated, were not prone to easy, quick solutions.

The key word for me in deciding to use a participatory action research methodology was process and "...seeing research as part of an ongoing process for change" (Women's Research Centre, 1992). Based in community, employing reflexivity, and wishing to engage in research with women on issues of anti-

racism, I felt that a participatory action research methodology rooted in post-colonialism was invaluable to the research project (Jiwa, 2003; Women In Transit, 2005). Participatory Action Research seemed to fit best as the women involved with FWC were all active in community organizations to varying degrees and were 'experts' on the topic to be researched.

Choosing PAR

Historically, FWC had used a collaborative model when working with women's groups in various communities. The centre employed PAR strategies such as focus groups and interviews to assist women in designing projects that affected their lives. The new women moving into the Centre planned to use the same techniques in their work on issues affecting racialized women. During their interviews both Vanessa and Kathy spoke to the issue of accountability when working with women's projects. Vanessa reiterated the importance of doing focus groups with communities in order to hear and integrate other women's experiences on similar issues so that we could minimize the organization re-creating inequities of power between us and other women in our separate communities (Interview, 1999). And Kathy voiced her feelings about the actual validity of past FWC documents: "...the structure meant that a non-privileged woman or woman of colour would not even have the opportunity to be interviewed by them" (Interview, 1999). Kathy's interpretation of PAR went a step further and completely took away the role of professional researcher as was historically practiced by FWC:

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My dream would be to be able to get people from these communities who are not researchers to be able to work with a group. They would learn to take up research. I bet you the findings from their research would be much more deeper than ours because they have an association, an identity, they can go in there and ask the right questions. They could feel and other people would be more willing to share and that itself is a gem. (Interview, June 1999)

Limitations in funding, time and energy made it impossible for us to do the type of research Kathy dreamt about. However, its underlying principles influenced how FWC aimed to pursue its work in the future. This ideal, coupled with the work done by other feminist organizations noted above, reaffirmed that PAR was the best method of inquiry for this project at the time as it was consistent with the philosophy of the Centre: to be transparent, reciprocal, and jointly owned and created.

Tools & Techniques

Methodological choices in this inquiry were defined largely by the overall goals of the emerging centre under study. I used a multi-method participatory approach which focused on group process. In addition to a historical overview, methods included a review of minutes from meetings, notes from interviews and a focus group, and personal journal entries from a journal I kept throughout the research project. As women were reluctant to be formally observed, I have minimized what I included from observations. Questions for the interviews are attached in Appendix 2 and the focus group, in Appendix 3.

I had hoped that individual interviews with the women at FWC would give me an opportunity to gain knowledge about their background, interests, and any

ideas they had about the future of FWC. Additionally, I felt that a focus group on group processes relating to issues identified by the women would highlight emerging group dynamics. I foresaw a focus group as the best way to examine not only points of agreement, but differences between women all working towards the common goal of better understanding complex group dynamics.

It was imperative to do a historical overview of the organization to trace its evolution and map the fissures that had led to the pivotal moment when the leadership changed from white women to that of a collective of racialized women. I reviewed and analyzed data from both the old and newly emerging group. Historical records included notes from previous staff and board meetings, ideas for projects, copies of project application forms, and the published/public documents and reports on projects (Field Notes, 1998-9). This material gave a sense of the immense work that women had put into the organization. The material also spoke to the 'blinders' that kept the predominantly white women from approaching issues of racism within the feminist work they did.

I relied heavily on minutes of meetings, reports, and applications for funding to track group process and I examined the tensions, contradictions and challenges that had begun to emerge in the group. This information became vital to my comprehending what was happening in the group as women were reluctant to have me do 'observations'. They all agreed that they felt uncomfortable with me observing and recording their actions in the group. It is impossible, of course, to state that I did not observe (consciously or unconsciously, intentionally or

unintentionally) the unfoldings at FWC. Like other women involved in the process, what I witnessed has informed both my personal life and this research.

At the insistence of FWC and the women involved, the interviews and focus group were supplemental with the work at hand. Women agreed to the interviews as it was part of the research project and largely on the condition that the focus remain on FWC group processes and development. Women were given the interview questions in advance and had the opportunity to ask for clarification, make suggestions, and omit questions they were uncomfortable with. As much as possible, interviews were scheduled to meet the needs of the women. This meant that we generally met during the day at either the new centre or in women's workspaces, homes, and coffee shops. Often the interviews were squeezed into women's busy schedules to accommodate their work and school commitments, families, cultural and religious practices and other volunteer work.

A further example of the lack of priority women gave to the research project in their lives was their reaction to the focus group which I had hoped to be a stand-alone activity. Women decided that, due to the nature of their commitments, they wanted to have the focus group as part of the organization's retreat. Initially the retreat was to focus on a lengthy 'to do' list and address vital components of FWC's day-to-day business. I was worried and disappointed as I feared that the key issues of visioning and group processes I hoped to document would get lost in the group's addressing FWC business. I had hoped that we would concentrate solely on the focus group for the purposes of the research

project. As I feared, we ran out of time to thoroughly discuss and reflect on women's responses to the focus group questions. Women felt the questions to be too ambitious and were overwhelmed with having to participate in both the focus group and attend to FWC business matters.

Challenges in Participating and Writing

Documenting the research findings has not been easy. Historically, FWC produced a number of documents that it would have been helpful to include in further understanding the work of the organization. It has been difficult to not give the organization credit but rather disguise its' name when referring to the work it has done. Issues of confidentiality have kept me from openly connecting these sources to FWC. Furthermore, although I committed to writing about the tensions, contradictions, and challenges of a group of racialized women marginalized by race, I was not prepared for the numerous factors, both inside and outside the organization, that would make this increasingly difficult to document.

Being a collective member, doing contract work for FWC, and choosing to be an active researcher meant that I constantly wrestled with issues of power and privilege (Patai, 1991; Wolf, 1996; Kirsch, 1999) and straddling the fence as an "insider-outsider" (Collins, 1990) during the course of the project[10]. Authoring findings into an academically acceptable piece of work means that the research will likely be published and public with my name on the title page. FWC women

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[10] Speaking to issues as a paid contract worker and researcher often signalled a self-interest that left me feeling uncomfortable.

hoped to create a piece that can be used by both women's centres and scholars to better grasp the nature and difficulties of alliance-building for women. I recognize that I will benefit from this supposed collective piece of work. This resonates with what Deliah had previously suggested.

Moreover, my role of researcher is complicated by my own identity, politics, and the relationships I developed with women in the group. I identify as an immigrant woman of colour with some measure of class privilege and note the complexity this lent to my relationships with other racialized women at FWC. The relationships I nurtured with different FWC women along the axes of identity and personal politics around issues such as racism were superimposed with my role as academically-recognized researcher. Furthermore, problematizing inter-group relationships within a group of racialized women requires naming both our successes and our failures. I have questioned why I am afraid to write portions of this work and which of the women I will hurt, offend, and alienate through it. I have developed relationships with some women, and lost touch with others. This, a colleague has reassured me, is part of the research process.

Lastly, writing about tensions, contradictions and challenges for a non-white women's centre may well invite public scrutiny at a time when the provincial government has made its disdain for women's centres and organizations well-known through severe cuts to funding for such spaces (Creese & Strong-Boag, 2005). There is always the danger that, just as one's work may illuminate different strategies that women's organizations would welcome; it might also lead to further public backlash and scrutiny. My hope lies in the possibility that this

project can be used by women's centres to engage in alliance-building to subvert racist state agendas and policies.

Emergent Themes

FWC women wrestled with two issues when re-designing the centre. The first involved the inclusion of white women in the organization. Most of us were divided on including white women (both those originally involved with the centre and other allies we had). Our personal and professional experiences with women's centres and concepts of multiculturalism and anti-racism illuminated possible motives for our desire to include white women or not.

The second issue focused on the concept of 'marginalization'. Our use of the term marginalization with a focus on issues of race often silenced other markers of identity such as class, sexual orientation and ability. Although issues of sexual orientation and ability remained largely in the background, class called attention in a manner that demanded we reconfigure our concepts of marginalization and power. 'Marginalized women', we found, exercise power in different spaces.

Research findings from this project point to the difficulties of racialized women forging alliances. Historic state policies and practices have influenced how women both experience and respond to, their worlds. In particular, the practical application of racist state policies continues to be mirrored in inter-group processes. The issues of immigrant and refugee women were, in many ways, markedly different from those of the sole First Nations woman in the group.

These differences divided us and threatened our desire to work as allies. Over time several women, including myself, left FWC for various reasons and it became a centre of predominantly immigrant women.

Our work on these issues of inclusion, identity markers, and alliance-building helped us formulate recommendations for a progressive women's centre open to dialogue across differences. We hope that these suggestions will help women's centres remap the contours of their practice to include the interests of racialized women to create greater equity and social justice.

CHAPTER 4   RACE POLITICS: THE QUESTION OF INCLUDING WHITE WOMEN

The act of naming issues and examining what being political means to us and what political process means to us is an important part of this work. (Vanessa – Interview, June 1999)

One of the most contentious issues[11] in rebuilding FWC was the role and inclusion of white women in the centre. FWC women had many different thoughts on white women's participation in the newly forming centre. Feelings of excitement about doing work with a feminist anti-racist agenda were punctured by moments of fear at how we would be perceived in multiple communities we lived and worked in. We realized that we would have to contend with others' perceptions of us as "angry women of colour responsible for destroying a feminist organization" in order to gain power for ourselves (FWC Meeting, 1999). Rekha stated, "...Now other women will see us in positions of power—like the elite" (FWC Meeting, 1999). We feared that we risked both personal and professional ramifications such as tarnished reputations and loss of credibility and jobs for our actions in FWC.

Several key events lead to FWC moving from a predominantly white women's space to one foregrounding the issues of racialized women. The hiring of women of colour and a First Nations woman; publications that spoke of racism

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[11] Women had many different ideas when reconstructing FWC. We struggled with many issues including differentiating between paid and volunteer work and whether or not to close the collective to further membership.

in the women's movement and community organizations; and an internal review that resulted in a series of workshops and meetings all assisted in moving the centre towards a greater inclusion of marginalized women.

The five women of colour and one First Nations woman who were hired by FWC at different times as either paid staff or contract workers all identified racism as a problem in the organization. This growing 'consciousness of the differences and inequities' (FWC Meeting Minutes, early 1990s) suggested that white staff and board members prioritize and genuinely work on this issue within the organization (Interviews with Kathy & Rekha, 1999). Women's personal experiences dictated that change was necessary if they were to continue to be involved in the space. It was beyond the scope of this research project to interview all the women involved due to restrictions of time and location (some had re-located outside the province).

This demand for accountability came at the same time as women of colour across the nation were challenging the agenda of a largely white feminist movement led by middle-class, privileged white women (Bannerji, 1993; hooks, 1984; Moraga and Anzaldua, 1983). Women marginalized by race and ethnicity, class, sexual orientation/identification, age and ability were insisting on the recognition of their experiences within the North American women's movement. This demand for accountability resulted in FWC developing a book that focused on racism and the struggles of predominantly racialized women in the women's movement, shelters, and anti-violence organizations (Field Notes, 1999). The work brought together a cross-section of women who wrote about violence

against women from an integrated standpoint and challenged organizations such as FWC to work towards the acceptance and inclusion of difference.

Interestingly, during the course of the research project Kathy, Rekha and another woman of colour (outside FWC) who had contributed to this publication, challenged the validity and representativeness of the work. They spoke about the faulty process used to solicit women to participate, which women's voices were missing from the work, and the political underpinnings driving the work (Field Notes, 1999). For example, Kathy argued that the work did not fully articulate the interests of marginalized women as the women participating in the project all worked within the mainstream feminist movement (Interview, 1999). Rekha spoke to the heated interactions between FWC and activists writing for the publication that led to immigrant women and women of colour wanting little to do with the centre once the project was finished (Interview, 1999). Additionally, there is a difference between soliciting the voices of marginalized women from the community for a book and fully integrating their interests in the inner-workings of a centre.

FWC also received money to examine the issue of violence against women in three different ethnic communities within Vancouver (FWC Notes, 1998). The Centre chose to focus its efforts on listening to, and documenting, the experiences of Chinese, First Nations and South Asian women working within women's shelters and community organizations. The workshops (the most

successful of which was one with South Asian women[12]) resulted in women contextualizing their concerns about racism, sexism, poverty, sexual identity and orientation, ability and age within the feminist movement and various community organizations (FWC Notes from Workshops, 1998).

The findings of the workshop were closely aligned with FWC's move to conduct an organizational review. White women within the organization began to question whether the organization was reflective of women marginalized by race. Minutes of past meetings indicate that white women in FWC had historically wrestled with issues such as ignorance, fear of being labelled 'racist', funding cuts, staff turnover and change, being caught in a web of "what if we can't do it right?, how do we do it right?, if we can't do it right then we can't and shouldn't do it", and personal life changes that affected staff and board energy (FWC Meeting Minutes, early 1990s). Such feelings led to the issues of inclusion and integration being continuously sidelined. The workshops provided momentum for women to begin to examine the centre's inner workings.

Metamorphosis – I

There were two key meetings that led to the internal changes at FWC. The first was a facilitated discussion in the fall of 1998 between FWC board and staff and various women of colour in the community (including myself) to examine issues of racism within the centre. Vanessa, a First Nations woman and future FWC member, facilitated this meeting. Following this meeting a handful of

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[12] When I asked Rekha (the woman responsible for organizing and facilitating the workshop with South Asian women) about this she stated that the organizing committee did not know the reason why interest and turnout had been so low in the other two groups.

us, all identifying as women of colour, scheduled another meeting to expand membership of non-white women in the centre. The consequence of these discussions was a collective of 11 women identifying as immigrant women, refugee women, women of colour, and First Nations women coming together to forge a new agenda for FWC.

Race and racism, marginalized women will attest, are difficult to be open and honest about when sitting in a mixed group that includes white women. Resources designed to work on issues of racism and greater integration and involvement by women marginalized by race point to the reluctance of white women to work on issues of racism (Estable, Meyer & Pon, 1997; Bishop, 1998; CRIAW 2002). Vanessa began the session by outlining the vulnerability of women of colour when speaking to issues of race and racism in a predominantly white occupied space (Field Notes, 1998). Although speaking about race and racism was difficult for all women, the impact of it was distinctly different for women who had been historically marginalized by race. Many such women, she stated, had perhaps been involved in other change efforts that led to little, if any, perceptible change. Questions of trust, risk and gain were essential in order for women to disclose and participate in creating tangible changes.

Furthermore, Vanessa stated, there was a lack of First Nations women in the meeting (Field Notes, 1998). She clarified that she currently occupied the role of group facilitator and this changed the dynamic of her involvement within the workshops. Her role of facilitator would keep her from participating in group

activities. The absence of First Nations women in the group continued to mark and highlight the issue of racism that continued at FWC.

These issues were cast against the seeming lack of commitment of white women. Throughout the meeting the FWC Coordinator, Libby, and Board members shared that they had little to no energy to put into the organization any longer. Money for projects from the core funding source was dwindling. Serious health issues for women affected their energy to perform their duties and demanded that they cut back on their responsibilities at FWC. Other's worked full-time jobs or were expecting to move into positions that would require their full attention. This had many of us questioning white women's dedication to principles of anti-racism and inclusion. Nevertheless, we produced a series of ideas of how to move FWC forward (see Appendix 4). Ambitious in content and scope, the list was produced on the premise that all ideas are valuable and must be included.

A second meeting arranged to attract other immigrant women, refugee women, women of colour and First Nations women to FWC yielded similar questions. The predominantly immigrant women attending the meeting stated that they did not wholly believe the intentions of white women willing to give up an organization. We all noted the difference between being invited to participate in the fundamental structure and operating principles of a healthy organization, and inheriting one whose funding may be in jeopardy.

The nature and extent of white women's involvement was a contested issue at FWC. All of us agreed that it was necessary for Libby the Coordinator;

and Julie a part-time Administrative Assistant, and a few key knowledgeable

Board members (all white women who had been involved with FWC for some

time), to continue to be involved with the organization during its transition. We

needed assistance with becoming better informed about the organization,

applying for funding, and learning about its daily operations. However, the desire

to minimize and eventually phase out white women's involvement was met with

accusations of 'reverse racism'[13] (FWC Meeting, Fall 1998). Those of us

opposing the immediate involvement of white women argued that reverse racism

was impossible given the level and extent to which systemic racism permeated

and affected the lives of racialized women in Canada (Bannerji, 2000).

Several factors influenced FWC women's desires to ex/include white

women from the centre. Women's personal experiences with FWC, themes of

multiculturalism and anti-racism, and ideas of what constitutes 'legitimate feminist

work' (and often what projects get funding) all had implications for how women

responded to this issue. The most salient of these, I will argue, was the

multicultural and anti-racism frameworks FWC women had internalized through

their work and personal experiences.

Women's Past Involvement with FWC

Five out of 11 of us on the collective had attended the FWC meeting in the

fall of 1998 when the centre first began to explore issues of greater integration of

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[13] This term has been used to demonstrate racism against white people through initiatives such as employment equity (Henry and Tator, 2005; CRIAW, 2002). It was used by some FWC women to suggest that we were discriminating against white women by limiting their involvement and participation in the new centre.

women of colour. In this section interview data from three of these FWC women highlight the nature of the issues involved in the change to exclude white women as part of the process of focusing the centre more directly on racialized women. These issues are also manifested in notes from meetings that occurred during this transition process.

Three women had a long association with FWC and were either working or had previously worked with the centre. Kathy, Rekha, and Janice became involved with FWC due to their keen interest in supporting a feminist space doing progressive work on women's issues. Janice had been involved sporadically over the course of a few years. Kathy joined FWC in order to assist the centre with its bookkeeping and annual audit; and Rekha was invited to help with a project targeting violence against women. Rekha's contract work with the organization brought her into close contact with white women in the space. Her experiences of racism within FWC clearly affected her desire to change the space to reflect the needs of racialized women:

> *It took, just from my experience, about three years (at FWC) to finally realize that there are dynamics around working with white women that prevent us from really getting to the issues. The other woman of colour, First Nations woman and myself went through a very difficult time at FWC—it was very isolating and divisive. I went through a lot of pain and struggle...would leave meetings with the thought that I just cannot go back there. I came to a point of saying that I can't do this work with white women in the room. We couldn't come together with white women there.* (Interview, July 1999)

Rekha's involvement with FWC started when the centre had approached her to sit on a committee and participate on a project with them. She worked

with a Chinese woman and First Nations woman on the project in an environment that was largely controlled by white women:

It was still white women running the meetings, coordinating meetings, telling us how much money there is and how much we could use and, you know, the three of us talked about how at any given point we were being told what to do. There was nothing in it for us at the time. (Interview, July 1999)

The two women were paid employees on the project whereas Rekha was simply a committee member. Both women left as 'it wasn't working for them—so it wasn't just a personal choice' (Interview with Rekha, July 1999). Rekha had continued working with the centre because she,

...Had some areas of privilege such as a steady job outside the centre, education, lack of physical violence in (her) life, and an opportunity to do self-work, which allowed (her) to be resilient and more able to stay at FWC. (Interview, July 1999)

The five of us who had attended FWC's Fall 1998 meeting (Rekha, Kathy, Janice, Vanessa and myself) witnessed hints of what Rekha had articulated. We noted the hesitation on the part of some white women to take responsibility for the racist conditions of the organization when we questioned them about the length of time it had taken to acknowledge issues of racism and work toward inclusion and the sharing of power. Claims to understand that they "were doing the best they could and made what they thought were good decisions at the time" were met with silence by women of colour (FWC Meeting, Fall 1998). These moments of silence were difficult for all women to sit through, but had a particularly painful impact on racialized women who had historically been kept

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out of FWC. Women's frustration was evident in their faces and their eventual

questioning of white women's interventions (FWC Meeting, Fall 1998).

We had agreed to come together to talk about our experiences of racism

in feminist spaces as we believed that white women at FWC wanted to bring

about change and greater inclusion. This was not an easy decision as many of

us who had participated in such processes in the past were familiar with the

common responses of white women. White women wanting to explore racism

frequently responded with feelings of guilt, denial, anger, and a desire to be

educated by racialized women (Estable et al. 1997; CRIAW, 2002; Mohanty,

2003). As some of us had anticipated, some white women were still reluctant to

share power and decision-making within the group and this affected group

dynamics. An important incident was the point at which Vanessa, the facilitator

and sole First Nations woman in the group, felt herself being silenced in this

meeting. During her interview, she articulated the resistance she felt from a

white woman in the group that triggered a role change from facilitator to

participant:

> *I remember sitting down on the floor and saying 'I'd just like to say
> that I'm feeling more like a participant than a facilitator'. And that
> was because one of the key players in the old collective was taking
> over. That was the energy I was feeling from her. She had her
> own agenda the whole time and so I thought, I'm not going to fight
> you, you know, this is your thing here not mine. So that's when I
> started to make the shift.* (Interview, June 1999)

This reluctance on the part of a white woman to accept a First Nations

woman exercising some measure of power in her capacity of facilitator

underscores the difficulty of accepting non-white women in positions of power[14]. Although working towards the same goals, early on there appeared to be a polarization of interests between white and racialized women. A blend of deeply embedded racist practices in a structure that had historically positioned white women against racialized women may have led some white women to wholly surrender their power at FWC. Vanessa's experience speaks to how tense and difficult any transition at FWC would be.

The six women who later joined FWC (Cam, Maria, Maya, Parvin, Lourdes, and Deliah) lacked this experience with the centre. They came to the group on the heels of these meetings and were not privy to what had transpired in them. In particular, they had missed some of the more subtle and nuanced exchanges that transpired between the racialized women and white women in their efforts to question and transform the space. Perhaps unfairly we were requiring them to make decisions based on a second-hand rendering of events.

Of these women, all but Deliah questioned the decision to close FWC's doors to white women. During their interviews both Parvin and Maya referred to this decision again. Parvin stated that once we had 'rebuilt' FWC it was her hope that white women could re-enter the organization:

> *Right now the white women are aside and this group or society is working for themselves. My hope is that every single woman can come and be here and get a little bit of benefit from this place.* (Interview, July 1999)

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[14] Bannerji (1991) and Ng (1993) have written about their personal experiences of being marginalized when teaching at universities and Rekha and Vanessa shared similar experiences in facilitating various workshops in the community.

And Maya doubted the group's ability to work together just on the basis of excluding white women from the circle:

> *The fact that you're all women of colour and Aboriginal women...(long pause)...will have very little impact, I feel, on how people work together. I mean, in everybody's heads there might be a possibility, you know, that things will be easier in terms of working with each other. It may never be stated by anyone blatantly but people may have those unrealistic expectations. I think the group of women who ran it before were a much more homogeneous group than we are. I would say we would be a more homogeneous group if we were made up of people who came from a similar background, had similar work experiences, and were from the same racial group. That would be the equivalent of what the white women had in the past in working together.* (Interview, June 1999)

Both Parvin and Maya attributed their reluctance around the exclusion of white women at FWC to their experiences with white women in different contexts. Parvin had never worked in a self-defined women's centre and Maya had extensive experience working with different women's organizations. My own desire to delay the participation and inclusion of white women at FWC led me to disagree with both Maya and Parvin's statements. Maya's comments about the homogeneity of white women previously managing and running FWC neglects to note, and minimizes, potential intra-group differences between them. Although we had little interaction and information about the personal backgrounds and experiences of white women at FWC, the potential differences along class, sexual orientation, ability and age between white women in the group must be taken into consideration. It would be erroneous to portray all white women who had historically been involved with FWC as a homogenous group with completely similar interests.

Furthermore, turning to Parvin's statement, I believe that the quality of group dynamics and interactions would be different without the presence of white women in the group. My own, and other FWC women's personal experiences, point to arguments that the inclusion of white women would keep group processes around racism at a simple binary of white versus other. Many of us believed this would keep us from getting at the root ways women marginalized along the lines of race had learned to relate to, and communicate with, each other. Although we may have been, as Parvin noted, "working for ourselves", we wanted to document and publish work that would illustrate our group processes and dynamics with other women's organizations—white and of colour. The findings would be based on a contextual analysis with historical dimensions of our experiences both with and without white women in the group.

Multiculturalism & Anti-Racism – Different Language, Different Frameworks?

Women used different frameworks when making decisions around the in/exclusion of white women at FWC. Women who initially supported the inclusion of white women in the organization all worked within immigrant and refugee-serving community organizations in Vancouver and Burnaby. Parvin, Maria, Lourdes and Cam were committed to assisting immigrants and refugees with issues of settlement and integration within a multicultural context. The programs and services within these organizations were funded by multiple levels of government all supporting the ideals of settlement, integration and multiculturalism. Critics of multiculturalism have spoken to its glossing over

racism and inadequately addressing inequities (Bannerji, 1993 & 2000; Das Gupta, 1999).

The organizations these four women worked at outside FWC supported immigrant and refugees from across the world including Eastern Europe. Not only did Parvin, Lourdes, Maria and Cam support women from their own communities, they were also privy to the prejudice and discrimination that white immigrant women faced in Canada (FWC Meeting, Fall 1998). These experiences influenced their argument that a space such as FWC must be open and inclusive of all women struggling with issues of racism in all its manifestations. Davia Stasiulus (1990) has written about the complexity of the category 'immigrant women' which often neglects the experiences of white immigrant women.

Social constructions of race using whiteness (among others markers) for in/exclusion affects immigrant and refugee women's integration into Canada. While both white and fair-skinned immigrant and refugee women, and immigrant and refugee women of colour may be struggling to secure housing, employment and language classes, the social construction of skin colour is detrimental to one's entry into life in Canada (Bannerji, 1993). Additionally, racism and violence against people and women of colour of Middle Eastern dissent has intensified since the bombings of the twin towers in the United States (Thobani, 2001).

However, many of us who had worked with white and fair-skinned immigrant and refugee women noted the complexity for these women as they negotiated relationships frequently based on social constructions of whiteness

that favoured white/fair skin within their own ethno-specific groups (Field Notes, 1999). While a perceived whiteness may have bought them some privilege, it was often coupled with tensions, contradictions, and struggles with personal identity.

Additionally, worries about public perception and the fear of being labelled 'racist' fuelled the response of some women in the group. Women working in immigrant and refugee-serving agencies were uncomfortable with some of us voicing our negative experiences with white women. Including white women in the group, they believed, would maintain a commitment to a global feminism that worked for the equality of all women. During the interview Parvin reiterated,

> ...You can't bring your anger from somewhere else to that place (FWC), you know? Because in that group it's nobody's fault. So it's not right that I bring my anger from ten years ago or whatever that I'm Iranian this-that-this-this, I'm handicapped so I will bring my anger to the group. So nothing is solved. (Interview, July 1999)

Her level of discomfort was echoed by both Maria and Lourdes who during the course of the research project shared their hesitation at 'dwelling on past events' (FWC Meeting, 1999). They appreciated the chance to be heard and gain support from the First Nations woman and other women of colour in the group. However, they stated that they wanted to move beyond the dialogue on racism and other forms of oppression and do more 'hands-on' work such as doing needs assessments for future projects, writing and publishing our findings (Group Meetings, 1999).

Parvin, Lourdes, Maria and Cam identified and referred to other women in their communities as 'immigrant women' and integrated the language and theory of multiculturalism in their work to different degrees.

This reluctance to examine racist historical practices fits with the popular multicultural arguments often adopted by immigrant and refugee settlement agencies that focus on minimizing and forgetting past events and moving on to embrace a multicultural mosaic hinting at equality. It underscores the state's efforts to absolve this country's 'founding fathers' (and mothers) of entrenching policies and practices that continue to affect Aboriginal people and people of colour in detrimental ways. Parvin, Lourdes, Maria, and to a lesser degree Cam's, desire to turn away from how these practices had become integrated in spaces such as FWC hinted at their acceptance of multiculturalism and their reluctance to engage in dialogue that would involve some degree of conflict.

Roxanna Ng's work (1988) regarding immigrant women and state-generated community programs is useful in contextualizing the situation for some women in the group. Ng (1988) writes of how the Canadian state creates and perpetuates the category of "immigrant women" to fill a particular niche in the labour market. Programs and services including employment counselling programs, she argues, are designed to accommodate Canada's labour market needs (1988). Women emigrating to Canada are labelled immigrant women and frequently hired by community organizations at low wages to facilitate the job placement of other "immigrant women" into underpaid positions. Agnew (1996) writes:

Community groups describe their services and advocacy in terms of providing equal opportunity and equal access rather than in terms of fighting race and gender discrimination, which might be taken to be critical of state policy. (p. 171)

Other women had very different ideas about the involvement of white women at FWC. Those of us who opposed the presence of white women—Kathy, Rekha, Janice, Vanessa, Deliah, Maya, and myself—worked in organizations and centres that subscribed to a different framework and language than that found in immigrant and refugee settlement agencies. We frowned upon, and were reluctant to use, the theory and framework of multiculturalism. Racism, we believed, could not be abolished through multiculturalism as it did not adequately name or work against systemic racism and white privilege. We had negative experiences in mixed groups and felt that our issues were dismissed, silenced and marginalized by white women who refused to be accountable on issues of racism (FWC Meeting, Fall 1998).

Several women reiterated their negative experiences in predominantly white women's organizations during the interviews. Kathy requested that I turn off the tape recorder during our interview when I asked her about her experiences in women's organizations. She did not wish to have her comments tape recorded but gave me permission to include hand-written notes to the response in the text. Kathy talked at length about what she had witnessed in three women's organizations she'd worked in. Women of colour, in her experience, typically worked under predominantly white women administrators and were silenced or forced to leave due to the racism they experienced there. These women, often hired under affirmative action policies, were marginalized: if

they didn't speak English fluently, were seen as having any measure of power in their jobs, or if they suggested adding programs and services for diverse communities (Interview, June 1999). She summed up, *"...white women accept you if you seem to act as if your background and status are white"* (Interview, June 1999).

In addition to the racism she had to fight at FWC, Rekha spoke about the absence of immigrant women from other women's organizations. She was a staunch advocate for women, yet had little desire to work in a feminist organization that had trained her on issues of violence against women. She identified the reason as one of integration:

> *In many women's organizations' philosophy and mission statements there is no mention or even an attempt to try and understand the diversity of women's experiences, you know. In particular, the issues and voices of immigrant women are missing at the core of many organizations and literature and the history of the women's movement.* (Interview, July 1999)

While women's organizations had 'saved her life', Janice shared that there was also

> *...a rude awakening that women's organizations were not utopia. Women could be mean to each other (laughs). And other forms of inequality existed—the world existed, right in that place.* (Interview, July 1999)

Vanessa's spoke of the marginalization of women of colour and Aboriginal women in feminist organizations:

> *Feminism has been seen by some as, what's that cliché, riding on the backs of Aboriginal women and women of colour and made all these strides and taken all this credit and still there's these*

marginalized groups that never get true recognition and decision making power and all that stuff. (Interview, June 1999)

She went on to share a story to illustrate what she saw as typically happening in predominantly white women's organizations.

There's a committee in Vancouver, as an example, that wanted Aboriginal women to be a part of it. And we tried and then we heard some racist stuff and said fine, we're not here, see-ya and we blew it off. We wrote a letter (of complaint) and a year later I'm still hearing about it. They're still struggling internally about how to deal with this. And they want to apologize to us and have us go there and give a talk and I said, 'We don't need an apology. We just want to know you're working on yourselves. So go and do some work. (Interview, June 1999)

This reluctance to educate white women about racism speaks to past experiences of First Nations women and women of colour who have previously attempted to engage in such work (Lorde, 1984; Monture-Angus, 1995). It comes at a personal cost and frequently change, if there is any, is slow.

Those of us who had some experience participating and working in predominantly white women's organizations and centres believed that anti-racism more accurately captured the work that needed to be done in such spaces. We reasoned that the involvement of white women would re-marginalize our interests and compromise the overall aims and goals of the group (FWC Meeting, Fall 1998).

Questions of Perception & Legitimacy

FWC women were confident that we had successfully questioned the mandate and inner-workings of a feminist organization for accountability in meeting the needs of women in our communities. Local and national women's

organizations commended us for engaging in this work (Personal Communication 1998-99). However, there was the question of continued funding for what we were doing. Namely, would the work we proposed to do be constituted as legitimate enough to secure funding? We wanted to examine how our inter-group processes around issues of racism affected alliance-building between us. Women's previous experiences with funding bodies reminded them of funders' typical lack of interest in actively pursuing projects, programs, and services sincerely committed to anti-racism endeavours. Past experience dictated that the state used a state-defined notion of multiculturalism designed to maintain systemic inequities within a rigid capitalist structure. Our work in community organizations had previously involved using the language of various funding bodies to secure essential money to provide basic programs and services (FWC Meeting, 1999). FWC women were at a disadvantage as we would be engaged in a process lacking programs and services with perhaps few immediate tangible outcomes.

With Libby's help, Rekha and Kathy worked on developing a letter of intent and proposal for FWC's primary funder. FWC had a solid history and relationship with the funder. We hoped that this would work to our advantage in our efforts to focus on:

- What differences and commonalities do we have as women working together from various racial backgrounds?
- How can women of colour, immigrant and aboriginal women work together?
- What values, principles, goals and structures do we need to create in order to further anti-racism work? (Letter of Intent, December 1998).

Early on Rekha noted her apprehension at 'representing FWC' when speaking with the funding body. She struggled with both representing and naming us. We all agreed that we needed a qualifier to outline exactly who we were both to the funding body and the community at large. It was a long and arduous process in choosing a qualifier. Slowly and rather apprehensively, we settled on the term 'marginalized women' to represent our interests (this will be further explored in the next chapter). Our rational for this term was based on the fact that all of us had been marginalized in commonly accepted organizational practices and decision-making processes (Letter of Intent, 1998).

We received a favourable response resulting in funding over 1999-2000. Our happiness was tempered with questioning the funding body's process and motives in funding the work. FWC's past coordinator, Libby, had a long-standing and reputable relationship with the funding body. Although we appreciated her assistance, at times we questioned how the funding body would have responded if our spokeswoman Rekha, an articulate and professional woman of colour with several years of experience working in community organizations, had approached them on her own. How much of this decision to fund the project was due to the continued involvement of white women in the process? What is implied when white woman (a white women administrator handled our file) are in positions to financially approve the efforts of racialized women to focus on inter- and intra-group processes? Is this process indicative of a multicultural approach focusing on group dynamics of communities of colour while minimizing the systemic racism that influences these dynamics?

Despite a confirmation of funding there was a delay in FWC receiving the money outlined for the project. Lengthy project reviews, delayed approval, and a slow transfer of money are common experiences for community organizations. FWC women questioned the priorities of funders. Were the efforts and livelihood of 'marginalized women' (some women depended on their wages at FWC to meet their living expenses) less important than other projects promising tangible deliverables?

Negotiating Race Politics – Continuing the Connection with White Women

Admittedly FWC could not wholly escape the presence of white women in its changeover. We relied on Libby and Julie to assist us with learning about the day-to-day running of the organization. The funding bodies with which we needed to build strategic relationships were staffed by white women we would have to work with. Group conflicts that emerged had some of us turning to local white women activists and allies to help us organize effective responses to avoid further scrutiny from the community and funding bodies. We reasoned, however, that this was different from the inclusion of white women in our membership and still allowed us to focus on intra-group processes. Together we learned to navigate our interests and negotiate for change with white women at FWC and in the funding body.

The minimal involvement of white women at FWC did allow us to concentrate on deconstructing the relationships between ourselves. We had the space to speak about racism (and other types of oppression) without getting

caught in the simple 'black-white' binary. Women were generally thankful to have a space where they could process how they experienced racism. It also gave us an opportunity to share and develop anti-racist strategies to cope with the multiple forms of racism we wrestled with daily. Similar to what Lee and Lutz (2005) outline, we began "...critical 'readings' of how power operates and how it transforms, and reforms, social relations through racial categories and consciousness" (p. 4).

We worked in and with different organizations with multiple frameworks and understandings of concepts such as multiculturalism and anti-racism. Women's adoption of these frameworks through their work and personal experiences influenced their lives and thus what happened at FWC. Parvin, Maria, Lourdes and Cam had immigrated to Canada and internalized the language of 'settlement and integration' both through their personal experiences and their work within various community organizations (Field Notes, 1998-99). They had an intimate knowledge of, and experience with, departments and agencies handling issues concerning immigrants and refugees.

Alternatively, many of us worked in various community organizations and women's centres and were in spaces such as post-secondary institutions (as either students or instructors) that used an anti-racist framework to dissect daily life here. For instance, Vanessa was fighting against Bill-C31 for recognition of her status as an Indian in Canada. Maya worked with the Asian community on HIV/AIDS. And many of us networked with feminist anti-violence organizations that focused their efforts on addressing violence against women. The language

of these various experiences often differed from that used within immigrant and refugee community organizations.

The broad spectrum of issues we dealt with were permeated by commonalities. Virtually all of us named the issue of violence against women to be a pervasive problem in our communities (Field Notes, 1998-99). And many of us dealt with government agencies and departments for basic necessities for our communities such as housing, food, and employment.

However, a closer examination yields that we had internalized different frameworks that often kept us from identifying similarities and commonalities in our struggles. FWC women's desire to see multiculturalism and anti-racism as having separate agendas often kept us from acknowledging how the Canadian state has assisted in dividing the interests of feminism and multiculturalism (Lee & Cardinal, 1998). Our experiences resonated with Lee and Cardinal's argument which suggests the dangers of a hegemonic discourse that fails to see the connections between feminism and multiculturalism and forge grounds for a common struggle. Weary of a multicultural argument that neutralized differences and maintained inequities, many of us failed to note the possibilities underlying what Goldberg, Shohat & Stam, and St. Lewis (as cited in Henry, 2002) have termed radical or critical multiculturalism. Henry (2002) extrapolates:

> Critical multiculturalism moves away from a paradigm of pluralism premised on a hierarchical order of cultures that, under certain conditions, "allows" or "tolerates" non-dominant cultures' participation in the dominant culture. The more pro-active, radical model of multiculturalism focuses on empowerment and resistance to forms of subjugation; the politicization and mobilization of marginalized groups; the transformation of social, cultural, and

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economic institutions; and the dismantling of dominant cultural hierarchies, structures, and systems of representation. Critical multiculturalism imagines minority communities not as "special interest groups" but as active and full participants in the state who are part of its shared history. (p. 238)

Those of us espousing an anti-racism argument may well have neglected to acknowledge that perhaps this is what Parvin, Maria, Lourdes and Cam were alluding to in their efforts to include white women at FWC. We were often caught in an "either multiculturalism or anti-racism" argument without seeing the potential for alliances by merging the socio-political aspects of the two as Henry and others have suggested.

Furthermore, neither multiculturalism nor anti-racism provided the precise critical language we sought in examining intra-group processes. Through the process of wrestling with the issue of in/excluding white women at FWC, women noted the systemic inequities rooted in state policies that worked to divide our interests. We established the danger of locking ourselves into categories of multiculturalism and anti-racism with impassable boundaries with different and opposing interests. Alliance-building across difference on issues of racism demanded that we do some work alone and some, due to the nature of systemic racism, with white women allies. The critical point was to create a dynamic centre that would allow us to examine how we had internalized systemic, state-created differences in our work with each other.

CHAPTER 5   MARGINALIZATION, SILENCE, SPEAKING

Forging an Identity—Reaching Consensus around 'Marginalization'

It may take conflict to create structure and a way of working together. (Janice – Interview, July 1999)

Articulating our political beliefs within a transforming FWC required that we identify who we were and what we proposed to do. FWC women wanted to secure legitimacy and credibility in the community. We recognized the need to balance the prescribed language of feminist organizations, our own concerns, and the discourse funding bodies would recognize and favour. Our identity had to fall within the purview of frameworks, ideology, and language prescribed by the state if we wished to pursue funding from state bodies. This was a formidable task as we identified as immigrant women, refugee women, women of colour, and First Nations women. We were a highly diverse group with different, and at times, conflicting interests.

The topic of identity emerged twice during the research project, once during a meeting to attract more women to FWC in January 1999 and then again during the focus group in September 1999. During the January meeting immigrant women, refugee women, women of colour and First Nations women struggled with agreeing to a single identity for the Centre. Forging a cohesive group identity was difficult for women of different backgrounds, histories, and beliefs who were in the beginning stages of developing a working relationship

together. Women felt compromised in surrendering the identities they were comfortable using on a daily basis for a term they felt did not wholly capture the socio-historical scripts with which they currently lived. The specific socio-historic experiences of different racialized women varied. Groups had different interests and needs that required a range of various resources. Women pointed to how purely racial qualifiers had led to misperceptions about them and their communities (FWC Meetings, 1998-2000). They argued that terms such as women of colour, immigrant women, refugee women and First Nations women failed to note the heterogeneity within these categories (FWC Meeting, Spring 1999). Differences along the lines of ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, age, ability, literacy, and religion existed within these categories. Adopting the language and terminology used by the state, community agencies, and women's centres masked intra-group differences between them.

In particular, during the meeting to attract more women in January 1999, immigrant women spoke about their reluctance to use the term 'women of colour'. Women stated that they identified as 'immigrant women', used it in the context of their work, and participated in organizations and on committees that used the term. It was a term they were familiar and comfortable with and used on a daily basis. Women also pointed out that the term was important as it signified their relationship and connection to the land, 'culture', and First Nations communities in Canada. In addition to the numerous personal experiences where Aboriginal people had asked for accountability from immigrants around claiming immigrant status on their territories, this was a powerful reminder of the

necessity of using the term immigrant when contextualizing the situation of people who were not born here.

Personal recollections of group meetings and encounters with First Nations people who had challenged me on my immigrant status in this country resonated with what the immigrant women said. I was reminded that those of us born elsewhere were immigrant women standing on Aboriginal territory. Those who were born here but not Aboriginal would have a different connection to the land. I could struggle alongside Aboriginal women but had to remain keenly aware of how my presence affected them.

Similar to arguments put forward by Ng (1988), Bannerji (1993 & 1995), Lee & Cardinal (1998), and Abu-Laban, (1998), immigrant women also observed the problematic nature of the state-generated hegemonic term "immigrant women". They were aware that it signified a temporary and transitory status within the country and fixed and locked them into a category of 'outsiders' to the nation (FWC Meeting, January 1999). They agreed that securing citizenship did little to alter others perceptions of immigrant as 'not from here'. Furthermore, women concurred that intra-group differences based on ethnicity, nationality, religion, and class were lost when using the term immigrant women (FWC Meetings, 1998-2000). The matter was pronounced for refugee women whose issues were either mistakenly subsumed under the category immigrant women or vanished altogether.

Women identifying as 'women of colour' agreed that the term 'immigrant women' was coined by state interests in creating an insider/outsider dichotomy

between white and other communities (FWC Meeting, Fall 1998). We believed that the use of popular state-definitions without a critical analysis of these definitions was not enough. We needed a response that would dissect the creation and intention of state-generated terminology and help us to politicize the interests of racialized women (FWC Meeting, January 1999). In short, we chose to use the term 'women of colour' as a form of resistance against state policies to define us.

The situation was further exacerbated for First Nations women such as Vanessa. We were reminded that whereas the women's movement had forgotten the interests and needs of refugee women, immigrant women and women of colour, it had virtually abandoned those of First Nations women (Monture-Angus, 1995; Anderson, 2000). The specific experiences and issues of both urban and reserve First Nations women had become almost totally nullified in many women's centres. Similar to other racialized women, First Nations women created their own enclaves in order to address issues central to the struggle of their communities (Monture-Angus, 1995; Anderson, 2000).

In addition to this we noted that all of these terms—immigrant women, refugee woman, woman of colour and First Nations women—lacked the subtleties of additional, equally important fragments that constitute identity. FWC women articulated that many life experiences affected our identities. Positions in the biological, extended, and chosen family were key components in women's lives. Community participation and expectations affected their lives. The titles and status they held at work were important in shaping their identities. Women

practiced different spiritual beliefs that sustained them and affected how they identified. And they engaged with concepts of feminism and the feminist movement and referred to themselves as feminists (FWC Meetings, January-September, 1999). Limiting ourselves to a single identity was impossible given the multiple ways FWC women identified. This was similar to the theories proposed by Hall (1996), Bhabha (1994), and Rattansi (2005) about fluid notions of identity. It also underscores Khayatt's (1994) argument that identity is a complex phenomenon.

Following the heated discussion about identity that ensued in January 1999, we reluctantly settled on the term 'marginalized women'. We agreed with arguments put forward by several scholars-activists including hooks (1984), Ng (1988 & 1993), Bannerji (1993), Maracle (1996) and others that women of colour, immigrant women and First Nations women are frequently denied economic, social, and political participation in both nation-building and resistance movements including women's centres. We hoped that the term 'marginalized women' would capture the multiple identities we brought to FWC and outline the essence of who we were in relation to white women and the community at large. Furthermore, based on our personal experience with women in our communities and similar to what other writers (Moraga & Anzaldua, 1983; hooks, 1984; Collins, 1990; and Holland, 1998) have outlined, we acknowledged the margins as an active place of struggle and resistance. Our ideas and experiences had been historically marginalized by the feminist movement and continued to be frequently marginalized by the community organizations and women's centres we

worked in (Field Notes, 1998-1999). These commonalities were underscored by a dialogue suggested by Bakhtin's concept (Casey, 1993; Holland, 1998) of the self authoring itself through an engagement with the outside world and the 'other'. FWC women ongoingly engaged with authoritative discourses (Bakhtin, 1981) in state-created systems.

Women were not wholly happy with the label 'marginalized women' but agreed that it was an umbrella term that would outline their position 'inside the margins' as they struggled to define themselves in their interaction with different systems in their personal and professional lives.

Resisting 'Marginalization'

This resistance by FWC women to affix an identity continued to resonate throughout group meetings and the focus group. While we may have used the term loosely with funding bodies, women's centres and community organizations, we continued to refer to ourselves in a language of our own choosing. This was elucidated in women's responses to the first question in the focus group (see Appendix 3) which asked how they identified and how it influenced their work at FWC. Some women responded with labels alluding to race such as visible minority woman, immigrant woman, woman of colour, Aboriginal, and South Asian (Focus Group, September 1999). They further elaborated that FWC gave them a sense of belonging, a space for self-exploration and clarification, that it informed one's politics and everyday realities, and that the Centre influenced every aspect of their life. In contrast to these positive comments, Vanessa said that it 'made her question the workability of the situation—i.e. one Aboriginal

voice and the extent to which she would be seen as having to work on issues solely relating to Aboriginal women'.

Other women used a broad brush in identifying themselves: 'has to be your true self: heart, mind, spirit' and 'one drop in the ocean' (Focus Group, September 1999). Upon further discussion these spiritual connections about identity resonated with many women. This expansive framing of identity signalled the desire of women to be seen as more than common prescriptives that locked them into racialized categories. The multiple words we used to describe ourselves in various contexts demonstrated that identity was, as Hall (1996) and Rattansi (2005) suggest, not a static notion for us. It shifted and took varying shapes and forms depending on the contexts we were in and spoke to how we perceived ourselves in relation to others in the group and the community. Furthermore, after reviewing the answers to this question, women commented that another question for further discussion might be: how much of our identities are externally based, created, and imposed (Focus Group, September 1999). Unfortunately, due to previously noted time constraints, there was little opportunity to discuss this question any further in the focus group.

Re-Marginalization at FWC

> *We need to share important positives, common passions, common values in order to come through conflicts and tensions together which will be inevitable.* (Maya – Interview, June 1999)

We claimed that we wanted to spend time reviewing internal group processes but there was often a hesitation to turn a critical gaze inward. Women

were often reluctant to examine how racism and other forms of oppression were operating in the group. A silence on issues of power and privilege led to the re-marginalization of different interests in the group. I was unsettled by these silences that we stated we wanted to explore; curious to know how women defined inequities; and wondered if they were experiencing them at FWC. I had hoped that women's participation in the focus group would help begin the dialogue.

Women gave a range of responses to questions asking how they defined such issues as racism, sexism, poverty, and homophobia. Some brainstormed words such as fear, ignorance, arrogance and hate; and others suggested power, privilege, systemic, colonialism and exploit (Focus Group, September 1999). This spectrum of responses spoke to the multiple experiences that women had with these issues. Some thought that racism could potentially be addressed through education and greater awareness. Others noted the structural nature of power differentials inherent in relationships between women and different systems in the community.

When asked how racism, sexism, poverty and homophobia operated in FWC, women responded with statements such as: the issues exist at FWC; we are on our way to exploring them; and there is 'a continual struggle with the implications around the work we desire to do, that needs to be done and actually can be done—Desire, Identity, Action' (Focus Group, September 1999). Despite our acknowledgement of the issues in meetings and the focus group, there was little discussion about them in a concrete way. We failed to make the leap from

our own experiences of racism with white women to examining how racism and other forms of oppression operated in the group.

Women frequently noted that issues of time led to little dialogue on the potential for racism in the group. Furthermore, a lack of refugee and First Nations women in the circle meant that the discussion often focused on issues pertinent to immigrant women and women of colour. Refugee and First Nations women's needs were either subsumed by the category 'women of colour' or attached as an afterthought. There was little dialogue amongst us on how the experiences of refugee women differed from that of immigrant women and how immigration policies had affected First Nations communities. We noted the lack of adequate programs and services for women, but neglected to examine the void for refugee and First Nations women.

Maria shared her experiences of seeking to become a landed immigrant in Canada on many occasions and expressed a desire to see FWC support projects for refugee women. Her personal experiences as a popular educator and journalist in Mexico sparked ideas for doing local-global research projects with refugee women. However, while the group was cognizant of the conditions of refugee women we did not spend time or energy on their specific needs. Women supported Maria's interests, but did little to note the difference between immigrant and refugee women, develop projects to address their needs, or include more refugee women in the Centre. The socio-political constructions of women by the state (Dossa, 2004; Bannerji, 1995) and various community organizations including women's centres (Rekha, Interview, 1999) continue to re-

marginalize the interests of racialized women in Canada. The everyday life situations of immigrant and refugee women are largely forgotten.

Additionally, women had heard Vanessa speaking about her personal experiences and were privy to the continued marginalization of First Nations women in the feminist movement. Yet we did not resolve the divide between immigrant women talking of securing adequate skills to be able to work in Canada, and the knowledge that First Nations women were struggling with child apprehension, substance abuse, and extreme levels of poverty and violence that frequently threatened their very survival. These stark inequities were noted but left largely unaddressed. We heard Vanessa's concern about being 'the lone Aboriginal voice', but throughout the course of the project made little effort to include more First Nations women in the Centre. Vanessa continued to be the sole First Nations woman at FWC and Maria, the only refugee women. This was particularly problematic as the new office was in an area of East Vancouver that had both a sizeable First Nations and refugee population at the time.

Sexual orientation and identity, and ability were also silenced at FWC. There was little naming and discussion of how a gendered, racialized identity was intersected by sexual orientation. Women who may have identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered or queer (LGBTQ) often refrained from sharing this aspect of their identity with those of us who were heterosexual. Unlike those of us who identified as heterosexual, they rarely spoke about their personal lives, social circles, and partners. Women in the group who were not heterosexual would often share only bits and pieces of this aspect of their identity

in meetings and more informal conversations. I only became privy to this aspect of women's identities through my personal conversations and friendships with them.

This silence signalled the fear of homophobia that LGBTQ women lived with. Women may have been reluctant to 'come out' in the group and talk of issues specific to LGBTQ communities due to the vulnerabilities and past experiences of 'outing oneself' (Moraga and Anzaldua, 1983; Lorde, 1984; Butler, 2004). At one group meeting a FWC woman had pointedly made reference to a prominent local women's organization stating that they went overboard in their efforts to integrate gay and lesbian issues in all aspects of their work. She had tried to volunteer for the organization but found them to be 'too pushy' with their philosophy and 'disrespectful of other sexual identities and practices' (FWC Meeting, Spring 1999).

The issue of ability was noted but largely ignored within the group. Parvin, the only woman at FWC with a visible disability, staunchly refused to be seen as such:

> *I'm handicapped because when I was two years old I had polio and it came all the way with me. I have never, never thought of myself as handicapped. No way. I say I can do more than anybody else. Obviously it's hard emotionally. Physically I can't do whatever I want but my thoughts, beliefs, and emotions have never (held me back).* (Interview, July, 1999)

Parvin was resistant to being seen and treated as less than capable due to her ability. She had retaliated by developing a strong resistance to being seen as handicapped and developed a strong will to succeed.

Lack of an elevator and easy access to the space (the new FWC office

space had numerous stairs in the entryway) had Parvin commenting on a few

occasions that it was difficult for her to attend FWC meetings. Women agreed

that this would be a problem for women living with disabilities and began to

question how we were going to address it (FWC Meeting, Spring 1999).

Unfortunately, similar to other organizations struggling with tight budgets and

having to find cheap office space, we had 'forgotten' the issue of ability and an

accessible office space. There were no easy solutions and women remained

silent on the topic.

In my own rush to examine issues of racism in the group, I too failed to

include ability in the focus group questions when asking women how they defined

different issues. None of the women brought this to light either during or after the

focus group.

Encounters with Difference: Classism, Power and Privilege in the Group

Unlike race, sexual orientation/identity, and ability, the issue of class and

professional status called the most attention throughout the course of the

research project. The complexity of class was highlighted when we were forced

to address issues of class privilege among ourselves.

Most of us agreed that outlining the spaces in which we held some

measure of power and privilege was paramount in the work we were doing at

FWC. If we claimed to, '...examine, analyze and document questions and issues

related to our commonalities and differences and explore how women of colour,

immigrant and aboriginal women can work together for social equality' (Proposal to Funders, 1999-2000), then we would have to commit ourselves to reflecting on issues of different forms of power and privilege within our group. Most women agreed that it would have been impossible to soundly document this process unless we examined the places where we individually and collectively held power (Working Group Meetings, 1998-99).

Throughout the course of the research project, women made reference to when and how they benefited from privilege and power in different spaces including FWC. Lourdes and Kathy spoke of how their partner's income and status translated into their class privilege. Vanessa noted how her current situation of being a First Nations woman attending university and engaging in work she sincerely loved to do gave her some measure of privilege within the First Nations community. Rekha named that her economic situation had cushioned her experiences of racism at FWC enough for her to remain on during difficult times. And I talked of how my role in documenting the processes at FWC for this research project opened up spaces of privilege for me as I was privy to information about women that others were not and stood to gain a degree out of the process.

A clear exception to this process was Deliah who claimed that she did not see the point of 'dwelling' on the topic. Deliah softened her status and privilege by stating that although she worked in a post-secondary institution, she also did a lot of work in the community with various community organizations and local funding bodies. Deliah's desire to minimize the class divide between herself and

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the other women by often simply dismissing her status and class privilege continued and was further reflected in what we perceived to be unreasonable demands. There was discomfort in the group toward her: lack of contribution in assisting with any physical labour in moving office space; request to participate in meetings by phone; drive to influence the type of projects the organization should be doing; and her desire to do paid work within the space. Women's unhappiness with Deliah's individualistic approach climaxed when she initiated a discussion with Julie about 'taking over' her duties. At the same time she also issued a four-page letter to collective members outlining her concerns about how the organization was functioning and suggested areas for improvement. FWC women were unhappy with both Deliah's conversation with Julie and the letter. We had collectively decided to keep Julie in her position based on her knowledge of the centre and the skills she brought to the position. We were more upset, however, by Deliah's letter that suggested almost a complete overhaul of FWC. Many women found the letter dismissive of the work they had put into the centre. Furthermore, Deliah had drafted the letter without consulting any of us and thus it fell outside of our collective framework and way of working together.

These tensions spiralled into us unanimously reaching a painful decision: we had lost trust and good faith in Deliah and simply did not wish to work with her anymore. Deliah was asked to leave the organization. By reaching consensus to expel Deliah from the group we had, as Rekha declared, '...told another woman of colour that we did not accept her politics' (FWC Meeting, Spring 1999).

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Speaking and Power

These are some of the crimes of the women's movement. (Janice – Interview, July 1999)

Both Rekha's and Janice's words spoke to the vulnerability of women's politics in women's collectives. These were not easy spaces and there were heroes and villains who we identified as markers for in/exclusion in the circle. The events that unfolded with Deliah were difficult for women to deal with and particularly challenging for those of us who may have worked with her more closely. Women experienced mixed emotions at her leaving. Feelings of remorsefulness were coupled with those of relief that the tension had dissipated. Much of what had transpired between Deliah and the rest of us occurred during the interviews. Thus, I was privy to hearing women's thoughts on the topic. Women's reflections clarified that they were committed to the ideals of what was outlined in the proposal—' examining relationships between immigrant women, women of colour, and First Nations women'—and the success of FWC. Some women articulated that this was not a new phenomenon, and that they had witnessed this in other women's groups. Janice noted,

> *I'm thinking about, you know, the issues that are coming up with the group—with the women in the group...that is the work (that needs to be done). Cause that certainly was going on everywhere for women of colour and Aboriginal women. We need to put that stuff in writing or create something that people can use because these are the issues.* (Interview, July 1999)

Further to this, Maya gave an interpretation of what was going on:

> *I think it requires a degree of honesty and non-self-deception that I think not everybody's at. I mean, not everybody in the group is in that place with themselves. Which may mean, when they're called,*

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you know, when they're challenged over certain things, they might not be able to deal with it. (Interview, June 1999)

Ironically, Maya's words may have been referring to both Deliah and those of us in opposition to her.

When I asked Janice about group decisions that lead to women voicing that they could no longer work with another woman of colour and what that says about our movement she replied:

> *But those are the questions. I mean, that's essentially what some of the struggles are. And I've been involved with organizations where this sort of thing has come up. If I'm using power and choosing individualistic approaches to our collective work and if I'm unable for whatever reason—unwilling, unable to see that...What do you do with me? What do you do?* (Interview, July 1999)

In addition to engaging in the work we had outlined in our proposal, we were also carving out and solidifying the group. In Rekha's estimation the experience was not wholly negative:

> *I'm seeing all of us individually being able to take a firmer stand on our beliefs because we're going through a conflict right now with challenging another woman's privilege. I've seen women who maybe when we first had this meeting, you know, who might have not said anything or might have said something in an angry way or whatever because we were coming from different experiences. Now I see all this confidence in women being able to kind of say what they feel and take a stand and all this kind of stuff so I-I feel like we've already done a lot of work.* (Interview, July 1999)

This critical incident that unified women at the expense of another woman brought issues of power to light. It may have been easier for Janice and Maya to comment on the situation as they were no longer involved in the group or affected by the dynamics that frequently left many of us emotionally drained and

exhausted. We may have found confidence and spoken out about inequities we were experiencing in the group and, in an ironic way, come to trust each other and forge a stronger group together. However, we were painfully aware that this had come at another woman's expense.

The structural location of FWC women positioned by state policies affected our experiences and influenced where we chose to concentrate our energy. Ultimately it influenced group process. We wanted to focus on the common concern of racism and its ramifications in our lives. We acknowledged that race intersected with other phenomenon such as sexual orientation, ability and class but work and personal demands frequently asked us to focus our attention on a single issue such as racism through an umbrella term such as 'marginalized women'.

We had difficulty bridging diverse multiple interests such as those faced by refugees seeking to become legal residents in Canada with those encountered by Aboriginal women struggling to gain recognition of their rights under the Indian Act. Limited First Nations and refugee women's participation at FWC translated into their voices often being sidelined by us. Similarly, LGBTQ women's reluctance to begin to dialogue in a potentially homophobic space left them silent. Straight women's reluctance to examine their heterosexual privilege led to little dialogue and alliance-building in this area. And although we may have acknowledged women with disabilities, we continually sidelined their needs and interests in the group.

FWC women cited that a lack of time, energy, and additional outside responsibilities often kept us from achieving our outlined goals. There is an element of truth to this as many of us noted that, "we seem to be putting out fires and band-aiding problems—rarely dreaming and doing" (Field Notes, 1998-99). Key organizational-building elements such as establishing a board, moving office space and reviewing the mandate, as well as learning the daily operations took up most of women's time. Hence, there was frequently little, if any, time and energy left for analyzing and building inter-group relationships (Field Notes, 1998-99).

Additionally, the expectation of funding bodies (and to a lesser degree, other community organizations) demanded that we fix an identity in order to apply for funding and be seen as legitimate players in the arena of community organizations. FWC women were aware of this pressure but sought to genuinely understand how we could work together more effectively to enact social change. Witness a question brainstormed in the last visioning exercise done by FWC women in the research project: 'how do women of colour and Aboriginal women live in this world and how do we think outside this thought process within which we are so embedded?' (September 1999).

FWC women, it must be noted, continued to resist this fixing of their identities and struggled for their separate communities on many different fronts. Immigrant women, refugee women and women of colour were struggling with the state for funding for adequate programs and services. And, in concert with the

efforts of an Aboriginal women's organization, Vanessa was actively working on the recognition of status rights for First Nations women in her community.

FWC women may have agreed on points of group process and accountability but, based on differences in our personal histories, we differed on what the central issues of concern were to us and our communities (see Appendix 5). Women's responses indicate a range of interests specific to either immigrant or First Nations women. Responses such as, "...Look at ways of working together/policies/protocols/decision-making and think about making a policy about when we don't feel comfortable with other collective members", suggests that we were committed to forging new ways of working together.

A Changing FWC: Metamorphosis – II

FWC women continued to wrestle with change in the rebuilding phase. Many women—Maya, Janice, Vanessa and myself—left the organization either during the course of the research project or shortly thereafter for different reasons. Maya was in the process of questioning her involvement with women's organizations (Interview, June 1999). Janice voiced that she, "...felt disconnected from the work of FWC and strangely conflicted about some of the organizational goals and practices" (Field Notes, February 2000). Interestingly, while she did not elaborate as to what goals and practices she was in conflict with us about, she agreed to continue supporting us as a board member. Vanessa simply felt that it was time for her to move on as the group no longer met her needs. She also wanted to put energy into other commitments. I left shortly after Vanessa, citing that the evolving work "...did not fit with my personal

politics" (Field Notes, November 2000). I felt the group was shifting towards

adopting a multiculturalism framework void of acknowledging systemic

inequalities and critical change. The remaining FWC women—Cam, Kathy,

Lourdes, Maria, Parvin, and Rekha— were left with the task of continuing the

organization. Sadly, although funders responded favourably to our efforts for the

1999-2000 fiscal year they denied the centre funding to continue the work the

following year.

During the course of the research project FWC had evolved from a centre

focusing on pertinent issues for racialized women to one foregrounding issues of

concern to predominantly immigrant and refugee women. FWC struggled with

in/exclusion and the re-marginalization of issues. Similar to the Sistren Theatre

Collective documented by Ford-Smith (1997), we wrestled with both external and

internal forces to forge a group committed to the ideals of anti-racism. We

struggled against both white women and state funding expectations to forge a

group that would be able to meet the needs of different racialized women. We

agreed with Lee and Cardinal's argument (1998) that hegemonic state-mediated

forces facilitate divisions between women and threaten potential alliance-building

between us. Our lives were shaped by histories and state policies and

discourses that mediated our work and affected how we related to each other.

The resulting structural impositions affected group processes at FWC.

FWC women found that racialized women can work together if they are

prepared to be in a dynamic space that challenges them. Similar in tone to the

issues of remaining open and accountable as outlined by Bishop (1998), the

experiences of FWC women highlight the subtleties of a more nuanced approach when immigrant women, refugee women, women of colour and First Nations women are involved. Women, we recognized, have different histories that are entrenched within a socio-political system designed to divide us from forming alliances across difference. Therefore, we noted that it is essential to identify how power and privilege manifest between women of different racial backgrounds so that we can construct structures and practices leading to equitable spaces where we can work towards greater social change.

CHAPTER 6   DIALOGUE TO CREATE CHANGE

I am one drop in the ocean... (Focus Group, Fall 1999)

I close with the above comment to illustrate the multiple positionings of FWC women both within and outside the centre. We were enmeshed in systems shaped by socio-political forces that both impinged on and shaped our life experiences. State-designed policies and acts such as citizenship and immigration, recognition of Indian status and rights, employment equity, and other issues affected FWC women's daily life experiences and ultimately our relationships with each other. Political forces often divided women's interests along the lines of race, class and other factors and frequently hampered our ability to work together.

FWC women were negotiating personal identities against larger authoritative discourses in rebuilding the centre. These negotiations between self and other, be it the state, white women's movement, or our peers, shaped our desire to rename ourselves and question the parameters of who we could/not work with. Findings from the research project suggest that our personal experiences of racialization and marginalization rooted in, and shaped by, historically oppressive state-sanctioned systems often affected our framing and response to the 'other'. Painfully, this exercise of 'othering and excluding' led to silence around particular topics, internal frictions within the group, and a

reconstituting of in/exclusion as women were either asked to leave or left of their own accord.

I return to myself and my decision to leave FWC based on my inability to work with other racialized women who have 'different politics'. How have historically oppressive and divisive state-initiated systems and authoritative discourses affected my framing of what constitutes political resistance? What internally persuasive discourses did I and other FWC women wrestle with in re-imagining and rebuilding FWC? Where are we to turn if there is no sufficient space from which to sustain a centre?

FWC women came together in what Mohanty has termed a "politics of engagement rather than a politics of transcendence" (2003). We stepped outside our comfort zones and challenged each other, and were held accountable in turn, to the politics of change we wished to implement. Like other women, we recognized the importance of coalitions in resisting a patriarchal state that employs violent racist measures to marginalize us. Our work with white women allies in addressing internal conflicts at FWC allowed us see occasional parallels such as issues of class and status (Bishop, 1998). We found that it was possible to work, in a limited way, with white women allies who genuinely grasped and supported the work we did. FWC women were resolute, however, at the type of involvement white women would be allowed.

In retrospect PAR may not have been the best methodology to use in documenting group processes at FWC. Power differences between researcher and participant (frequently present in all research projects), and structural

barriers such as time and level of commitment required from participants made it difficult to implement PAR effectively. While women's groups have managed to document successful PAR projects (Huntley & Blaney, 1999; Philippine Women's Centre of BC, November 2000), FWC's efforts to do the same were cut short due to the internal fractions that occurred and the funding body's reluctance to help us continue with our work.

A final review of the research findings illustrates a gap in FWC women's understanding and conceptualization of racism and suggestions for building dynamic, resilient women's centres. A telling comment that was brainstormed in the visioning session was 'reverse discrimination/reverse racism—what does it mean?' (September 1999). Clearly there was still some disagreement about the concept of racism in the group. In many ways it would continue to absolve the systemic racism that state policies and practices helped maintain as it suggested that discussions would remain at the level of inter and intra-group racism between women. This would single individual women out to be the 'problem'.

Our experiences suggest a number of different conclusions for women's centres. Firstly, the language of both multiculturalism and anti-racism were seen as vastly different and conflicting. The commonly-understood language and philosophy of each were understood to be in opposition rather than working towards the same goals. FWC women's histories, life and work experiences pointed to similarities between these two approaches which were often seen to be contradictory. Our work together proposes that we need alternative languages, frameworks and ways of working together across difference. Just as

political consciousness cannot be presumed, language must be seen as changing and politically transforming.

Secondly, a remarginalization of racialized women's interests is not only possible but probable given the re-creation of inequity through state-generated policies and practices that continue to create difference. State created policies such as the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and the Indian Act have successfully divided the interests of various racialized women. Immigrant and refugee women frequently have different priorities than First Nations women. Structuring different women's interests as separate and oppositional threatens alliance-building between women. Our experience dictates that racialized women need to learn more about each other's histories, struggles and lived realities.

Thirdly, it is essential that government funding bodies and women's centres make a commitment to work towards a sustained involvement of immigrant women, refugee women, women of colour and First Nations at all levels. This must move beyond a mere tokenization of racialized women to ensure that one is not left to represent the whole. We require a balanced representation of women to ensure that our interests and needs are reflected in women's centres. Additionally, it is imperative to recognize the rights and special circumstances of Aboriginal women who are at particular risk of survival.

Both white women working in women's centres and funding bodies typically refer to racialized women as a homogenous category. We need for there to be an acknowledgement of the similarities and differences within

categories such as immigrant women, refugee women, women of colour, and First Nations women. It is crucial to note the heterogeneous nature and fluidity of women's identities in building a women's centre.

Additionally, funding bodies need to formally recognize and support efforts such as group process and engaging with conflict. Typical funding scenarios have short-term and limited funding with strict guidelines on deliverable programs and services. Funding for proposals advocating processes leading to fundamental structural change are rare. Given the changing and fluid nature of our identities, interests and needs, it is imperative to view internal group processes as ongoing. There must be a commitment to conflict resolution processes and policies in women's centres. We noted that it would be invaluable to have a transparent process with additional funding available for hiring outside facilitators.

Fourthly, forming successful alliances across difference involves establishing common goals with fluid working relationships. Our experiences outline that it is possible, and sometimes necessary, to establish boundaries between groups such as white women and racialized women when examining issues such as racism. This relationship can be a fluid one as we rely on white women allies who have historically had access to information, knowledge and resources and, in some cases, a long-standing relationship with funding bodies.

Fifthly, women's centres need time to strategize and build coalitions with other women's centres and community organizations. Often the interests of immigrant and refugee women, women of colour, and Aboriginal women are

seen as different and competing rather than filtered through the same system. Developing a commitment to examine local-global links that connect women's social-political-economic interests both here and abroad requires time. This would include transnational coalition work across borders and facilitate coalition-building.

And finally, FWC women saw the value in developing evaluation policies and procedures to monitor the progress of the group. In addition to the collective process which favours reflexivity and a critical lens upon any and all work, our experiences suggest that it would be beneficial to adopt methods to measure it and how ways-of-working meet the needs of the group not only for its well-being but for the benefit of other, sister groups.

Throughout the research project FWC women laboured for what may be termed an alternative women's centre where racialized women would be engaged in dialogue and relationship-building that would facilitate greater understanding between themselves and lead to social change for themselves and their communities. We witnessed the need for ethno-specific spaces (Monture-Angus, 1995; Anderson, 2000) and recognized that they are traversed by differences such as class, sexual orientation and age. We also observed the value of working together on common issues of concern to us across racial divides (Henry, 2005; Women in Transit, 2005; Vancouver Status of Women, 2004).

Mediating between discourses shaped by self, others and state policies and practices in women's centres implies that we inhabit spaces of dis/comfort.

FWC women found that the centre-margin dichotomy is a complex space demanding a revisioning of thought. Fluid ways of working together across differences are necessary and signal an emerging feminism built upon difference.

APPENDIX 1   WOMEN'S BIOGRAPHIES

Cam is a Vietnamese woman working at Immigrant and Refugee Circle (IRC). Throughout meetings she shared that her family and community kept her busy. She is firmly committed to supporting people in her community with internal issues such as inter-generational conflict and external issues such as racism and other types of oppression. Cam did not sit for an interview but did participate in the focus group.

Deliah is an Ismaili woman who teaches at a post-secondary institution in Vancouver. She is firmly committed to community based research and acknowledged that universities typically disregard the interests and needs of the communities they research. She was eager to help FWC in its efforts to implement praxis in the work women proposed to take on.

Kathy identifies as Chinese. Her family had immigrated to Canada from Hong Kong several years back. She was a happily married mother of one (a daughter) when we first met. She became pregnant again over the course of the research project. Kathy and her husband actively practiced Christianity and, outside of the church, did volunteer work with families and youth at a community centre in Vancouver. Trained in accounting with a prestigious accounting firm, Kathy was firmly committed to working part-time in order to be present for her children and family.

Janice is a bi-racial woman of colour of Ghana-Swedish descent. She grew up in the Lower Mainland and has an extensive history in working with women healing from abuse due to violence. She spoke of a spiritual-physical connection and about using her body to feel connected to the earth. Janice is a mother and calls herself an environmental activist. She was the first to leave FWC but continued to support the Centre.

Lourdes came to Canada in 1994 from Venezuela with her husband and daughter. She had studied in Mexico and England and has a Master's in Sociology. Lourdes developed skills in the area of popular education and community-based research practices through her work on the border between Brazil and Venezuela and with Native women in Venezuela. Similar to Cam, Parvin and Rekha, Lourdes works with Latin American immigrants and women at IRC and acknowledged that she was "learning a lot about immigrant women because when I first came to Canada I met many middle-class people. It's a different Canada that I was involved in. The world of immigrant women is a completely different world for me" (Interview, 1999). IRC's collaborative work with a local university had given Lourdes an opportunity to work on an international community development research project. Her experiences, unfortunately, had been negative and resulted in her distrust of such projects. She was excited to be involved with FWC to continue doing work in the area of community-based research.

Maria is a refugee claimant from Mexico. She was moving through the appeal process during the research project. Maria had studied journalism in

Mexico City but mostly did popular education work with 'illiterate adults' for the Mexican government. She had been married in Mexico to someone she still had a great deal of love and respect for. His political actions were partially responsible for her having to flee Mexico. The Canadian government allowed her to work part-time here and she managed to secure work with the Latin American community in a community organization in Burnaby. Maria was concerned about the quality of programs and services for refugees and immigrants and worked hard to lobby for their interests. She was eager to begin working on internal processes at FWC.

Maya, of Chinese origin, immigrated to Canada from the UK. She did community development work with women for 25 years and called herself a recovering political activist. She was in between contract jobs for various local community agencies during her time at FWC. Throughout the interview she often talked about blending and resolving her feminist beliefs with Buddhist philosophy. She openly stated that she was unclear about remaining at FWC. By the time we sat for the interview she had left FWC.

Parvin, an Iranian woman, had immigrated to Canada in 1991. Contracting polio at two years of age had left her with a noticeable limp. Throughout FWC meetings and during the interview she staunchly argued that she had never thought of herself as being handicapped. Parvin now works as a settlement worker at IRC although she was an electronic engineer in Iran. On numerous occasions she stated that she is happily married and feels an equal to her partner. She has a daughter who often remarks that she is the strong one in

the family. Parvin was thinking of going back to school at the time of the interview.

Rekha is a South Asian woman raised in the Lower Mainland. Her mother and grandmother are strong role models in her life. She is a single mother who identifies as a 'social change agent' as she is uncomfortable using words such as 'feminist' and 'activist' in her community. Rekha actively works to end violence against women and also does consulting in the area of anti-racism/oppression throughout the province. She is employed at the IRC and has a firm commitment to women based on what she calls a '...compassion in her heart for women in general'. Rekha was instrumental in recruiting women to participate in, and rebuild, FWC.

Vanessa identifies as a First Nations woman of mixed German-Ojibway heritage. She has worked for over eight years with First Nations communities in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver and, more recently, across BC. Vanessa has done extensive work in the area of violence against women and, similar to Janice and Maya, was making connections between what she termed 'social change movements' and spirituality. During the interview, she was interested in conflict and wanted to explore questions such as, 'How are we functioning together as a group and are we really being affective here? Are we burning out?—yes. Are we back-stabbing?—yes. I think our potential is huge but we don't access it because we're tired—we're all so tired' (Interview, 1999).

Mridula is a South-Asian woman who immigrated to Canada from India in 1969. I was raised in the interior of BC and had worked in social services for

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almost 10 years when I got involved with FWC. My work in community organizations with predominantly immigrant women, women of colour, and First Nations woman is what brought me to FWC. I am interested in understanding the dynamics that inform working relationships between women on issues such as racism and other types of oppression.

APPENDIX 2 GUIDING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Personal/Professional Background

1. You have had a chance to look at the proposal, itinerary and interview questions. Do you have any questions for me before we start?

2. Tell me a little bit about your job—what groups/communities you work with (i.e. women, youth, immigrants, seniors). Describe a typical day for yourself.

3. How did you end up doing this type of work? Was it a choice for you? What were you doing before you became involved with this line of work?

4. What is the most rewarding thing about the work you do?

5. What is the most frustrating thing about the work you do? When you feel 'stuck', what strategies do you use to negotiate for the communities you work with?

6. If you could change anything about your job what would it be?

Working for Social Justice

1. Do you think that the kind of work a) you do, b) your agency does, and c) FWC does brings about social change and improved conditions for the groups/ communities you work with? How so?

2. In your experience, what are some of the necessary programs and services that are lacking for the groups/communities you work with? What experiences have you had which influence this view?

3. Do you consider yourself to be an activist? If not, then who would you call an activist?

Choosing to Work with a Feminist Centre

1. What experiences (both positive and negative) have you had with women's organizations?

2. How did you hear about FWC?

3. Why did you become involved with FWC?

4. What are your hopes and aspirations for a feminist organization such as FWC?

5. What do you think will be necessary to achieve this?

6. How could FWC's services be changed to better meet the needs of the communitiy/ies you work with? What needs to change in the organizational structure (e.g. the quality of relationships, meetings, communication processes) for social justice to be achieved?

7. What do you plan to do if the organization is not funded?

8. Do you have any final comments?

APPENDIX 3 FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Identities

   a) How do you identify and why?

   b) Has this influenced your work at FWC? How?

2. Oppressions

   a) How do you define racism?

   b) How do you define sexism?

   c) How do you define poverty?

   d) How do you define homophobia?

   e) How do these operate in local community organizations?

3. Organizational structure and way of working

   a) As a model for other organizations, how would you define FWC?

4. 'Help' other women

   a) What do we mean by this? How?

5. Community-Based/Participatory Action Based Research

   a) What do we mean by this?

   b) Who/what may we have forgotten?

APPENDIX 4 BRAINSTORMING THIS TRANSFORMING ENTITY

- community and political organizing

- have a public presence and involve more women

- consciousness-raising and risk-taking

- location to be more community-based

- satellite meetings at women's homes with perhaps only small office space

- actively ask wider community for mandate

- core group of women (practical) working with 'resource group' pulled in for special skills

- a network of different communities

- a number of seats allocated for white women and marginalized women with fluidity between groups—sometimes women could work together and sometimes apart

- meaningful participation vs. tokenism

- educational outreach

- advocacy for women

- accountability to the community

- political salon where ideas—not budgets—take forefront

- research other women's groups doing similar work that we could use

- (FWC Meeting, September 1998.)

APPENDIX 5   VISIONING—WHAT DO WE WANT TO DO AT FWC?

Resource library accessible to the public.

Networking, sharing and exchanging information, partnering, consulting, hosting workshops, participating in public education.

Talk to Aboriginal women and women of colour about their views and ideas about research—have focus groups in the community with different groups and marginalized women and explore their understanding and expectations of research. What is the understanding of women about research, knowledge, consciousness?

New publications.

Translating old publications.

Immigration and law.

Immigration and women/taxes.

Aboriginal women working in public, govt., and private sectors.

Integrating political, spiritual working ourselves.

How do women of colour and Aboriginal women live in this world and how do we think outside this thought process when we are so embedded?

Look at the challenges and tensions within, what and why things happen.

Have more Aboriginal women participating in the collective and on the board.

Look at ways of working together/policies/protocols/decision-making and think about making a policy about when we don't feel comfortable with other collective members. Document ways of working that may be of interest to other groups with a goal of publishing in a few years.

Documenting the work (policies and processes, transferring the Centre, our change—who are we?) and transformation process.

Tape recording a retreat that simply asks the question, 'Who are we?', transcribing the tapes, and coming out with a small publication.

White women are not/would not be asked the same questions that Aboriginal women and women of colour are/will be asked about what's happened at FWC.

Reverse discrimination/reverse racism—what does it mean?

Responses to are we an open/closed collective and why?

(FWC Meeting, September 1999).

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