Deconstructing ‘Hegemonic Feminism’: The Emergence of ‘Second Wave’ Feminism in Canada (1965-1975)

by

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Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
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Abstract

Drawing on a collection of interviews with Canadian feminists, this thesis explores the emergence of a ‘second wave’ of feminist organizing in Canada from 1965 to 1975. Using insights from poststructural feminism and critical race theory, I deconstruct the notion of ‘hegemonic feminism’ and examine how certain women came to inhabit a position of hegemony during the movement’s early years. I focus on key events in feminist organizing during the 1960s-1970s: The Royal Commission on the Status of Women and the founding of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women. Drawing on oral history interviews and a close reading of the report on the RCSW, I suggest that more nuanced approaches are needed to move beyond the binary thinking that inflects accounts of Canadian feminist history. I conclude with a series of feminist narratives which aim to complicate linear histories and offer an alternative reading of this movement.
Acknowledgments

All work is collaborative. This thesis was no exception.

First and foremost, this work would not have been possible without the existence of the Second Wave Archival Project. The three years that I have spent interviewing women across the country have provided not only the academic fodder for my research, they also challenged me to rethink feminist politics and activism in ways that were unimaginable to me when I began. I am grateful to the women who shared their stories with me and for their willingness to put their histories on the public record. There is a great risk when we tell our stories – a vulnerability and trust that we must assume – and I owe a great debt of gratitude to the women who took this risk. It is hard to believe that a work such as this would have been an academic impossibility a mere forty years ago, this fact bears remembering and I give thanks to the courageous women who made our place within the academy not only possible but essential.

In addition to the women whose stories are recounted here, I would like to thank project organizers Senator Nancy Ruth and Beth Atcheson. That the project grew from its initial ten interviews to the 100 that now live at the Canadian Women's Movement Archives is a testament to their belief in importance of documenting this history. I am thankful also for their continued trust in me – not only to conduct the interviews but to use them for my own research.

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Chapter 1
Introduction: Research Question and Literature Review

Question: What were the conditions of emergence that led to the establishment of a 'hegemonic' feminist movement in Canada (1965-1975)?

Summary:

The goal of my MA thesis research is twofold. First, I want to examine social conditions that led the emergence of a Canadian women’s movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. I will do this by examining a collection of oral history interviews with women who were involved in the movement at this time. The aim, as my research question indicates, is to unpack the conditions - social, political, discursive and economic - that led to the emergence of a 'second wave' of feminist activism in Canada. The decade from 1965 to 1975 (culminating with 1975 being declared International Women's Year by the United Nations) saw an upswing in feminist activism in Canada (Robbins et al. 2008; Bégin 1998; Andersen 2010; Rebick 2005). With the Royal Commission on the Status of Women (tabled in 1970) and the establishment of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (1971) this period can also be read as the entrenchment of a particular mode of feminist organizing in Canada. Under the leadership of white, middle-class women who worked through state-sanctioned channels, this mode of feminist organizing has become a site of critique for its hegemonic and exclusionary nature. This leads to the second goal of my research: to explore how this mode of feminist organizing came to be seen as hegemonic and how this hegemony has been reinforced and rearticulated in the historiography of the Canadian women’s movement. These two goals are inextricably linked and the latter cannot be undertaken without considering the former.
The goal of my intervention is to trouble binaries that seem to plague discussions surrounding the history of feminist organizing in Canada. I am particularly interested in picking apart the binary of “white/hegemonic” feminism and its counterpart “antiracist” feminism by asking: what do these terms offer and what do they foreclose? In order to undertake this project, however, I must engage with the terms that currently shape these debates. Rather than speaking abstractly, let me offer this example to highlight the goals of my work. Sociologist Mary-Jo Nadeau has conducted a comprehensive antiracist critique of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC). In the introduction to her doctoral thesis, Nadeau states that “[m]ore research is needed to adequately interrogate the formation of white feminist hegemony in NAC” (2005: 55). I share Nadeau's concern about the lack of research on NAC's early years as well as how and why the organization was largely run by middle-class white women. Thus, on one hand my thesis will attend to this gap. Drawing on the recollections of women involved at this juncture, I hope to offer insight into how and why the movement took the shape it did. Reading the transcripts of these interviews next to documents from the time (specifically the report on the RCSW) I hope to broaden the debate by examining the contestations and conflicts that led to the emergence of this movement.

My second goal, going back to Nadeau's statement, is to examine the notion of “white feminist hegemony.” Here, I am interested in exploring how this term – 'hegemonic feminism' (Shohat 1998:3) and related terms such as 'western feminism' (Mohanty 1991) and 'imperial feminism' (Parmar and Amos 1984) - have been taken up in relation to a particular mode of feminist organizing. Specifically, how did the notion of “white feminist hegemony” come to have
currency in Canada? What work does this term do? How does it reveal certain hegemonic power relations within the Canadian women's movement and, at times, occlude others? In sum, I am interested in taking seriously the contributions of transnational feminism to the writing of the history of the Canadian women's movement. These contributions are underpinned by examinations of racial hegemony and as such, my work aims at problematizing the notion of “hegemonic” feminism. I undertake this work not to do away with the concept but from a sincere commitment to understanding how certain people come to take up hegemonic positions at certain historical junctures.

My interest then, is to bring into relief the contestations and conflicts that were at play in the decade generally thought of and remembered as the beginning of the 'second wave' feminist movement in Canada (1965-1975). I want to bring the insights from a collection of oral history interviews into conversation with the contributions of transnational and antiracist feminism. Using post-structuralist feminist theory, I do not take these interviews as “truth” (Joan Scott). Rather they offer ways of thinking about both the way subjects are historically and socially constituted and how power relations are shaped by language and discourse. Following Foucault, these interviews help us think about the 'conditions of possibility' that led to the emergence of a particular mode of feminist organizing. Poststructuralist feminist theory helps us think about power relations and complicates notions of agency. It encourages a reflection on the way language works to secure identity and allow certain discourses to become privileged while others are shunted aside. All these insights (which will be unpacked in the chapter on methodology) inform my project.
Literature Review:

My interest in the research question stems from work I undertook as the lead interviewer on an oral history project aimed at “documenting the history of the second wave feminist movement in Canada” (Second Wave Archival Project Literature: 2008). Under the auspices of this project, I conducted more than 100 oral history interviews with women who were involved in this social movement. While I discuss this project at greater length in the methodology section of this proposal, I raise it here because it ties directly to one of two approaches generally taken in analysing 'second wave' feminism in Canada. My work, as part of the Second Wave Archival Project, is similar to several recent endeavours that document women's or feminist history from an 'experiential' perspective. In this tradition, oral history accounts and interviews are a primary vehicle for exploring the experiences of women at certain historical junctures. In this mode of historiography, women's experiences and memories become the site of analysis and are seen as containing important insights that might otherwise be forgotten or overlooked (see: Robbins et al. 2008; Andersen 2010; Rebick 2005).

The second approach draws on contributions from transnational feminism and critical race theory to decentre hegemonic accounts that privilege the experiences of certain actors over others. Transnational feminism asks us to pay close attention to exclusions, contestations and the way that history itself becomes implicated in shaping power relations and hierarchies (Briggs et al. 2008; Grewal and Kaplan 2000; 2006). Both approaches offer useful tools for understanding the history of social movements; transnational feminism in particular offers crucial insights for problematizing the complex relationship between racism and feminism. That being said, neither
approach is wholly adequate for unpacking the historical conjuncture to which my research question attends (1965-1975). In the following section I sketch the contributions that both these approaches have made to the history of the Canadian women's movement. I hope to reveal that while both have made significant contributions to contemporary understandings of the movement, both are limited in what they offer. The first paradigm often takes a celebratory tone that fails to account for those who were not included in the movement, the second, while critical, rarely accounts for the conditions of possibility that activists at the time faced. Both depend on fixed binaries ('socialist' feminists versus 'liberal' feminists; 'mainstream' versus 'radical'; white versus antiracist) that fail to address the overlap, contradictions and negotiations that took place. My hope is to bring these seemingly conflictual approaches into conversation with one another. I do so not to shore up one against the other nor to celebrate certain forms of feminist organizing. Rather my goal is to reveal the intricacies of this historical moment with the aim of broadening current discussions and transcending the (rigid) binaries that plague these analyses.

Paradigm 1: 'Experiential' Accounts and a Linear Account of the History of the Canadian Women's Movement: I am not alone in grounding my analysis of this movement in the biographies of women. Indeed, biography and oral history have become a primary vehicle for documenting this chapter of the Canadian women's movement. This method brings into relief the complexity and contradictions inherent in this movement and accesses versions of history that might otherwise be excluded or overlooked. In recent years, there have been a number of oral history or biographical accounts of this movement, including Ten Thousand Roses (Judy Rebick 2005); Minds of Our Own: Inventing Feminist Scholarship and Women's Studies in Canada and Quebec, 1966-1976 (Robbins et al (eds) 2008); and most recently 'Auto/reflection.'
Autobiographies (Feminisms in Canada and Quebec, 1960-2010 series) edited by Marguerite Andersen (2010). In what follows I will outline what has been written about the historical conjuncture that I plan to explore in my thesis (1965-1975). I offer this as a preliminary sketch drawn from the literature that is available, not as an authoritative history, but as a first attempt to unravel this moment.

Most histories of this chapter of the Canadian women's movement begin with an account of the Royal Commission the Status of Women (RCSW). This document, released in September 1970 and tabled in Parliament in December of that year, is perceived by many as a catalyst of the women's movement that followed. Thus, I begin this account by asking: “What were the (economic, social, political, discursive) conditions that led to the creation of the RCSW in 1967?”

In order to answer this question, it is worth saying a few words about Canada in the 1960s. While the RCSW itself is seen as a catalyst for feminist change, it did not emerge in isolation but rather was the product of an emerging feminist consciousness of this period as well as radical shifts in demography, economics and political culture.

The limitations of oral history have been articulated by a number of scholars – the benefits and limitations of this methodology will be taken up briefly in the methods section of this paper and in greater detail in the thesis proper.
Drawing from the historical literature available regarding this moment (Robbins et al. 2008; Adamson et al. 1988; Bégin 1992; Rebick 2005), I would like to summarize three factors that led to the establishment of the RCSW:

1) Demographic, political and economic shifts in the Canadian context
2) The emergence of a feminist consciousness at the national and global level
3) Women organizing in Canada through established women's groups

**Demographic, political and economic shifts in the Canadian context:**

Chapter 1 of the 488-page Report on the Royal Commission on the Status of Women opens with the following acknowledgement:

The rapid changes which have taken place in Canada, especially during the last 30 years, have profoundly affected the lives of women. Technological developments, urbanization, industrialization and the progress of medical and other scientific research have altered the way they live today, and will continue to alter it. (RCSW 1970: 1)

This chapter, titled “Canadian Women and Society,” goes on to describe the changes in Canadian society that were reshaping social life in the 1960s. The subsequent chapter (“Women and the Economy”) echoes the state of rapid social and economic change with reference to the increasing level of involvement of women in the paid workforce. The demographic and economic changes
to which the Report is referring have been well documented by feminist historians (see the introduction in Robbins et al. 2008; and chapter 2 in Adamson et al. 1988).

Between 1965 and 1975, women's participation in the workforce increased by 70 per cent. Despite this increase, there remained a stark division of labour between 'men's jobs' and 'women's jobs.' In 1971, for example, 64.2 per cent of women in the labour force were isolated in 20 professions. During that time, women earned approximately 57.3 per cent of what men earned. There was also a pervasive gender ideology that assumed that women would leave the paid workforce as soon as they married or had children and that their primary responsibility was as a wife and mother. When women did stay in the workforce, they faced blatant discrimination and were prevented from competing on an equal footing with men in the same position (Robbins et al. 2008). It is essential to note here, as Robbins et al. point out, that while these dominant ‘ideologies’ would go on to become the target of feminist organizing, they reflected a limited perspective on inequality. These ideologies spoke predominantly to the way white, middle-class housewives should be living. They did not reflect the ideological parameters that shaped the lives of other women during this period. First Nations women, for example, had their children forcibly removed from their homes by the Federal Government through the Residential School Program. Working class women had little choice but to work outside the home. These ‘gaps’ reflect both the disjuncture between ideological expectations and lived experience as well as the way in which certain ideological constructs came to dominate the feminist political agenda while others were ostensibly ignored.
In Canadian history, the 1960s represented a time of national identity formation. The immigration laws changed dramatically in the late 1960s to open the country up to more and different immigrants and respond to a labour shortage (Simmons in *ibid*). These changes resulted in a pronounced shift in demographic composition from a predominantly white Euro-American settler society in the early 1960s to a multicultural country of immigrants from around the world. These changes led to the introduction of the official Multiculturalism Policy in 1971 (See Ng 1992 (in Nadeau 2005) and Stasiulis 1997).

The RCSW should be contextualized in relation to these and other government-led efforts to consolidate Canadian identity. In her analysis of the RCSW, Cerise Morris suggests that in order to understand its origins it should to be read as a piece of legislation that defined “the status of Canadian women as a social problem warranting treatment” (Morris 1980: 1). The RCSW was bracketed by the tabling of the B&B Report (The Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism) in 1967 and the FLQ Crisis in 1970. In 1968 Pierre Trudeau ascended to political power on the heels of Expo '67 in Montreal (celebrating 'Man and His World'). Thus, following on the heels of the Canadian Centennial, the RCSW can be seen alongside the 1971 Multiculturalism Policy and the B&B Report as key policy recommendations that shaped Canadian political identity during the late 1960s-1970s (Bégin 1992).

**The emergence of feminist consciousness at the national and global level:**

In her recollections of how the RCSW came into existence, Monique Bégin states quite clearly that the idea for a royal commission came, “culturally speaking from English Canada...I also
observed...how much the American Presidential Commission on the Status of Women set up by President John Kennedy had impressed Anglophone colleagues” (ibid 24). Bégin's statements are supported by comments Judy LaMarsh makes in her autobiography (1969). LaMarsh states that she had been encouraging Prime Minister Pearson to establish a commission modelled on President Kennedy's Commission since the early 1960s. Both statements reflect the way in which a form of feminist activism (albeit state-led) was proliferating across national boundaries. Indeed, the United Nations' Status of Women bureau was pushing for governments to examine the condition of women in their countries. Six nations had already carried out reports on the status of women in their countries in the 1960s (Robbins et al. 1998).

Alongside these political formations, there was a cultural shift towards feminist consciousness through the publications of books such as Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949, translated into English in 1953) and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). In Canada, feminist fiction emerged with the work of Gabrielle Roy (1945) and Anne Hébert (1970) in Quebec and Margaret Atwood (1969), Alice Munro (1968, 1971), Margaret Laurence (1966) and Marian Engel (1968) in Anglophone Canada. Along with musicians, poets, sculptors and filmmakers, the 1960s and 1970s provided fertile grounds for feminist artists of many media.

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2 LaMarsh goes on to say that while the Prime Minister expressed interest, he was discouraged by others close to him.

3 See the introduction to Robbins et al. 2008 for a good account of the cultural influences on the feminist movement.
It was not just the situation of women that was changing dramatically during this period. The baby boom ended in 1957 and the children of this period were coming of age in the relative prosperity of the 1960s and 1970s. This led to an increase in the number of people (including women) attending postsecondary institutions (Adamson et al. 1988; Robbins et al. 2008). These changes came alongside a shift in popular attitudes influenced by social movements happening both internationally and in Canada. Mobilization for civil rights and against the Vietnam War, along with the rise of the Women's Liberation Movement in the United States all contributed to a shifting political climate (Adamson et al. 1988). Canadian women participated in considerable numbers in the peace movement, particularly through the Voice of Women (VOW). These movements coincided with native-rights activism in Canada and national liberation struggles further afield. This charged political climate led to a new zeitgeist that allowed, as Judy Rebick puts it, “my generation [to] believ[e] anything was possible” (xi). This is echoed in Adamson et al.: “I had a tremendous sense of being young and powerful. The 'swinging sixties', long hair, communal living, jeans, dope, loud rock music – all the things our parents hated – showed us how powerful we were” (1988: 39). The birth control pill became available in Canada in 1961 and the Divorce Act came into place in 1968, making divorce more accessible than it had been previously (Robbins et al. 2008).

Women organizing in Canada through established women's groups:

The literature on the history of the Canadian feminist movement distinguishes between the women's groups that pushed for the creation of the RCSW and what Monique Bégin describes as the “radical women's movement” (1998: 28). There is a general consensus that from its earliest years in the mid-to-late 1960s, the Canadian women's movement had two “distinct points of
origin” (Adamson et al 1988: 29). On the one hand there were women from the established women's organizations (“institutionalized” women's movement), including Voice of Women (VOW), the Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW) and the Fédération des femmes du Québec (FFQ). And on the other there was the “community-based” or “grassroots” movement (ibid). This distinction, while imperfect, does attend to a divergence in perspective and at times in approach (sometimes articulated along generational lines, sometimes ideological) that existed within the movement from its earliest years. In relation to the RCSW and this distinction, Bégin writes:

The Canadian women's movement, inspired by the American women's liberation movement, came into being during the existence of the royal commission and could have influenced its work. It did not. The commission did not benefit from discussions generated within the women's movement because we did not know what was going on except through rare public demonstrations... (1992: 28)

While the radical or 'grassroots' women's movement would go on to play an important role in the movement, it was the more established women's organizations that successfully lobbied for the implementation of a royal commission. The details of this campaign will be detailed below but what is important to note here is the collaboration that took place between Francophone women in Quebec (under the leadership of Thérèse Casgrain's FFQ) and Anglophone women in the rest of Canada (under the leadership of Laura Sabia and the CFUW). It was a working relationship between these two women – and hence their organizations – that Bégin attributes to the success of the campaign for a royal commission. Cerise Morris echoes this, arguing that the RCSW resulted from the coming together of three distinct political participants: The federal government, the news media and established women's groups (1980: 8). By 'established' women's groups both
Morris and Bégin are referring to professional and voluntary women's organizations that were instrumental in lobbying for a royal commission. While VOW and FFQ were relatively new organizations (established in 1960 and 1966 respectively); the CFUW had long roots in Canadian history dating back to the early movement for women's suffrage. These organizations shared a social base of upper middle-class white women, most of whom were married. Adamson et al. refer to this as an “‘old girls' network' that gave them not only a sympathetic media voice (Chatelaine) but sympathetic MPs and government officials” (1988: 51). This provided a respectable forum for certain women to participate in public life. The royal commission came into existence because of a concerted and collaborative effort on the part of these organizations.

**Getting the Royal Commission:**

Having made some preliminary comments on the historical context out of which the RCSW emerged, I will now outline how the RCSW came about and discuss its impact.

The history of the campaign to establish the Royal Commission has been well documented (Bégin 1992; Rebick 2005; Williams 1990; Morris 1980): The political climate in the aftermath of the B&B Commission made it necessary that demands for a royal commission come from both sides of the 'two solitudes' (Bégin 1992). Laura Sabia, then head of the CFUW, called a meeting in May 1966 to bring together representatives from established women's groups. Out of this meeting emerged the Committee for the Equality of Women (CEW), chaired by Sabia, which had as its main goal the creation of a royal commission to explore all aspects of the status of Canadian women.
In September, the Fédération des femmes du Québec joined the CEW and together with women journalists in the print media began lobbying the Federal Government (at the time a minority government held by Lester B. Pearson's Liberal Party). Lobbying efforts were assisted by the (only) two women MPs in parliament: Judy LaMarsh (Liberal) and Grace MacInnis (NDP). The CEW drafted an 800-word brief detailing the need for a royal commission and presented this brief to Lucien Cardin, Minister of Justice, in November 1966. The government was polite but dismissive in their response (Morris 1980; Fraser 1975). This recalcitrance led to Laura Sabia stating in *The Globe and Mail* that “If we don't get a royal commission by the end of this month, we'll use every tactic we can. And, if we have to use violence, damn it, we will” (Williams 1990: 742). On February 3, 1967 Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson announced a Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada.

**RCSW:**

The commission sat from 1967 to 1970 and tabled its 488-page report in Trudeau's Parliament on December 7, 1970. The aim of the commission was "to inquire into and report upon the status of women in Canada, and to recommend what steps might be taken by the Federal Government to ensure for women equal opportunities with men in all aspects of Canadian society" (RCSW 1970: vii).

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4 Doris Anderson who was the Editor of *Chatelaine* during this period played a key role in bringing feminist issues to the Canadian public.
Indeed, reading the Report forty years after it landed like “a bomb, already primed and ticking” in Parliament (Toronto Star journalist Anthony Westell in Bégin 1992), one appreciates the degree to which Canadian society has changed. Bégin states that while the commission lacked a general theoretical framework, the commissioners can be seen as “pragmatic” and “liberal” with a commitment to “equal rights” for women (29). The primary issue debated at the time of the commission was whether mothers should work outside the home, and if they did, what kind of support they should receive from the government. Along with a universal childcare program, the Report recommended an increase to the family allowance to support women and families. Reproductive rights were also a central focus of the public debate. While the Report did recommend that the Criminal Code be amended to permit abortion “on the sole request of any woman who has been pregnant for 12 weeks or less” (RCSW 1970: 412); several of the commissioners contested this recommendation in separate statements and a minority report. Most of these contestations opposed the recommendation, arguing that the Criminal Code should not be modified with respect to abortion. One commissioner, Elsie Gregory MacGill, opposed this recommendation on opposite grounds; arguing that the recommendation did not go far enough and that abortion should be removed from the Criminal Code altogether.

Bégin points out that because the commission drew its recommendations from what they heard in briefs and public hearings from women across the country, there were absences in the Report. For Bégin, this is because there was a lack of political language which rendered certain issues off limits. The report does not, for example, identify violence against women as an issue. It is similarly silent on issues of sexual orientation. Beyond that, however, is the reality that at the time that the Report was written, terms such as “gender” had yet to emerge as political
categories. The Report itself was mocked for its presumption to analyse women: an analytical category which had hitherto not been identified as different from 'Man.' Toni Williams (1990) has critiqued the RCSW and its report as a site where a “univocal women's truth” (728) is used as a vehicle for legal reform and social change. Using the notion of a “gen(d)eric” analysis, Williams posits the unexamined category of “women” at the heart of the report renders the experiences of racialized women invisible. Gen(d)eric analysis “combines the ideas that women share a generic oppression 'as women' and that women's oppression is derived exclusively from gender relations” (730). Williams' critique is situated within a firmly anti-racist feminist trajectory which will be discussed at length in the following section.

It is worth citing her critique alongside that of Monique Bégin's comments, however, because both Williams and Bégin – while holding different theoretical commitments – share a critique of the report for what it fails to include. For Bégin, these oversights stem from the commission's lack of a theoretical framework. Coupled with the 'pragmatic' spirit that imbued the project, its desire to represent what they heard from Canadian women meant that when there were topics that women could not or would not talk about (domestic violence, incest, rape etc.) these were overlooked in the final Report. For Williams, the problem is more substantive. The commission, by failing to adequately interrogate the essentialized subject at the heart of the project (i.e. “Canadian women”) fails to address the issues faced by women who may be excluded from “dominant feminist” purview.

**From RCSW to NAC:**

In 1972 many of the founding members of the CEW came together to form an organization that would oversee the implementation of the 167 recommendations of the RCSW. Made up of women in leadership roles from various established women's groups, they formed the National
Ad Hoc Committee on the Status of Women and organized a “Strategy for Change” conference to take place later that year. This conference was funded by the Liberal Party and, as such, brought together a large number of Liberal Party women and civil servants. The composition of delegates was not, however, uniform. Along with Liberal Party members, the conference hosted representatives from the emerging Women's Liberation Movement (characterized as younger and more 'militant' or 'radical') and the labour movement. Many of the women who have come to be identified with this era of the Canadian women's movement were in attendance: Laura Sabia, Kay MacPherson, Helen Tucker, Moira Armour, Elsie Gregory MacGill, Réjane Laberge-Colas, Regina Tait, Grace Hartman and Kay Sigurjonsson (Vickers et al. 1993).

The major debate at the Strategy for Change conference was over whether to establish a government body to address issues pertaining to the status of women. This was pushed by the government organizers and endorsed by Florence Bird who presented the keynote address (Madeleine Parent in Rebick 2005: 29). Madeleine Parent, a leader in the Quebec labour movement opposed the idea of a government advisory council and saw this instead as “the time to set up a movement” (ibid 30). She and other women at the conference, including Laurell Ritchie and Kay MacPherson, brought together a coalition of women to reject the government proposal for the advisory council. I quote Parent at length:

[We] went to Laura Sabia, and we said, this is the time to set up a movement; the recommendation for an advisory committee should not be part of it...
Next we went to the young women's, or radical, caucus. There were about sixty women there. We said to them, the enemy here is not these bourgeois women; they organized this conference, and we have to join with whoever is willing to set up a real women's movement. In the end, they agreed. I called for a disciplined group at the plenary. If we started splitting off among ourselves, then we would certainly lose.

I opened up the debate, and it roared. It was filled with pros and cons right through. It was beautiful. It was the biggest, longest debate of the women's conference. We won, and it was decided that we would have our founding convention the next year. (in Rebick 2005: 30)

Parent's statement is echoed by Laurell Ritchie (22-years-old at the time):

About fifty to seventy young women who considered themselves radical held a meeting during the conference, and a couple of the older women attended as well. There was a wide range of issues, and people wanted a more radical approach, more action than just changing laws. Madeleine [Parent], Grace Hartman and Kay MacPherson forced us to think about the government's agenda and to put forward an alternative. We produced a statement saying that the system was wrong, not just the status of women...We suggested that the women's movement had to be separate from the power structure. There was thunderous applause when the resolution that called for an advisory council was defeated.

(In ibid: 31)

Having thus rejected a government appointed advisory council, the conference delegates voted for the creation of a National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC). As an umbrella organization NAC set as its main priority the implementation of the recommendations of the RCSW: “[T]o evaluate, update and spearhead the implementations of the recommendations of
Vickers et al. point to the fact that NAC was established not to produce policy per se but rather to focus on pressuring government to implement the recommendations.\(^5\)

In the first issue of *Status of Women News* (NAC's official newsletter) it described itself in the following terms:

> NAC does not duplicate nor supersede established organizations. It is non-profit and non-partisan. NAC serves as an educational and communications link for women in Canada who are striving to improve their status and to change the traditional attitudes and habits of prejudice towards women. (Vickers et al 1993: 74)

Kay Sigurjonsson, who was on the NAC executive during its early years, described it as such:

“NAC was pretty establishment...It was pretty middle class and respectable for a long time. But that was a useful thing. Governments gave us a lot of money...because we didn't look as dangerous as we were.” (Rebick 29).

In the following two decades NAC went on to become the face of the Canadian women's movement. During the twenty years that it was most active, NAC was involved in a number of campaigns aimed at improving the status of women in Canada, focusing on a diverse array of issues: from childcare and pay equity, to abortion, pensions and family law reform. Boasting a

\(^5\) Despite the decision by conference delegates to forego establishing a government body, the government did create the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women (1973-1995).
membership base of over 600 women’s groups, NAC was seen by many as ‘the parliament of
women’ (Vickers et al 1993). NAC maintained a relatively amicable relationship with the
Federal government, receiving Federal funding up until 1997. The historical trajectory of this
national organization offers one means of charting the history of the women's movement (see
Vickers et al. 1993; Nadeau 2005). For the purposes of my thesis I will spend some time
dwelling on the relationship between NAC and the wider movement in the early 1970s as I
believe it offers a useful point of departure for examining how certain forms of feminist
organizing became dominant.

Concluding Comments on Paradigm 1:

This paradigm offers a fairly 'comprehensive' account of the emergence of 'second wave'
feminism in Canada. Most dominant historical narratives echo the one I have presented here. As
a historical paradigm, this mode allows us to imagine this movement as fairly cohesive and
following a linear trajectory. In offering the personal testimonials of women who were involved
it attempts to reflect the divergences and contradictions within the movement. That being said,
in taking women's memories as 'facts' rarely do these accounts question the way memory and
subjectivity intersect to produce 'history' (Scott 1992). Often overlooked in these accounts is the
way certain groups of women (particular white, middle class, educated) came to take their place
as dominant while others were left out. Also excluded from these narratives are the multiple
points of contestation that took place throughout Canadian society during this time: Between
women who worked outside the home (labour women); young radicals who did not participate
in NAC but were involved in the anti-Vietnam, anti-colonial struggles; regional tensions
(beyond Quebec and Ontario); struggles between lesbians and gay liberation. The way in which
these contestations trouble existing historical accounts of the movement will be discussed in
further detail throughout this thesis. Before attending to these, however, I turn to a second
analytic paradigm that attends to some of these tensions.

Paradigm 2: Transnational Feminism and Antiracist Critique:

Transnational Turn in Feminist Theory:

Up until this point, I have presented a version of this historical conjuncture that has been largely
shaped by the accounts of women who were involved. I turn now to contemporary analyses
informed particularly by the notion of “transnational feminism.” Before attending to my
research question, I will introduce this body of theoretical work which has come to inflect
contemporary historiography of the Canadian women's movement.

Defining Transnational Feminism:

Those who work with the term 'transnational' argue that it has several genealogies: Namely, anti-
colonial struggle and postcolonial scholarship stemming from the work of Franz Fanon, Anil
Loomba, and Edward Said. It is also informed by subaltern studies, critical race theory, diaspora
studies, feminist legal theory and includes critiques of late capitalism and neoliberalism with a
focus on labour and migration (i.e. Briggs et al. 2008; Grewal and Kaplan 2000, 2006).

Drawing from a wide range of critical work, transnational feminism has several distinct features
which are useful for tracing the rise of antiracist feminism in the Canadian context. Of specific
relevance are two aspects of transnational feminism which I will discuss in detail below. 1) A
critique of the nation-state and 2) a challenge to “imperial feminism” and the emergence of “intersectional analysis” as a way of theorizing systems of oppression.

These notions of transnational feminism have profound implications for the way we do history. History itself becomes a site for a critical analysis that takes into account issues of representation and power. Essential to this work, then, is an understanding of how transnational feminism works to problematize and contest dominant historical narratives.

**The Nation is the Question:**

Central to my understanding of transnational feminism is a critique based on the decentring of the nation-state. A transnational feminist perspective on the nation does not assume the nation to have an ‘always-already’ quality. Rather, the nation is a site of contestation. Drawing heavily on post-colonial theory, the nation comes to be seen as an object of critique, as a site where racial hierarchies are established and maintained, where difference is organized and where conflict is managed. Briggs et al. argue that transnational feminism works against writing histories or analyses that take national boundaries as fixed, implicitly timeless, or even always meaningful, and for a quite different role for history-writing and criticism – one that directly challenges the nation by revealing nationalism as ideology. (2008: 627)

By ‘revealing nationalism as ideology’ a transnational perspective brings colonialism, capitalism and neoliberalism into the analysis. The violence that underpins the formation of the nation state
particularly in the form of Euro-American colonialism – becomes central to our understanding of contemporary subject formation. Indeed, through this lens, the nation becomes an actor that mediates identity formation. Of particular relevance to my work is the role that the Canadian nation-state plays in structuring relationships between the state and its citizens and between citizens themselves. Specifically, a transnational analysis of Canada brings into relief critiques of democratic pluralism and multiculturalism that are at the heart of the Canadian project.

Sunera Thobani (2007) has examined the specific nature of Canadian nationalism and how it informs Canadian identity formation and notions of subjectivity. Describing Canada as a “racialized dictatorship” that places the white citizen-subject on the top in relation to “Indians” and “immigrants, migrants and refugees” (Thobani 2007: 6), Thobani's analysis is useful for understanding the relationship between stakeholders in the Canadian nation-state as they have been both historically constituted and politically marginalized. Conceiving of Canada as a racialized state runs counter to hegemonic notions of pluralism and multiculturalism that have become the hallmark of the ideologies surrounding the nation-state. These ideologies serve “as an effective defence against the real substantive demands that the articulation of cultural difference...makes upon democratic pluralism” (Bhabha 1992: 235).

Critiques of Imperial Feminism:

Central to my analysis of the rise of anti-racist feminism in Canada is the broader critique of what is variously called 'hegemonic feminism' (Shohat 1998:3), 'western feminism' (Mohanty 1991) or 'imperial feminism' (Parmar and Amos 1984). Briggs et al. point to the debate between
Pratibha Parmar and Valerie Amos and Robin Morgan in 1984 as a turning point for questions of who was embraced by universal notions of feminism: Morgan celebrated “Global Sisterhood” while Parmar and Amos retorted that such a thing could only be named “imperial feminism” (Briggs et al. 2008: 631). This debate coincided with a number of important publications by women of colour in the United States articulating the need to incorporate an analysis of race into questions of feminism. These writers demonstrated the way in which women of colour faced sexual oppression within their communities and racial oppression outside it. Kimberlé Crenshaw articulated the need for an “intersectional” analysis which examined the multiple oppressions faced by women of colour (1989).

The notion of an intersectional analysis was also integral for women of colour organizing in Canada. Himani Bannerji's 1987 article in Resources for Feminist Research, “Notes Towards an Anti-Racist Feminism” was influential in calling attention to the way women of colour were excluded from the mainstream Canadian feminist movement. Along with Bannerji, significant texts included We are All Rooted Here and You Cannot Pull Us Up (Bristow et al. 1994) and Makera Silvera's Silenced (1995). This work helped formulate a critical theory that spoke to the experiences of women of colour in Canada, against hegemonic narratives of multiculturalism

6 Other significant texts include This Bridge Called My Back (Moraga and Anzaldua 1981); But Some of Us Are Brave: All the Women are White, All the Men are Black (Hull, Scott, Smith 1982); Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism (Mohanty et al. 1991) and the statement from the Combahee River Collective which read:

[W]e are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives.
and democratic pluralism. Sherene Razack further developed the notion of intersectionality by discussing the ways that “women are produced into positions that exist symbiotically but hierarchically” (1998: 13): that is, professional white women and the racialized domestic workers who work for them. The 'hierarchical symbiosis’ reflected through Razack’s work complicates single-axis interpretations of power demonstrating the complex ways in which subjects are produced in relation to one another. These scholarly interventions emerged alongside, and were clearly mutually influential on, the development of an anti-racist feminist practice in the feminist movement in Canada (see also: Robertson & Dua 1999; Bannerji 1992; Carty 1993). For example, in February 1987, the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) hosted a conference entitled: Women and the State: A Conference for Feminist Activists. This conference was significant in developing a critique of hegemonic feminism (Weir 1987).

History/Power/Representation:

Integral to the concept of transnational feminism is a re-evaluation of the way knowledge is produced and history is written. In articulating the need for a feminism that speaks to the experiences of women of colour in Canada, Himani Bannerji writes that “[t]he point is to shift the centre itself from the mainstream to the so-called margin.” (1993: xix). What she is implying, I believe, is a radical shift in positioning away from the hegemonic, white, western subject to the marginalized, “silenced” other. Here she draws on the work of Chandra Mohanty (1991) for whom representation is key to understanding how power organizes difference. For Mohanty, the centre always needs the periphery or margin to understand itself:
Western feminists might have succeeded in joining the 'centre' but they did so by defining the 'Third World woman' as Other. Power, then, works through the ordering and organizing of difference: who is re-presented by whom and who is “silenced” (Bannerji 1993). It falls to historians to take seriously these critiques of representation and to examine carefully the discursive practices we employ in our work. A concerted effort to “renarrativize” the story of second wave feminism in Canada has been taken up most explicitly by Mary-Jo Nadeau (2005) and Davia Stasiulis (1999), both of whom use the notion of “relational positionalities” to examine how white feminists in Canada can be both “oppressed and colonizing” (Stasiulis 1999:211). Similar efforts have been taken up by Antoinette Burton (1994) and Mariana Valverde (1992), both of whom explore the imperial narratives that were active in the earlier feminist movements (Burton in Victorian England and Valverde in the Canadian suffrage movement). As Burton puts it, these cases present “an important historical example of how even an oppositional politics can inscribe hegemonies in its ideological practices” (1994: 20).

**Transnational Feminism and the History of the Canadian Women's Movement:**

Influenced by this shift towards a critical perspective and an interlocking perspective, new scholarship has emerged that takes seriously a decentring of both the nation-state and a universalising, essentialist feminism. Njoki Nathani Wane (2002), for example, has been crucial in developing Black Canadian feminist thought.
Back to the Drawing Board is a series of essays aimed at “carv[ing] out a critical space” (15) for Black Canadian feminist theory. Drawing on the efforts of Black feminist scholars in Britain and the United States (Patricia Hill Collins), as well as the work of a handful of Black Canadian feminists (Sylvia Hamilton, Dionne Brand, Linda Carty), Wane et al. articulate the necessity of a theory that speaks to the unique, though heterogeneous and contested, realities of the Black Canadian feminist experience: “to find and articulate a feminism that speaks to my historical and contemporary experiences – a multi-layered feminism that incorporates the ideologies of African, African-American and White feminisms and that places Black-Canadian women in the centre” (17). The essays in this collaborative collection speak to the experiences of Black Canadian women and work against homogenizing narratives that might occlude the histories of these women.

Like Wane, the 1999 collection Scratching the Surface: Canadian Anti-racist Feminist Thought (Dua and Robertson) seeks to carve out space in contemporary historiography to take seriously the roles of women of colour in Canada. In the introduction to this work, the authors articulate the emergence of anti-racist feminist thought in Canada by identifying three “cornerstones:” 1. Discursive deconstruction of race in Canada (influenced by Himani Bannerji) which leads to an understanding of how racism is structurally and discursively embedded in everyday life. 2. The Eurocentric nature of Canadian society tied up in ideas of the family, motherhood, nation and morality and particularly the relationship between whiteness and Canadianness (here they reference Roxanna Ng's 1989 work on immigrant women) and 3. The relationship between anti-
racism and socialist feminism which has been actively thwarted by the Canadian nation-state (Dua 1999: 14).

Concluding Comments on Paradigm 2 and Summary of Literature Review:

Transnational feminism has led not only to significant theoretical contributions about the experiences of women of colour in Canada but it has also come to inform how history of the early years of the Canadian women's movement has been written. In their collection on the history of Women's Studies in Canada, Robbins et al. (2008) acknowledge the “blind spots and lacunae” of this movement (328). They address explicitly the limitations of early feminist activism that was centered on the axes of sexual oppression alone. Similarly, Judy Rebick’s 2005 account takes seriously questions of race. Her oral history collection attends to the contradictions and exclusions that were felt by women in the movement and discusses exclusions based on physical ability, sexual orientation and race.

In reviewing the literature on the history of the Canadian women's movement I have attempted to reflect the binary that exists between what Mary-Jo Nadeau describes as the “white feminist mode” and the “antiracist feminist mode” of writing history (2005: 12). In her work, Nadeau

7 Left out of this particular discussion of Canadian anti-racist feminism is the little explored relationship between immigrant women and women of colour. Below, I discuss the relationship between (white) immigrant women and feminist organizing and suggest that greater attention ought to be paid to the way in which 'immigrant' has come to be always already imagined as a woman of colour. This imaginary makes it difficult to problematize the (complex) relationship between the nation-state, immigrants and racism.
uses critical race theory and transnational feminism (“antiracist feminism”) to “renarrativize” NAC. While interventions such as Nadeau's are useful for rethinking and rewriting the history of the movement – against otherwise static, linear and celebratory histories – her account also takes certain 'foundations' as unmoving and fixed. Rather than examining how discourse, subjectivity and memory intersect or what conditions of possibility exist for actors at certain historical moments, these (re)narratives reinscribe subject positions and take identities as always already fixed and unchanging: in Nadeau's case “the anti-racist feminist” and “white feminist.”

Thus, both paradigms fail to examine the way power and discourse operate through subjects in mutually constitutive ways. My aim, then, is to bring these two seemingly contradictory lenses into conversation with one another using a feminist post-structuralist approach that attempts to break down and render fluid the fixity of current debate.

Nadeau acknowledges that overcoming this binary was a struggle that she faced throughout her dissertation: “I struggled with the question of how to map out the story of racial-national power relations in NAC that does not a) reproduce an overdetermining binary framework of “white feminism”/”anti-racist feminism”, or b) erase the multiplicity of struggles that have contributed to the history of NAC.” (2005: 316)
Chapter 2

At the heart of this thesis is a tenuous web that binds fact and fiction, truth and memory. *Contra* normative oral history accounts that take these histories as ‘fact’, my work hopes to productively trouble the rigidity of these binaries. Following Toni Morrison, I am curious about the relationship between fact and *truth*. Accounting for the work of fiction writers, Morrison suggests that the opposite of fact is not fiction, but a kind of truth. That is, there are truths that do not exist as facts, they exist, rather, in the “interior life” of the unknowable subject (for Morrison the slave of the transatlantic slave trade). Her work as a writer of fiction is to discover and write the “truth” of that subject's interior life: “[T]he crucial distinction for me is not the difference between fact and fiction, but the distinction between fact and truth. Because facts can exist without human intelligence, but truth cannot” (1987: 112).

Like fiction, oral history narratives trouble facile distinctions between what is 'fact' and what is 'true.' The stories that people remember and tell are sometimes not factual, and yet, does this make them untrue? To think through these conundrums, I have found it useful to explore the contributions that poststructural feminist thought brings to the production of history. Specifically, I am interested in exploring how insights from poststructural feminism on agency, power and subjectivity might inform broader questions about the history of the Canadian
women's movement. I am also interested in moving these theoretical contributions to the level of reading, interpretation and ultimately historical methodology. It is in this chapter that I elaborate the theoretical and methodological framework underpinning this thesis.

This chapter proceeds in four parts. In the first, I outline the parameters of an oral history project called the Second Wave Archival Project – the interviews collected under the auspices of this project make up the bulk of 'data' that I will be using for my MA thesis. In the second, I detail the theoretical framework that informs this work: Specifically poststructural insights on knowledge production and history; political agency and discourse, and power and subjectivity. In the third section, I attempt to translate these theoretical insights into more 'concrete' practices of reading and interpretation: How might a poststructural framework invite a different way of reading/interpreting these oral history interviews? In the final section of this chapter, I make some preliminary comments about the benefits of using these methodologies. I suggest that this approach opens up different ways of reading that make visible the discontinuities of history and the politics embedded in practices of remembering. This helps challenge normative historical accounts and thus make possible new ways of doing, writing, reading history.

The Second Wave Archival Project:

Between 2008 and 2010, I was employed as the lead researcher on an oral history project aimed at documenting “the history of second wave feminism in Canada” (Project Literature 2009). Under the auspices of the Second Wave Archival Project, I conducted more than 100 interviews with women in the following provinces and territories: Ontario, Alberta, British Columbia, Nova
Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, the Yukon and the Northwest Territories. In no way complete, these interviews nevertheless make an important contribution to the history of a movement that is only now being written. These interviews were digitally recorded and are housed at the Canadian Women's Movement Archives (CWMA) at the University of Ottawa. The first forty interviews took place in Ontario and were all transcribed. I was the primary interviewer and completed the transcriptions myself.

For the purposes of my MA thesis, I will be drawing on the interviews from the Ontario portion of the project. I will be using the transcripts as the basis for answering my research question. This makes sense given that many of the early 'national' organizations were actually based in Ontario (Toronto and Ottawa) and were staffed by Ontario residents – the regional limitations of the early years of the movement is a point of interest in my thesis. Additionally – and pragmatically - working with the transcripts alone limits what might otherwise be a massive undertaking well beyond the scope of an MA thesis.

About the interviews:

The oral history portion of the Second Wave Archival Project grew out of an earlier document retrieval and archival project that commenced in 2007. Originally, project organizers\(^9\) hoped to

\(^9\) The project was a collaborative endeavour between the Canadian Women's Movement Archives (at the University of Ottawa) and a private Toronto-based foundation: Nancy's Very Own Foundation (NVOF). NVOF was
collect documents and ephemera from the 'second wave' feminist movement in Canada. Finding these documents difficult to locate, project organizers decided that oral history interviews would be a more effective means of capturing this history.

Partnering with the Canadian Women's Movement Archives helped formalize the project: An interview list, interview guide and consent form were developed. The project began with the intention of interviewing approximately ten women in Ontario who had been active in the early part of the movement (1960s). Priority was given to women who were active early in the movement and those who were oldest on our list. The second consideration was to reflect the diversity of the movement through the interview selection. An early goal of the project was to include the experiences of women of colour, aboriginal women, women with disabilities, and women who identify as LGBT (lesbian gay bisexual or transgender). The project quickly snowballed beyond the original ten and by the end of the first part of the project (May-October 2008) I had completed more than forty interviews.

Both the interview guide and consent form were drawn up with input from legal and academic experts. The consent form (Appendix A) was drafted by lawyers working on the project with input from the CWMA. While clearly stipulating that the recordings would become property of the CWMA, drafters of the form were careful to include a

established by Canadian Conservative Senator Nancy Ruth – a feminist philanthropist and self-identified 'second-wave feminist.'
section where interviewees could restrict access to their interview. The consent form also states that interviewees will be provided with a copy of the transcript of their interview. The contents of the consent form were reviewed in some detail with participants prior to commencing the interview and again following the interview (at which time they were asked to sign the form and identify any restrictions they might wish to include).

The interview guide (Appendix B) was created with collaboration from feminist academics from a range of disciplines (history, sociology, etc.) along with the project coordinator who had a background in oral history and feminism. There were two stated goals for the interviews: First, to generate stories for 'the next generation of feminists' and second to create permanent archival records for use by future researchers.

The interview guide attempted to keep questions general so as to elicit a wide range of answers. These questions are loosely grouped into four categories. The first section focused on how participants came to be involved with feminism. Part two of the interview explored the more formal structures of the feminist movement (organizational affiliations, group membership etc.). The third set of questions is aimed at unearthing what it felt like to be part of the movement. Lastly, we asked interviewees to look back and consider issues that they believed to be of relevance for young women/feminists today.

Except when asked, interviewees were not given the interview guide prior to the interview. Included in the guide but appended to the open-ended questions was a list of
demographic questions. These were used as follow-up questions at the end of the interview to make sure no relevant information was missing.

While the guide was useful for structuring the interview, the project took the approach that the interview should be ‘driven’ by the interviewee (and not the interviewer). One technique employed to facilitate this was a visual exercise. I would draw a line across a blank page and ask the interviewee to recall the significant events in their life (date of birth; year of graduation; marriage; divorce; birth of first child etc.). This “life line” then acted as a useful memory prompt and framework for the interview. This was particularly effective given that many of our interviewees were quite elderly and the events we were discussing took place decades earlier (for example, the Royal Commission on the Status of Women commenced in 1967 and many of the interviewees remember this being a catalyst for their involvement in the movement).

**Reflexivity and Positionality:**

The CWMA collection presents researchers with an overlapping, multi-layered and contradictory account of a social movement that is itself rife with contradiction and disharmony. Because of the contradictions and challenges it is through these interviews – informal, in-depth, unstructured life histories – that I have come to understand feminism, feminist organizing and the complexity of this particular social movement.
24-years-old at the time, I was hired precisely because of my age and the fact that I had not participated in the period of feminist activism under examination. One of the stated goals of the project was to collect stories that would be of interest to younger Canadian women – “the next generation of feminists” (Project Literature) - and it was felt that a younger interviewer would be better able to elicit those stories. My youth and relative inexperience have been a blessing and a curse throughout this project, but certainly, having not participated in the movement and being unaware of much of the internal politics and struggles, I was well positioned to ask (sometimes quite unintentionally) questions that someone closer to the movement might have avoided (see Bragg 2009).

It is also important to note here that as a white, university-educated, middle-class and heterosexual woman, I shared a race and class background with many of the women I interviewed. Interviewees often commented that I reminded them of their granddaughters or nieces. It is also important to note that the project was an initiative of Senator Nancy Ruth and as such, her status and connections granted me access to people that I would not have otherwise had. Both these facts – a shared race and class background, as well as Nancy Ruth's influence and reach – should be considered when accessing and using the interviews.

Also relevant is the way the project evolved over time. The reach of the project expanded both regionally (well beyond Ontario) and in terms of participation. For example, on the advice of women in Northern Canada, we changed the language of the project (dropping the word “feminist”) to solicit participation of Aboriginal and First Nations women in Northern
communities who did not identify as “feminists” but who had been involved in important work for women in the communities. Similarly, the project which began with fixed dates (1960-1990) became less bounded as we encountered women who were very active in the women's movement well into the 1990s and up until today.

Having spent the last three years working on this project, I decided to invest this year in thinking through some of the questions that have been generated through the interview collection. In some ways my process is backwards for a typical Master's project where a question is developed and then research is conducted in order to answer that question. I have found poststructural feminism useful for helping me work through this disjuncture – working as I am with a collection that was generated several years ago when my questions were different from the ones I have today. In the following section I detail these contributions.

**Poststructural Feminism:**

Poststructural feminism has offered me a way of approaching a large and unwieldy collection of 'data' that has at times felt inaccessible. The desire by researchers to create what Foucault called “continuous history” (in Scott 1992: 789) is so pervasive that I felt inordinate pressure to create out of this collection of stories – an 'appropriate' – continuous – narrative of this social movement. To produce a 'continuous history' of the Canadian women's movement would have required that the wealth of diversity and contradiction that these interviews reveal be ironed out and erased. As a co-producer of these interviews, in no way could I ignore the questions that these stories generated. To dwell on them, however, would come at the expense of producing a
history that was linear and that ran counter to existing – dominant – narratives of the movement. While I cannot claim that these tensions are fully resolved, I have found that poststructural feminism suggests new ways of thinking about knowledge production and history.

I am particularly interested in the way that poststructuralism opens up and complicates humanist ideas of the bounded and fixed 'knowable' subject. I am curious about how these insights can be employed when reading and analysing my 'data' (transcribed interviews). It is this question – of how to use poststructuralism – that I will explore in this chapter.

Poststructuralism helps me think about these interviews beyond the 'truth' that they offer. Following Joan Scott (1992), I am curious about what these transcripts might reveal in terms of the construction of subjectivities, identities, agency, language and experience. In the introduction to Feminists Theorize the Political, Butler and Scott (1992) write that poststructuralism “is not, strictly speaking, a position, but rather a critical interrogation of the exclusionary operations by which 'positions' are established” (xiv). Similarly, Denise Riley (1988) argues that feminist history must examine how and why certain categories of analysis (i.e. “Canadian women”) come to have salience at particular historical conjunctures. The task of poststructuralism then, is not to produce linear and holistic historical accounts, rather, it is to reveal the contradictions, ambiguities and disjunctures out of which historical events emerge.
In what follows, I will highlight some key insights from poststructural feminist theory that are integral to my project. I offer these not as a complete 'overview' of poststructuralism - as Judith Butler has noted, this paradigm defies that kind of “unification” (1992: 6) – rather, I hope to present several conceptual tools for thinking, and rethinking, history. The research question driving my thesis is informed by poststructural feminist thought about history and subjectivity, as such, a discussion about these terms is essential - both for understanding the project at hand and how I will be tackling it.

**History/Knowledge/Foundations:**

Joan Scott's 1991 critique of 'experience' offers a useful point of entry for thinking through the relationship between personal accounts and historical narratives. Scott critically observes that the move to incorporate 'marginal' stories into the hitherto masculinist project of writing History, has been simply a “project of enlargement” (777). That is, the shift to include the 'experiences' of women, workers, lesbians and gays, people of colour (etc.) into the project of history-making and writing has merely expanded that historical base while keeping identities fixed and bounded and the structure of historical work itself, intact. Leaving 'experience' as an unexamined category means that historians fail to account for how those who have these 'experiences' shape identity and subjectivity, how difference between subjects is constituted and how agency weaves itself/is woven through these contested spaces.

For Scott, writing history should not be about broadening the playing field to included 'marginal' stories or experiences (i.e. women in Canadian history), but rather, it should be to take “the
emergence of concepts and identities as historical events in need of explanation” (793). Quoting Stuart Hall, Scott argues that categories of identity – for Hall “blackness” - are historically produced, always contingent, always shaped by and shaping discursive possibilities (792). The role of the historian, then, is not to take these categories as immutable, but to problematize, historicize and question the work that they do.

Like Scott, Denise Riley (1988) is critical of the way that feminist history takes certain categories of existence as fixed and bounded. Riley suggests that “‘women’ is indeed an unstable category, that this instability has a historical foundation, and that feminism is the site of the systematic fighting-out of that instability” (Riley 1988: 5). Riley's emphasis on the construction of the category of ‘women' in history is particularly relevant to this project: Her insights demand that we examine not simply the story of women struggling for rights in Canada, but that we examine how this category of identity - “Canadian women” - came to have salience and meaning. I do not see these projects as mutually exclusive. They are, in my estimation, inextricably linked: the project of feminist struggle in Canada was always a struggle over language and positionality: of staking out and claiming space to become “numbered among Humanity” (Riley 1988: 9), yet this project was always imperfect, always contested and always fraught with contradictory claims for recognition. It was also always a struggle over the meaning of the category of ‘woman’ – and how this category came to have political relevance. My project, then, is to explore these contestations.
Like Scott and Riley, my work is indebted to Michel Foucault's notion of genealogy (1977). Foucault's contributions to thinking about the way certain categories come to have meaning—homosexuality, madness, sexuality—inflect poststructural thinking about the relationship between language and history. Of genealogy, Foucault writes:

[T]he development of humanity is a series of interpretations. The role of genealogy is to record its history: the history of morals, ideals and metaphysical concepts, the history of the concept of liberty or of the ascetic life; as they stand for the emergence of different interpretations, they must be made to appear as events on the stage of historical process. (Foucault In Scott 1991: 796)

Thus, for Foucault, as for Scott and Riley, our task is to examine 'the emergence of different interpretations.' One way to do this—again following Foucault—is to excavate the discursive conditions that enabled these emergences. This is what I will take up in the following section.

**Discourse/Agency/Power:**

**Discourse:** The relationship between language and meaning is at the heart of poststructural analysis. Rather than assuming that there is a 'real' that is reflected to us through language, poststructuralist critiques invite us to see language for its *productive* qualities (St. Pierre 2000). That is, language and meaning are always already implicated the one with the other: Language shapes the social and material experiences of everyday life. Like genealogy, much poststructural thinking around this relationship is owed to Foucault. His concept of *discourse* enables the genealogical approach to history discussed above.
For Foucault, discourse shapes not just institutions and structures, but also the way individuals become subjects enmeshed in relations of power. It is also a non-linear and dynamic process that moves in multiple directions: discourse shapes institutions and subjectivities and in turn, subjectivities and institutions shape discourse. Discourse, then, can be understood as producing subjectivity. Elizabeth St. Pierre writes: “Deconstructive analyses...puts the autonomous, present individual of humanism sous rature by positing that the subject does not exist ahead of or outside language but is a dynamic, unstable effect of language, discourse and cultural practice” (2000: 502). Thinking about the subject as embedded in language and discourse is central to my project. Understanding the productive work of language – especially in relation to subjectivity – changes my way of reading and interpreting my transcribed interviews. If subjects are 'effects' of language - produced historically and contingently - than we might read these transcripts for how subjects are constituted through the language they employ and the conditions that they understand as available to them:

Even more important, the rules of discourse allow certain people to be subjects of statements and others to be objects. Who gets to speak? Who is spoken? Discourse can never be just linguistic since it organizes a way of thinking into a way of acting in the world. (St. Pierre 2000: 485)

The mutually constitutive relationship between subjectivity, history and discourse is at the heart of my project. What conditions of possibility were available to women in the 1960s and 1970s? Who was able to speak 'for' Canadian women? How did the category of 'Canadian women' come to have meaning? These questions are linguistic, surely, but they are also bound up with the way (feminist) subjects were constituted: politically, socially, historically.
Agency: At the heart of poststructural feminism is the troublesome question of agency. Much of the contentious debate around the 'linguistic turn' – and the subsequent critique of 'foundations' (Butler 1992) that it engendered – surrounds questions over power and agency. To paraphrase Judith Butler's rhetorical question: What is left of feminist politics without the foundational category of 'woman'? Butler asks this rhetorically, of course, because for her, poststructural critiques of the unified, knowable subject of humanist political projects are a vital pretext for progressive feminist politics:

A social theory committed to democratic contestation within a postcolonial horizon needs to find a way to bring into question the foundations it is compelled to lay down. It is this movement of interrogating that ruse of authority that seeks to close itself off from contest that is, in my view, at the heart of any radical political project. (1992: 8)

To critique the humanist subject is also to critique the notion of rationality and agentic subjectivity that accompanies it. If subjects are the 'effects' of language and discourse, what possibilities do these subjects have for resistance, agency, freedom?

Power: For Foucault power must be understood relationally. Of power, he writes that it ‘comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled as the root of power relations ... no such duality extending from the top down’ (in St. Pierre 2000: 490). Foucault's notion of power runs counter to many feminist claims about the shape and work of patriarchy. Yet it opens tremendous possibilities for (re)thinking the complexity of relationships between women and men and also between different women in different circumstances. As Judith Bennett put it (controversially) “Women have not been merely passive
victims of patriarchy; they have also colluded in, undermined and survived patriarchy” (Bennett 2006: 67). Similarly, insights from feminists of colour have pointed to the gross inequalities between women and the necessity to challenge “imperial” claims about sisterhood and the 'universal' oppression of women (see for example: Parmar and Amos 1984; Mohanty 1991; Moraga and Anzaldua 1981; Smith et al. 1982; Bannerji 1992). These poststructural and post-colonial critiques have paved the way for accounts of oppression that are more attentive to the 'intersectional' and complex ways that power operates.

Foucault's notion of power as relational complicates facile binaries between oppressor and oppressed. He also suggests that where there is power there is freedom:

It should also be noted that power relations are possible only insofar as the subjects are free. If one of them were completely at the other’s disposal and became his thing, an object on which he could wreak boundless and limitless violence, there wouldn’t be any relations of power. Thus, in order for power relations to come into play, there must be at least a certain degree of freedom on both sides. (St. Pierre 2000: 490)

This question or possibility of freedom is a site of intense inquiry by feminist thinkers (for example: Mahmood 2005; Butler 1990). It is also central to my own project – my questions are directly interested in how groups take up positions of resistance, how they claim authority and how they form political subjectivity. Given that power is relational and subjects are constituted in and constitutive of discourse and language, how might one think about the political agency of
feminist activists in Canada in the 1960s and 1970s? This question – and the others that it engenders – is predicated on a notion of agency informed by poststructural feminism. In order to think about these questions, I have found Judith Butler's work on subjectification useful.

Reflecting on this work, Bronwyn Davies writes that, for Butler, “[t]he subject does not have an existence that lies outside of or prior to these acts of formation. It does not construct its own conditions of possibility separate from its performance of itself within those conditions” (Davies 2006: 426). This is not a deterministic position. The subject is produced, for Butler, through an interplay between submission and mastery: the subject who is produced as an effect of discourse is the same subject who masters these discourses and may 'turn them against themselves.' While agency always takes place under certain conditions of possibility – not all of which can be freely chosen – subjects hold within them the ability to know, reconfigure and rearticulate the powers that surround them. Davies quotes Butler at length:

[T]o claim that the subject is constituted is not to claim that it is determined; on the contrary, the constituted character of the subject is the very precondition of its agency. For what is it that enables a purposive and significant reconfiguration of cultural and political relations, if not a relation that can be turned against itself, reworked and resisted? (Butler in Davies 2006: 426)

I dwell on this question of agency not necessarily to 'resolve' its space within poststructuralism but rather to invite a reflection on the complex (unresolvable) tension between structure and agency, power and freedom, discourse and subject. These are the tensions upon which this research is founded – an unstable foundation to be sure, yet hopefully, also, a productive one.
Butler (1995) asks, “[h]ow is it that we become available to a transformation of who we are, a contestation which compels us to rethink ourselves?” (Butler in St. Pierre 2000: 504) Similarly, we might ask what relations of power and possibility, subjectivity and identity, agency and freedom prompted the emergence of particular political subjectivities (feminist) in Canada in the 1960s? How did 'new' discourses become available? And to whom?

In developing a poststructural feminist approach for reading and interpreting this collection of transcribed data, I walk the “knife-edged ridge” between determinism and absolute freedom that Terry Lovell discusses (2003:1). For Lovell, Judith Butler's notion of performativity also lives on that edge: “A slip of the foot to one side casts the ‘performative self’ down among earlier casualties of ‘over-socialization’...The temptation on the other side is to imagine one can take wing and soar away into freedom” (2003: 1-2). Lovell is interested in contextualizing acts of agency within the socio-historical conditions out of which they emerge. Throughout the process of transforming data into 'history' I walk this same line between romantic notions of resistance and freedom and highly deterministic, 'always-already' accounts of circumscribed possibility and attempt – following Terry Lovell – to find this balance.

**Reading Transcripts:**

While the 'linguistic' or 'postmodern' turn has invited critical reflection on the role of the researcher in the accumulation of data (for example: Clifford and Marcus 1986), rarely does self-reflexivity translate into the interpretation of data at the level of reading. That is, reflexivity often extends only as far as thinking about how the researcher is implicated in the collection of
research data (at the interview site, in the field etc.): it is unusual to see how the researcher is implicated in the construction of the final product or text. Even more rare is an account of how poststructural ideas around subject formation and discourse are applied methodologically to 'reading' research material (transcripts, archival material etc.). In order to grapple with this question – how to apply poststructural feminist theory as method when reading transcripts – I have found Linda Cullum's work helpful.

In her book *Narratives at Work: Women, Men, Unionization, and the Fashioning of Identities* (2003) Cullum uses interviews with women who were involved in the formation of a women's labour union in Newfoundland in the 1950s to document the history of this union. Cullum employs an explicitly 'poststructural' approach in her analysis. Informed by Joan Scott and Bronwyn Davies (among others) Cullum is interested not in creating a complete or comprehensive account of the history of women's labour organizing in Newfoundland, rather, she is curious about the relationship between subjectivity and memory and how these are produced through narrative. Of particular interest to Cullum is the way that narratives are 'constructed' at particular social and historical conjunctures – how are memories produced and co-produced? How do subject positions shift? How does language intersect with subjectification? What are the desires and investments of subjects and how are these articulated?

Like Cullum, my own work takes up a poststructural frame that sees the subject as non-unified, fluid, and shifting. I also understand subjectivity to be mutually constituted by discourse. In order to bring these questions into conversation with my 'data' I borrow from Cullum's practices
of 'reading.' Cullum suggests two ways of reading transcribed interviews that are relevant to my own research process.

**Multiple readings:**

Moving away from a position that takes interviewees’ experiences as 'truth' to a position that understands experience as a co-constitutive with discourse requires a constant checking and rechecking of oneself as 'reader.' To facilitate this checking, Cullum suggests reading the transcripts multiple times. Because these interviews have been in my own life for several years, this multiple reading has been essential. Despite the fact that some interviews took place nearly three years ago, I have my own memories of the interview. In re-reading these transcripts, I have been surprised to find that my relationship to the interview has shifted. As my own personal and theoretical perspectives has shifted, so too have my interpretations – and ways of reading – these transcripts.

Following Cullum, my first reading of the transcripts involved reading without taking notes: reading for the 'plot' and broad themes of the interviews - “as if they were a rough anthology of related short stories” (2003: 58). From this initial reading, I was able to compile a list of broad themes that were shared across interviews. These themes revealed questions that framed the second reading. In the second reading, I was more detailed in my approach, this time taking notes related to the original themes. In the second reading I also followed Cullum and created a conceptual map that connected the various interviewees across themes and references (organizational affiliations, family structure, class position, racial identification, political
allegiances). My transcripts quickly became multi-coloured, highlighted and post-it note collages. Like Cullum, at this point of the reading process I became overwhelmed and frustrated: how could I possibly turn this wealth of data into a coherent piece of work?

**Asking 'How' Questions:**

To cope with the anxiety produced by my coded and flagged transcripts, I moved away from thematic reading toward Cullum's third reading approach. Based on the conceptual web and the broad themes that had emerged, I began asking a series of “how questions.” Cullum writes:

> I tried to look beyond binary oppositions, to ask how questions. How do/did the narrators constitute their work, themselves as workers, other women, other men? How do/did they resist certain representations of themselves, of their work? How do/did the narrators negotiate different, sometimes competing or contradictory discourses positioning them? How are/were they differently invested in, and desirous of, particular discursive constructions of their identities? (*ibid:* 61)

Asking 'how' questions ushered in a new way for reading the transcripts and for thinking about my project and question. It was during this third reading – while engaging with the text like an interlocutor – that I began to form the question I wanted to explore in this thesis. This third reading was essential to the development of my research question and for beginning to think about how I would approach it. Asking 'how' questions helped displace my own desire to fix the interviewees in time and space and (my own) memory. It also encouraged me to read the way in which I, as interviewer, navigated the various interview spaces and intersubjective interactions.
This 'third' reading could not have been done without the preceding readings: I believe that the first two readings made the third possible. I needed to familiarize myself with the textual reproductions of the interviews – to connect in new ways with the interviews and interviewees.

**Continuous History and Narrative Coherence:**

The desire to produce a coherent account of the 'second wave feminist movement' – a desire that has plagued my own relationship to my research – was shared and reflected by interviewees. In some ways, this was also reflected in the original mandate of the project which sought to produce a comprehensive account of the social movement. This was reflected in the criteria for selecting interviewees: women who were remembered as having an active and public role in subverting social conventions. When I started reading the transcripts for how interviewees navigated the interview space, I was struck by the number of times the question of ‘am I doing this right?’ would appear in the transcripts. I can only speculate on the motivation behind this question – and its variations: 'Is this what you want?', 'Surely, you don't want to hear about that?' - but the presence of these 'check-ins' suggest to me a desire to 'get it right.' Interviewees were informed that their interviews would become property of the University of Ottawa and be housed at the Canadian Women's Movement Archives. They were informed through project literature that the aim of the project was to record the history of the 'second wave feminist movement' for fear that if it was not documented, it would be lost. As the lead interviewer on the project, I played a role in enforcing the notion that these interviews were important and 'mattered' and that they would be an essential source of historical data for future researchers. I suspect also that the fact that this project was tied to Senator Nancy Ruth – a wealthy and powerful feminist philanthropist – secured a sense of legitimacy and authority around the project.
Regardless of the motivations, I was struck, when re-reading the transcripts – how ubiquitous questions of ‘doing it right’ were. I suspect that this question echoes my own anxiety around producing a correct or authoritative account of this social movement. It reflects, I believe, a desire on the part of participants (I include myself here) to be acceptable and appropriate subjects of history, to ‘fit’ within the parameters of the dominant historical narrative. To use Scott's idea of enlargement: This anxiety over producing the 'right' kind of narrative speaks to the desire to be accepted in this enlargement. The fear of being excluded, deemed inappropriate or of not fitting in the enlarged historical picture is reflected through these questions. Cullum encountered similar desires with her interviewees. She describes this as the subject’s desire for narrative coherence: “The question – 'Is my story the same as...?' - becomes a pointed interrogation in the conversations. The desire to tell the story becomes visible” (Cullum 2003: 18). For Cullum – and for myself – this anxiety is an important framing device for how I read the transcripts and produce this thesis. It acts as a reminder of how subjectivity and narrative are unstable and fluid concepts that are produced through intersubjective interactions (such as the interview). It also brings to the fore insights around conditions of possibility and discourse: the possibilities of what is say-able (and what is rememberable) are not unlimited. They are always contingent and shot through with complex power relations. I will spend the final moment of this examining the politics of remembering.

The Politics of Remembering:
As I outlined above, I was selected as the lead interviewer on this project because of my age and relative 'inexperience' with the movement. While I was never told outright why my age and lack of experience were assets, it was suggested that as a young woman, I would be able to ask questions that someone closer to the movement – 'an insider' – would not. This proved more or less accurate in that I was able to stumble, often inadvertently, into questions that I realized – later – were considered politically insensitive or inappropriate. That being said, my position on the line of insider/outsider was not fixed and I, like the interviewees, moved and shifted depending on the context, the question, the shifting power relations that structure all intersubjective interactions. What I would like to discuss here, however, is the way in which – despite my insider/outsider status – there existed a politics of remembering that inflected the project and the interviews.

Cullum discusses the “sociality of remembering.” Of this she writes: “I have come to realize [remembering] is also a social act embedded in, and drawn from, our relationships with others. How is it that we remember, or forget?” (2003: 50). Beyond the social, I would also suggest that remembering and forgetting are political acts. The desire to remember 'correctly' and to tell the 'right' story is shaped by social and political motivations that are inextricably linked. While this thesis draws on only forty of the 100 interviews collected under the auspices of the project, my experiences conducting more than 120 interviews with women across Canada (only 100 made it to the archives intact) inform my belief in the politics of memory.
Like Cullum, using a snowball approach to interview selection meant that most of the women in the project knew one another. They had longstanding relationships with one another. This was especially true in Ontario where many of the women interviewed were drawn from Nancy Ruth's personal network. Under her direction, I interviewed approximately ten women who had been part of the Ontario Committee on the Status of Women (OCSW). The OCSW interviews present remarkable similarity to one another. One of the questions I would ask was: “What stands out as highlights from your work in the movement?” Across these ten interviews there is a shared identification with the major significant events of the organization. Likewise, there is a shared story of origins and leadership figures. This uniformity is unusual across the project – it becomes legible, however, when one realizes that these women still connect socially. They are engaged in their own history project – collaboratively documenting the history of the OCSW. They meet annually at functions and social gatherings. This reveals, I believe, the sociality of remembering.

In my head and my journal, I have a series of stories that did not make the final cut: Stories that were told to me off the record. Stories that were told after the interview over tea and cookies. Stories that made it onto the tape, only to be excised later. Whole interviews that were removed completely at the request of the participant. There is also the gossip and whispers and intimations that undergirds my relationship to these interviews and project. Occasionally interviewees would be very upfront and say explicitly that they would not discuss certain issues. With the Ontario interviews, these concerns were brought to the fore when interviewees received their transcripts. A number of participants withdrew from the project stating various concerns ranging from not liking the way they 'sounded' on the page to being uncomfortable with having their story on the historical record. Anyone unconvinced about the power of language need only go through a
collaborative transcript editing process with feminist activists to become assured that the words do indeed matter.

The feminist movement began with the ethos of the 'personal is political.' It started with a desire to push what has been private out into the public or, as Audre Lorde writes of poetry: “The way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought” (1984:116). My own work on this project and history-making has confirmed the deeply personal, emotive and affective nature of feminist organizing. The intersubjective stakes – the relationships, the power dynamics, the desires and investments (political and personal) – cannot be abstracted from the organizational affiliations and political commitments. As one interviewee told me (jokingly) when I asked her about moments of frustration or difficulty: “Global warming is caused by the number of feminist women's tears that fell in the last fifty years. We're causing the oceans to rise with our tears.” This speaks, I believe, to the fraught and emotional connection between politics, affect and remembering. The formal narrative produced through the interviews rarely reveals the emotional complexity of these histories. Thus, these interviews, and the narratives that emerge therefrom, must be read as 'partial truths' (Geertz 2000: 34). As such, part of my methodological approach has been to keep the 'limitations' of these accounts in front of my mind.

**Conclusion:**

Of the men and women who told him their stories, the great oral historian and writer Studs Terkel stated: “In their rememberings are their truths” (1970:3). Like Morisson and Terkel, I hope that my work – and the methods I describe herein – honour these stories as truthful, while
not relegating them to 'fact.' I use the word 'relegate' carefully – attentive to its diminutive connotations. My hope has been to present a methodological approach that allows for the transgression of the fact/fiction binary and to explore the possibilities of narrative work, memory, storytelling and history. My commitment to oral history as method demands that I imagine a way of reading these stories that is outside of and other to the distinction between fact and fiction: where the former is “true” and the latter “false.” My contention throughout this chapter has been that poststructural feminism – with its critiques of fixed binaries (victim/oppressor), the knowable and rational subject of humanism and continuous, linear history – makes this rendering possible.

The remainder of this thesis attempts to maintain the tensions outlined herein: I hope that they are never fully resolved but rather that they keep pushing us to examine what is foreclosed or left out when we claim to have the “facts” about “the way it was (is).” In the following chapter I expand further on the concept of ‘agency’ developed in this section. Specifically, I examine the 'foundational' nature of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women (RCSW) in existing historiography of the Canadian women's movement.
Chapter 3
Conditions of Possibility: RCSW and the Discursive Terrain of 1960s Canada

Introduction

Effective political agency is interactional and collective. But, as Butler argues...the collectivities that are formed in the creation of oppositional groups may achieve incorporation at the expense of redrawn boundaries of inclusion/exclusion...What norms are reinforced through the success of particular bids for inclusion, what exclusions reaffirmed? (Terry Lovell 2003: 14)

In attempting to understand the (re)emergence of feminist activism in Canada the late 1960s and early 1970s, it is necessary to discuss the Report on the Royal Commission on the Status of Women (RCSW). In this chapter, I use the RCSW as a site for examining the conditions that enabled a particular mode of feminist organizing to emerge in Canada. While the RCSW has been critiqued on a number of fronts, I argue in this chapter that the Report on the RCSW is a key document for revealing the dominant discourses that were available to feminists at the time as well as the ways in which feminists contributed to shaping these discourses. It can also be understood as a site of contestation – revealing the complexity of feminist organizing in 1960s Canada.

Using insights from poststructural feminist theory, I use the Report as a vehicle for exploring the discursive possibilities in 1960s Canada. Central to this analysis are questions around authority and agency: who was (is) authorized to speak on behalf of 'Canadian women'? How did the
category of 'Canadian women' come to have meaning? Who was implicated in the construction and maintenance of this category? How were boundaries created and secured? These questions are directly tied to the broader questions at work in this thesis of understanding the emergence of a 'hegemonic' feminism in the Canadian women's movement.

Much existing work on 'the' history of the Canadian women's movement – both normative and critical – take certain events as essential facts. The RCSW in particular is subject to this rendering. Normative accounts of the RCSW – discussed in the first chapter - tend to celebrate its emergence ignoring the class and race hierarchies it enabled (Vickers et al. 1993; Bégin 1992; O’Neil 2001). Critical accounts – whether from socialist feminists or critical race theorists – have complicated these celebratory accounts and have paved the way for much important work on race and class privilege within the movement (Adamson et al. 1988; Rebick 2005; Nadeau 2009; Williams 1990). That being said, both normative and critical accounts treat the RCSW as the origin of the movement and as a fixed and immutable basis of analysis. It is “foundational” - a point of origin – that is taken as a given by scholars of the Canadian feminist movement, regardless of their political or theoretical commitments.

Taking Judith Butler's critique of foundations seriously, I hope to trouble the essentialized, impermeable quality of representations of the RCSW and the Report produced therefrom. Butler writes that “a politically engaged critique” must “interrogate what the theoretical move that establishes foundations authorizes, and what precisely it excludes or forecloses” (italics in original Butler 1992: 7). Indeed, this is what I hope to do.
This chapter proceeds in three parts: In the first I unpack the theoretical paradigm at work in this chapter. Specifically, I define what I mean when I discuss “agency” and how this term is taken up in poststructural historical accounts. In the second section, I examine the class politics behind the creation of the Report arguing that a more complicated account of the RCSW and this period must take into account class hegemonies. In the final section I explore how these hegemonies are expressed through three tropes which dominate the Report: The Housewife, The Family and The Nation.

**Agency**

To what extent is social transformation the product of individual acts of agentic heroism and to what extent are these acts contained within social fields, discourses and histories? To address this perplexing issue, I have found Terry Lovell's work (2003) useful. Lovell is similarly curious about the relationship between agency, authority and social change. Using Rosa Parks' historic act of defiance as a case study Lovell suggests that agency must be given “a more interactive, collective and socio-historical location” (2003: 5). That is, individual acts (performances) of 'resistance' must be read in the socio-historical locations in which they take place. Lovell uses Judith Butler's critique of Pierre Bourdieu's *habitus* as a point of departure for her own analysis of Rosa Parks and the agency/authority conundrum she represents.
Butler's critique of Bourdieu centers on two points: first, that speech acts (for Butler, *performances*) are embodied (something Butler suggests Bourdieu does not attend to adequately). And second, that because the social order depends on the repetition of performances or speech acts, this order can be interrupted by performances that do not follow 'the logic of iterability' or repetition. Thus, writes Lovell:

> For Butler, the possibility of transgression is therefore implicit in the very nature of speech acts, indeed of all action. But she goes further. She envisages speech acts and other performances which do not merely transgress, but that do so with authority. Legitimacy is maintained only by being enacted in repeat performances. But through performances that have no prior authorization in social norms, institutional norms may yet be derailed with authority. (Lovell 2003:4)

This question of authority is essential to Lovell's critique of both Butler and Bourdieu. For Lovell “[p]ure acts of resistance are as rare as unequivocal acts of submission. We may look for and find elements of submission/consent to norms within the most courageous acts of resistance, and vice versa, elements of resistance in the *habitus* of submission” (12). Her interest lies not in finding one theorist more convincing than the other but rather to explore the complex relationship between submission and authority/resistance and domination. Ultimately she finds both *performativity* and *habitus* wanting: While both authors acknowledge the space that is opened up between what is said and what the body does/acts, Lovell believes that Butler is overly optimistic about the potential transgressive acts of the body while Bourdieu perceives bodily acts to represent a “force for conservatism” (13). Neither account for the tightly wound threads that bind resistance and domination, submission and mastery. Citing Richard Sennett (1980) and Luisa Passerini (1987), Lovell writes:

> Whether verbal or encoded in the language of the body, resistance may actually tighten the bonds that tie together those with authority
and those subject to it (Sennett, 1980)...The ‘disposition to resist’ may coexist with a desire to (appear to) conform. This desire may be dictated by prudence...But it may also be deeply inscribed in lived subjectivity. (13)

Using Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her seat on a Montgomery bus in 1955 as a case study for exploring questions of agency and authority, Lovell critiques Butler's account of the event wherein Butler states that Parks' “endowed a certain authority on the act, and began the insurrectionary process of overthrowing those established codes of legitimacy” (Butler in Lovell 2003:5). Lovell disputes Butler's claim that Parks 'endowed a certain authority on the act' and instead places Parks' action within the socio-historical context of the time.

1955 was a significant year for the civil rights movement: the Brown decision desegregating schools had passed the year before and throughout the South resistance by local authorities was on the rise against mobilizations by the Black community. Lovell situates Parks' actions among those taken by other black women on buses and in the public sphere that were taking place throughout the South at that time. What made Parks' act significant was not necessarily the 'authority' she endowed upon it, but rather her specific class location as a “respectable” working class “church going” black woman that deemed her an appropriate figure to 'lead' this particular chapter of the movement. Lovell documents how Parks' case was 'selected' by leaders of the Women's Political Committee in Alabama as the case to represent the struggle. Lovell details that Rosa Parks was chosen over another woman, Claudette Colvin, who was described as “immature...prone to breakdowns”. She was also unmarried and pregnant. Parks was deemed the more appropriate 'emblem' of the movement:
What was sought...by the Women’s Political Committee, and by the black populace that was being asked to take great risks was not a leader but an emblem of the mundane harassment that black people routinely suffered: an ‘innocent’ victim of impeccable credentials who had suffered abuse on the buses. (Lovell 2003: 11)

I dwell on Lovell’s account because her project presents an important effort to situate political agency within the social and historical conditions out of which it emerges. Following Lovell – and post-structuralist thought more generally – I want to suggest that political acts never occur in isolation. As Joan Scott writes about subjectivity: “Being a subject means being 'subject to definite conditions of existence, conditions of endowment and conditions of exercise.' These conditions enable choices although they are not unlimited” (Scott 1992: 793).

The premise for this chapter, then, is the following: Political agency is always constrained by social and historical conditions. Following feminist scholars Antoinette Burton (1994), Mariana Valverde (1992) and Sherene Razack (1991), I would argue that discourses of 'respectability' are particularly relevant to the history of women's emancipation. Notions of respectability help us draw attention to who is authorized to speak. The Royal Commission can be seen as one example of the dialectical relationship between 'submission and mastery' or domination and resistance: On one hand it was an essential and emancipatory document that 'transformed' the status of (some) women in Canada. On the other, the RCSW can be read for the discursive limitations placed on 'respectable' feminists at the time. While in no way equating Rosa Parks' act with the foundation of the Royal Commission, I do see the two as analogous in this way: Following Lovell's situated account of Rosa Parks, the Montgomery bus boycott and the US
Civil Rights movement, I seek to place the RCSW into the socio-historical conditions out of which it emerged. In doing so, I draw attention to the strategic efforts that a particular cadre of the women's movement was making in 1967. By paying close attention to the class location of the women instrumental in securing the RCSW and the language employed in the final Report, I argue that the RCSW reveals important discursive realities and resources available for political agency in 1960s Canada.

**The Royal Commission on the Status of Women (RCSW):**

Because the RCSW was discussed in detail in Chapter 1, I reiterate only some of the key points here: The RCSW sat from 1967 to 1970 and tabled its 488-page Report in Trudeau's Parliament on December 7, 1970. The aim of the commission was "to inquire into and report upon the status of women in Canada, and to recommend what steps might be taken by the Federal Government to ensure for women equal opportunities with men in all aspects of Canadian society” (RCSW 1970: vii).

The commission marked a series of 'firsts' for royal commissions: it was the first commission to be chaired by a woman (CBC personality Anne Francis aka. Florence Bird); the first commission to have an equal gender balance, and it was the first royal Commission whose hearings were to be televised. These novelties led to Heather MacIvor describing the RCSW as a “national consciousness raising project” (O'Neil 2001:3). The RCSW was novel also in its attempt to reach out to Canadian women. Pamphlets were produced and distributed at supermarkets and libraries in the hopes of soliciting participation from women at many levels of Canadian society. When it
was complete, the commission had received 468 briefs, about 1,000 letters of opinion and it had Commissioned 40 special studies concerning the status of women. It held 37 days of public hearings and visited 14 cities in 10 provinces.

**Respectability, Class and Paradigms of Liberal Humanism:**

As a government-endorsed initiative, I would like to suggest that the Report on the RCSW helped create the conditions for the emergence of a particular mode of feminist organizing that was unique to the Canadian context (Vickers et al. 1993). The National Action Committee on the Status of Women which was created in 1972 with the sole mandate of implementing the recommendations of the RCSW was unusual in the world for the fine line it walked as a government-funded, non-partisan lobby group. The RCSW is the precursor for this kind of organizing. Through the process of securing the royal commission, feminist activists of the late 1960s began a several decade long relationship between the Canadian state and the project of securing women's rights. I am not suggesting that the RCSW, NAC and the work that emerged therefrom should be taken as the *only* form of feminist organizing during this period. Rather, my point is that this mode of organizing came to secure a position of hegemony within normative historiography of 'the' Canadian women's movement.

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10 For further details see Special Issue of Resources for Feminist Research 17(3) September 1988.
What I would like to explore, then, is how this hegemony was secured. In order to do this, I will examine socio-historical conditions out of which the Report emerged. In this section, I pay close attention to the class dynamics at play in securing the royal commission. I argue that the Report should be read while paying close attention to the individuals who were implicated in its creation, specifically, the class location of the women involved. Because there have been a number of excellent interventions (Nadeau 2009, Williams 1992, Morris 1980, Freeman 2001) addressing the racial make-up of the RCSW and the limitations of the Report, I will focus this discussion on the class hierarchies of the RCSW. In taking seriously the invitation to conduct an intersectional analysis, I open this discussion of class not in an attempt to supersede the important work that has been undertaken by critical race analysts, rather, my hope here is to deepen the debate to include reflection on the ways that race and class privilege worked together to secure forms of hegemonic power.

Class Privilege and the RCSW:

When I interviewed Sylvia Ostry\(^\text{11}\) she recalled going to meet Florence Bird “at very fancy club in Ottawa” to discuss the RCSW and being prevented from entering the front door of the club. At that time, women were required to use the side door. Ostry recalls laughing and saying, “That's good, because we're having a meeting on the Royal Commission for Women [sic] and I'll be sure that this place is either closed or you open the front door.” I am interested in the shift that this

\(^{11}\) Sylvia Ostry was a high profile civil servant and economist: Chief Statistician for Statistics Canada and Chairman of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). She was married to Bernard Ostry who served as deputy minister in Pierre Trudeau’s government.
time period represents in carving out a space of (some) women in the public sphere. As the Report itself indicates, this was a time when abortion was discussed in the House of Commons by one woman and 263 male members (1970:355). Given the limits on who was authorized to participate in the ‘public sphere’ – how did the RCSW come about and what shape did it take?

Adamson et al. (1998) are correct in describing the women who 'got' the RCSW as an “old girls club” (1988: 51). The RCSW was obtained by an elite group of women familiar with and implicated in the national political elite. Laura Sabia and Thérèse Casgrain led the push for the RCSW. Florence Bird was the chairman [sic]. Sabia, Casgrain and Bird were white, wealthy and connected to influential politically involved men. All three would go on to run in elections for federal politics. These women embodied a particular kind of feminist organizing. Monique Bégin who was 31 at the time recalls: “Women of that generation, they would phone the men in very important situations, jobs that they know, and it's the telephone [call] or the cocktail and give them an electroshock and ask for money and ask for this and that.”

Bégin states that before becoming a “great admirer” of Thérèse Casgrain (they were both founding members of the FFQ), she had difficulty working with her:

I recall being quite shocked...she would arrive at times and say, 'Monique, it's unbelievable, my Bell shares have dropped again!' And she would always talk of money in terms of which today of course I totally understand but I was totally shocked at the time that a socialist could have shares in anything. So we, and I, had difficulty working with Thérèse Casgrain because I couldn't relate to the way she was doing things...We need something, she phones a man. As a young woman feminist I thought that was so gross.
Florence Bird was an American-born Liberal Democrat from an upper-class Philadelphia family. She was known to Canadians as CBC radio personality Ann Francis. Well-connected and childless, Bird was a personal friend of Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson. A journalist covering the commission commented that Bird ruled over the proceedings with “steel fingers in peau de soie gloves.” (Freeman 2001: 34)

Bégin describes Bird as a “benevolent father” figure: “she was a very, very high class person in her own definition of herself; generous to the poor...” The class politics here are significant for understanding the moral underpinnings of the Royal Commission. Bégin goes on to suggest that she believes Bird hired her (Bégin) because:

I was very well-educated with good manners, I mean, and French from France, almost young, young much younger than the men she had interviewed, I don't want to say servant but you know people who would obey and follow and all of that which I am not but anyway, I always thought that. It was good. I have been well brought up and I had class. That's the word: I had class.

Stock shares, cocktails, fancy clubs: All reflect a particular moment in the history of the Canadian feminist movement and what other scholars have described as the “hats and gloves” generation of feminists (McPherson in Rebick 2005: 17). In 1967 the Women's Liberation Movement was just beginning to gain momentum and notoriety but it was still a relatively unknown quantity to the political establishment and elite. Bégin comments speak to the generational and ideological lines along which the movement coalesced.
Critical race theorists point to the shared racial positions of the Royal Commission and the emergent feminist movement (Nadeau 2009; Stasiulis 1999; Williams 1990). While there is no denying the hegemonic position that white women played in the push for the RCSW and the Report it produced, it is also important to include an analysis of the class and generational hegemonies that were also at work here. Florence Bird – with her hats and gloves and 'good breeding' and influential husband – represented the archetypal figure of white respectability and class privilege. She was an insider and part of an elite and therefore was versed, not in the language of the burgeoning feminist movement, but rather the language of Canadian nationalism, liberal humanism and social change through state-sanctioned channels. This is not to say that Bird herself was not a feminist, but rather to suggest that her role in crafting the final Report – and the subject position she embodied – must be taken into account when reading the document (and when analysing how the Report was taken up by the movement that emerged thereafter). It is also crucial to not read the Report simply from the perspective of those whose situation it sought to improve – namely white middle class women – rather, the Report must be seen as the product of a particular social, historical, racial and class conjuncture.

Paradigms of Liberal Humanism:

I am interested in how a certain strand of liberal feminism has come to dominate the historiography of the Canadian feminist movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. I emphasize that liberal feminism was not the only strand of feminist organizing taking place during this period, however, it has been entrenched as a central mode of organizing against
which others are positioned. The historiography of this movement reproduces this paradigm, pitching 'Liberal Feminism' as 'Hegemonic Feminism' and positioning other feminism(s) against its hegemony (radical feminism, socialist feminism, antiracist feminism etc.) (see for example: Adamson et al. 1998; Nadeau 2005, 2009; Dua and Robertson 1999).

Thus, to understand the emergence of this 'hegemonic' feminism an analysis of the philosophical underpinnings of the RCSW – the cornerstone of Canadian liberal feminism – is essential. As Bégin quote in chapter 1 revealed, while the Commission did not have an articulated philosophical or ideological framework per se, liberal humanism and a commitment to the universal declaration of rights were critical elements of the Commission (Bégin 1992:29).

Barbara Freeman has conducted a thorough analysis of the media coverage of the RCSW. In her book *The Satellite Sex* (2001), Freeman highlights several key features of the Commission and its philosophical underpinnings. Freeman points to the language of “equal opportunities” with men in the Terms of Reference of the Commission. According to Commission minutes, there was some dispute over whether the language should be “equality with men” or “equal opportunities” (2001: 32). The latter – which was kept – bespeaks the commitment to liberal ideals of equal *opportunities* rather than the arguably more prickly “equality.” Citing philosopher Lorraine Code, Freeman suggests that this claim to equal opportunity over equality: “leaves (narrowly defined) masculine values intact and does not address the systemic injustices fostered by the patriarchal relations that sustain women's sexual and economic dependence” (Code in Freeman 2001: 29).
Freeman states that Bird herself was more a humanist than a feminist when she joined the Commission: “Bird almost always insisted to Reporters that Canadian women right across the country were experiencing the same problems and wanted the same 'equality of opportunity' notwithstanding some of the obvious regional, rural/urban and racial variations” (ibid 34). The essential message was that for her, the Commission was merely an exercise in democracy. When one of the Commissioners quit, Bird replaced him with John Humphrey, a McGill law professor and Director of the Human Rights Commission at the United Nations. Humphrey had helped draft the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and enhanced the RCSW's image as a project committed to human rights, not necessarily feminist transformation (Freeman 2001: 37).

The words “equality” and “freedom” are ubiquitous throughout the text. Indeed the Report is premised on securing for women “equal opportunities with men in all aspects of Canadian society” (Terms of Reference). Page 1 of Chapter 1 quotes John Stuart Mill on the subjugation of women and a number of chapters begin with quotes from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. At the heart of this Report, then, is the rational, freely choosing autonomous subject of liberal humanism.

As a former journalist herself, Bird took control of the Commission's public and media relations. According to Freeman, Bird worked assiduously to guard against any “image problems” (2001:33). This meant, for example, scheduling potentially “sensational” briefs during the lunch hour when journalists were away filing their stories (ibid 35). 'Sensational' referred to briefs
made by women speaking on behalf of groups identified as the radical women's movement. In my interview with Bégin, she recalls:

we sensed that something new, which was the women’s lib, was starting in universities but we didn’t know what it was exactly, but it was scary, like they had techniques and tactics that none of us knew. It was the new radicalism and we just knew there was something.

What this reveals, I would contend, is the work that was done to produce a particular kind of document. The commission, in an effort to protect the image of respectability sidelined certain discourses at the expense of others. As Lovell suggests above, this may have been done out of “prudence” - the Commission met with heavy criticism from the press and general public both when it was announced and in 1970 when the Report was finally published – but regardless, these 'choices' of language and public presentation reflect the ideological commitments that were implicated in the production of the Report.

**Reproducing Dominant Discourses: Housewife, Family, Nation:**

“Subjection consists precisely in this fundamental dependency on a discourse we never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency” (Butler 1997:2).

Judith Butler has suggested that the relationship between subjectivity and discourse is one of “submission and mastery” (Butler in Davies 2006:2). Following Foucault, Butler is interested in the relationship between power and subjectivity. Foucault tells us that the individual actions
taken to construct subjectivity are “not something invented by the individual himself [sic]. They are models that he finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, his social group” (1997: 291). If we accept the mutually constitutive relationship between subjectivity and discourse – between how we construct and understand our identities and how the social order shapes those constructs and understandings – we are better situated to explore the relationship between political agency and effect. The aim of this section, then, is to examine the strategic efforts made to secure the RCSW and that went into the production of the final Report. In doing so, I lay the groundwork for further discussion on the impacts of the Report both on feminist organizing and political mobilization.

This is not to offer an apologia for the exclusions and blind spots of second wave feminism, but rather to critique the presentism that inflects some accounts. To situate the RCSW in the discourses that were available at the time is to appreciate the poverty of conceptual language available to activists of this period. Absent are terms such as “gender”, “multiculturalism”, “queer politics”, “violence against women” (etc.) The paucity of language meant that in the early years of the movement women relied on the terms that were provided for them by their ‘culture, society, social group.’ This echoes what Adam Ashforth argument that government commissions are a process of “reckoning the schemes of legitimation” (1990:6). Ashforth suggests that commissions should be read in terms of their particular historical and juridical contexts and understood as a means of securing a form of discursive legitimation vis-a-vis the populace. He further argues that the results of commissions of inquiry - in this case the Report on the RCSW - are produced through a “complex calculus” that weighs the various discursive and ideological constraints in an attempt to convey a particular – and legitimate – form of social legibility (ibid).
Ashforth work helps contextualize the strategic efforts of Report drafters and the way in which
the Report should be historically interpreted.

In this section I examine three tropes through which the Report on the RCSW functions. I
suggest that these tropes - the housewife, the family and the (Canadian) nation – are the vehicles
through which the 'problem' of the status of women came to be articulated and understood. They
reflect the dominant discourses available to those who produced the Report and participated in
the commission. Understanding these tropes as discursive constructions also helps us to see the
effects of these discourses – how they were taken up by various actors – both by the state and by
feminist organizers in the years that followed.

Housewife:

In her retrospective account of the RCSW, Monique Bégin writes that a major question the time
was whether married women should work outside the home (1992: 25). This concern is reflected
throughout the Report. Indeed, Chapter 1 “Canadian Women and Society” begins with a lengthy
discussion on the “changing role of women” due to the mechanization of the home and the
modernization of the nation. The figure of the housewife – made famous in Betty Friedan's 1963
The Feminine Mystique – is the middle class, white, heterosexual addressee at the heart of the
Report. Chapter 5 “Taxation and Child-Care Allowances” is devoted almost entirely to
reforming the Income Tax Act to support women working outside the home.
This recommendation is a site of controversy in the Report and was opposed by one of the (male) Commissioners, John Humphrey: “The Report is unfair to married women at home, who, unless she is looking after young children, is made to appear a social parasite.” (1970: 434). The Report is explicit in its aim to open opportunities up for women so that they can be “free to decide” (1970: 65) whether to participate in the labour market or not. The Report exhaustively accounts for the various changes that would be required to support women entering the workforce. These recommendations include: Changes in early childhood education around sex role stereotyping; amending the Income Tax Act; establishing a national daycare policy; and offering adult education courses for women wanting to enter the workforce. The Report also suggests, rather optimistically, that accommodating housewives in the workplace can be a good thing for employer and employee alike:

A wire products manufacturer has developed a “Housewife Shift” through the co-operation of management and unions. It has solved a labour shortage and provided extra income to families. This shift allows women to prepare the family dinner before Reporting to work. (102)

The middle class addressee is further evoked through the Report's discussion of prostitution. In 1967, prostitutes were charged under section 164(1)(c) of the Criminal Code: “Every one commits vagrancy who, being a common prostitute or night-walker is found in a public place and does not, when required, give a good account of herself” (369). After recommending that this section of the Criminal Code be repealed, the Report goes on to suggest that:

[...]ny proposed modification of the law must be followed up with facilities and programmes designed to rehabilitate adult female prostitutes. These women should be protected from the influence of their former surroundings by being given help in finding a different environment and a new way of thinking about themselves and their lives. (p. 371)
Using the language of 'protection' and 'rehabilitation' bespeaks a certain middle class morality and respectability. Following Ann McClintock (1995) and Antoinette Burton (1994), Razack and Fellows (1998) argue that this recommendation can be read as shoring up a particular racial and class identity. They point to how middle class Victorian women, in striving to be “respectable”, needed the Other of the prostitute and domestic workers to distance themselves from notions of degeneracy that defined Victorian womanhood. Razack and Fellows write, “She [the 19th century middle class woman] achieved and maintained her toehold on respectability through the economic and sexual exploitation of other women and that exploitation was itself the product of class, gender and racial hierarchies” (348). This desire for a 'toehold on respectability' continues to shape how women react to allegations that they are complicit in the subordination of other women. Because of a failure to acknowledge how systems of oppression are interlocking, respectability is sought over justice. This claim for respectability allows these systems to remain intact. In the Report the implicit distinction between the prostitute and the housewife shore up claims for respectability made in the Report: the prostitute becomes the Other against which claims for recognition (by the middle class addressee) can be made.

That being said, it is worth considering the options available to drafters of the Report. The archival footage of the media coverage of the commission reveals the prevailing attitudes of the time, with CBC Reporter Gordon Donaldson explaining the motivation behind the Commission: “Years of long skirts have hobbled her speed in chasing deer and generations of domesticity may have hobbled her mind but now she's back in the hunt this time demanding equal rights in the labour market while retaining the special privileges of a lady” (CBC Archives). The commission
was criticized in the press and public from the outset, leaving commissioners to navigate the choppy waters of public opinion (Freeman 2001). As a state-sponsored initiative they were accountable both to government and to the 'Canadian public' for producing a Report that would be perceived as 'reasonable.'

**Family:**

Another central trope that figures prominently in the Report is the family. Chapter 4 (“Women and the Family”) begins with a quote from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 16: “The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by Society and the State” (1970: 300).

The idea that the family is the 'natural and fundamental group unit of society' is a key framing device for the Report which takes the nuclear family as an essential and universal premise. This was not particularly unusual for the time. Indeed, the Report states that the Dominion Bureau of Statistics “divides the population into two groups: families and unattached individuals” (1970: 310). That 'families' are a unit of analysis is itself revealing of the social and economic terrain of the time. The Report was considered quite controversial and forward-thinking for drawing attention to, for example, women's work within the home/family unit (Bégin 1992). Challenging the Income Tax Act – eliminating the Family Allowance - brought attention to the unpaid labour that women do within the home. Along with insights from critical race theory, women of colour
have long challenged the racial and class dimensions of this 'oppression', it is worth situating the Report within a context where the nuclear, heterosexual family was considered both natural and fundamental to the social order. Socialist feminists would also critique the Report for not going far enough in terms of critiquing the family as a site of women's oppression (Adamson et al. 1998).

In the early pages of the chapter on 'women and the family' the authors of the Report take a moment to spell out the role of the family in Canadian society. Citing a discussion paper from the Vancouver Women's Caucus, the Report tacitly opposes the position taken by the 'Women's Liberation Movement' that suggests that "marriage is a contract of slavery for women and that the family is an unjust and outdated arrangement for modern human beings" (1970: 226). Instead, the Report insists that

in Canada there seems to be a general belief in the continuance of the family in a somewhat altered form. It is supported by those social scientists who, although they find it hard to predict how social changes will affect the family in the future, maintain that the family will always exist in some form, as they "know of no people who have succeeded for long in dissolving the family or replacing it." (Report 1970: 226)

12 "The conditions of privileged, white women's lives were – and are – directly linked to the absence of privilege in other women's lives. When Betty Friedan published The Feminine Mystique in 1963, advocating that wage labour liberated women, she, like many of her privileged white sisters, was referring to high-paying, influential careers. Friedan feminists failed to recognize that most women working outside the home worked – and still do work – in menial, minimum-wage jobs that could not – and still do not – liberate them from dependence on men nor from other forms of patriarchal domination" (Carty 1999: 42).
This section of the Report is significant for the work it does to secure and validate the role of the nuclear family as the fundamental unit of the society. Equally revealing is the recommendation that “family life education” should be co-educational and should begin at the kindergarten level (1970:185). The Report encourages teachers to examine “their own attitudes and prejudices” and to “[question] their own conception of sex differences and the relationships and responsibilities of marriage partners” (ibid). The goal of this recommendation, presumably, is to encourage more broad-minded approaches to teaching children about sex roles within the family unit. Boys should be instructed on how to care for children, cook and sew and girls should learn “manual skills” and should participate equally in physical education.

The significance of 'the family' for the Report cannot be overstated. It speaks to the double-edged effect of discourse that both structures and is structured/produces and is produced. The family is clearly a vital institution with which the writers of the Report had to contend. In turn, however, the Report also secures the nuclear family as the central and essentialized natural unit in society. In framing the status of women in relation to the family the Report not only reinforces the always already connection of woman to family but also structures the feminist organizing that will follow from the Report. Here again, Ashforth’s insights of commissions as sites where the “the idea of the state [is invented]” remind us of the strategic efforts made by drafters of the Report to produce a document that would be 'legible' to its audience: namely a hostile male public, press and political sphere. Regardless of the strategic motivations, by leaving the family unit unexamined and intact the Report reveals not only the discourses available to drafters at the time and goes some distance to structuring the kinds of claims that will hereafter be made by feminist organizers on the state.
Nation:

But the impact of our recommendations will reach even further. By the full use of their skills and abilities, women will be able to make a greater contribution to the economy than ever before. The beneficial effects on the economy of increased production cannot help but work to the advantage of all Canadians. (Report 1970:159)

Many scholars of the RCSW have suggested that the Report needs to be read alongside the “cacophony” (Nadeau 2005: 126) of nation building projects from the 1960s and 1970s: The B&B Commission, Expo '67, the Multiculturalism Act (1971) and the FLQ crisis (and the Federal response), as well as the nationalist fervour around Pierre Trudeau's ascendancy to political office (Bégin 1992; Nadeau 2005; Ng 1986). Certainly, when reading the Report for an indication of what discourses were prevalent at the time of its emergence, the role of the Canadian nation state becomes central.

The philosophical-ideological underpinnings of the Report are reflective of the kind of nation state that post-war, modernizing Canada was trying to be(come). The ubiquity of the words “equality” and “freedom” reflect the ideological commitment by the Canadian government to liberal democracy. The Report capitalizes on Canada's role in the crafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and many of its claims are based on Canada's existing commitment to these rights through the signing of that document. As evidenced in the quote above, the Report makes claims that follow a “what's good for women is good for Canada” framework – making claims on the state for women's rights which are not only amenable to the nation but that are also
good for the nation. Common throughout the document are claims that a recommendation will be “to the advantage of all Canadians” (1970:159). These claims make evident the desire to make the recommendations of the Report appear legitimate and reasonable. The closing sentence of the Report emphasizes this point: “In terms of Canada's commitments and the principles on which a democracy is based, what we recommend is no more than simple justice” (1970: 393).

Based on these claims I suggest that the RCSW produced a Report that walked the razor wire between submission and mastery. Using language that was familiar to the Canadian 'public' and the government that sanctioned (and paid for) the RCSW, drafters produced a document that could be comfortably apprehended within the discursive parameters of 1960s Canada. Their actions were also strategic and bespeak the 'complex calculus' (Ashforth) necessary to produce a Report that would be taken seriously by the political establishment and yet that would also reflect a feminist agenda. This was a 'Canada' that was itself being constructed through initiatives such as the RCSW and the other royal commissions and white papers of that period. The nation and the Commission worked in tandem to secure a particular imaginary of the benevolent and just nation.

**Conclusions:**

In attempting to address confounding questions of political agency, inclusions and exclusions, and authority, this chapter has, itself, walked a fine line between ‘defending’ acts of exclusion based on (class and race) privilege, on the one hand, and slipping into facile – presentist – critiques which (I contend) attribute agency where little existed. Ultimately, my aim has been to
open questions, instead of providing answers, and to complicate, trouble and undo historical accounts which fail to examine their own foundational ‘truths.’

The RCSW – I believe – is an example of a historical document/project that began a series of negotiations with and within the dominant discourses of the time. Arguably it helped enable conditions for renegotiating relationships of hegemony, domination and power between the state and (certain) members of the ‘public.’ But it was precisely because it was generated by a particular elite operating within specific discursive conditions that it was unprepared to (incapable of?) transcend the limits of its own creation: To foster a more integrative and unbounded imaginary of the ‘Canadian women’ and the conditions of ‘her’ existence. In the next chapter I examine how the discourses produced by the RCSW were taken up by the National Action Committee on the Status of Women and how they shaped the parameters of that organization.
Chapter 4
Consolidating 'Hegemonic' Feminism: The Establishment of the National Action Committee in the 1970s

Introduction:

In chapter one, I outlined how the National Action Committee came into existence on the heels of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women. The “Strategy for Change” Conference held at the King Edward Hotel in Toronto in 1972, is a mythologized event in Canadian feminist history. A government funded event, the aim of the conference was to establish a government body that would be responsible for implementing the recommendations of the (recently published) Royal Commission Report on the Status of Women. As detailed in chapter one, the conference was well attended by both 'government women’ (mostly Liberal party members, civil servants and government workers) and women from the emerging women's liberation movement. In the standard historical accounts of this event, the conference is described as the coming together of women from many different sectors of Canadian society: Union women; Women from Quebec; Aboriginal women; Women from established women's organizations (Canadian Federation of University of Women; Voice of Women; Fédération des femmes du Québec ) and young radical women. Kay McPherson described the event as the coming together of the hats and gloves with the T-shirts and jeans (in Rebick 2005: 22). In the history of the movement the conference is (generally) hailed as a success for the coming together of “institutionalized” and “grassroots” women's groups (Adamson et al. 1988: 29) or, as Judy Rebick puts it, the beginning of “an uneasy unity” (2005: 22). Rather than accept the government proposal - endorsed by the conference keynote Florence Bird – conference attendees saw this as “the time to set up a
movement” (Parent in Rebick 2005: 30). The outcome of the conference was the establishment of the National Ad Hoc Committee on the Status of Women.

As an umbrella organization NAC set as its main priority the implementation of the recommendations of the RCSW: “[T]o evaluate, update and spearhead the implementations of the recommendations of the Report” (Vickers et al. 1993: 6). From modest roots, the NAC flourished into a national umbrella organization boasting a membership of over 500 women's groups. It was perceived by many as the “Parliament of Women” (Vickers et al. 1993) and was called upon publicly to speak 'on behalf of Canadian women.' While NAC functioned as an extra-parliamentary lobby group, it also received a significant portion of its funding from the Federal Government. In the twenty years that it was most active, NAC would tackle a number of issues related to women in Canada: daycare, abortion, equal pay legislation, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, family law and so on. In 1997 the last of NAC's Federal funding was cut and the organization has all but disappeared from the political landscape (Rebick 2002: 74).

My interest here is to explore NAC's formative years. NAC's position as a state-funded, non-partisan lobby organization with a relatively broad base of support marks it as “unique” in the world (Chappell 2002; Vickers et al. 1993). Granted, this unique position does not make it innocent of inequities within the organization, nor does erase contestation and struggle within the organization. That being said, NAC's role within the broader movement – at times represented as the face of the Canadian women's movement – means that it cannot be ignored when examining hegemony and power relations within the Canadian movement.
NAC represents the manifestation of a particular mode of feminist organizing: a mode that has been both critiqued and celebrated for its proximity to the Canadian nation state. Louise A. Chappell describes NAC in its early years as an organization that operated with a “pro-state” mandate. This (successful) relationship with the nation-state allowed NAC to secure funding from the government for the majority of its existence. Many interested in NAC's demise have suggested that it was a move toward “anti-state” actions that led to NAC's loss of funding and concomitant demise (Brodie 1998; Brodie and Jensen 1990; Chappell 2002).

This chapter dwells on the emergence of NAC and the varying positions it occupies in the historiography of the Canadian women's movement. Ultimately, I have two goals. First, I outline the varying perspectives of NAC that currently exist. In the second part of the chapter I offer a critique of these narratives. I argue that both perspectives on the organization – 'normative' and 'critical/antiracist' – fail to account for the multiplicity of divergent accounts that exist regarding NAC. I argue further that by 'reducing' the story to one of pro-state/anti-state or white feminists/feminists of colour, current historiography fails to attend to the complexity of this unique – albeit imperfect – organization. In this section I outline three counter narratives that need to be further explored by feminist historians and social scientists interested in this chapter of Canadian history.

**Two Modes of Doing History:**
For the purposes of this chapter, I mimic an analytic framework that is often employed in accounts of the Canadian women's movement. This analytic pits “normative” - what Mary-Jo Nadeau (2005) calls the “white feminist mode” of doing history - accounts against “critical” or “anti-racist” accounts. In the first part of this chapter I reproduce this analytic. I do so critically. My hope is to reproduce this static binary so that in the second part of this chapter I can introduce a number of competing narratives that 'interrupt' existing accounts of the movement: both normative and critical.

**Normative:**

By “normative” accounts of the National Action Committee I am referring to accounts which reproduce what Foucault described as “continuous history” (in Scott 1992: 79). These accounts – while not universally *uncritical* – produce accounts of NAC that are linear and take the structure of the organization for granted. In these accounts, distinctions are made between what Adamson et al. (1988) refer to as the “grassroots” and the “institutionalized” feminist organizations. There is a tendency here to draw on a distinction between liberal feminists, socialist feminists and radical feminists. 'Liberal' feminist accounts position NAC as a central vehicle for feminist social change – employing as it did, state-sanctioned modes of feminist organizing. Socialist and radical accounts of the movement include a discussion of NAC but usually as a critique of the organization: socialist feminists wrestled with the tactical and strategic dilemmas of a state-funded feminist organization while 'radical' feminists demanded an overhaul of the entire patriarchal system (Adamson et al. 1988; Rebick 2005). This somewhat facile distinction plays itself out in the historiography of the movement. While NAC is discussed in socialist feminist
histories of the movement it is never featured in the foreground (see Rebick 2005; Adamson 1988) as it is in 'liberal' accounts (Vickers et al. 1993; Chappell 2002).

Most 'normative' accounts reproduce the origin story of the 1972 Strategy for Change Conference as central to the reconciliation between 'grassroots' (socialist/radical feminists) and 'establishment' feminists. Socialist accounts of NAC's history – where they exist – tend to focus on NAC's later years (1988 onward) when these feminists became more active in the organization (see Greaves 1991; Brodie 1998; Lee and Cardinal 1998).

The most comprehensive normative – 'liberal' - account of NAC is the work of Jill Vickers, Pauline Rankin and Christine Appelle (1993) which provides an overview of the organization from its inception up until 1988. The text is a succinct political analysis of the organization and its relationship to the Canadian state. I will briefly outline its major arguments and, in so doing, present a general example of a normative account of NAC's history.

From the outset, Vickers et al. are clear that the goal of their work is not to produce a history of NAC but rather to use it as a site for examining the institutionalization of the Canadian women's movement. They also see this work as a way to bring into conversation with one another the insights of political science and feminist theory. For the authors, the success of a feminist organization can be determined by the ability of that organization to become “institutionalized” (11). Because feminist projects are multigenerational, they require the stability that formal
institutionalization provides. While acknowledging that this might run counter to feminist practice, the authors contend that women need to “appropriate” the concept of the institution from men and allow it to inform their work (11). This allows for the sustainability of feminist organizations across time and generations.

In their analysis, NAC is assessed historically in terms of its ability to establish itself as a Canadian political institution capable of improving the status of women. Central to the argument is their belief that organizations are largely informed by the political context of the states in which they emerge (18). As such, Vickers et al. discuss NAC as a 'Parliament of Women.' Conceptualizing NAC as such indicates the author's liberal perspective that for feminist organizations to be effective they should mirror the political institutions of the state (here the feminist 'parliament' mirrors the structure of the Canadian Federal government). It is celebrated by the authors for its ability to 'manage' conflict and 'include' different stakeholders. After demonstrating NAC's limited ability to represent Quebec feminists, First Nations women and a "new force" (11) of women (here they are referring to the increasingly public participation of women of colour, immigrant women and women with disabilities in the Canadian women's movement), the authors state that NAC was the "institutional arm of the English-speaking women's movement" (13). While it had limited and symbolic relationships with these other groups, its roots in established English-speaking women's organizations (such as the CFUW) meant that NAC was characterized by a particular political culture. The authors refer to this

13 While critiques of NAC will be discussed later in this chapter, for a succinct antiracist analysis of NAC as a 'Parliament of Women' see Mary Jo Nadeau 2005 (32).
culture as one informed by an ethos of “radical liberalism.” For the authors, this refers to 1. A commitment to ordinary political process and a pro-statist approach to change; 2. A commitment to dialogue and debate across difference (generational and ideological); and 3. A belief in service towards others as a legitimate contribution to efforts for social change (46). For Vickers et al., radical liberalism opposes a more American style of radical feminism, and as such, sets NAC apart as a “uniquely Canadian” (79) feminist organization.

Tracing the history of NAC, Vickers et al., demonstrate how the organization shifted from a lobby group whose primary goal was the implementation of the recommendations of the RCSW to “an umbrella structure and grafted-on radical grassroots” (4). From its relatively modest roots by 1988 NAC boasted a membership of 600 women's organizations (ibid). For the authors, NAC's history can be read as a series of struggles between ideological forces within the organization. Questions over strategy and tactics dominate. Particularly salient are questions over the nature of the relationship between NAC and the Canadian government. Tensions over the organization's dependence on government funding are also critical. In their analysis, the authors read these as tensions between the 'grassroots' and the 'establishment' – it is the successful mediation of the conflicts that permitted NAC's survival.

**Antiracist:**

The second mode of history on NAC is largely influenced by the 'transnational' turn that was discussed in chapter one. Challenging linear narratives that focus on gender hierarchies, these anti-racist histories focus on the 'intersections' or 'interlocking' of multiple oppressions. In this
reading, NAC is critiqued as a site of contestation and (specifically though not exclusively) racial oppression.

'Nation, Race and the Politics of NAC' – Mary-Jo Nadeau (2005)

A good example of this work is Mary-Jo Nadeau's 2005 *The Making and Unmaking of a Parliament of Women*: Nation, Race and the Politics of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (1972-1992). In her PhD dissertation, Nadeau uses a transnational feminist analysis to trace the rise of anti-racist feminism within NAC.

Using archival sources, Nadeau charts the emergence of NAC out of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women. For Nadeau, NAC should be read as a “microcosm of Canada” and as a site of the “consolidation of white hegemony in Canadian feminism” (iv).

Working against what she describes as the “white feminist mode” of doing historiography about NAC (this mode privileges the gender hierarchies; traces a linear, singular historical trajectory of NAC and fails to engage anti-racist critiques); Nadeau argues that, in treating the nation as a singular unproblematic entity, NAC – as a microcosm of the nation – reproduces the racial hierarchies of the Canadian nation-state (Nadeau 2005: 7). Nadeau's work posits that a “myth of unity” and “cooperation” dominate the discourses around NAC (Nadeau 2005: 4). This myth of unity and positioning of NAC as a site of where conflict is managed through cooperation obscures racial contestation within the organization.
Drawing on the work of Ghassan Hage (2005) Nadeau argues that the RCSW and NAC were initiatives orchestrated by a “white national aristocracy” who had a sense of “governmental belonging” which allowed them to bring issues of sexual equality to the attention of the nation-state (Nadeau 2005: 9). She elaborates this point by deconstructing the notion of a “Parliament of Women” arguing that this term *works* to mystify racism: “the 'parliament of women' discourse operates primarily as an ideological frame which narrates NAC through white liberal nationalist terms of belonging” (124). This discourse, according to Nadeau, leaves unexamined questions of colonialism and racial exclusion and establishes (white) liberal feminists as “benevolent and necessary custodians of the national movement” (133).

Nadeau carefully traces what she calls the “making and unmaking of the 'Parliament of Women'.” Her argument is that NAC articulated its identity through various “discursive emergences,” specifically: hegemonic political, racial and national discourses of liberal feminism, unmarked whiteness and the discourse of “unity and diversity.” Central to her thesis is the claim that through these discursive practices, the “white national aristocracy” at the heart of NAC sought to maintain control of the organization on their terms (149). That is, through these discursive constructions, white liberal feminists sidelined women of colour, scuttled contestation and conflict and imposed a hegemonic narrative with an unexamined white nationalist Self at the centre.
The “unmaking” of the 'parliament of women' took place, according to Nadeau, between 1983 and 1992. Nadeau traces the rise of anti-racist feminism within the organization. Observing the shift in language towards “multiculturalism” and “inclusivity,” Nadeau suggests that these shifts were the first iterations of the displacement of “white feminist” hegemony. She notes the creation of the Visible Minority and Immigrant Women Committee in 1985 and the push for an organizational review process in 1986. Nadeau argues that this process “must be read in the context of, and as a broad (white feminist) managerial response to feminists of colour establishing a base in NAC” (271). Her analysis concludes in 1992 arguing that the period from 1989 to 1992 represent the successful culmination of anti-racist activism within the organization.

'Tears, Fears and Careers' – Anti-Racism and Feminism in Canada (Srivastava, Razack and Fellows):

Other examples of this mode of history come from critical race theorists who examine the relationship between race and feminism. Reading Nadeau's work on NAC alongside the work of Sarita Srivastava (2006, 2007) and Sherene Razack and Mary Louise Fellows (1998), a complex picture of the relationship between racism, feminism and whiteness emerges. Sarita Srivastava has explored what happens in feminist organizations when white feminists are confronted with charges of racism. She draws on Ruth Frankenberg’s groundbreaking research on whiteness (1993) along with historical analysis by Vron Ware (1992), Ann Stoler (1995) and Mariana Valverde (1992) to describe the attachment that white feminists have to notions of innocence and morality. Using Foucault's work on “heterotopia,” Srivastava argues that the second wave feminist movement is imagined by white women as a social, political and moral community of ethical individuals. In Canada, this movement is “overlaid” with national discourses of tolerance,
multiculturalism and nonracism. This feminist community imagines itself as inherently egalitarian and inherently nonracist. Thus, when confronted with charges of racism, white feminists often react emotionally; this is in large part due to the fact that, as feminists, they embrace an identity as good, just, innocent actors.

Razack and Fellows (1998) refer to this as an “emotional attachment to innocence” (1998: 343) that is revealed when the dominant group (in this case, white women) have their domination contested. They refer to this as a problem of “competing marginalities” that inevitably leads to the “race to innocence” where claims for whose claim of subordination is the most urgent come to dominate. This 'race to innocence' leads to emotionally charged and politically unproductive moments that often end in a frustrating impasse.

What These Histories Reveal:

My aim in this chapter is to critique existing normative and critical accounts of NAC. While critical and anti-racist critiques of NAC have been crucial for broadening the feminist debate and complicating celebratory narratives of the organization, they also reinforce the binary between 'white' and 'other' that they seek to complicate. As the documentary and historical record of second wave feminism grows, it is essential that attention be paid to which narratives of the “feminist past” we rely on (Burton 1994). What is important, I would contend, is to trouble all narratives that fail to account for the complexity of NAC’s emergence. What is needed is a more nuanced, non-linear and perhaps disjunctive account (and accounts) which access multiple vectors of oppression and domination/power and resistance. In what follows, I
outline several tracks that have – to date – been inadequately examined in the writing and reading of NAC's history.

In my discussion of the RCSW in chapter 2, I suggested the Report on the RCSW operated through three dominant tropes: The housewife, the family and the Canadian nation. Because NAC was implemented with a mandate to implement these recommendations, it follows that NAC – as an organization – was shaped by these same discursive parameters. My specific interest in this section is to reflect on how the last of these tropes – the nation – has been taken up in contemporary historiography of this 'national' organization. My argument here is not that the nation has been ignored: as discussed above, the racial hierarchies of nation is an important site of critique in antiracist accounts of the movement. That said, my critique aims at inviting more complex accounts of the relationship between nationalism and feminist organizing.

Both normative and critical accounts of NAC have taken the nation-state into account – albeit in radically different ways. Vickers et al. believe that feminist organizations reproduce the political culture of the state in which they operate. Similarly, Chappell's comparative accounts of feminist organizing in Australia and Canada argue that national political contexts are crucial for understanding feminist organizing (2002). Critical race theorists, such as Nadeau (2005) and Stasiulis (1999), argue that NAC reproduces the racial hierarchies and oppressions of the Canadian nation state.
While these accounts take seriously the transnational feminist imperative suggested by Briggs et al. - to “rev[el] nationalism as ideology” (2008:627), only rarely do they unpack the particular socio-historical conditions of this particular moment (1965-1975). That is, 'nationalism' itself and nationalist discourses are treated as a-historical and timeless concepts. What is needed are accounts which reflect the specific – and changing – impact(s) of nationalist discourses on feminist activism of this period. It is relatively well documented that the RCSW emerged alongside a plethora other policy recommendations, white papers and royal commissions. Albeit from different theoretical perspectives, Bégin (1998), Nadeau (2005) and Ng (1992) point to the emergence of the Multiculturalism Act, the B&B Commission and Trudeau's political ascendency alongside the RCSW and the creation of NAC. Yet each of these analyses stop short of examining how these projects were taken up differently by different stakeholders in the Canadian nation-state. What is left to examine is the specific shape of 1970s Canadian nationalism and its relationship to different 'Canadians.' For example: How were these discourses taken up by or how did they shape the experiences of women of colour? Immigrant women? Poor women? Rural women? Women in northern Canada? First Nations and Aboriginal women? Lesbians?

Because a full account of these multiply situated experiences is well beyond the scope of this thesis, I offer here three examples of the kinds of elisions that took place both within NAC and that continue to be reproduced in the historiography – critical and normative – of the movement. I am suggesting here that these gaps present examples of the way that discourses of 'the national' and 'nationalism' are represented as timeless and static concepts – as “foundational” – how might one trouble the false unity that these terms suggest? Alissa Trotz has asked that we
examine what the “nation” erases: “At stake, as always, is the question, what are the terms of inclusion? Who is hidden from this picture and what does inclusion – different from transformation – entail?” (2007: 14). Following Trotz, I suggest three areas that have been under-examined in relation to the ‘nation’ in current accounts of the National Action Committee: The Ontario bias; the role of immigrant women; and the relationship between NAC and Aboriginal and First Nations women.

1. What the “National” elides:

What is little documented in the history of the National Action Committee is the degree to which the organization was centered in Ontario. My own trajectory studying the second wave feminist movement reflects this oversight. The original interviews conducted under the auspices of the Second Wave Archival Project were with women based in Ontario. Because I began with these interviews, much of my early understanding of ‘the movement’ was inflected by the particular character of Ontario’s feminist history. NAC features prominently in these accounts because, for much of its early years, NAC was an Ontario based organization, run primarily by women living and working in Toronto. At the same time, as an umbrella organization based on a membership base of some 100 women's organizations across the country, NAC could claim to be a 'national' organization (Vickers et al. 1993). That being said, the extent to which this Ontario bias impacted the 'national' organization has not been the focus of feminist history. My own realization of the limits of NAC's national mandate came when I started interviewing women outside of Ontario. It very quickly became apparent that while NAC was on the minds (and in the hearts) of a certain cadre of feminist activists in Ontario – the organization was of less concern or relevance to women outside Ontario. This is not to say that it was unknown –
feminists across the country had had varying relationships with the organization – but that it was in no way as central as it was in the Ontario accounts.

Of particular relevance – and equally unexamined - is the relationship between Ontario-based women's organizations and the emergence of NAC. Both the Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario (hereafter the FWTO) and the Ontario Committee on the Status of Women (OCSW) were deeply implicated in first the founding (the FWTO) and then the leadership (OCSW) of NAC throughout the 1970s. For example, NAC's first meeting was held in the Offices of the FWTO in Toronto. Kay Sigurjonsson, who was heavily involved in both NAC and the FWTO recalls Laura Sabia telling the women in the FWTO office that they were “crucial to the movement” because they had a type writer. Status of Women News – NAC's official newsletter – was printed out of the FWTO office for years. Sigurjonsson told Judy Rebick:

The National Action Committee on the Status of Women was really founded in our office [Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario]. Laura Sabia called a meeting after the Royal Commission reported...It was agreed that we would have a founding convention of people from across the country. We called ourselves the National Ad Hoc Committee on the Status of Women. We laughed about it, because there were two women from St. Catherines and the rest of us were from Toronto...My secretary...and I were NAC for a long time (2005: 27).

Similarly, my interviews with members of the OCSW reveal that there was a great deal of overlap between the OCSW executive and the NAC executive. As one interviewee put it:
There was a lot of overlap with NAC and its executive. Several people who were prominent, including founders of the Ontario Committee on the Status of Women, did go on to be elected to the NAC executive. Lorna Marsden was the President [of NAC] at one point. Many of the presidents of NAC you would recognize their names if you were looking at a mailing list of the OCSW. There was a strong relationship.

This interviewee goes on to list a number of women who were involved in both the OCSW and NAC and suggest that these “inter-connections” were characteristic of Toronto in the 1970s and 1980s. While NAC, the OCSW and Federation of Women Teachers of Ontario were ostensibly separate organizations with different mandates, all operated out of Toronto in the early 1970s and the leadership was shared across these organizations.

Similarly, accounts of racism within the movement tend to be concentrated in a few key stories: “The June Callwood Effect” (Srivastava 2005; Roach Pierson 1998); the 1986 International Women’s Day March (Findlay 1998; Egan et al. 1988; Agnew 1993) and the fracturing of the Toronto Women’s Press (Findlay 1998). While these accounts are vital for challenging celebratory narratives of the movement, they also privilege Toronto. Little explored is the way race was taken up in other contexts. For example, interviews in Vancouver reveal interesting coalitions between Vancouver Rape Relief (VRR) – a radical feminist cooperative – and Indian Mahila Association (an organization supporting women of South Asian origin in Vancouver). At the same time, VRR has been critiqued for its unwillingness to allow a transperson to stay at the shelter. These accounts reveal complex and “scattered” hegemonic relationships between women in different cities and across different lines of experience (Grewal and Caplan 1994).
Our histories need to move beyond the Toronto-Ottawa-Ontario nexus and seek more complicated accounts of activism and struggle (and hegemonies and power).

2. Immigrant Women and the National Action Committee:

A second point of inquiry that would benefit from further inquiry is the role immigrant women played. While critical race theory and antiracist feminism have made important contributions in rethinking ("renarrativizing") dominant historical accounts which fail to address racial hierarchies, little attention has been paid to the role that white immigrant women played in the movement. When it is addressed the focus is on the influx of American immigrants at the height of the Vietnam war (Rebick 2005; Adamson 1995). My interviews with feminists from the period reveal that immigrant women – not just Americans – were actively involved in this chapter of the feminist movement. The myriad of ways these immigrant experiences translated into feminist activism needs to be more thoroughly examined, particularly in relation to 'national' organizations such as NAC.

The first five presidents of NAC – all white women – were also all Canadian born. While immigrant women were certainly active in the wider movement, I know of no accounts which speak the specific relationship between immigrant women and NAC. This oversight needs to be

14 While little has been written specifically about NAC and immigrant women, there have been a number of important interventions on the history of immigrant women in Canada. Specifically: *Sisters or Strangers:*
more thoroughly examined: what organizations did immigrant women join? What form did their activism take? How did NAC incorporate (or not) these divergent experiences? I offer a few anecdotes from my interviews which speak to the need for further research in this area.

Canadian immigration policy shifted dramatically in the early 1970s, when a new system of categorizing immigrants allowed more and different immigrants to enter (Simmonds in Robbins et al. 2008). At this time, the demographic and cultural make-up of the country was dramatically different from today. Toronto – today described as Canada's most 'multicultural' city – was predominantly white. This was echoed in the stories that women of colour recounted in their interviews. Jean Augustine recalls that when she came to Toronto in 1961 from Grenada: “When I first came here the population of Toronto in 1961 was completely unlike the faces you see today so when you saw another black person you said 'Hi! Hello! Where are you from? Here is my phone number. What is yours?’” Similarly, Alia Hogben, current head of the Canadian Council of Muslim Women – herself an immigrant who eventually married a Canadian born man of Scottish descent - recounts walking down Yonge Street in Toronto and being stopped and asked if she was “the Muslim who married the Scot” - so unusual was inter-racial marriage at the time.

While critical race theory and antiracist feminists have explored the intersections of racism and feminism in the Canadian context (discussed at length in chapter 1), these interventions have been crucial for problematizing facile or celebratory accounts of the movement. As Himani Bannerji writes, these accounts help “shift the centre itself from the mainstream to the margin” (1993: xix). Without reducing all immigrant experience to one experience – especially given the complex legacies of colonialism, imperialism and their ongoing effects – it is important that the role that white immigrant women played in the movement also be examined. As I will discuss later in this thesis, these accounts complicate the static paradigm where white is always already a powerful/hegemonic position. White immigrant women exist in a liminal space between Canadian-born white women (with whom they are often analytically grouped) and racialized immigrant women. This liminal space needs to be carefully examined for the kind of feminist activism it produced.

The immigrant women I interviewed revealed a sense of being 'outside' the national project. I would suggest that these women – many of them white – held a perilous position vis-a-vis the nation state. Other immigrant women with whom I spoke suggested that they were hesitant to become involved politically – although they did find a home in certain factions of the women's movement. For example, of the forty interviews we conducted in Ontario, eleven of the interviewees were immigrants from Europe, the United States, the Caribbean and South East Asia. As outlined in chapter two, the interview project adopted a “snowball” approach which meant that many of the women interviewed were in some way connected with one another. That being said, this reflects – if only anecdotally – the significance of immigrant women in the movement.
Marguerite Andersen, a prominent feminist and writer, herself an immigrant from Germany, suggested to me that her own activism was structured through her experience as an immigrant. While she was actively involved in the movement – teaching early women's studies courses featuring, for example, a debate between Henry Morgentaler and a Jesuit Priest on the subject of abortion – she told me that, in hindsight: “I wish I had gone into politics at one point, but I think as an immigrant it never occurred to me that I could do that.”

It is relevant, also, to examine the relationship between the emergence of women's studies and the “Canadianization” movement in the social sciences. Feminist sociologist Margrit Eichler has attributed her neglect of issues of race and disability to an over-emphasis on 'Canadian studies' in the academy (Eichler in Robbins et al. 2008: 198). This reflects the way the nation ideologically imposes “misrecognition” (Grewal and Caplan 2000) and marginalizes certain bodies/experiences/histories at the expense of others. More research is needed to probe these misrecognitions.

3. First Nations and Aboriginal Women

The third elision that needs more attention is the erasure or flattening out of the complex relationship that existed between Aboriginal and First Nations women and the National Action Committee. This is not to say that First Nations and Aboriginal women are absent from the historical record: Important antiracist interventions have drawn attention to the (troubling)
relationship between feminism and empire and the way that the Canadian nation state actively participated in the subordination and discrimination of First Nations and Aboriginal women (see: Nahane 1997; Monture-Okanee 1992; Monture-Angus 1995; McIvor 1999; Silman 1986; Stevenson 1999; LaRocque 1997). What is less explored, however, is the relationship between early organizing efforts of First Nations and Aboriginal women and their white counterparts in national organizations such as the National Action Committee.

At the time of the royal commission, the Dominion Bureau of Statistics did not collect information on First Nations and Aboriginal communities (then referred to as 'Indian, Eskimo and Metis'). In 1979, a Federal study found that

> Indian women likely rank among the most severely disadvantaged in Canadian society. They are worse off economically than both Indian men and Canadian women and although they live longer than Indian men, their life expectancy does not approach that of Canadian women generally. (in Silman 1986:10)

At the time of the RCSW, journalists reported on the troubling living conditions on reserves: less than ten per cent of homes had running water; the birth rate, while double that of the white population, yielded a maternal mortality rate five times higher than white women; unemployment was ten times the national average and the high school drop out rate was around ninety per cent (Freeman 1998). In an attempt to secure greater rights from the government, First Nations communities established national organizations to lobby the government. The National Indian Brotherhood was one such organization (Freeman 1998).
Under the Indian Act, women faced severe discrimination through Section 12(1)B. It stated that if a woman married a non-status Indian she would lose her Indian status and be unable to confer it to her child. If an Indian man married a non-status woman, however, his status would remain intact and would be passed on to his children. This discrimination was noted in the RCSW and changes to the Indian Act (repealing this section) were recommended (1970: 238). Unfortunately changes to this Indian Act were opposed by the Federal Government and the Indian Brotherhood: First Nations and Aboriginal women would spend two decades fighting this discrimination at every level of Canadian courts, ultimately taking it to the United Nations which overturned the Supreme Court's decision (Silman 1986).

Barbara Freeman has written an important article about the media coverage of Aboriginal women during the Royal Commission (1998). Her work reflects the complex relationship between the (white) government initiative (RCSW), white feminists (Florence Bird and co.) and Native Women's groups who participated in the Commission. Freeman states that research on this work is incomplete and that there is a need for “broader and more sophisticated interpretations” of the relationship between the news media, the nation-state and Aboriginal women (1998:87). Her work points to the tactical and strategic choices made by First Nations women who used the royal commission hearings as a space to raise awareness about First Nations’ women's issues (by using the human rights discourse of the Commission). The racial, political and ideological parameters of the time, however, meant that the public received “complex messages” about the conditions of Native women and their demands: At times the news media shored up conventional and stereotypical images of the “degraded Indian” (1998:
at others it managed to critique the Canadian government for its “custodial' attitude” towards native communities (1998: 93).

The organization “Indian Rights for Indian Women” - founded by Mohawk activist Mary Two-Axe Early in 1968 - predated NAC. Mary Two-Axe Early attended NAC's first meeting and secured a pledge of support from NAC to make Indian Women's rights a priority. Two-Axe Early was also an early board member of the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAW). Several scholars have pointed to the close relationship between Quebec labour activist and feminist Madeleine Parent and Mary Two-Axe Early: A relationship which secured support for native women across political, national, cultural and linguistic lines. When the Supreme Court of Canada ruled against Jeanette Lavell – stating that section 12(1)(b) of the Indian act did not discriminate against women – NAC held a national day of mourning (Rebick 2005: 107).

Caroline Ennis – an activist from Tobique who helped organize the Native Women's Walk to Ottawa (1979) and was closely involved with the Sandra Lovelace case – was on the NAC executive. In an interview with Judy Rebick she states: “I spent some time on the NAC executive during those years, because I understood we needed mainstream support to change the Indian Act. Some of the native women opposed mainstream groups, but I convinced them it was necessary” (115). This comment speaks to the challenge faced by native women's organizations who when speaking out about violence or discrimination within their own communities are put between “a rock and a hard place” - a sexist community and a racist society (Razack 2000).
Ruth Roach Pierson, writing about 'difference' and the Canadian women's movement, has suggested that supporting First Nations and Aboriginal women in their struggle for status, was “less disruptive” to white feminists than other forms of solidarity work (across difference) might be (Roach Pierson 1993: 202). Roach Pierson is referring to the “attachment to innocence” (Fellows and Razack 1998) that white feminists claim: Assisting these women allowed white women to remain 'innocent,' while shifting the burden of responsibility onto the shoulders of Indian men. “It is more comfortable,” writes Pierson, “for women in the dominant group to see inequality between men and women in the subordinate group than it is to acknowledge between, say, white women and Native women” (Roach Pierson 1993: 202). Echoing Spivak's (1988) pithy comment about the project of white (wo)men saving brown women from brown men, Pierson is suggesting that certain kinds of solidarity work are more appealing to white feminists than others. This theory is convincing and needs to be explored in relation to accounts like Ennis' above – how were claims for difference/autonomy reconciled with feminist claims for the justice?

While careful attention must be paid to not obscure the colonial legacies – still ongoing – that structure the relationship between white feminists and First Nations and Aboriginal women, it is also necessary to explore the intricacies of this relationship – something that has yet to be done. I am not suggesting here that the relationship between these movements was harmonious or that it took place on equal footing. Rather, I suggest the complexities of this relationship have not been adequately problematized. The specific geographic, cultural and historical conditions of the
Canadian nation-state demand more complex and nuanced accounts of the solidarity work that was done – or that was not done – across regional, political, cultural and racial lines.

**Conclusion:**

In this chapter I have attempted to outline points of disjuncture – accounts which disrupt and trouble existing accounts of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women and the movement more broadly. My goal is to suggest that these alternative accounts present us with more complicated readings of NAC – these readings are crucial as the historical and documentary record on second wave feminism grows.
Chapter 5

Hegemonic Feminism and the ‘Imaginary Mainstream’: Narratives of the Canadian Feminist Movement

In attempting to produce a non-linear historical account of feminist activism in Canada in the late 1960s and 1970s, my work is invested in writing against normative, teleological accounts that assume a static model of power relations. I write against notions that certain actors are always-already oppressed while others are always-already oppressing. Following Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal, my work draws on the notion of “scattered hegemonies” - a perspective that allows for the consideration of multiple axes of power and oppression (1994). In this final chapter, I would like revisit the original question of “hegemonic feminism” and its theoretical and epistemological contributions to the history of the second wave feminist movement in Canada.

I draw on Ella Shohat's definition of “hegemonic feminism” which she describes as “an imaginary mainstream” (1998: 3). In this chapter, I use Shohat's idea of the “imaginary mainstream” to probe the inclusions and exclusions of second wave feminism. In an attempt to write against a “continuous history” (Foucault), I present a series of narratives from the interviews I conducted. As I suggest in the second chapter, in addition to discerning their content these narratives should be read as much for what they say as for what they reveal about political subjectivity, memory and power relations.
For Shohat “hegemonic feminism” refers to an “imaginary mainstream” that presents a “univocal mode of feminist narrative” (3). Working against this mode, Shohat contends that it is necessary to “remap the shape-shifting modalities of oppression and empowerment, recognizing that 'oppression' and 'empowerment' are themselves relational terms” (4). Central to my own analysis, then, is a critical look at this “imaginary mainstream” of the Canadian feminist movement to examine who is included and who is not.

In chapter two, I reflected on the intersections of memory, truth, fact and history, I would like to bring this discussion full circle and explore how certain narratives (as well as bodies, subjectivities and 'experiences') have become hegemonic in the history of Canadian feminism. Drawing on the interviews I conducted, I want to suggest that an 'imaginary mainstream' which is articulated in both normative and alternative historical accounts is also shored up by the stories of women who were involved in the movement.

This chapter is grouped into three sections. In the first, I present stories from women who are held to inhabit the 'imagined mainstream' of the second wave feminist movement: white, middle class, university educated, heterosexual women. These women self-identify as “second wave feminists” and were involved in organizations like the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC), the Ontario Committee on the Status of Women, the Federation of Women Teachers and in early women's studies programs in universities. I suggest that these women used (or remember using) their race and class positions strategically. That is, they took up this
'imaginary mainstream' strategically – inhabiting the position of 'Canadian woman' – to make claims on the nation-state for recognition.

In the second section, I present narratives from women of colour whose accounts reflect the foreclosures and exclusions upon which the 'imagined mainstream' was predicated. In these accounts, the imagined mainstream is used as a framing device – an Other – against which claims for identity and recognition by women are made.

The final narrative comes from a self-identified radical lesbian feminist. Her account cannot be easily slotted into conventional historical accounts: Her story troubles both celebratory accounts that view Canadian feminism as a reconciliation of radical and liberal politics (Vickers et al. 1993) and anti-racist accounts which rarely account for inequities between white women (radical feminists vis-a-vis liberal feminists; lesbians vis-a-vis heterosexual women; immigrant women vis-a-vis Canadian-born women). I conclude this chapter with her story in an attempt to reveal the way in which paradigms that employ the concept of hegemony must take into account the multiple, fractured and contradictory way that power operates.

**The Not-So-Imaginary Mainstream: White Women Reflecting on Power:**

I do not know of any other time in history when there was greater need for political unity to confront effectively the dominations of 'race', 'gender', 'sexuality', and 'class'. I also do not know of any other time when the kind of unity we might help build could have been possible. None of 'us' have any longer the symbolic or material capability of dictating the shape of reality to any of 'them'. Or at least 'we' cannot claim innocence from practicing such dominations. White women, including socialist feminists, discovered (that is, were forced kicking and screaming to notice)
the non-innocence of the category 'woman'. (Donna Haraway *Cyborg Manifesto* 1991)

In this section, I want to dwell briefly on how white middle class women – held to inhabit the mainstream second wave feminist movement in Canada – remember their activism. I highlight two points of relevance from these excerpts. First, I am specifically interested here in the way these women suggest that their activism was situated in political contexts that demanded they leverage their class position to make substantive claims for social recognition and feminist change. Second, I open this section with Haraway's comments that white women were 'forced kicking and screaming to notice' their complicity with systems of oppression to point to the political context that inflects contemporary discussions about second wave feminism and feminists. It is significant how interviewees feel compelled to defend or explain the foreclosures and exclusions on which their activism was predicated.

**Class and Strategy:**

In chapter three, I suggest that the Report on the Royal Commission on the Status of Women acts as a foundational text out of which certain forms of feminist activism grew. By attempting to unpack the figure of 'Canadian woman' at the heart of the Report on the RCSW, I argued that feminist activism was inflected by specific race and class hegemonies. These hegemonies played themselves out in the founding of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women and, as I have demonstrated, these hegemonies are also reproduced in many of the historical accounts about this period. Instead of disputing the hegemonic position of white middle class women in
the movement during this period (1965-75), I would like to explore how women remember inhabiting this subject position strategically.

Here I would like also to recall Butler's notion of subjectification: We become subjects through the interplay of submission and mastery of the discourses that surround, engage and shape us. While there is no space outside or beyond discourse where subjects exist, agency is enabled when subjects mobilize strategically the discourses that surround them. Some of the women I interviewed recall using their middle class status to their advantage and that this was position was inhabited strategically. They did so as to be 'heard' by the political establishment so as to gain recognition and political rights.

Recall the quote from Kay Sigurjonsson, a founding member and on the NAC executive during its early years, who described it as such: “NAC was pretty establishment...It was pretty middle class and respectable for a long time. But that was a useful thing. Governments gave us a lot of money...because we didn't look as dangerous as we were” (in Rebick 2005: 29). Sigurjonsson's comment reflects the political utility of being middle class and respectable. Similarly, Brigid O'Reilly, another early member of NAC and the Ontario Committee on the Status of Women recalls supporting the Dare Cookies Strike.15 O'Reilly told me that: “We had a boycott of stores that sold Dare Cookies and so we marched up and down in our sort of middle class outfits which

15 In 1972 workers went on strike at the Dare Foods Plant in Kitchener, Ontario to publicize the bad working conditions that workers – 75% of whom were women – laboured under. The strike was supported by the Ontario women’s movement (Roach Pierson and Griffin Cohen 1995)
drew the attention of some people.” Both Sigurjonsson's and O'Reilly's comments speak to an awareness for the need to appear respectable and the attention that 'middle class outfits' would generate.

While some scholars have noted the importance of the media in bringing attention to the movement (Freeman 2001; Morris), more work needs to be done to explore the intricacies between feminist activism and the media in the late 1960s and early 1970s. My interviews reveal that women were highly aware of the need to 'manage' their image in the press and public sphere. This was especially true of the so-called mainstream or liberal feminist movement who sought to appear 'respectable' and 'middle class.'

The anecdote below reflects the way that image, presentation and performance were closely tied to political strategy and ideology:

We held a peace march at Parliament Hill and I remember there was a Parliamentarian of some significance...who had agreed to meet with some of these women’s groups. And for some reason, I had sidled up to some women...Trotskyites they were, and they were on it to go to this meeting. Part of their political process was that they didn’t have a spokesperson, because a spokesperson would place that person above the others, so even though they’ve got this God-given opportunity to meet with a minister and put some of their ideas forward, they didn’t have a spokesperson. So I said, “Well, would you like me to speak on your behalf?” So there I am in my ‘Hello, take me seriously’ suit with a bunch of Trots who are not well known for...their fashion sense...And I kind of have the role of turning to them and saying, “What is your position on such and such?” And they would tell me and then I would turn to the minister and I would say, “Well, the position of this group is that, you know, minimum wages are directly impacting women because it’s primarily women who work for minimum wages, and so it’s an inappropriate means of keeping women in an economically disadvantaged position.” And then I would turn to
them, “Did I get that right? Good.” And so this just struck me as, oh, please, every organization needs to have some structure to it. (Pat Masters)

In my original analysis I overlooked anecdotes such as these, believing them to be 'merely' stories. My second and third reading of the transcripts, however, reveal a strong consciousness about appearance. This is also echoed in Judy Rebick's interviews with women who were part of the 1970 Abortion Caravan who described debating heatedly over what to wear into Parliament (they had to borrow “middle class clothes” and purses) (Rebick 2005: 37). The “Hello, take me seriously suit” contrasts sharply with the “Trots”’ lack of “fashion sense” and reproduces the difference in political strategy between 'liberal' feminists taking advantage of the “God given opportunity” to speak to a member of government and 'radical' feminists who – in this account – thwarted the opportunity not only in their unwillingness to speak to the Parliamentarian but also in their failure to appear 'appropriate.'

**Explaining Exclusion:**

We did everything on a wish and a prayer, although our groups probably had access to more resources than many community based groups, some grassroots groups. I don’t think they were nearly as great as some people think they were but we were really good at grant writing and we were really good tactically at getting money, small bits of money out of here and there. And we would have unquestionably partly been successful because, you know, of education, credentials and some leading form of contact. I mean, I’m still amazed at how people can look at a resume and…we have lots of shortcuts in our world, people assume you’re good or right or knowledgeable simply because of the way you look on paper, anyway, we were prepared to use that and we did use it. But we also used it somewhat consciously which I think is not probably
understood, you know, we knew that we were outsiders in that sense. (Beth Atcheson)

In a 2002 article in Elm Street discussing the disappearance of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) from public politics, former NAC president (1990-1993) Judy Rebick denied the claim that the “fight against racism killed NAC” (Rebick 2002: 74). Rebick makes the same point in greater detail in her 2005 book wherein she disputes the “conventional wisdom” (254) that blames the 'death' of the women's movement on identity politics. Her comments reveal the way in which the 'feminist movement' has had to defend itself against the claim that it has fractured to the point where it has ceased to be meaningful. There is a 'commonsense' that suggests that 'identity politics' killed feminism. Because these interviews took place between 2008 and 2010 - ten years after NAC's funding was cut and approximately twenty years after the first critiques against 'white' feminism were levelled – many of the white women I interviewed spoke reflexively about the racial and class hierarchies of the movement.

As I suggested in chapter two, there is a politics caught up in our acts of remembering. While it is impossible to know to what degree anti-racist critiques inflect the rememberings of white feminists, in the wake of these critiques, there seems to be a strong awareness about the position of relative power that these women held. Beth Atcheson – a founding member of the Legal Education and Action Fund and Ontario Committee on the Status of Women – suggests that a failing of the second wave in Canada was:

Inclusiveness at a really functional level of communities...We worked in peer groups and just by the fact that we worked in peer
groups, there were limitations. I usually worked in groups where the experiences were somewhat shared, somewhat I mean...not entirely but somewhat shared...I think that’s how most people work in groups but then the question is how do you put together the groups whose experiences aren’t shared? And I think that that kind of work we didn’t do as much of...

Sarita Srivastava (2005), writing about racism within feminist organizations commented that the 'June Callwood incident' figured prominently in the memories of her (white) interviewees. This was also true of my Ontario interviews. The accusations of racism against Callwood feature in accounts by white women about the exclusions inherent in the movement:

Where it fell apart...I want to say June Callwood...[She] was accused of racism...'Saint Joan' as she would have been known, and it was just kind of just reared her back. The pain that that caused her was just terrible. But it was part of a legitimate, a legitimate accusation that the women's movement had been taken hostage by the interests of white middle class women. And as I said, probably quite valid. (Pat Masters)

Several other interviewees also spoke about this moment in relation to their coming to understand the position of privilege they inhabited. While many have written about the “attachment to innocence” that imbues white feminist activism – Srivastava for example suggests that an overemphasis on how white women feel about racism dominates organizations rather than substantive investments in anti-racist initiatives – these comments reveal the complexity of feminist activism. There is an awareness, I would contend, on the part of white feminists about the complicity they had with a form of established power. They felt – and this is reproduced in the language of the Report on the RCSW – that they were advancing the rights of all women.
Awareness of their complicity should not be equated with innocence but it should be inflected in accounts of this period and this 'mainstream.'

**Alternative Histories: Outside the Imaginary Mainstream:**

Having reflected on the accounts of women who are identified with the mainstream women's movement, I move now to accounts by women who were excluded from the mainstream. This is not to say that these women were not active in the women's movement – they were – rather, these accounts speak to the way in which (some) white feminists held a particular position of hegemony within the movement.

While not often recognized in dominant historical accounts, there is a long tradition of political organizing by women of colour in Canada (see: Silvera 1989; Carty 1997; Bristow 1994). In the 1970s and 1980s one important area of struggle was around domestic labour and securing rights for foreign workers who were brought in on temporary work visas (Silvera 1989). The campaign: “Good enough to work, Good enough to stay” organized by INTERCEDE (a Toronto-based immigrant women's association) was one example of this kind of organizing (Bakan and Stasiuslis 1997). When I asked one of the founders of INTERCEDE, Judith Ramirez, about the relationship between the 'mainstream' women's movement and the activism by immigrant women for rights, she described it in the following terms:

The best description is [that] they were like two solitudes but with fragile bridges that were developed and solidified over time.
INTERCEDE, for example, was very conscious that in order to win these battles for domestic workers that we needed the support of mainstream women’s organizations like the YWCA. Also the church related groups [and] the mainstream organizations like the National Action Committee...but it was still very much the case that we had to carry the issues of immigrant women on our own without more substantial support from the mainstream organizations that were far better endowed in terms of resources and staff. [I]t was difficult but we understood that it had to be done and that we were ones who were going to have to do it if it was going to get done so we persevered and it yielded I think some important results.

This quote reveals the extent to which some modes of feminist organizing – namely that done by immigrant women – had less power and influence than other modes (here described as the ‘mainstream’ movement embodied in such organizations as the YWCA and the National Action Committee). It also reveals the degree to which these ‘fragile bridges’ had to be built by those outside of the mainstream movement.

When dominant historical accounts of the movement attend to the different modes of organizing within 'second wave' feminism each mode or organization is treated as equivalent (see for example Adamson et al. 1989; Rebick 2005). This chain of equivalence fails to attend to the inequities and power relations that exist both within social movements and within society more generally. The position of working class immigrant women as outside of the mainstream reflects a reproduction of the hierarchies within the Canadian nation-state.
Another example of hegemonic power relations within the movement comes from Rosemary Sadlier: an African Canadian woman who identifies as a “Black woman leader.” While she identifies as a feminist she describes her activism in the following terms: “I’m trying to make sure that I’m attacking [or] approaching that double issue of people who have been so impacted by racism and by sexism.” When discussing her relationship to the ‘feminist movement' she reflects that:

I was interested in what women’s organizations there were but...where were they?...There was the sense of feminist organizations as some of them...like there were some women who wore white gloves and drank tea and then there were the feminist organizations so it wasn’t quite that but it was something else. I would say that there was significant discouragement to go and I don’t recall any, any outreach coming to the university setting, even though we were talking feminism in the class, I also don’t recall any outreach for example coming to my church...

By describing feminist organizing as 'something else', this interviewee reflects the sense long identified by feminists of colour that feminist praxis that took gender as its sole axis of oppression often meant little to women of colour who struggled under the double oppression of sexism and racism (Bannerji 1992; Ng 1986). The failure of ‘mainstream' Canadian second wave feminist organizations to include women of colour is starting to be documented by feminist historians and sociologists (Nadeau 2005; Stasiulis 2007). Using a concept of hegemony helps forge the way for thinking about and theorizing accounts which contest romantic or celebratory histories.
These accounts of exclusion reveal the dominance that one form of feminist organizing has over others. In their recollections of this movement, both immigrant women and women of colour identify as being peripheral to 'mainstream' ("white hats and gloves") organizations. The anti-racist feminist critique demands an examination of the way racism operates in organizations that might otherwise be thought of as progressive. Interviews with women of colour reveal that exclusion went beyond simply being left outside of dominant modes of organizing. As Jean Augustine – a former Member of Parliament - put it: "It is very difficult when you are an African-Canadian or a black woman because often times you are not too sure – is it because of race or is it because of colour or is it because of gender?"

Rosemary Sadlier stated that for her "it was almost as if the concept of being a feminist was inconsistent with being a person who was connected to issues around the African-Canadian community.” Later in the interview, she describes being accused of stealing by her supervisor at the YWCA - “the hotbed of the women’s movement in Toronto:”

that was actually quite a telling experience for me because it didn’t matter what my training was, what my motivation was, what my experience was, what trust I had thought I had created in terms of relationship with this supervisor. At the end of the day I was a black woman who was of course going to be taking things from her desk.

Whether at the organizational or personal level, these accounts highlight the importance of de-centring narratives that mythologize or romanticize a particular moment in feminist organizing. Srivastava argues that the Canadian feminist movement is “overlaid” (2005: 31) with national
discourses of tolerance, multiculturalism and nonracism which make allegations of racism within feminist organizations especially difficult and contentious. Using critical race theory and Foucault's concept of the “heterotopia” Srivastava demonstrates how narratives of whiteness, morality and ideologies of Canadian nationalism interact to produce emotional reactions by white feminists to allegations of racism. Srivastava's work is useful for thinking about the relationship between feminism and racism and the relational nature of power. Her work – and the examples of racism and exclusion articulated in the quote above – help to de-center the “artificial consensus” forged by some hegemonic accounts of Canadian women's history.

**Competing Marginalities:**

I want to suggest that while the term 'hegemonic feminism' is useful for opening up analysis of relational positionalities and for thinking in more complex terms about power and power relations, it ceases to be an effective trope when it (inadvertently) re-inscribes the binaries that it seeks to displace. That is, for the term to be effective it must explore the complexity of power relations and avoid the slippages that place certain groups as always already hegemonic and others as always already oppressed.

This is not to deny the historical legacies of colonization, capitalism, imperialism (nor to deny the pernicious and ongoing injustices of racism, homophobia and misogyny that structure these relations). Rather, it is to take seriously Foucault's notion of power – it's complexity and multi-modality: “[power] comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled as the root of power relations...no such duality extending
from top down” (Foucault 1982). The histories we write must be attentive to these complexities and consider what Razack and Fellows describe as “competing marginalities” (1998) and the way that people can be both “oppressed and colonizing” (Stasiuslis 1992: 211). Ultimately, it is not about ascribing guilt or claiming an innocence, rather, history should be attentive to the shifting and multiple effects of power on everyday life, subjectivity and the kinds of agency produced therefrom.

In what follows, I draw on another interview to demonstrate the way that other actors were positioned relationally to the 'mainstream' movement. I want to suggest that this woman's life story – her age, immigrant status and her identity as a lesbian – represent various other forms of contestation that also fall outside of dominant accounts of this social movement. I hope to show that her story represents another form of “subjugated knowledge” (Foucault 1997:7) that must be taken seriously by historians of this moment.

In contemporary historiography, accounts such as these are glossed over. By antiracist feminists this woman – as a white feminist – is perceived as hegemonic and powerful. Her activism is lumped in with other forms of (white) 'imperial' or 'hegemonic' feminism and thus excised from the anti-racist historical narrative. Alternatively, while dominant historical accounts might account for this subject position yet rarely – if ever – do they take seriously uncomfortable questions of exclusion or alienation. “Radical feminists” are identified as “allies” and a triumphalist account of the relationship between 'liberal' and 'radical' feminisms is hailed as a unique achievement of the Canadian women's movement (for examples see: Vickers 1993;
Rebick 2005; Adamson et al. 1988). Here I would like to read Eve Zaremba's story so as to show the complexity of a social movement that was rife with hierarchies, exclusions, shifting hegemonies and power relations. These took place along multiple axes of oppression – race, class, sexual identity, physical ability, immigrant status and age, among others. For an analysis of hegemony to be useful, therefore, the multiplicity and intersectionality of power relations must be taken into account.

**Eve Zaremba's Story:**

Eve Zaremba's personal account begins with the claim, “I was very different:”

I was born in 1930 and that has an influence on what I’m going to talk about because I was 40 in 1970 when everybody else was 20. I was very different from most of the other women...I had a job and I had my own place, it wasn’t very grand but it was my own, had a car. You know, I was a lesbian which at that point is very, very tricky indeed.

The 'everybody else' that Eve Zaremba refers to here are the other 'radical' and lesbian feminists that formed her feminist community. Eve Zaremba was instrumental in the creation of a number of radical feminist organizations in Toronto in the 1970s and 1980s: A Woman's Place, the Lesbian Organization of Toronto (LOOT), Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW), and the Broadside Collective (which produced the radical feminist newspaper *Broadside*). In her telling, Eve Zaremba positions herself against several major strands of the women's movement: 1. “Mainstream feminists” 2. Women born in Canada, and 3. Lesbians whose political allegiances were with gay liberation
Of the 'mainstream' feminist movement, Eve Zaremba echoes Rosemary Sadlier's comments about 'hats and gloves' above:

[M]ainstream feminists who started things like the Feminist Party of Canada...women from the old Voice of Women. Those were women who had been working for, what we would consider, women’s issues...way before...[T]hat would be people that...were quite well known, [Doris] Anderson and [Kay] McPherson and [June] Callwood those are the three that come to mind immediately. And they were kind of nice WASP middle class...They had a meeting, so you went and find out what they were doing, what they were thinking. That was great...We had a lot of respect for, but, like, it wasn’t the same…in the same category.

We didn’t relate in any kind of organizational way or personally. I mean, we were not in the same social group...We didn’t go to same parties. So...And the fact that they were people doing good things in Ottawa and fighting for us and on the basis of the Royal Commission. The way I remember the Royal Commission is something we said, “Oh, isn’t that great,” and put it aside, because it didn’t seem to matter. A Royal Commission is something that happens and then nothing happens from it. That’s the way we saw it. It was all very well. We were really happy it happened. But it wasn’t really part of our life or part of what we were doing or trying to do, which was essentially so grassroots...

This quote reveals the divergences within 'white' feminist organizing from the period. Echoing the work of some socialist feminists (Adamson et al. 1988; Rebick 2005), I would argue that Eve Zaremba's comments about not “go[ing] to the same parties” speaks to the class and generational tensions within the movement. That said, Eve Zaremba's own position – closer in age to prominent white feminists she identifies above (Kay McPherson, Doris Anderson and June Callwood) – challenges conventional generational analysis of this movement that positions
young women (baby boomers) who were born post-war against the pre-war generation. Born in 1930 Eve Zaremba challenges this facile generational distinction.

Her comments also speak to the political or ideological divergences between the 'mainstream' movement and radical feminists. In Eve Zaremba's telling, the radical movement was more 'grassroots' and organizationally different from the work being done in 'Ottawa.' This reference to the Canadian capital is significant for revealing a major point of fracture within the 'movement' – those who campaigned through state-sanctioned channels (such as the Royal Commission) and those for whom the women's movement was about liberation. As the interviewee put it: “[T]he Women’s Movement wasn’t like an organization you joined, there was no membership list, there were no leaders...We weren’t offering...a clear path, a clear way of belonging. You know, you had to do it yourself, it was an internal struggle.”

Eve Zaremba's status as an immigrant and a lesbian also marked her as an outsider. While she does not discuss discrimination she faced as an immigrant she remarks that it positioned her as different from the other women with whom she worked and organized: “The composition of the women I was involved with throughout was largely white absolutely and largely native born Canadians. We didn’t get immigrants, white or otherwise.” As a lesbian, this tension was more salient. Eve Zaremba states that a predominant attitude at the time was that lesbians within the movement had to keep quiet about their sexual identities:
There was this trend that said or ideas that said, “You got to keep the fact that there’re a lot of lesbians in the movement quiet because it’s bad for the movement.” You know, and indeed it was used like that by our opponents. You know, all lesbians are not feminists as we well know and certainly all feminists are not lesbians. But there is a tendency and there was a tendency...to lump feminists and lesbians as being the same thing or somehow or other if you’re a feminist, you must be a lesbian. And that puts off a lot of women who don’t want to be called lesbians.

While this comment reveals the homophobia internal to the movement and the pressure on lesbians to keep quiet, Eve Zaremba is clear in her interview that her allegiances lay with lesbian feminists and not lesbians active in the gay liberation movement. *Broadside*, the radical feminist newspaper she co-founded and co-produced, for example, was a feminist publication that Eve Zaremba describes in the following terms:

> [W]e saw ourselves [as] a feminist paper. But 99% of women who worked on it were lesbians...We, of course, covered lesbian issues obviously. But we didn’t want to be seen as just purely a lesbian [paper]. We were feminists. But there was a whole group of lesbians who thought we should be a lesbian paper and they picketed us...They - our, you know, our lesbian sisters - but we were not lesbian enough or the paper wasn’t lesbian enough. So we had that to contend with. We tried to be, I mean, we covered things like, you know, Quebec separatism. We covered all sorts of areas that we thought were important to us as Canadians and as, you know, as citizens and as women and just generally, were important to people.

The tensions between gay liberation and the women's movement in Canada is not one that has received adequate attention from historians of this women's movement. Where it is addressed it is approached in a cursory manner (Rebick 2005). Similarly, more work needs to be done to shed light on the competing marginalities and hegemonies of sexual and racial discrimination.

Questions to be explored include where alliances were forged, where they failed and how these complex subject positions interacted with one another.
**Conclusion:**

Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan suggest that for transnational feminist analysis to be effective there is an imperative “to articulate the relationship of gender to scattered hegemonies” (1994:17). Taking seriously this imperative requires taking into account, as the authors suggest, the histories of colonization, the global economic order and division of labour and the production of knowledge in postcolonial horizons. I would add that it also requires careful attention to the scattered hegemonies that inflect social movements. Our histories – if they are to be truly committed to combating oppression – must guard against re-inscribing the binaries they seek to displace. As Ella Shohat puts it: “The new moment requires a feminist rethinking of identity designation, intellectual grids, and disciplinary boundaries...[W]e have to move beyond a number of false dichotomies, double binds and catch 22s” (1998: 3-4). The work of historians, then, should be to write against these binaries and to maintain a commitment to examining the multiplicity and complexity of power.
Conclusion

This common pedagogical mode seems counter-productive for political engagement and is too often based on incomplete knowledge of the history of the social movement being “taught.” Rather than admonish and advise, it would make more political sense to locate, engage and expand productive political moments for future elaborations. (Lisa Duggan 2003: 81)

My intention in writing this thesis was to imagine a version of feminist history that dwelled productively in the space between answers. I have been searching throughout this work not to produce a historical account that could be repackaged and presented as unified, but rather one that would begin the process of unsettling the stories that exist about the history of the Canadian women's movement.

In a way, this work has been self-serving: troubled by the dearth of histories that 'fit' with my own fragmented and contradictory picture of this movement, I sought to produce an account that would complicate facile narratives and move away from linear or binary imaginaries. My experience conducting these interviews leaves me with an understanding of this history that is profoundly multi-layered and multi-faceted. I hope that this thesis has prompted – and will prompt – a rethinking of historical accounts that attempt to iron out the inevitable contradictions and incoherences.

I am indebted to the work of poststructuralist feminists, namely Judith Butler and Joan Scott. Their insights into 'experience' and the complexity of 'the subject' allowed me to set aside a
commitment to creating a 'continuous' or linear account of this moment. While a great battle has been waged over what is lost when we set aside 'foundations' – I have found that this critique productively opens a space for a new kind of imagining, a different way of writing history and, frankly, a way out from the circular (and unproductive) race for the more 'convincing' historical account. Similarly, when we begin to conceptualize power as multi-modal, non-linear and always caught up with discourse, we move closer to the contradictions and disharmonies of our histories. Finally, poststructuralist feminism allowed for an alternative reading of my oral history transcripts. Instead of reading them for a kind of 'truth' I was able to position them in a context of political and social memory: What is sayable? What is rememberable? Asking these questions allowed me to challenge conventional approaches to oral history which take them as a kind of 'fact.' Here, Linda Cullum's work (2003) provoked me to ask 'how' questions and situate my interviewees (and myself) in fields of power, discursive possibility and sociality.

Grappling with 1960s and 1970s Canadian feminism, I focused on the Report on the Royal Commission on the Status of Women and explored the dominant discourses operating during this period. I suggested that the Report should be understood as dialectically produced. On the one hand, it reveals the discourses available to feminist activists at the time, on the other it can be read as the product of a particular social and historical (racialized, classed and gendered) period. The RCSW, I contend, is imperative for understanding the hierarchies and hegemonies of feminist activism during the movement's early years – both in how they were produced and how they are reproduced in the historical record.
Building on my analysis of the RCSW, I suggested in chapter three that the Report on the RCSW created the political and social context that led to the emergence of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC). While NAC played a crucial role in the early years of the women's movement, I argue that the historiography of this period ignores crucial aspects of the organization. Drawing on my interviews, I suggest that more attention needs to be paid to what is erased by the imagined 'national' character of the organization. Specifically, the role of immigrant women, the Ontario bias of the organization and the role of First Nations and Aboriginal women in NAC's early years.

Problematising the RCSW and NAC lays the groundwork for the narratives I present in the final chapter. By contrasting a series of accounts by women involved in the movement (both in 'dominant' and 'marginal' positions) I suggest that an 'imaginary mainstream' is at the heart of our understanding of hegemonic feminism and the history of the Canadian women's movement. Drawing on Ella Shohat's work, I present divergent accounts of the movement and feminism with the hopes of troubling historical accounts that attempt to smooth over these 'inconsistencies.' In presenting these narratives, I write against normative accounts that position certain actors (bodies, subjectivities) as always-already oppressed and others as always-already oppressing, instead, I suggest that more nuanced accounts of power are necessary when documenting the history of social movements.

Going forward:
A project such as this is necessarily incomplete. My goal was to productively trouble existing narratives with the hope of asking new questions and eliciting new kinds of reflection on Canadian feminism. Because the history of this social movement is only now being written, I am indebted to the early work that undergirds much of my own reflection. My critique of this work should be read as an attempt to open dialogue, not to position my account as 'correct' and others as 'lacking' – indeed, that would run counter to the ethos of this project which seeks to construct more complex, less linear or 'authoritative' accounts. I hope that my work will be taken up with the same spirit of critical engagement as it is only through these exchanges that we foster deeper ways of apprehending our histories.

Building on this thesis, I would like to offer several points of engagement that would benefit from further scholarly reflection. Because the interviews that form the basis of this thesis are on the public record and housed at the Canadian Women's Movement Archives (CWMA), there exists an opportunity for future scholars to revisit some of the questions posed in this work. It also opens the door for new questions. In the following section I offer three directions for feminist historical research that might profit from the archival collection at the CWMA.

**Intersectional Analysis:**

*People are different from each other:* It is astonishing how few respectable conceptual tools we have for dealing with this self-evident fact. A tiny number of inconceivably coarse axes of categorization have been painstakingly inscribed in current critical political thought: gender, race, class, nationality, sexual orientation are pretty much the available distinctions. They, with the associated demonstrations of the mechanisms by which they are
constructed and reproduced, are indispensable, and they may indeed override all or some other forms of difference and similarity. But the sister or brother, the best friend, the classmate, the parent, the child, the lover, the ex-: our families, loves and enmities alike, not to mention our work, play and activism, prove that even people who share all or most of our own positionings along these crude axes may still be different enough from us, and from each other, to seem like all but different species. (Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick 1990: 22)

A major aim of this work was to move beyond some of the entrenched binaries that plague contemporary feminist historiography. That is, following Sedgewick, I want to push us beyond the 'coarse axes of categorization' to what she later describes as a “nonce taxonomy” : a way of conceptualizing intersubjectivity through “the making and unmaking and remaking and redissolution of hundreds of old and new categorical imaginings” (23). I believe that this is a major strength of oral history interviews: they provide rich, nuanced and complicated accounts of subjectivity that go deeper than the limited taxonomy of current sociological categorization.

The interview collection presents an archive that allows for a truly intersectional analysis to take place. This means examining the complex relations between race and class, as well as other aspects of intersectionality that shape an individual's subjectivity: immigrant status, regional affiliation, ideological and political commitments, age, marital status, family, sexual orientation, physical ability, educational background (etc.). Also, how our 'families, loves, enmities...work, play and activism' inflect our way of being, remembering and our political commitments.

My own work would not be possible without the contributions of critical race theory: for rethinking the nation-state, the relationships between whiteness, class privilege and respectability
and for disavowing a commitment to linear History. More work needs to be done to bring these insights into conversation with the accounts of early feminists. Following Butler and Foucault, attention needs to be paid to the multiple ways that power operates through discourse and on bodies: how did discourse change over time? Who came to be included in the 'public sphere'? Who was excluded? How did different forms of marginalization or 'difference' inflect activism?

Similarly, following Sherene Razack (1998), how does power operate relationally: how does one group's power shore up another's oppression? How does this operate both historically and in the way that we write our historical narratives? As I attempted to demonstrate in the last chapter, individuals often exist outside of our established models of power relations. They occupy complicated positions vis-a-vis a variety of forces: their race, class, gender, sexuality but also their social groups, the nation-state, and the discourses available to them at a given moment. Bringing the interviews into further conversation with critical race theory, transnational feminism and poststructuralism will help elucidate these complexities – inviting deeper reflection on the nature of political subjectivity and feminist activism.

**The National:**

Recalling Alissa Trotz's reminder to consider what the 'nation' erases, I suggest that more work is needed to examine the particular social, historical and political contexts of the Canadian nation state vis-a-vis feminist organizing (Trotz 2007). I reiterate here some gaps that merit greater attention by feminist historians: 1. First Nations and Aboriginal women and the feminist
movement; 2. the role of immigrant women in the movement; and 3. the kinds of feminist activism that took place beyond the Toronto-Ottawa nexus.

1) First Nations and Aboriginal women and the feminist movement: Canada's position as a settler colony makes it imperative that the specific histories and legacies (still ongoing) of colonization be carefully examined when writing our feminist histories. More work is needed to explore the intersections and divergences between the 'mainstream' movement and the work of First Nations and Aboriginal women. Particularly underexamined is the kind of activism undertaken by women in Northern Canada. The Second Wave Archival Collection includes interviews with women from these regions. These interviews should be analysed to examine the strategic alliances that were forged between local women's groups and First Nations women. First Nations women in Northern Canada are doubly excluded from the historical record both because of regional isolation and their citizen status as a colonized people. In keeping with the argument I made in chapter three, too often accounts of discrimination within the movement are normatively focused on women of colour living in major urban centres. These accounts in and of themselves are valuable. We need to work harder, however, to explore the complexity of discrimination, hierarchy and hegemony that is unique to the Canadian geographical and historical context.

2) Immigrant Women: Because this chapter of the feminist movement emerged alongside a major shifts in immigration policy, demography and the emergence of a new brand of Canadian nationalism, it is imperative that our histories attend to the discursive
parameters at play in the lives of Canadian women at this time. While some important work is being done on the relationship between Canadian nationalism and feminism, too little has been done on the impact of these efforts on the lives of immigrant women during this period. As I indicated earlier, white immigrant women played an instrumental role in this chapter of the women's movement. Deeper exploration is needed to probe the limitations, challenges and quality of this work. How did feminist praxis emerge alongside a Canadian identity for immigrant women during this period? What imaginaries or discourses shaped the immigrant 'experience' and how did these shift along regional, rural/urban and gender lines? How were groups of immigrants differently assimilated or taken up by the national project? How did this shape feminist engagement or activism?

3) **Canada is Not Ontario:** This self-evident fact is often overlooked in the historical accounts of the 'Canadian' women's movement. Because most 'national' organizations were founded and run out of Toronto or Ottawa and because of the proximity to the Federal Government (and its funding bodies), the work of feminists in other regions of the country is often overlooked. In addition, much scholarship – particularly antiracist feminism – has emerged out of the University of Toronto and there is a tendency to limit research to parameters closer to home. My experience conducting interviews in rural areas, northern communities and the *other* provinces challenged many of the pre-existing notions I had about the women's movement (most of which came out of my earlier, original, interviews in Ontario). The regional differences in Canada are real. The political, social, historical and economic conditions change radically from province to province, so too do the forms of feminist engagement and activism. The CWMA
collection includes interviews with women in seven provinces outside Ontario and two territories, these interviews should be mined with the intention of reflecting the diversity of feminist engagement, solidarity work and relationship to the (imagined) national project.

The 1980s, 1990s and the 'Death' of the Canadian Feminist Movement:

In the mid-1990s, American critical theorist Nancy Fraser described the contemporary political context as “postsocialist.” By this Fraser was referring to the following three conditions: First, the “delegitimation” of socialism in the post-cold war period and the lack of a comprehensive progressive alternative to the existing political-economic order (Fraser 1997: 2). Second, “postsocialist” referred to the shift within progressive politics from claims for economic redistributive justice to claims for recognition of group difference. The third feature of the “postsocialist” condition is the “resurgence of economic liberalism” by which Fraser means the particularly pervasive nature of globalized capitalism in the 1990s and the sharp rise in material inequality which accompanied it (ibid: 3).

For Fraser, the “postsocialist” condition was one that demanded a theoretical and political response to help move the Left beyond the “false antithesis” between claims for recognition (cultural) and claims for redistribution (economic) (ibid). Her goal was to bring the “best of socialism” together with a politics of recognition grounded in justice (4). While Fraser is clear in her work that this binary is fictive – that claims for redistribution and recognition are always-already implicated the one with the other – her binary well articulates contemporary readings of
historical events, particularly the demise of the 1960s and 1970s social movements. Judy Rebick's comments in Elm Street (reiterated in chapter five of this thesis) refuting the claim that identity politics killed the women's movement bespeak a 'commonsense' nostalgia (on the part of some) for a unified, in this case 'feminist', political project. There is a sense – and certainly this was echoed in some of my interviews with white feminists – that the Canadian feminist movement is dead in the water and that 'identity politics' should be held accountable.

Antiracist feminists – notably Mary Jo Nadeau – have suggested that the transformation of the women's movement, to a more broad-based, diffuse and globally focused movement, was a vital step toward second wave feminism divorcing itself from its white middle class bias (2009; 2005). Nadeau quotes Sunera Thobani, for example, the first woman of colour president of NAC, who stated that NAC's shift towards affirmative action “saved [it] from total irrelevance” (Nadeau 2005: 320). Thobani’s claim is that the organization needed a radical new direction to stay politically relevant. These histories and critiques are only beginning to be written and much more work is needed to explore the intricacies of feminist activism in Canada in the 1980s and 1990s. This includes examining the fractures and dissolutions (NAC, for example, had the majority of its federal funding cut in 1997 and has been a political non-entity for the last 15 years) as well as the successes and reincarnations.

I believe that here too the interview collection at the CWMA will be useful for filling some of these gaps in the historical record. While this thesis has focused primarily on the movement's early years, the interviews include stories of activists who were and continue to be involved in
feminist work. With time and careful scholarship, the record will be filled in to account for the shape and quality of activism that took place in the 1980s and 1990s in Canada. I would caution, however, that these histories be attentive to the pitfalls of the culture/economy divide. In feminist historiography, this divide is reproduced as nostalgia for a kind of 'real' feminist organizing (memorialized by (some) white feminists as the activism of the 1960s and 1970s) against the disjunctive and broad-based organizing of the 1990s and 2000s (emblemized by the anti-globalization protests in Seattle and Quebec City). This binary is unintentionally shored up by critical historians who celebrate the decline of 'white feminism' without attending to the radical shifts in economic and political terrain in the wake of neoliberalism. In both accounts – whether melancholic or celebratory – one group is pitted against the other reinforcing the false belief that some claims for social justice are more legitimate than others.

In her critique of Fraser's binary, Judith Butler reminds us that claims for economic justice can never be divorced from claims for cultural recognition (Butler 1997). The tendency to reproduce a binary between 'serious' claims for economic justice on the one hand, versus 'merely cultural' claims for 'recognition' on the other. Critiquing Fraser's designation of queer politics as 'cultural,' Butler argues that Fraser's analytical distinction fails because it reduces queer politics to claims for cultural recognition and leaves unexamined the economic implications of queer claims for justice: “Why,” asks Butler, “would a movement concerned to criticize and transform the ways in which sexuality is socially regulated not be understood as central to the functioning of political economy?” (1997: 271).
Lisa Duggan goes further and suggests that what is most perilous about the contemporary political and economic order is the way in which neoliberalism operates through cultural institutions. Duggan writes: “While reasserting this ideology of discrete spheres of social life, in practice, contemporary neoliberal policies have been implemented in and through culture and politics, reinforcing or contesting relations of class, race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion or nationality” (2003: xiv).

For both Duggan and Butler, the imperative is to not place one claim above another but to see how neoliberalism works through the creation of difference – so we believe, for example, that feminist claims for pay equity are unrelated to indigenous claims for sovereignty. Reinforcing this false dichotomy leaves us fighting over who is the most oppressed instead of coming up with new ways of building solidarity and transcending frustrating political impasses. These dichotomies are reinforced in the way we read and write our histories. I have tried, in this work, to re-imagine a way of doing feminist history which avoids the narrative coherence of both critical and normative accounts, it is born out of a desire to remain balanced – at times precariously – between truth-telling and story-writing. It is also an attempt to write against histories that get trapped in the neoliberal snare of having to choose which side of the divide we are on – instead of imagining forms of political solidarity which might transcend it.
Bibliography


Appendix A
SECOND WAVE ARCHIVAL PROJECT
ORAL HISTORY CONSENT AND RELEASE FORM

I have been informed that the purpose of this project is to record the experiences of women involved in the second wave of feminism in Canada. These recordings will become part of the archival collection of the Canadian Women’s Movement Archives at the University of Ottawa, where they will be accessible to the public. This oral history initiative is part of a larger project to preserve the records – documents, ephemera, images and sound - of the Canadian women’s movement in all its diversity. My interview, in whole or in part, may be included in a published work, such as a history of the second wave of the women’s movement in Canada. My interview may also be made available as sound files via the internet.

I have been informed that the interview will take one to two hours and that I may withdraw at any time. A subsequent interview may be scheduled by mutual agreement. The interview will be digitally recorded.

I (interviewee) __________________________ hereby agree that the
recording conducted on (date) ___________ at (location) ________________________________ will become the property of the University of Ottawa, Library Network, Archives and Special Collections, Canadian Women’s Movement Archives.

Subject to any restrictions initialed below, I further grant, transfer and convey absolutely unto the University of Ottawa any copyright which I may now have or may hereafter acquire in the said recording and transcript thereof, including the right to reproduce, edit, print, exhibit and make them available online, in whole or in part.

I recognize and acknowledge that the University of Ottawa shall be entitled to administer the archives in accordance with generally accepted principles of document conservation, which may include the destruction of certain documents and the conservation of all or part of the said archives by means of mechanical, photographic and computerized process.

RESTRICTIONS (please initial)

None _____  Or _____

1) The recording will be closed to researchers for _______ years. During this period, they may be used only with my written permission.

2) The recording may be used only (specify restrictions and time period during which they apply)

________________________

Unless otherwise indicated, I understand that any conditions initialed above apply only during my lifetime or for a maximum of 50 years, whichever comes first.
I will notify the University of Ottawa, Library Network, Archives and Special Collections, Canadian Women’s Movement Archives at 65 University Street, room 603, Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 6N5 of any change to my address.

________________________________________
Donor/Interviewee

________________________________________
Interviewer

________________________________________
Date

________________________________________
Archivist, University of Ottawa, Library Network, Archives and Special Collections, Canadian Women’s Movement Archives

________________________________________
Date
Appendix B

Second Wave Project – Oral History Interviews

Activism Stories

Can you remember an early defining moment that made you aware of gender inequality?

What is the first feminist event or group in which you participated? What made you go?

Did your family and/or upbringing influence you to become an activist? Any particular individual or group?

How did those close to you react to your activism?

Which formal or informal groups did you get involved with to promote social, political or economic change? (eg, women’s groups, community based, union, political party, etc.)

Note: if several, please repeat the next 4 questions for each.

Did you hold office in this group? If so please specify when and what role you played.

Did you know anything about the group before you got involved? If so, what information did you have and where did it come from?

What were the most important campaigns/activities you remember in the group?

What other events stand out? Why?

What was it like working with other women to bring about change?

What were the most important achievements or successes of the groups you worked with?

What would you say were your own most significant achievements as an activist?

When did you experience frustration? Conflict? What did you learn from these experiences?

Have you been recognized for your activities (eg, award, citation, etc)?

What are the critical issues faced by women in Canada today, in your opinion?

What advice would you offer to girls reaching adulthood in the next 10 years?

Is there anything else we haven’t talked about that might be relevant to your roles/activities?

Please make sure you have covered the following information in the interview. If not, please ask at the end. Some of the information may not be critical to the story - use your own discretion.

Demographic Information/ Identification
Name
Date
Year of Birth
Place of Birth
Where did you grow up?
Maternal Language
Preferred Language
Current Address
Telephone/fax/email

**Family Background/Education**

Mother’s Name
Mother’s occupation
Father’s Name
Father’s occupation
No. of siblings
Where do you fit—oldest, youngest, etc?

How would you describe your family’s socio-economic status?

Schools attended/years (elementary/secondary)
Post-secondary education: School/college
Area of concentration
Year of graduation
Professional training
Area of concentration
Year of graduation
Other?
Work experience (list principal jobs from oldest to most recent)

Name of institution/company

Location

Years in position

Job Title/ Function

Dates of Employment