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UMI
BLACK WOMEN ACTIVISTS IN TORONTO FROM 1950 TO 1990

by

Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Theory and Policy Studies in Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the work and life of black women activists in Toronto from 1950-1989. In this thesis, I examine how black women are able to move from subject to radical subject. Further, I interrogate the nature of activism as defined by black women who are engaged in social change work. This study combines multiple theoretical approaches to understand the workings of power, discourse and race on black women activists. The research also is embedded within an Afrocentric feminist framework to explore notions of resistance and experience.

I have found that within the American historiography on black women activists a connection is made between black women's activism and the social and educational advancement of black communities. The history of black women activists' work and their impact on black communities in Canada has not been adequately recorded.

My study reveals through the oral testimony of black women activists that their social change work has improved social and political opportunities
for black people in Toronto. Activism for black women is a process that emerges out of their everyday resistance to oppression.

The findings of the study highlight the strategies that black women use in their communities to address social inequities. Ideas of community and family were used by black women activists, in this study, as a site from which to challenge systems of oppression.
Acknowledgments

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INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I will explore black women's activism from 1950 to 1990 in Toronto. There is a dearth of historical sources on black women's activism in Ontario. Therefore, I have conducted oral histories of black women activists in Toronto to augment the historical record. Further, the use of oral history allows for the stories of the women to be central to the research. The interviews cover the period between the 1930s through to the 1990s.

In the 1930s and 1940s, most black Canadians in Toronto were descendants of slaves who escaped from the United States to Canada in the 1700s through the underground railroad.¹ There was, however, a very small Caribbean community living in Toronto during this time.² Blacks in Toronto experienced many instances of discrimination in employment, housing and education throughout their long history in Toronto. World War II was a significant time period for black men and women in Canada when job opportunities expanded because of a severe shortage of labourers.³

I am particularly interested in the activism of black women after the World War II period when black women's community organizing seems to have become more focused on improving the social conditions of black people in Toronto. During the war there was one particular black women's organization in Toronto called the Dilettantes, a social club in which middle-class black women organized teas and June Balls.⁴ Over time, black women in the

³Dionne Brand, "We weren't allowed to go into factory work until Hitler started the war: The 1920s to the 1940s," in Peggy Bristow, comp., We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up: Essays in African Canadian Women's History (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), p. 178.
organization developed a concern for the maintenance of the economic and social gains achieved by the black community during World War II.\(^5\) Thus, members of the Dilettantes changed the club's focus towards social issues and in 1951 renamed the organization the Canadian Negro Women's Club/Association (CANEWA).\(^6\) CANEWA's initial mandate was to educate and retrain the black soldiers returning from overseas.\(^7\)

Another time period I see as significant for this study was the late 1960s and early 1970s when there was an increase in the number of Caribbean peoples of African descent immigrating to Canada, and Toronto specifically.\(^8\) The change in the demographic composition of blacks in Toronto brought with it new challenges and different responses to racism by the Caribbean newcomers.\(^9\)

In this thesis, I am particularly interested in how some black women activists came to develop radical subjectivities. This thesis takes subjectivity as "a process of movement through various discursive positions whose availability is determined by the experience, exposure and imagination of the individual."\(^10\) I see radical subjectivity as the repositioning of an historical subject's experience and imagination from the fringe to the centre.

Through the examination of the experiences of black women activists, I hope to contribute to a theory on black female radical subjectivity. In general, black women are positioned within discourses of race, colonialism and gender that are intricately bound together. These interrelationships create conflicting and competing multidimensional experiences. My interest in interviewing black women activists for this thesis is stimulated by a desire to explore how "radical" black female subjectivity is contingent on its gendered, colonised and racialised positioning within "western" society.

\(^5\)Dionne Brand, ""We weren't allowed to go into factory work until Hitler started the war": The 1920s to the 1940s," p. 178.
\(^7\)Ibid.
\(^8\)Michael O'Neill, "Ontario's Demographic Bases," September 1979, Toronto, papers of the Cross Cultural Communication Centre (CCCC); and Jan Schrieber, "In the Course of Discovery: West Indian Immigrants in Toronto" Board of Education for the City of Toronto, Toronto, papers of the CCCC.
\(^9\)Ibid.
My overall contention is that black women's activism has been historically constituted within racialised/sexualised contestations which have also constructed their subjectivities. Further, access to progressive social movements and black radical discourses has been essential to black women activists' ability to work for social change.

I will utilize Michel Foucault's contention that power can be understood at the level of discourse. In applying this theoretical proposition I might begin to understand how oppressed individuals are sometimes able to resist their oppression. Foucault's suggestion that power has many sites and locuses within a given society is also used to explore the contradictions that emerge in the exposition of differences in terms of sexuality, class, age, nationality etc. among my subjects.

I have chosen to investigate black women activists to uncover the nature of black female radical subjectivity. When I decided to select the topic of black women activists I was influenced by my own experience as an anti-racist activist in Toronto. Therefore, I came to this project with a definition of activism based on my own experiences as an activist. I had viewed activism as the active challenging of social injustices in society. Also, I defined activists as individuals who organized for social change through their participation in grassroots organizations.

Typically, notions of radicalism and activism have been framed by concepts of union organizing or political agitation against an opposing ruling party. However, black women in North America have had limited access to unions and political groups that oppose mainstream power. Therefore, black community institutions were most often the site in which black women could organize for social change. The activism that black women were able to employ grew out of their ability to define notions of black womanhood and blackness.

The term activism, however, was seen by most of the subjects of this study as an unsuitable descriptor of their activities. Most of my interviewees viewed activism and radicalism as explosive terms and therefore disavowed the application of these terms to themselves. Yet, the subjects of my study have

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13Ibid.
made significant contributions to education, social policy and black history and have challenged mainstream discourses in doing so.

This thesis will also employ the theme of racial uplift which has historically been seen within North American black communities as the responsibility of middle-class black women who were educators.\(^\text{14}\) Anne Meis Knupfer in her study of black club women in Chicago between 1890 to 1920 found that community uplift was a powerful discourse that infused middle-class black women with authority in their community. She writes:

> Indeed, since the early 1800s, community uplift and self-uplift had been intertwined, as those more fortunate assisted those in need. This community ethos was restated by the club women who in studying the "sub-conditions" of the race proposed such resolutions as "better schools, homes, jobs."

According to Knupfer, differences of class between the club women and poorer black women were mediated by the strong and complex connection between them. In my own study, I will examine how racial uplift was practised by my subjects as they sought to improve social and educational opportunities for members of the black community in Toronto.

In this project, I will frame the experiences of my historical subjects within an Afrocentric feminist epistemology. An Afrocentric epistemology highlights racial oppression as the significant factor in shaping black people's experiences. According to Collins, feminist claim that "women share a history of gender oppression" therefore, gender has primacy over other power relations such as race, sexuality and class.\(^\text{16}\) Black women have both race and gender as important shapers of their life experiences. Combining both an Afrocentric and feminist epistemology will elucidate the lived experiences of black women.

The common themes of community, education, family and church in the black diaspora are central to an Afrocentric standpoint. Black communities have looked within the confines of family, community and the church to access


power. An Afrocentric feminist epistemology will be used in this study to analyze the everyday experiences of the black women activists.

As stated earlier, I have undertaken to explore radical subjectivity by conducting oral history interviews. Ten black women of various cultural and class backgrounds participated in this study. The black women engaged in activism in Toronto during the period 1950 to 1989 interviewed for this study were Penelope Hodge, Rella Braithwaite, Aileen Williams, Rosemary Sadlier, Rita Cox, Joan Arbor (pseudonym), Fleurette Osborne, Gloria Reinbergs, Joan Pierre and Keren Brathwaite. I also interviewed Dr. Frederick Case, the only male subject, in connection to my chapter on Keren Brathwaite and the Transitional Year Programme to provide further details on the development of the program. Through my oral interviews, I believe that a new voice and vision of radical subjectivity, activism and community will emerge.  

In the process of exploring the move that my subjects have made from subjectivity to radical subjectivity, I have looked directly at the work that these women have done in the organizations that they were part of. Although the organizations were not the focus of my thesis, close scrutiny of these institutions at the time of my subjects' involvement provides context to my subjects' shift from subject to radical subject.

For example, Rosemary Sadlier, the president of the Ontario Black History Society (OBHIS), from 1989 to the present-day had mostly viewed her role in the organization as the top administrator and retriever of black history. However, Sadlier became radicalized with the potential loss of the oldest black church in Toronto, the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME). The possible decimation of the AME church galvanized Sadlier to act against the City of Toronto's plans to demolish the building without public debate. A close reading of the documents in the OBHIS as well as the City of Toronto's records on the planned decimation of the AME church provides further insight into Sadlier's activism.

In order to examine the impact that my subjects' activism had on the organizations of which they were part, I needed to consult a wide range of sources.

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documentary evidence. Thus, I have not depended solely on oral testimony for my historical examination of black women’s activism. I looked at the archives of the Cross Cultural Communication Centre, the Ontario Black History Society and the Congress of Black Women (Ontario-chapter). Within these organizations, I examined their newsletters, letters, constitutions, mandates and minutes of committee and board meetings. Furthermore, I made extensive use of newspaper accounts of the activities of these women and their organizations.

I examined articles in mainstream papers, such as The Toronto Star, The Globe of Mail, and The Toronto Sun from the 1950s to 1990s. I also accessed community newspapers, such as Contrast, Caribbean Life and Share, searching specifically for relevant information for the period between the 1970s and 1990s. The community newspapers, from the Caribbean community provided a dissenting voice to the views expressed about the black community’s activities in mainstream newspapers.

For example, mainstream newspapers in their discussion of the annual event, Caribana, tended to concentrate on the negative aspects of the festival, such as the large debt that the organizers had incurred over the years. In community papers, the successes as well as the failings of Caribana were written about throughout the festival’s duration. The fact that my subjects and their projects were reported on in community newspapers also demonstrated the impact these women had on the black community. However, to some extent mainstream newspapers did report on the activities of my subjects. Rita Cox has been written about prodigiously in both the mainstream and community presses.

The newsletters as well as the minutes of board meetings of the highlighted community organizations were also primary documentary sources. They provided a concrete record of the processes that black women activists and their institutions underwent. For example, Fleurette Osborne, as the first president of the Congress of Black Women of Canada [NBCWC] was responsible

19During the early 1970s, there was a growth in black community newspapers in Toronto. Contrast and Share newspapers were well regarded by members of the black community in Toronto. See Ken Alexander and Avis Glaze, Towards Freedom: The African-Canadian Experience, p. 226.
20Phinjo Gombu, "Successful Caribana concentrates on the future," The Toronto Star, 5 August 1997, B4; and Theresa Boyle and Bruce DeMara, "Caribana festival is a go: Province may commit to three years of support," The Toronto Star, 16 May 1998, A5.
for creating the organization's first constitution. The minutes of NBCWC's committee and board meetings documented the actual process where the wording and ideas for the constitution were agreed upon.

Further, I used a broad section of secondary sources which provided multiple theoretical perspectives and historical contexts for the oral testimonies. In these multiple sources, I found consistently that black women activists in North America emphasized the education of black youth and the preservation and retrieval of black history as worthy and vital goals.

I will now summarize the ensuing chapters.

In chapter one, I provide a discussion of the theoretical frameworks that are embedded in this study. There are six areas that I explore. First, I utilize Foucault's theory of discourse and power as an avenue to expose how black women's radical subjectivity has been constructed historically. Secondly, I illuminate the impact of black radical discourses as constructed through the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s on black women's activism. Thirdly, I argue that the metalanguage of race as an overarching factor shapes and obscures differences such as class, gender and sexuality. Fourthly, I examine how language is used by black women activists to counter negative views of black people. Fifthly, I look at how the ability of some black women to define themselves is crucial to their activism. Finally, I examine how historically the discourse of racial uplift has been important in making space for black women to work for the social advancement of their communities.

These theoretical constructs taken together produce a tension within the work. Bonnie Thornton Dill suggests that the study of black women must employ frameworks that are historical and dialectical to expose the contradictory nature of black women's experiences in mainstream society.22 For example, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham argues that the metalanguage of race is both oppressive and liberatory.23 Higginbotham contends that the metalanguage of race can obscure differences among black women such as

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race, class gender and sexuality. However race can also be utilized as a unifying tool to resist racial oppression.

For this thesis I have combined the theoretical tenets of the metalanguage of race and Afrocentrism to talk about notions of race that can be used as a liberatory tool. Further, Foucault's theory of power and discourse offers the possibility to explore the contradictions that emerge out of the counter-discourses of the black women interviewed for this study.

Chapter two addresses the methodological questions that underpin my oral history project. I explore the problem of authority and power that the historian has over the text. I then interrogate unequal power relations between the oral historian and the researched. Finally, I discuss the importance of an Afrocentric feminist epistemology to lending an understanding of black women's activism.

I combine the oral histories of Rella Braithwaite, Penelope Hodge and Aileen Williams in chapter three. These women are grouped together because I consider them the foremothers of modern-day black women's activism in Toronto. They were central actors in the development of black women's organizing in Toronto through their involvement in the Canadian Negro Women's Club/Association [CANWAC]. Although the women are central to the chapter, I utilize the work of CANEWA to explore how Penelope Hodge, Rella Braithwaite, and Aileen Williams became radicalized.

I have focused, in chapter four, on the activism of Fleurette Osborne, the first president of the National Congress of Black Women of Canada [NCBWC]. This chapter follows my discussion of CANEWA because the NCBWC emerged out of a black women's conference organized by CANEWA in the early 1970s. The NCBWC's present endeavors was built on both the work of CANEWA and Osborne's vision as the first president of NCBWC. Therefore, Osborne is important not only because she radicalized herself but she helped to bring black women's organizing onto the national stage.

In chapter five, four oral histories are combined to examine the nature of black women's activism within the framework of community. The women of this chapter are Rita Cox, Gloria Reinbergs, Rosemary Sadlier and Joan Pierre. These historical subjects envisioned varying notions of community to effect social change.

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I present an oral history of Joan Arbor (pseudonym) an American and more recent citizen of Canada in chapter six. The life history of Arbor is explored in a separate chapter because of her specific identity as an American expatriate. Further, Arbor's particular history comes directly out of the turmoil of the civil rights struggles in the United States. Arbor's life story, therefore, provides a unique perspective on the development of a black female radical subjectivity.

In chapter seven, Keren Brathwaite is the central figure, as one of the founders of the Transitional Year Programme (TYP) at the University of Toronto. Brathwaite's life work has focused on improving access to higher education for black students and other disadvantaged groups in Toronto. Brathwaite is central to the chapter, an analysis of her work and programme at TYP provides a framework to explore this subject's transformation from subject to radical subject.

The final chapter summarizes the study and suggests some ideas on the nature of radical subjectivity and activism. In general, it postulates that the typical concepts of radicalism and activism are not fully conducive to an understanding of black female radical subjectivity. Black women's lack of mainstream political influence has meant that their activism has been shaped within community organizations and movements.

There are differences among the women that I have chosen to interview for my thesis and this is reflected in the voices and stories represented in the work. Although they share an identity as black women, they often differed in terms of class, sexuality, nationality and age. Further, they also had varying approaches to black community uplift. Some of the women worked within mainstream organizations to effect social change, whereas others worked within community organizations. In the study, some subjects organized with black men in male-dominated institutions to improve the social and economic opportunities for the black community. Individual subjects such as Fleurette Osborne chose to build separate black women's organizations.

Yet there are many threads that draw these women together. All of the subjects of this study were committed to the racial uplift of black communities. They all were engaged in anti-racist strategies either in education or in social policy. Finally, their radicalization was a process in which their own dedication to social change made their shift from subject to radical subject possible.
The focus of the research is on black women's activism and the impact their work has had on the educational and social development of black communities in Toronto. It also will explore how some black women move from subject to radical subject.
In this chapter, I rehearse the conceptual frameworks that I will be using throughout my thesis to explore black female radical subjectivity. To understand the multiple shifts that some black women make from subject/radical subject one must explore how their subjectivities are historically produced within specific discourses.\(^1\) However, it is also very important to utilize the self-knowledges of individual black women activists as a focal point for theorizing their radical subjectivity. Their critical imagination and their decolonized standpoint as radical subjects give them a specific vantage point from which to theorize about their own experiences. Therefore, I will historicize black women activists' experiences to create a basis for an evolving theory about black women in the diaspora. In order to explore radical subjectivity as it relates to black women, I will examine five areas. First, utilizing Foucault's theory on discourse and power, I will examine how black women's radical subjectivity has been composed through historical moments. Second, I will assert that black radical discourses have been informed by a number of social movements. These movements have been paramount to the creation of strategies of resistance among communities of black women. Third, I will discuss the metalanguage of race as an overarching factor that shapes other factors, such as class, gender and sexuality. Fourth, related to the previous section, I will explore the importance of language as a tool of black women activists. Fifth, I will expose the importance of self-definition among black women who are radical subjects. Sixth and finally, I will examine "racial uplift"\(^2\) as a specific and significant factor in the coming to voice of the black female radical subject. I recognize, however, that the synthesis of these theoretical tenets will produce contradictions in my interrogation of black women activists. Through the

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contradictions that emerge with the application of the theoretical frameworks outlined above, I hope to gain insight into black female radical subjectivity.

1. Foucault, Power and Strategies of Resistance.

Some feminists believe that utilizing Foucault's theory of discourse and power can produce an analysis of patriarchal power relations which facilitates strategies for change. But there is also a recognition amongst both black feminists and white feminists that Foucault's work is limited by his lack of analysis on race and gender issues. I found that Foucault's analysis of power, discourse and subjectivity are useful tools for theorizing about black women activists.

Although black women have been negatively produced through dominant discourses, they have had access to counter-hegemonic discourses enabling them to contest and resist such positions. According to Chris Weedon, discourses "are ways of constituting knowledge, together with social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects which they seek to govern." Stuart Hall adds to this when he states that "discourses are not reducible to class-interests, but always operate in relation to power - they are part of the way power circulates and is contested. The question of whether a discourse is true or false is less important than whether it is effective in practice." In other words, a particular discourse has primacy when it has been effective in regulating power relations over certain groups and individuals. The question this opens up is how have black women activists used the dominant discourses and statements to restate and open up opportunities to resist their oppression?

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4 Ibid., p. 108.
Within dominant discourses there are discursive elements that are oppressive as well as discursive elements that black women activists have been able to use for themselves counter-hegemonically. In this sense, Foucault's conception of the power/knowledge nexus of discourse facilitates an analysis of black women activists' strategies of resistance. Foucault's conception of power has generated excitement among scholars, theorists and feminists who are seeking social change through their study of the "oppressed." Michel Foucault's model of power and resistance has contributed to opening the way for a historical knowledge of multiple sites of struggle and subjugated knowledges.6

Michel Foucault's theory of power rejects the traditional conception of how power operates. Jana Sawicki contends that Foucault's theory of power differs from the traditional model in three basic ways:

1. Power is exercised rather than possessed.
2. Power is not primarily repressive, but productive.
3. Power is analyzed as coming from the bottom up.7

Foucault does not focus on the question who exercises power. Further, Foucault contends that one cannot determine who exercises power unless "that other question 'how does it happen?' is resolved at the same time."8 He argues that although there are heads of states and their deputies, how power is exercised cannot be assigned to one particular group or individual. Power, then, is a process which is exercised by both the state and those from below.

To Foucault, understanding power as productive and not primarily repressive provides the possibility of better determining how power has a hold on individuals. Furthermore, by analyzing power from below, historians and

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7Jana Sawicki, Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power, and The Body, p. 21.

theorists would be able to uncover how the oppressed understand power. Jana Sawicki writes:

He [Michel Foucault] does not deny the phenomenon of class (or state) power, he simply denies that understanding it is most important to organizing resistance. As I have indicated, Foucault expands the domain of the political to include a heterogeneous ensemble of power relations operating at the microlevel of society.

I am interested in how black women activists at the microlevel wield their "personal" power to effect social change. I assert that it is possible to utilize Foucault's model of power to understand the black female radical subject's ability to resist oppression. The limits of Foucault's model of power is that there are "real" structures of power, such as colonialism for example, that remain intact although there are efforts by some to dismantle them. However, it is possible to counter the dominant discourses produced within these structures of domination in order to lessen their hold.

For example, I am exploring how black women's subjectivities are produced in two specific geographical locations, the Caribbean and in Canada, and therefore I must examine how these histories differ among these women. In the Caribbean context it is important to investigate how power relations such as race, class, gender and sexuality have operated in the lives of black women activists who have experienced colonialism and imperialism. Black women in Canadian have experienced the brutality of slavery and racist immigration practices by the state. As stated earlier, there are specific discourses/statements that are produced within slavery, colonialism and imperialism in which Caribbean/Canadian black women have been constituted and therefore should be interrogated. The question, then, is what discourses within colonialism and imperialism are black women activists from the Caribbean responding to? Through an examination of how institutions, histories and locations have produced an individual subjectivity, one can explore how power works through that individual as well as oppresses her. The question that I am attempting to interrogate is: how does Foucault's theory of power alter how one might think about black women activists' relationship to power?

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The above question can be answered in two ways. The first is by couching black women's resistance within Foucault's discussion on the relationship between power and resistant subjectivity. A second way is by looking specifically at the counter-hegemonic discourses available to black women who are activists. Foucault emphasizes below that although discourses produce oppressive power, they also produce points for opposing strategies:

Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it.11

Black women activists are able to use discourses to undermine the effects of power by exposing how power oppresses those from below.

However, there are very few black women in North America who are a part of the political apparatus of the state. Black women do have access to power at the microlevel through their communities, church and families. Black women who are able to use their personal power, nurtured at the microlevel, to organize for social change have made a shift from subject to radical subject.

For example, educational institutions have historically been oppressive to black women and their children. However, educational institutions have also been a particular site where black women have sought to work against their domination.12 Black women's struggle within educational settings tacitly demonstrates how power is exercised locally.

An illustration of an individual effecting power is the Transitional Year Program which was founded by Keren Brathwaite in 1969-70. As a Ph.D. student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in the late 1960s, Brathwaite noticed that Canadian-born blacks were underrepresented at the University of

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Toronto. To tackle this problem, Brathwaite approached the University of Toronto and found that the common belief was that black students were not well prepared enough to take the rigours of University education. Keren Brathwaite took on the dominant discourse that defined black students as "unprepared" and "unworthy" students and came up with a program that sought to "prepare" black students for a university education.13

Through a unique summer programme in 1970, Brathwaite along with other black community members recruited black students for preparatory classes for possible entrance into a university undergraduate program. The Transitional Year Program was so successful that the summer project of 1970 was eventually integrated into the University of Toronto in 1972.14 Brathwaite took her understanding of how power operated within the educational system and spoke to the dominant discourse on black students directly. She developed an understanding of the University of Toronto, first as a graduate student at the same university and by accessing the knowledge from black community members who provided more strategies for countering the negative portrayal of black students who were Canadian-born.

Black women have access to alternative discourses around race, gender, and sexuality to resist their domination and work for social change. In developing her view that "marginality" nourishes one's ability to resist, bell hooks theorizes a link between "being on the margins" and being able to produce alternative discourses in the sense of counter-discourses. She writes:

It was this marginality that I was naming as a central location for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives. As such, I was not speaking of a marginality one wishes to lose - to give up or surrender as part of moving into the centre - but rather of a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one's capacity to resist. It offers one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds.15

15bell hooks, Yearnings: race, gender, and cultural politics (Toronto: between the lines, 1990), 149-150.
Counter-hegemonic discourses are crucial to creating a critical location in which radical subjects can resist. Alternate discourses which black women access must be embedded within specific strategies of resistance and/or organizations in order to effect real social change.

In summary, I examine, in this thesis how the subjects of this study negotiate between oppressive power and their ability to resist their oppression. An examination of black women activists' roles in community, church and educational activities will reveal the workings of power at the microlevel. Further, I will interrogate how black women activists are sometimes able to transform their localized power into a strategy for social change.

However, black women's resistance to their oppression is a constant struggle as oppressive power is in every facet of their everyday dealings with society. I have suggested that black women understand how oppressive power operates because of its persistent and ubiquitous hold on their lives. Black women's radical subjectivity emerges from their ability to understand how oppression operates and takes form at the moment they organize for social change.

2. Black Radical Discourses and Progressive movements

There are specific discourses and movements that have shaped activism among black women in the North American context. It has been established that contemporary feminism, since the 1960s, has its roots in political movements. The concern for equal access to education, for equality of opportunity in general, for reproductive choice, and for quality, state-supported childcare were some of the issues that the women's liberation movement organized around. Out of the aforementioned issues feminism became a politic, "a theory, or a range of theories. Whether acknowledged or not, every form of feminist politics, and there are many, implies a particular way of understanding

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16 The social movements that have informed feminism of the 1960s were the women's movement, student movements, Anti-Vietnam war movement and the civil rights movement. I am arguing that the women's movement was a political grassroots movement that generated and supported feminist beliefs and values.
patriarchy and the possibilities of change."\textsuperscript{18} Like Weedon, I hold that progressive theory should emanate from "real" social issues and should also be defined by the oppressed. Therefore, a theory of black women's radical subjectivity should emerge out of their experiences, histories and black feminist politics.

2a. Black Radical Discourses

The black woman, from her first contact with the "New World," was involved in resistance struggles. The genealogy of black women's strategies of resistance in North America and the Caribbean began with their response to slavery. The genealogy of slavery is "a genealogy of the Atlantic: a genealogy of bodies. Of ghosts. Of the silenced. Whose voices can still be heard. If you listen closely enough. Of resistance: a genealogy."\textsuperscript{19} In North America, black women's genealogy of resistance includes the everyday struggles that occurred upon the plantation during slavery.

Their genealogy of resistance also includes flights from slavery in the United States via the underground railway into Canada.\textsuperscript{20} In addition, the Abolitionist movements in North America and Europe included free blacks in Canada and America along with progressive whites who organized first for the abolition of the slave trade and then for the abolition of slavery in order to end that oppressive regime.\textsuperscript{21} Another site of resistance was the campaign against the lynching of black men which occurred in the United States. Black women responded with anti-lynching campaigns which garnered Europe's condemnation of this practice.\textsuperscript{22} Within these historical sites there has always

\textsuperscript{18}ibid., p. 4.
\textsuperscript{19}Marlene Nourbese Philip, A Genealogy of Resistance and Other Essays (Toronto: Mercury Press, 1997), p. 23.
been the development of strategies of resistance by black people and black women specifically. Access to counter-discourses on race, sexuality, class and gender has been a strategic response to oppression historically.

Out of these multiple sites of oppression and resistance there developed black radical discourses that ran parallel to or generated strategies of resistance. For example, Marcus Garvey, originally from Jamaica, was deported from the United States in 1927 for his radical views on black destiny. Garvey was crucial in the development of a black radical consciousness among blacks in the diaspora. His views were pre-eminent among the emerging radical black culture both in the Caribbean and in North America, in countering negative dominant discourses on blackness and calling for black pride. As early as the 1920s and 1930s, Garvey called for blacks in the diaspora to return to Africa. However, Garvey's message was much more complex than simply calling for blacks to return to Africa. As Garvey himself stated:

The Call to Africa is still more than the indefinable cry of an oppressed people, more than the interpretation and the inspired utterances of a bold and inspired leader, whom the Negro acclaims, who spreads discomfort among the ranks of Negro oppressors: the Call to Africa is the voice of the omnipotent. Let my people go, that they might serve me. The Call to Africa is the Omnipotent in the act of delivering His people from bondage.

24 Marcus Garvey's name consistently came up as a transformative figure in the personal narratives of Penelope Ilodge interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 22 January 1998; Rella Brathwaite interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 18 March 1998; and Aileen Williams interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 10 February 1998. In fact it could be argued that Marcus Garvey's writings and speeches had tremendous influence over Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and others in the civil rights movement.
25 In Marcus Garvey's papers, which were edited by his wife Amy Jacques Garvey along with E. U. Essien-Udom the work is particularly dedicated to Brother Malcolm X Shabbazz. This demonstrates a connection between Malcolm X's work and movement in the United States in the 1960s and Marcus Garvey's much earlier work.
Garvey in this editorial published in *The Blackman* newspaper in 1929, makes a figurative call for blacks in the diaspora to return to Africa. Most significantly there is a cry for a freeing of the mind from racism and colonialist discourses.

Frantz Fanon, Marcus Garvey and others have explored, within black scholarship, constructive strategies of power, subjectivity and consciousness. In *Black Skin White Masks*, Frantz Fanon talks about a black consciousness that runs counter to the dominant discourse on black peoples. Fanon utilized the term blackness as a call to blacks in the diaspora to find a language in which they could articulate themselves. Further, the emergence of a decolonised language would make it possible for blacks to free themselves from the destructive dominant discourse of racism. Additionally, Fanon illustrated that within the context of blackness an articulation of a black nationhood existed. I would offer that Benedict Anderson’s idea of an imagined community allows for the possibility of a notion of black nationhood that defies geographical, linguistic, ethnic and linguistic barriers.

2b. Progressive Movements

A variety of liberation struggles within North America, Europe, the Caribbean and in the African continent began to embrace the notion of a black nation. The movements that spoke to black liberation were the black nationalist movements, anti-colonial movements and civil rights movements which were informed by


28 In an interview with Keren Brathwaite, she talks about how individual scholars can be transformative in encouraging political action. In her case she cites Guyanese scholar Walter Rodney’s *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: Bogle-L’Ouverture Publication, 1972) as the scholarship that was transformative. Keren Brathwaite interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 15 April 1998.


black radical discourses. Specifically, black nationalist movements came out of black people's fight for independence from European rule both in Africa and the Caribbean.

Dionne Brand, on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's radio show "Ideas", relates that during the 1970s Africa (and its emerging nations) "was a symbol for us [blacks in the diaspora] of the possibility of liberation from colonialism ourselves."31 In the 1960s and 1970s, many Caribbean nations were also seeking nation-statehood. These movements advocated various strategies for redressing black oppression world-wide.

In the 1960s Black women's politics were not only affected by the black liberation struggles around the world, but their politics were also informed by sexism in relation to black men and racism in relation to white women. Ironically, black women have found that the sexism within black dominated male institutions was significant in transforming their consciousness as well as developing the need for the creation of black women's organizations.32 bell hooks explains how black women became disenchanted with liberation struggles dominated by black men:

Sexism has diminished the power of all black liberation struggles - reformist or revolutionary. Ironically, the more radical black nationalist liberation efforts were informed by a sexism much more severe than any present in earlier civil rights reform. . . The work of black women active in the 1960s was often appropriated by black males without acknowledgment or recognition.33

Black women also left these revolutionary movements because they had begun to develop a critical analysis that encompassed gender issues. Further, their

33bell hooks, Yearnings: race, gender, and cultural politics, p.16.
issues tended to focus on specific concerns, such as education, family, and health.34

In the 1960s, the mainstream women's movement, although addressing the aforementioned issues, was not addressing race which complicated many social problems for black women. Race and racism continue to be difficult issues for women's organizations to contemplate. In 1988, the Toronto Women's Press, for example, was embroiled in a power struggle between white women and women of colour and black women over race and appropriation of the voices of Aboriginal people and people of colour in literature. Philip concludes that ultimately the debate at the Toronto Women's Press was about racism. She explains:

I cannot, however, conclude otherwise in view of the fact that when the issue of racism in writing and publishing surfaced, the debate would not be about how to ensure that African, Native or Indian women would have access to publishing . . . but whether white middle-class women ought or ought not be allowed or should be able to use the voice of traditionally oppressed groups.35

According to Philip, the racism was apparent in the white women's shifting of the focus of the debate away from the issue of non-white women's lack of publishing opportunity at the press onto the issue of white women's freedom of expression in the sense of freedom to appropriate the voices of African-Canadian, native and women of colour.

Black women's experiences within black male institutions and white female organizations provide an illustration of how power is exercised in localized sites. Both black men and white women have historically been more visible to the dominant culture. This has often meant that the needs of black women have been invisible. Racism and sexism as power relations operate even in organizations that seek to eradicate these oppressions precisely because power operates within all aspects of our lives. Black men and white women have had some access to power through patriarchy and white supremacy respectively.

Racism and sexism as relations of power are also operating to produce radical subjectivities at the same time they are operating to objectify them. In other words, although black women are oppressed by racism and sexism, they are able to find moments of resistance by acquiring an understanding of how these power relations operate.

Black radical discourses that challenge the images of "blackness" and black womanhood that are reproduced in dominant discourses on race and gender provide the context for the creation of the radical black woman subject. Studying the role of black and "third world" women in liberation movements as well as their coming to political and radical consciousness demands the pulling together of a number of dominant discourses as well as counter-discourses. Chandra Talpade Mohanty states:

There is now a substantial amount of scholarship on women in liberation movements, or on the role and status of women in liberation movements... Constructing such histories often requires reading against the grain of a number of intersecting progressive discourses... as well as the politically regressive racist, imperialist, sexist discourses of slavery, colonialism, and contemporary capitalism.36

Therefore, to examine the strategies of resistance that black women activists deploy one must look at the multiplicity of black radical discourses, as well as examining the dominant discourses that seek to oppress and define black women in racist and sexist ways.

3. Metalanguage, Discourse and Radical Subjectivity

In this section, I will argue that the metalanguage of race has shaped relations of class, gender and sexuality and therefore deconstructing racial discourse must be seen as crucial to understanding and dismantling other power relations. In addition, in defining race as a discourse of power, I contend that it is

important to bring the question whether there is a "metalanguage"37 of race that links multiple social relations of power into a practical discussion of the experiences of black women in North American society.

Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham defines race as a "metalanguage" in at least three senses. First, Higginbotham defines race as a system of global signs, meanings, terms and expressions which infiltrates and shapes every aspect of social relationships.38 Secondly, she argues that race is a metalanguage, a totalizing discourse that has tended to obscure differences of class, sexuality and gender among blacks.39 Thirdly, Higginbotham asserts that the language of race has historically been what one might call a "double-voiced discourse."40 Higginbotham contends that because of white ownership of black women's bodies during slavery, race has had an important role in shaping class relations and constructing gender's "power to mean."41 Therefore, black women are constituted within the dominant discourse in a racialized configuration of gender that is inextricably linked to their identity. In addition, the metalanguage of race as a double-voiced discourse serves as the "voice of black oppression and the voice of black liberation."42 In the previous section, I explored black radical discourses in which black thinkers used the idea of race as a form of nationalism and therefore race could be a liberatory tool.43 Higginbotham also discusses the metalanguage of race as "a double-voiced discourse" to explore how the idea of race was not internalized by whites and blacks in the same way. I will now briefly interrogate Higginbotham's suggestion that whites have internalized the discourse of race differently from blacks in North America. One way to understand how race has been internalized by whites and blacks differently is to explore how prominently race is spoken about in the everyday lives of black people in contrast to white people.

38Ibid., p. 255.
39Ibid., p. 255.
41Ibid., p. 257.
42Ibid., p. 267.
43Higginbotham identifies black intellectuals and leaders who utilized race as nationalist tools as 'race men/women'. She names W.E.B. DuBois, Ida B. Wells, Marcus Garvey, Malcom X and Stokely Carmichael. Ibid., pp. 267-268.
For whites in North America, race is not seemingly a perpetual reality in their lives. In anti-racist workshops white participants often speak about how race or racism does not become an issue until people of colour move into their white middle-class neighbourhoods. For the white participants, whiteness does not become racialized until the "other" is present. For blacks in the West, the "other" is always present. Recently the notion of constructing whiteness has been added to the scholarship on race.

In the Canadian context, black people’s class, ethnicity, sexual orientation are obscured by mainstream society’s racial stereotype of black people. In Toronto, therefore, the black press has found it important to counter mainstream media’s uni-dimensional representation of black peoples. In Caribbean Life Magazine, for example, Raymond Nedd’s wrote: "[Through the media] he [black male youth] learns that if he is black he is going to commit crimes and participate in race riots." The purpose of Raymond Nedd’s article was to challenge the mainstream press to represent blacks in their breadth of diversity.

To illustrate how race defines all aspects of human relations in North America, Higginbotham uses the example of "good" hair and "bad" hair to show how certain words have racial meaning. According to Higginbotham, "good" hair has meant straight hair and bad hair, kinky or curly. The significance of Higginbotham’s argument is that not only have all aspects of life in the West become racialized but that the dominant language has a racist text. I would suggest that within racist societies there are few "innocent" words or terms that do not have negative racial meaning. Therefore, black women activists often see the creation of a decolonised language as paramount in their efforts to bring about social change.

Higginbotham has called the constructing power of race a "metalanguage" in which there are sites of dialogic exchange and contestation. According to Higginbotham, "as a fluid set of discourses, race is perceived as arbitrary and

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illusionary, on the one hand, while natural and fixed on the other hand." In a recent newspaper report Ted Anthony discusses the origins of the Melungeons who had been thought to be Scottish-Irish and are categorized as white in the American census. However, through oral accounts and certain genetic traits, a theory has emerged that they may be descendants of a tri-racial "isolate" of whites, blacks and American Indians.

This above example demonstrates the intangibility of race and that as a category it is sometimes a shifting construction rather than biologically stable. However, the lived reality is that the metalanguage of race through specific historical sites has had "real" consequences for black people in terms of maintaining their domination.

3a. Metalanguage, gender and sexuality

As previously mentioned, black women's gender has had a particular impact on the discourse on race. Examining slavery as a historical site is crucial to understanding the differing social locations of black women and their black male counterparts. Awareness of the childbearing and childrearing responsibilities of black women during slavery provides insight into these differences. Black women's reproductive concerns did not change their workload in relation to black men. They were made to work in the fields, doing heavy manual labour along with black men. Some black women, however, resisted hard labour by utilizing their pregnancies or menstruation to evade hard labour on plantations.

The racialization of black women's gender put them outside the concept of white womanhood. Black women, gendered differently from white women, were not seen as needing protection from hard labour or sexual abuse.

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48 Ted Anthony, "Appalachia's Genetic Mystery: Who are the Melungeons? They thought they were Scots-Irish white trash but they may be more exotic than that," The Toronto Star, 14 June 1998, F8. In the article Abe Lincoln and Elvis Presley were named as possible Melungeons. The report illustrated how through genetic sleuthing connections between people of so-called different races are shown to originate from the same ancestors.
During slavery, black women, because of their racialized sexuality, often experienced the brutality of rape.\(^{50}\) In this regard, sexuality can also be understood "as a primary locus of power in contemporary society, constituting subjects and governing them by exercising control through their bodies."\(^{51}\) Slavery gave slave owners "legitimate" ownership of black bodies. In addition, the representation of slave owners sexuality as loose has become institutionalized and politicized. For example, Agnes Calliste in her study of Caribbean domestics found that black women were originally rejected as nannies because Canadian immigration officials believed that black women would be sexually promiscuous and therefore would be not suitable immigrants to Canada.\(^{52}\)

Therefore, within the "metalanguage" of race, the reproduction of the myth of black women's sexuality as "sexually aggressive"\(^{53}\) has continued to affect how they are perceived and how their sexuality can be talked about in the black community as well as within mainstream society. The aforementioned myth of black women's sexuality dehumanised them and allowed their sexual abuse on plantations to appear normal. It has also been the case that black women have had to contend with the sexual abuse by their black male counterparts. The powerlessness that black women and men encountered during slavery in terms of countering the negative portrayal of black women's sexuality and the resulting abuse by white men created a racialized shame.

As a consequence, a virtual silence on issues concerning black sexuality within black communities has remained. Anita Hill's experience of sexual harassment could not be believed because there was not a racial/sexual script (on black women as victims of rape and sexual harassment) that was known to


\(^{52}\)Agnes Calliste, "Canada's Immigration Policy and Domestics from the Caribbean: The Second Domestic Scheme," in Jesse Vorst et al., eds., Race, Class, Gender: Bonds and Barriers (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1991), 136-168.

the American mainstream. However, there was a racial/sexual script featuring black women, the Jezebel script, that made no room for the experiences of Anita Hill. The absent script was that of black women as victims of rape and sexual harassment.

The dominant discourse on the lynching of black men was well documented in the mainstream; therefore, Clarence Thomas' utilization of the term 'high tech lynching' was intelligible to his detractors as well as his supporters. The black journalist, Ida B. Wells, a black journalist, produced an important counter-discourse on lynching in which she condemned the "uncivilized" practice of white men's violence against black men. Further, Wells, in her construction of an alternative discourse on lynching, contested the dominant discourse's negative portrayal of black men's sexuality and also the myth of white women's innocence. Wells exposed through her writing that some white women were willing sexual partners of black men.

For black women the absence of a recognizable positive script on their sexuality has meant that they were often viewed as lacking morals and belonging to a different category of womanhood from that of their white female counterparts. Over time, the dominant discourse on black women's sexuality has integrated these racist images or codes and thus made the reality of black women's lives invisible.

However, to some extent, black women have also responded to the dominant discourse on their sexuality and womanhood by creating alternative discourses that reaffirmed them:

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56 Gail Bederman, Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender And Race in The United States, 1880-1917, p. 76.
57 Angela Davis describes Harriet Beecher Stowe's depiction of her white heroine in Uncle Tom's Cabin as the epitome of motherhood, Christianity and frailty. Black women are depicted as naive mother figures and natural caregivers to white society. See Angela Y. Davis, Women Race and Class, p. 31.
Victorian ideologies of womanhood marginalized black women by depicting them as unwomanly harlots and contrasting them with white women, who were depicted as real women, high-minded and sexually pure. By resisting these ideas and insisting on black women's pure womanliness, black women in effect produced an alternative discourse of womanhood.58

Black women's radical subjectivity has involved a need to address and resist racist depictions of black women's sexuality but this has also meant challenging the racist depictions of black male sexuality as well. For whites in North America their sexuality has not been tied to their racial identity.

The privilege and supremacy of whites in North America continue to be based on the alleged naturalness and unassailability of the dominant discourse on race. In black communities in North America, the discourse on race involves knowledge of that invisible script but also a racial script that embodies resistance and the embracing of blackness.

Therefore, deconstructing the "metalanguage" of race could provide the historian who is exploring the experiences of black women access to black women's consciousness and a new way of constituting them as historical subjects. Deconstructing the "metalanguage" of race should also expose the interlocking nature of race, class, gender and sexuality in defining the meaning of blackness.

Black women's "knowledge" of the dominant discourse on race generated a dual consciousness in black women.59 The dual consciousness that black women inhabit consists of both a self-defined consciousness and a consciousness shaped by racists' views of black women. Black women became familiar with the language of the oppressor and adopted and adapted it for their survival, while simultaneously they created their own self-defined standpoint unfamiliar to the dominant discourse. Black women have access to a double-voiced discourse which provides them with the space to have agency in their own lives.

I am using Higginbotham's theory of the metalanguage of race to understand how the meaning and reality of race infiltrates the experiences of black women activists. I am not suggesting that there is a unitary black woman activist's

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experience; rather, I am interested in the contradictions that emerge in utilizing the concept of the metalanguage of race in this thesis. Further, through an application of Michel Foucault's notion of discourse and power I deconstruct how social relations such as sexuality, gender and class and nationality have constructed black women activists' multiple and competing experiences.

4. Language and Radical Subjectivity

In this section I look at how language shapes black women's radical subjectivity. I have suggested earlier that social movements and radical theorists, as well as regressive and racist discourses, are part of the process of forming a radical subjectivity among black women. To Weedon, "language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed."\(^6\) Further, "rather than simply reflecting social reality or historical context, language is seen instead as constituting historical events and human consciousness."\(^6\) However, as stated earlier, I believe that the radical black woman subject also uses language to transform herself and society.

Marlene Nourbese Philip has found that language and the use of language hold the many stories and histories of black peoples in the "New World." Philip found that the language of the poem genre, which she describes as sometimes disjointed and abrupt, was an interesting representation of the West.\(^6\) She argued that her poems reflect the history of the "West" which is full of disruptions, displacements as well as of the West as a geographical invention.\(^6\)

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\(^6\)Marlene Nourbese Philip, *She Tries Her Tongue; Her Silence Softly Breaks* (Toronto: Ragweed, 1988).

\(^6\)Stuart Hall, *The West and The Rest: Discourse and Power*, p. 186. Hall contends that the West was produced by certain historical processes and geography that perhaps cannot be repeated.
Recently, Philip writes with reference to her first collection of poems entitled *She Tries Her Tongue; Her Silence Softly Breaks*:

It seemed to me, long after the work was done, that the interruptions and the many-voiced quality of the work was a truer representation of the New World and its massive and traumatic interruptions of the aboriginal, African, Asian, and European texts. To attempt to "read" that experience which continues today, in a logical and linear way was to do it a second violence.64

Philip also suggests that the English language is both the mother tongue and the father tongue because it "comes tainted with a certain history of colonialism and imperialism."65 However, Philip both rejects and reclaims the English language by exploring how black peoples have resisted through the reshaping of the "oppressor's" language. Within the Caribbean language/dialect/patois there is both the genealogy of oppression and the genealogy of resistance.

As a poet, Philip works with the English language as a site of power and as a site of resistance:

Approaching language this way then leads and encourages me to work with it on a micro-level which most poets do. The added aspect for me in my approach to language is the genealogy of English in the lives of New World Africans.66

It can also be argued that the genealogy of Christianity has played a large role in shaping language among blacks in the diaspora. Christian discourse has been both repressive and liberating for black peoples in the West. However, both in the North American and the Caribbean context, religious patterning has not only infused everyday speech patterns but it also has informed a recognizable language of resistance.67

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65 Ibid., p. 129.
66 Ibid.
67 I think that the music has also had a tremendous impact on the language of resistance that black women have deployed. The music that has been significant in this in my view includes Reggae, Blues, Jazz, Rap and Calypso. I think this would be an interesting new avenue of scholarship. For the beginnings of this, see Angela Y. Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998).
For example, if one were to examine the speech patterns of Martin Luther King or Marcus Garvey one would easily see how religious phraseology and metaphors infused their voices. In Garvey's call to Africa, highlighted earlier, he peppers his speech with a religious voice as in the following: "Let my people go" and "delivering from bondage."\(^6\) Also, repeating important themes or words which one wants the listener to understand as important is common in religious language and in African oral traditions.\(^6\) Further, as in the case of Marcus Garvey, the repeating of ideas is also an invitation for response or a call to action. I suggest that Christian patterning in speech was central to developing a liberatory language in which a black radical discourse could be forged.

Language not only connotes specific genealogies but geographies as well. Through language, subjectivity can be expressed through a particular space that can be in the subconscious but also can be rooted in a geographical space. However, black "identities of various ethnic/national communities . . . exist as challenges to the very specific definition of what constitutes a 'nation' in terms of geography and place."\(^7\) Caren Kaplan argues that subject positions should be linked to geopolitical and metaphorical locations because periodization and linear historical forms of explanations cannot account for the production of complex identities among people in the diaspora.\(^7\) Specifically, the subjectivities of Canadian black women, therefore, must be explored in the context of multiple locations and "languages."

Through her speech patterns, Joan Pierre, who is originally from Trinidad, illustrates that her location is both in the Caribbean and in Canada.\(^2\) Using here and there interchangeably she refers to the Canadian mainstream and the

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\(^6\) Lorna McDaniel, an Ethnomusicologist, argues that African language(s), the African drum and religious phrasing have been infused into the nation-language of Grenada. She is presently studying the use by the people of Carriacou of the drum as a linguistic device. Lorna McDaniel gave a presentation on this subject at the Sixth International Conference of Caribbean Women Writers and Scholars on May 20, 1998 in Grenada.


\(^7\) Joan Pierre, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 2 December 1997.
Caribana organization as geographically located. But, she also uses geography to demonstrate that she has also moved from here to there in terms of transforming her consciousness.

As suggested earlier, language can be used to create a black female radical subjectivity that is dynamic. In the words of Dionne Brand:

So, what I measured against that written literature was the stories of my grandmother or my grandfather or my aunts, the language spoken on the street, on McGilvry Street in San Fernando, Trinidad, when I was nine or ten or so. And in a sense, this written literature validated that oral literature for me. I saw the opportunity to define language, evocative, valuable in recreating that self, one's self.  

Language can define not only individuals but nation-states. So, for burgeoning new states in Africa and the Caribbean, reclaiming language was part of the process of liberation. Black female radical subjectivity involves shaping a language of resistance that contests dominant racist/sexist definitions of black womanhood and their communities.

For black women activists, language is a significant site of resistance. Finally, language allows for the possibility of reshaping definitions of black womanhood and black communities.

5. Black Women's Self-defined Standpoint.

The construction of a radical black woman's subjectivity, which is in opposition to the dominant discourse, must be self-defined. As Patricia Hill Collins states in Black Feminist Thought, "their ideas and actions suggest that not only does a self-defined, articulated black woman's standpoint exist, but its presence has been essential to black women's survival." Audre Lorde anticipated this view when she wrote:

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74Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought, p. 93.
... it is axiomatic that if we do not define ourselves, we will be defined by others - for their use and to our detriment. The development of self-defined Black women, ready to explore and pursue our power and interests within our communities, is a vital component in the war for Black liberation.  

This self-defined identity exists independently of a dominant discourse that mythologizes and pathologizes the reality of black women's lives. Clarissa Chandler, as we have seen, also asserts that black women must define themselves, otherwise others would define them.

This self-defined identity has given black women the social space within the dominant discourse to speak freely. As discussed earlier, Foucault's contention that power is not fully repressive might explain black women's ability to create a space for resistance. However, I would argue that the continued maintenance of hegemony over black women is precisely because the dominant discourse allows for its disruption in order to maintain its hold on the groups it oppresses. Moreover, and contrary to Foucault, I would argue that there are real structures within the state apparatus that wield oppressive power over black women. Therefore, resistance to, and dismantling of, structures of domination such as neo-colonialism, imperialism, and racism are crucial to the liberation of black women as well as other oppressed groups.

Acquiring voice has been crucial to black women's development of "self" and has created a platform from which to act. Patricia Hill Collins elucidates this point:

Black women have been described as generally outspoken and self-assertive speakers, and as a consequence of an Afrocentric expectation that both men and women participate in the public sphere, Black women communicate more nearly as equals with Black men. . . . But despite this tradition, the overarching theme of finding a voice to express a self-defined Black women's standpoint remains a core theme in Black feminist thought.

Acquisition of self-definition and voice ultimately leads to action. This action may be within the confines of community or in the society at-large.

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76Ibid., p. 94.
As discussed earlier, historically the fear of rape "influenced the
development of a culture of dissemblance among black women." This fear was
internalized by black women and is part of their constructed social selves:

By dissemblance I mean the behaviors and attitudes of Black women that
created the appearance of openness and disclosure but actually shielded
the truth of their inner lives and selves from their oppressors.

Black women's dissemblance or shielding of their interior selves provided
them with the opportunity to collectively create positive alternative self-images
in opposition to the dominant view of black women's identity. These private
spaces were empowering places where a definition of self could emerge.

A greater understanding of what constitutes the self-defining nature of
black womanhood could provide the tools for analyzing black women's
educational and social activism.

6. Racial Uplift and the Ideology of Respectability:
An Historical Overview

Historically black women who were well educated were often viewed as having
greater responsibility for racial uplift and for the elevation of black

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77 Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West:
Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance," p. 292.
78 Ibid., p. 292.
79 Historians of black women's history have found that the penchant for secrecy among
black women has made the excavation of their personal lives much more difficult. Often,
there are few personal papers or records of their personal lives. For example, Nell Irvin Painter
found, in her investigation of Sojourner Truth, that the lack of personal documents made it much more difficult to differentiate between the
historical myth of Truth and the "true" historical experiences of her subject. Sojourner Truth's illiteracy was also one of the causes for the paucity of personal papers on this historical subject. See "Sojourner Truth in Life and Memory: Writing the Biography of an American Exotic," pp. 359-371.
womanhood.\textsuperscript{80} At the end of slavery, racial uplift\textsuperscript{81} became the motto for many black communities which were struggling to achieve equality within North American society. Furthermore, through racial uplift black women were expected to copy the ideal of white womanhood. Slavery had produced a racial discourse that stated that blacks were inferior and sexually debased. The advent of the concept of racial uplift and the adoption of the ideology of respectability became a strategic and linguistic response to the dominant discourse on race and sexuality.

For example, as the executive director of Caribana, Joan Pierre used the concept of racial uplift to respond to a dominant racist discourse on the festival that posited black people as disorganized. Pierre states:

While I was in there [Caribana] I would work for six months without even seeing a paycheck. I didn't mind, I wasn't there for the money. I was there to just make this thing work for us so we could be proud as black people. Because the stigma on us out there is - black people can't run anything right. You might say, I had one goal and that was to change that and make Caribana run so well that they would have to say, "at least they run Caribana well." That was my goal. Even if it took twenty years to get there because you deal with racism everyday, so it would take us longer to get there - but that was my goal. To make it run so well so that they [white society] could not point a finger at us anymore.\textsuperscript{82}

To Pierre, Caribana was a symbol of black people's pride and achievement in Toronto. A well run Caribana, in Pierre's view, might change the negative views that whites in Toronto have about black people. Pierre also believed that a successful Caribana would uplift black people both economically and politically in Toronto.


\textsuperscript{81}Gail Bederman argues that the notion of racial uplift was utilized by white women to demand a position in the public sphere along with white men. Charlotte Perkins Gilman specifically deployed the term to argue for economic and intellectual opportunities equal to their white male counterparts. See Gail Bederman, \textit{Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917}, p. 146.

\textsuperscript{82}Joan Pierre, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 2 December 1997.
However, the adoption of the ideology of respectability and the use of the racial uplift concept by some black women activists has obscured and suppressed differences in terms of sexuality and class in the black community. Through their adoption of the ideology of respectability black women have tried to respond to the negative portrayal of black sexuality in dominant discourses. However, the consequence has been the exclusion of black lesbians and gays from the black community. Further racial uplift has contributed to the erasure of individuals within the community who are gay and lesbian. The racial uplift concept has also, at times, been used by black middle-class women to exclude black working-class women from participating equally in community projects. The desire for black women of the elite to prove black worthiness to the white middle class contributed to a false unitary prescription of black womanhood.

Nonetheless, the concept of racial uplift and the ideology of respectability were crucial in mobilizing black women's activism. Further, it is my view that black women's response to the negative discourse on their sexuality underpins the creation of the racial uplift concept and the adoption of the ideology of respectability. The depiction of black women as sexually loose occurred in conjunction with the general belief in black people's inferiority within the dominant discourse on race in North America. Black women's social location is "both racially oppressive in gendered ways and sexually oppressive in racialised ways."

Racial uplift deployed two specific strategies. It obliged educated black women both to advance the social mobility of black people through education

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86 Amina Mama, Beyond the Masks: Race, Gender and Subjectivity (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 123.
and to "lift up" the moral character of blacks by demonstrating sexual virtue.\textsuperscript{87} Some historians have theorised that for black professional women the pressure not to work was mitigated by the 'race work' that the community expected from them. It has also been proposed that the racial uplift concept was sometimes used as a ploy by middle-class black women to detract from criticism of their taking employment.\textsuperscript{88} Black women de-emphasized the wage-earning aspects of their employment and focused on their reform activities.

Historically, black women's primary purpose for seeking professional advancement has been for economic reasons but racial uplift work was an important secondary concern. Black women's economic goals and racial uplift work should be regarded as involving a fluid movement between their private and public lives.\textsuperscript{89} However, black women "simultaneously constructed institutions -- family, schools, churches, benevolent societies -- that were founded on the ideology of separate spheres."\textsuperscript{90}

Contributing to the racial uplift project and the politics of respectability was the black church. For example, in the United States the Baptist church believed that the uplift of the entire black community following slavery rested on the ability of the elite to embrace respectable white middle-class values:

Through the black educated elite, the degraded masses would be introduced to the values of white, middle-class Protestant America. The Talented Tenth would guide the black masses along the journey up and away from the heritage of slavery.\textsuperscript{91}


\textsuperscript{89}Mary Church Terrell, the American activist, wife and mother, came from the black elite. During the reconstruction era, she combined successfully her private sphere work with the building of black community institutions. In 1905 she was one of the co-founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP). See Dorothy Sterling, \textit{Black Foremothers: Three Lives}, pp. 119-157.

\textsuperscript{90}Shirley J. Yee, "Gender Ideology and Black Women as Community Builders in Ontario, 1850-70," \textit{Canadian Historical Review} 28, no. 1 (March 1994), p. 73.

Black Baptist women of the elite believed that Christian and moral values would uplift the plight of poor blacks.

However, Higginbotham argues that the black Baptist church developed a counter-discourse of resistance alongside the promotion of the ideology of respectability. Although there seemed to be compliance with white middle-class views of respectability, the black church also offered strategies to combat racism and oppression:

Although women's historians tend to focus overwhelmingly on the secular club movement, especially the National Association of Coloured Women as exemplary of black women's activism, clubwomen themselves readily admitted to the precedent of church in fostering both "women consciousness" and a racial understanding of the "common good." Hence, the black church played a significant role in fostering the concept of racial uplift for black women. Perhaps it was this interchange of Christian values, racial uplift and notions of respectability that further added to a consciousness of resistance which black women then used to challenge larger systems of oppression.

In one regard, the adaptation of the ideology of respectability by middle-class black women seems to suggest that they had fully embraced white culture. However, I would take Higginbothom's argument one step further and argue that many black middle-class women combined white middle-class values with their own "African-American/Canadian" values to create a dialogue between the mainstream and their communities. For black women, the commitment to racial uplift and the ideology of respectability arose out of three social phenomena: the need to resist sexual exploitation, the embracing of Christian values within the creation of a strong black church, and, finally the adoption and adaptation of white, middle-class values and mores. Ultimately, racial uplift became a strategy of resistance that black women in North America used to improve conditions for all members of the black community.

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92 Ibid., p. 2.
93 Ibid., pp. 16-17.
7. Conclusion:

Black women's history of resistance began with their earliest journey to the "New World". Although black women have been victims of repressive power, they have been able to decipher its intricate workings in order to survive its hold. Black female radical subjectivities have produced alternative discourses in order to counteract racist and sexist discourses that have sought to disempower black women.

The strategy of response has been multifaceted. Historically, black women have recognized that their racialised sexuality has been an important dominant discourse to oppose. Racial uplift and the adoption of the ideology of respectability, as we have seen, have been critical strategies of resistance to the mythology surrounding black women's sexual character. Further, racial uplift and the adoption of the ideology of respectability were used to improve the economic and educational opportunities of black people. The racial uplift concept in the North American context has been an enduring strategy among black women educators who have striven to improve the academic standing of their children. However, the racial uplift concept and the adoption of the ideology of respectability have also served to erase differences of sexuality and class in the black community.

In their general struggle for survival, black people have embraced the concept of race and used it as a basis on which to unify in their fight against oppression. The metalanguage of race has shaped factors of class, gender and sexuality and therefore deconstructing racial discourse must be seen as crucial to understanding and dismantling other power relations.

Toward that end, language has been significant in forging multiple sites of black identity and resistance. The English language,\(^9^4\) like the discussion on race, has been embraced by black people and its meanings have been disrupted

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\(^{9}{4}\)English is not the only colonizing language. I recognize that French, Portuguese and Spanish are also languages that colonized Africans. However, in North America, English is the dominant language and therefore it is primarily the language which North American black women must interrogate.
by the genealogy of black women's resistance. In particular, black women have used language to re-articulate and re-define their identity.

Self-definition has been crucial to the creation of a radical black female subjectivity. The ability of some black women to have their own notions of black womanhood has given them a standpoint from which to counter dominant racist and sexist discourses that devalue them.

From this self-defined standpoint, the radical black female subject has also been informed and transformed by black radical discourses that she helped to create. Since the 1960s and perhaps even the 1950s, the civil rights, women's, and black nationalist movements opened multiple sites in which to produce strategies of resistance for contemporary black women activists to deploy.
CHAPTER TWO:
Oral history: Methodological Concerns

Oral history provides the opportunity to reclaim the history and culture of black women activists in Toronto absent from the written historical record. I see the use of oral history as a tool for exploring the empowerment of my particular subjects, black women activists. For black women activists the telling of their stories provides insight into their lived experiences. The telling also reaffirms their work for social change. However, the use of oral history raises many problems and issues. Therefore, a concerted effort must be made to expose and attempt to rectify its weaknesses.

One potential weakness can be the lack of acknowledgment on the part of the researcher as to her personal and professional bias. While my past personal involvement in community activism could be read as a bias toward my research subjects, I see it as facilitating the process of my oral history project. My vantage point, as one who has engaged in community activism, will assist me in investigating the reality of my oral history participants' lives and work experiences.

In this chapter, I explore how oral history has been a useful tool for uncovering radical subjectivity among black women activists. I will begin with a discussion of the methodological questions that occur with the use of oral history. Then I will explore feminist and Afrocentric feminist epistemologies. This will be followed by a discussion of my selection of historical subjects, the process of interviewing them and then transcribing their interviews. Further, an exposition of the tools of analysis and of the new themes that emerged out of the data collection will provide insight into the process of oral history. Finally, I will interrogate the language of oral history and its implication for interpreting the texts of black women's oral histories.

1. Methodological Issues: An overview

As stated earlier, oral history provides the opportunity to record the stories of subjects who are usually left outside of the historical record. The lack of
recognition of the contributions of black women activists, specifically, has meant that their achievements in black communities and in mainstream Canadian society have been neglected. Oral history provides the opportunity to fill this historical gap. However, within oral history, authority, power, and the researcher/researched relationship elicit methodological concerns which should be addressed. In this section, I will explore key methodological problems that arise from conducting oral histories.

1a Authority

The issue of authority over a text is complicated within the interviewee/interviewer relationship because of factors such as gender, age, race, and project intent. The authority of the researcher is also emboldened by her professional relationship to an academic institution. In addition, the oral historian's scholarly background increases her authority over her research subjects.

Typically, written documents are held up by the oral historian as the authority against which oral accounts are compared. Susan Geiger asks: "Why isn't the written word, the received understanding, or the 'latest' in analytical virtuosity tested against women's oral testimonies instead of the other way around?" For those historians who want to challenge the notion that oral testimonies are not authoritative, the solution is to examine the written record, such as newspapers, diaries, etc., to determine their bias in their recording of historical events.

For example, the written history of Caribana in Toronto has tended to obscure the origins of this significant event. Through the media, most Torontonians would view Caribana as originating in the late 1960's with the first big influx of

Caribbean immigrants. However, through oral testimonies I uncovered an account of the roots of Caribana which countered the written record. Mainly Canadian-born black women in the Canadian Negro Women's Organization created Caribana in the late 1950s. Utilizing their oral testimonies as authoritative, I then found written documents to support their oral accounts.

The researcher also exercises her authority as the interpreter of the oral testimonies. Interpretation of oral testimonies is an important part of the process of studying the experiences of the subject of the research. However, some historians' interpretation of their subjects' testimonies may change the meaning of the researched oral testimony.

For example, Brinton Lykes studied the response of black women professionals to racist incidents. To accomplish this goal, the author set about interviewing 70 black professional women who were of middle to upper middle class status. The author set up an elaborate rating system to determine who was able to cope with or overcome a racist incident. She states that this process would "explore the multiple effects of institutional discrimination on individuals by examining the distinctive and interactive and/or institutional discrimination on the coping styles of older black women." The problem in Lykes' approach is that the interviewer has authority over these black women's experiences because her analysis is primarily determined from her research devices and not from her subjects' personal insight. Lykes' analytic choice to some extent silences her subjects which is contrary to what I see as the goal of oral history as a methodology.

Authority over the oral research subject is also exercised by the researcher in her use of the final product. Marjorie Shostak asks: "Is the collection and

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publication of personal narratives a boon for researchers while being a thinly disguised 'rip-off' of informants?8

For example, who owns the narrative produced through the process of oral history? Certainly the narrative belongs to the researched but the narrative has also been shaped by the topic, questions and interpretations offered by the researcher. Judith Stacey suggests that the researcher should communicate within the researcher/researched relationship that the researcher has authority over the text and discuss what limitations will result from the process.9

1b Power

The power that the oral historian has within the researched/researcher relationship is a difficult issue to resolve. Amina Mama believed she had minimized her differing positionality from that of her subjects by choosing participants as much like herself as possible. This, she hoped, would diminish her power over her informants. She states:

The second alternative is to conduct within-group research, in which researchers research members of their own social group, or people of similar status, as a way of rectifying the constant reproduction of the status quo within knowledge production. My choice of black women of similar class background and age to myself places it within this option. It reflects my commitment to generating knowledge out of more egalitarian power relations between researcher and researched.10

I do agree with Mama that if she was able to find interviewees who were similar in subjectivity to herself, then certain issues of "difference" would be minimized.

9Judith Stacey, "Can There Be A Feminist Ethnography?" p. 115.
Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis also chose to interview women like herself, black, professional, middle-class women, to temper the dynamics of power during the interviewing process. However, most of Etter-Lewis' participants were older than herself, and, therefore, as older black women, they elicited deference from the researcher. It is almost impossible to control for all the variables in terms of differences and similarities that exist between the researched/researcher to diminish power imbalances. Etter-Lewis and other oral historians concede that power dynamics are always operating in the interviewee/interviewer relationship whether it is an egalitarian relationship or an authoritarian one.

It is also important to recognize that individuals position within power relations affects the oral history outcome of particular subjects. As Kristina Minister explains:

> After direct physical force, communication is the means for "doing" power. We all frequently negotiate power by our verbal and nonverbal communication with others. Both those who exercise the power and those who yield [to] it do so without being consciously aware that the socially constructed communication patterns that individuals carry with them substantially determine the balance of power in specific situations.

I believe that the relationship that develops between the researcher and the researched mirrors power relations that occur within mainstream society. When the researcher is different in terms of race, class and gender, research results are affected.

Further, the possibility of heightening the exploitation of the researched becomes more dangerous "when the researcher is interviewing 'down,' that is, among groups less powerful (economically, politically, socially) than the researcher herself." For researchers who are doing oral research with participants who are from lower socio-economic and political backgrounds, the

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participants themselves view the researcher as more powerful.\textsuperscript{15} Therefore, both parties can maintain the researcher's position of power.

Kristina Minister believes that "interviewers must position themselves subjectively within the discourse in order to minimize their more powerful position."\textsuperscript{16} However, it is also those areas of "difference" among historical subjects and between the researched and the researcher that can be the most informative in terms of providing insight into power relations.

\textbf{1c Oral Historian/Researched Relationship}

As stated earlier, the inequality that exists between the researched and the researcher has the potential to produce a treacherous relationship in which those interviewed are intruded upon and exploited.\textsuperscript{17} Riv-Ellen Prell, in her critique of Barbara Myerhoff's work, contends that Myerhoff was able to position her interviewee as subjects in their oral life stories. She states:

In her work, Barbara Myerhoff consistently violated conventional scientific norms for life history and theory by introducing herself into the life of her subject, and introducing her subject into her theorizing. She maintained multiple and contradictory voices in all her work. Hence, she transformed the subject-object relationship of the traditional life-history interview into a subject-subject relationship.\textsuperscript{18}

In Riv-Ellen Prell's view, Myerhoff was able to minimize her authority over the text by inserting herself into her theoretical frame. Further, Prell contends that Myerhoff wanted to develop an interactive relationship between herself

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., pp. 143-144; Judith Stacey, "Can there Be A Feminist Ethnography?" p. 115; and Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis, My Soul Is My Own: Oral Narratives Of African Women in the Professions, p. 139.

\textsuperscript{16}Kristina Minister, "Feminist Frame for the Oral History Interview," p. 36.

\textsuperscript{17}Judith Stacey, "Can There Be A Feminist Ethnography?" p. 113.

and those she researched to maintain the multiple meaning within the narrative.

In my case, I found that I did share some important similarities that were useful in my exploration of black female radical subjectivity among black women activists. As black women, we experience and share multiple layers of oppression that may lead to a certain shared consciousness. Nonetheless, despite our oppression as black women activists we are able to create agency in our work. How does that happen? In addition, the dissimilarities in membership in such social categories as class, age, sexual orientation between myself and some subjects of the oral histories were as important as the similarities (race and work chosen) in answering this question.

For example, Penelope Hodge’s Nova Scotian origins differed from my birth and early upbringing in Britain and have had an impact on our unique personal outlooks. However, the fact that I was recording Penelope Hodge’s life was more of an impediment to developing an interactive relationship during the interview. Although I had an on-going working relationship as a fellow volunteer at the Ontario Black History Society, Penelope Hodge was at times, verbally reticent during the taped interview. However, after we finished her interview and had tea, I was able to elicit valuable historical recollections within a more informal discussion. The formal interview set me apart from the subject of study and created the typical power dynamics that occur in oral interviews.

There can also be a symbiotic relationship between the researcher and the researched based on a similar commitment to, for example, social justice issues. However, I found that the power differentials that usually operate between the researched and the researcher can be minimized by including informal, untaped dialogue with the subject. In addition, although the researcher can situate herself as the insider, the researcher, because of her role as investigator, cannot escape her outsider status.


Patai contends that we must question feminist claims that the interview process "is empowering in that it 'gives voice' to those who might otherwise remain silent, one may well ask: is it empowerment or is it appropriation?"\(^2\) I believe that the historian should recognize that elements of the interviewing process will be disempowering. For example, once the oral historian has acquired sensitive disclosures from her subject and other significant information, the oral history process is often terminated. The decision to terminate the oral history process by the oral historian may disempower the participants because they are often not included in the decision to conclude the interviews.

However, Susan Geiger states that "doing oral history within a feminist methodological framework is about intellectual work and its processes, not about the potential for or realization of relationship beyond or outside that framework."\(^3\) I concur with Geiger that the intellectual process is ultimately the quest of the oral historian, not for the maintenance of a short-term relationship. The goal, to some extent, is to empower the participants who participate in the research process, but the knowledge that is generated through this exchange has primacy.

In summary, the power dynamics between the researched and the researcher continue to pose an on-going dilemma. Oral history researchers must acknowledge in their text that there is an unequal relationship between interviewer and interviewee, especially for those historians who are outside of the communities of their subjects. However, this might also be tempered by situating oneself as an "insider". Black women who conduct oral histories of black women might consider utilizing their self-knowledge to frame their interviews.

\(^2\)Daphne Patai, "U.S. Academics and Third World Women: Is Ethical Research Possible?" p. 147.

2. Afrocentrism and Feminist Epistemologies

Feminist epistemologies contend that there are different ways of knowing the social world and women's experiences.24 Oral history can be an avenue to explore black women as multi-dimensional people.25 My subjectivity was a useful site from which to gain entry into the radical subjectivity of other black women activists. Therefore, I used my self-knowledge and my black self-defined standpoint as the starting point to uncover the reality of my subjects' experiences.26 Further, I explored whether an Afrocentric feminist standpoint can provide a way of understanding the subjugated knowledges of black women activists. In this section, I will explore, standpoint epistemology, truth claims and Afrocentric feminist epistemologies.

2a Standpoint Epistemology

In general, history has been shaped by those in power and this factor has limited how one can understand the experiences of the oppressed. Standpoint theory draws on the experiences of those who have been oppressed because of their race, class, sexuality and gender to provide new insight into human relationships and societal structures.27

Some feminists contend that situated knowledges can produce a more objective depiction of history. Furthermore, utilizing women and other

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oppressed groups as the starting points can provide the opportunity for more critical questions about the experiences of women or more specifically black women in society. Harding states:

I shall show why it is reasonable to think that the socially situated grounds and subjects of standpoint epistemologies require and generate stronger standards for objectivity than do those that turn away from providing systematic methods for locating knowledge in history.28

Black women activists' experiences, for example, offers the opportunity to explore history and historical events from their vantage point. The knowledge that emerges from the study of black women activists provides an "objective" view of their lived experiences.

Standpoint epistemological practice, however, should be critiqued to ensure that those from "below" are not held to one monolithic vision. According to Donna J. Haraway, the standpoint of the subjugated should be interrogated by the researcher:

The standpoints of the subjugated are not 'innocent' positions. On the contrary, they are preferred because in principle they are least likely to allow denial of the critical and interpretative core of all knowledge . . .'Subjugated' standpoints are preferred because they seem to promise more adequate, sustained, objective, transforming accounts of the world.29

Both those who are oppressed and the dominant members of society are limited by their experiences and how they understand those experiences. The standpoint of the subjugated is not an innocent position30 and thus this standpoint may broaden an understanding of power relations.31 The possibility of an objective vision either by the oppressed or those in power is not achievable.

28Sandra Harding, "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What is "Strong Objectivity?"" p. 50.
I believe that standpoint feminist epistemologies provide another vision and another vantage point from which to understand the complexity of these women's lives. When feminist standpoints are combined with existing views of history, a fuller interpretation of human societies and relationships can be achieved.

2b Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology

I use Patricia Hill Collins' definition of Afrocentricism which she describes as a set of shared values among black people of community, family, and spirituality that preceded the original contact with Europe. Further, an Afrocentric epistemology reflects the varying histories and geographies of black people within a schematic of shared African values which predate racial oppression. However, my definition also includes black people's shared history of resistance to slavery, colonialism, imperialism and racial domination.

Collins also argues that feminist epistemology is similar to an Afrocentric epistemology. She writes:

Feminist scholars advance a similar argument by asserting that women share a history of gender oppression, primarily through sex/gender hierarchies. These experiences transcend divisions among women created by race, social class, religion, sexual orientation, and ethnicity and form the basis of a women's standpoint with a corresponding feminist consciousness and epistemology.

Collins contends that the remarkable similarity in ideas expressed by both Africanist and feminist scholars provide the basis of a unique synthesis of the two epistemologies. An Afrocentric feminist epistemology should be rooted in the everyday experiences of black women in the United States and Canada.

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33 Ibid.
34 Ibid, pp. 206-207.
The contradiction or tension that exists in unraveling black women's experiences must be understood within an historical context. Further, a synthesis of both Afrocentric and feminist epistemologies might expose and define the nature of black women's activism. Therefore I will utilize black women activists' experiences to illustrate how Afrocentric and feminist epistemology connect. In particular, I will embrace the overlapping conceptual themes of feminist and Afrocentric epistemology in reference to notions of experience, resistance and "ways of Knowing."36

Black women scholars who study the everyday experiences of black women might be limited by their vantage point. For example, Barbara Omolade utilizes an Afrocentric feminist epistemology to uncover the social origins of black women of the intelligentsia. However, Omolade discovered that black women who undertake historical inquiry have a broader lived experiences than the black women they seek to investigate. She states:

The social origins of the contemporary Black female intelligentsia are broader than the distinctive experiences Black women share. In order to write about ourselves in relation to the intellectual structures of history, power and knowledge, a group of black women had to be "thrown off " the normal course of Black female experience.37

Barbara Omolade contends that specific historical events in history and society have produced this "new" group of black intellectuals of which the black woman researcher is a member.38 She asserts that the Southern civil rights

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37 Barbara Omolade, the rising song of African American Women (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 117.
38 I use the term "new black female intellectual" tentatively since it should be noted that writers and scholars such as Alice Walker, Barbara Smith, Barbara Omalade, etc., have all traced their intellectual works back to their foremothers from slavery days to the present. Especially influential have been women like Zora Neale Hurston, Ida B. Wells, and Sojourner Truth. Since the nineteen sixties, the social environment has allowed for black female intellectuals' work to be heard and read. At a recent Alice Walker reading, Dionne Brand thanked Alice Walker for rediscovering the works of Zora Neale Hurston (in Toronto at the Danforth Music Hall, 2 October 1998); also see Barbara Omalade, the rising song of African American Women, p. 119.
movement in the United States provided the change in environment for a black women's intelligentsia to emerge.39

In chapter two, I also asserted that the civil rights movement, black power movements and the feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s have had a significant role in not only producing, in the black diaspora, the "new" black female intellectual but black women activists as well. However, also crucial to the development of the "new" black female intellectual activist are the shared Afrocentric values of community, personal accountability and familial relationships.40 These shared aforementioned values among black women provide the starting point for a black feminist epistemology to detail the complexity of black women's lives. However, in spite of the diversity of standpoint approaches, Afrocentric feminist epistemology must remain rooted in the experiences of black women.41

2c Truth and Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology

One of the major epistemological issues facing black women scholars "is the question of what constitutes adequate justification that a given knowledge claim, such as a fact or theory, is true."42 Since, "epistemology is the study of the

41Ibid., p. 207.
philosophical problems of knowledge and truth, the interrogation of truth claims in this oral history project is warranted.

Nell Irvin Painter found that the reality of Sojourner Truth's life was difficult to unravel from the mythology produced by white feminists and black intellectuals. The paucity of documents encumbered the revealing of the "true" identity of Truth. Painter realized, because of the limitations in constructing a typical biography of Truth, that her historical "truth" would have to be multiple.

In my case, when I interpreted the narratives of my research subjects, alternative voices as well as competing truths emerged. The Personal Narrative Group states:

We have emphasized the multiple truths in all life stories. Only by attending to the conditions which create these narratives, the forms that guide them, and the relationships that produce them are we able to understand what is communicated in a personal narrative. These angles of interpretation not only provide different perspectives but reveal multiple truths of a life.

I also recognize that my view of the "truth" of a subject's experience may at times differ from what the subject holds to be true. Nonetheless, my investigation into the radical subjectivity of black women opens up the opportunity to explore the specific experiences of black women who are activists.

The use of an Afrocentric feminist epistemology will unravel the core themes and subjugated knowledges of black women activists. A unitary black woman activist does not exist; however, there are shared processes and values that can be unearthed with the use of an Afrocentric feminist epistemology.

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Further, "truth" that comes out of analyzing a subject's narrative may shed light on the social positioning of other black women in the West. The historical truth of an individual's account is not the only goal of this project but it begins the journey in unraveling "multi-truths" and accounts of particular events or issues.


For my oral history of Black women activists in Toronto from the 1950s to 1990s, I interviewed ten black women whom I considered to be activists. They were Rosemary Sadlier, Penelope Hodge, Rella Braithwaite, Keren Brathwaite, Rita Cox, Gloria Reinbergs, Joan Arbor, Joan Pierre, Aileen Williams and Fleurette Osborne. Fleurette Osborne was interviewed on three occasions in an effort to clarify significant facts in her long association with the National Congress of Black Women of Canada. I interviewed Keren Brathwaite twice to explore more fully her life story as well as the development of the Transitional Year Programme (TYP). Dr. Frederick Chase, the only black man interviewed, provided further details on the development of TYP.

3a Primary Documentary Sources

Along with interviews, I used a wide range of documentary primary sources from the organizations that the subjects were involved with such as the Cross Cultural Communication Centre, Ontario Black History Society, and the National Congress of Black Women of Canada. I drew information from these organizations' newsletters, board and staff meetings, letters and organizational mandates.

For example, Fleurette Osborne, the first president of NCBWC, gave me full access to that organization's files. The letters exchanged between Osborne and government representatives provided insight into Osborne's ability to define the social concerns of NCBWC to the state. Further, the documentary primary
sources from the NCBWC offered an alternative insight into the structure of the organization from its beginning in 1973 to the 1990s. Aileen Williams, Penelope Hodge and Rella Braithwaite made their personal letters available for analysis which then allowed for a fuller representation of their experiences as activists.

I also depended on newspaper reports from the 1950s to 1990 from *The Toronto Star, The Globe and Mail* and *The Toronto Sun*. Reports from community newspapers, *Share, Contrast* and *Caribbean Life Magazine*, were useful sources because they reflected the black community's view of my subjects and their activities.

3b Selection of Participants

The selection process that I used to find activists was a complex journey which involved a transformation of the term for myself and my participants. (I will discuss the evolution of the term "activist" later in this chapter).

Deciding to study black women whom I characterized as activists seemed like a logical choice because the decisions coincided with my theoretical interests in the question of black radical female subjectivity. However, prejudging what a radical subject looks like may have closed off other signifiers of radical subjectivity among black women.

Although I occupy the outsider/insider role because of my social location as both researcher and community activist, I have strengthened my insider role by choosing participants who were known to me and with whose work I was familiar. Why have I done this? By selecting my subjects in this way, I hoped to reduce the power dynamics that occur between the researcher and researched. In general, I chose black women who were involved in community organizations or who were utilizing mainstream organizations to work at the community level.

I also relied on reports about black women activists in black community newspapers and mainstream media to assist in obtaining participants names for this study. Finally, I asked women who had already agreed to be interviewed for additional names for this study.

When selecting participants, I tried to represent the diversity of black peoples that are part of black communities in Toronto. My study had two distinct
groups: black Canadians raised in Canada and those raised in the Caribbean. One subject, American-born Joan Arbor, came to Canada as an adult in the 1980s.46 Most of the participants were born in the 1930s but at least two interviewees were born in the 1950s. Only one subject declared herself an "out" lesbian. Most subjects considered themselves "middle class"; however, two participants said that they were working class.

3c Interviewing

I had hoped that the interviewing process would be empowering for the subjects of this study. To accomplish this, I attempted to develop a more egalitarian approach to interviewing. However, since the aim of the project was to explore radical subjectivity, I recognized, as discussed earlier, that there was no way to eliminate my power as researcher.

During the interviews, I let the oral history participants determine the content and the flow of the interviews. I viewed my subjects as having authority over the text of their lives and therefore I tried to apply a methodological approach that was interactive.

Drawing on an Afrocentric perspective, I structured the interviews around four main themes:

1. Family experiences
2. Educational expectations (parental and individual)
3. Self-defining black womanhood
4. Community responsibility and political activism.47

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47 Scholars who study the experiences of black women in North America have found the themes of family, educational expectations, self-defined black womanhood and community responsibility as crucial to an Afrocentric epistemological standpoint. See Patricia Iill Collins, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment, pp. 214-219; and Annette Henry, "Taking Back Control of Children: Toward An Afrocentric Womanist Standpoint on the Education Of Black Children," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, pp. 57-61.
In addition, for the purpose of exploring the movement of a participant from the object to subject of history, a poststructuralist framework was useful. The themes outlined above determined the questions that I prepared and posed to my informants. In the case of one particular interviewee, a poststructuralist framework was useful in exploring how radical subjectivity can still be forged despite horrific circumstances.

During my interview with American-born Joan Arbor, she revealed that she had been sexually molested by her father as a child. My inclination at this stage was to avoid further questioning about this informant's sexual abuse. I had been surprised by her revelation of sexual abuse, since black women historians in general have found that black women are more likely to conceal than reveal issues around sexual violence. In addition, my unfamiliarity with issues of sexual abuse limited the types of questioning I might have been able to pose. However, sexual abuse is an important aspect of this interviewee's lived experiences and contributed to her development of a self-defined black womanhood.

Joan Arbor's story also illustrates the duality that exists within themes of community, church and family. Family, for example, was viewed by the participants of the study as a place of empowerment and personal nourishment. Arbor's, experience, however, demonstrates that the family can also be an oppressive structure for some black women.

The participants were interviewed separately and sometimes more than twice depending on whether outstanding issues remained. There were a number of questions posed that explored the subjects' lived experiences as adults, and as children. For the interviews I used a small tape recorder to minimize the intimidation factor of being recorded. Although the tape recorder was troublesome for some interviewees, most of my subjects were quite familiar with being interviewed and taped by an interviewer. I found that taping the interviews was important to ensure that the representation of what was actually said could be closely replicated.

In transcribing the taped interviews as the researcher, I inherently had power over the content of the data. Certainly, it was extremely important to transcribe accurately what was said by the interviewees. I also sent all transcripts to the participants so that they could make corrections of facts or add information that they felt would make clear their view of specific experiences. In addition, I allowed sections of transcripts to be removed from the data if the informants felt they did not want these passages included in the final draft of their text. Finally, I always made sure that the subjects knew they were able to withdraw from the project at any time.

I found at times, while transcribing taped interviews, that what was said was sometimes unclear because of how the information was conveyed to me. This occasional lack of clarity therefore made it difficult sometimes to transform interviews into text. Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack suggest that the researcher needs to refine her method of probing by listening to the level at which the narrator responds to questions posed. They state:

...we need to listen critically to our interviews, to our responses as well as to our questions. We need to hear what women implied, suggested, and started to say but didn't. We need to interpret their pauses and, when it happens, their unwillingness or inability to respond.49

Therefore, in transcribing taped interviews I would put in the pauses, the laughter and sometimes the body language. To indicate "silences" or the "unsaid" in the transcript, I frequently wrote pause or dash to illustrate more was meant by various passages. I recognized that the "unsaid" was as important if not more important than what was actually spoken. Further, the "unsaid" was useful in elucidating the meaning behind the words that were spoken.

In summary, the selection of the participants for this project was extremely important. The selection process was significant in determining the outcome of interviews. However, the interviews were structured to foreground the voices of my research participants. Annette Henry asserts that respecting the memories of black women, especially during their interviews, resonates within an Afrocentric tradition and past. Transcribing the text of the interviews was a challenge in terms of reproducing the tenor of what occurred; however, I tried to address this by including the silences in the text.

4. Data Collection And Analysis

Data collection can elicit unexpected themes. The historian does not know how the data will add to, or alter, the theoretical assumptions with which she started her project. My selection of interviewees has also had implications for the shape of the study and the results. For example, there was an expansion in the definition of activism as the study evolved. Activism came to include the everyday resistance strategies of black women. I also found through the data collection that two significant "new" themes emerged: "notions" of community, and migration.

For example, the notion of community turned out to be a complex concept to articulate. There were a number of questions that I grappled with. What is the "black community"? is an important question since blacks in Toronto are

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small in number but very diverse in terms of national origin, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. How vast, geographically, ethnically, and racially, was the idea of community? Does the concept of community among black women extend outside of "black solidarity"? 53

For example, community is often seen within the Afrocentric tradition, as an extension of an individual’s family.54 During an interview session with Rita Cox I began to see that the idea of community was amorphous. In this excerpt Cox gives her own view of community:

Even as a children's librarian, I think it's a good training because you have to do a lot of outreach in children's work. You have to get to know the people. So outreach is a very important part of what you do. Your mandate is to serve the needs of your community. How do you know to serve the needs of a community unless you know the community. I began to listen more carefully . . . It's been a troubled community. Not always, but in my time, because the wealthier people who used to live there were getting old and leaving their big stately homes.55

Cox's framework for community began with her role as the children's librarian of Parkdale library. Parkdale is a geographical location inhabited by people with differing racial, ethnic, religious and class backgrounds. Her work has centered around servicing this community and finding common ground among Parkdale residents on the basis of which they could have political clout. Rita Cox's "notion" of community reflected the Afrocentric models of community which stress connections, caring, and personal accountability.56 Gloria Reinbergs, a librarian, also envisioned a "notion" of community that went beyond boundaries of race, class and ethnic backgrounds.

However, most of the informants stated that their "idea" of community originated from the needs of blacks in Toronto. The "idea" of the black community was also at times very inclusive in that many programs that originated in the black community benefited many Toronto communities.57

54 Ibid., p. 223.
57 Keren Brathwaite's transitional year program for example has not only benefited its original target, the black community, but it has also helped aboriginal and
The migration story turned out to be a common theme among all of the interviewees, even those who were eighth-generation Canadian. Darlene Clark Iline contends that the migration story in America, and I would add throughout the black diaspora, begins with the "middle passage," with the forced migration of Africans to slave plantations in the "new world." However, since that "event", migration has continued to be a component of the black experience in North America and elsewhere in the diaspora.

Agnes Calliste also asserts that the economic legacy of slavery and colonialism in the Caribbean has been underdevelopment and high unemployment. According to Calliste, the migration of blacks from the Caribbean was encouraged by Caribbean governments to stimulate their economies back home. "Thus, Caribbean people have had a migratory tradition since the time of emancipation, as they responded to employment opportunities within the Caribbean and opportunities abroad to support themselves and their families." 

The search for a better life economically and socially is common among most migrants. Robert Miles contends that "migration is a constitutive force within and of capitalist societies, and any analysis which portrays the main dynamic of evolution of such societies must therefore specify its significance." Migration was also significant in maintaining imperialist, colonialist, and capitalist states.

Within Canada, migration has been common among black Nova Scotians. For example, Penelope Hodge, an eighth generation Canadian, migrated from a small segregated town in Nova Scotia to Toronto in the 1940s. Like her forebearers, the dire economic situation of blacks in Nova Scotia meant that

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60 Robert Miles, Racism after 'race relations', p. 112.

migrating elsewhere was seen as a sound strategical path.\textsuperscript{62} Migrating to the United States or to other parts of Canada was seen as a reasonable strategy for survival. The surprise for this researcher was that the migration story was not limited to my Caribbean-born participants.

The data also provided interesting results in terms of how participants in the study responded to the idea of activism and being activists. I found that all of the interviewees except Joan Arbor were unable to completely embrace the term activist.\textsuperscript{63} I have defined the term "black female activist" as consisting of three parts. First, black women are activists when they are able to create black female spheres of influence within areas of activity traditionally invested with importance in the black community, namely schools and churches. Secondly, black women activists are able to create institutions of their own which they used to challenge structures of domination. Thirdly, black women are activists if they are working towards countering oppression within the society at-large.

Rosemary Sadlier, the President of the Ontario Black History Society, a participant in the study, had a great deal of trouble with the term "activist". Rosemary Sadlier's definition of activism seemed to have been shaped negatively by the more "radical" movements of the 1960s and 1970s.\textsuperscript{64} This view was shared by most of the participants who appeared to liken being termed "activist" to being termed "anarchist" or "radical".

Keren Brathwaite of the Transitional Year Programme at the University of Toronto holds that becoming an activist is a gradual process.\textsuperscript{65} This suggests that radical subjectivity among black women activists has to be explored as a process which is personal, and social. However, both Brathwaite and Sadlier are activists, as defined in this chapter, because they worked within both mainstream and black institutions to counter the oppression of black people in Toronto.

\textsuperscript{62}ibid., p. 46. There was a trend of out-migration from Nova Scotia for both blacks and whites, working-class and middle-class from the end of the 1800s.
\textsuperscript{63}Marlene Nourbese Philip rejects the term "activist" because it cost her personally and professionally. Susan Kastner, "Don't Label me an activist, author says," The Toronto Star, 20 February 1999, L9.
\textsuperscript{64}Rosemary Sadlier, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 21 November 1997.
\textsuperscript{65}Keren Brathwaite, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 15 April 1998; and Keren Brathwaite, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 17 June 1998.
In conclusion, data collection and analysis are intricately intertwined from the moment the researcher has decided on a topic. Often the choice of topic, narratives explored, or questions posed, reveal the theoretical premise on which the project rests. However, the possible "truths" that may emerge with the blending of narratives and analysis can provide for a new reading of experience for those involved and also stimulate the exploration of possible additional themes.

5. Language and Oral history

The constitutive properties of the discourse on race complicate how the language of black women can be read. To respond to this limitation, black women researchers have begun to create an alternative communication frame for their oral histories. For example, Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis, in "Black Women's Life Stories: Reclaiming Self in Narrative Texts," focuses on sociolinguistic representation of the black female self. Etter-Lewis interviewed older black professional women in the United States and analyzed their speech patterns to determine the unspoken words.

Etter-Lewis breaks down the communication patterns into three types: unified, conversational and segmented. The "unified" pattern she describes as words and/or phrases all related to a central idea. Etter-Lewis defines conversational as referring to a set of sentences used to illustrate an idea or event. Segmented is described by Etter-Lewis as contiguous parts of a narrative characterized by a diverse assortment of unrelated utterances.\textsuperscript{66} Etter-Lewis contends that "language is the invisible force that shapes oral texts and gives meaning to historical events."\textsuperscript{67}

However, the most intriguing question that Etter-Lewis asks is: "How do their [black women's] unique experiences influence the manner in which they tell their own life stories?"\textsuperscript{68} She suggests that the feeling behind the words can be

\begin{footnotes}
\item[67]\textit{Ibid.}, p. 47.
\item[68]\textit{Ibid.}, p. 43.
\end{footnotes}
elucidated by doing a textual analysis that studies word phrasing and double meanings.

For black women, this type of excavation is particularly useful. She says: "For women of colour, this is especially crucial in that their voices are usually not heard or deemed important. As long as women of colour suffer double discrimination, understanding the texts of their lives will require a close reading of the styles or patterns through which their life stories unfold." 69

The language of my participants varied depending on their original geographical and social location. However, for all participants, the social inequities that they experienced in their lives were reflected in their language. The racism and sexism that shape large parts of black women's experiences are manifested in language. 70 For example, the language used by Penelope Hodge, one of my informants, was infused with her experience of racism in Nova Scotia. The language that Hodge uses below illustrates a lot about her life in terms of what is said and how it is said:

And my father of course talked to me incessantly about how important it was to have education. In those days it was a well known fact that as coloured people - as we were called then- [we] couldn't find jobs. My father was a visionary, he was always looking down the road - he always said if you got it, when the opportunity comes you can take advantage of it. The other theory back then was, what's the point of going to school, you're not going to get a job any way. My dad never thought like that no - no - no. You have [an education] and if an opportunity does arrive, then you're ready for it. 71

First of all, Penelope Hodge's speech is embedded in a specific time and geographical location. The term "coloured" that she uses was a racial designation assigned to black people in North America prior to the 1960s civil rights movement. Simply asking the question about Hodge's parents' educational expectations elicited the thinking and the language of the time. Hodge discloses that education was considered a waste of time by some blacks because black Canadians could not get a job in 1930s Nova Scotia. But Hodge's story also

69 Ibid., p. 47.
discloses that other black Canadians like her father thought education was the only hope. Although not explicitly expressed in this speech, a sense of motion, of going some place "better," is represented in her text. For example, the use of the phrase "looking down the road" seems to refer to moving to a place where there were better job opportunities, or to waiting and hoping for something better to come one's way.

Joan Pierre, originally from Trinidad, often uses here and there in her storytelling to refer to migration of thought, location and consciousness. Below she talks about her only child's difficult first years of life:

Where I really did a lot of work - we had our daughter in 1978. She was only 2 pounds/ten. She was a bit of a problem at this time. She had bronchial spasms and all this stuff. By the second year of her life we had to take her out of here. Every six weeks she was in and out of the hospital. It was driving me crazy. I said, "no, we can't do this, we got to get out of here." Every time the weather would change it would affect her. It was the up and down - the climate her body could not adjust to. No drastic change. And you know how this country could be.72

The whole passage seems like a metaphor for the trials of the black immigrant in Canada. The "bad" weather and the hostile climate can be read as euphemisms for the racism and sexism that are also experienced. Her last statement "And you know how this country could be" could be understood as a call to anyone, or perhaps me in particular, to reaffirm this hardship.

As stated earlier, language for many of the participants also conveyed where they were originally born and raised. For instance, when I interviewed participants from the Caribbean they tended to repeat words or sentences in their stories. As mentioned in the previous chapter, I discovered that the repeating of phrases or words was part of the African/Caribbean oral and linguistic tradition in which important ideas are emphasized through repetition. However, the penchant for repetition of important words or phrases was also evident among those who were Canadian-born. This suggests that an African linguistic patterning in oral storytelling has survived throughout the black diaspora.

For the black woman historian, problems of deriving meaning from black women's testimonies are complicated by the silences in the text that are

produced by a dominant discourse that has rendered many black women voiceless. However, if the historian is willing to include and read the varying underlying meanings of texts, then multiple voices can emerge.

6. Conclusion

There are many possibilities and limitations in conducting and producing oral histories. However, the opportunity to explore the lived experiences of people who are often left outside of historical accounts is an important undertaking. The selection of participants was a significant part of framing my oral history project. During the selection process I explored my motivation in the choice of subject/subjects in order to extricate the weaknesses in the process. Once the selection of participants was completed, I tried to establish a subject to subject relationship with the interviewee to forge a more equal power dynamic. While interviewing I sought to make the process interactive and an empowering experience for the participants of the study.

However, the issue of trust, in terms of how the data would be interpreted by this researcher, was also a concern for the interviewees. When transcribing the text, I therefore included every word spoken and all utterances "said" or "unsaid" to ensure that the interviews were represented faithfully. Ultimately, however, the representation of the data will be affected by the conceptual framework of my investigation into the process of radical subjectivity that the black woman activist inhabits. In addition, themes that have emerged out of black women's narratives, such as community, migration and the idea of activism, must be interrogated.

In summary, I have used an Afrocentric feminist epistemology to interrogate the experiences of black women who are activists. The contradictions that emerge within the context of my subjects' experiences will be discussed within specific historical moments and geographies. Finally, oral history methodology has allowed the possibility of illustrating the shift that black women activists make from subject to radical subject by exploring their experiences as they worked for social change. Therefore, the subsequent chapters of this thesis will allow the varying voices and stories that emerge from the research to individually chart an understanding of black female radical subjectivity.
CHAPTER THREE:
Foremothers of black women's community organizing in Toronto

Black women have been engaged in community activism in Ontario from the birth of Canada as a national entity. In this chapter, I explore the modern day beginnings of black women's organizing in Toronto. Black women's organizations initially rested on the work of mainly Canadian-born black women who wanted to improve the conditions of black peoples in Toronto. In addition, during the 1950s, black women were concerned with preserving the economic and social gains that black people had made during the Second World War. Prior to World War Two black women could principally find jobs only as domestics or teachers in all black schools. At the close of World War Two, black women wanted to keep the jobs they had found in factories and as sales clerks.

The Canadian Negro Women's Association, founded in 1951 by Kay Livingstone, was originally a social club called the Dilettantes. The overall black political consciousness of the time changed the group's focus towards political and social activism. Through the oral testimonies of Penelope Hodge, Aileen Williams and Rella Braithwaite, the history of the Canadian Negro Women's Association (CANÉWA) and its contribution to the creation of the National Congress of Black Women of Canada are explored in this chapter. This historical

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4 Ibid., p. 21; and Dionne Brand, "We weren't allowed to go into factory work until Hitler started the war: The 1920s to the 1940s," in Peggy Bristow, comp., We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up: Essays in African Canadian Women's History (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), p. 178.
perspective demonstrates that black women's activism has had a significant impact on the educational and social advancement of black peoples in Toronto and that this impact has been felt in the society at-large. Following a summary of each subject in brief, an examination of the early lives of Rella Braithwaite, Penelope Hodge and Aileen Williams will lend some understanding of their subjectivity. Then, I will look specifically at their work in CANEWA and their role in the birth of the National Congress of Black Women of Canada.

I. A Look at the Women in Brief:

The women of this chapter, Penelope Hodge, Aileen Williams and Rella Braithwaite, were all born in Canada during the 1920s. As individuals and through their organizations, the participants in this study worked for the betterment of the black community in Toronto. Their work at the Canadian Negro Women's Association, in my view, has provided a model for the development of other black women's organizations in Toronto. In this section I will briefly introduce the individual life stories of Penelope Hodge, Aileen Williams and Rella Braithwaite.

Ia Penelope Hodge

Penelope Hodge was born in 1920 in Digby, Nova Scotia. Her ancestors have lived in Nova Scotia since the United Empire Loyalists settled in the province in 1783.6 Hodge's mother, Alfaretta Berry, was a teacher and her father, Martin Anderson,

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was a Baptist preacher. Penelope Hodge attended a segregated public school in Yarmouth. 7

Hodge first came to Toronto in 1945 after working as a teacher in Weymouth Falls, Nova Scotia, and then as a clerk in Ottawa. When Penelope Hodge migrated to Toronto, she intended to continue her teaching career but was required to upgrade her Nova Scotian teaching license as outlined by Ontario provincial guidelines. Instead, Hodge took a job as a clerk at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) and worked her way up to a staffing officer. Hodge remained at the CBC for thirty years until her retirement in 1986. 8 She served as CANEWA’s treasurer, vice-president and, from 1956 to 1957, president. Penelope Hodge has also been an active member of the Ontario Black History Society for several years. In addition, Penelope Hodge has been the church historian, for over 30 years, of the First Baptist Church, the oldest black church in Toronto. 9

1b Aileen Williams

Aileen Williams was born in 1924 in Toronto. Williams attended the Duke of York Public School and graduated from Northern Secondary School. She recalls attending social gatherings at the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) at 355 College Street as a teenager. 10 The First Baptist Church was also another important place for black youth during the 1930s to socialize and Williams was a frequent participant.

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10 The building at 355 College street was owned by the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) during the 1930s. See Peter Edwards, “Black history looms large at busy corner,” The Toronto Star, 26 January 1998, B3.
In 1949, Williams worked at Simpsons' mail order department in Toronto. Thereafter she held jobs at Metro-Goldwyn Mayer Pictures of Canada, the CBC, and the Ontario Ministry of Revenue. Aileen Williams has served as the president of CANEWA on two occasions, 1953 to 1954 and 1973 to 1974. She has also been involved in the Ontario Black History Society, serving as its vice-president in the 1980s.

Rella Braithwaite was born in rural Ontario in 1923. She went to high school in Listowel, a small farming town just outside of Stratford, Ontario. Braithwaite came to Toronto in the late 1930s. Braithwaite, like Aileen Williams, remembers the gatherings at the UNIA building on College Street. Rella Braithwaite, after World War Two, moved with her husband (Henry Braithwaite) to Scarborough where they raised six children. Braithwaite has been part of the Scarborough community for over 50 years. She was an active member of the Scarborough School Board and also participated as the only black member and one-time president of the Soroptimist Business Women's Club. Her championing of black history resulted in her not only writing books but becoming involved in both educational projects and government committees. For example, in 1975 Rella Braithwaite was appointed a member of the Ontario Multicultural Advisory Council in which she participated for three years. The then Premier of Ontario, Bill Davis, sent a letter thanking Braithwaite for her participation.

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11 Aileen Williams, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 10 February 1998.
14 The Soroptimist Business Women's Club's members were mainly professional white women who wanted to contribute to the Scarborough community. Rella Braithwaite, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 18 March 1998.
2. Education, Family and Church experiences

In this section I will explore in more depth the early lives of Rella Braithwaite, Penelope Hodge and Aileen Williams. The participants were raised in the Canadian society of the 1930s and 1940s. Their ideas of race and racism were informed by the stories of their ancestors' escape from American slavery. Therefore, their notions of resistance to oppression were forged through the examples of their foremothers and forefathers who actively sought to find a liberatory space in which to live their lives. Through an examination of the educational, family and church experiences of Rella Braithwaite, Aileen Williams, and Penelope Hodge, one can uncover how their values have influenced their activism.

2a Education

As mentioned earlier, Penelope Hodge grew up in Nova Scotia in a segregated black community. In the 1920s and 1930s there were very few employment opportunities for black people. This meant that many black Nova Scotians, including many of Hodge's family members, migrated to other parts of Canada or to the United States.¹⁶ The lack of job prospects among blacks in Nova Scotia informed their views on higher education.

According to Penelope Hodge, black Nova Scotians drew differing conclusions in relation to the lack of employment opportunity for blacks in Nova Scotia. One viewpoint saw higher education as a useless exercise because

there were so few occupations open to blacks. The competing viewpoint considered higher education as an important step towards the time when job prospects would improve.17

Penelope Hodge's parents strongly supported the view that higher education might increase the possibility of better employment opportunities for their daughter. Hodge's mother made sure that her daughter would remain on the "right" track in terms of staying in school. She states:

My mother taught school in the community. She taught me until I was ready to go to junior high school. My mother said, "you must have an education." And I think I can always remember when I was in high school - I once said to my mom, 'I don't think I want to go back to school.' Very straight face she says, "I know a lady who's wealthy who needs someone to clean." I thought I don't want to do that. [laughs] I didn't say anything more about not going back to school. You know, she knew just how to divert me, so I stayed in school.18

In this passage Penelope Hodge's mother's response to her daughter's announcement that she did not want to continue her education was to reframe or redirect how the topic was to be discussed. By saying, "I know a lady who's wealthy who needs someone to clean," Hodge's mother encoded the historical knowledge that black women who were uneducated could only get domestic work.19 The narrative is filled with Hodge's mother's hopes and fears for her daughter's future. It is understood that the listener, Penelope Hodge, will draw from a shared genealogy to fill in the silences or the *more* within the text.

Another interesting element in the passage is how Hodge introduces her mother's place of employment. Hodge says, "My mother taught school in the community." A person knowledgeable about the racist practices of segregation in Nova Scotia at the time can understand Hodge to mean that her mother taught at one of the segregated schools in the black community. The "known" history of the time eliminates the necessity for Hodge to be explicit in her description of

18 Ibid.
her mother's working conditions. Penelope Hodge's narrative points to the systematic and institutional practice of segregation in Nova Scotia.20

When Penelope Hodge was later schooled in a desegregated setting, her father emphasized the importance of "good" behaviour as a tool of survival. Hodge elaborates on this below:

I guess my father [pause] his theory was, you know, you've got to be the best you can be. And he always came down hard on behaviour. I always remember that he would say, "They remember us. It's unfortunate but that's the way it is - because of our colour." He was so right. I can go back to my home town - you know - years and years later and people [would] say, 'Oh, you're Penny Anderson, I went to school with you.' And I'd think, who are they? I don't remember you. They remember me. I was the only black kid in school. So that was one of his lessons. Behaviour is very very important. My father would say, "don't try to do what you see the white kids doing."21

The underlying meaning in Hodge's text is that race and "good" behaviour were more important for black boys and girls. In contrast, Hodge's white classmates' racial identity was not tied to a code of behaviour, bad or good, that was racialized. How black people understand race differs from the understanding that most whites have about its meaning. Black girls, in particular, are taught that their racialized and gendered identity has specific meanings within the dominant discourse on race. The notion of good behaviour espoused by Hodge's father also illustrates his concern for his daughter's emerging sexuality.

The dominant discourse on black women's sexuality in North America has drawn on the myth of the promiscuous jezebel.22 To counter that negative stereotype, Hodge's strategy was to be the "respectable" black girl with proper manners. The emphasis on good behaviour was an acceptance of the ideology of respectability. Furthermore, "proper behaviour" was a strategy of resistance to the dominant discourse's negative portrayal of black women's/girls' sexuality.

Educational attainment was also stressed in Rella Braithwaite's family. Braithwaite attended school with her white neighbours in a small Ontario farming community. Braithwaite's prime difficulty was economic and the distance she had to travel to high school. She recalls:

Although I was living in a rural area, they [her parents] did think education was important. I did have the opportunity to go to the town. It was quite an effort to go the town of Listowel and stay there all winter. I had to find room and board to be able to attend Listowel high school. But at the same time it was sort of like a culture shock for me because I lived in the country. To go to this town and high school - the high school seemed so big. And of course I was the only black one in the high school.23

The responsibility of Braithwaite's education was considered to be that of not just her parents but also members of her extended family. Her elder brother paid for her room and board while she attended high school in Listowel. The view that educating the youth within a family was the concern of all members of the family was a value shared among the participants of the study. Furthermore, the responsibility of educating the young people in families would sometimes extend to black community members outside the immediate family.24

Braithwaite's educational experiences were more subtly affected by race than Penelope Hodges'. For instance, in a discussion with Dionne Brand, Braithwaite comments on the reality of being the only black student when she states:

Being the only Black child in the school - Oh, Mary! - I didn't function that well. Somehow I was not impressed with strangers. I just didn't feel that comfortable.25

In this passage it is not explicitly stated that Braithwaite was made to feel uncomfortable by her white classmates or by her teacher but the silence

suggests that she endured some racism within this environment. At times, painful experiences of racism were often difficult to verbalize among elder subjects in this study. Perhaps a conscious effort to put aside memories of racist incidents was a strategy of "emotional" survival.

Aileen Williams, like Rella Braithwaite, also attended school along with her white neighbours in a small community in Ontario. Williams' parents also believed that she should get a good education. Williams attended Northern Vocational School in Collingwood where she was in a four-year vocational program. Williams' dream was to become an interior decorator; however, she was discouraged by a University of Toronto representative. She remembers:

I was in four-year vocational. I spoke to my head room teacher about the possibility of going on further. I was interested in taking on interior decorating. I had applied down at the University of Toronto and went down [to Toronto] for an interview. The young lady who was interviewing me instead of trying to encourage me - which I didn't realize at the time that she was trying to discourage me - she went into great lengths about how expensive the course would be. 26

There are silences in this text around the racism that Aileen Williams confronted when she expressed her desire to continue her education at the University of Toronto. The anger and pain that Williams felt in response to this incident are buried within the narrative. It took Williams some time to understand that this was a racist incident. Williams' parents decided that their daughter should not pursue a career in interior decorating because they felt that their daughter might encounter too much opposition within that occupational field.

Education was seen as very important to the families of Rella Braithwaite, Penelope Hodge and Aileen Williams. Hodges educational experiences were mostly within a segregated school setting which often meant inferior learning conditions. However, all three women felt the impact of racism within the educational system which tended to limit their future employment choices.

26 Aileen Williams, interviewed by Marcia Wharton Zaretzky, Toronto, 10 February 1998.
2b Early Family Life

The family life of Rella Braithwaite, Penelope Hodge and Aileen Williams was crucial in forging them as radical subjects. Family was paramount in providing the subjects of the study with the critical thinking and other skills to survive in the face of racial and gender oppression. Further, family values were the foundation upon which these women's social activism would be based. In this section, I will explore how their early family lives shaped the activism of Rella Braithwaite, Penelope Hodge and Aileen Williams.

The economic conditions of Aileen Williams' family shifted from a working class situation to that of a middle-class environment. She remembers:

My dad had a regular job. My mom worked as a housekeeper and a cook until my father went into business for himself. He went into the washroom sanitation business. And then my mother looked after his books and she sent out his invoices and stuff like that. In the late 1930's I don't know if you would call that middle class. Everybody has their own interpretation. But I guess middle class or lower middle class.27

Both Williams' parents were responsible for the economic solidity of the family. Historians have found that black women are often very crucial to the economic viability of black family life.28

The perceived status of Williams' family and friends was very important to her self-definition. Aileen Williams recalls what it meant that most of the members in her personal circle had jobs:

27Ibid.
I think most of my family's friends if they had a job, they were doing well. They were happy - no not happy - they felt they weren't on welfare. I think there was a strong resentment for being on welfare.29

Aileen Williams expresses relief that her family and friends "weren't on welfare." The employment record of Williams' family and friends works against the dominant discourse that "most" black people are on welfare and unwilling workers. The last sentence, "I think there was a strong resentment for being on welfare" has at least two meanings. First, it could mean that blacks resented black people who were on welfare because they reflected badly on the black community as a whole. Secondly, Williams and her family resented the commonly held perception among whites that black people are usually on welfare.

In Penelope Hodge's case, the place of her family and ancestors in Canadian history was important to her identity and self-definition. Hodge has been exasperated over the denial by some whites and others of her full identity as a Canadian.

That's why I'm always annoyed when people [whites] would say to me, "where did you come from?" "What island are you from?" When I first came here [Toronto] I got a lot of that. They would say, "where's your people from?" 'Nova Scotia.' "Where's your grandparents from?" 'Nova Scotia.' I didn't know anything beyond Nova Scotia. And of course my mother was a great historian. She knew the dates and everything. So we are really Canadians who have been here years and years, we really have! I'm a thorough Canadian my dear! I got so annoyed by the question, you know, "where'd you come from?" My mother said, "tell them your an eighth generation Canadian."30

The fury underneath her repetition of the questioning of her place of origin was communicated effectively to the listener/reader. Penelope Hodge's identity has been obscured in Toronto because of a Canadian nationalism that does not recognize that black people and people of colour have been crucial to the nation-building of this country.31 The increasing number of blacks who were

29 Aileen Williams, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 10 February 1998.
coming to Canada during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, mainly from the Caribbean, has been utilized by those in the dominant group to maintain the fiction that blacks who are multi-generational Canadian are recent migrants. Hodge understands that the underlying meaning of the question concerning her nationality was a challenge to her Canadian identity or right to "Canadianness".

The diversity among black people in Toronto is not a new phenomenon of the 1980s and 1990s. The migration of blacks from the United States, other regions of Canada and the Caribbean began in the 1600s. Diversity of sexual orientation, class, ethnicity and gender among blacks has also been obscured by race operating as a totalizing metalanguage.

Hodge's parents were most significant in developing and sustaining a self-defined black womanhood. She states:

I was that kind of person, I wanted to please my parents. Another thing my parents did, when I wanted to leave home they never stood in my way. My father said the more places you can go - the more places you can visit. Take the opportunity. I run into parents here who don't like it when their daughters want to leave and go some place. That's so wrong. It really is! Because that's when you have to grow up, when you leave home, you sure do. That's when you have to take responsibility for yourself. Know how you behave and how you pay your rent and that kind of thing. You start to grow up. So I guess [for] my parents [pause] education was number one. My parents were my role models. They really were.

Hodge believed as a black woman that she should be financially and personally independent. Hodge's emphasis on "how you behave" suggests that her family saw that respectability was crucial to Penelope Hodge's self-defined black womanhood. Many black feminist theorists have argued that black women...
subjects must be able to define themselves for themselves or black women will be defined by others. Further, Patricia Hill Collins maintains, black women activists must sustain "an independent consciousness as a sphere of freedom" in order to engage in various forms of resistance. Self-definition is a process that, in my view, begins in the earliest moments of life and is actualized in the work of the radical subject.

Although Rella Braithwaite had a large extended family, her self-definition was attained in a white farming community in Listowel. However, she emphasized that the members of her family were "respected" in the community and therefore experienced very little racism. She recalls:

The rural community that I lived in was made up of immigrants from Ireland, Scotland and that's going back to the thirties because I was born in 1923. My father was a hard working man and my mother she just helped wherever she was needed. And she was mainly busy in the home. But they ... When we look back now and think about our parents they sort of accepted things more so in regards to discrimination. They accepted things more than we would ourselves as we grew up. But we were in a nice community and we became involved in the United Church there. Actually we were highly respected but we were just one family [meaning one black family]. We were one family in that community but we did have relatives. We were fortunate that we did have relatives that could come on weekends not that far away.

Rella Braithwaite's family was respected in the "white" town that she lived in but the further suggestion here is that the singularity of Braithwaite's family minimized the racism that they might have experienced. On the other hand, the increasing number of Irish or Scottish immigrants to small Ontario towns during the 1930s was not perceived to be a racial problem by native born whites.

The issue of race is a visible factor in the lives of Canadian blacks whereas race is not a visible social factor in the lives of their white counterparts. Hodge
throughout her childhood Hodge was reminded by her parents of the "meaning" of her social positioning and how to navigate, survive and surpass barriers of race and gender. Blacks have also utilized the liberatory side of the double-voiced discourse of race.40

The adoption of the ideology of respectability was a strategy of resistance that the subjects' families utilized to ensure that their daughters' good reputation could not be disputed. The families of the informants hoped that black respectable families and their daughters might be seen as worthy of broader opportunities within the wider society. In subsequent sections, the liberatory "meaning" of race as understood by my oral history participants will be revealed in their activist role. The participants of the study are from a long line of black Canadians who were committed to the racial uplift of other black Canadians.

2c The Church

The black church was an important part of the early lives of Rella Braithwaite, Penelope Hodge, and Aileen Williams. Many of the values upheld in their families such as community responsibility, self-reliance and educational attainment were echoed in church teachings. These aforementioned values are the legacy of their black ancestors who settled in Canada long ago.41 Furthermore, the institution of the black church provided many of the social supports that were wanting in Canadian society.42

42Sheldon Taylor, "The Black Church in Canada: A Rock On Which They Stood," Journal of African Canadian Studies 2 no. 2 (Summer 1994) p. 1; Dorothy Shadd-Shreve, The AfriCanadian Church: A Stabilizer (Jordan Station: Padeia Press, 1983);
The black Canadian church has played a large role in forging the ideology of respectability and racial uplift in black communities. Penelope Hodge remembers:

The church has always been very strong among black people because there were leadership roles in the church to be taken. You couldn't find it in politics and business and other places but it was in the church. So that's one reason but I guess to black people who have been suppressed for so long and had so many horrible things happen to you that the church teachings were important. There's going to be a better land - a better - you believed in God because things had to get better somewhere along the line. Don't you think? Yeah I think that's what it was all about. I really really do ... Caring for one another I think it was a very big role in the Baptist church and still is. I think the black community has always had a lot of self-help organizations it always has whether it was the church ... 43

The concept of racial uplift seems intricately bound into the teachings of the Canadian black church. The model for community organizing and black leadership, as Penelope Hodge points out, originated in the black church since leadership opportunities in mainstream institutions were closed to blacks.44

Rella Braithwaite's parents believed that the church was an important part of their lives.45 As a young woman leaving home, Braithwaite was advised by her parents to find the church. Then the community. Once on her own Braithwaite followed her parents' advice and sought a church. She recalls:

I went to the three different churches The three main black ones. I was involved in the African Methodist Episcopal And then my sister who

and Dorothy Shadd Shreve, interviewed by Marcia Wharton Zaretsky, Buxton, 25 August 1990.

83
became a minister and she was busy with the British Methodist Episcopal. I would go to events at either one and also the Baptist because that was one place that the young people would meet. It's not that way these days but many people would meet and they would congregate sometimes outside the church before it started and after it was over.

During the interview, I further questioned Brathwaite on what other roles the church took on beyond concerns for its youth. Brathwaite explains:

Besides a meeting place, they did have organizations for the youth. And organized activities for the women. But I think as the blacks moved out of the central area of the city it became more difficult to remain a member in the black church. I know there were many families that made an effort even when they did move out to Scarborough. They made an effort to go back and be involved in the black churches.

The church was not only a spiritual guide but was crucial to the solidity of the black community. For black youth, the church provided a meeting place for their social activities. Individual members involved in organizing church projects became role models to young church goers who were able to see, first hand, blacks as leaders.

Rella Braithwaite and Aileen Williams contend that in their youth, church member Mme Brewton was their role model. Rella Braithwaite recalls:

She [Madame Brewton] and her husband operated a [salon] - he was a foot specialist, she was a hairdresser. They operated a place on Yonge Street in the early years [1930s] and that was remarkable. She was a wonderful person. She was involved in the church, more than one church. She started up a youth group, it was called the Young Men's Bible class. It soon had women and men. She was just so professional and then her having the business. She was American born. She seemed to be a very smart person. I did admire her and she would always give the youth advice too. She was one

of the role models. There were others too. I can't recall them right now but I admired her.49

Mme. Brewton was an important black female role model for Braithwaite and Aileen Williams. For example, Braithwaite recalls that Brewton founded the Young Men's Bible Class at the First Baptist Church in Toronto which was open to boys and girls of all races. Furthermore, in her beauty shop which she co-owned with her husband, she trained a number of young women to be hairdressers.50 Brewton, in Braithwaite's and Williams' opinion, provided a model for black women in the community which emphasized community responsibility and professionalism.

The black church was crucial in providing institutional support to black families in economic, social and spiritual need. Furthermore, the church provided the location for a black leadership to be nurtured and revered.

3. The Canadian Negro Women's Club/Association51

Rella Braithwaite, Penelope Hodge and Aileen Williams contend that the CANEWC/A emerged in 1951 from an existing group called the Dilettantes.52 The Dilettantes was a social club in which black middle-class women congregated to organize bake sales, dances and garden parties.53 However, members of the Dilettantes wanted to address social problems in the black community, and therefore, with this change in focus, the creation of a socially conscious black

51 In the primary documentary evidence, the Canadian Negro Women's Association was called the Canadian Negro Women's Club. The change from Club to Association in the primary documentary evidence did not occur until the late 1960s.
women's organization was needed. The development of CANEWCA was a response to the needs of a black community unsure of its place in Canadian society in the aftermath of World War Two. This section will explore the roles that Aileen Williams, Rella Braithwaite and Penelope Hodge played in CANEWCA in their desire to uplift the black community of Toronto.

Braithwaite, Hodge and Williams all agreed that Kay Livingstone was a significant figure in the creation of CANEWCA. Aileen Williams explains:

There was a dozen of us who were friends. We started to have a sort of a social group. It was purely a social club. We called ourselves the Dilettantes. Kay Livingstone came to town (from Ottawa) - to Toronto. She joined the group. She said this is a waste of time, we're just doing things socially, we're not doing anything that would make a difference. We have to get involved. She was very concerned.

We had a meeting and she outlined some of the things we could possibly get involved in, and what we should be doing to help our youth and give them some stability. Give them some strength and encourage them. So we changed and we changed the name. Those who wanted a social group dropped out.

Kay Livingstone was concerned about the education of black youth as well as other social issues facing black people in Toronto in the 1950s. Her concerns led to the transformation of the Dilettantes into the Canadian Negro Women's Club (later Association). The stated purpose of the new organization was "to become aware of, to appreciate, and further the merits of the Canadian Negro." The subsequent projects that were spearheaded by CANEWCA reflected the new philosophy.

As stated earlier, Kay Livingstone was a central figure in transforming the nature of community organizing for Penelope Hodge, Aileen Williams and Rella Braithwaite. Kay Livingstone was born in London, Ontario, in 1918. Her parents were the founders of Dawn of Tomorrow, the first black newspaper in Ontario.

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Dawn of Tomorrow, was geared to serve the black community in Ontario politically and socially. Livingstone was a professional television and radio actor. She had a radio show called the "Kay Livingstone show" for CBC radio during the early 1950s. The show explored the traditions and cultural activities of blacks in the diaspora around the world. Livingstone died suddenly in 1974 leaving behind her influence on a number of organizations, such as CANEWC/A, the National Congress of Black Women of Canada, and the Women's Section of the United Nations Association.

Kay Livingstone left a legacy beyond her many projects in the black community. She was the originator of the term "visible minority." In 1975, Penelope Hodge stated:

Kay was determined that minority groups should not be overlooked and it was she who coined the phrase 'Visible Minority Groups' which has been picked up and used so liberally in this past year by the media.

This term changed how black people and people of colour were spoken about in the dominant discourse. Specifically, "visible minority" differentiated people of colour who were visibly different from whites from those minorities who were not. The term "visible minority" became an organizing tool which CANEWC/A members could use to challenge unfair institutional practices in education, policing and immigration.

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58 Penelope Hodge, "A Tribute to Kathleen Livingstone," 27 July 1975 for the Canadian Negro Women's Association, papers of the OBHS.
62 Penelope Hodge, "A Tribute to Kathleen Livingstone," 27 July 1975 for the Canadian Negro Women's Association, papers of the OBHS.
63 Lawrence Hill, Women of Vision: The Story of the Canadian Negro Women's Association, 1951-1976, p. 14; Penny Hodge, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-
However, the use of the term “visible minority” has become a contentious issue. Some feminists argue that the use of the label “visible minority” has become a divisive tool in which various immigrant groups fight amongst themselves for ownership of the term.64 Furthermore, it has been argued that the use of the label visible minority obscures the fact that often blacks and people of colour are invisible to mainstream institutions and society.65 However, Livingstone’s intention in her construction of the term “visible minority” was to provide an organizing tool with which to make “visible” to the federal government the concerns of black people and people of colour in Canada.

In fact, Ontario Court of Appeal justice George Finlayson recently authored a ruling in which “visible minorities” were given the right to challenge prospective jurors for proof of community prejudice. Thus, defendants who appear to be visibly different from jurors could question potential jurors on whether they held a bias against a particular community of colour. The term visible minority has also become part of the legal discourse on people of colour.66 “Visible Minority.” at the time of the inception of the term, was seen by members of CANEWC/A as a “radical” descriptor of their location in Canadian society.

Kay Livingstone was also significant in bringing together talented black women within CANEWC/A to strengthen the effectiveness of the organization. Penelope Hodge contends that Kay Livingstone was instrumental in convincing her to join the Dilettantes, promising Hodge that the club was changing its focus from a social club orientation to social issues effecting the black community. Hodge describes the process of the Dilettantes’ transformation into CANEWC/A.


66 Julius Melnitzer, Visible Minorities May Challenge Jurors for Cause,” Law Times (Winter 1999), p. 3.
The first purpose we decreed was to become aware of and promote the merits of the Canadian Negro. Well, at that stage too, we realized that one of the keys was education. We really got involved in trying to encourage kids to stay in school. That was the thing that we were all about. To do that we had to raise money to give scholarships and bursaries. We realized then that the War was over then, in the early fifties, and jobs were opening up and we felt that we were never going to take our place in the community or the city if we don’t have an education. Some of the men of course were coming back from the army or navy and were able to go back to school.67

Supporting and encouraging the education of black youth was one of the primary functions of CANEWC/A.

Penelope Hodge's first role in CANEWC/A was finding funds for the scholarships reserved for deserving black students.68 Hodge describes the efforts of members of CANEWC/A:

It was the first big thing that we rallied around and tried to promote, and of course that involved us having to make money. And where was this money going to come from? There was no multiculturalism and there were no government grants. They just didn’t exist. So if we were going to make money to help Joe Blow, we had to plan activities and raise the funds so we would have money to give them.69

Penelope Hodge and other members of CANEWC/A recognized that they had to rely on their own ingenuity because Canadian society was not going to assist black students to attain higher education. The concept of self-reliance and racial uplift, which were strong values in Hodge's family, guided her quest for scholarship money.70

Originally, the scholarship money was used for World War Two veterans returning back to Canadian society from the battlefields of Europe. Hodge explains:

68Canadian Negro Women’s Club, Newsletter: Re: Scholarship, January 1962, papers of the OBHS.
Some of the men of course were coming back from the army or navy and wanted to go back to school. Then they became aware of us [the Canadian Negro Women's Association] because people started coming to us for help. I wound up being president. I forget the dates of that. I remember chairing committees. At the beginning of the year we'd decided what things we were going to do and appoint people to chair committees.71

A former teacher, Hodge recognized that CANEWC/A could play an important role in providing educational opportunities to members of the black community. During Hodge's time as president of CANEWC/A her primary goal was to maintain a strong educational focus within the organization.

Penelope Hodge and other members of the newly formed CANEWC/A, were involved in fund raising for scholarships for black students through organizing innovative events. However, Hodge contends that the annual June Ball which CANEWC/A members used to raise funds for scholarships was a "hangover" from the Dilettantes days.72 Nonetheless, CANEWC/A did originate Calypso Carnival which raised thousands of dollars in funds for black youths' education in Toronto.73 Further, this fund raising event also worked to celebrate and perpetuate a black Caribbean cultural tradition. In fact, I would argue that Calypso Carnival was the precursor to Caribana. Many of the women who organized Calypso Carnival would later become committee members and advisors to the first Caribana in 1967.74

As mentioned earlier, Aileen Williams was also the president of CANEWC/A for two terms, from 1953 to 1954 and again from 1973 to 1974. Williams had formally been a member of the Dilettantes and therefore was part of the transformation of the organization to a more socially conscious entity. Williams remembers her various roles in CANEWC/A:

71 Ibid
72 CANEWA records also reveal that other banquets and balls were held to raise funds for scholarships. The Canadian Negro Women's Club programme, 10th Anniversary Banquet and Ball, 14 October 1961, papers of the OBHS. At this ball, Mr. Oscar Peterson was given a Merit Award along with other prominent black Canadians.
I was the President, the Secretary, the Treasurer. I was every position in the group but mostly the Secretary. Some of the girls were real activists. But we played that down because our main program, as we had specified in the beginning, was to encourage young people. We set up scholarships. We had different activities that involved young people. We had the Calypso Carnival that went for ten years and the money was used to go into our scholarship fund so that we could maintain it. We were involved in quite a few activities. We built a chalet in Ghana. Our members went to and joined in the Martin Luther King march.75

Aileen Williams seems to have been instrumental in maintaining CANEWC/A’s image and role as a self-help organization first and foremost and only secondarily as an organization agitating for social change.

However, Williams, through CANEWC/A, was well aware of the black political movements around the world and CANEWC/A members gave their support through raising funds or writing letters of protest.76 Williams as the president of CANEWC/A often authoured letters to the government or the media protesting injustices that occurred to blacks in Canada.77 However, Williams was careful not to draw the organization into political debates that would use up their limited resources reserved for their scholarship drives.

The other focus of CANEWC/A was on educating all Canadians on the history of blacks in Canada. Rella Braithwaite wrote speeches and books under the auspices of CANEWC/A particularly during its later years. Rella Braithwaite, in a presentation to George Brown College in 1976, wrote: "As Blacks, as we grope towards new definitions of womanhood and manhood, this can no longer mean denying personal growth and identity. We must know our identity. For any race

75Aileen Williams, interviewed by Marcia Wharton Zaretsky, Toronto, 10 February 1998.
77Aileen Williams, interviewed by Marcia Wharton Zaretsky, Toronto, 10 February 1998. Aileen Williams, President of the Canadian Negro Women’s Association to Mr. Ritchie, Under Secretary of State for External Affairs, 11 July 1973, papers of CANEWA. Kay Livingstone, President and Aileen Williams, Secretary to Mr. Howard Walker, President, South Parkdale Residents’ Association, 25 April 1969, personal papers of Aileen Williams.
or nation to achieve recognition it has to have an identity. This identity will become a source of pride, because a country without a history is a country without a future. 78

The combining of nation and race has been a focus of some black radical thinkers who viewed one's racial identity as a political category. 79 Braithwaite ties her self-definition to race and nation within the context of a Canadian past. Rella Braithwaite considers the history of blacks in Canada as part of the untold story of the role of black Canadians in nation-building. Nonetheless, Braithwaite recognizes that blacks have been doubly situated within the nations of the West. For instance, blacks are simultaneously apart from the Canadian state and intricately a part of Canada's past. Braithwaite, through the uncovering and writing of black history in Canada, has attempted to reconcile blackness within the Canadian state. For example, in 1973 Rella Braithwaite and Enid F. Doyle were asked by CANEWC/A to write Women of Our Times, a history of black women of Canada. 80

Rella Braithwaite along with other CANEWC/A members believed that the development and dissemination of black history in educational settings and throughout society would benefit black youth as well as other Canadians. On March 14, 1958 CANEWA launched the first "Negro History week" in Canada. 81


81 Aileen Williams wrote a number of letters about "Canadian Negro History Week" to the media in Toronto. Mrs. Aileen Williams, to Mr. John Dairymple, Managing Editor of Liberty Magazine, 14 January 1959, papers of CANEWA; Mrs. Aileen Williams, to Mrs. Doris McCubbin Anderson, Editor of Chatelaine, 14 January 1959, papers of CANEWA; Doris McCubbin Anderson, Editor of Chatelaine to Aileen Williams, 14 January 1959, papers of CANEWA; Mrs. Aileen Williams, to Mr. Ralph Allen, Editor of Maclean's, 14 January 1959, papers of CANEWA; Rella Braithwaite, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaritsky, Toronto, 18 March 1998; Penny Hodge, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaritsky, Toronto, 28 January 1998; Aileen Williams, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-
As the 1970s emerged, the members of CANEWA felt that black women needed a national voice and in 1973 they organized the first National Congress of Black Women. Aileen Williams asserts that this increased politicization was necessary for three reasons. First, male dominated organizations, like the National Black Coalition, were not addressing black women's concerns. Secondly, the white feminists were ignoring issues of race and racism within the women's movement. Thirdly, CANEWA members wanted to organize black women nationally because they wanted black women to have a broader political voice.

4. New Beginnings: The First National Congress of Black Women and the Congress of Black Women of Canada:

The first National Congress of Black women organized by CANEWA formed the basis for the creation of the National Congress of Black Women of Canada (NCBWC). The first NCBWC was held at the Westbury Hotel in Toronto on the weekend of April 6, 1973. As president of CANEWA, Aileen Williams was crucial in orchestrating the first National Congress of Black Women. At its first meeting, the conference workshops passed a number of resolutions that would provide the framework for the formation of the National Congress of Black Women of Canada. However, the first NCBWC activities should be seen as an


83Flourette Osborne, interviewed by Marcia Wharton Zaretsky, 20 November 1997.


93
expansion onto the national stage of issues that CANEWA had been tackling at the local level.

For example, in the first NCBWC report, conference members denounced Canada's immigration policies which discriminated against black and Third World people. In particular, they denounced the Domestic Scheme which since the early 1970s gave only temporary resident status to black women who wanted to immigrate to Canada.87 Previously, under the Domestic Scheme passed into law in 1955, West Indian domestic workers had been given automatic landed immigrant status.88 The NCBWC report specifically discussed immigration as an institutional problem which should be challenged by black women. Below is a resolution from the report in which the Congress defined the faults it found within the Immigration Act.

**Immigration Policy: Sexual Discrimination**

Considering the fact that the present immigration policies have produced a marked imbalance in the male/sic/female ratio of immigrants in the black community:

**BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED:**

That pressure be brought to bear on the Canadian policy makers, by both West Indian and African governments and Canadian Black organizations to effect a reformation of these policies.89

The resolution highlighted the gender discrimination entrenched within the Immigration Act. Further, the resolutions called for an international effort in terms of challenging Canada's immigration policy regarding black women. The

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88 The Domestic Scheme has been also been called the West Indian Domestic Scheme which has been used to target West Indian women for domestic work in Canada since 1955. See Linda Carty, "African Canadian Women and the State: 'Labour only, please,'" in Peggy Bristow, comp., *We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up: Essays in African Canadian Women's History*, pp. 217-220; Agnes Calliste, "Canada's Immigration Policy and Domestic from the Caribbean: The Second Domestic Scheme," in Jesse Vorst et al., eds., *Race, Class, Gender: Bonds and Barriers* (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1991), 136 168; and Makeda Silvera, *Silenced*, p. 8.
possible sexual abuse of single black women and the single black immigrant female by black men and white men was a significant issue at the First National Congress of Black Women.90

Also in the report of the First National Congress of Black Women, conference members defined what they perceived to be pressing issues in education, as evident in the following recommendation:

- Whereas a good self-image is vital in the basic emotional fibre of all children and historical awareness is essential to the development of one's identity, we recommend that in the composition of all school curricula, proper recognition be given to our ethnic contributions, past and present.91

In the NCBWC report the authors wrote: "Black history should be included in the curriculum at all levels in the schools."92 To assist school boards with this curriculum change members of the First Congress were willing to lend their expertise by designing for the educational system curriculum materials on black history.

- Since Canada's school population is becoming increasingly multi-racial and multi-cultural, it is imperative that teacher training colleges recognize the existence of racism so long inherent in our society, and which is so frequently manifested, whether consciously or unconsciously, in a teacher's approach.93

This further recommendation addressed the perceived need for anti-racist educational training of teachers. In the report it states:

Accordingly, we recommend that sensitivity training be compulsory for all teachers and that courses in psychology and sociology address themselves particularly to the pathology of racism, with a view to helping teachers free themselves of those stereotypes which can prejudice their relationships with children.94

90 ibid.
91 ibid.
92 ibid.
93 ibid.
94 ibid.
They believed that the racism in the schools was due to institutional structures, practices and training that ultimately were failing black students. Although members of the First Congress believed that the educational system had responsibility for providing anti-racist training to teachers, Congress members were willing to participate in the re-training.

In summary, Aileen Williams, Rella Braithwaite, and Penelope Hodge remained involved with the NCBWC in its crucial years of development.95 Rella Braithwaite was commissioned to write a book about black women’s history following the close of the First National Congress of Black Women. Braithwaite and Enid Doyle wrote *Women of Our Times* a history of black women in Canada.96

Aileen Williams was on the original steering committee which passed the resolution that the National Congress of Black women of Canada must develop a constitution.97 In 1977, Williams would become the Treasurer at the NCBWC and in 1980 she was the Ontario Representative of the NCBWC.98

5. **Conclusions**

The contributions that Rella Braithwaite, Penelope Hodge and Aileen Williams have made to black women’s organizing are still being felt. The National Congress of Black Women of Canada has remained a viable national voice that continues to address the issues that are of concern for black women. In addition, other legacies from CANEWA are Black History Month and Caribana; both events

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have been crucial in the celebration of the diversity of "blackness" in Toronto. I would argue that Caribana and Black History Month have provided the basis for more political clout in Toronto in the terms of attention and monetary rewards that they have provided the city. Ultimately, Rella Braithwaite, Penelope Hodge and Aileen Williams have contributed to improving conditions for blacks and society at-large through their various kinds of work on issues of education, and immigration.
CHAPTER FOUR:
Fleurette Osborne and the National Congress of Black Women of Canada

In this chapter, I will explore the life and work of Fleurette Osborne. A review of Osborne's experience as an activist will elucidate the building of the National Congress of Black Women of Canada [NCBWC]. In chapter three, through the oral testimony of Rella Braithwaite, Aileen Williams and Penelope Hodge, I undertook to study the work of the Canadian Negro Women's Association [CANEWA]. The creation of NCBWC was a legacy of the activism performed by the women of CANEWA. Osborne's work, as the first president of NCBWC, was built on the existing work of CANEWA which responded innovatively to crises in education, immigration and employment.

However, Osborne, an immigrant from Barbados, also draws from a genealogy of resistance that differs from the multi-generational Canadian background of Rella Braithwaite, Aileen Williams and Penelope Hodge. For example, black women from the Caribbean have had to resist the colonial discourses that took hold of West Indians' lived experiences following their emancipation from slavery. Therefore, black women in Canada from various cultural, linguistic and class backgrounds have varying histories and belief systems that produce their relationship to the world. The multiplicity of the culture of black Canadian women's resistance ultimately defines their activism which has been a "conscious" attempt to affect meaningful political and economic change within their communities and the larger society.

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In addition to unearthing some of the history of black women's organizing, I have found that Osborne's oral testimony lends itself quite readily to discourse analysis. As Foucault has stated, language embodies many of the power relations that exist in society. "Yet," according to Chris Weedon, "language, in the form of socially and historically specific discourses, cannot have any social and political effectivity except in and through the actions of the individuals who become its bearers by taking up the forms of subjectivity and the meanings and values which it proposes and acting upon them."5 Fleurette Osborne takes up black female radical discourses as a guide to improving the lives of all black women.

I conducted three interviews with Fleurette Osborne. I have also had full access to the NCBWC's files at the Toronto Chapter headquarters, which I have used as primary documentary sources.

In this chapter, I will first investigate the early life of Fleurette Osborne. Secondly, I will examine the impact Osborne has made on the NCBWC and Canadian society at-large.

1. Fleurette Osborne: The early years

Fleurette Osborne was born and raised in Barbados. She came to Canada in September 1960 as a young university student. She attended Sir George Williams University (renamed Concordia in 1974)6 where she received her Bachelor of Arts degree. In 1970, she went to Toronto to attend graduate school in Social Work. In this section, I will examine three aspects of Fleurette Osborne's life: her family, church and community.

Born in Barbados in the late 1930s, Fleurette Osborne describes her family as close knit:

We were a small family. We were really close knit. My sister and I are sort of close. There are three years between us. My brother came a lot later. As

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6 A merger between Sir George Williams University and Loyola College created Concordia University in 1974. See http://www.concordia.ca/visitor-centre/History/History.html#
far as I could see we used to have a lot of fun together but there was sibling rivalry - no matter how close you are. I suppose some people would say that we were middle class. But, my definition is, if you got to work, you're working class. My father worked. My mother didn't work- she stayed at home. But people said we were middle class.7

Most intriguing is Osborne's concept of class which she defines as being needs based as well as materially based. Osborne recognized that her neighbours might have defined her family's economic status as middle class because of what her family owned. The perception of Osborne's family as middle-class may also be related to her mother's ability to work at home. Osborne understood that her family's middle-class status was a tenuous one, which required the hard work of both her parents in order for their status to be maintained.8

In many black families, black women have needed to work because their male partners' earnings tended to be significantly smaller than those of their white counterparts. Since the 1960s, black women and men in the diaspora have tended to have mobility between the classes. However, black feminist theorists have found that for blacks, the movement between classes tends to be fluid in both directions depending on a number of societal variables.9

The importance of education was stressed within Heurette Osborne's family life in Barbados. She remembers:

Our parents educated us as much as they could and as far as they could. My brother went to New York and he did accountancy. I came to Montreal and ended up with a social work degree. My sister went to England to do her nursing. And then she came back to Montreal because I was living there at the time. They [parents] never said you had to be this or that or the

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other. All they did was provide the opportunity for us to be educated. There were always books. They read, we read then we would talk about what we read. They never insisted that we be this or that. If they had any expectations, they never burdened us with them.10

The culture of Osborne's early family life stressed reading and learning in the home. Although Osborne's parents did not explicitly insist that their children seek higher education, they created a learning environment where the need for the acquisition of knowledge was cultivated. Osborne and her siblings acquired advanced degrees which supports the presupposition that Osborne's parents held high educational expectations for their children.

The church was also an important part of Osborne's childhood. However, Osborne's connection to church values and teachings was tempered by the colonial and racist past of the Anglican church in Barbados. She remembers:

I remember one of the things that used to really bother me at the Anglican Church. They rented out the pews. And those rented out to all these white people - one couldn't go and sit in those pews. These pews could not be used by members of the black congregation, even if they [the whites] were not present. And this is a church. (laughs lightly) This practice was discontinued. Some blacks did rent pews; however, they were not so strict about who sat in them.11

This privileging of certain church members based on race was distasteful to Osborne and consequently she left the Anglican Church for the black Methodist church of Barbados. In the Barbadian colonial context, whites in the 1950's and 1960's were overtly able to maintain their racial supremacy in many institutions through segregation and an unequal share of property rights.12

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10 Fleurette Osborne, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretzky, Toronto, 10 April 1998.
In fact, the vestiges of colonialism had created an unspoken racial script with which black Barbadians were familiar throughout their society. Their familiarity with colonial discourse protected blacks from certain racial situations. Osborne explains:

The thing with racism was that it was there [Barbados]. And you knew it was there. There were certain hotels where black people could only go as workers. You walk into a bank and the only black people you would see at the bank were the people who would be the messengers carrying messages from one place to the other and also cleaning the place. Just before I left, it changed. But we knew that there was the racism and in fact there was sort of a separation of the two groups of people. There were about eighty percent of black people who needed the other twenty percent. Most people worked in the civil service, in the hospitals and the schools. Some people worked in their own businesses, many worked in agriculture on the plantations. Generally you didn't meet them [whites] and you knew where you shouldn't go so you didn't go there.

During this interview, Osborne did tell me of a story in which a visiting friend from a neighbouring island unwittingly went to the wrong hotel and was thrown out because blacks were not allowed as patrons at that hotel. Osborne's response to this incident was that the young man should have known better. The signs and signifiers within the discourse of racist colonialism were so deeply entrenched that defying the racism was deemed foolish.

As we have seen, from a very early age Osborne was aware of colonialism and racism and their scripts. This familiarity allowed Osborne to counter their effects with the development of counter-discourses that challenged white supremacy. Osborne was conscious as a young person in Barbados of the need to

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15 Ibid.
16 Interestingly, Hazel Carby contends that the process of inscribing national issues on black bodies accomplishes the ideological work that is necessary for the maintenance of systems of racial oppression. See Hazel Carby, "Encoding White Resentment: Grand Canyon - A Narrative for Our Times," in Cameron McCarthy and Warren Cricliow, eds., *Race Identity and Representation in Education* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), p. 236.
avoid situations where she would encounter racist incidents. However, this "avoidance" also demonstrated that Osborne had some understanding of how power operated within colonialist discourse(s).\textsuperscript{18}

Osborne left the Anglican Church in Barbados for the Methodist church to experience a more grass-roots spirituality. She explains:

Methodists were younger than the other [Anglican church] and they were not aloof - they were approachable very friendly and in a lot of cases not much older than some lot of us were ourselves. And they were much involved in the community. And they seemed much more interested in the members of the congregation than seemed to me happened at the Anglican church.\textsuperscript{19}

In the Methodist church in Barbados, Osborne found that the value for uplifting the community through the church was part of its practice and teachings. Further, the ministers were much more a part of their congregation in terms of their age and racial background. The age of the Methodist Ministers would be an important variable in light of the political climate of the Caribbean in the 1940s where young people were demanding liberation from colonial oppression.\textsuperscript{20} Younger Ministers may have been more sympathetic to the revolutionary movements emerging in the Caribbean.

Upon coming to Canada as a young university student, Osborne chose to connect to a community church on campus. Osborne remembers:

When I came to Montreal, I attended the United Church. The United Church which was the closest to Methodist and near the campus. This church had a marvelous program for students. The students just filled the church. It was the same type of atmosphere as in the Methodist church. [the church she had belonged to in Barbados] They [the United Church near Sir George Williams University] had this marvelous program after


\textsuperscript{19}Fleurette Osborne, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 20 November 1997.

Osborne found that the United Church near Sir George Williams, like the black Methodist church in Barbados, took on the responsibility of organizing activities for community members, especially the youth. The church served as a platform from which Ms. Osborne could participate actively in the university and the surrounding community. The utilization of the church as a platform for political activism has historically been significant to black women's organizing in the public sphere.

Fleurette Osborne's criterion for attending a church was determined more by whether members shared a similar concern for social justice issues than by the church's denomination. The church's focus in Canada, particularly for black women who had migrated from elsewhere, whether from the Caribbean or from rural Ontario, was mostly on community development issues. The women sought activities that would address issues, such as housing, education, and youth.

Evelyn Higginbotham, in her discussion of the black church in the United States, describes it as the backbone of the black community. Further, Higginbotham states that it cultivated and produced oppositional discourses to counter the oppressive and negative view promoted in the dominant discourse.
on black people. However, Osborne's experience with the Anglican church in Barbados exposed how relations of power in society were also present in religious institutions. Consequently Osborne, since her undergraduate years at Sir George Williams University, has never returned to the church.

I asked Osborne about how community and family responsibility were juggled by her family. From her response, one could conclude that the church, family and the community were intricately bound together:

My mother, not so much my father, was always involved in the community. She would always drag me along. So that's how I got involved in any branch of the community. I was involved in boys' clubs and girls' clubs. I was involved in that... At the primary school there were a number of committees that I was involved in - like the drama club and other stuff that was creative. In my teens I went from Brownies to Girl Guides to Rangers. I was always involved in stuff around the church. I grew up as an Anglican and then I left the Anglican church and became involved in the Methodist Church. I suppose that was because a lot my friends at high school were Methodists. There were three churches and they were all Methodists. Young people in the Methodist church also got involved in community work. We sort of got together and ran a drama club for some of the youngsters. And also two of us after leaving Rangers... three of us were able to start a company of Girl Guides.

In contemporary urban Canada, in contrast to the Caribbean, for example, most institutions including mainstream churches and schools have tended to suffer from a separation from their surrounding communities. But I have found that most of my interviewees who were originally from the Caribbean have tried to build community connections linking workplace, family, and the church.

According to Fleurette Osborne, her view of community was shaped in the Caribbean where she was born and raised. Osborne viewed the community as an extended family but a community might also be colleagues from work, church members or even strangers in need. Perhaps, this explains Osborne's

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29Philip examines how genealogies of resistance are framed by geography, space and community. M. Nourbese Philip, A Genealogy of Resistance and other essays.
gravitation towards the United Church at Sir George Williams University which, like the Methodist church in Barbados, was able to integrate the needs of the community into church programs. The United Church was a positive experience for Osborne as a Barbadian newcomer to Canada.

Patricia Hill Collins contends that the notion of the African-American community as family was part of the strategy utilized by black churchwomen to undermine oppressive institutions. Further, she traced this tendency to Caribbean and African women from the continent. 30 The notion of finding community in all facets of her life remains very important to Osborne.

Osborne's dynamic concept of community was forged in her family and within the larger society of Barbados. The idea of community as extended and inclusive would appear to have migrated from the Caribbean to Canada as it is an idea commonly held by black women activists of Caribbean descent who came to Toronto and dramatically changed its political landscape.31 It will become clear that the shape of Osborne's work as an activist within the confines of the NCBWC is directly related to her concept of community. Further, as an activist with a complex understanding of power, Osborne would utilize various strategies of resistance as president and later as an executive member of the NCBWC.

2. Fleurette Osborne and Radical subjectivity: the emergence of the black woman activist

As an activist, Fleurette Osborne has had to tap into various black radical discourses. During the 1960's, black radical discourses became dominant internationally because of black power movements, pan-Africanism and anti-colonialist movements around the world.32 For black women from the

30Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness And The Politics of Empowerment, p. 146.
32Amina Mama, Beyond the Masks: Race, Gender and Subjectivity, p. 105; Dionne Brand, Black on Black, Ideas, (CBC radio) transcript, in Toronto, March, 1998, p. 2;
Caribbean, the colonial-integrationist discourse along with a black radical discourse have shaped their experiences. The colonial-integrationist discourse can be described as a discourse requiring conformity to and acceptance of white hegemony, and black radical discourse can be described as discourse conveying a politics of resistance and subversion. Foucault contends:

Indeed, it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together. And for this very reason, we must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable. To be more precise, we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but a as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies.33

Colonial-integrationist discourse(s) and black radical discourse(s) are perpetually resisting and informing each other. Black radical discourse(s) are opposing strategies which are produced out of dominant discourses of race, class, gender and sexuality.

In the 1960s, Fleurette Osborne was at the then Sir George Williams University at a time when there was a convergence of the black student movement,34 black political movements and the women's movement dominating the political landscape. For example, Anne Cools (now a Canadian Senator) and other black students held a sit-in, in February of 1969, to protest the unfair treatment of West Indian students by their professors.35 Cools and a

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and Dionne Brand and Krisantha Sri Bhaggyadatta, Rivers Have Sources, Trees Have Roots (Toronto: Cross Cultural Communication Centre, 1986).
number of black students held the computer rooms hostage and caused minor
damage to the equipment. Cools' participation in this event gave her credibility
in the black women's community and, for black women like Osborne, Cools' action was a radicalizing moment.36

It is against this historical back drop that Fleurette Osborne's life-long relationship with the NCBWC began. A series of Congresses starting in 1973 formed the institutional framework for a national black women's organization in Canada.37 At the 1976 Congress in Halifax it was resolved that the Congress of Black Women would become a national organization. In 1977 a steering committee was created to begin the process of formally becoming an organization. However, not until 1980 were the Congress members able to acquire operational funding. They celebrated their success at that year's annual Congress. Fleurette Osborne was then elected and became the first president of the newly created National Congress of Black Women of Canada.

Osborne describes these aforementioned events below:

We can go back to 1973. There was a woman, she is now dead, Kay
Livingstone. I think it was 1973 when she organized the first Congress.
Before that she was involved in the National Black Coalition. I was also a
member of the National Black Coalition. It [National Black Coalition] was
very patriarchal (laughs lightly). There were very few women in
executive positions. When you think of the people there were only
Dorothy Wills of Montreal, Rosemary Brown . . . Kay Livingstone was the
Ontario rep. And anyway she marshalled women from across Canada and
also women from the border states like Detroit and New York. The first
Congress was held here in Toronto. And then the second one was held in
Montreal. And then there was a third one in Halifax in '76. It was in

36In 1978, Anne Cools ran for the liberal nomination in Rosedale where she proved to have some political support. In an editorial written in Contrast in 1978, Alan Hamilton criticized the mainstream media for doubting Anne Cools' ability to garner political support in Rosedale. Hamilton in his editorial describes Anne Cools as the product of the sixties black power movement and the New Left which were thought to be an antithesis to Rosedale politics. See Alan Hamilton, "Anne Cools' Triumph," Contrast 10, no. 14, Toronto, 13 April 1978, p. 4; and Ontario Black History Exhibition, Profile: Anne Cools, Toronto, 18 February 1987, papers of the Ontario Black History Society.
Halifax that people decided that every year or every two years they would come together.38

One impetus for the founding of the NCBWC came from the fact that the National Black Coalition, which was heavily funded by the Canadian government to focus on black issues nationally, was not addressing black women's concerns.39 What is also significant, as discussed previously, was that the Congress came out of an existing black women's organization, the Canadian Negro Women's Association which itself evolved from another black women's group called the Dilettantes.40 CANEWA continued until 1976 and some of the women of CANEWA became active members in the newly formed Congress.41 I have found that many of the black women's organizations, in fact black organizations in general, in Toronto, have had an ongoing networking relationship.42 This is contrary to the generally held belief that these organizations were in conflict with each other over funding and political goals.

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38Fleurette Osborne, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 10 April 1998.
39Fleurette Osborne, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 20 November 1997. Some of the male members of the group were Howard McCurdy, Rocky Jones, and Wilson Head. Sexism within male dominated organizations was also the case in African-American organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People [NAACP] during the civil rights movement. See Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods, eds., Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers & Torchbearers 1941-1965 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).
42Fleurette Osborne, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 15 April 1998.
The NCBWC in its unification of black women across Canada became a powerful political voice. Foucault contends that "discursive fields consist of competing ways of giving meaning to the world and of organizing social institutions and processes." The NCBWC sets out in a document that its main aim is to give its own meaning to black "woman". The aims outlined by the Congress were: "to increase awareness of the Media and Government institutions concerning: position of Black women on issues of general interest; position of Black women on issues pertaining to the Black community, and to develop a mechanism for creating social action." The Congress sought to create a counter-institutional environment in which black women would provide meaning for themselves on ideas of black womanhood, community and education.

Fleurette Osborne, throughout her tenure as president and later as an executive member of the organization, maintained full-time work at the Ontario Human Rights Commission and at the Federal Ministry of Indian Affairs as the Ontario Regional Community Development Officer where her concerns for equity issues for blacks, aboriginals and women were addressed. She was transferred to many locations throughout Ontario and spent a number of years in Saskatchewan in the early 1980's.

Osborne had a formidable job as the NCBWC's first president. She had to begin with structuring the organization. She recalls:

I was a member of the steering committee that organized the structure of the organization. We came up with a constitution by 1979. In between that time we published a newsletter and we had a fairly extensive mailing list. I now don't know whatever became of that extensive mailing list. I became the first president of the organization in 1980. I have been working with the organization ever since.

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43 Linda Carvey, "Congress has ambitious goals for Black women," Pandora 4, no. 1 (Fall 1988), p. 27.
44 Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language, p. 35.
45 Minutes of the Montreal Regional of the National Committee, November 1975, Papers of the National Congress of Black Women of Canada at the Toronto-Chapter Offices. Hereafter cited as NCBWC Papers.
46 The Constitution and By-Laws, prepared by Fleurette Osborne for the Congress of Black Women of Canada, 1980, NCBWC Papers; Minutes of the Montreal Regional Committee of the National Congress of Black Women, November 1975, NCBWC Papers. This document spells out the aims of the organization.
47 Fleurette Osborne, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 10 April 1998.
Osborne's other key project as president would pit her against Canada's formidable immigration practices.\textsuperscript{48} The history of Canada's immigration policy has been quite racist towards black women from the Caribbean. As discussed in previous chapters, under the Domestic Scheme in operation from 1955 to 1961 black women from the Caribbean were able to come to Canada to work as domestics.\textsuperscript{49} Further, under the 1950s Domestic Scheme, black Caribbean domestics were only reluctantly given landed immigrant status by the Department of Immigration.\textsuperscript{50} However by 1971, under a revised Domestic Scheme, the Department of Immigration was no longer giving landed immigrant status to domestics. Domestics from the Caribbean were now expected to return to their country of birth upon completion of their contracts.\textsuperscript{51}

The various incarnations of the Domestic Schemes were framed within a discourse of race and racialized gender regarding black women from the Caribbean. Concerned over black women's inability to assimilate, the Canadian government's Domestic Schemes outlined that eligible candidates had to be unmarried and childless.\textsuperscript{52} Agnes Calliste contends that the representation of black women's promiscuity was used as a legitimate reason for denying them entry into Canada in the 1950's. The negative image of black women's sexuality, therefore, was often seen by black women activists and their institutions as an important dominant discourse to counter.\textsuperscript{53} Race combined with one's gender was a significant determinant of who could immigrate to Canada.\textsuperscript{54}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{ibid} \textit{ibid.}, p. 148.
\bibitem{Ramirez1982} Women of colour from other third world countries also gained entry into Canada through the Domestic Scheme. See Judith Ramirez, "Domestic Workers Organize!" \textit{Canadian Women's Studies} 4, no. 2 (Winter 1982), pp. 89-91.
\bibitem{Calliste1993b} Agnes Calliste, "Canada's Immigration Policy and Domestics from the Caribbean: The Second Domestic Scheme," pp. 136-168; and Agnes Calliste, "Race, Gender and
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From the birth of the Congress, it has been involved in fighting against the unfairness of the Domestic Scheme. In particular, the Congress focused its efforts on denouncing the racial and sexual discrimination and harassment of domestic workers in Canada. In 1989, the NCBWC mounted the Domestic Workers Project which is referred to in a talking-points document produced by the organization.\textsuperscript{55} The aim of this campaign was to advocate on behalf of Caribbean domestics in disputes between employers and immigration officials.\textsuperscript{56}

As president of the NCBWC, Osborne challenged the unfair immigration policies and practices throughout her term. For example, in December 1981, Osborne took on the case of a two-year-old West Indian girl who needed important medical care but was being deported from Canada. Chanelle De Gourville needed medical attention and had been sent by her family to Canada from Haiti. Gourville's father, a skilled worker and resident of Montreal, seemed to be in a good position financially to provide care for himself and his daughter. However, the Canadian government wanted to deport Monsieur De Gourville and his daughter back to Haiti.

As spokeswoman for the National Congress of Black Women of Canada, Osborne wrote Lloyd Axworthy, the Minister of Employment and Immigration at the time, to request that this child's deportation be stayed:

A recent article in the Montreal Gazette regarding two-year-old Chanelle de Gourville, who resides in Montreal, Quebec has prompted the Executive Council of the Congress of Black Women of Canada to urge you to intervene on humanitarian grounds, and grant Chanelle and her father immigrant status so that she can remain in Canada and receive the special treatment she needs, and which is unavailable in her Native land, should she be required to return.\textsuperscript{57}

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\textsuperscript{55}See Resolutions of the Toronto Chapter of Congress of Black Women, 1993, NCBWC Papers.
\textsuperscript{56}Resolutions of the Toronto Chapter of Congress of Black Women, 1993, NCBWC Papers.
\textsuperscript{57}Fleurette Y. Osborne to Lloyd Axworthy 7 December 1981, NCBWC Papers; Lloyd Axworthy to Fleurette Y. Osborne 18 December, 1981, NCBWC Papers; Juanita
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The Congress was successful in being able to get permission for the child to stay for treatment. Osborne was also successful in getting Chanelle de Gourville's and her father's application for permanent residence favourably reviewed on an exceptional basis, again through a writing campaign requesting Lloyd Axworthy's intervention.

Osborne's and the organization's concern for black women and their families was also international. For example, letters were also written by Fleurette Osborne in her role as the president of the NCBWC on behalf of mainly black women, held unjustly as political prisoners in various countries of the world. Osborne remembers:

One of the things I was instructed to do after the election in 1980 was to write letters to the Prime Minister about intervening in the release of women in Haitian Prisons who were being kept for long periods of incarceration without trial. And in some cases they were mistreated.

Many of the letters that Osborne wrote to the Canadian government officials received a response and at times brought about social change. The institutional weight of the NCBWC gave black women a national "voice" that was harder to ignore by the federal government.

In a 1990's memo, the Toronto Chapter of NCBWC clearly states its role as a political advocate:

The work of the Congress of Black Women - Toronto Chapter has been to provide leadership in deconstructing and challenging systems of racism through political activism. This work is determined within a context of

Westmoreland-Traoré to Fleurette Y. Osborne, 27 November 1981, NCBWC Papers. The matter of Chanelle de Gourville was originally brought to Fleurette's attention by Ms. Westmoreland-Traoré a black Canadian lawyer of repute.
58 J.K. Bartleman, Department of External Affairs to Fleurette Osborne, 31 March 1981, NCBWC Papers.
59 Fleurette Osborne, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 10 April 1998. Also see Lloyd Axworthy to Fleurette Osborne, 30 October 1981, NCBWC Papers.
examining the impact of racism on the organization, the membership, and the larger Black community.60

A report submitted by Jean Augustine (now an MP in the Federal government) states that some of the Toronto Chapter's objectives were: "Social Action - Advocating on behalf of Black Women, lobbying, networking, publicizing the views of the Congress."61 However, the loss of the NCBWC's operational funding in the late 1980's and the advent of project funding changed the direction of the organization.62

The loss of the NCBWC's operational funding in the late 1980's was due to an administrative error.63 The Congress' operational funding was never reinstated because by the early 1990s most non-governmental agencies in Toronto received minimal or no operational funding from federal and provincial governments.64 The original focus of the organization on advocacy became less prominent as it had to become more service-oriented to comply with project funding regulations imposed by the funders.

In Fleurette Osborne's role as president, in the early 1980s, the Congress was ahead of its time in dealing with issues such as employment equity and pay equity.65 She recalls:

Well the first thing we did was a series of workshops on pay equity, affirmative action before it became employment equity, leadership development and on parenting. We did a number of briefs on pensions, on multiculturalism. In two years, we did three briefs. This was between 80

60Resolutions of the Toronto Chapter of the Congress of Black women, 1993, NCBWC Papers.
62Fleurette Osborne, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 20 November 1997. They had received operational funding from the Secretary of State.
63ibid.
65Bill 79 Employment Equity Act., 1st Reading (June 25, 1992); "Report on the Employment Equity Consultations," June 1992, copy at the NCBWC Papers. This report was written by Juanita Westmoreland-Traoré, who was the Commissioner and had been the resident lawyer of the National Congress of Black Women of Canada.
and 82. This was long before employment equity. There was no bill. There was no bill anywhere. You see I was working with human rights at the time. We also became involved in consultations by Rosalie Abella (Justice) about E.E. [Employment Equity] and which led to the establishment of the E. E. Act.66

The Employment Equity Act called for women, racial minorities, native people and people with disabilities to be considered for employment free of systemic barriers. The NCBWC's "radical" voice(s) were heard through their contributions to political roundtables, governmental reports and the many workshops they orchestrated on the issue of employment equity.67 For example, through the Focus on Black Women's group, employment equity and affirmative action goals were clearly enunciated for the federal government of Canada. Below is an excerpt:

4. that Government departments and Crown Corporations establish affirmative action programs, in which:

a. hiring and promotion must be based on a standardized system of job qualification and merit assessment wherein subjective factors irrelevant to job performance, particularly those susceptible to biased influences by traditional stereotyping, are eliminated and outlawed,

b. a concrete plan of action must be developed; a time table of reasonable milestone dates for achieving various target objectives must be established on the premise of no involuntary displacement of current employees and taking due account of projected employee attrition rates, impending technological changes, and the increasing availability of qualified personnel from 'visible minority' groups (as a result of availability of equal opportunities to these groups)68

The wording of the Focus group sponsored by the Congress was very similar to the Employment Equity Act which also had timetables and action plans for the

hiring of the target groups. In workshops throughout the country, Osborne, as president and later as the committee coordinator of the Congress' Affirmative Action group, educated Canadians on the goals of pay equity, affirmative action and employment equity issues.

During the early 1980s, community organizations were utilizing the term "affirmative action" to discuss inequities in the labour market in Ontario. In early documents, both the Cross Cultural Communication Centre and the National Congress of Black Women of Canada used the term affirmative action and employment equity interchangeably to discuss political solutions to the racism and sexism in working environments. In 1985, Marjorie Cohen complained that the term Affirmative Action was being confused with equity issues. She stated:

The idea of Affirmative Action should not be confused with the idea of Equity. The term employment equity has been adopted recently in preference to affirmative action because the latter is deemed too dangerous to use. The question now is whether or not the substitution of the term equity is backing off from the basic principles which affirmative action implies. I maintain that it is.

Cohen maintains that affirmative action meant a lot more than equal opportunity and equal pay. "Affirmative Action calls for positive steps to rectify past discrimination and inequities which have become a structured part of the system." But by 1989, government bodies were opting exclusively for the term "employment equity" to address in Ontario employment inequities among women, aboriginals, the disabled and racial and ethnic minorities in Toronto.

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69 Bill 79 Employment Equity Act, 1st Reading (June 25, 1992).
70 Fleurette Osborne, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 20 November 1997; Fleurette Osborne, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 10 April 1997; and Minutes, National Executive Meeting, Calgary, 13 April 1985.
72 Ibid., p. 23.
73 See Cross Cultural Communication Centre Newsletter 8, no. 8 (September 1989); Cross Cultural Communication Centre Newsletter 8, no. 9 (September 1989); and Cross Cultural Communication Centre Newsletter 8, no. 10 (September 1989).
Bob Rae, the then premier of Ontario, brought The Employment Equity Act into law in June 1992.\textsuperscript{74} However, this Act was repealed in 1995 by the government of Mike Harris, the current Progressive Conservative Leader of Ontario, upon his election as Premier of Ontario. Nonetheless, the Employment Equity Act was a triumph for the Congress and its allies because they were able to see Employment Equity become law, at least temporarily.

Osborne, through the NCBWC, sought to improve the rights of black women in Canada. As president of the Congress, Osborne was at the forefront of introducing the idea of legislative rights for women, blacks and people of colour in the form of pay equity, and employment equity (Affirmative Action).\textsuperscript{75}

Within the Congress, tensions were brewing over inequities in terms of class and sexual orientation within NCBWC. In particular, issues pertaining to the homophobia that exists among Congress members had to be addressed. Osborne explains:

Well, another resolution coming out of the AGM [in May 1997] was for a committee to continue to work on anti-lesbophobia. This goes back to the AGM [1982] in Winnipeg. [Adonnica Huggins] is a member of the Toronto Chapter. She was nominated as one candidate for President and she declared herself as an out lesbian. That set off a whole ruckus which was not dealt with. I think in a way it was dealt with but not properly dealt with and so there was no resolution and partly because there wasn't time. Although in retrospect I think we should have found time to deal with it. But at the AGM in May '97 we held a forum on a Friday night. There was a panel and there was a question and answer period. Given the kind of feedback and attitudes of some of the people in the organization, especially in Ontario it was quite interesting that women outside of Ontario seem much more amenable to discussing the issues than most women in Ontario.\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{74}Bill 79 Employment Equity Act., 1st Reading (June 25, 1992).
\textsuperscript{76}Fleurette Osborne, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 10 April 1998.
Within black organizations and black communities, resistance to the concerns of gays and lesbians has been ongoing. Although black women who are lesbians have been at the forefront of activism in Toronto and Canada, their participation has not been fully recognized within some black communities.77

However, when Fleurette Osborne and I were going through the organizational files, Osborne was thrilled to find a document that seemed to suggest that the organization was dealing with lesbian issues from the Congress' inception. The minutes of a 1980 meeting held by the Saskatchewan Working Women's Association, which was an associate member of the Congress of Black Women of Canada, demonstrates this point:

Whereas women are discriminated against on the basis of their sex and whereas lesbians suffer much greater discrimination on the job, be it resolved that SWWA fight for an end to the specific oppression of lesbian workers.78

This clearly illustrates that black lesbian issues were being explored by the Congress before the late 1990s but the application of these inclusive resolutions was not instituted. The NCBWC is presently creating a new constitution that will integrate lesbian concerns throughout the organization.

The notion of a rights-oriented strategy against oppression was very much a part of black radical discourses coming out of the 1960s in Canada, the Caribbean and the United States.79 From the Congress' beginnings, a black female consciousness was developed that organized and created strategies that would confront the patriarchy that existed in black male dominated institutions. Furthermore, the NCBWC's black feminist standpoint recognized that black women in Canada needed to address their specific needs in an institution specifically for them. Finally, the interest in black women's well-being went beyond national boundaries as Fleurette Osborne and the Congress advocated for black women's rights all over the world.

78 Minutes of the Saskatchewan Working Women's Association, 1980, NCBWC Papers. This document was submitted by Astrid Egger, Sylvia Pusch, Andrea Walker and Maylynn Woo. (Unfortunately the exact date of this document was not recorded).
CONCLUSION:

Black women activists have contributed to the settlement and social advancement of black peoples in Toronto. Fleurette Osborne, through her long association with the NCBWC, has been successful in advocating for political change in terms of legislative rights and changes in racist immigration practices. In addition, Fleurette Osborne and black women activists in general have dynamically changed the notion of the "imagined community." They have viewed community as a space where one's religion, race or ethnicity were not the sole determinants in how they would define communities of resistance. Their political geography was based on advocating for black women but also building alliances across all social boundaries. Consequently, black women activists like Osborne viewed community as a political framework in which they could participate in all facets of society including immigration practices and education. We have seen how Osborne's radical subjectivity was the result of her move from the margins of political discourses in Toronto and Canada to the centre of equity and social justice debates. As such, her efforts epitomize how black women's activism has made a large contribution in improving the lives of Toronto's denizens and Canadian society at-large.
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CHAPTER FIVE:
Black Women Activists and Community

In North America, differences among black peoples are invisible to the mainstream because of stereotypical beliefs that characterize blacks as members of a homogeneous group. In Canada, specifically, the existence of indigenous blacks and the continued immigration of black peoples from the Caribbean and Africa and the United States have created tremendous diversity amongst individuals of African descent. In addition, differences including gender, race, class and sexuality affect black Canadian experiences in differing ways. However, in spite of the differences among black Canadians there are some significant commonalities that have been utilized by them to effect social change. In particular, the idea of race and community are concepts that have been used as organizing tools to empower black women activists and their communities.

In previous chapters, I explored how black women activists in Toronto were able to create effective black women's organizations that have challenged systems of oppression in Canada. Black women have had to create organizations of their own because they were without a political voice in mainstream institutions. The lack of mainstream political power of black women has also meant that black women activists have had to work within their communities or community organizations to bring about social change. I will argue, therefore,

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1Andre Alexis contends that it is the Canadian media that have contributed to black Canadians' invisibility. In Alexis' view, the unlikely comparisons made by the media between black Americans and their Canadian counterparts contribute to that erasure. See Andre Alexis, "Borrowed Blackness," This Magazine, May 1995, p. 18; and Rinaldo Walcott, "Black like who? Black Subjectivities: Ethnicity, Race and the Politics of Film in Canada," Word 6, no. 8 (December 1997/January 1998), pp. 16-18.

that the economic and educational advancement of blacks in Toronto could not have occurred without black women activists' dynamic use of the concept of community.

In this chapter, I will explore the radical subjectivities of Rita Cox, Gloria Reinbergs, Joan Pierre and Rosemary Sadlier, each of whom has made contributions to both mainstream and black communities in Toronto. Rita Cox, Gloria Reinbergs and Joan Pierre were originally born and raised in the Caribbean and have brought ideas of community and professionalism into Toronto's milieu from their places of birth. Furthermore, their notion of community activism was shaped by progressive movements of the 1960s, particularly the civil rights movement and anti-colonialist movements within the Caribbean context.

The subjects of the study who are Caribbean-born had models of black leadership in their governments, educational administrations and other social institutions in their countries of origin. However, the fight against colonialism certainly involved an element of uplifting blacks from being consumers of European culture to consumers of West Indian cultures.³

In the case of Rosemary Sadlier, who was born in Canada, the invisibility of the black community and its history in Toronto made her childhood at times difficult. However, her awareness of her family's long history in Canada gave her a sense of belonging and Canadianness that has been enduring.

I argue that the concepts of community and specifically black community were significant factors in shaping the activism of these women. An examination of the oral testimonies of Rita Cox, Gloria Reinbergs, Joan Pierre, and Rosemary Sadlier demonstrates their respective unique mergings of community and activism within the City of Toronto.

³One should note that West Indians are descended from Chinese, South Asian and European ancestors. However, for this chapter, West Indian or Caribbean will be used in discussing those who are of African descent.

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1. The Women in Brief:

In this section I will briefly introduce the subjects of this chapter. These biographical sketches will illustrate how the lived experiences of Rita Cox, Gloria Reinbergs, Joan Pierre and Rosemary Sadlier are extraordinary.

1a Rita Cox

Rita Cox was born and raised in Trinidad from the 1930s and 1950s. She immigrated to Canada in 1961 and entered the Toronto Public Library system as a librarian. In 1973, Rita Cox became the children's librarian at Parkdale Public Library. Soon after, she was promoted to head librarian. In addition to her work at Parkdale Public Library (she retired in 1995) Cox pioneered literacy programs for children and adults. She also is a world renowned storyteller.4

1b Gloria Reinbergs

Gloria Reinbergs was born and raised in Barbados in the 1940s and early 1950s. She immigrated to Canada in October 1959. One of eight siblings, Reinbergs finished her high school education in Toronto and obtained her library degree from the University of Toronto. Reinbergs has been active in many community organizations, notably the Cross Cultural Communication Centre as a board member for several years. Reinbergs has also had a significant role in gathering one of the largest collections of aboriginal resource materials in the City of Toronto.5

1d Joan Pierre

Joan Pierre was born in Trinidad in the late 1940s. Pierre came to Canada in the early 1970s and immediately found a job at Bell Canada. However within two years, Pierre was combining full-time work with community theatre at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute [now Ryerson University]. In 1986, Joan Pierre became the executive director of Caribana. She was the first executive director to concretely demonstrate to members of the black community and the mainstream business community that Caribana brought more than 200 million dollars into the City of Toronto.6

1e Rosemary Sadlier

A sixth generation Canadian, Rosemary Sadlier was born and raised in the Toronto area in the mid 1950s. Sadlier has a bilingual Honours Degree in Sociology and a Masters Degree in Social Work. She has published articles and a book on the history of black Canadians.7 Sadlier has been president of the Ontario Black History Society (OBHS) since 1993. Her tenure as president of the OBHS involves research writing and editing the newsletter - Ontario Black History News. Rosemary Sadlier has been involved in numerous presentations on black history to schools, community groups, churches and universities.

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2. Ideas of Community: the Early Years

As mentioned earlier, Rita Cox, Gloria Reinbergs and Joan Pierre were raised in the Caribbean in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s at a time when anti-colonialist movements were gathering momentum. Changes in music and literature intrinsic to West Indian sensibilities were demanding new definitions of nationhood. In coming to Canada from the late 1950s to 1970s, they witnessed various progressive movements such as the women's movement and the civil rights movement. Rosemary Sadlier, Canadian-born and much younger than the others, drew not only upon contemporary examples of resistance but also incorporated stories of resistance of her ancestors into her lived reality. However, despite differences of geography and space, the aforementioned black women activists developed similar concepts of community within the context of childhood experiences.

Rita Cox describes the community spirit of Trinidad in her youth:

There were no community centres for instance. But I remember being in a club - a club that we [the youth of the community] created - it was the island club. We called it the literary - it was very pompous of us - the literary, debating and something club. We [young people in the community] were the ones who decided we wanted to do this club. There was a youth centre but a primitive place. We were the ones to get Mr. Ottley [an educator] to be our patron. And he took responsibility! He showed us how to conduct meetings, showed us how to organize debating programs and that

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sort of thing. Looking back, I'm thinking about so many people, prominent people, who took on youth.11

Cox observed that the adults in her childhood community took responsibility for the welfare of all of the youth. Cox took that model and applied it to her work as a children's librarian. In Parkdale she did community outreach to determine not only the needs of the children who were using the books but the needs of their families as well.

Rita Cox's view of the role of the community librarian was also shaped in her youth. The Trinidadian community library system that Cox experienced combined library services with youth and political organizing. For example, the first place that Cox heard black radical voices was in the library. She remembers:

I heard Paul Robeson through the Trinidad Public Library. Through the library- I don't know if it was a personal interest of the chief librarian, or he saw it as a function of the library. I remember Marian Anderson, it was through the library. I heard my first political speeches, Dr. Eric Williams - going with my parents to the library.12 You know. All kinds of important people came down to the library. So, I always saw the library as the seat of the information sharing and sort of an impresario. So, it [her experience of the library and community in Trinidad] definitely affected how I saw the role of the library and the community. And a whole sense of community.13

Cox was fortunate to have heard the words of so many significant future black leaders. In the 1930s and 1940s Eric Williams was an intellectual and an anti-colonialist agitator.14 Paul Robeson was an actor/performer who was also a

12Eric Williams was the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago from 1961 to 1981. He founded the People's National Movement and led Trinidad to independence from Britain in 1962. His book *Capitalism and Slavery* asserts that slavery in the West Indies was a significant factor in funding the industrial revolution in Britain. See Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1964).
14In the 1930s and 1940s Trinidad sought independence from Britain and was enmeshed in questions of the island's national identity. See Rhoda E. Reddock, *Women Labour & Politics in Trinidad and Tobago: a history*; Franklin W. Knight, *The Caribbean: The Genesis of a Fragmented Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 206; and Jan
social activist throughout the 1930s through the 1970s. Robeson was one of the first non-heads of state to actively politicize people around the world while meeting with national leaders. Marion Anderson was an American black opera singer, who in the 1930s was crossing colour lines because of her choice of career. These individuals, considered "radicals" in their time, had an enormous effect upon the life of a young Rita Cox. Furthermore, she saw that the library was not only used as a community centre but also as a place of political action and ideas.

As mentioned earlier, the rumblings of anti-colonialist sentiment, brewing in the 1940s, accompanied by a black cultural movement. Rita Cox, during her youth, experienced the black cultural movement in Trinidad at a community level. She recalls:

I think for instance of the steel band movement. When I was young, the steel band movement was a very precarious thing. If my brother went into a steel band he'd get it because it was only certain kinds of people that were in the steel band. Now it's the glory of the country. But there was Lennox Spear, a minister and a whole set of people in politics, in religion,

Schreiber, "In The Course Of Discovery: West Indian Immigrants In Toronto Schools," Board of Education For the City of Toronto, papers of the CCCC, p. 23.


16 In the 1930s, Robeson was also a member of the Communist Party in reaction to the desperate conditions of many American people during the depression. In addition, Robeson had a long fascination with Russian culture and politics, sending his sons to be educated in Russia in the 1930s. In the late 1940s, Robeson's was seen as "un-American" for his communist sympathies by both the American federal government and the black leadership. See Gerald Horne, "Comrades and Friends: The Personal/Political World of Paul Robeson," in Jeffrey C. Stewart, ed., Paul Robeson: Artist and Citizen (New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press and The Paul Robeson Cultural Centre: 1998), pp. 197-215; and Philip S. Foner, ed., Paul Robeson Speaks: Writings, Speeches, Interviews, 1918-1974 (Larchmont, N.Y.: Brunner/Mazel, 1978).


in education, in law came together. It was like gang warfare, and they came together to try to do something about bringing peace among these different steel bands because there used to be real bloodshed. And started the steel band movement, you see. It was the community effort and the leadership taken by certain prominent people in the community that was the beginning of what we have today. Because it could have disappeared.19

The steel band represented to the colonial state a threat to an entrenched British system. In fact, throughout Caribbean history, individuals of African descent were prohibited from reflecting their African cultural heritage.20 Marlene Nourbese Philip contends that the Trinidad Carnival "from its inception has been a culture of resistance - to imperialism, colonialism and racism - embedded within it."21 The steel band music movement was oppositional to the colonialist government which sought to crush all ties to the African continent. Further, the steel band represented a new black identity in Trinidad which was part of radical black discourses that were countering the import of European culture.22

In Dionne Brand's view, black immigrant women from the Caribbean, who engaged in activism, drew from a history of resistance and modern-day civil rights movements.23 This view is illuminated by the example of Gloria Reinbergs. As a young woman, Gloria Reinbergs linked several movements together in her life and work. She remembers:

Part of getting involved [in the community] was when I went to Tanzania with CUSO [Canadian University Students Overseas] in '68. When I went to university we did some picketing and what not. At that time we used to picket the American Embassy on South African apartheid and civil rights but I don't think I was really that actively involved because my parents

20Marlene Nourbese Philip, "Black W/Hole," p. 27.
22George Lamming locates the Caribbean identity in the drum in which characters defend against colonial control. See George Lamming, Season of Adventure (London and New York: Allison & Busby, 1960), p. 20; and Earl Lovelace, in his novel, on Trinidad Carnival refers to the steelband as a movement in which Trinidadian creoles fought against "cultural colonialism." See, Earl Lovelace, The Dragon Can't Dance (Essex: Longman Group Limited, 1979), p. 63.
aren't that political. They're not. But then I got married really young and then we decided to go to Tanzania and while I was in Tanzania it really taught me a lot. Liberation movements were going on. East African countries were trying to fight oppression from colonialism. Then I started reading and that is where it started. When we came back I guess based on being a returned volunteer we started doing things within the community. It [her experiences in Africa] enabled you to look at your community through different eyes.24

Gloria Reinbergs' stay in Tanzania was crucial in shaping her ability to tie liberation movements that were going on world-wide to Toronto communities. Also significant was that her experience of Tanzania gave Reinbergs a political lens through which to focus her view of the nature of the black community in Toronto.

Reinbergs understood that the resistance struggles that were occurring in geographical spaces that were global were transferable into the "local" community of Toronto.25 For example, the structures of domination that the Tanzanians resisted were predicated on a belief in black inferiority. These structures of domination were also locally experienced by blacks in Toronto. Further, Reinbergs recognized that the unsettled political and social conditions of many countries on Africa affected how Africans in the diaspora were viewed around the world. Reinbergs' notion of a "global/local" community would also galvanize her work in the Toronto Public Library by her insistence in making linkages between ethnic/racial minorities in the City of Toronto.26

Gloria Reinbergs' initial years in Barbados shaped her ideas about race and community. Below she describes her family:

I grew up in Barbados and spent the first fifteen years of my life there. It was good. I grew up with my mom, my dad died when I was three, my sisters, my brothers and mainly with my grandparents. I spent a lot of time with my grandparents. I guess in the early 40's and 50's, as a child, we didn't seem to have many cares. We weren't conscious of a lot of things going on in the world. We had to help out within the house. Girls inside,

26Kaplan contends that feminists must continue to make linkages between the exercise of power at the global level and how it is mirrored locally. Caren Kaplan, "The Politics of Location as Transnational Feminist Critical Practice," p. 148.
boys outside, the roles were defined. We helped out during the crop season in the fields but it was easy, we never had to do a lot of work.  

Reinbergs contends that she was not "raced" until she came to Canada. In Barbados, Reinbergs' sense of self was not enmeshed in notions of "blackness." Gloria Reinbergs became racialized upon her migration to Canada. The process of racialization within Canadian society provided Reinbergs with an experiential understanding of race as a social construct. Further, the categorization of individuals into "races" and the concomitant devaluing of non-whites in Canadian society gave Reinbergs a passion for social justice. Overall, Reinbergs self-definition came out of her shifting identities as black/woman/Caribbean/Canadian.

Gloria Reinbergs in her personal life and in her professional life utilized the idea of race to improve the black community(s) as well as other communities in Toronto. Reinbergs found that race was both an oppressive and liberatory feature in her personal life. She states:

It started me to get more involved in the community. Going to community events. And when we got back here in '70, things were taking off in Toronto with regards to the community. A lot more blacks were becoming aware but they were also becoming more cohesive. You have to go through this stage where it's just us first until we sort out our things. I did some things [in the community] but I didn't do much because my husband was white. Some of them would say you come but you can't bring your husband. And at that time they [black community] were going through that.

Reinbergs was aware that during the 1970s, the black community in Toronto was organizing around its common identity in terms of race. The use of race as a means to change the oppressive elements of mainstream society was understood by Gloria Reinbergs. However, the strategy of racial cohesion meant, in Reinbergs' case, the exclusion of her white husband from black political rallies and social activities. Reinbergs recognized "that at that time they [black

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27 Gloria Reinbergs, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 2 April 1998.
29 Ibid.
30 Gloria Reinbergs, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 2 April 1998.
community members) were going through that certain short-term exclusion, which was necessary."

The lack of tolerance of different "personal" lifestyle choices within the black community was viewed by Reinbergs as a strategy of survival. Defining the parameters of the black community of the 1970s in Toronto, by excluding "unpopular" topics/persons from its political platform served to define the issues and the strategies that would accomplish social change within the mainstream. The exclusion of unpopular topics from the black communities debates meant that individual members of the community were silenced. For example, gay and lesbian members of the black community and their issues were ignored.

Joan Pierre's notion of community responsibility was shaped by her family environment. Pierre was born and raised in Trinidad, the eldest of ten children and one of the primary care-givers of her other siblings. She remembers:

I'm the first of ten. [hearty laugh] Grew up in Trinidad. It has been quite a life being the first of a huge family. I grew up much faster than most of the others following me. I look at my sisters, five girls, four boys, - brothers and sisters. The huge responsibility I had at a very very tender age of ten most of them didn't have to go through. My parents, I guess, they saw me as the second mother and parent in the home so I was trained very early to be responsible for looking after them when they're not around. And that made me now looking back at my life, a very strong disciplined individual.

As discussed previously, community and family were concepts often collapsed within an Afrocentric perspective. Interestingly, the number of siblings in Pierre's family and her being the eldest child seemed crucial in her radical subjectivity.

31Ibid.
34There appears to be a relationship between the nature of black women's activism and family variables such as birth order, family size and gender
Looking after others in the community was a value upheld within Joan Pierre's family setting. The importance of community/extended family in a small town in Trinidad was also part of Pierre's experiences.

We were all in some group of some sort - giving to the community. Whether we were involved in some church group - which is what it was in those days - mostly church activities. Helping with something in the church or you're involved in the choir or you do trips with the kids on holidays. Each one of us had something somewhere but we were all mostly involved in church activities. That's where you volunteered your time.35

Pierre's family volunteered for community work through their church. The close connection between church "work" and community activity has been a common theme and experience of the interviewees of this study regardless of their social and geographical location.

Rosemary Sadlier connects church and community but she also grounds the black community of Toronto within a rich ancestral past.36 She remembers:

My mother's ancestors are connected to survivors of the underground railroad and they are from Ontario. And my mother and her mother were from Toronto. Other ancestors were from different parts of Ontario. My father was the newcomer because he was the descendant of black loyalists and he came from New Brunswick. Just as an aside here - recently I found out that his family had been in Canada probably from about 1783. I didn't know that when I was growing up and sometimes it would have been incredibly helpful. But I did know about my mother's side. And I did know about the underground railroad.37

Sadlier goes on to explain that many of the blacks who were descendants of the black loyalists and the underground railroad lived in black sections of Toronto.38 Rosemary Sadlier's mother was born and raised in a black neighbourhood in Toronto before she married and moved to north of Toronto.

composition. Further investigation into this area is warranted. Joan Arbor, the subject in chapter six, also comes from a large family in which responsibility for all its members is part of the family structure.

35Ibid.
Sadlier's notion of a black community came out of her mother's stories about the long history of black Torontonians. Further, the knowledge that Sadlier had about her family's long history in Toronto gave her a strong sense of belonging to Canada's past and future.

Sadlier's isolation in the white suburban community of North Toronto also gave her a need for a black community rooted in an historical past. Consequently, Sadlier found it difficult to fully define for herself "black womanhood." To survive, Sadlier constructed a double self to cope with her racial and gender oppression. During the week, Sadlier was able to fit into her mainstream life by submerging her other self. The separation of Sadlier's selves was particularly necessary in the classrooms of North Toronto schools. Sadlier, as a good student, learnt the racist materials offered by some teachers while simultaneously rejecting parts of the curriculum.

In addition, Rosemary Sadlier had to contend with the mainstream's hostility to young black girls, and the over-sexualization of black women. As a young girl, Sadlier strove to maintain a distance from the "sexual mythology" attributed to black women. She remembers:

I was really tall. I was almost - not that I am so tall . . . I was almost this height when I was ten. If I didn't know by then -- I certainly learnt quickly that there was a certain stereotype of what a black woman was and I learnt that very clearly by the time I was ten or twelve. Even though I was a virgin I was the last virgin in Toronto I'm sure. That didn't matter. Black women were somehow supposed to be sexually available, sexually interested in anyone at any time. Or the other image - just to be incredibly domineering. [pause] And I guess I had to find a way to deal with that as well. I got a lot of unwelcome white adult male attention that I had to find a way to deflect. And it was based on what - the fact that I was there, the fact that I was waiting for a bus, the fact that I was walking down the street. So you become very very acutely aware of what this society says about black women.39

Interestingly, Sadlier contends that her resistance to the idea that she was "sexually available" helped define her as a black woman. Sadlier understood that the myth about black woman's sexuality was a means by which black women were subjugated.40

39Ibid.
40Annecka Marshal, "From sexual denigration to self-respect: resisting images of Black sexuality," in Delia Jarrett-Macauley, ed., Reconstructing
Rosemary Sadlier found her "authentic" self in the black church:41

And then on Sunday I was with people who were just like me, who reflected that beautiful rainbow of people who were of African origin and I saw black people making decisions. I heard black people speaking eloquently. I saw black people working together and doing good things. It was helpful. It wasn't helpful at the time. I didn't appreciate it at the time. I don't think - not always. But it was nice to know that everybody that was an adult in that situation was interested in who I was. They accepted me for who I was and gave me some tools to deal with coping and feeling strong in this particular situation.42

In the church environment Sadlier was affirmed as a person of value. She wrote: "As the only black child in my "uptown" area, the BME [Christ St. James British Methodist Episcopal Church] took on a special significance because I was part of another community that provided me with unconditional acceptance."43

Further, Sadlier saw people who looked like her in leadership positions discussing issues that affected the black community as a whole.

Community responsibility was an important value stressed in the early family lives of these subjects. Gloria Reinbergs, Rita Cox, and Joan Pierre were raised with a "Caribbean" notion of community which combined community, extended family, nuclear family and church together. The concept of community was an organizing tool which was used to uplift the political and economic situation of less privileged people. As activists, their concept of community along with a liberatory use of race would prove to be a powerful strategy of resistance.

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41Rosemary Sadlier, "The BME: Memories of my church," The Toronto Star, 25 April 1998, H4. In this piece, Sadlier reminisces about the church of her childhood Christ St. James British Methodist Episcopal Church which on April 16 1998 was burnt to the ground by an arsonist.
42Ibid.
3. Community Responsibility and Social Activism

These subjects applied the concept of racial uplift and the ideology of respectability in their work as "community" activists. The idea of racial uplift was seen as a strategy of resistance within the black community and the multifaceted/multi-identified communities that the subjects of the study serviced. In this section, I will explore how the aforementioned women took their concepts of community into their activism.

3a The Librarians

Rita Cox from the early 1960s worked at various Toronto Public Library branches around Toronto. In 1973, Cox reluctantly took up the position of children's librarian at Parkdale Public Library at the behest of Alice Cane, a mentor and Cox's first Canadian employer. Alice Cane was retiring from Parkdale and wanted Cox's community development skills at Parkdale. During the early 1970s Parkdale was gaining a reputation as a troubled community. However, the progressive political activism already present in the community and the arrival of Rita Cox proved to be an ideal convergence of ideas and interests.

Rita Cox's view of community and her use of progressive socialist ideas would over time create new political voice(s) at Parkdale. She recalls the complexity of Parkdale of the 1970s:

When you go to a place, what do you do? You have a mandate. I went there [Parkdale Public Library] as a children's librarian. In a year I was asked - 

44Summary of Some Accomplishments: Rita Cox, papers of the Parkdale Public Library, 1992.

45Roynier Maharaj, "Rita's shoes are tough to fill," The Saturday Sun, 28 January 1995, p. 12; and Pat Lee, "Parkdale librarian wins top award: Cox connected to community," The West Toronto Journal (Summer 1986).
Rita Cox's notion of the role of the librarian migrated from her Trinidadian experience of community to her job at Parkdale. Cox viewed the librarian as crucial to community activism and community cohesion especially in diverse communities. Her radical subjectivity was realized in her ability to transform a diverse community's view of itself and its ability to effect social change.

Cox also created a family network within Parkdale Public Library that created a cohesiveness among staff members. Cox elaborates below on the supportiveness that Parkdale library staff and she herself experienced:

We had a few things that happened in the library. One of my staff went right off her head. And I was the one who just grabbed her and put her coat on and took her and got her to get the help that she needed. And she was away for six months. She used to meet me in my office every morning when I came in and she'd say, "never mind I'll take care of you." Her husband was Iranian. He'd just stolen her baby and was gone for years. She's on Child Find. I went to court with her when they were having their marital trouble. I was away from the library but she called me and asked me if I'd go to court with her. I could tell that she's matured and that she's handling it very effectively. She's on Child Find and I saw her being interviewed and I was so proud. She isn't the brightest person in the world academically but she is strong and sensible with her own affairs. But the

staff is constantly supporting her so that tells me a lot. And we were mutually supportive.\footnote{Rita Cox, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 28 January 1998.}

Cox utilized a concept of family within the Parkdale Public Library which radically changed the dynamic within the library as well as in the community it served. As in a real family there were conflicts between Cox and some staff members who challenged her authority to make changes in the library. However, under Rita Cox's leadership, changes were made within the system which emphasized the library's responsibility to the community.

For example, Cox, as head librarian at Parkdale Public Library, recognized that Canadian black children of Caribbean heritage needed to have resources in the library that reflected their West Indian heritage. She petitioned the library board to create the first in-depth West Indian heritage book collection in the City of Toronto. Cox experienced opposition to the Caribbean collection from members of her staff and from some library board members. She recalls how the Caribbean collection was initially marginalized in the library system:

They weren't catalogued like the rest of the library. They were separated. And little nonsense. It wasn't until we became automated that they became a real full child of the library. So in a way I had all the knowledge but it wasn't everywhere. So nobody else knew exactly what we had in our collection . . . After a time I realized that I was putting things in the collection that were Canadian or American because they were of interest. And then that was a potential political problem. Because you know people who were here for generations since the underground railroad were very offended to see their literature with a WI [West Indian] sticker on it. So that was when I made a proposal through the library board to change the scope and the designation of the collection. And that was when it became the Black Heritage and West Indian Collection. They asked me why its not called just Black Heritage. And I said because not all West Indians are black and that is important.\footnote{Ibid.}

The obscuring of the nature of the Caribbean book collection occurred in two ways. First, the books were not properly catalogued in the Toronto Public Library Board system which meant that books on the Caribbean experience were difficult to find. Secondly, the cataloguing of all books on black Canadians under a West Indian designation made invisible the existence of black Canadians.
who were multi-generational as well as of those blacks who were recent immigrants from the African continent. Further, West Indian and Caribbean peoples are made up of many cultures, and races of which African peoples are just one grouping. Therefore, a West Indian designation for the book collection on black people was inaccurate. The racism that Rita Cox encountered in terms of seeking the inclusion of the Caribbean collection for Parkdale Public Library resulted in an institutional burying of its existence.

Gloria Reinbergs, head librarian at the Spadina Public Library, also built a collection for specific members of the library community, such as the aboriginal community. She recalls:

The collection isn't perfect because there's not a lot written on the history of native peoples in Toronto. We need to start exploring more of that but its growing. They have to have an input. I could build a collection but if it doesn't take the users or the people into consideration it's useless. It's sort of a holistic type thing.

Reinbergs contends that she learned to build a library collection in the 1970s from the new scholarship emerging in the academies in North America. In particular, Reinbergs explored the scholarship coming out of Women's, African and Caribbean studies. However, Reinbergs contends that building a collection must involve the input of the community that it represents.

Reinbergs actively engaged aboriginal communities in Toronto and in Northern Ontario to explore the histories of native peoples. Individuals from the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto on Spadina Avenue have brought artifacts and documents that they deemed appropriate for a collection that represents the aboriginal experience in Toronto. Reinbergs became quite knowledgeable about native issues as a result of her in-depth study of aboriginal culture and history and was appointed to the Native Library and Information Services Task Force in the summer of 1991.

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51Gloria Reinbergs, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 2 April 1998.
Reinbergs was also recognized for being very knowledgeable on appropriate literature for young readers. For example, Reinbergs and librarians from around the world met in Ottawa in June 25 and 26, 1988, to create the Carrie Best Collection, a collection that chose 500 of the most important books that promoted self-esteem and intellectual growth among young readers.

Cox and Reinbergs have received accolades not only from the communities in which they served but also from the Canadian government. In Reinbergs' case, she received a certificate of recognition from the Ministry of Multiculturalism and Citizenship, which states its appreciation for "a collection of books to enhance the appreciation of multicultural literature among young Canadians." Rita Cox was appointed a Member of the Order of Canada in 1996 and received an Honorary Doctorate of Letters from York University for her contributions to Toronto.

Both Reinbergs and Cox believe that the library must be intricately interwoven within its surrounding community. Therefore, outreach and community development are essential for the community librarian. They also did not focus on the black community exclusively but also sought to improve the lives for other oppressed groups in Toronto.

For example, Gloria Reinbergs was a board member of Cross Cultural Communication Centre, an organization that studied and advocated on behalf of...
displaced ethnic and racial minorities in the City of Toronto. Reinbergs remembers:

How I joined the CCCC was when I came back from Nigeria. I had always known of the Cross Cultural [Communication] Centre. I was very interested in collectives and how they worked. I was writing for a journal called the Emergency Librarian. I wrote a series on women in prison. I actually visited Kingston Prison to write. It started to widen my horizons on the work that could be done here. I went to the CCCC, I started by talking to Laura [Heller] and then after a while they asked me if I wouldn't mind becoming a board member. They were involved in immigration issues, racism issues because at that time in Toronto there were things that you couldn't push under a chair anymore. 56

At the CCCC, Reinbergs was a board member at a time when multiculturalism issues were being reframed as a discussion of anti-racism and employment equity issues.57 In addition, the CCCC was drawing linkages between global communities who were oppressed and recent immigrants and refugee women to Toronto.58

Reinbergs' global awareness based on her travels overseas provided her with the analysis and expertise to address issues such as multiculturalism, racism and sexism as a board member at the CCCC. In addition, Reinbergs' writings in the Emergency Librarian have also reflected her progressive political and social views on the situation of those who are oppressed.59

As mentioned earlier, Rita Cox galvanized the diverse political, cultural and racial nature of Parkdale neighbourhood into a unified voice. Cox accomplished

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56Gloria Reinbergs, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 2 April 1998; and Cross-Cultural Communication Centre, Annual Report 1979, papers of the CCCC.
57Gloria Reinbergs was a board member and contributor to CCCC's development of a number of organizational change manuals. See Judy Persaud and Salome Lucas, Anti-Racist Action Plan (Toronto: Cross Cultural Communication Centre, 1991), Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky also contributed to this manual as the Anti-racist Education Coordinator of the CCCC.
58For a sample, see any Newsletter issued from the mid 1980s through the 1990s by the Cross Cultural Communication Centre. In particular see Nan Peacocke, ed., "Innu Support Actions Headed For Ottawa," Cross Cultural Communication Newsletter 19, no. 11 (Winter 1990), p. 1. This article asks the question, "What is the significance of the struggle of the Innu against NATO for the Canadian, immigrant and refugee communities?"
this in two ways. First, in her ability to choose issues on which most of the members of Parkdale could agree. Secondly, she made institutional changes at Parkdale Public Library that would service the needs of the neighbourhood. She recalls:

I established the Parkdale Information Services. There was a small service before even I went there [in the Parkdale community]. . . The Social Planning Committee had asked for a study on an information centre and the South Parkdale Residents' Association in its effort to try to respond to the needs of the maritime residents believed an information centre was needed. The chief librarian who was there when I was there, too, was quite an activist. He decided the library would do it. But when I got there it was totally ineffective because it was a list of files. Without community input, without community involvement - and if you want to serve the community you have to serve them according to their needs and you need their input and their participation.60

The Parkdale Information Service was institutionally based within Parkdale Public Library. However, Rita Cox developed it into an independent organization. With the elimination of core funding in the early 1990s, the decision to keep Parkdale Information Service under the auspices of Parkdale Public Library has allowed this institution to survive funding cuts.61

3c. The Executives

Joan Pierre's and Rosemary Sadlier's community activism has been carried out as executives in high profile Toronto organizations. Joan Pierre challenged ideas of community, identity and "Caribbeanness" in her position as the former executive director of Caribana. However, she also played on notions of blackness in the mainstream and within the Caribbean community of Toronto. This aforementioned strategy was employed to change the negative view of Caribana in mainstream society and media. She remembers:

Being involved in Caribana you have to work with such a wide spectrum of people. You can't always please everybody - but please most of them. And I saw where I had to really think carefully when dealing with corporations and with government as to how they view us (blacks). And as to how I was to change their thinking. I think I played a role having that mind-set of us as a people doing what we do and not just judging us by some preconceived notion of some sort. It was a constant struggle I had with opening their eyes, making them understand the struggles we were going through to do what we had to do - and at the same time getting their help financially.62

Joan Pierre tried to educate corporate and government sponsors on who black Caribbeans were as a people. In addition, Pierre had to demonstrate that the black community could be fiscally responsible. This was due to two factors: first, racist stereotypical views on black abilities and secondly, a lack of business skills among some prior executive directors. However, part of Pierre's strategy was to create a counter-discourse as to what Caribana means.

For example, Pierre talks about Caribana not being a black event:

... don't judge us because we're black and it's a black thing. It's not a black thing. It's an event and it's created out of our culture, it's rich for everybody so it must be rich for us too. So let's look at it from that basis. It's not the approach I would take that some individuals might take. "Well they owe us this!" I don't go that route. I don't believe in that route of saying well you owe me!63

The policy of extracting the "black" presence out of Caribana was promoted by other significant players on the Caribana Committee.64 During a radio broadcast in 1991, Sam Lewis, the then Chairman of the Caribbean committee, earnestly "de-raced" the festival:

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63Ibid.
64Sam Lewis, interview with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) in Toronto, 21 August 1991; also Pierre may have been successful in selling Caribana as a Canadian event. In a Toronto Star article the reporter in her lead-in states: "Toronto belongs to Caribana." See Lisa Wright, "Now this is a party": Rain doesn't put damper on spicy Caribana parade," The Toronto Star; 4 August 1991, A2.
I can't repeat this enough, Caribana is not a black festival necessarily. It is a Canadian festival that reflects black and Caribbean culture.65

By removing "blackness" from the festival and framing it as a "Canadian" event, Pierre and the board members hoped to give the power holders of Toronto a vested interest in supporting Caribana. Hence, Pierre and members of the Caribana board of directors struggled to infuse the festival's Caribbeanness with a Canadian identity.66

In addition, Pierre wanted the mainstream media to see Caribana as a well-run arts organization and an example of the strength of black leadership in the City of Toronto. She states:

So we [Caribana] changed. Adapted to improve what we are. Now, we think Caribana is positioned to take that leadership role that the city's black community needs. We will remain, essentially, an arts organization.67

There are and have been many contradictions in the direction and scope of Caribana over the years. Pierre considers the organization to be beyond race but yet wants the festival to show leadership in the black community. The confusion as to the role of Caribana in the black community and in the mainstream

65Sam Lewis, interview with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) in Toronto, 21 August 1991.
66However, it might have been as useful for Pierre and the organizers to draw upon Caribana's Canadian roots which originated in Toronto in 1958. As already stated in chapter three, Aileen Williams, Rella Braithwaite, and Penelope Hodge revealed that the Carnival that the Canadian Negro Women's Association (CANEWA) organized was the precursor to Caribana. Caribana began as an entity in 1967 as an event organized to celebrate Canada's Bicentennial birthday. Many of the CANEWA members were part of the organizing team that put together Caribana in 1967. Furthermore, CANEWA members continued as board members for the "new" Carnival/Caribana until the early 1970s. Lawrence Hill, Women of Vision: The Story of the Canadian Negro Women's Association, 1951-1976 (Toronto: Umbrella Press, 1996), p. 17;
continues to be the major problem in maintaining the festival as a viable institution. An important question remaining has been whether to define Caribana as either a global/political event or purely an entertainment showcase for those of Caribbean heritage.

Joan Pierre's other strategy, which was more successful in terms of maintaining Caribana's survival, was to run Caribana as a business. Pierre's business acumen was developed as an executive at Bell Canada during the 1970s and 1980s. She remembers:

Okay, I believe in proving what I'm saying is true. In 1990 it took a while to understand - because remember my training outside of that was Bell Canada. Bell Canada would give me their guide and you follow it and produce what they want and give them a report at the end of the month and they smile and that's what I was trained to do right? And I was good at that. So it took a while for me to re-educate myself as to how corporate and how government worked because I had no dealings with them prior to Caribana. And I realized that the only way that you can make people pay attention is to give them facts from a source they would respect. Not from our source. And that's why in 1990 I went after Tourism to give us the money to do the survey. That's where that started because only when we had the survey and I could say we raised two hundred million dollars see [pause] based on Caribana. Come let's talk, how are you going to support this. How are you going to help me make three million while we make a million when we do so.

Pierre was able to get many Toronto businessmen to listen once they found out that Caribana was bringing millions into the Toronto economy every year. Joan Pierre altered how one might speak about Caribana in order to engage mainstream Toronto. However, the strategy of removing Caribana from the

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68 The confusion over the role of Caribana has also taken on international proportions in that Pierre and board members have felt compelled to respond to crises occurring in the Caribbean during the festival. For example, in 1990, Trinidad experienced an attempted coup d'état in which Pierre in a Toronto Star article commented on Caribana's importance in reflecting well on Trinidad. See Mitch Potter, "Caribana: Hip-hopping into the present," The Toronto Star, 3 August 1990, B9.


70 Ibid.

71 In 1990, Decima Research reported that Caribana generated 187 million dollars in that year. As already stated, by 1994, the figure was in excess of 200 million dollars.
black community has resulted in the loss of control over the creative, political and financial destiny of the festival.\textsuperscript{72}

The viability of Caribana greatly suffered with the departure of Joan Pierre in 1993. Joan Pierre's dismissal from an executive role at Caribana was the result of a bitter power struggle between Pierre and the committee members of Caribana. Pierre remembers:

And unfortunately for us as a people, just when they [members of mainstream business and government organizations] were bending, the community board members in Caribana (as they put it), I became a threat to them as a woman and as a person who strangely enough was getting things done. So the comment to the board members and the chair was she has too much of a high profile. We as board members will never get the recognition we need with Joan in here. Because quietly my work was out there and everybody was seeing what I was doing - it was very visible. I was making a difference. Making a difference to corporate and government was great because then they would start coming on board. They could see that things could happen right. They're [black people] managing things okay - you know. Then we could really start feeding into it in a very positive way. But that didn't work for the board members of Caribana... [The board member would say]: "Everywhere we go it's disgusting and Caribana's name comes up, it's oh Joan Pierre this, and Joan Pierre that! Nobody else's name comes up, she's not the head of Caribana I am!" And that was the struggle between the board and me and why they got rid of me in 1993 and now look at Caribana today. Do I have to say any more? You know.\textsuperscript{73}

In Pierre's view, Caribana's board members were very threatened by the public profile and power that she had gained by her significant contributions to raising the profile of Caribana within mainstream society. To Pierre, her formidable skills as a manager and her gender were threatening to the mostly black male members of Caribana's board. Following Pierre's departure, a series of male executive directors organized the festival although with varying


\textsuperscript{73}Joan Pierre, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 2 December 1997.
success. In 1997, Caribana had its most disappointing year with band leaders not participating and many Torontonians staying away.74

The sexism within the black community and the racism in the mainstream society have made invisible the role of individuals like Joan Pierre and other black women activists in uplifting the black community. As a writer and researcher of black Canadian history, Rosemary Sadlier has found that black women's role in solving settlement issues in Canada is still suffering from erasure within the historical record. Sadlier states:

Even in terms of the earliest days it was black women's organizations, black women who were doing things to help in settlement issues in terms of new people coming into the city during the time of the underground railroad. So we have been doing things. It is not an easy task to be able to talk about them and expect them to be widely known in Toronto. So that's the challenge of what I do. To try to make sure that people do know because nothing is more frustrating than going into a school and seeing - Oh how wonderful they're now celebrating Black History Month and they're making references to only African Americans as if African Canadians didn't exist or didn't make a contribution.75

Sadlier's role at the Ontario Black History Society [OBHS] has been to promote the history of blacks in Canada. In Sadlier's view, from the earliest years of settlement by non-indigenous peoples blacks have been part of nation-building and therefore are an intricate part of Canadian society.

In 1997, to preserve the historical legacy of blacks in Toronto Rosemary Sadlier became more politically active. Sadlier took up the struggle to preserve the oldest public building associated with the black community in Toronto: the former African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) slated to be torn down by Whittington Properties Limited to build condominiums in the chic area of Queen and Spadina.76

The building was built in 1906 for the Church of Latter Day Saints.77 The AME Church itself goes back to 1833 in Toronto, when freed and runaway slaves met

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76Commissioner of Urban Development Services to City Council, 2 October 1997.

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in community members' homes for religious instruction. There have been various locations in downtown Toronto in which the AME Church has been housed. However, the AME Church had been housed in the Soho Church from 1928 to 1988 when it was sold.

In her efforts to save the old Soho building which had housed the AME Church since 1928, Rosemary Sadlier has had to challenge the municipal government to assist the OBHS' drive to save the church site. She explains:

"It's not a church that I'm a member of and as I looked at the situation I felt that I had a mandate given what this organization stands for even though it isn't something that we had ever done before. And even though technically we're [OBHS] apolitical, apolitical in the sense we don't openly support any particular political party. It needed to be done and I did what I could do. And I got involved at a point in time when I could get involved - when they were working on decimation issues [and] on development issues. I tried to garner as much community support as I could. I just did what I could. The developer was unwilling to budge. I was able to move it from the neighbourhood committee to the executive committee all the way up to city council which was very unusual. I believe the night before the executive council meeting I got a phone call from a very high ranking individual who I wish I could name, but I know that would not be a wise thing to do. Who basically told me to back down. So I was dealing with all kinds of garbage that I never had to deal with before. You have to be constantly saying, is this the right thing to do? And why is this the right thing to do? And as long as you can know that - then you can do anything."

Utilizing the black historical community, Sadlier ran an offensive set on stopping the decimation of the Soho building.

Support for the preservation of the building that had housed the AME Church on Soho for over sixty years also involved alliances with other heritage groups in Ontario. For example, Sheldon J. Godfrey of The Society of Heritage Associates...
Associates wrote an impassioned plea to City Councillors for the maintenance of the building. Interestingly he ties the disregard for the historical importance of the Soho building to the lack of acknowledgment of the role that blacks have had in settling Toronto. He wrote:

In the City of Toronto, we have not been much faster at recognizing the achievement of Black pioneers. There is nothing to commemorate the Black Loyalist soldiers who camped across from the Parliament buildings at the foot of Parliament Street before 1800. There is nothing to recognize the fact that the St. Lawrence Hall, soon after its reconstruction in 1851, was used as the place for meetings of North American Abolitionists seeking to end slavery in the United States. There is not adequate recognition of the achievements of William Peyton Hubbard, Toronto's first Black Alderman who served Ward 4 from 1894 to 1907, the last four years as vice-chairman, and as Alderman for Ward 1, in 1913. In fact, if you look around our city, memorials to the history of our Black pioneers are sadly lacking.  

In Godfrey’s plea to save the AME Church, he makes clear that the black church has always been the focal point of the black community.

Barbara Hall, the Mayor of Toronto at the time, was persuaded by Rosemary Sadlier of the OBHS and her supporters that the Soho building was worthy of preservation. However, the developer and some members of City Council were opposed to designating the old AME Church on Soho as an historic site. Rosemary Sadlier wrote:

In the winter, the designation process of the AME Church (Soho site) made it possible for OBHS involvement. The initial contact showed the developer [sic] to be interested in commemoration only since the church, from their perspective, was not worth saving in whole or in part. Later, the OBHS was advised 2 hours before the Neighbourhood’s Committee meeting that the report of Heritage Toronto had already been completed and historic designation was not being supported for the AME church. As an extension of our mandate, the OBHS pursued historic designation of the AME. The AME should have historic designation because it is the oldest remaining Black church structure in Toronto. Those who built and supported the AME were the descendants of those who have been in Toronto since the earliest times. The absence of structures, built heritage which have been given

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84 Paul Moloney, "Black history centre proposed: Doomed church perfect site, council told," The Toronto Star, 1 October 1997, B3, papers of the OBHS.
designation because their relationship to the Black community is shocking - there are none in Toronto.\textsuperscript{85}

In Sadlier's deputation to the City of Toronto council, she further wrote:

We are so disconnected from our full story as a country that even people of African origin may not know about their exploits and triumphs in a country that they have called home for generations or for weeks. Consequently, the OBHS sees the importance of keeping the AME church site as a visible and concrete symbol of our presence and connection to this place.\textsuperscript{86}

The night before Sadlier was to present this deputation, a council member phoned her at her home late at night and told her to end the "save the AME Church campaign."\textsuperscript{87} Sadlier did not accept the councillor's "advice."

Although Sadlier was not successful in saving the Soho church site, the council did agree to lend financial and political support for a black museum to be built in the City of Toronto.\textsuperscript{88} In addition Whittington Properties Limited agreed to contribute $30,000 toward a documentation project which would be carried out in consultation with the Grant AME church, the Ontario Black History Society, Heritage Toronto, and Whittington Properties.\textsuperscript{89} Rosemary Sadlier, in an OBHS newsletter, characterizes the City of Toronto and the OBHS relationship as a partnership in their joint aim to build a black museum, tentatively called, the Underground Railroad Museum.\textsuperscript{90}

Sadlier was very focused on saving the old Soho Church site because she recognized its importance as both an historic symbol of black presence in

\textsuperscript{85}President's Report, 1996-1997, OBHS Annual General Meeting, Toronto, 19 October 1997, papers of the OBHS.

\textsuperscript{86}Deputation Re: AME Church, Soho Street, Rosemary Sadlier, President of OBHS, to City Hall, Toronto, 30 September 1997.

\textsuperscript{87}Rosemary Sadlier, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 21 November 1997. I asked Sadlier for the name of the City Councillor but she declined. Sadlier believes that disclosure that that individual councillor might exacerbated future funding problems for the OBHS.


\textsuperscript{89}Commissioner of Urban Development Services to City Council, 2 October 1997.

\textsuperscript{90}Ibid.
Toronto and as an important source for the cultivation of an "independent" black consciousness. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham contends that the tie between the development of counter-hegemonic discourses and spirituality within the black church developed a particular activism among black women.91 Higginbotham explains:

At the same time that church values and symbols ordered the epistemological and ontological understandings of each individual and gave meaning to the private sphere of family – church values and symbols helped to spawn the largest number of voluntary associations in the black community. It follows logically, then, that the church would introduce black women to public life. The church connected black women's spirituality integrally with social activism.92

The connection between black women's activism and the black church in Canada has not been fully explored by researchers. However, particularly for individuals like Rosemary Sadlier, who grew up in all-white neighbourhoods, the black church was the only site in which a model of black leadership was available. Sadlier's passion to save the African Methodist Episcopal Church on Soho can be understood within an historical understanding of the black church.

4. Conclusion

The concept of community has been a significant factor in how black women activists have worked towards social change. The idea of community has mainly been predicated on notions of race, however, not exclusively so. The women of this study have worked for the racial uplift of members of the black community as well as other ethnic and racial minorities in Toronto. In a real sense, community has been used by the subjects of this chapter not as a geographical location, but rather as an expandable tool that can embrace groups or issues where politically suitable.

92Ibid., p. 16.
Community has been commonly seen by Caribbean and Canadian-born black women activists as an important unifying tool in working for social change. However, there has been a migration of a particular view of community from the Caribbean utilized by Gloria Reinbergs, Rita Cox, and Joan Pierre in their efforts to uplift their communities. Community for these women involved a complex social network that involved the church, school and individual families working together for the good of all its members. Children of the community were considered to be the responsibility of everyone.

Once in Canada, Caribbean-born subjects brought their community networking skills into neighbourhoods and were able to infuse a sense of community among disparate individuals and neighbourhoods.

Interestingly, Rosemary Sadlier, in her role as president of the OBHS, took an active role in preserving the "old" black community of Toronto through her efforts to save from demolition, the AME Church. Sadlier, recognized that preserving the black community's historical past was crucial to advancing the social conditions of black Canadians in the present.

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CHAPTER SIX:
Coming to Voice: Radical Subjectivity and the Black Woman Activist

Black women anti-racist activists often are impelled by their own experiences of oppression to mobilise anti-racism or anti-oppression action within their communities and within mainstream organizations. A key question has been how have the personal experiences of these women shaped and impelled their anti-racist activism? An exploration of the personal histories of these women can assist in answering this question.

In general, black women have taken on the activist role for the very survival of themselves and their communities. They have been able to move from the margins to the centre within the discourse on anti-racism.

However, the utilization of a poststructuralist frame allows the possibility of exploring elements of a particular community without essentializing the experience of the historical subject. As in the case of the feminist subject, black women must be explored in all their multiplicity of being. It is useful to understand the "unity" of black womanhood in that it can be a site of self-development, but their differing social locations must also be explored because they provides the basis for new ways of achieving subjectivity.

Poststructuralism is also useful in that it allows for an understanding of the creation of the radical subject. One can trace the moments in which the historical subject encounters her radical subjectivity by exploring the discourses and counter-discourses available to the subject. My intention is to uncover the black woman as a radical subject, particularly in historical terms of moving from the object to the subject of historical study. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the construction of a particular counter-discourse of what constitutes the black woman activist without essentializing her.

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This chapter will argue that the self-defining nature of the black woman as subject is ultimately the tool that enables her to move from object to radical subjectivity and take up the activist role. To explore this thesis, three areas will be examined. First, the question of how black women are constituted within the dominant discourse and how this conflicts with black women's self-decisions will be explored. Secondly, I will examine issues of voice, agency, and the construction of discourse through an exploration of Joan Arbor's life story. Thirdly, and finally, this chapter will study Joan Arbor as activist drawing on her lived experiences to further examine her radical subjectivity.

1. Discourse, Constructing Self and the Black Woman.

As explored throughout this thesis, black women are constituted within western civilization through various social, historical, and cultural positionalities; however, their multiple location is framed by the oppression that they all experience. Further, black women's self-defined identity is constructed in opposition to dominant discourses that portray them negatively. Theorists contend that a self-defined, clearly articulated black women's standpoint is crucial to black women's personal and social survival. However, to understand the black woman activist, it is important to recognize that self-identity and community are intricately intertwined and therefore one needs knowledge of the community in which she was raised. In addition, black women must inhabit a self-defined identity that exists independent from dominant discourses that distorts the reality of black women's lives.


As discussed in chapter one, images of black women have been produced historically through myths about black womanhood that must be understood as the legacy of racism and sexism interacting over time. These myths are not innocent in that they maintain power relations that continue to devalue black women in contemporary society.

Black women's consciousness has both embraced and rejected images of black womanhood that portray a negative and imaginary "self". To construct a counter-discourse on the black female self, black women have looked to their family and their communities to provide alternative discourses on black womanhood.

The importance of having voice has been crucial to black women's development of "self" and has created a platform on which to work for social change. Jana Sawicki suggests that in giving voice to the marginalized peoples of society one creates a radical discourse that runs counter to the dominant discourse. This self-definition and voice can lead to political action. This action may be within the confines of community or in the mainstream.

Throughout this study it has been maintained that an understanding of what constitutes the self-defining nature of black womanhood could provide the tools for analyzing the radical black woman subject. Further, I maintained that crucial to black women's self-definition has been the construction of counter-discourses that challenge images of "blackness" and womanhood that are reproduced in the dominant discourse. An exposition of Joan Arbor's text might provide an opportunity to understand how counter-discourses operate.

One can trace the moments in which the historical subject encounters her radical subjectivity by exploring the discourses and counter-discourses available to the subject.

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8Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought, p. 93; and bell hooks, Yearnings: race, gender, and cultural politics, p. 45.
9Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought, p. 94.
Joan Arbor is a black woman activist. Although born and raised in the United States, Arbor has for the past several years been working in Toronto as an anti-racist educator, therapist, and community organizer. Through studying the threads of Arbor's life, black women including myself can chart the process whereby we come to voice.

In exploring Arbor's life I asked a series of questions that would bring forth the key components of, and would demonstrate how she came to define "self." In addition, the central question I posed was, "how are individuals who are outside of the dominant discourse able to have voice, and challenge power relations?" I have divided this section into two parts: one on family experiences and the second on educational experiences, although for the Arbor family these experiences often overlapped.

A. Family Experiences

One of the first questions that I asked Arbor was for some description of her childhood environment. Her answer provides rich insight into the evolving self-defining black woman.

Well I had five sisters but my five sisters were mainly in the first part of the family. So, I have four sisters and one brother in that. Then I have a couple of brothers and then a sister and then more boys. So I grew up having five sisters and five brothers but I grew up with seven male persons. I had my father and six brothers. And two of those brothers died, right. I grew up in a really male-dominated household. It just was. . . (laughter) because I just was in a household of adolescent boys, adolescent boys and then my sister who was six years older than me and then a brother two years older than me and a brother two years younger. So, I was like ten and my sister was sixteen and she didn't want me any where near her. (laughter) And by the time I was twelve she was away at
university. I was always trying to get to my sisters in a household of boys, intense - adolescent, loud big boys!11

Did you run after them or did you create a separate life from them?

I would probably say that I was considered a tom boy in that my activities were very much like what they did. But in comparison to them I was very much like a femme type of little girl. Meaning that I was very sensitive, I wanted everything just so. I wanted my little things - I wanted my little play area. It's just like I wanted little things. I wanted all these little delicate things, I would like quiet. I liked sewing, I liked talking to my mom, I liked questions. I was very introspective, very shy, very nervous energy type of a kid. If someone was yelling I would cry. Very, very very sensitive and introverted. I was introverted, I mean I was observably introverted for most of my life.12

As Arbor continued to elaborate on her family life experiences, I became aware of the importance of class and its impact on her family life. Furthermore, Arbor's mother's application of "middle class values" significantly shaped the "knowledges" that were available to her children.

The only thing was that my mother interestingly enough had a strong value about class that I have actually only understood in the last five years. Because she didn't express class in ways that I recognize other people to express class. She had a couple of values. One of her values was that we read well and we speak well and that we were able to dress ourselves well in any financial situation. These were the three values that she had that she insisted upon. There were two other values which went with that - you had to have excellent food and serve an excellent table and sleep in an excellent bed. These were like her values. Now I had no connection to these things having anything to do with my ability to move amongst very different economic classes and within very different groups but they really were.

Now, when I was born into the family, the family was breaking apart but the structure still maintained itself which I think is interesting now . . . The three things that happened, we got up at 5:30 am in the morning, we had prayers, we had a family motto, we had a family song and we had to discuss being black and what it meant to be black. And when we returned home we were supposed to discuss if anyone interrupted our concept of

12Ibid.
self. But she wouldn't say did someone interrupt your concept of self? What she would do is say, You are not ordinary, you are extraordinary, you're Black - it means this to be black you are from da...da...da...da...da... When we came home from school she would say, So, What did people say about it. She would correct you every single day, every single day of your natural life, (laughter). This happened every single day! 13

Arbor's family created an opposing discourse around gender and class that was crucial in the creation of Arbor as a radical subject. The family, Arbor's mother in particular, called upon a long tradition in the black community of creating a safe environment for the development of a black identity that was whole.14 Within this very structured setting, Arbor and her family were given clear instructions as to the value of their "blackness" and were corrected when they capitulatated to the dominant discourse on "blackness." The discourse on blackness that Arbor's family relied upon suggests that it is possible to develop a black consciousness that is an independent unifying force outside of the dominant consciousness.15

What is most instructive is that members of Arbor's family are not alone in their task of finding "self"; in contrast to the dominant culture which sees the claiming of "self" as an individual journey. In fact, Joan Arbor describes herself as being introverted, without voice. However, her family, particularly her mother, gave her tools of critical thinking, writing and reading which provided her with the confidence to become a self-defining black girl/woman. In Arbor's experience the development of self was seen as the role of the community and the family. Individual members of the black community are not abandoned to the dominant discourse on "blackness", rather they are encouraged to create positive concepts of black identity that run counter to racist discourse on "blackness." Arbor's family and other black North Americans understand the finding of "self" to be a collective endeavour.

Also affecting Joan Arbor's self-defining standpoint is her birth order. She is the only girl in the last part of a very large family. The impact this has on her activism is consistent with Karen Brodkin Sacks' "What's A life story Got to Do

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13 ibid.
14 bell hooks, Yearnings: race, gender, and cultural politics, p. 45.
with it?" in which she found family dynamics had a direct impact on the type of activism role women, black women in particular, took on. For Joan Arbor, it seemed her gendered position was reinforced in the family by the limited "sisterly" modelling she encountered.

Another tradition that is found in many black families is the importance of reading and writing. The fierce connection to reading and writing within the African American family is borne straight out of the reaction to slavery, in which slaves were not allowed to read or write and those that defied this regulation could face death. After slavery, blacks who could not read or write were at the mercy of tricksters who could cheat or deny them their rights because of their inability to read. Many African Americans talk about the self-teaching that occurred within their families because of the distrust they felt towards state schools; to individuals like Maya Angelou, bell hooks, Patricia Collins reading and writing are seen as critical to the development of a voice that can critique the dominant discourse as well as serve as a liberatory tool for the larger community.

Arbor's words confirm this:

And my mother had more education so she had really strong values about that[getting an education] in those regards. She was still of that generation that you communicate all those principles but also that you must pass it on, right, so that's the key piece. It's a strong value that if you are just educating yourself then you are not educated because that means that the whole race is not going to survive. So its strongly linked to those things as well. Oddly enough, there is a lot of continuity around that not just in our family but in a group of families.

18Maya Angelou, I know Why The Caged Bird Sings (New York: Bantam Books, 1969); bell hooks, Yearnings: race, gender, and cultural politics; and Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought.
What I also found fascinating about Arbor's mother was how she was able to access important knowledge out of the dominant discourse(s) like her "class values" and convert them into tools in which her daughter would be able to "pass" within any social strata she found herself in. The other thread of strong value, consistent with historical studies written on black teachers, is the concept of racial uplift. Racial uplift stresses that black people have not been helpless people of slavery but have had agency in resisting their oppression. Black women have assumed a large role in this resistance. Blacks freed from slavery have not only worked to "rescue" the rest of the race but to liberate blacks from their inferior social status. In addition, they have worked upon their liberation, educating blacks in order that they could improve their chances of participating economically and socially at par with whites. Interestingly, in Arbor's family, the older children were responsible for educating their younger siblings. Joan Arbor's mother integrated the concept of race uplift into the structure of the family life in a pragmatic and dynamic way.

B. Educational Experiences

The distrust of the educational system was strongly integrated into how the family viewed the educational system. Arbor states:

Well interestingly enough my parents didn't expect white people to educate Black children. They didn't have that belief, they didn't have that expectation. And because we were living in a place (pause) When I went to school we moved to an integrated neighbourhood which was in the early 60's. I was born in 1956. They felt it was really important to go to a school that was integrated because you would be able to get the books, the resources and have the physical access you needed in order to learn. But that was not an environment that would necessarily nurture your learning. So two things that my parents did around my education that was

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21 bell hooks, Yearnings: race, gender, and cultural politics, p. 45.
significant. One, they interviewed me everyday about being black. I shouldn't say they interviewed me; I should say I was interviewed everyday about being Black. Sometimes it came from my mother sometimes it came from my siblings. The other piece was that my parents had a value which said every child is to be facilitated and nurtured to learn. What they knew was that the child under them should know before they got to school, if not, the child above them would have to demonstrate that they've learned it... And, if those grades were not reflected at school, then it was assumed that there was some kind of trickery happening at school because you're educated at home and you go to school to demonstrate that you have been educated. But, you don't go to school to be educated, so (lots of laughter) It was a real strong reality, you do your own research, you did your own learning and you go to school for degrees and for accreditation, and recognition.22

Joan Arbor's parents provided their children with a counter-discourse to the dominant discourse within the educational system. Again, we can see the construction of "loving blackness", which was developed within a family context. Arbor's parents also attempted to construct a "safety net" within the school setting in order that issues around race could be dealt with swiftly and effectively. This discourse runs counter to the dominant discourse on "blackness" which devalued black people. bell hooks in "Loving Blackness as Political Resistance" believes that in order for blacks to embrace their blackness they must decolonize their minds and break with white supremacist thinking that suggests that they are inferior, inadequate, and marked for victimization.23

The creation of a structure and network to deal with any crisis of racism was an important counter-discourse that Arbor could employ, as shown below:

I was in my senior year at high school and my brother was a sophomore in high school and he was working in the student store and somebody accused him of stealing and he was all in an uproar. And it was interesting to me, at the time it seemed normal, now I find it quite amazing, because my brother and I, our response to that accusation of our brother was it didn't occur to us to try and find our mom or get help. What we did was that we both got totally dressed up went down to the principal's office and said he has been accused of this, he's in distress, we want the people accusing him of this in here now. And we sat there totally waiting with full expectation that someone would respond and if not we knew how we would proceed. And I

23bell hooks, Black Looks: race and representation (Toronto: between the lines, 1992), p.17.
remember them bringing in the accusations, people who said he stole and we went through the whole process, and we insisted that the principal follow it up until it was proven that he had not stolen and in fact they did not know who stole and that they had just decided that it must be him. And we went through the whole process of facilitating, and talking about it and processing and working through it. Now that I think about it I think it's wild! I think it's really wild that we were so programmed that there is a response and if our parents aren't there it's up to the siblings to demonstrate that advocacy for him. Because, you're in a white context they'll try to trick you out of your accreditation.24

Arbor and her siblings had witnessed routinely their parents' and the black community's response to racist situations and therefore had this example to follow in their own lives. From this encounter it is clear that Joan had developed problem solving, facilitating and group processing skills that she would later need as an anti-racist educator. Joan Arbor would later go on to state in the interview that her parents were less concerned with analyzing the behaviours of racist teachers. Instead the emphasis was on challenging the behaviour of racist teachers. The other crucial lesson that Joan Arbor learned was the importance of community support in times of crisis, and that solving issues like racism involves strategies that go beyond the individual person who has encountered it.

The Arbors also imbued in their children a love of learning that was independent of the dominant educational discourse. This provided them with the ability to critique every aspect of the educational system because they kept their mental autonomy. Arbor's critical imagination which was nurtured within a family discourse on blackness and womanhood centred her as a radical subject. Karen Brodkin Sacks has stated, "I had a strong hunch that women learned the values and skills to resist oppression at work from their families."25 What makes Arbor particularly interesting is her ability to be conscious or aware of where her activism skills originate.

3. Radical subject

In further exploring the rich and complicated dynamics of Joan Arbor's childhood, I discovered other key issues that are crucial to an understanding of Arbor as radical subject. She says below:

My mother had a value that if she was closer to me then my father couldn't abuse me. So she would not put up any barriers between us because she felt that's what happened. She went and confronted my father when my older sister was sixteen about his abuse of her and my father kicked her [the sister] out. And my sister blamed my mother for confronting my father and said that my mother's jealousy was the reason she got kicked out. And my mother never recouped from that, she confronted and she lost a daughter and she lost a daughter's love while my father maintained it. She was bound and determined not to confront, not to get in the middle of that again. So her relationship to me was - if there is no barrier between us, if he did something to me I would tell. And what was wild was that he did molest me and I did tell her but I told her in my twenties. Which freaked her out, because her idea was that I would tell her as a little kid. So she was enraged when I told her that. So, she had a lot of stuff around being married, taking responsibility for a man she couldn't control, and then being blamed for somebody else's behaviour. And then him dying with no one confronting him or holding him accountable and then everybody coming to her to resolve it later. She had a lot of feelings about that that she communicated to me verbally and non-verbally about freedom. Don't get caught up in somebody else's experience, live your own life, have your own choices, and have your own freedom. So she didn't give me analysis and said this is feminism. She just said make sure you take care of your own business, emotionally, physically whatever.26

Arbor's mother had imbued in her daughter a strong sense of self and independent spirit. Her mother also tried to save Joan from her sexually abusive father by developing a close connection with her daughter.27 Although she failed, Arbor's mother did provide her with a strong connection with women

27 Darlene Clark Hine suggests that black communities in North America are often silent on the question of sexual misconduct and sexuality because of the sexual abuse that occurred during slavery. The shame that resulted by the utter powerlessness at the hands of slave holders has continued to be one of the enduring legacies of slavery. See Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West: Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 14, no. 4 (Summer 1989), pp. 292-297.
and the ability to take control of her life. Arbor's mother gave her two important counter-discourses, a discourse on freedom and a discourse on feminism. Although Arbor's mother had given up her life to her husband, she gave Joan Arbor the personal power to make choices that were for herself. For Joan Arbor, the discourse on feminism came from a lived experience that was both horrific and joyful. The sexual abuse by her father and the domination of her brothers over herself and her mother gave her a critical concept of male power and patriarchy. However, she also was privy to the warmth and power of the bond that exists amongst black women and later sought to recreate it in all facets of her life. The interplay of Joan Arbor's race and gender was also an important development in her emergence as a radical subject. This is illustrated in her response to the question below:

*How did that [being sexually molested by her father] affect you as an activist?*

In a lot of ways. I've never had a male boss, you know what I mean. The only way I've ever worked with men is when my employee is underneath me or as consultants, or in an environment where I have as much power as them - and which I could leave if I elected to. So I have never been directly under the control of a man in any of my working environments. It also translated into me seeing it all connected. Because all those ways from the civil rights on directly affected my life. For the civil rights for blacks to the conflicts around women's issues to the issues around labour, in California, and the issues around migrant workers. All those things were affecting my life in a hands-on way. So I never saw them as separate, I saw them as integrated because of how strongly and powerfully they were affecting my life. And then, as a young woman electing to work in a lesbian organization. But the focus of my work was on lesbians of colour. It was about women, and it was about race, it was labour, and class all of that was integrated and it became explosive in the work that I was designing. But it never seemed disconnected to me. What I was really struck by talking to other activists, a lot of activists grew up in families that were for example working class and it was about the union or the labour movement. Or they grew up in the civil rights movement. But I think growing up in California gave me an unusual set in which they were all integrated. So it was the labour movement, it was the women's movement, it was the gay/lesbian rights movement, it was the black experience in the civil rights movement. 28

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28 *ibid.*
There were many factors that contributed to Joan Arbor's ability to gain her activist voice. Her highly structured upbringing gave her a counter-discourse on race, gender, education and political action. However, at the time of her coming of age, Joan Arbor also could tap into the revolutionary discourse(s) that were coming out of the many social movements of the 1960's in the United States. 29 Her social location was also affected by the geography of her birth and upbringing which gave her a certain ease about conflict, pain and reconciliation. Apart from Arbor's experiences of these revolutionary movements we also see how historical events have legacies that exist "outside" of the mainstream discourse of their meaning. As we see below, all of these experiences directly affected Arbor's work as an activist.

What were the work experiences that led you to become an activist?

Having been involved in competitive speaking, forced me to engage when I was a very shy, introverted type of person in what was immediate and hot for people then and take a position. And what it did was that it helped me realize how every thought I had was political because other people didn't want me to have it. (laughter) It wasn't like I thought to myself, Hey I'm a political animal. I grew to that recognition, because I think if I had remained introverted and not explored externally those opinions, I would have thought people don't care what I think. It would have been a way in which I would have operated in the world where I would have seen myself as insignificant or wouldn't have believed people would want to kill me for what I thought. I saw high school kids my age turn from their liking of me from rage to hatred because I would not conform to their opinion. Because they felt that they had the right to dictate to me how they felt the world should be. I found that very politicizing. And then I also found that I was raised being told this is how you cope with racism, this is how you cope with sexism. Being given those strategies deliberately, I always felt that someone could deliberately, intervene and not give it to me. So with every interaction to be in the world, was a political fight. And that was like going to activism school. To think of the world that way. So I think in a lot of ways I was structured to be an activist. 30

Again we see that Arbor's counter-discourses on education, fostered in her family, placed her as an outsider but also gave her a clear sense of "self." Joan Arbor learned as a child how unpopular deconstructing the dominant construction of knowledge produced in the educational system would be. Her decolonized standpoint, which she brilliantly demonstrated to her classmates, constituted her as "outsider". Arbor's awareness of "who I was is political" was a self proclaimed acceptance of the "outsider" role as a "powerful" and self-empowering standpoint. bell hooks has written on the dangers endured by black women when they express a decolonized standpoint. This decolonized standpoint, however, gave Arbor a revolutionary voice within the anti-oppression, anti-racism movements of the late 20th century. As we continue to explore Arbor's activist experiences, this revolutionary voice begins to demonstrate the pitfalls and the triumph of this type of work.

What was the first job that you did that reflected all of what you just said?

When I started working towards generating legislation and services for women who experienced domestic violence. I was always organizing communities and legislation around health care services, and anti-violence services for women of colour which was not allowed and not encouraged. So I would say right off the bat my very first job, was to co-create the California women of colour against domestic violence. And start organizing to be part of a state wide alliance to create legislation. I was like nineteen, twenty. So for my very first job I was taking an activism role but I didn't realize it. And I also majored in political science.31

When did you call yourself an activist?

I would say that I didn't feel in jeopardy from being an activist until I was 30, and I designed a project for latino lesbians. That's when I realized how fierce it was to be an activist and how the old strategies of organizing didn't work and then I got really scared. It came to a moral decision. And that's because I was used to a particular coalition, I was used to being able to go to white women for this, I was used to going to the black community for this, and going to the gay and lesbian community for this. Because I was working in all these communities in a fragmented way, right. But what I had done by creating Lapis is that I had integrated them. It was race, it was gender, it was sexual orientation. And what I watched was the gay and lesbian community backed off because they saw it as the gay and lesbian

31Ibid.
white community, I watched as the black community backed off because they said like hey, this is not our issue, and I watched as white women backed off because they said its not about all women. And it was a mind blowing experience for me, because the black women in the black organization were particularly frightened of this program. Not only the people who would receive it but the people who would work in it. And I started standing alone and that politicized me in a way that nothing else has politicized me in my life.32

Lapis was a political organization that worked for furthering social opportunities for women of colour who were lesbians. Issues of gender, race, class, sexual orientation were integrated for Arbor. But in practice and theory, for members of those groups, coalition building on a unitary political agenda created conflict and division. In addition, it served elements of those communities as well as the dominant society to keep those communities divided. Arbor was "political" and dangerous because she combined them on a personal and political level.

Arbor’s family experiences and multiple counter-discourses that she had access to primed her for the moment she would stand alone. As Joan Arbor states, she was "structured" to be an activist; her development as an activist subject is an on-going process. Her work and school experiences were the catalysts for her emergence as a black woman activist. However, her activist standpoint was realized by the jeopardy Arbor found herself in by creating an explosive feminist program which combined gender, race, class and sexual orientation into a unitary project. As stated earlier, a radical black subject that holds a decolonized mind is seen as dangerous to the state, particularly when that subject challenges power relations.

Although Arbor’s project gave voice to an invisible group, women of colour lesbians, who were left out of the discourse on gays and lesbians which was seen as white, they receded from taking responsibility for the project. Arbor’s task of making them visible involved creating a counter-discourse that combined several identities together. However, this counter-discourse was feared not only by the state but by all the women involved because of issues of difference and power sharing. Ultimately, these issues made the limits of coalition building evident to Joan Arbor.

32Ibid.
Conclusion

The becoming of Joan Arbor as radical subject was facilitated by the construction of a counter-discourse created by her family, community and lived experiences. Arbor's self-definition was a learning task that was supervised and devised by her family, particularly her mother. The absence and the coming home of her sisters were also crucial to the development of Arbor's black womanhood and sense of self. Arbor's radical subjectivity was also derived from the sexual abuse she endured from her father. The abuse radicalized Arbor's choice of work as well as who she would select to mentor her professionally. Within her family setting, loving "blackness" and an independent mind were crucial components in the creation of a self that was "outside" the dominant discourse on black womanhood. The importance of reading, writing and critical thinking went into the creation of an independent self.

All of these skills were sheltered and nurtured by family members to combat the onslaught of negative images about who black people are. Community was also important in reflecting negative images of blackness propagated by the dominant culture. Furthermore, the concept of self or selves was reinforced and further developed within the black community. However, Arbor's development of a lesbian identity, in general, was not nurtured in the black community. Rather, Arbor created an alternative lesbian of colour community that would accept all of her selves.

The development of Arbor's radical identity was developed from the notion of black motherhood and women mentorship that gave her a political voice. The difficult experiences she had in her first activist job placed her in personal and professional jeopardy. However, her own self-defining voice gave her the agency to complete the project successfully. Nonetheless, it does point to the conclusion that there is no such thing as a unitary feminist subject. The radical subjectivity of who Joan Arbor is cannot be explored through the concept of "Other" or difference, but is elucidated by an exploration of the counter-discourse on blackness, and black womanhood.
In North America, historically, black women who became teachers believed that through their profession, they could uplift the socio-economic status of blacks in their communities. In addition, members of the black community considered black women teachers as leaders of the community and as such was responsible for its members. Historians have also found that black teachers utilized their high status in their communities as an avenue to social activism. Further, black teachers' sense of community responsibility often initiated the formation of black women's organizations that were political in nature.

Keren Brathwaite, a black Canadian educator and co-founder of the Transitional Year Programme (TYP) at the University of Toronto, follows in the long tradition of black women teachers in North America. The programme was conceived as an avenue to increase black access to university education. Keren Brathwaite and fellow founders of the programme hoped that those black students who successfully accessed a university education would become leaders in the black community. The intent of the program has fundamentally been an effort to uplift the black community in Toronto on the whole.

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4 Dr. Frederick Case, Chair, Department of French, University of Toronto, "1987 Graduation Address: Transitional Year Programme University of Toronto," *The Transitional Year Programme Newsletter* no. 4 (Spring 1988), p. 4.
In this chapter, I explore the radical subjectivity of Keren Brathwaite. Further, I will argue that Keren Brathwaite's work as one of the founders of the Transitional Year Programme has contributed to the educational and social advancement of blacks in Toronto. In addition, her commitment to equity issues in education has benefited a variety of communities in Toronto.

Keren Brathwaite at a Glance

Keren Brathwaite came to Canada on an academic scholarship to attend the University of Toronto in the 1960s from Antigua. Upon completing her Bachelor of Arts degree and attaining her teaching diploma, she returned to Antigua to teach. In 1969, however, Brathwaite came back to Canada on a Commonwealth Scholarship to complete a doctorate degree at the Ontario Institute For Studies in Education. Keren Brathwaite found that her concern for and commitment to educating, black youth became her overriding passion and she dropped her doctoral studies to co-found the Transitional Year Programme at the University of Toronto. She is also presently a member of the Consultative Committee on the Education of Black Students in Toronto Schools, Ontario Black Educators' Working Group and the Organization of Parents of Black Children.5

Keren Brathwaite the Early Years, Family, Community and Education

Black women's shift from subject to radical subject can be understood through an analysis of how they have developed a self-defining lens. "The institutional sites where black women construct independent self-definitions reflect the dialectical nature of oppression and activism."6 Without a self-defining black womanhood, black women would not be able to challenge systems of domination.

Keren Brathwaite's self-defined standpoint was quite clearly forged in her childhood in Antigua. In this section, I will examine Brathwaite's family, community and educational experiences in the Caribbean.

A Family

Keren Brathwaite remembers a very happy family as a young child in Antigua. Brathwaite's mother was dedicated to providing for the comfort and safety of her family members. bell hooks suggests that the black family home normally created by black women is a location in which black people can be whole. She states:

The task of making homeplace was not simply a matter of black women providing service; it was about the construction of a safe place where black people could affirm one another and by so doing heal many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination. We could not learn to love or respect ourselves in the culture of white supremacy, on the outside; it was there on the inside, in that "homeplace," most often created and kept by black women, that we had the opportunity to grow and develop, to nurture our spirits.7

In the family setting, black children could model their mothers' counter-hegemonic discourses on race and gender and their efforts to create a liberatory space within the home.

bell hooks also argues that the practice of racial uplift is learnt within black families by the mothers' creation of the "home place." hooks writes:

The assumption then is that the black woman who works hard to be a responsible caretaker is only doing what she should be doing. Failure to recognize the realm of choice, and the remarkable re-visioning of both women's role and the idea of "home" that black women consciously exercised in practice, obscures the political commitment to racial uplift, to

7bell hooks, Yearnings: race, gender, and cultural politics (Toronto: between the lines, 1990), p. 42.
eradicating racism, which was the philosophical core of dedication to community and home.8

The subversive role of the black woman homemaker in the development of a self-defined black self-hood among her children has not been fully explored in black historiography. Indeed, most black women in the diaspora work outside of the home and therefore scholarship has tended to concentrate on the formulation of resistance strategies in black women's work settings. However, resistance strategies are most potent within the home where black ideas and values have authority. One could argue that black motherhood is an inherently subversive role because the black woman's most important task is to counter negative discourses on blackness.

Keren Brathwaite's remembers her family home in Antigua as tranquil:

I grew up in Antigua in the Caribbean. I grew up in a village called Olins. One of six siblings. I have three sisters and two brothers. I should say that my childhood was extremely happy. I think there were sort of pastoral aspects to it. I had summers with my siblings and my friends, skipping rope, playing house under the house. It was a very happy childhood. My family was very supportive. My family was the centre of an extended family because my parents really took care. My extended family was there and they added to the joy of childhood. My grandmother making the sugar cakes and homemade dolls and so on.9

Brathwaite's family was crucial to her development as a black woman. Within this "homeplace" there was a space for her to develop into a confident black woman. Brathwaite states that "I found that the values that I imbibed when I was young - I found that they remained with me. The value of family, politeness, sense of duty, discipline."10

Not only was Keren Brathwaite's childhood family disciplined but there was a structure of learning and sense of history within the home. Brathwaite remembers:

8Ibid., p. 45.
10Ibid.
My mother was a very young mother. She married my father before she was eighteen and started having us from eighteen. So you had a mother with a father who was fifteen years older. There was discipline, there was support, there was reading stories at night. My father liked to tell stories with all of us sitting around him. My parents told stories and my maternal grandmother told stories at night outside with the moonlight. She told us folk tales, Anansi stories, and she would tell us stories about the old days. The slavery days and the plantation system. So there was a sense of history, and culture within my upbringing.11

Keren Brathwaite experienced family culture that was imbued with a strong sense of Caribbean and black culture. This was counter to the colonialist culture of Antigua during the 1950s in which British culture and whiteness were held as the norm.12

Jamaica Kincaid, an Antiguan writer, in her novel A Small Place, condemns the "Britishization" of Antiguans. She wrote:

And so everywhere they went they turned it into England; and everybody they met they turned English. But no place could ever really be England, so you can imagine the destruction of people and land that came from that.13

Indeed, Brathwaite's parents within the home provided a positive sense of "blackness" that was counter-hegemonic to a colonialist society that repressed all things African.

Brathwaite strongly asserts that her self-defined black womanhood was shaped by her mother. She recalls:

My mom. She was a great organizer, cook, mother, wife and community person. I thought of her as a physically beautiful woman. She just had a presence. People used to come to her for advice, you know. A person having

11Ibid.
marital problems. My father used to say, "but Martha you could keep out of that." And she would say, "but they came to me." She used to sell the education message as saving black people. She was a very strict disciplinarian. As a kid I didn't like that. As I grew older, I felt differently. 14

Martha Brathwaite's multiple roles as mother, wife, disciplinarian and community advisor were respected by her daughter. Further, Martha Brathwaite's emphasis on education in the home would influence Keren Brathwaite's view of education as crucial to the quality of life of black children.

Brathwaite's mother wove into her family structure stories of slavery and resistance which gave a context to her overall attempt to empower her children. 15 The culture of the home gave Brathwaite a strong self-defined black womanhood and a commitment to racial uplift in her family and community life.

b community

When Keren Brathwaite describes her family in Antigua it includes extended family and members of the community. The strong tie between community and family perhaps explains why there is such a strong belief in social responsibility among black women from the Caribbean.

As already discussed, Keren Brathwaite experienced the importance of racial uplift in the home and in the community through her mother's example. Brathwaite's mother ingrained in her children a strong sense of community when she involved them in local projects. She recalls:

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15 Slavery was abolished in Antigua in 1834. There are many stories in Antigua of black domestics during slavery taking revenge on their owners. See Bridget Berereton, "Text, Testimony and Gender: An examination of some Texts by Women on the English-speaking Caribbean from the 1770s to the 1920s," in Verene Shepherd, Bridget Berereton and Barbara Bailey, eds., Engendering History: Caribbean Women in Historical Perspective (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), p. 66.
I always tell my friends here that I grew up with a sense of community. There was family, there was extended family and there was community. We were so much a part of a community that we knew what was going on in the community. We knew what people's needs were. For example, my mother on a Sunday would cook a lot and if there were old people, if there were sick people, she would send us kids [with the food]. She would bake a lot, you know. And any poor person that could not afford to have a cake or a bun, we would drop these things off. In addition to that, I could remember when we were quite young - a literacy class was started for adults. And I could remember helping to tutor, you know, adult men and women in the area that I knew. Helping them to learn. I taught them the very basics.16

As a young girl, Keren Brathwaite was helping to educate the less fortunate members of her community. Brathwaite as a young girl took the initiative and became involved in the learning process of some community members. From her close relationship with the community and its members in Antigua, Brathwaite came to view the local society as an extension of her family responsibility.

The sense that community and family were interconnected concepts migrated with Brathwaite to Canada. For example, as a young married woman in Toronto and having just given birth, Brathwaite took her new baby throughout the black community to introduce the infant to key community members. To Brathwaite, introducing her baby to the black community was like blessing the child and acknowledging the community as an extension of her nuclear family.17

The process of keeping community within the network of family in Toronto continued as her children grew older. Brathwaite describes an example of networking community and family activities:

At that time we were very involved in African Liberation and B.E.P. [Black Education Project]. We took our children as infants to meetings and all the Caribanas. So the community has been a big part of family. A lot of times personal things had to be given up. There were times as they got older and there was a lot of homework to be done, right, and one finds oneself running out to a meeting. These meetings were at the Toronto Board and elsewhere. Looking back some of that time should have been spent supervising that homework.18

17Ibid.
18Ibid.
Interestingly, Brathwaite's commitment to the black community would mean a sacrifice of her personal and family time. However, Brathwaite's children understood their mother's community work as an extension of their "homeplace." The view of community as extended family was also common among other black women from the Caribbean whom I interviewed. In subsequent sections, I will discuss how Brathwaite combined ideas of family and community to work on political projects in Toronto.

c Education

In this section, I will explore the concept of racial uplift through an examination of Keren Brathwaite's experience as a student in an Antiguan Grammar school and as an undergraduate student at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica. An exposé of Keren Brathwaite's educational experiences will provide further insight into her commitment to racial uplift in the education of black students.

Brathwaite's parents were actively involved in the education of their children. For example, there was a process of debriefing the lessons of the school day with the Brathwaite children. This process ensured the children learnt their lesson but it also offered meaningful parental support. Brathwaite recalls:

I had two parents who valued education very much even though my father's level of education was low for the standard of the time. My mother's was average. We would share with them what would happen during the day at school and they would listen to us, read and so on. So I always found myself and my siblings sort of ahead of the class. 

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19 For example, Rita Cox, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 28 January 1998.
The active involvement of Brathwaite's parents in the education of their children contributed to their success as students.

Brathwaite found that her own experience of education as a young child was not limited by her gender or race. Rather, students, in Antigua were encouraged to develop a full range of academic skills and goals. Brathwaite contends that her childhood teachers were also significant in defining her black womanhood. She recalls:

Also, Miss David [A white teacher from Britain]. She was a big woman in size. When she stood in front of our primary class and called for order, we gave it. When she said you could, you did. In things like a school concert, she expected the best.21

Miss David provided Brathwaite with confidence in herself and pride in her black girlhood. In addition, like Brathwaite's mother, Miss David empowered all of the children to learn. Most importantly, Miss David had an expectation that all children were capable of learning.

Nonetheless, in Antigua, Keren Brathwaite experienced the reality of colonialism through the educational system.22 During her childhood, Brathwaite's education was composed of mostly British-based knowledge and history in the schools.

It was not there in a conscious way. There were white people who lived on the island. Independence in association with Britain did not come about until 1965. I could remember in primary school the empire celebrations where we had to sing the British songs and wave the British flag. So we knew that there was this difference that existed. I sat in class next to the governor's daughter so I knew that people were people. I realized that brilliance did not reside in the white people. I experienced that, you know. We were just motivated to be the top of the class. Those that had the power in some areas did not exert the power in the class room with us.23

21 Ibid.
In the grammar school that Brathwaite attended in Antigua, all of the teachers were white British women who came to the island to teach. Brathwaite found that most of the white teachers from Britain had a positive attitude towards their Caribbean students. Nonetheless, "these teachers, regardless of their personal orientations, cannot but inculcate Western values and views in the schools." 24

However, Brathwaite contends that she was unaware of the colonial content of her education in Antigua. Her consciousness had not been raised in terms of the need for an "indigenous" Antiguan reality and history within the school curriculum. She recalls:

I felt I got encouragement [from her teachers] but what could have kept us back was some aspects of the curriculum, the colonial curriculum. Although we were excelling, later on we realized that we should not have been having our exams graded at the University of Cambridge. I did University of Cambridge O levels and A levels. Later on you realize that the curriculum did not have enough of the Caribbean and Antiguan content. 25

Brathwaite did not become aware that she was lacking a black education in her grammar school experiences until she was older.

Her experiences as a young undergraduate student at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica would be the primary catalyst for understanding that her primary education had been mainly colonial. Brathwaite remembers:

I had done my first degree at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica. And there was this group of black students from all over the Caribbean and those were my formative years. And it was really nice. I met people like Walter Rodney who was a student! Progressive, brilliant and it was a time of getting to know our Caribbean roots and feeling our potential of where we could go in the world. They were students interested in building a better Caribbean. 26

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In the 1950s and 1960s, anti-colonialist movements were taking root in the Caribbean. Young West Indians on the university campuses and in their communities were imagining a post-colonialist Caribbean. Of particular note, was Brathwaite's association with a number of Caribbean students at the University of the West Indies who would become world players in the fight against colonialism. One example was fellow classmate Walter Rodney, who subsequently wrote *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* which would cause a stir in the academic and political world. Walter Rodney was a black scholar who contended that the underdevelopment of Africa was due to the advent of the slave trade. The use of Rodney's landmark but controversial work in TYP will be discussed later in the chapter.

Brathwaite, later as an educator, understood from her own experiences the importance of black parental involvement in the education of black children. In 1996, Brathwaite wrote:

> Our parents have taught us that education is the most important ticket to the future for us as Black people due to our historical experience of racial discrimination and limitation, against which we have always struggled. We also instruct our children and Black youth in general about the necessity of getting a sound education.

The culture of Brathwaite's community and family gave her insight into how black children ought to be educated in the West. Brathwaite understood that the legacy of slavery and racial oppression must not be used as excuses to limit the achievement of black children.

Brathwaite's consciousness as to how black children should be educated became realized once she came to Toronto. She understood that the lack of

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stories, histories and topics on the black experience must be of central concern for the racial uplift of black children through education.31

In summary, Brathwaite emulated the multiple roles of wife, mother, disciplinarian and community advisor inhabited by her mother. bell hooks contends that within "the black family" the practice of racial uplift was usually performed by the mothers as the creators of the "homeplace."32 Keren Brathwaite's life work as an educator would be influenced by her mother's emphasis on education and community responsibility. Interestingly, Brathwaite's parents provided a black curriculum within their family life to augment her public school education. The addition of West Indian history and culture to Brathwaite's education at home augmented and was counter-hegemonic to the colonial program of the grammar schools in Antigua during the 1940s. Finally, there was not a clear demarcation between family and community in Brathwaite's childhood in Antigua and therefore the practice of racial uplift was seen as transferable between the private and public sphere.

3. Keren Brathwaite and the Development of the Transitional Year Programme

In this section, I will first explore the beginnings of TYP through an examination of its grassroots origins and its later inclusion into the University of Toronto community. Secondly, I will discuss TYP's pedagogy and the role it has played in increasing access to higher education for blacks, aboriginals and working-class whites.

32 bell hooks, Yearnings: race, gender, and cultural politics, p. 45.
3a. Transitional Year Programme's Beginnings

The Transitional Year Programme's roots are in the black community of Toronto. Through word of mouth, in the summers of 1969 and 1970, under the auspices of the University of Toronto, a number of "disadvantaged" students were prepared for undergraduate study at York University. TYP became officially a part of the University of Toronto in September 1970 and was housed in Innis College. TYP was initiated at the peak of black civil rights movements in the United States and Canada as well as at the beginnings of the women's movement throughout North America. Further, there were anti-colonialist movements in Africa and the Caribbean where concepts of "black nation" and black consciousness were developing within black radical liberatory discourses.

Subjugated knowledges within university campuses were vying for inclusion into intellectual debates throughout North America. During the late sixties, the exclusion of women and post-colonial voices caused students to resist uncontested dominant discourses within academies in the West. Into this mix, TYP with its "new" pedagogical approach emerged to address inequities of race, class and poverty in black, aboriginal and white communities in Toronto.

For Brathwaite the under-representation of black students at the University of Toronto was the initial impetus that brought about her involvement at TYP. During Brathwaite's studies as a doctoral student at the Ontario Institute for

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33Keren Brathwaite, "The Lessons TYP Teaches Us" (Excerpts from Address on the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of The Transitional Year Programme, University of Toronto, 15 March 1991), personal papers; and Transitional Year Programme Calendar, 1997-98, University of Toronto, p. 10.
Studies in Education, she felt that she had to be actively engaged in the process of recruiting black students for higher education programs. In a recent speech, Brathwaite writes:

When I came to Canada in 1967 to pursue graduate studies in education, I could not have known that from 1969, I would be committing 20 years to the development of TYP. I came to Canada with the intention of returning home to the Caribbean and using my education in the service of "my people". "My people", however, was to take on a new definition when I became aware of the social and educational inequality of black people in Canada who were marginalised, generally denied opportunity and were dismally underrepresented in Canadian institutions of higher learning, including the University of Toronto.38

In developing the TYP at the University of Toronto, Brathwaite responded to what she believed was the exclusion of Canadian black students from the university setting.39 Keren Brathwaite went to black communities in Toronto as well as consulted with other black students on campus to envision how they could improve access to university education for black students.

3a TYP and the black community

In the late 1960s, black students met at the International Student Centre at the University of Toronto to strategize on issues of access and equity for black youth who desired a higher education. Brathwaite recalls:

I can remember in those early days of discussing this project which lead to TYP being started in 1970 at U of T [University of Toronto]. I think very very central to the development was a young man. He was an undergraduate student at York University. His name was Horace Campbell and he was very very very much involved in the discussing out of these ideas. Someone who entered the first project as a student, her name is Elaine Maxwell. She walked the pavement and recruited and spread the

38 Keren Brathwaite, "The Lessons TYP Teaches Us" (Excerpts from Address on the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of The Transitional Year Programme, University of Toronto, 15 March 1991), personal papers.
39 Ibid.
word. It was like a community effort. I spoke in one of those newsletters about spreading the gospel of TYP in the black community. That was the spirit in which we entered it. Advertised by word of mouth. And then we would interview and I would counsel and teach. I had a very very significant teaching role and counseling role.40

Keren Brathwaite was joined in her efforts in establishing TYP through a grassroots community effort with a number of black students from York University. Professor Frederick I. Case, Chair and Principal of New College at the University of Toronto and a long time supporter of TYP, confirms that the program was also initiated by black students at York University. He remembers:

A number of students from York University who one summer organized intensive courses which I think were originally for students of African origin and First Nations students. But the second summer there were students of African origin, First Nations students and Chinese students which is very interesting.41

The TYP students who were of African descent were quite diverse. There were black Nova Scotians, black Caribbeans and a few black Ontarians in that first summer in 1969. The white students who were later targeted for the program were working-class of Portuguese descent.42 Individual students like Elaine Maxwell, a black Nova Scotian, were also significant in selling the program throughout the black community.43

As mentioned earlier, Brathwaite took on the TYP idea as a personal mission. She went to the black community for its expertise in terms of what the needs of black students were in general. Brathwaite knew that the "older" black

40Keren Brathwaite, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 17 June 1998; Keren Brathwaite, "Twentieth Anniversary Issue!" The Transitional Year Programme Newsletter, no. 11 (June 1992), p. 1; and Keren Brathwaite, "The Lessons TYP Teaches Us" (Excerpts from Address on the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of the Transitional Year Programme, University of Toronto, 15 March 1991), personal papers.
41Dr. Frederick Case, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 2 March 1999.
42Ibid.
community had been frustrated with educational opportunities for higher education for their youth, and thus had a better understanding of the issues.

To sell the programme in the black community, Brathwaite used word of mouth and framed the value of TYP in gospel language and technique. Keren Brathwaite seemed to merge multiple "languages" together, Christian, Caribbean and mainstream, to describe her programme to the black community. Perhaps this strategy of blending languages harkens back to the Caribbean where the creolization of English occurred with the blending of English/French/Spanish and multiple African languages together.44

Further, Brathwaite's emphasis on higher education for black youth may stem from her role as "othermother" in the black community. Annette Henry suggests that black female teachers' activism may rest in their consciousness as mothers in their fight for equity in education for their children.45 Henry states:

Makeda recalls that upon moving to Canada a (white) guidance counselor attempted to place her sister in a nonacademic program, and she would have been so placed had not her parents insisted she be placed in an academic program. Makeda's consciousness as a mother has been a site for Black Womanist activism and a catalyst for her work at Bedford.46

Keren Brathwaite seems to have used her consciousness as an "othermother" to mobilize other black mothers to solve the problem of black students' under-representation at the University of Toronto. Brathwaite's mother served as an example of the importance of "mothering" community children. Othermothering in the Caribbean tended to create the notion that the academic success of youth was the concern of all community members.47

In Canada, Keren Brathwaite drew on black mothers' disillusionment with the Canadian educational system to support organizations she co-founded such

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45Of course, it is the spirit of motherhood not actual motherhood that is animating. Within black communities in North America and the Caribbean, childless black women of "stature" sometimes become "othermothers" to children of the community. See Annette Henry, "African Canadian Women Teachers' Activism: Recreating Communities of Caring and Resistance," p. 396.
46Ibid., p. 394.
47Ibid.
as the Canadian Alliance of Black Educators, African Heritage Educators' Network, the Organization of Parents of Black Children (OPBC), and the Transitional Year Program (TYP) at the University of Toronto.48

From the beginning of the program, community development and racial uplift were its foci. Dr. Frederick Case recalls:

That the students from York University who founded were very much grassroots oriented. They were the same people who founded BSU (Black Students Union). They were the same people who founded BEP (Black Education Project). The same people okay. Very grassroots oriented. Very much interested in the oppressed classes as it was expressed during that time. Therefore, there was this commitment to return to the community.49

Interestingly, students were expected to live and work in their communities once they had completed their university degrees. The TYP program was not seen as a vehicle for only individual intellectual fulfillment but was seen as a tool to uplift the entire black community and other oppressed groups in Toronto.

3b TYP and the University of Toronto

However, the University of Toronto had to be convinced that it needed to be more inclusive of black, aboriginal and poor students. Brathwaite recognized that there was a particular language in which TYP had to be discussed within the university establishment. Brathwaite, therefore, chose to construct a counter-discourse that challenged the view that black, aboriginal and poor students were not worthy students for the University of Toronto. She recalls:

49 Dr. Frederick Case, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 2 March 1999
The Project for Disadvantaged Students. It was a project to help black students to access university education. And the discussion centered around, of course, giving them a curriculum of preparation in a short period of time. To convince a university or universities that they were able to handle the rigours of university education and that they had the potential to do so if they had the right support. So our program was to show that. I took on the task of doing the language work, the writing and the reading. I designed the program and taught it.50

TYP was originally called The Project for Disadvantaged Students. Brathwaite understood that there was a particular language in which TYP had to be framed in order to be intelligible to the dominant discourse on black students.51 Utilizing the notion of "disadvantage" and the term "equal opportunity" she wrote a program for the University of Toronto that would be successful.

To ensure the success of TYP, Brathwaite strategically took on allies she describes as progressive university professors at the University of Toronto and a group of white intellectuals and social activists in an organization called Praxis.52 Praxis was the most significant factor in bringing TYP into the University of Toronto.53

Brathwaite viewed the integration of TYP into the University of Toronto as a triumph for the program. However, according to Dr. Frederick Case, TYP's commitment to the black community waned once the program was brought into the University of Toronto. Dr. Case argues that TYP's move into the University of Toronto was the single most disastrous move made by the black community and the founders of TYP. He states:

51There were various studies conducted by the various boards that pondered the problems of black students in the Toronto area. At the time of TYP's development the following reports were done: John Roth, "West Indians in Toronto: The Students and the Schools," The Board of Education for the Borough of York, 1974; Jan Edward Schrieber, "In the Course of Discovery: West Indian Immigrants in the Toronto Schools," Toronto: Board of Education for the City of Toronto, 1971, papers of the CCC; and Loren Lind, "New Canadianism: Melting the Ethnic in Toronto Schools," This Magazine (Summer 1973), pp. 6-10.
53Dr. Frederick Case, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 2 March 1999.
Then unfortunately, unfortunately!!! The program moved into the University of Toronto . . . It then became institutionalized within the University of Toronto and subject to all of the demands or the exigencies - all the stupid bureaucratic rules of the University of Toronto. And lost a lot of its initial impetuses. Because you see right at the beginning there had to be a commitment on the part of the students once they had finished the TYP and they had got into some university somewhere whether York or the University of Toronto or Ryerson Polytechnic (as it was at that time) or community college - when they had completed their courses that they would return to their community to work. And that was a fundamental principle of TYP at its origins.54

Surprisingly, TYP was also conceived by black university students as a stepping stone towards the creation of the first African-Canadian university in Canada.55 The development of an African-Canadian university out of TYP could have been attained because there was financial and political support for such an institution in the black community. Dr. Case argues that there was and still is enough economic and political support in the black community for an African-Canadian University.

However, in TYP's case, once the program was institutionalized within U of T other priorities within the university took precedence over community development.56 In particular, the emphasis on "academic excellence" which meant that students became more concerned with grades than with social issues and social change. Case argues:

One of the priorities was this academic excellence. This stupid jingoistic term that is used in this university. Academic excellence. Okay. Academic excellence necessarily means in an institution like this that alienates everybody necessarily means that you move as far away as possible from the real problems of life. So that was one of the priorities that took over. This obsession with grades. The obsession with making straight As at any cost. And that took over rather than the actual commitment to the community. So that less and less were students in TYP, actually involved in any community whilst they were working on their degree. This used to be

54 ibid.
55 ibid.
56 ibid.
one of the features in the early days. You could be certain that the students would be involved in some community work.57

According to Case, the talk of academic excellence was a prominent dominant discourse in which black students were seen within the university establishment as needing to concentrate exclusively on their studies in order to achieve academically. The emphasis on the need for academic "excellence" was also a move away from the program's initial goal of empowering the whole student.

Keren Brathwaite contends, however, that the motto of TYP is "Making Academic Excellence Accessible." TYP's motto stresses that academic excellence among "disadvantaged" students can be achieved by creating equitable access to higher education. To ensure that students could access academic excellence, TYP put in place a support system and structure that made success in higher education available for students who were committed to learning.

For example, TYP has attempted to make sure that there were adequate bursaries for needy students. In addition, providing daycare has always been recognized as an important support for young single mothers. Many of these women had to drop out of high school to attend to their infants. Further, some students of TYP were the sole financial providers for their poor families. These individuals were not at liberty to devote their time full-time to study unless they could have full financial aid.

Eradicating barriers due to race, gender, class, and poverty were seen as significant factors in making sure students could succeed at TYP. According to Brathwaite, the problem with accessing education elsewhere at the University of Toronto has been that the structure of learning at the university ignores the needs of students of diverse backgrounds.58 Ultimately, Brathwaite has always understood that academic excellence was also determined by a "disadvantaged" student's ability to compete equitably with other students.

57 Dr. Frederick Case, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 2 March 1999.
58 Keren Brathwaite, "The Lessons TYP Teaches Us" (Excerpts from Address on the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary The Transitional Year Programme, University of Toronto, 15 March 1991), personal papers, pp. 4-5.
At the beginning, the pedagogy of TYP promoted black empowerment and racial uplift in the black community. However, the program later expanded to include aboriginal students and other "disadvantaged" students. The curriculum was geared to the actual experiences of students who were black, aboriginal and working-class Portuguese. Some of these students had been disaffected not only because of financial and social reasons but also because the content of mainstream education did not reflect their lived reality.

Barbara Omolade finds that there is a great deal of tension between feminist theory, classroom pedagogy and historical empowerment. She describes her experiences as a black college professor of working class background, teaching black history to black women who were also of working class backgrounds. Omolade states:

I was teaching Black women about themselves and their history in an attempt to rescue and liberate both of us from silence and oblivion, making us historical beings who had the power to move away from the margins of the university as well as the bearers of legitimate knowledge to its cutting edge.

Omolade views the act of teaching black women as a source of empowerment for herself and her students. Further, Omolade understood that critical black feminist teaching was a political act that could provide students with an analysis of their lives and structures of domination.

Brathwaite, as the English Coordinator of TYP, hoped to instill in her students critical thinking as well as a race and class critical analysis of their world. In addition, Brathwaite set out to create a curriculum that would encourage her students to learn. Brathwaite recognized that the material had to reflect the past and the future of her students. Omolade suggests:

The challenge of a black feminist pedagogy is to use literacy to connect people with ideas and histories across racial, gender, and class boundaries.

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and to further connect black women to each other and to their unique history.60

Black feminist teachers struggle with the question: how can they be critical of their students' work and empower them at the same time. As an instructor, criticism of students' ability to meet the standards of the program would be constructive in terms of imbuing the students with a passion to learn while constantly improving the curriculum at TYP. Brathwaite encouraged her students to unravel their own histories and experiences in order to develop an analysis surrounding their social locations.

As already stated, the purpose of TYP's pedagogy was to create a learning environment for black, aboriginal students and other "disadvantaged" students that would be meaningful. Brathwaite states:

In TYP, we recognize in Paulo Freire's terms, "the relevant themes" of our times, the issues which impact on our students' very being which they bring with them to school. Thus our classrooms cannot be isolated from the social realities of Toronto and Canada and the World, for in TYP, relevance and integration are key to academic success; inclusion is our academic way of life.61

Within the program, Keren Brathwaite included many pieces of literature by black scholars in TYP that would prove to be controversial.

When writing the TYP program in the late 1960s, Brathwaite believed that black radical thinkers' writings were important inclusions into a program which was geared to awaken the interest and intellect of black students.62 However, in the 1970s, the curriculum also included dynamic works offered by the aboriginal community as well as material from the growing field of feminist critical scholarship. According to Ali Behad, postcolonial and other "minority" critics have played a major part in challenging the dominant politics of

60 Ibid.
61 Keren Brathwaite, "The Lessons TYP Teaches Us" (Excerpts from Address on the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary The Transitional Year Programme, University of Toronto, 15 March 1991), personal papers, p. 11.
62 The program also from its inception, recruited from the aboriginal community in Toronto. Keren Brathwaite, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 15 April 1998.

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knowledge through their "wild" practices that have been in general counter-
systematic, contestatory, and antidisciplinary. 63

For example, in the early 1970s, Dr. Case contends that there was a kind of
intellectual oppression on the University of Toronto campus.

But the kinds of things that were being done in TYP was the fact it was the
place on campus where black academics had a voice. And various students
can freely voice their impressions. There was a lot of oppression on campus
when Walter Rodney's book came out - How Europe Underdeveloped Africa
I remember very well. There were professors in the social sciences and
political sciences and history and so on that would not permit students to
use that text because they said it was not documented and therefore it
cannot be used. It wasn't valuable as an intellectual work. So there was that
kind of thing. There was also the general impression of black students in
courses throughout the university that no one was willing to listen to them.
Whatever their experiences, objections or contributions. 64

As stated earlier, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was an explosion of new
academic inquiry into feminist, and anti-colonialist literature on university
campuses throughout North America. 65 At times, these radical discourses were
competing for a limited space within the university's critical space. 66 Black
academics and students were experiencing a suppression of their ideas and
intellectual work. 67

Certainly, women's studies as a field was also fighting for legitimacy within
academic circles which at times caused a division among the new "academics."
For example, there appears to have been a clash between African/anti-
colonialist voices and white feminists. Women of colour and black women were

64 Dr. Frederick Case, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 2 March
1999.
65 Combahee River Collective, "The Combahee River Statement," in Barbara Smith, ed.,
66 Ibid; and bell hooks, Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom
67 Dr. Frederick Case, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 2 March
1999
distressed by the lack of analysis on issues of race and class within white feminist debates.68

Further, according to Dr. Case, there were black male "radical" discourses on campus which were alienating white women with their espousal of "sexual revenge" through sexual dalliances with white women. Frantz Fanon, in Black Skin, White Masks, also refers to the tendency of some black men to utilize their sexuality as a means to prove that they were liberated.69 This would become a larger issue for TYP when it was threatened with permanent closure in 1976.

In addition, the most innovative aspect of TYP's radical pedagogy was the structure of learning in the program. Case describes:

But TYP was the place where this [a radical pedagogy] could happen. And I think much more important than curriculum was the structure. That was important for students of African origin and also native students, First Nation students. Now as far as the curriculum was concerned, my recollection is that there was a lot of Caribbean works, African works, particularly in literature. And in terms of the social science courses there was a lot of discussion in terms of African and Caribbean and Indian of India and history and sociology and so on. And a lot also on the First Nations, at that time too.70

The curriculum structure and pedagogical approach of Brathwaite's program was a reflection not only of her students' social location but her own. Brathwaite's perspective on learning came out of a postcolonial and feminist scholarship which also mirrored her lived experiences.

69 Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, pp. 70 - 83.
70 Dr. Frederick Case, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 2 March 1999.
Students of TYP responded mainly positively to the program’s pedagogical approach. Many of TYP’s former students found the program inspiring. For example, Makeda Silvera, a graduate of TYP, now a publisher and writer, states:

For two years I was a street kid. I went down to Bathurst and Bloor, where I heard that Blacks hung out. Sometimes I shared a room with ten other kids like myself. Then I heard about the Black Education Project (BEP), and started going there to hang out. I met people like Horace Campbell (a TYP founder) and Marlene Green, who helped to change my life around. They gave me literature about Black consciousness, by Martin Luther King, Malcom X, Angela Davis, Marcus Garvey and others. 

As echoed in Silvera's experience, Keren Brathwaite, as an undergraduate student at the University of the West Indies, also came in contact and read works by many black visionaries. In particular, Frantz Fanon’s writings raised Brathwaite's level of Black consciousness and provided her with critical thinking.

Carol Couchie also found that the radical teachings in the course were liberating for her as an Ojibway woman. She states:

TYP had the key. I was falling apart. My marriage was gone; the kids were gone. My father had died. TYP pulled the pieces together for me. My understanding grew, of what it means to be an Anishanabe kwe (Ojibway woman), in my family, in my father’s family, and in my marriage. Feminist theory also helped me to understand things that had happened to me and to my mother. Keren (Brathwaite) (TYP English Co-ordinator) and Maureen (Fitzgerald) (Carol’s academic advisor at TYP) were like grandmothers, aunts, teachers.

One of the key elements of TYP was taking into account the lived experiences of its students. However, what was truly unique was the use of the experiences of

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71 Makeda Silvera is the founder and publisher of Sister Vision Press. She also wrote the landmark book on West Indian domestics in Canada. See Makeda Silvera, Silenced (Toronto: Sister Vision Press, 1993).
73 Carol Couchie, "Every Child Deserves Their Own Story," The Transitional Year Programme Newsletter, University of Toronto, no. 18 (October 1998), p. 5.
the students to actually further the learning of other students in the program. For example, instruction encompassed how a student with little income was able to budget for the groceries that she/he needed that week.

In summary, the pedagogy of TYP offered a dynamic opportunity for "disadvantaged" students to learn. Many of the intellectual works included in the program offered black, aboriginal and Portuguese students a chance to critique their social locations. Further, the pedagogy of TYP utilized the knowledges of its students to both educate and empower students and their communities.

4. The threat to TYP's survival: Its early years

The dynamic and "dangerous" pedagogy of TYP threatened its survival many times throughout the 1970s. The TYP had to be sold on concepts of fairness and equality. Keren Brathwaite contends that the birth and continuation of TYP occurred through the promoting of accessibility issues and that issues surrounding equity should be emphasized when telling the history of the program. She states: "for had there been a warmer climate of acceptance for the concept of TYP in its early years, and had equity of education (we used the term equal opportunity back in 1969 and 70) been a more desired goal, then our programme would not have had to expend so much energy on survival."76

Although Keren Brathwaite was successful in recruiting "worthy" black students, in 1976, the University of Toronto suspended the TYP program. The suspension seems to be based on the Crowe Report which challenged the "radical" teachings in the programme. The report was researched and written

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74 Keren Brathwaite, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 15 April 1998.
75 Keren Brathwaite, "Almost 20 Years Later: Reflections on the TYP," The Transitional Year Programme Newsletter, University of Toronto, no. 7 (Fall 1989), p. 2.
by Dr. Harry Crowe, former dean of Atkinson College at York University.77

Below is a Toronto Star excerpt of the report:

The original purpose, and a worthwhile one, was to help bright but underprivileged students fill gaps in their previous learning to qualify for university. But after six years, as a result of a takeover by an outside group more interested in Marxist ideology than in education, the program was a scholastic mess.78

In general, the report argued that the curriculum brought about racial tension and therefore was racist. In addition, the curriculum was also Marxist.79 These statements were overblown and did not further an understanding of the pedagogical tenets of TYP.

Brathwaite through the years has solidly defended TYP's curriculum. She wrote:

We have also learned in 20 years to incorporate race, class and gender into our curriculum, with good results. There is some irony here, for the Crowe Report which the U of T Governing Council used as a weapon to suspend our programme in 1976, this report seemed to suggest that the study of Marxism and the consciousness of race and class in TYP were problems! . . . My belief is that had we chosen to locate our classrooms away from the life of our students, then we would have lost more of them. . . .80

Keren Brathwaite states that in addition to incorporating the experiences and knowledge of individual students into her lessons she included controversial subjects and writings into the program. Brathwaite continues to maintain that the curriculum had to incorporate the concerns of black and native students of the program in order to validate their experiences. Including the relevant

80Keren Brathwaite, "The Lessons TYP Teaches Us" (Excerpts from Address on the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary The Transitional Year Programme, University of Toronto, 15 March 1991), personal papers, pp. 10-11.
"personal" experiences of the students of TYP was a radical move for educational pedagogy in early 1970s Toronto.

There was, however, some resentment among white and aboriginal students because of the apparent emphasis on black and Caribbean literature that did cause some racial tension. Racial tensions also existed between black students and white teachers but that was occurring throughout the university at that time.81

Studying issues of race, class and gender oppression in a classroom tends not only to stir intellectual questions but also often can affect the student and the teacher emotionally. bell hooks concurs that the illumination of certain "truths" and biases in the classroom can cause anxiety, pain and confusion for those engaged in challenging the dominant world view.82 Further, bell hooks contends that being engaged in "cultural diversity" in the classroom can expose, for those instructors and administrators who are unfamiliar with the experiences of students, the limits of their authority.83

Black community members who were on the policy committee of TYP were outraged by the suggestion in the report that blacks had hijacked the program. Dr. Esia Richards and Joseph S. Reid, West Indian community members of the Transitional Year Programme Policy Committee, wrote a brief that was published in Contrast newspaper that responded to a media campaign in which they were attacked. They wrote:

As West Indian Community members of the Transitional Year Programme Policy Committee who were invited to participate, we feel disgusted that the Crowe Report and the University of Toronto have subscribed to the presentation of accusations in the press which can be described as scandalous.84

The students in the TYP program had various responses to the criticism in the Crowe Report. Investigative reporter David Jones collected multiple views of the program from staff and students at TYP.

81 Dr. Frederick Case, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 2 March 1999.
82 bell hooks, Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom, p. 30.
83 ibid.
84 Dr. Esla Richards and Joseph S. Reid, Community Representatives of the Policy Committee of the Transitional Year Program at the University of Toronto, "West Indian community members of TYP Policy Committee protest," Contrast, 8, no. 25, Toronto, 24 June 1976, p. 6.
For example, former student Donna Norris, who entered the program with Grade 10, remarked that: "I wasn't a Marxist when I entered the program, and I never came out of it a Marxist freak, but I know a little about it." Further, in 1976, Eleanor Morgan, a teacher in the program, when asked why there was an intense emphasis on black scholars, and writers in the TYP, stated that: "The real reason was pedagogic. Rule one of Pedagogy is that you begin where the child is."86

Dr. Case asserts that the Crowe Report, which was the catalyst that caused the suspension of the program in the spring of 1976, had little to do with TYP's pedagogy. He contends that the Crowe report was an effort to ruin the career of himself and another professor at the University of Toronto. He recounts:

NO!!! The Crowe report has a different dynamic behind it. It was not only Crowe it was also D'Oyle. Okay. If you speak about Crowe then you have to speak about D'Oyle. And D'Oyle is black. He's still alive. D'Oyle is one of the founders of OISE. There were three professors who founded OISE and he was one of them. Dr. Vincent D'Oyle. A sell out. He was one of those also involved in that particular [Crowe] report. I was Chair of the policy committee of TYP. And one of the members of the policy committee was Cunningham in the department of philosophy. Now, Cunningham at that time was a stalwart member of the Communist Party of Canada. Okay. I was very well known for my very left wing and radical views. What Crowe and D'Oyle attempted to do in their report was to completely destroy the two of us and our careers. So the Crowe report, a lot of it, has little to do, in my mind, with TYP as an institution. But rather with myself and with Cunningham.87

The written record, however, does not mention that there were problems between TYP's policy committee members, Dr. Case and Dr. Crowe. Further, there is little mention of Dr. D'Oyle's role in writing and promoting a report that could have sabotaged the careers of Dr. Case and Dr. Cunningham. This is perhaps how intriguing oral testimony can be in that it often puts a different light on historical events or questions. Unfortunately TYP's policy committee minutes, during the year of TYP's suspension, have been lost. Certainly, TYP's policy

86ibid.
87Dr. Frederick Case, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 2 March 1999.
committee minutes might have shed further light on the "true" reasons for the program's suspension and the motivating factors behind the Crowe Report.88

However, in Case's view, although not addressed in the Crowe Report, there were also sexual improprieties between a few students and teachers that caused problems for the program. According to Dr. Case, sexual relationships between teachers and students were not uncommon throughout the university culture; however, the nexus of race in particular black sexuality made the matter a more serious problem for the establishment.89 As stated earlier, black male students were utilizing a black radical sexual discourse that proposed that racial abuses of the past can be rectified by a sexual revenge in the present.

There were also leadership concerns expressed by both teachers and students in the program. Case recalls:

There was a real crisis in confidence in him [David Nimeo, the then director] by people teaching in the program and by students - by community members. What had happened by then was that a lot of the community members, and 1 class myself with the community members because I was not teaching in TYP nor have I ever taught in TYP - we had had enough of white directors of the program. This is why I was saying that it is so unfortunate that the program ever moved into the University of Toronto. Because from that point onwards it was a succession of white male directors of the program. And the program seems to be with successive male directors less and less committed to its first initial priorities.90

The TYP program was suspended in the spring of 1976 officially because of the charge that it was Marxist and racist.91 The suspension, however, came under scrutiny because the Academic Affairs Committee of the University of Toronto was accused, through the mainstream media, of being afraid to close down the program.

88This researcher was told by participants in this study, that the minutes of the TYP policy committee minutes were available. However they were not found at the locations suggested to the researcher either at the University of Toronto Archives, Simcoe Hall or at TYP headquarters.
89Dr. Frederick Case, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 2 March 1999.
90Ibid.
In a letter to the editor in *The Toronto Star*, William B. Dunphy, Chairman, Academic Affairs, defends the committee:

... a Star report [inferred that] 'some form of intimidation' was at work - your editorial blasted absent members of the Academic Affairs Committee as apparently (not caring) to stand up and be counted [in terms of cancelling TYP] at the risk of being accused of being anti-black or anti-communist.92

Complicating the release of the Crowe Report was another report, conducted by the Re-evaluation committee for the University of Toronto, which praised the program. In the Re-evaluation committee's report, investigators found that 85% of the 53 students in the one-year course were able to complete the program. Further, among the graduates of TYP, 78% were recommended for university. Based on U of T's internal report, TYP was given a temporary reprieve.

The black community was very interested in the continuation of TYP. Alan Hamilton, founder and editor of *Contrast*, a reputable black community newspaper in Toronto wrote: "It is certainly good news to the black community that the University of Toronto has decided to save the Transitional Year Programme (TYP) despite recommendations that it be scrapped."93 Specifically, the black community had a vested interest in the Transitional Year Programme. The black West Indian community benefited especially from TYP. Of the fifty students enrolled in the program in 1976, most of the students were black West Indians with a few black Canadians, aboriginals and working-class whites.94 However, in the end the Governing Council of the University of Toronto accepted Crowe's tarnished report and cancelled the Transitional Year Programmes in the summer of 1976.95

92William B. Dunphy, Chairman, Academic Affairs Committee, University of Toronto, "Criticism of U of T program was inaccurate, he claims," *The Toronto Star*, Toronto, 5 July 1976, CS.
93Alan Hamilton, "Retention of TYP is good news," *Contrast* 8, no. 23, Toronto, 10 June 1976, p. 6.

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Then, in the summer of 1977, the Transitional Year Programme was reinstated with a revised program. This was due to pressure from the black community and the Kelly report which supported TYP. Brathwaite recalls:

> It was black people and other community [members that] became strong advocates and spoke before the Governing Council and spoke for the continuation of this program. And a new committee was set up to review it. It was headed by the then principal of St. Michael's College, Father Kelly. And that report brought in a stronger program! [this is said with great passion] It said not only should the suspension be removed but this program should be supported.

Professor Chase echoes:

> Afterwards there was Father Kelly who was asked by the University to do a report on TYP. The university thinking that Kelly was going to come out with a very conservative report. Kelly had been president of St. Mikes, a very venerable character and eminent voice. They didn't know Kelly! They did not know Kelly! And Kelly came out with a report that completely vindicated the program. And put it back on its feet in a better position than ever before.

The black community, particularly the multi-generational Canadian blacks, were significant in making sure TYP would survive. Students, past and present, were ardent and effective advocates for the program. Although the program was threatened with the loss of financial support by the Ministry of Colleges in 1978, in general TYP since the late 1970s has been solidly institutionalized within the University of Toronto.

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98Dr. Frederick Case, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 2 March 1999.
100See, David Jones, "Transitional Year Program faces Queen's Park axe: How a Grade 11 dropout got into university," The Globe and Mail, Toronto, 17 May 1978, p. 5; Letter to the Editor, "Don't cut off help for needy students," The Toronto Star, Toronto, 20
However, as discussed earlier, since TYP has been ensconced in the University of Toronto, its original ties to the black community have become more tenuous. The program has continued to have mainly white male directors. Keren Brathwaite, although demonstrating a twenty-year commitment to education and the TYP, has never been the director. Dr. Case explains:

However, after the Kelly report that was a watershed. A fundamental principle was established which is in order to have credibility in this hierarchical institution the director of TYP must be a tenured faculty member. The people who teach at TYP up to this point have been tutors and senior tutors. Now that is a situation that the university could change at any moment. They got the money, it would just take a signature from the provost. No problem. They could all become tenured faculty members. But she [Keren Brathwaite] has never been director for that reason.101

Case contends that Brathwaite has all of the skills that are required in order to be director of TYP; she has the administrative skills, community involvement background, and the experience of programming.

In summary, the early history of TYP has been a struggle for survival within the University of Toronto. Perhaps, the history of instability of TYP is a reflection of the lived reality of many of the program's students, who struggled to have access to higher education. TYP represented, within the University of Toronto, a clear commitment to equity and diversity on the campus. Therefore, removing TYP from the University of Toronto would have been an end to an effective dialogue on equity and access in higher education.

5. Keren Brathwaite: education and the black community

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101Dr. Frederick Case, interviewed by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky, Toronto, 2 March 1999.
Brathwaite has viewed black community development to be a complicated process in which organizing for social change should take place in many fronts. There has been criticism, however, that there are too many black organizations in the community and that this has caused an inability to be effective challengers of systems of oppression. Nonetheless, Brathwaite argues that each black organization has an important role. Brathwaite contends that the Ontario Black History Society, for example, has a specific role in recovering and preserving the history of blacks in Canada. The Organization of Parents of Black Children's role, which Brathwaite has been involved with for more that twenty years, has been to ensure that black youth have access to equitable education from primary to post secondary school.

In Brathwaite's case, as an education activist, her associations have been with grassroots black community groups dedicated to improving educational access for black children. Specifically, Brathwaite has organized black parents to be advocates on behalf of their children in primary and secondary schools. The emphasis of OPBC, for example, has been on parental involvement as well as on the content and method of educating black children. Brathwaite states:

The work I'm talking about is where we [black women] have come in and we brought in principles that we know should be part of education. So that we have helped to make some fundamental changes. Anti-racism, equity and parent involvement in education. The work that we have done around this, I still have my submissions. When I used to go to boards and speak about what parent involvement means. They use to look at me and say, "What do you mean? Parent involved in that level?" And then some of our white peers took the things we said - others ran with, as if they said it. Some of the results that should have fallen on our children - have not. Sometimes other groups benefit more from our [black women's] ideas than our children.102

According to Brathwaite, black parents wanted to have a greater role in ensuring that their children would be educated in the classrooms. Therefore, the concept of parental involvement was very important to the black community. However, other communities have also recognized that the educational system could indeed benefit from the input of parents.

The contributions that the black community as a whole have made to education in Toronto have not been fully credited. Brathwaite contends that the black community has recognized that if they did not advocate for their children, the needs of black children would not be addressed. It was never an option to give the state full control over black children’s education. Brathwaite recounts:

I think the black community has really worked hard at being advocates for children and young people. I know that in the Organization of Parents of Black Children that’s been its focus for eighteen years. In doing so, for example, when it was recommended to the Toronto Board that we should have a study of black students and [pause] that study was done and I was on the committee and so on. Some of the recommendations which came out of it benefited the system. There’s a greater understanding, in my view, of what the needs of children and young people in school are.103

Through the activism of Brathwaite and other black parents many ideas for bettering education in Ontario have benefited all students in the province. For example, in September 1998, the Ministry of Education recommended that high school students have an education plan. The black community, according to Brathwaite, had advocated for an education plan in the OPBC reports issued to the Toronto Board of Education in 1986 and 1988.104

Black parents and educators have also been concerned over the psychological violence that black children face in the educational system. Specifically the incidences of racial harassment that go unchecked by the authorities in the schools. Black children, at times, have had to defend themselves from verbal and psychological attacks from their peers.

The provincial government has rightly been concerned with the increasing violence in the schools but its definition of "violence" is problematic. Therefore, the development of the anti-violence policy has been strictly defined as "physical" violence. The OPBC, through Brathwaite's participation, has confronted the provincial government on its anti-violence policy. She explains:

The Ministry came up with an anti-violence policy in the schools. Groups like the Organization of Parents of Black Children, The Black Secretariat,

103 ibid.
104 ibid.
The Congress of Black Women these were the groups who were saying to
the Ministry, "no!" If you put it this way you are just going to press down
on a particular group, and particular groups of students. You need a wider
definition of violence. The violence that some of our children experience
emotionally, psychologically . . . So that when there was this big
conference, a Ministry [of Education] conference on violence, some of us
went to say certain things about the policy.

The policy has in general tended to penalize harshly black children for violent
acts without an investigation into "the violence" of racist psychological abuses
that they may have endured from their schoolmates. In summary, Brathwaite
has maintained a grassroots community approach to tackling inequities in the
educational systems. Brathwaite has utilized the concerns and skills of black
parents to strongly advocate for changes in the schools. Many of the ideas that
have originated in the black community and their parent-led organizations
have benefited all students in the province.

CONCLUSION:

The contributions that Keren Brathwaite has made to the education of children
in Toronto are enormous. Recently, Brathwaite won the Distinguished Educator
Award of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of
Toronto, in which she was "recognized for her work in building representative
parent associations and school councils across the province."105

Brathwaite's life work has also focused on accessing higher education for
black youth as well as young people from aboriginal communities in Toronto. As
a child in Antigua, the notion of community responsibility to the education of
all children was practised by the local adults. A Caribbean view, therefore, of
parental and community responsibility to educating youth has informed
Brathwaite's educational activism in Canada.

The development of TYP by Brathwaite and other black university students
utilized a grassroots community campaign in the black community. Issues of
equity and access were new concepts utilized by Brathwaite and her allies to
propose the need for TYP. In addition, an analysis of race, class, gender and

105 "Transitional Year Program," University of Toronto Bulletin, no. 14, 8 March 1999,
p. 2.
poverty were used to explain the need for TYP. The dynamic idea of TYP and its pedagogy as well as the "unlikeliness" of the program's students made TYP vulnerable to attacks by University of Toronto representatives. Interestingly, TYP was originally seen not only as a tool for community development but also as the groundwork for a future African-Canadian University.

Brathwaite's radical subjectivity came out of her ability to transform her understanding of racial uplift as expressed in her "homeplace" into a liberatory tool for improving educational opportunities for black youth in Toronto. In so doing, Brathwaite has not only contributed to advancing the educational and social goals of blacks in Toronto but also other oppressed groups.
Chapter EIGHT:
Summary

To acknowledge our ancestors means we are aware that we did not make ourselves, that the line stretches all the way back, perhaps, to God; or to Gods. We remember them because it is an easy thing to forget: that we are not the first to suffer, rebel, fight, love and die. The grace with which we embrace life, in spite of the pain, the sorrows, is always a measure of what has gone before.¹

This study has set out to explore the role of black women activists in the educational and social advancement of blacks in Toronto from the 1950s to 1989. I have also been engaged in a number of questions that might uncover the lived experience of the black woman activist. What constitutes the black woman activist? What makes it possible for her to move from the margins to the centre of political debate? How are black women activists initiated into activism? What have black women in Toronto accomplished through their activism? What are new areas of research that might be undertaken to explore black female radical subjectivity? The answers to these questions are complex and warrant further study beyond the project that I have completed.

In the following three sections I will summarize the findings that have emerged out of the research and will suggest, throughout, new areas for future research on black women activists. First, I will examine the nature of black female radical subjectivity. Secondly, I will explore the migration of the radical subject and the effects of social location on activism. Thirdly, I will present an overview of the contributions these women have made to the black community and Toronto at-large.

1a. Radical Subjectivity: black women and activism

Radical black subjectivities exist within an imagined "space" that resides outside of their experiences of oppression. This imagined "space" is a site in which they can "act" within counter-hegemonic discourses that propose various strategies of resistance. These strategies of resistance are risky because they involve working towards changing relations of power within dominant discourses on race and gender. I have found that the nature of black female radical subjectivity among the subjects of this study was complex.

On embarking on this project, I was working with a presupposition that the black female radical subject was conscious of her radical subjectivity. The movement that a black female subject makes from subject to radical subject is multi-faceted. In fact, the process of moving from subject to radical subject involves a combination of early childhood and adult transformative experiences. These experiences expand consciousness and create space to resist. However, the subjects of the study did not set out to actively subvert and challenge the oppression that they and their communities experience. As discussed in chapter two, almost all of the subjects of the study, except for Joan Arbor, when asked whether they were activists, only reluctantly allowed that they were. This perhaps is not an uncommon occurrence among historical black female subjects who scholars might identify as activists.2

For example, Rosa Parks, one of the icons of the civil rights movement in the United States, would not have characterized herself as a radical subject when she refused in December 1955 to give up her seat to a white passenger on a crowded Montgomery, Alabama, bus.3 The Montgomery bus lines were

segregated as were many public facilities in Alabama because of Jim Crow laws instituted at the end of the nineteenth century. At that moment of refusal, Parks was just a tired bus rider who was heading home from a long day's work. This act pushed her into the centre of the civil rights movement and onto the national stage. Rosa Parks did not set out to become an activist; however, she acted upon an inner desire to confront racial injustices.

bell hooks describes below the inner turmoil that occurs before an individual "acts" rebelliously:

There is an inner uprising that leads to rebellion, however short-lived. It may be momentary but it takes place. That space within one's self where resistance is possible remains . . . That process emerges as one comes to understand how structures of domination work in one's own life, as one develops critical thinking and resists from that marginal space of difference inwardly defined.

Parks experienced an internal rebellion that expanded her consciousness and eventually her role in the civil rights movement. I would like to point out that

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6 bell hooks, Yarning: race, gender, and cultural politics (Toronto: Between the lines, 1990), p. 15.
the radical subject's move to the centre does not mean either that she has been co-opted or that she has taken on the position of the dominant power-holders. Rather, it suggests that the radical subject has managed to position a particular social issue or transform organizational and political debates within the mainstream.

The inability of some scholars to comprehend black women's radical subjectivity has been because of generally held, but limited definitions of "radical subjectivity" and "resistance." Patricia Hill Collins points out that in the past, scholarship on activism has tended to confine the definition to labour unions and opposing political parties dominated by white men. However, black women's activism involves their ability to survive the incessant attacks on their self-hood and on the communities that they cherish. Black women's radical subjectivity involves a conscious and subconscious effort to resist every day the reality of their oppression.

In this study, I found that most of the subjects were not engaged in direct political acts as conventionally defined. Most worked in black organizations with black men and/or black women's institutions to bring about economic and social improvement for blacks. A couple of participants worked within mainstream organizations to produce social change for their surrounding communities. All of the subjects were adept at responding politically and socially to the needs of the environments in which they found themselves. Overall, radical subjectivity among these black women was not produced by civil disobedience but by their ability to effect social change through transforming mainstream institutional settings, defining their issues within black women's institutions, and galvanizing their communities to work for social change.

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1 b. Radical subjectivity: family/community and black radical discourses.

Self-valuing and self-definition have been crucial to the development of black women's radical subjectivity. My research has shown that the connection that exists between the black family and the community was a common experience of the women of this study. The way in which a sense of family connectedness could be extended to a larger group of people to make community was a powerful source for affirming and empowering black women to challenge their oppression.

For the participants of the study, the family was a location where an counter-discourse on "blackness" and black female identity was produced. This took the form of creating within the family a mechanism that upheld a positive image of black womanhood independent of negative discourses on black women. In Arbor's case, her mother structured a rhetoric on blackness and self-hood that would ensure that her children would have self-defined identities. This was consistent with Nova Scotian-born Penelope Hodge's family experience in which her father interrogated her on blackness and gender and her proper enactment of those roles. As emphasized in the previous chapters, the black family was a place where parents could exercise some control over their children's view of themselves and their relationship to the world.

However, in Arbor's case, her sexual abuse by her father disrupted the picture of family as benevolent. Joan Arbor's example illustrates that family can be an oppressive structure for black women. Arbor's experience of abuse by her father changed how she would construct her "family" in the future. For example, family would become women-centred politically and socially.

Black female radical subjectivities, in general, were forged in the "home-place" which emphasized self-esteem and racial uplift. The subjects of the

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9 bell hooks, Yearnings: race, gender, and cultural politics, p. 45.
study became radicalized when they sought to put into political action the teachings of their respective childhood families. One example of this is Rita Cox, who experienced family as a broad network of community, the church and extended family.

My family was small and yet large because at that time in my community and I think it still exists today everybody was family. Cousins were family. I came from a second marriage so I had two older brothers from a first marriage. But we never considered, as I hear people in North America, them half-brother and half-sister, I never considered it that way. Because we’re family everybody looked after everybody else. Your teachers were your family. Your church colleagues were your family so it was a very caring kind of growing up. We felt safe and looked after.10

This exchange, when juxtaposed with Cox’s description of the Parkdale Public Library, illustrates how Cox reproduced a "family" network within her workplace:

And if you have to serve in especially such a difficult community you had to have harmony within. In order to have the strength and desire and the ability to reach out to difficult people you see. It was like a family. Things changed in recent years because things changed, everywhere. But still there is that sense in that particular branch of coming together and about sharing.11

Cox provided emotional support for members of her staff on a professional and personal basis. For instance, a member of the Parkdale staff suffered a nervous break down on the job. Cox provided emotional support and assisted that staff member's search for suitable medical assistance.

Cox used a concept of family within the Parkdale Public Library which radically changed the dynamic within the library as well as in the community it served. As in a real family there were conflicts between Cox and some staff

11Ibid.
members who challenged her authority to make changes in the library. However, under Cox's leadership, changes were made within the system which emphasized the library's responsibility to the community.

For example, Cox insisted that all staff members were to do outreach in the community as part of their duties as librarians.\textsuperscript{12} Further, Cox organized evening community get-togethers in the library in which an ethnic group from the neighbourhood was responsible for the food and entertainment for that occasion. The aim of the community get-togethers was to bridge gaps across people of different racial and ethnic groups in the Parkdale community.

The family-like network created by Rita Cox within Parkdale library produced a sense of belonging and responsibility among its members. All of the subjects in my study utilized in various ways the notion of family and community to shore up support for social issues or projects that would benefit and unify disparate members in terms of race, class, ethnicity and political outlook.

Another component of black women's radical subjectivity was the role that reading and the studying of black radical thinkers had in raising their consciousness. In particular, Keren Brathwaite, as discussed in chapter eight, found her voice through the radical teachings and readings to which she was exposed at the University of the West Indies. Brathwaite brought black radical writings directly into her Transitional Year Programme to inspire her black students.\textsuperscript{13} However, within the University of Toronto, Brathwaite struggled against the perceived over emphasis on materials written by black scholars within the program. Further, the radical teaching and curriculum in the program was used to justify the programme's closure in 1975.

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid.

An interesting journey that research could take in the future would be to delve into the connections between black women's radical subjectivity and black popular culture. I am thinking specifically of the many forms of black music within the African diaspora.14

Research that is leading the way is Angela Davis' *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*, which convincingly argues by means of textual analysis that black women's blues songs were part of the roots of black feminism in the United States.15 Textual analysis of Calypso and Reggae songs might illustrate that a connection could be found between the black female radical subject and her participation in movements such as anti-colonialist, and even present-day anti-oppression movements in the diaspora.16

2. Migration of the Radical subject

On framing this research project, I had not originally foreseen that migration and migratory subjectivity were important aspects in deconstructing the radical black female subject. I have found that the migration of the subjects who were Caribbean-born, American and Canadian-born created shifts in their subjectivities. I cannot extrapolate a conclusive argument as to the nature of black female migratory subjectivities from this study, because of the

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14For example, the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s has been touted as the birth of the black intellectual class in the United States. This group has included academics, writers and jazz musicians. See Hazel V. Carby, "The Quicksand of Representation: Rethinking Black Cultural Politics," in Henry Louis Gates, ed., *Reading Black, Reading Feminist: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Meridian, 1990), pp. 76-90.
16Bob Marley, for example, in the 1960s and 1970s was writing powerful lyrics on resistance and survival while black intellectuals were making these arguments in academia in North America and the Caribbean.
small sample available. However, I can offer preliminary ideas on the nature of migratory subjectivity based on this research.

I have noted previously that the nature of the black diaspora has been migratory since slavery. There are, however, differences in the migratory experiences among Canadian black women who are born in America, the Caribbean and Canada which I will briefly discuss. Nonetheless, economic and social advancement are common reasons for the migratory practices among black women who have come to Canada from around the world.

Carol Boyce Davies, in "Transformational Discourses, Afro-Diasporic Culture and the Literary Imagination," suggests that there is a different but "unitary" experience that exists unifying Afro-Diasporic communities around the world. Davies found, for example, commonalities in songs, poems, dances and survival mechanisms between Afro-Brazilians and Afro-Caribbean nationals. She explores these subjectivities as a reflection of her own "migratory subjectivity" and contemplates the notion of a "global" culture. She states:

The concept of migratory subjectivity... allows me to re-articulate it here within the level of contemporary discussions of globalization. In this case, I offer as paradigm the deliberate and directed migration for liberation to other worlds rather than aimless wandering or containment within dominant discourses. Thus is created another set of movements outside of the terms of the political-economic systems in place.

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18 In fact, the migration of racial and ethnic minorities, in general, to "Western" countries is often due to economic impoverishment and political oppression in their countries of birth. See Robert Miles, Racism after 'race relations' (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).
One could argue that the physical migration of an individual must first be preceded by an ability to imagine a life outside the site one is located in.\textsuperscript{20} By changing her geographical and social location the migratory subject has liberated herself from oppressive circumstances. However, with the migration of the subject, ideas, culture, and to some extent the fabric of one’s past society also make a move.

For example, when Caribbean-born subjects came to Canada they brought with them Carnival with all its various incarnations from around the West Indies. Caribana, which to some extent has replicated Trinidad Carnival, has over the years been ‘creolized’ through integrating African-American, black Canadian, and Canadian mainstream culture into itself.\textsuperscript{21} As a former executive director, Joan Pierre has understood that to ensure the festival’s survival, Caribana needed to actively infuse varying musical forms and ideas into the festival. The strategy of survival of Caribana and indeed of the black Caribbean-Canadian community at-large has been to syncretize and adapt to a new society.

Through migration there has also been a creolization of family/community among Caribbean-born black women activists. The very nature of the Caribbean has been to creolize multiple identities, locations and cultures. Mary Chamberlain explains:

Caribbean culture itself is global, a mélange of European, and Native Indian, African and Asian. Elements of each, old and new, have forged, and continue to forge, a unique syncretic cultural form which continues to adapt, incorporate and transform the local with the global.\textsuperscript{22}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{20}Carole Boyce Davies, \textit{Black Women, Writing And Identity: Migration of the Subject} (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 22-23. \\
\textsuperscript{21}Mitch Potter, "Caribana: Hip-hopping into the present," \textit{The Toronto Star}, 3 August 1990, E3. \\
\end{flushleft}
The migration of Caribbean culture into the Canadian context has resulted in its transformation into a new entity which is constantly shifting in scope.23

The migration of both the American and Canadian-born subjects of this project has also impacted their activism and the communities they serve. Interestingly, the migration of black Americans is part of a very long history of blacks in Canada.24 The more recent migration of Joan Arbor (child of the 60s) brings forth a particular radical subjectivity that has been steeped in a history of American civil rights, labour and women's movements.25

The migration of Canadian-born women, in this study, occurred from rural to urban centres and in one case from Nova Scotia to Toronto. They brought certain values and cultural differences that have affected Toronto communities which should be explored more fully in a future project.

3. What have these women accomplished?

The women of this study have contributed enormously to the educational and social advancement of blacks in Toronto by utilizing three strategies: first, the participating in black organizations; secondly, developing transformative practices within mainstream organizations and institutions; thirdly, working at the grassroots community level; and finally, facilitating workshops on social justice issues.

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23 Carole Boyce Davies, Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migration of the Subject, p. 13.
3 a. Black women's organization

I have found that the creation of black women's organizations allowed black women to self-define themselves within mainstream political discourses. Further, they were able to define issues that were important to black women in Toronto and Canada more generally. As advocates for the black community, they were successful in their ability to bring about changes in society in areas such as immigration policy and education.

For example, education was an important issue for both the Canadian Negro Women's Association [CANEWA] and the NCBWC. Both organizations set out to increase attention to the systematic failure of educational institutions to educate black students. Black women in these organizations put forth ideas that would improve the performance of Ontario's educational system in its efforts to educate black students. Through their organizations, black women activists sat on government task forces and on community committees to strategize about educational reform. Specifically, they insisted on these changes to the educational system: the inclusion of black history in the curriculum, the anti-racist education of non-black teachers, the inclusion of more black teachers, and the encouragement of more parental input into community schools.26

3b. Black organizations

Most of the women in the study had significant roles in male-dominated organizations like the National Black Coalition, and the United Negro Improvement organizations. However, the sexism within these organizations limited their role in the decision-making process. Nonetheless, two subjects of this study were able to produce significant contributions to Toronto through black organizations which were run by both men and women. Rosemary Sadlier at the Ontario Black History Society (OBHS) and Joan Pierre through Caribana. Through the OBHS, Sadlier has attempted to uncover and preserve historical documents that illustrate the heritage of all black Canadians. Further, Sadlier and other volunteers of the OBHS have actively gone to school boards as advocates and as speakers to insist on the inclusion of African-Canadian history in the curriculum.

Caribana continues to contribute valuable dollars to the City of Toronto. Under the auspices of Joan Pierre, who ran the festival for over five years, the festival expanded its role and profile in Toronto's mainstream community.

3c. The development of transformative practices within mainstream organizations.

Almost all of the subjects worked in mainstream as well as principally black organizations and contributed their particular vantage point to these organizations. I think what is of note is how black women activists brought the notion of community input into the running of mainstream organizations. This is exemplified in the work that black women have done in contributing to institutionalizing community outreach within both the Toronto Public Library system and the educational system.
3d. Social justice issues and working at the grassroots.

Although not thoroughly examined in this study, black women activists worked significantly at the grassroots level. At the grassroots level they also managed to agitate for changes in immigration and education. For example, employment equity and anti-racism workshops were sometimes spearheaded by black women's institutions but many of these workshops were run by independent black women activists who saw the need.27 They functioned on their own as in the case of Joan Arbor, or as representatives of community or mainstream organizations. During the early 1980s, Fleurette Osborne, both as president of the Congress of Black Women and at the Ministry of Citizenship, designed and performed workshops on affirmative action and pay equity throughout Ontario and Saskatchewan.

I hope that further study on the contributions of black women activists in Canada will be undertaken by researchers. Black women activists reside within contradictory positionalities in relation to power and to resistance strategies that they employ. Although their social change work was rewarding, black women activists struggled against dominant power structures that curtailed effectiveness. Nonetheless, this project has shown that charting the history of black women activists in Toronto can provide insight into the strategies of resistance that the black community has employed over its long history in Canada.

APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

I, the informant named below, give consent for Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky to tape record one or more extended interviews in the production of a Doctoral Dissertation on Black Women's Social and Educational Activism in Toronto from 1950-1990.

The focus of the research is on black women's activism and the impact their work has had on the educational and social development of black communities in Toronto. Further, it will be an exploration of black women's occupational selection and their possible decision to become activists in Metro-Toronto. The final Dissertation will be submitted to the Department of Theory and Policy Studies in Education, The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, at the University of Toronto, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Ph.D.

I understand that the interview(s) I give will be transcribed and used by Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky for both Dissertation and future publication purposes.

I understand that the interview tapes and transcripts may be housed at Ontario Black History Society. I may have a copy of the tape(s) or transcript(s) of my own interview for personal use.

I understand that confidentiality will be respected. If I request, my name or place names used in my interview will be altered to protect my anonymity.

I understand that the final Dissertation or subsequent publications will be available to me as an informant for my perusal.

I understand that I may withdraw from the research at any time during the course of the project. This consent form does not override my right to withdraw from the project.

I HEREBY GIVE MY CONSENT UNDER THE CONDITIONS LISTED ABOVE.

INFORMANT__________________________DATE__________

ADDRESS______________________________

RESEARCHER__________________________DATE__________
PRELIMINARY INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. What was your family life like?

2. How would you describe the economic status of your family?

3. How was educational training viewed in your family?

4. Do you have any siblings, if so what are their occupations?

5. Describe for me how as a child you viewed the relationship or lack of relationship between community responsibility and family responsibility.

6. What types of education have you received and is your present occupation a result of that training?

7. Is your current occupation tied to past job situations?

8. How do you presently view the relationship between community, social, and family responsibility?

9. Describe for me the nature of your job.

10. How do issues of race, gender, sexual orientation and class get taken-up in your workplace and in your community work?

11. How might you define the term activist?

12. Do you consider yourself an activist?

13. Discuss the issues that you face as an activist in your present job situation.

14. How do you view your role in relation to the black community and the larger Toronto community?

15. What do you think has been the impact of black women activists' work on black communities and metro Toronto?
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