Transnational Latina Feminism in Toronto, Canada, 1970s–2000s: Treading the New Avenues

by

R. Magaly San Martin

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Social Justice Education
Ontario Institute for studies in Education
University of Toronto

© Copyright by R. Magaly San Martin (2018)
Transnational Latina Feminism in Toronto, Canada, 1970s–2000s: Treading the New Avenues

R. Magaly San Martin

Doctor of Philosophy 2018
Social Justice Education
University of Toronto
2018

Abstract

Latin American women have a long history of anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist political engagement, expanding into feminist praxis with diverse women’s movements across Latin America. Following connections with the Chicana cannon and establishing connections with other racialized grassroots groups in Canada, a particular Latina feminist subjectivity emerged that complicates Canadian feminism and challenges dominant narratives of Latin American political activities.

Canadian feminist historiographies regularly engage in processes of erasure that inscribes Whiteness and imperialism into the Canadian landscape. In this context, Latin American women’s agency, experience, and lives have tended to disappear—along with other racialized women—from Canadian consciousness and literature, relegating them to the perpetual and exclusive role of victims.

In this dissertation, four historical junctures have been selected that illustrate the transnational praxis of Latin American women’s feminist subjectivities in the city of Toronto, Ontario, Canada. These key moments showcase complex political debates, including the political crisis in
Latin America, the imposition of neo-liberal policies, political repression, and exile. Diasporic Latin American women from the 1970s to the early 2000s developed organizations that responded to the political exigencies of the times, maintaining transnational connections with women’s and feminist movements in Latin America while also creating new spaces in Canada, ultimately evolving a unique diasporic Latina feminist subjectivity. These junctures are: (1) the solidarity movement of the 1970s to the 1990s, focusing on two women’s organizations; (2) the formation of the Latin American Coalition to End Violence against Women and Children (LACEV) in the 1990s; (3) the organization of the First Latin American and Caribbean Women’s Encounter in 1995; and (4) the foundation of MUJER in 2003. These four examples are neither linear nor lacking in controversy. This study is based on a mixed methodology that includes interviews with leading activists, document analysis, and personal experience.

Throughout their historical journeys, Latin American women contributed not only to the processes of democratization in their countries of origin but also to Toronto’s feminist political milieu, providing a vital contribution and translating into invaluable organizations that continue to support Latin American women’s agencies and political praxis.
Acknowledgments

This has been a long and arduous road with many stumbling blocks. There are many people to thank for their unwavering support.

I want to thank my thesis supervisor Dr. Abigail Bakan who graciously agreed to be my Supervisor when I unexpectedly approached her at a fundraising event. I have been extremely fortunate to have her keen attention to detail and guidance throughout this process. I also want to thank the members of my Supervisory Committee: Dr. Alissa Trotz who provided valuable feedback on every aspect of the draft; and Dr. Miglena Todorova who provided invaluable assistance in identifying a more appropriate methodology. I am very grateful to the Internal Examiner Member Dr. Njoki Wane, who endeavored to participate from Kenya in spite of the atrocious phone connection. Dr. Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez provided me with vital comments that made me think about my dissertation from a different perspective and that will undoubtedly shape my work in the future. Finally, Dr. Vannina Sztainbok who acted as an Alternate Internal Examiner Member and who graciously replaced Dr. Wane when the fight with the phones was lost.

It goes without saying that without the support of members of my community, especially the women with whom I have shared many key aspects of my life, this thesis would not be possible. I am very grateful to my friend Abigail Salole, who brings me amazing food, took on a course so I could have a leave of absence, and read my first chapter, all while doing her own amazing thesis. My everlasting thanks to my compañera Dr. Mary Jo Nadeau, who also read and provided feedback on the first chapter of the thesis; I really appreciate the time you set aside to do this at a moment when time is precious. Other people who provided me with vital support were Dr. Joan Simalchik who shared her archival material with me and Rodrigo Barreda who lent me his interview videos with prominent members of the community. Many other friends and family have walked along with me sharing the penuries, loneliness, and sometimes hysterical laughter that academia inspires: Lorena, Ayshia, Maria Antonieta, Maritza, Erika, just to name a few, to all of you, thank you.

In the long road to sow the new avenues that we as women shall tread, I have been inspired, loved, and supported by so many extraordinary, difficult women. We have shared
dreams and utopias. We have argued, pulling and pushing in different directions. We have negotiated and made pacts in order to advance, always striving to remember that we need to be compassionate with each other, that we are sisters of a sort, or better yet compañeras. We have hugged and cried with exhaustion after organizing major events and after seeing the seedlings of projects bloom. I have emulated these women, and appreciated their sacrifice, their wisdom, and their tempers. One woman in particular, Lilian Valverde, I first met Lilian when I was really young, and then again when we became colleagues and friends. We didn’t always see eye to eye, but I never doubted her resolute belief in struggling for a new society where women could be free. In a way this thesis is her story.

To all the women who shared their memories with me: sigamos sembrando las grandes Alamedas por donde algún día, pasaran la mujer y el hombre libre.
Table of Contents

Acknowledgments ........................................................................................................................................... iv

Table of Contents ............................................................................................................................................. vi

Chapter 1 Introduction ................................................................................................................................... 1

1 Historical Memories and Persistent Erasures ............................................................................................... 6

2 Terminology: Identity, Demographics, and Language ..................................................................................... 11

3 Methodology: Feminist Oral History ............................................................................................................. 13
   3.1 Objectives of the Researcher ...................................................................................................................... 19
   3.2 Oral histories: Interviews, participants and questions ............................................................................. 21
   3.3 Data Verification ......................................................................................................................................... 24
      3.3.1 Primary sources ................................................................................................................................... 24
      3.3.2 Secondary sources ............................................................................................................................... 25
   3.4 The Character of the Relationship: Insider/Outsider ............................................................................. 25
   3.5 The Intended Audience and Potential Beneficiaries ............................................................................. 27

4 Organizational Review .................................................................................................................................... 27
   4.1 Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework ........................................................................................................... 27
   4.2 Chapter 3: “Democracy in the Home and in the Country” ..................................................................... 28
   4.3 Chapter 4: Solidarity in the Diaspora and Transnational Feminism: Women’s Organizing ............... 28
   4.4 Chapter 5: Latin American Feminist Agency in Community Organizing: LACEV .......................... 28
   4.5 Chapter 6: The First Latin American and Caribbean Women’s Encounter in Ontario, 1995 ......... 29

5 Conclusion ..................................................................................................................................................... 30

Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework .................................................................................................................... 32

6 Introduction ..................................................................................................................................................... 32

7 The Postpositivist Realist Theory of Identity, Theory of the Flesh, and Differential Consciousness ........ 36

8 Transnational/Diasporic Identities .................................................................................................................. 40

9 Conclusion ..................................................................................................................................................... 48

Chapter 3 “Democracy in the Home and in the Country” .............................................................................. 50
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Latin American Women’s as Political Actors</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Transnational Identities: The Latin American Feminist <em>Encuentros</em> from 1981 to 1990</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Latin American Diasporic Women in Toronto (1970s–1990s)</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>The Women’s Committee: El Frente Femenino (FF)</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>The Latin American Coalition against Violence against Women and Children (LACEV)</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Historical Background: Latin American Women and Community Work</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>The Creation of Ethno-Specific Community Agencies</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Working Across Racialized Feminist Women’s Organizations</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td><em>Pre-Encuentro</em> and the Necessity of Visibility</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Preparing the Ground: The Call</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>The Encounter</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>The methodology of the encounter</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td><strong>Chapter 4</strong> Solidarity in the Diaspora and Transnational Feminism: Women’s Organizing</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td><strong>Chapter 5</strong> Latin American Feminist Agency in Community Organizing: LACEV</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td><strong>Chapter 6</strong> The First Latin American and Caribbean Women’s Encounter in Ontario, 1995</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td><strong>Chapter 7</strong> MUJER, Creating Latina Leaders (2003–2015)</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
31 The Latin American Women's Group, MUJER ................................................................. 159
32 Changing Social Landscapes .................................................................................. 161
33 Teaching Leadership: A Latina Feminist Praxis .................................................... 169
34 The Latina Feminisms Course .................................................................................. 176
35 Racialized Masculinity: Latinos against Violence against Women ....................... 186
36 Critiques of MUJER .................................................................................................. 188
37 Conclusion ............................................................................................................... 190
Chapter 8 Conclusion .................................................................................................. 192
38 Final Thoughts ......................................................................................................... 198
References .................................................................................................................. 201
39 Appendix A ............................................................................................................. 223
Chapter 1
Introduction

I watch how desperately we need political memory, so that we are not always imagining ourselves the ever-inventors of our revolutions; so that we are humbled by the valiant efforts of our foremothers; and so with humility and a firm foothold in history, we can enter upon an informed and re-envisioned strategy for social/political change in decades ahead.

— Cherrie Moraga, 2015

Latina or Latin American¹ feminism in Turtle Island (Canada) has subsisted as a subterranean current that has sporadically interrupted or disrupted hegemonic discourses from both the Latino and Canadian hetero-patriarchal structures, as well as from the mainstream feminist movement. This study focuses on the city of Toronto, the largest urban centre in Canada and one of the primary sites for both Latin American immigration (Statistics Canada, 2013; Armony, 2014, 2015) and progressive political action. At particular historical junctures, shifts have taken place in the feminist landscape that have allowed or forced Latina feminisms to erupt with enough momentum to make a stand, only to disappear again into the depths of the Toronto political Left. At the same time, Latina feminisms have been beleaguered by their own internal contradictions and bitter struggles reflecting the heterogeneity of the women who compose it. Divisions in terms of determining political priorities and ideological allegiances, classism, internal racism, and homophobia have plagued Latina feminisms at different points; historically, many of these struggles were often temporarily suspended to allow for fleeting fronts of united actions against the forces of hegemonic discourses that deny a political past, annulling Latina feminists as conscious actors.

Indeed, in the imperial mythology of subject formation, there has been a conjecture that immigrant or exiled women who have been in contact with the developed world have been uniformly transformed by their exposure to more democratic, and presumably egalitarian,

¹ See section on the uses of terminology on page 11.
societies. That is, transnational migration or displacement movements from what has been referred to as the global South to the global North have been heralded as intrinsically transgressive and emancipatory for women. This imperial mythology further argues that women from the South should be able to shed their “traditional” and “backward” cultural constraints to become freer individuals when in contact with the civilizing global North (Burton, 1994; Mohanty, Russo, & Torres, 1991; Mohanty, 2002; Amos & Parmar, 2005; Hall, 2017). Thus, it is implied that those who migrate to Turtle Island (Canada) have been exposed to different relations of power that have allowed women to blossom into active, free citizens who espouse a feminist consciousness and benefit from feminist political gains.

This particular narrative presumes that those who come to Turtle Island (Canada) arrive as tabula rasa, devoid of political subjectivity and agency. It contributes to a paternalistic, imperial racism that sees the liberation of racialized women as the burden of an imperial project. There are a number of erasures taking place in this simplistic narrative. First is the assumption that developed countries such as Canada are, in fact, a more egalitarian society for women (Saldívar-Hull, 1999; Razack, 1998). For example, in Looking White People in the Eye, Sherene Razack argues that in cases of refugee claims based on gender persecution women must argue (with the help of their lawyers) that their countries of origin are unwilling or unable to protect them, and the easiest way to do this is to “present an image that recalls the imperial notion of the barbaric and chaotic Third World and, by implication, the more civilized First World” (1998: 110). As a result, lawyers use tropes that position these women as coming from social and cultural contexts that are incredibly sexist and violent—it must be up to Canadian authorities and institutions to protect these women. Only when these women are in Canada, they argue, do they find out that violence against women is against the law. This perspective, which epitomizes Canada as a haven for women, has been decidedly put into question by the United Nations’ highly publicized reports on gender inequalities in Canada (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 2017).

2 This assumption of superior Western values has resurfaced in the public sphere recently. Brampton councillor John Sprovieri wrote an email that included this comment: “I hope that the newcomers will learn the values of the white people so that Brampton and Canada will continue to be a favourite destination for people who want a better and peaceful lifestyle” (Global News, July 7, 2017).

3 See section on terminology on page 11.
This narrative also situates feminist consciousness as absent from the political struggles of women in the so-called global South, in this particular case, Latin America (Mohanty, Russo, & Torres, 1991).

The following study examines the complex ideological loci from which political organizing materialized in Toronto, Ontario, Canada from the period spanning the 1970s to the early 2000s, and how specific ideologies, such as feminist ideology, became part of a Latina identity. This study is based on a mixed methodology that includes interviews with leading activists, document analysis, and personal experience. The dissertation challenges two dominant narratives, androcentric Latin American histories (Bascuñan & Borgoño, 2015; Concha Caldera, 2014) and exclusionary feminist histories (Roach Pierson et al., 1993; Roach Pierson & Griffin Cohen, 1995; Rebick, 2005). Latina feminists in Toronto have had to confront, negotiate, accommodate, and develop strategic alliances to claim their identities as Latina feminists and as political agents in the local political milieu. This journey to acquire a “voice” and a space has been formidable, with many upward surges and downward slides. By examining key historical moments, this research suggests insights into the constant transnational flux of the imagined Latin American feminist community in Toronto, specifically, their ideological dialogues with women in Latin America, Chicanas/Latinas in the United States, and other women of colour, who are also continually resignifying discursive repertoires to inform and reframe their political praxis.

It is my contention that Latin American women were able to develop a particular feminist subjectivity from a transnational dialogic relationship with the social, economic, and political struggles taking place in Latin America, which brought to the fore the feminist movement and women’s organizations that were taking the lead in political resistance in their countries of origin. Thus, Latin American women in the diaspora began to be exposed not only to the knowledge production and feminist debates taking place in Latin America, but also to the theoretical and activist experiences of women of colour in the United States, particularly the Chicana movement. Concurrently, the urgent social issues facing exiled and immigrant women in Toronto compelled them to forge complex alliances along transversal lines with other diasporic, racialized women, in the interest of maximizing support for Latin American organizing around solidarity and local issues. In both of these cases, the relationship with the White feminist movement in Canada, to the extent that this was an emerging entity, was fraught
with tensions, and sometimes outright hostility. I postulate that anti-racist feminists have historically understood the “Canadian women’s movement” as “white feminism.” Mary-Jo Nadeau (2005) identified two currents of feminism when discussing how the National Action Committee (NAC) on the Status of Women became the public face of the Canadian women’s movement. The NAC, she argues, was formed by the struggle between “the grass-roots ‘women’s liberation movement’ comprised of radical and socialist feminists, and the institutionalized movement comprised of liberal feminists” (15). More importantly, however, is that both of these currents “have relied on notions of (and identification with) ‘white Canadianness’” (17). Consequently, for Latin American women, gender consciousness and their emergent feminist identities were constructed in isolation from the White Canadian women’s movement, but in transnational dialogic relationship with the women’s movement in Latin America, and in relationship with the feminist women of colour movement in the United States and in Toronto. Given the multiplicity and complexity of these perspectives, emergent Latina feminisms developed as a bricolage of uneven surfaces and heterogeneities.

In a context where Turtle Island (Canada) has been mythologized as a post-racial, multicultural idyllic state, it is crucial to recognize that this particular fiction has been constructed on the ongoing erasure of racialized groups. This has been the case, for example, of African Canadian and Black Canadian women (Wane, Deliovskey, & Lawson, 2002; McKittrick, 2006), as their presence has been relentlessly and methodically buried, forgotten, renamed, relocated, underexplored, and deemed unimportant or irrelevant, creating “subaltern disappearances” (McKittrick, 2006). The same can be stated about Indigenous women, whose “voices and roles have remained silent and invisible” (Altamirano-Jiménez, 2013: 55; Kermoal & Altamirano-Jiménez, 2016).

This dissertation attempts to unearth Latina feminist historical trajectories that have been buried, obscured, hidden, or ignored in the gender-blind orientation of the telling of Latin American community history (Bascuñan & Borgoño, 2015; Concha Caldera, 2014) and in mainstream, White, middle class, Canadian feminist historical narratives (Roach Pierson et al., 1993; Roach Pierson & Griffin Cohen, 1995; Rebick, 2005). I propose that some grassroots organizations led by Latinas, considered in the research here, created radical possibilities and subjectivities in particular historical moments that reimagined and reconstructed forms of resistance and survival
in a hostile environment. By reclaiming crucial parts of the history of Latin American women in Toronto, this dissertation echoes the aims and projects of other oral histories that strive to incorporate women’s voices to “claim a space as a legitimate and valued repository of knowledge” (The Book Project Collective, 2015).

The study further demonstrates how Latina feminist subjectivity, developed in dialogic relationships with the women’s and feminist movements in Latin America and in isolation from the White, middle class, Canadian feminist movement, became reflected in the organization of a number of political and community formations.

This is a project that significantly endorses Latin American women’s articulation of experiences coupled with the reflexivity, and signification of diverse knowledges, of events in the past and the present, allowing for an understanding of how gendered feminist identities have been forged, mutated, adapted, and transformed in transnational interactions. It is hoped that this work has the potential to expand on existing feminist historiography by inscribing the political legacy of Latin American women and various community organizations that significantly changed the political landscape in Toronto. Hopefully, this work can inform a pedagogy of feminist historiography that challenges hegemonic erasures. It is my aspiration that this project will endeavour to provide grounding for younger Latina feminists by connecting them to the struggles and victories of the women who forged the path and sowed the alamedas (avenues) where free women shall tread. What follows in this introductory chapter is an overview of the scant literature about the political participation of Latin Americans in Turtle Island (Canada) and the glaring omission of Latin American women’s political participation and leadership.

---

4 Sadly, even in a compilation such as the Resilience and Triumph: Immigrant Women Tell Their Stories, edited by the Book Project Collective, there is not even one narrative from a Latina.

5 Salvador Allende’s last speech while the national palace was being bombed included the phrase, “sooner rather than later, the great avenues (alamedas) will open along which free men will walk to build a better society” (September, 11th, 1973). I want to assert that those who planted the seeds for the trees to grow in the avenues were and are the women. By being subsumed in the use of word men, women have been pushed aside symbolically and literally from the utopic socialist dream.
1  Historical Memories and Persistent Erasures

There has been a notable paucity of analytical theorizing of the political participation and agency of Latin American women in Turtle Island (Canada). Little has been written about the experiences of Latin American women as political agents and actors. Most research has focused on social and economic barriers that Latin American women face, generally from the perspective of their vulnerability in Canadian institutions, specifically in terms of their roles as mothers. Latin American women have not been mentioned in the historical compilations of the Canadian feminist movements (Roach Pierson et al., 1993; Roach Pierson & Griffin Cohen, 1995; Rebick, 2005). Yet Latin American women and Latin American women’s organization have played a vital role in the development of solidarity movements, autonomous women’s groups, and community and social organizations in Toronto.

A great number of women came to Turtle Island (Canada) as exiles from the 1970s to the early 2000s and worked tirelessly in solidarity movements and political and cultural groups. Many of these women, especially those who migrated from 1970s to 1980s, had worked with and for women in their countries of origin. More than a few understood the workings of patriarchy, although they may have chosen not to prioritize gender at the time. With a long political trajectory that began in their countries of origin, after arriving in Turtle Island (Canada) some

---

women considered themselves to be equally militant and respected as the men in their political
groups. Others, in retrospect, felt differently, when they were faced with exacting and
counterintuitive demands, including the expectation that their families would take a back seat to
the political organization or, conversely, that they would become solely responsible for their
families while their partners dedicated themselves entirely to the “cause.” Many of these women
became active in their parties’ women’s sections. Since their inception, traditional parties of the
Left in Europe, North America, and Latin America have historically had women’s sections. In
these segregated spaces, women focused on issues that were assumed to be the purview of
women: motherhood and peace. More broadly, however, these women’s sections created
intersecting networks with other partisan women’s groups that shared the same ideologies in
order to support the work of the male militants in the party.

Gradually, as a result of the ongoing transnational flux of information from women’s emergent
leading roles in their countries of origin (Baldez, 2002; Cracken & Simon, 2013; Craske &
Molyneux, 2002; Crispi, 1987; Di Marco, 2010; Herrera, 2010; Jaquette, 2009; Largo & Qüence,
2006; Pieper Mooney & Campbell, 2009; Maier, 2010; Pieper Mooney, 2010) and their
relationships with other feminist women’s groups in Turtle Island (Canada) (Working Women
Community Centre, 2012), Latin American women became increasingly aware of the historical
second-class role that was attributed to them by some of the political organizations that relegated
them to the position of assistants, lovers, and cooks (empanada makers). Furthermore, many
women had to face the personal fractures in their own social positions. Turtle Island (Canada)
disregarded educational and professional backgrounds, which inevitably led to confronting
discrimination and racism, including the lack of settlement services for the newly arrived exiles
and children being “streamed” into lower educational levels. The inability to deal with these
necessities was an incentive to organize social and community agencies that could assist with
settlement issues and parents’ groups that organized against educational “streaming” (Bascuñan
& Borgoño, 2015; Smith, interview, 2017). The work that took place in the development of

---

7 Streaming is defined as separating students by academic ability and limiting their access to university by streaming
them into applied programs. This practice has been found to be profoundly racist and classist. Although it was
supposed to have been ended in 1999 it continues to exist. See for example,
https://www.thestar.com/yourtoronto/education/2017/04/24/black-students-hindered-by-academic-streaming-
suspensions-report.html.
community and social agencies led to alliances with Black, Indigenous, and other racialized women to engage with issues that pertained only to women. It is in these transnational and intersecting dialogic relationships that Latin American women began to develop their feminist praxis. Women who came later, from the 1980s to the 2000s, or who have been born in Turtle Island (Canada), have continued to be influenced by Latin American feminisms, but increasingly, other racialized or Latina feminist women in Toronto have become influential in their development.

Only a few publications have reported on Latinas’ political participation and their involvement in solidarity organizations and community agencies. In terms of scholarship, there has been only one book, Julie Shayne’s *They Use to Call Us Witches* (2009), which is about the formative feminist work of the bilingual magazine *Aquelarre* (meaning a nocturnal gathering of witches). This magazine by Latin American women, which published 21 issues between July 1989 and 1999, documented the overlooked contributions of Latin American women. There have also been a few doctoral and master theses (Escobar, 2000, 2006; Lobo-Molnar, 2012; San Martin, 1998) and some journal articles or chapters (Barriga & Vanzaghi, 2006; Carranza & Rivera, 2008; Gajardo, 2009; Ginieniewicz & Schugurensky, 2006) on the subject. For example, the newly published *Chilenos en Toronto: Memorias del Exilio* (*Chileans in Toronto: Memories of Exile*) (Bascuñan & Borgoño, 2015) offers testimonies of the Chilean community in exile in Toronto. While the authors *Chileans in Toronto* made a palpable effort to include women’s voices, only four pages are dedicated to the organization made up entirely of women called informally the Frente Femenino (*Feminine Front*), a clear erasure of women’s crucial participation in the solidarity movement organized to support resistance against the military dictatorship.

---

8 While this book is an important effort in reclaiming the historical contribution of Latin American women to the Vancouver political scene, it continues to reinforce the trope that Latin American women faced inordinate sexism. In her review of the book, Joan Simalchik (2011) argues cogently that while Chilean women were indeed confronting patriarchal strictures and male privilege, “Canadian” women were experiencing the same kinds challenges confronting the patriarchal left and the Canadian state.

9 In a book with 305 pages the history of the Frente Femenino (FF) goes from page 152 to 156.
In terms of community publications, the Working Women Community Centre has published a seminal book that has gathered the experiences of women of colour and immigrant women, including Latin American women, in the non-profit sector (Working Women Community Centre, 2012). The Final Report on the First Latin American Women’s Encounter (Lara et al., 1995) and an evaluation of the leadership training organized by the Latin American women’s group MUJER (San Martin, 2009) are the only reports dealing with Latina political participation at the community level. The lack of historical documentation makes the reconstruction of many grassroots organizations, and even funded agencies, challenging. As Julia Sudbury states when talking about Black women’s autonomous organizations in the United Kingdom: “The failure to maintain archives has meant that the records of many Black women’s organisations which folded during the 1970s or early 1980s were lost, scattered among former members’ personal belonging and often eventually discarded” (Sudbury, 1998: 9). A similar problem exists for Latin American women’s organizations in Toronto.

Meanwhile, it seems that the mainstream feminist movement continues to lament the absence of women of colour (Sudbury, 1998; Wane et al., 2002), while ignoring the continuous work that Latina women and others are engaging in. As Julia Sudbury succinctly puts it, when talking about Black women in the UK: “By focusing on black women as an absence, this approach perpetuates the stereotypical notion of black women’s victim status, ignoring their participation in communities of resistance and foregrounding their subjection to ‘backwards’ cultural practices or to ‘double discrimination’” (Sudbury, 1998: 14).

The last decades have seen groundbreaking theories from Latinas, Black women, South Asian women, and other racialized and marginalized groups (Anzaldúa, 1987, 1990; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981; Ng, 1993; Bannerji, 1995, 2011; Thobani, 2007; Razack, 1998, 2002, 2008, 2010; McKittrick, 2006; Wane et al., 2002). Unfortunately, Latinas have also witnessed the continued utilization of their theoretical analyses—not only their intellectual legacy but their experiences as marginalized women—as a prop to give white women theorists credibility while blithely disregarding racialized women’s authorship (McKittrick, 2006; Moya, 2002). One poignant example occurred when feminist philosopher Nancy Fraser postulated in The Guardian that feminism has been co-opted by neo-liberalism (October 14th, 2013). That she offered this as a new revelation discounts Black and Third World feminists who have been writing about these
phenomena since the early 1970s, systematically critiquing the colonial legacies of state and
global capitalism. In the same vein, when Fraser was interviewed by an Argentinian magazine
in 2014, she bluntly stated that “historically the global South has looked to the global North to see how things were done” commenting that currently the situation has been reversed. The statement clearly shows that Fraser is completely unaware of a long history of leftist,
autonomous, and decolonial feminist organizing taking place in Latin America.

Although there are important emergent studies about Latin American community organizations
in Toronto, erasures and misrepresentations about gender persist in the literature. For example,
many of these studies do not consider gender as a key indicator and have tended to make few
comments on women’s leadership roles in community agencies. Additionally, some scholars
have noted that while Latin Americans developed fertile grassroots organizations, they have
made little difference at the macro levels of society in the Canadian context. By analyzing the
narrow definition of what counts as successful engaged citizenship, the focus in this area of the
literature has been the study of the limited impact of Latin American organizing on the formal
spheres of governance, legislation, and policy (Landolt & Goldring, 2009; Landolt, Goldring, &
Bernhard, 2009, 2011; Schugurensky, Armory, & Barriga, 2004). Ultimately, this narrow focus
has tended to support the idea that Latinos have only impacted the political landscape at the
micro level.

The argument presented in this study, however, disrupts this assumption. This study emphasizes
that radical grassroots organizations led by women were able to create far-reaching projects that
had a tremendous impact at particular historical junctures by reimagining and reconstructing
insurgent subjectivities and resistances, which allowed them to survive and thrive in an inimical
environment. Contrary to what appears in the existing literature, these radical formations
significantly affected and changed the Canadian political landscape at the micro, mezzo, and

10 See for example the response by Brenna Bhandar and Denise Ferreira da Silva (2013). White feminist fatigue

11 The interview by the Argentinian magazine Página 12 took place in October 2014. Indeed, much of the feminist
ideology developed in Latin America was counter hegemonic with a sharp anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist content
macro levels. In the next section I will clarify some of the terminology being deployed in this dissertation and its relationship to identity, subjectivity, demographics, and the problem of language in the diaspora.

2 Terminology: Identity, Demographics, and Language

Daniel Mato (1997) uses quotes to refer to the term Latin (“Latin”) to elucidate the arbitrariness, partiality, and inadequacy of the term. The usage of the term Latin comes from the assumption that millions of inhabitants in the South, Central, and North American continent (if we place Mexico in its correct location) are connected by “a pair of romance languages, and certain elements of post-colonial history” (74). Indeed, the term Latin was coined by French diplomacy in the interest of imposing a cogent identity on what they called the “Unión Latina.” The term primarily erases Indigenous and Afro-descendant identities, in addition to other identities that are present on the continent, such as Asian and Middle Eastern. More recently, other terminology is being reclaimed and incorporated in the lexicon referring to this vast geography, including Indigenous referents such as Abya Yala (the American continent), Anahuac (Mesoamerica), and Tawantinsuyu (the Andes region) (Mignolo, 2005). However, this new nomenclature has not yet become generalized, and each of these terms continues to be partial.

Furthermore, the term Latinos, used as a plural to include men and women, has already been challenged for erasing women. In some countries in Latin America the usage of the word Latin@ or Latin@s to refer to both men and women is becoming quite common. In addition, the term Latinx was introduced around 2012 in the United States to be inclusive of non-binary and queer groups. However, there has been a fierce debate about the usage of the term. Some of those opposing it define it only as an imperialist imposition and a buzzword (Alamo, 2015; Guerra & Orbea, 2015) and those supporting its usage argue that it reflects intersectionality and gives voice to emergent trans/queer/non-gender conforming/non-binary communities (Scharrón del Río & Aja, 2015; Reichard, 2015). While the debate rages, there are others that resist its usage because it does not reflect Afro-descendant or Indigenous identities (Latino Rebels, 2017). In this dissertation I will use the terms Latin America, Latin Americans, or Latinas/os with the understanding that the word is insufficient for reflecting the vast heterogeneity of identities that exist in the hemisphere. When referring to women I will use either the terms Latin American
woman or Latina and I will add the term Latinx later on, to be chronologically consistent, to include those women who identify as queer.

In more general terms, I will use the term racialized women to include those women who do not identify as “white.” Racialization is defined as process through which groups come to be socially constructed as races based mainly on phenotypic characteristics but also on ethnicity, language, religion, and so forth (Das Gupta et. al., 2007; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2017). I will also use the term women of colour as this was a term that was initially used by racialized women to identify themselves.

It is important to clarify that identities in Latin America have never been fixed and are always historically contested. The multi-racial composition of Latin America (co)exists precariously within the borders of nation-states. European descendants, creoles, mestizas/os, a myriad of Indigenous groups, Afro-Latin Americans, Asians, countless other groups, and the miscegenation that has ensued have been imagined as “the nation.” As Jiménez-Bellver (2010) states, hybridity and mestizaje have been discursive mechanisms in the construction of racial categories and national identities in Latin America that have erased Afro- and Indigenous populations. Subsequently, the formation of “diasporic subjectivities” in the global North must take into account the instability of Latin American identities.

The situation becomes further complicated when we admit that Latina/o subjectivity expands throughout the continent. Younger generations of Latinas struggle with identity, and lack of Spanish language skills and the use of Spanglish have become key elements to consider in the development of programs and services that acknowledge the problematic of identities. I will expand on these issues when I examine current feminist projects for young women in Chapter 7. Predictably, the fluid and shifting categories of Latina/o identities, compounded by the needs of the Canadian state to manage these populations, has also made it difficult to categorize the

---

12 As Altamirano-Jiménez (2013) states, mestizas/os (mixed descendants of Indigenous people and Spaniards) also became the larger population in Latin America. The construction of mestizaje, or the ideology of racial hybridity, served to erase Indigeneity while at the same time celebrating an Indigenous past. Presently, however, and in light of the political struggle of Indigenous people, mestizas/os have begun to problematize this identity.

13 Spanglish is hybrid language combining words and idioms from both Spanish and English, especially Spanish speech that uses many English words and expressions.
Latina/o presence in Turtle Island (Canada). The community has disputed the statistics, contending that the categories of “Hispanic” did not provide a clear criterion for Latin Americans and do not reflect the real Latin American demographics in Turtle Island (Canada) (Schugurensky & Ginieniewics, 2007). Duberlis Ramos, Executive Director of the Hispanic Development Council (interview, 2017), states that there were 14 different categories that conflate nationality, ethnicity, race, and language, making it very difficult to estimate the actual numbers of Latinas/os in Turtle Island (Canada) (Thompson, 2016). At the moment, the community estimates the population to be much higher than the Census figures.

The next section in this introductory chapter focuses on the mixed methodology used for this dissertation, which includes interviews with leading Latin American activists, document analysis, and personal experience.

3 Methodology: Feminist Oral History

Feminist epistemologies study how gender influences knowledge, understanding that dominant masculinist and Eurocentric perceptions of knowledge systematically disadvantage women, especially racialized and marginalized women. Women are either excluded from research or women’s activities, knowledges, and experiences are made invisible or rendered inferior to the masculine models, perpetuating the social relations of domination and the dehumanization of women (Blazquez Graf, 2012). Thus, a primary objective for feminist epistemologies and feminist research is to make visible, to denaturalize, and to historicize women’s subjectivity in society (Castañeda Salgado, 2012).

Feminist research has the commitment to improve the condition of women. Its fundamental tenets have been the understanding of patriarchal hierarchies, women’s oppression/exploitation, productive and reproductive methods, sexual discrimination, gender/sex, and power (Bartra, 2012). It has usually started by formulating different kinds of questions, sometimes not considered relevant, such as, Where are the women? Women may have traditionally occupied a subaltern social role, but as women they may have greatly contributed to social, political, and economic history—yet they have been ejected from this history. In the end, the objective of feminist epistemology is to create new knowledges that are no longer only centred in men’s ways of being, thinking, and feeling, but also to consider that reality has more than one sex/gender
(Bartra, 2012). The methods the researcher uses to obtain information can be listening, observing, and examining documents; the methodology is how the researcher chooses to use these methods.

This dissertation will trace the emergence of feminist identities and subjectivities of key Latin American women living in Toronto from the mid-1970s to the early 2000s. To do this, I will use oral history as a methodology. For data, I will draw on (1) primary sources from a number of grassroots feminist organizations (minutes, newsletters, articles, reports, communiqués, press releases, petitions, and videos); (2) key informants interviews; and (3) secondary sources such as relevant books and biographical or historical studies.

This study will draw upon a “historical processes research” of events informed by intensive interviews (oral history) by participants in those past events (Schutt, 2012). This methodology will allow for a critical examination of the evolution/revolution of Latina feminist subjectivity in Toronto through several historical periods told by different participants in those events. These stories, told from different points of time, tell us about the dis/continuities, challenges, and accommodations that Latin American women engage with in their feminist trajectories. These points view and experiences have been entirely absent from the Canadian feminist archives.

Alistair Thomson states that oral history was “an essential source for the history from below” (2006: 52). Initially, oral history sought to “establish the legitimacy of personal experience” and to challenge the “existing orthodoxies of history-making” (Bornat & Diamond, 2007: 23). Indeed, oral history has been an activist method par excellence. For example, historically the effort to recuperate women’s experiences was mostly divorced from the academy, emerging mainly from local and community-based publications keen to rescue women’s hidden stories. For feminists, it is a singular methodology that underscores that the personal is political, and that personal experience, critically analyzed, can produce theory from within. The effectiveness of the oral history methodology also relates to the fact that many of the documents or archival materials pertaining to women’s histories, and other marginalized groups, has been discarded, lost, or transferred; or, those in power have controlled the narratives and have told the official story to their advantage, silencing those in the margins.
Critically, however, there has been much debate about the validity of oral history (Gluck & Patai, 1991; Burton, 1992; Summerfield, 2004; Thompson, 2006); from the traditional historical perspective oral history is unreliable, anecdotal, and unrepresentative. Many feminist scholars have critically examined the complications of doing feminist oral history, concluding, for example, that assuming commonalities between the interviewer and the interviewee could in fact mask crucial differences (Summerfield, 2004). This concern has led to an increase in awareness of the relationship dynamics between the interviewer and the interviewee, although to some oral historians, this fixation may have displaced the focus on what “the narrator actually says” (Susan Armitage as quoted in Bornat & Diamond, 2007: 33). In this vein, the concept of positionality coined by Linda Martin Alcoff (1998) can be useful. Positionality was defined as a non-essentialist conception of the subject. Women have complex and multiple identities that are inseparable of ideologies, political institutions, and the cultural, social, economic environment that surrounds them. Women also contribute to this context as part of historicized and moving forces. Thus, the identity of “women is the product of her own interpretation and reconstruction of her history, as mediated through the cultural discursive context to which she has access” (Martin Alcoff, 1988: 434). Women’s voices then must be articulated from their particular positions (Martin Alcoff, 1988). The concept of positionality may be critical to address questions of voice and authority, since Martin Alcoff concludes that the “category of ‘woman’ need to be theorized through and exploration of the experience of subjectivity” (1988: 421). Experience becomes a pivotal aspect of understanding women’s positionality. However, the concept of “experience” is not an unproblematic one, especially in light of post-structuralist scepticism that experience cannot be separate from the cultural discourses that construct it. Notwithstanding, it is discernible that women will articulate what is important to them (Sangster, 1994: 5).

Understanding the differential power relationships between interviewer and interviewee has enabled discussions on the sharing of power, privilege, and authority, vital for those of us who are not solely academics but also activists. Researchers have tried to deal with these issues in a number of ways. For example, Benson and Nagar have envisioned new collaborative methodologies. The concept of “collaboration” in this context connotes “to forge alliances and re(de)fine methodologies that seek to reconstitute the norms, structures and content of feminist knowledges and political agendas in anti-hierarchical ways” (2006: 583). Unfortunately, this laudable ideal may not be feasible in academic settings where authorship is the paramount
indication of academic worth. In the case of this dissertation, participants were eager to support and facilitate this project as part of a recuperating collective history that has central implications for the Latin American community, but that was the extent of the collaboration. Other researchers, such as Sangster (1994), argue that by using people as sources for research one must ethically realize that this kind of methodology is intrusive, enmeshed in unequal and potentially exploitative relationships, and that participants do not have control over the final product. Therefore, aiming for detached objectivity or sisterly “collaboration” is unrealistic.

Another significant preoccupation has related to the process and interpretation of data. Oral history is especially reliable if triangulated with other types of data that can be used to provide a more complete picture of the context (Summerfield, 2004). In her article, Summerfield argues that the cultural approach to history has raised the problem that “the prevailing discursive constructions of the past ‘contaminate’ memory” (66). This argument underlines that “memory cannot be independent of cultural influence but is shaped or even constructed by them” (67). Therefore, researchers must be cautious in listening not only to the narratives but also to the “meanings invested in it and their discursive origins” (67). Summerfield develops the concept of “composure” where the process of life-story telling is crucial to the construction of the subject. “Composure” refers to the composition of the story but also to the pursuit of psychic ease. That is, the narrator seeks to constitute themselves as a subject in their story that is coherent, logical, and meaningful. These kinds of accounts provide the narrators with a version of themselves that they can live with. In my research I found that this may be relevant in the way that participants may have stressed their solidarity activism, in view of the fact that many of the earlier exiles may have been suffering from “survivor’s guilt” and the shame of “having run” (Grinberg & Grinberg, 1984).14

Other feminist oral historians have criticized this framework, theorizing that it is the narrator’s story and their interpretation that needs to be repositioned to understand the participants’ realities (Geiger, 1990; Bornat & Diamond, 2007). What is crucial is to “accept women’s own

14 These sentiments may be exacerbated in those who have attempted to return to their countries of origin only to find that many of their compatriots resent them. Those who stayed during the dictatorships assume that exile was a positive experience, in that people were able to study and work, and had access to material comforts, especially those living in the “developed” world.
interpretation of their identities, experiences, and social worlds as containing and reflecting important truths” (Geiger, 1990: 170). Therefore, if women’s voices are not representative of the entire group, what is representative are the “conditions or circumstances within which that person operates” (Geiger, 1990: 173).

Accordingly, while some women interviewed may not be “representative” of the entire experience of Latin American women in Toronto, the conditions and circumstances of exile and forced migration were the same. Participants were selected for interviews based on their level of active engagement, and those selected were, and still are, extremely active in political, social justice, and community work. Not all these women share the same political worldview or analytical tools, even if they were involved in solidarity work, for example. Pointedly, oral history provides “multiple” or “plural” truths (Geiger, 1990: 179) that reflect the multifaceted realities of the participants I interviewed. The methodology becomes central in destabilizing the history that has been told from one hegemonic centre, obscuring the lives, experiences, and contributions of large numbers of people who may have a “different” truth. In fact, as Stephens suggests, “the interpretative approaches from oral history and memory studies can work against fixed versions of feminism’s history and allow more ambivalent dialogues to emerge” (2010: 81).

In terms of gender, prevalent discourses of femininity and masculinity may also affect how women and men perceive and tell their stories. In the case of the older generation of exiles, this may appear as deemphasizing patriarchal authoritarianism in the interest of conserving a “unified political front.” Clearly, then, taking into account a cultural approach to oral history would enhance the comprehension that there is a “relationship between public discourse and the recall and recounting of experience” (Summerfield, 2004: 93). Indeed, many oral historians are keen to underscore that oral history (and memory) are always shaped by social and intellectual forces (Stephens, 2010: 82).

This is a project that recognizes that history is fragmented, fluid, imagined, and contradictory. The stories are told sometimes in a linear fashion, sometimes as a Foucauldian vertical excavation (Pérez, 1999), and sometimes in a circular manner, which is the way of orality, and how many women’s stories are told. Keeping in mind that
while the inclusion of the subaltern voice in ethnographies and social research is the first step towards obliterating hierarchies of meaning, the method of their inclusion perpetuates their subordination. Anecdotal evidence, the verbalization of concrete cultural and historical memory, is used as, at best, secondary supporting evidence, its essential orality and subjectivity judged as being inferior to the academy’s dictated and contrived ‘objectivity’. Lived experience is a local aberration on the broad strokes approach that defines academic objectivity. (Jeppesen & Latif, 2007: 16)

Bringing the explicitly personal into the textual makes the conditions ideal for introducing epistemic pluralism to academia. This kind of method has been privileged by Latinas not only from Latin America but also from the United States (Saldivar-Hull, 1999, 2005; Acevedo, 2001). In the book Telling to Live (2001), Luz del Alba Acevedo defines testimonio as “a form of expression that comes out of intense repression or struggle, where the person bearing witness tells the story to someone else, who then transcribes, edits, translates, and publishes the text elsewhere” (13). Testimonio becomes “a crucial means of bearing witness and inscribing into history those lived realities that would otherwise succumb to the alchemy of erasure” (2). Thus, testimonio is a tool that allows Latinas to recover their subjugated knowledges by theorizing oppression, resistance, and subjectivity. Furthermore, these testimonios “disrupt the essentialized, homogenized understanding of Latina as we present our respective genealogical and historical inheritance” (Acevedo, 2001: 6).

The project to recuperate memory is intrinsically linked to demands for justice and inclusion. In Latin America the effort to recuperate and establish particular truths against the barrage of pressures, admonitions, and threats that have endeavoured to maintain memories hidden in the interest of “national harmony” has become an arduous effort. A number of countries have created museums of memory (Simalchik, 2004).


The Mexican Journal of Social and Political Science from the National Autonomous University of Mexico, dedicated issue to Social Memory, 221, May–August 2014. Elizabeth Jelin published the article called “Memory and Democracy: An Uncertain Relationship” (225–242); Bertha Mendlovic Pasol published the article “Towards a New
become engaged in the process of recuperating memory in order to establish, perhaps justify, that people in exile played a major role in the fall of the dictatorships. For example, in Toronto, in the case of the Chilean community, the Latin American-Canadian Arts Projects (LACAP) organized a museum of memory in 2009. Whether in the countries of origin or in the diaspora, what still lies buried is the participation, organizing, and creation of women. In this context this work hopes to deal with a number of erasures.

Since there is nothing intrinsically feminist about oral history as a method per se, what makes it a feminist methodology, according to Geiger (1990: 169), are the following elements: (1) the objectives of the researcher, (2) the questions addressed in the research, (3) the evidence against which oral data are verified or evaluated, (4) the character of the research relationship, (5) the intended audience for the “product(s)” of the research, and the potential beneficiaries of the transformation of oral into written history. I will discuss each of these aspects next as they are intrinsically related to the methodology.

3.1 Objectives of the Researcher

The task of reclaiming these hidden histories is incumbent on different Latin American feminist scholars spread throughout Turtle Island (Canada). Because of the herculean nature of the task, this dissertation will limit itself to a focus on the City of Toronto. This emphasis stems from the fact that Toronto is one of the main destinations of Latin American immigrants and exiles (Statistics Canada, 2013; Armony, 2014, 2015). Toronto developed more services and programs specifically geared to the Spanish-speaking community and it facilitated the connection between newcomers and a constellation of progressive groups that provided much-needed political support and solidarity to the different waves of exiles. Although the lived realities of Latin

---

17 This exhibition, called “Ven (Come) Seremos (We will be),” is a play on words from the “Venceremos” that means “We will overcome,” and was the dictum of the Chilean exiles. The exhibition was described as follows: “The construction of a community’s collective memory implies a process of self-recognition, of coming together and reflecting on a common past.” Retrieved from http://lacap.ca/curatorial-projects/past-exhibitions/.
Americans in Toronto may differ from other key urban centres (Armony, 2015; Hartzman, 1991), it is still possible that these particular stories from Toronto offer lessons and perspectives that may resonate with the experiences of women in the wider diaspora globally. There were many grassroots Latin American women’s groups that have ceased to exist from coast to coast in Turtle Island (Canada) (Medina, interview, 2017), such as the now defunct Aquelarre collective that was based in Vancouver and that for several years published a very influential Latin American women’s bilingual magazine about women’s experiences, political perspectives, and theory. While the goal is not to narrate a conclusive history of Latinas in Toronto, I do want to begin a more comprehensive exploration and analytical recovery of the role of Latinas in Turtle Island (Canada) by focusing on the socio-political landscape of Toronto. The city’s history of intersecting geographies, political ideologies, experiences, *exilios*, and *desexilios* provides a rich site to problematize and explore the intersections of transnational Latina feminist identities.

Emma Pérez in *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* contends that she is “more concerned with taking the ‘his’ out of the ‘story,’ the story that often becomes the universalist narrative in which women’s experience is negated” (Pérez, 1999: xvi). In this dissertation, however, I am also interested in challenging the silences in the White “Canadian” feminist imaginary that has also tended to erase or disregard Latina feminist perspectives by asserting the contributions of Latin American women to the feminist history of the host country. Feminist historiography, defined as “women writing women into history” (Kitossa, 2002: 85), has historically privileged the experience of white femininity. It is White middle-class Canadian feminisms that equate gender with whiteness and whiteness with being middle class, creating a distorted vision that arrogates the right to speak on behalf of *all* women (Kitossa, 2002).

The goal of this dissertation is to reclaim these collective memories via (her)stories and experiences of Latina feminists living in Toronto through an oral history study based on historical moments that acted as junctures for women’s partisan and autonomous political organizing. The purpose in examining these historical moments is to address several broad questions. First, how did Latina feminist identity transform/evolve in order to carve a space in

---

18 This is word that came into being as a way to explain the difficult process of coming back from exile.
transnational contemporary political movements at home and in the host country? Second, how have Latinas articulated and deployed diasporic/transnational identities, political engagement, and feminist consciousness at these key historical points in time in the City of Toronto to enact effective constructs of agency and voice to contest the meaning and goals of feminism? Third, how do Latinas critically incorporate shifting identities, integrating, contesting, and rejecting difference along the lines of sexual orientation, race, nationality, class, and political (anti-imperialist) ideology? And finally, how have Latinas made meaning in their lives, their politics, and their collective organizing through a fluidity of identities that transcend national boundaries and continue to grow through connections with other groups of women? The politics of identity formation and the transgression of cultural conventions is based on the urgent necessity to become or continue to be political entities, and has led Latin American women to find themselves in other feminist women and to assume conscious positions as feminists.

3.2 Oral histories: Interviews, participants and questions

Semi-structured interview and oral histories have been privileged in the social sciences (Bartra, 2012). Within feminist methodology, the manner in which these techniques are deployed (how you listen, what you read) have a particular function: they must include a social construction of gender, the diverse experiences of women, the context of research questions, the position of the researcher, and the relationship between the research and the dynamics of power (Delgado Ballesteros, 2012). Knowledge production as a collaborative endeavour between the researcher and the participant is key, because “they mutually create the necessity to understand the forces that have shaped their lives as women deriving from this, propositions of transformation, authority and independence over their own lives” (Delgado Ballesteros, 2012).

As the researcher and interviewer, I used both Spanish (my native tongue) and English. I interviewed the dissertation participants in Spanish and translated and edited the interviews myself. I have also translated into English all of the sources that I used originally in Spanish. As Alvarez emphasizes, translation, literal or figurative, is “politically and theoretically indispensable to forging feminist, prosocial justice, antiracist, postcolonial/decolonial and anti-imperial political alliances and epistemologies” (Alvarez et al., 2014: 1). Translation is a challenging task, as in many cases there are untranslatable concepts and only approximations to meanings. It is important to stress that speaking the language is not enough; it is also necessary
to understand the nuances of culture, to be cognizant of political ideologies, to recognize the different processes of migration, and to share the identities as a diasporic Latina with ties to Latin America. It is all of these firsthand elements, in addition to the language, that provide me with the analytical tools that make the process of translation easier.

I interviewed in total 20 community members, 18 Latin American women and 2 Latin American men from different nationalities. I have chosen the majority of these subjects carefully, in that they are people who can provide me with a historical perspective that will help me to comprehend how they envisioned their roles as holders of historical memory, political actors, and feminist organizers. I focused particularly on women who were and who continue to be active in building feminist organizations, programs, community services, and other grassroots organizations. The interviewees included community workers; members of community agencies; and political activists in the areas of human rights, indigenous solidarity, queer politics, and immigrant rights. These interviewees shared their expert knowledge and political experience. Therefore, they provided me with a historical thread that allows me to map their political journeys, and for some, the evolution of their feminist subjectivity.

Participants were also able to provide information about their political past in their countries of origin, something that I was very much interested in, as part of my dissertation is to emphasize that most of these women had an active role in the struggles of their countries of origin that continued in Turtle Island (Canada). My main questions were:

- What was your political experience in your country?
- What was your participation in the Latin American political organizations?
- Are you active presently?
- What is your analysis of the role women played and the barriers they confronted as women?
- Do you now have a different gender analysis?
- Are you a feminist?

In Chapter 4, my first data chapter, I focused on the participation of women in the solidarity movement and their connection to women’s struggles in Latin America. I was interested in

---

19 Please note that I have also included, in selected places relevant to the narrative, interviews that have been published in books and from visual material gathered by other community members and used for the Museum of Solidarity project. For a short biography of the participants please refer to Appendix A.
mapping the divergent approaches to gender issues by women who participated in traditional political parties in the Chilean Women’s Committee (The Feminine Front) and the Latin American Women’s Collective, who began to organize as an anti-imperialist, feminist group. For Chapter 5, I was interested on how this solidarity work seeped into community work, making it a priority for survival but also a place where women could exert their incredible organizing skills and their political savvy. I was interested in learning about the networks that were developed amongst a very diverse community but also with other groups of racialized women. For Chapter 6, I interviewed women who participated and had a key role in the First Latin American and Caribbean Women’s Encounter. This was the only event of its kind and magnitude to happen in Turtle Island (Canada). I was very much interested in the politics of the Encounter, the exclusions and ruptures that occurred, and the strategies for future organizing. Finally, in Chapter 7, my participants differed from the previous interviewees, in that they were mostly young women who were born in Turtle Island (Canada), or had arrived recently from Latin America. These young women may or may have not had a traditional political upbringing, but have become feminist community activists. I interviewed young women who were part of the feminist agency MUJER. Some of them had taken leadership training and then become active members of the organization. Two of them were part of a Latin American Feminisms course organized by MUJER. These two women were active members of the Mujeres al Frente, a queer Latina group. I was very much interested in the issue of identity and how these women defined themselves as Latinas (and later Latinx) feminists.

The interviews contextualized a historical and political process in which Latinas in Toronto began or continue to mobilize politically, as well as to elicit opinions on different aspects of the political representation and participation of Latin American women in Toronto. The data obtained in these interviews have added to the reconstruction of history, as there is very little written on the subject. I view the interview subjects as expert informants because of their key role in the development of Latina feminist or political organizations. The majority of my respondents could be identified as *mestizas*, with two identifying as afro-descendants, one from Asian background, and one identifying as a Purapecha (an Indigenous group from Mexico). They have different national referents (Chile, Uruguay, Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Colombia) and all of them are Canadian citizens.
It is important to clarify that the choice of participants is directly related to their political participation in social movements or community organizations; this is what Duneier (2011) calls a “convenient sampling.” I know that there are women who hold alternative perspectives on how they developed politically (especially a younger cohort of activists). I would argue that since the key point of this dissertation is to bring forth the political experiences of women who have been mostly disregarded, an inconvenient sample would include women who have not participated politically or have ceased to participate because of their disenchantment with politics (see for example Escobar, 2000); their contribution would not be as significant.

Interviews were relatively unstructured and open-ended, lasting from one hour to three hours. They took place in settings chosen by the interviewees. Since one of the main reasons for the oral history project is to unearth hidden histories, I gave the participants in the project the option to give me permission to use their real names or to use a pseudonym. Part of the definition of oral history is precisely to rescue memories and histories, therefore anonymity is seldom used (Thomson, 2006). My dissertation is to acknowledge those who paved the way and honour them. Only one participant decided to use a pseudonym. I have also used, when appropriate and with permission, any other content from follow-up conversations by phone or Skype. All the interviewees were given the chance to read the transcripts and to edit them. For the purposes of this dissertation I have not only chosen quotes from the participants to highlight points, but I have also weaved their stories throughout.

3.3 Data Verification

3.3.1 Primary sources

Given the paucity of authoritative published sources on the political events that I will be focusing on, I rely mainly on primary sources from political organizations. I conducted a content analysis of primary documents, such as minutes, letters, emails, speeches, communiqués, press releases, monographs, flyers, pamphlets, reports and archives, websites, films, videos, local Spanish-speaking media, and English newspapers. The content analysis includes a systemic examination of these types of communication to map the ideological itineraries of the different Latin American women’s organizations in Toronto.
Because of my particular position as a participant/observer I have kept a substantial archive of primary documents that include minutes, pamphlets, advertisements, reports, and emails. This included documentation from the Latin American Women’s Collective and the Latin American Coalition against Violence against Women and Children (LACEV). I was also a key organizer of the First Latin American and Caribbean Women’s Encounter, and I was active in the development of MUJER’s leadership training and Latina Feminisms Course.

3.3.2 Secondary sources

The secondary sources that I have used include government documents, such as reports related to the Latin American community in Toronto, and census and statistical documentation. I also used some autobiographies and texts that have been published about the Latin American community in Toronto, in addition to other pertinent published material.

3.4 The Character of the Relationship: Insider/Outsider

This section bears explanation in terms of my positionality. My interpretation and reflections of these interviews and the archival material are situated in my dual roles as a researcher and research subject—or witness and participant in the events analyzed. My activist research reflects my engagement with politically organized movements or groups (Juris & Khasnabish, 2013). I actively participated in a Chilean political party in exile. I have been extensively involved in solidarity activities with a number of groups including in Chile, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and many other national struggles outside of Latin America. I was a member of the Latin American Women’s Collective and I have worked in the community agency sector for the greater part of my life including the Latin American Community Centre, the Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples, Working Women Community Centre and the Hispanic Council. I was also part of the coordinating committee for the First Latin American and Caribbean Women’s Encounter and I played key roles in curriculum development, grant writing, and as a member of the Board of Directors for the Latin American women’s organization, MUJER, since its inception in 2003, until I retired from the organization in 2016. Thus, as a feminist researcher I am not only situated as an observer within these particular struggles, but I have actively been part of them.
Patricia Hill Collins (1986) developed a key theoretical concept when she argued that Black women had to creatively use their marginality, in what she called the “outsider within” status, in order to produce Black feminist theory. Insiders are defined as those who have similar worldviews, especially, she argues, “if group members have similar social class, gender and racial backgrounds” (Hill Collins, 1986: 25) and if the group shares values and behaviours at specific historical times. In this sense, I am an insider who shares worldviews with the women who participated in this dissertation, such as political ideology and political or community activism. As exiles, we have shared similar experiences and common migratory histories.

Furthermore, sharing and being socialized in the “cultural pattern of group life” (Shutz as quoted in Hill Collins, 1986) means being able to decipher quotidian knowledge, the meaning and nuances of conducts and cultural expressions. Furthermore, as a Latina activist in academia I have also experienced a position in the margins of academia.

Committed feminist research has always been situated within diverse feminist movements inside and outside the academy. Other militant researchers have echoed this trend in efforts “to challenge the continuing hegemony of universalist objectification within a still largely white, Eurocentric university context” (Juris & Khasnabish, 2013: 23). Politically engaged research is about taking sides, and understanding from a critical perspective that so-called objective accounts are still inherently political. As a Latina activist scholar, it is imperative to identify some of the processes that we have engaged in, in terms of defining who we are here in Turtle Island (Canada) and how border thinking (Anzaldúa, 1987; Jiménez-Bellver, 2010) can assist us in the development of epistemic and political projects. My attempt to critically and analytically engage with the historical memory of Latina feminist consciousness is contingent on my cultural background, familiarity with exile/refugee organizing in Toronto, and also with my ethical and political commitment.

This kind of political research has been condescendingly called “me studies,” that is, “the investigation of issues that are closely related to the researcher’s own identity or otherwise play a prominent role in their own life” (Ayoub & Rose, 2016). These kinds of studies have been harshly criticized and many scholars have been marginalized in academia for not adhering to the patriarchal, Eurocentric canon. What is certain is that, for me, this is a genuine intellectual inquiry that brings to the fore and prioritizes knowledges that are regularly dismissed.
3.5 The Intended Audience and Potential Beneficiaries

This dissertation would provide a much-needed addition to a customary formal history, expanding the archives of Canadian feminist historiography. Oral history is a counter-hegemonic method that contests officially sanctioned methods and archives to include a perspective from women who took part in the historical events narrated. These particular narratives bring to the fore connections to key events that originated in the feminist practice of Latinas but that have had also an impact in the Canadian women’s movement. Similarly, in the effort to recuperate memory in the Latin American community, women’s stories have been minimal. Thus, this project would also add to the collective memory archives of the Latin American community.

The benefits of this type of methodology are that women see their stories and experiences included and validated in the collective memory of the community. Bridges are built with other racialized women who also endeavour to re/claim their own stories. Finally, it is fundamental to present these experiences to a younger generation of Latinas that are facing impossible obstacles, barriers, and violence. These ancestral stories may provide an anchor or grounding to continue to struggle for social justice and equality.

Memory has been used for advocacy and empowerment and sometimes memory projects have been used for the purposes of recognition and reconciliation (Thomson, 2006: 59). Not all these projects have been successful—memories may unsettle or contradict official narratives, and participants may be further marginalized, re/traumatized, and misrecognized.

4 Organizational Review

4.1 Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

This chapter elaborates on the epistemological framework that will be used to discuss issues of transnational/diasporic feminist subjectivities. In the present neo-liberal climate, studies on identity have been contemptuously called “identity politics.” The main argument of the chapter is that identity continues to be a useful theoretical tool to provide insight into experiences that have been wilfully ignored and erased. The border crossing and the creation of enclaves from the subordinate South within the imperial North has meant a plethora of imposition or claim of identities that are fraught with contradictions and possibilities throughout the Americas.
4.2 Chapter 3: “Democracy in the Home and in the Country”

This chapter examines the political processes that were taking place in Latin America from 1970s to 1990s. I will focus on two aspects. First, I focus on women as political actors against the brutal military regimes were they took positions of leadership in political, social, and economic spheres. In the Southern Cone women took to the streets, organized strategies for survival, and began to question patriarchal authoritarianism not only with regards to the dictatorships but also in the traditional leftist parties. In Central America, women had transgressed into the male sphere by participating *en masse* in the military guerrilla movements, becoming gender conscious in the process. Second, I focus on the emergence of the Latin American Feminist Encounters, key transnational sites where Latin American feminists strategized, defined, and refashioned feminist identities and discourses. These political movements reverberated and reshaped diasporic Latin American women’s organization.

4.3 Chapter 4: Solidarity in the Diaspora and Transnational Feminism: Women's Organizing

This chapter analyzes the development of solidarity organizations, which prioritized the overthrow of dictatorships and armed struggles in Latin American countries of origin. It is in this context that women begin (or continue) to question the verticality and authoritarian constructs of leftist partisan organizations. Echoing ongoing discussions and debates, and the preponderant role that women were playing in the anti-dictatorship resistance and military struggles in Latin America, women in Toronto began to establish grassroots organizations that engaged in solidarity work in their own terms. These organizations strived to establish transnational networks of support that intersect the local/and international arenas. I focus on the formation of two women’s groups: the Chilean Women’s Committee (the Feminine Front, FF) and the Latin American Women’s Collective (LAWC).

4.4 Chapter 5: Latin American Feminist Agency in Community Organizing: LACEV

This chapter specifically focuses on the Latin American Coalition against Violence against Women and Children (LACEV). This organization surpassed many other community agencies in building a feminist Latin American network that mobilized around issues of violence against
women. The chapter will analyze in detail the key role of LACEV in lobbying to repeal the use of provocation as legal defence in cases of violence against women in Turtle Island (Canada). The second part of the chapter provides a historical context to elucidate the role of women in development of a number of ethno-specific community agencies, illustrating the background that led to the First Latin American and Caribbean Women’s Encounter in Ontario.

4.5 Chapter 6: The First Latin American and Caribbean Women’s Encounter in Ontario, 1995

This chapter selects one particular event that served as a turning point in Latina feminism in Toronto. In 1995, as a reflection of the transnational feminist movement in Latin America, LACEV organized the First Latin American and Caribbean Women’s Encounter, a three-day province-wide encounter of Latin American women. The Encounter emphasized the multitude of social, political, and economic factors that informed how women identify as Latinas and as feminists. The Encounter also provided the backdrop that highlighted the issue of race and racism and homophobia within the community.

This event went completely unnoticed by mainstream society and also by the women’s movement in Turtle Island (Canada). Regardless of the lack of mainstream recognition, or perhaps because of it, the participants in the Encounter resolved that there was an urgent need for a new kind of feminist organization that promoted the integral development of Latin American women.


The First Latin American and Caribbean Women’s Encounter provided Latin American feminists with a clear mandate to develop a feminist organization that could respond to Latin American women’s needs in an integral manner. After many meetings, consultations, and conflicts, MUJER was founded in 2003. This organization publicly identified as a feminist, consciousness-raising organization that understood Latin American women as an extremely heterogeneous and multilayered group, with diverse needs and experiences that shared the lack of visibility and political power. One of the most explicit objectives was educating young women to take on social and community positions of leadership. Women problematized identity in terms of what it meant to be a Latina and a feminist. I will focus on three main aspects of the
organization: the educational projects, specifically leadership training for young women; 
MUJER’s collaboration with a Latin American Feminisms course; and, finally, the anti-violence campaign that targeted men in the community.

5 Conclusion

The dissertation concludes by reiterating the aim to reclaim a crucial part of the history of the Latin American community in Turtle Island (Canada), which has been mostly occluded or ignored. By examining the different historical junctures that have wielded the articulation and deployment of transnational identities and differentiated feminist consciousness, the dissertation brings to the fore the political legacy of Latin American women. By reconstructing Latin American women’s political participation through the process of oral history (testimonios), “the past becomes memory and then memory becomes history” (Ruiz & Dubois, 2000: xv).

Reclaiming this story has material implications for organizing and resisting. In this neo-liberal, purportedly post-racial and post-feminist era, it is imperative to understand how Latinas came to be here, who we are, and what we can do to change the world.

We live in a world where the voices of women have been systematically silenced or devalued. The Latin American community is no exception. For Latin American women, what is key is the articulation of experiences coupled with the reflexivity and signification of diverse knowledges, events in the past and the present, allowing for an understanding of how identities have been forged, mutated, adapted, and transformed. Personal experience is fundamental, so women can define themselves in the multiple construction and production of their lives. To identify tensions, contradictions, and fissures allows women to gate crash and seep into the mainstream political milieu and be able to make changes or provide alternatives to hegemonic pressures. These collective stories/memories contribute to the ever evolving interpretation of what identity and political praxis mean, because interpretation is a process of constant construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction (Delgado Ballesteros, 2012).

The need is not only epistemic, but also ethical and political. As an activist-scholar it is imperative to be committed to political change, to become “involved in questions of ethics, of reflexivity and reflection, taking into account emotions and sentiments in situation of collaboration and identification with the people; in other words, leave open the play of
intersubjectivity between the one who investigates and the people researched and their life conditions” (Delgado Ballesteros, 2012: 203). We are living in times where there is a multiplicity of struggles that are interconnected and require our solidarity. At the same, there is an acute political polarization throughout the continent; the increased explosion of politicized racism against Latinas/os in the United States may have important repercussions in Turtle Island (Canada). This might be a propitious time to reclaim our feminist legacies.
Chapter 2
Theoretical Framework

6 Introduction

This chapter maps out the broad theoretical terrain that will be engaged throughout this dissertation. My theoretical framework draws on Chicana, feminist, and transnational/diaspora studies to make links between transnational identity, subjectivity, and feminism. Combining the views of several scholars, I am particularly interested in defining identity as a politically viable category that is historically contingent and socially/discursively constructed (Moya, 2000, 2002, 2011; Martín, Alcoff 2006). I am also using Chicana scholars Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1981) theory of the flesh and Chéla Sandoval’s (2000) notion of differential consciousness to expand on issues of identity, subjectivity, and feminism. Finally, the concepts of diaspora and transnational identities emphasize intense connections to national or local territories and mobilize concepts of group identity and political projects that also affect how Latinas understand, articulate, and deploy the intersectional understanding of feminist identities and subjectivities (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994; Smith & Guarnizo, 1998; Bruneau, 2010; Faist, 2010; Alvarez, 2000). My contribution to feminist historiography aims to reverse the imposed invisibility of Latin American women to “Canadian” feminist history by subverting the accounts that Latin American women were absent or “new” to the feminist movement and by “nature” incapable of being “real” feminists.

As a Latina feminist scholar and an activist, “experience” and “identity” are primary organizing principles around which we mobilize and theorize. Although Latinas are keenly aware of the nonessentialist nature of our political and academic work, we continue to organize as Latin American women in organizations that respond to the particular needs of “our communities” by (re)conceptualizing the notion of identity while acknowledging the epistemic significance of identity. I argue that studying the (her)story and lived experiences of Latinas (and other marginalized people) is necessary to construct a more historically specific, accurate, and complex understanding of the gendered world we live in. While the experiences of diasporic Latinas in Toronto are admittedly subjective and particular (albeit always in a transnational dialogic relationship with Latin America), the knowledge that is gained from a focused study of their lives and political participation can have general implications for feminist and sociological
studies in Turtle Island (Canada) and in Latin America. The lived experiences of Latinas are rich sources of frequently overlooked or ignored information about the world in which we live, and therefore, inquiries about the praxis of this political engagement may amplify the opportunity for radical possibilities. As Hall compellingly stated, subaltern communities have emerged and struggled not only to demand justice but also to recover their own stories, histories, and voices, what he calls the “margins coming into representation” (Hall, 1997: 183). Through the reconstruction of the political imaginary, those who have been made invisible can not only be made present but also given a place to ground themselves and become politically efficacious.

Identities vary considerably between and within Latina/o sub/groups (Marquez, 2007; Mato, 2003). Latin America is a multiracial, multiethnic, and multicultural hemisphere divided into nation-states by arbitrary borders. Other social categories such as class, gender, religion, sexuality, and age also intersect the contained “imagined” national boundaries. In addition, political ideologies go from the far left to the far right. Currently, these differences are also reflected in the communities that reside in Toronto. There is an incredible gamut of political persuasions, especially with the arrival of the latest wave of immigrants, ranging from right wing, free-market capitalists, anti-racist groups, feminists groups, religious organizations (some of which espouse traditional values and others promote a liberation theology position), queer groups, and still active left-wing organizers that arrived mostly in the seventies. These groups coexist, sometimes precariously, within the same community and have a different analysis with respect to current socio-political issues and different political priorities.

Sectors of the community may “differ in their understanding of the causes and justification of economic stratification” (Marquez, 2007: 21). Or they may have very different positions with regards to whether racial discrimination is a problem within the community, as well as whether Latinas/os are a recognizable racialized group that confronts racism. Thus, political identities contain “essentially contested concepts that may or may not overlap with other Latino identities” (Marquez, 2007: 7), making Latin Americans a highly heterogeneous group. Although there is a tendency by the Canadian mainstream and even some Latinos to assume that Latin Americans in Toronto are mostly left wing, this is categorically not the case. Thus, it is imperative to understand that identity is characterized by a permanent plurality of perspectives that may be contradictory, and are in constant fluidity. The process of ongoing border crossing, whether in terms of national borders or cultural borders within Latin America and in Turtle Island (Canada),
makes the idea of static, unified, and homogenous identities ludicrous; Latina identity coexists with multiple identities in harmony or in conflict within each person, challenging the notion of “fixed” identities. Having stated this, it is undeniable that hegemonic identities such as “Hispanics” have either been imposed by the Canadian state or, more importantly, have been pragmatically taken up as a strategic organizing tool. In the face of the neo-liberal onslaught, there has been the urgency to reconcile the pressures of diversity and difference and to seek integration and “community” (Blazquez Graf, 2012). It is argued that a unifying identity will facilitate “representation” and “voice.” The challenge, however, is to reflect this heterogeneous, diverse group of people under a cross-situational identity that could be mobilized for oppositional political identity and utilized as a tool for processing community formation. Yet the ineluctable danger that such “imagined” representation posits is that it is incumbent on a process of reductive homogenization. The desire for unity and representation, when left unchallenged, produces arbitrary practices of exclusion and erasure that ultimately undermine the initial yearning for “community.”

There has also been much controversy and debate about the concept of identity or the laden phrase “identity politics,” from neo-conservative pundits, to postmodern theorists, feminist theorists, and women of colour activists. The term identity politics has been wielded by neo-conservatives, liberals, and even thinkers from the left to discredit oppositional politics by deeming it at best naïve and parochial, or at worse opportunistic and retrograde, “theoretically incoherent and politically pernicious” (Martín Alcoff, 2006). Neo-conservatives20 insist that the relentless exploitation of identity will lead to the disintegration of society and the erasure of our shared humanity. Liberals21 believe that a strong ethnic identity would mean exclusion from political participation. Identities are considered by many to harbour inherent political liabilities, since loyalty to the group, that is, racial identity (or religious, for example in the case of Muslims), is considered to be a priori a problem for the democratic state. From this perspective, identities must be left behind in order to enter the arena of public debate as “anonymous or dispassionate reasoners” (Martín Alcoff, 2006). This is particularly fictitious since, as Renato Rosaldo notes, ideas are assessed in relation to who expresses them (Rosaldo, 1997 as quoted in

20 See for example (Hirsch, 1987; Bennett, 1992).

21 See for example New Sectarianism (Good, 2001).
Martín Alcoff, 2006). Left thinkers have also weighed in on this debate. The Latin American Left historically has been reluctant to consider race and gender, in fact proposing to defer issues pertaining to identity until “after the revolution” (Kirkwood, 1986; Gago, 2007; Espinoza, Gómez Correal & Ochoa Muñoz, 2014). More recently, however, with the increased proliferation and pivotal political mobilization of women in the Latin American political landscape, in addition to Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities and organizations, issues of identity have become crucial to the political platforms of many parties from the Left. This change has also impacted most of the political organizations of the Left in the global North, such as unions and political parties. While class reductionism has been slowly disappearing from political platforms, it must be recognized that in Turtle Island (Canada) most union membership is still predominantly white and male. The New Democratic Party may accept difference in terms of demands for gender and racial equality, but lacks these representations in its rank and file and its party leadership. The influence of postmodernism has swept academic and political domains, with far more reaching consequences, to push for a concept of identity that is fluid, unstable, made up of conflictive parts, and infinitely malleable; a concept that by its very definition lacks any epistemological significance because of its limitations and unreliability. Admittedly, these critiques have had a salutary effect in terms of challenging reductive and essentialist notions of identity, while leaving those who are oppressed because of them somewhat bereft.

Notwithstanding some of these extreme views, it has been mostly feminists of colour and other marginalized theorists who have cogently argued that “identity” can be used as a politically viable category if it is examined as a historically contingent and socially/discursively constructed category (hooks, 1991, 1992; Bannerji, 1995; Moya, 2002, 2011; Martín Alcoff, 2006; Altamirano-Jiménez, 2013; Dhamoon, 2009). Indeed, it is mostly subaltern subjects who have used “identity” as a contestatory and oppositional response to oppression. Recognizing that members of particular constituencies assert or reclaim identities mostly because goods and resources are still distributed according to identity categories is crucial. This means that “who we

---

22 There have been exceptions to this position, for example José Carlos Mariátegui, a Peruvian Marxist, did write about race issues irritating many of the more dogmatic partisan groups.

23 For example, the work of Foucault, Lyotard, Lacan, Deleuze, Guattari, and Derrida.
are—that is, who we perceive ourselves or are perceived by others to be—will significantly affect our life chances: where we can live, whom we will marry (or whether we can marry), and what kinds of educational and employment opportunities will be available to us” (Moya, 2000: 4/18). As a matter of fact, progressive social change is predicated on an acknowledgement of, and a familiarity with, past and present structures of inequality—structures that are often highly correlated with categories of identity.

7 The Postpositivist Realist Theory of Identity, Theory of the Flesh, and Differential Consciousness

In this section, I will examine Paula Moya’s concept of postpositivist realist theory of identity to argue that this explanatory tool provides the most helpful foundation to reclaim the feminist subjectivities of Latinas living in Toronto. Thus, while “identity” may be fluid and temporary, the social and political conditions that enable its existence make its study a valid and necessary pursuit. To theorists such as Paula Moya, the theoretical problem of identity must be investigated because of its political and epistemic significance and its relation to knowledge production. To this end, this section reviews the main issues and debates and then expands on those ones most useful for the purposes of my work. To begin, Moya advocates a passionate defense of the concept of “identity,” which she defines as the

nonessential and evolving product that emerges from the dialectic between how a subject of consciousness identifies herself and how others identify her. Identity is thus a kind of shorthand term that I use to refer to the complex and mediated way that situated, embodied human beings look out onto and interpret the world they live in. Insofar as identities track social relations; they come into being through the kinds of experiences we have, and they inform the way we interpret the world around us. (Moya, 2011: 80)

Significantly, in Learning from Experience (2002), Moya’s theoretical understanding goes beyond both essentialist and postmodernist accounts of identity and knowledge. Indeed, Moya contends that “it is precisely because identities have a referential relationship to the world that they are politically and epistemically important: indeed, identities instantiate the links between individuals and groups and central organizing principle of our society” (Moya, 2002: 13). In essence then, Moya’s postpositivist realist theory provides a powerful explanatory tool to elucidate the ties between social location, experience, and identity. In fact, her more crucial
claim is “not that experience is theoretically mediated, but rather that experience in its mediated form contains an epistemic component through which we can gain access to knowledge of the world” (Moya, 2002: 39, italics in the original).

There are six principles that are key to Moya’s (2002) postpositivist realist theory of identity. The first principle is that “the different social categories (such as gender, race, class, and sexuality) that together constitute an individual’s social location are causally related to the experiences she will have” (39). Women will have different experiences depending on where they are socially located. For example, a woman will experience situations differently depending on her class and race. The second principle Moya establishes is that “an individual’s experiences will influence, but not entirely determine, the formation of her cultural identity” (39). Women may interpret the same social event diametrically differently based on the different conceptions or theories that they utilize to interpret the world. The third principle is that, since women can interpret experiences based on limited knowledge, there is an epistemic component to identity that allows for errors that can be revised as the woman’s understanding of the same situation changes. An example would be retrospectively understanding or reevaluating a social or political situation after acquiring the epistemic or analytical tools to understand it. The fourth principle is that some identities have greater or lesser epistemic value, to the extent that they can “accurately describe and explain the complex interactions between the multiple determinants of an individual’s social location” (41). Here, Moya argues that identifying as a Hispanic, Chilean-Canadian, Latina, or Latinx all describe the same ancestry and/or cultural acumen, but by choosing to identify as Hispanic, for example, one privileges language and European ancestry, while choosing to identify as Latinx denotes a politicized understanding of oppression in terms of class, race, and a desire to question gender binaries. The fifth principle of a postpositivist theory of identity is that our ability to understand the vital aspects of the world depends on recognizing and understanding the “social, political, economic, and epistemic consequences of our own social location” (43). More politicized claims to cultural identity have epistemic consequences; thus, “[an] individual’s understanding of herself and the world will be mediated, more or less accurately, through her cultural identity” (43). Finally, the sixth principle of the postpositivist theory of identity is that the oppositional struggle, which challenges dominant ideologies and practices, from oppressed groups enables them to understand the world more precisely.
Moya explains that “epistemic privilege” stems from “an acknowledgement that [racialized women] have experiences—experiences that people who are not oppressed in the same way usually lack—that can provide them with information we all need to understand how hierarchies of race, class, gender, and sexuality operate to uphold existing regimes of power in our society” (Moya, 2002: 38). She understands that experiences are subjective and that it is “our theoretically mediated interpretation of an event that makes it an ‘experience.’ The meanings we give our experiences are inescapably conditioned by the ideologies and ‘theories’ through which we view the world” (Moya, 2002: 38, 39). Moya’s crucial claim is that “experience in its mediated form contains an epistemic component through which we can gain access to knowledge of the world” (39, italics in the original). Therefore, identity provides us with an epistemic component that allows us to read the world in particular ways.

The postpositivist realist theory of identity, argues Moya, is consistent with Cherrie Moraga’s *theory of the flesh*, which she explains as “where the physical realities of our lives—our skin colour, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longing—all fuse to create a politic born of necessity” (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981: 19). Moraga and other women of colour “understand identities as relational and grounded in the historically produced social categories that constitutes social locations” (Moya, 2002: 26). Indeed, it is precisely these specific social categories that make up our social locations and that are causally relevant to the experiences we have, and which allow us to come together as a political necessity without forgetting that “sex and race do not define a person’s politics” (Moraga, 1993: 149). Moraga advocates turning toward bodies of women of colour to develop her theory of the flesh by examining, analyzing, and interpreting the sources of oppression and pain. Thus, part of her theoretical framework demands emotional investment; as Moraga tells Norma Alarcón in an interview for Third Woman Press, “it’s got to be from your heart” and posits the body as a source of knowledge (1986: 126).

Gloria Anzaldúa also suggests there is willingness to risk the personal—that by excavating deep into the self, by exposing oneself, by baring flesh and blood, one can create connections to others. Speaking about her own work she notes “the meaning and worth of my writing is measured by how much I put myself on the line and how much nakedness I achieve,” adding “to touch more people, the personal realities and the social must be evoked—not through rhetoric but through blood and pus and sweat” (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981: 170, 171). Anzaldúa also maintains that Latinas can have multiple allegiances and we can locate ourselves,
simultaneously, in multiple worlds. Her premise became pivotal in the development of political consciousness because it makes agency and contradiction visible and allows us to expand our field of vision by negotiating conflicting worlds, as she underscores with the phrase “only your labels split me” (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981: 205).

Thus, similarly to Moya, Anzaldúa postulates that the relationship of social location, knowledge, and identity is theoretically mediated through the interpretation of experience (Moya, 2002). Moraga and Anzaldúa explicitly state that “Third World women derive a feminist political theory specifically from [their] racial/cultural background and experience” (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981: xliiv). And it is these particular insights, in the case of Latin American women in Toronto who come together across differences, that are necessary to understand particular social and historical conditions in a country like Turtle Island (Canada).

Similarly, Chéla Sandoval’s notion of differential consciousness is also important to consider when talking about tactical subjectivity. In Methodology of the Oppressed (2000), Sandoval identifies five typologies around which oppositional consciousness is organized: “It is a mapping of consciousness organized in opposition to the dominant social order that charts the feminist histories of consciousness… This new typology is not necessarily ‘feminist’ in nature. Rather, it comprises a history of oppositional consciousness” (2000: 54, italics in the original). She identifies these sites of resistance as “‘equal rights’, ‘revolutionary’, ‘supremacist’, ‘separatist’ and ‘differential’ forms of oppositional consciousness” (43). When defining differential consciousness Sandoval puts forward the theoretical position that it can be used as “a theoretical and methodological device for retroactively clarifying and giving new meaning to any other” (43). Pérez also expounds that differential consciousness “allows for mobility of identities between and among varying power bases—for example: The move from liberal to socialist to feminist ideologies as forms of tactical intervention, or practice” (Pérez, 1999: xiv). As the conditions of oppression or the shape of power changes, “Third World feminists” were able to quickly respond to the exigencies of the postmodern world because of their social marginality. This practice, Pérez argues, refers to third space feminist practice, and that practice can occur only within the decolonial imaginary (1999: xiv).

Thus, the theoretical tools of a postpositivist theory of identity, Theory of the Flesh and differential consciousness, can be used as tools to uncover the voices of those women who have
been erased from history or condemned to be passive and silent witnesses to men’s historical exploits. These theoretical tools are particularly relevant to this study that aims to unearth the feminist transnational subjectivities of Latin American women living in Toronto through the interpretation of their lived experiences and their political agency in relation to their countries of origin and the local milieu.

8 Transnational/Diasporic Identities

In his insightful work about transnational identities, Mato (1997) elucidates how “representations of identity inform and legitimate both the practices of organizations and individuals that are important producers and disseminators of public representations as well as producers of sociopolitical agendas” (175). In the case of feminists, transnational feminist identities, feminist demands, and feminist political agendas were not only made cohesive by transnational feminist encounters in Latin America—there have been 14, the first one in 1981 and the last one in Uruguay in November 2017—they were also legitimated by the significant political bonds created across nations/borders with other local and global agents (NGOs). Thus, Latina feminist identities and ideologies have travelled, morphed, and consolidated through a permanent dialogic interaction that took place via diverse transnational encounters. Using feminisms from Latin America to Third World feminism, specifically Chicana praxis, Latina feminists in Toronto were able to develop political strategies and tactics that spoke to their own analysis of the world.

Forced and voluntary migrations are part of cross-border processes and elastic terms such as diaspora and transnationalism have been used interchangeably to describe these processes; indeed, it has been challenging to separate these concepts in a meaningful way although both concepts have different intellectual genealogies. Both diaspora and transnationalism emphasize intense connections to national or local territories (Faist, 2010). The development of identity formation from diaspora to transnational identity has been not been a unilinear process but rather what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) have described as a rhizome formation. This shape of a tuber

---

24 I will elaborate more on the acerbic differences amongst the various feminist currents in Latin America in the following chapters. Suffice to say that there were scathing critiques and bitter ruptures in the feminist encounters based on the relationships of various feminist currents with political parties and non-profit organizations.
contains both roots and shoots that lack form—the shape is unpredictable and capable of growth across multiple dimensions (Juris & Khasnabish, 2013).

*Diaspora* has been traditionally used to denote religious or national groups forcefully dispersed outside an “imagined homeland” to which return has been prevented. Diaspora is a term that mobilizes concepts of group identity and political projects (Faist, 2010). The dispersed community may form a bond based on a number of experiences, including trauma (Bruneau, 2010). These parameters can certainly be used to describe the Latin American exiles and refugees who arrived to Turtle Island (Canada) in the 1970s and the 1980s and proceeded to coalesce as communities (and as a community). As Wright and Oñate have argued that in the case of Chileans, but can also be easily applied to Uruguayans, Argentinians, Salvadorians, and Guatemalans, these groups clearly constituted a diaspora, which they defined as “a forced dispersion of a defined group to multiple sites that lasted a substantial time during which transnational ties to the homeland were maintained” (2007: 31). The definition of diaspora also underscores that the diasporic groups fail to integrate or incorporate into the countries of settlement, making and maintaining cultural and identity boundaries vis-à-vis the dominant group. In the case of Chileans, for example, Del Pozo (2004) called this the “culture of exile.” Although integration may not be an initial objective for the diaspora, there is still a need to interact closely with various social and political actors, institutions, and government in the host country in order to lobby and influence political and economic decisions regarding the country of origin (Dahinden, 2010).

In this vein, diaspora become “socio-spatial networks necessarily undergoing territorial expansion because they aggregate both places of memory and places of presence” (Offner & Pumain 1996: 163 as quoted in Bruneau, 2010). Exiles from the Southern Cone and Central America occupied micro places that acted as foci, such as churches, union rooms, community agencies, and neighbourhoods, any networked space where solidarity and memory could suppress spatial and temporal distance to the “imagined homeland.” This implied that there was a strong sense of identity awareness, and razor sharp commitment to a political project of overthrowing the dictatorships or supporting armed struggles back in the country of origin, which may have fostered a unity over political, but also class, educational levels, and ethnic differences. These dispersed groups of exiles throughout the globe maintained amongst themselves and their countries of origin multiple exchange relations. People, information, and
later goods, for example arts and crafts from women’s groups or political prisoner artisans, were exchanged in non-hierarchical, transnational, and transversal pathways. As Bakan and Stasiulis argue (2005) it is “civil society that is becoming more transnational” because refugees, exiles, and migrants may continue to have attachments to their countries of origin through “their globally dispersed households and networks, international labour markets, internationalist politics, and strategic reference to human rights” (15, italics mine). These transnational realities have made citizenship rights tenuous.

Exiles from the Southern Cone not only played a crucial part in supporting the struggles back home, but in many cases becoming, as it were, “the external front” of the struggles at home (Wright & Oñate Zuñiga, 2007). Exiles shaped and influenced the forms, styles and sometimes the direction of Latin American politics. This led to “more regional, transnational, or even continental perspectives” (Roniger & Green, 2007, 4 as quoted in Shayne, 2009: xvi) for the political project of the Left. In terms of the Latin American diaspora, the concept was mobilized by the different national groups to invoke not only a group identity, as reflected in the cultural activities that the exiles engaged in, but also a political project, albeit one that was differently conceived depending on where the exile stood in the spectrum of the Left. Cultural/political gatherings such as the peñas, theater productions, social, and political associations would concentrate the main elements of the exiles’ “iconography” (Shayne, 2009; Peddle, 2014)—that is, palpable symbols used to consolidate and preserve social networks and to mobilize resistance and solidarity in the host country.

It is impossible to analyze transnational identities without underlining the fact that this phenomenon is a direct result of multinational corporations and capital accumulation creating a series of more complex relations than simple binaries. Grewal and Kaplan (1994) state that “the terms generally used by the left (such as dominant-dominated, colonizer-colonized) to mark the interplay of power in the era of imperialism often overlook complex, multiply constituted

---

25 The famous arpilleras (quilts) were made from scraps of cloth appliquéd on burlap depicting Chilean stories that talked about poverty, repression, and the disappeared. The arpilleras used to include a hidden letter from the artisan. They were smuggled out of the country and sold at solidarity events.

26 Peñas were cultural/political events that were replicated in exile as a means to come together as a community and foster solidarity from the host country.
identities that cannot be accounted for by binary oppositions” (10). In quoting Brazilian sociologist Fernando Enrique Cardoso, they argue that the question that he posits about the center and the periphery can be answered by the question “Who is using these terms and where?”—since all of these terms are the product of specific discourses rooted in different social and political contexts and are historically specific. Thus, many of the discussions about transnational identities and culture are permeated with ambiguities, contradictions, and denials, but they are also imbued with powerful possibilities, in which local, marginal identities must also “speak right across boundaries” and “across frontiers” (Hall, 1997).

The term transnationalism became “appropriated and consumed” by a number of disciplines to such a degree that it was argued that it increasingly denoted ambiguity, with the danger of becoming an “empty vessel” (Smith & Guarnizo, 1998). While transnationalism from “above” has been reflected in the globalization of capital, both global media and supranational political institutions have been both criticized and celebrated as diminishing the borders of nation-states. Transnationalism from “below” has also been celebrated as both liberatory and dystopian (Smith & Guarnizo, 1998). More recently, however, there have been more nuanced and detailed readings of the concept that have complicated the usage of the term. There have been a number of studies that argue that nation-states have become increasingly interested in mobilizing the diaspora as entrepreneurial subjects, what Trotz and Mullings call “a nascent diasporic governmentality” (2013: 154). Cultural studies scholars such as Appadurai (1996), Clifford (1997, 2013), and Bhabha (1990, 1994) have been at the forefront of the analysis of transnational practices and processes. Schiller, Basch, and Szanton-Blanc (1995) link transnationalism to transmigration, arguing that even if immigrants become rooted in the host country they still maintained multiple, stable, and lasting linkages to their homeland. Mato (1997), however, has defined transnational relationships as “between two or more social subjects from two or more state-nations when at least one of these subjects is not an agent of government or intergovernmental organization” (171). In this case, the work of the solidarity movements would clearly fit this definition.

Grewal and Kaplan’s (1994) use the term transnational “to problematize a purely locational politics of global-local or center-periphery.” To them, “transnational linkages influence every level of social existence” including gender (13). The contemporary scholarship on transnationalism has focused on the role of corporations; in media and culture, most of the
studies have focused on migration flows and linkages. Lately, the issue of gender has been underlined as a significant differentiator of transmigrant practices (Mahler, 1999; Mahler & Pessar, 2001, 2006; Pessar & Mahler, 2003; Pratt & Yeoh, 2003; Bernhard, Landolt, & Goldring, 2006, 2009; Goldring & Krishnamurti, 2007). Grewal and Kaplan suggest “in theorizing feminist transnational practices…not only that communities are much more multiple organized than the conventional usages of these terms have implied, but that gender is crucially linked to the primary terms and concepts that structure and inform the economics and cultural theories of postmodernity” (1994: 16 & 17).

Using Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encounters, feminist scholars and activists have been theorizing about the tensions and possibilities of these transnational spaces. These “extra-official” Encuentros have been spaces where Latin American women have come together to define, contest, and negotiate feminist discourses, practices, and strategies to challenge gender-based oppression in Latin American. There have been 14 Encounters: Colombia, 1981; Peru, 1983; Brazil, 1985; Mexico, 1987; Argentina, 1990; El Salvador, 1993; Chile, 1996; Dominican Republic, 1999; Costa Rica, 2002; Brazil, 2005; Mexico, 2009; Colombia, 2011; Peru 2014; and Uruguay, in November 2017. Each Encounter has been defined by different “knots of conflict” that have tended to reflect the political contradictions and struggles of the times (Crispi, 1987). For the women in the diaspora, these Encounters fed into the circular flux of feminist ideologies and practices by providing them with analysis, narratives, and anecdotes that informed the different discussions, debates, and tensions that were also taking place in the diaspora. Sonia Alvarez and her associates have written extensively about the Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encounters (2000, 2003), and she posits that transnationalization, when used to describe feminist movement dynamics, refers to “local movements actors’ deployment of discursive frames and organizational and political practices that inspired, (re)affirmed or reinforced—though not necessarily caused—by their engagement with other actors beyond national borders through a wide range of transnational contacts, discussions, transactions, and networks both virtual and ‘real’” (2000: 30). She argues that local movement actors pursue transnational linkages for two distinct reasons: as means to first “(re)construct or reaffirm

---

27 I will discuss the first four Encounters in more detail in Chapter 4, as they are relevant to the formation of two different women’s groups in Toronto.
subaltern or politically marginalized identities and to establish personal and strategic bonds of solidarity with others who share locally stigmatized values (for example, feminist ideals) or identities (for example, Afro-Latin American or as lesbians).” And secondly, “activists also organize across borders in an effort to expand formal rights or affect public policy” (31). Thus, the Latin American Feminist Encounters have “proven to be key transnational arenas” that have been crucial to forge “‘imagined’ feminist communities” (Alvarez et al., 2003: 539). The Encounters as a space of transformation have fostered new ways of conceiving politics as a constant process of feminist negotiation that fosters new modalities of politics and activism.

Indeed, the concept of transnationalism has become quite useful, especially when dealing with grassroots and radical movements organizing and sharing ideas across national spaces. The term transnationalism has become celebratory as an expression of subversive popular resistance to globalized macro agents and capitalist enterprises, such as multinationals. However, Smith and Guarnizo (1998) challenge the totalizing nature of emancipatory discourses. Bhabha (1990), for example, characterized the practices of transmigrants as “counter-narratives of the nation,” blurring boundaries and subverting essentialized notions of national identities. These theoretical discourses tend to ignore asymmetries of domination such as race, sex, class, and migratory status of transmigrants, setting many migrants, such as temporary and undocumented workers, adrift in the nation.

Nonetheless, much of contemporary grassroots political activism and organizing has been transnational in nature, incorporating new social actors in a dialectic of opposition and resistance to the logic of hegemonic multinational capitalism. The term transnational can refer to “a scale that transcends, yet incorporates, other levels of analysis, including the local, regional, and national” (Juris & Khasnabish, 2013: 8). Solidarity movements have been by nature transnational. And it is important to recall that internationalism as a logic of the Left was also conceived as a transnational endeavour that could challenge narrow nationalism, jingoism, chauvinisms, racisms, and xenophobia by transcending the national (Malkki, 1994). The transnational relations of exiles to their countries of origin, and transnational crisscrossing amongst heterogeneous groups facilitated by ideological ties, was common amongst militants. This transnational tendency has also been replicated by right-wing organizations, such as police
forces, or even more drastically through the persecution of political militants, as in the case of the Plan Condor.28

Transnationalism also refers to immigrants’ durable ties across countries that include links to family by sending remittances and investing in the home country (Faist, 2010; Schiller, Basch, & Szanton-Blanc, 1995; Smith & Guarnizo, 1998; Trotz & Mullings, 2013). The constitution of bifocal subjects with dual citizenships has tended to (re)inscribe and extend national territorial jurisdictions and, by extension, may have reinforced notions of “illegitimate border crossers” (Smith & Guarnizo, 1998). In both these cases, the expansion of transmigration and transnational practices has resulted in “outbursts of entrenched, essentialist nationalism in both ‘sending’ and ‘receiving’ countries (Smith & Guarnizo, 1998: 10). As Smith and Guarnizo (1998) argue, material transnational practices do not take place in an imaginary “third space.” However, “in-between” and “cross-border” metaphors do speak to the experience of migrants in particular localities, such as Toronto. Thus, it is the locality that needs to be further conceptualized, contextualized, and historicized.

Exiles and refugees from the Southern Cone fit into the diasporic category until the reconstituted “democracies” in the 1990s prioritized and facilitated the return home. However, the idealized return to the “imagined homeland,” after the advent of “democracies” in Latin America, was riddled with contradictions and rejections that forced many of the “returnees” to leave their countries of origin, voluntarily this time, to return to their countries of exile, becoming a permanent transnational community. Lamentably, many of the “returnees” failed to adapt to their countries of origin due to financial, psychological, and cultural differences, forcing them to go back to their host countries. Many other exiles were simply unable to return or chose not to return. Contrary to what Francis Peddle argues (2014), I believe that decisions to continue to live in the host country were not necessarily a reflection of belonging. Indeed, as Bakan and Stasiulis state, “holding the passport of an advanced country is no guarantee of full and effective enjoyment of citizenship rights” (2005: 14). Actually, the reality may lead us to the conclusion that there might a measure of resignation due to the fact that families, including children and

28 The Plan Condor was a campaign of political terror from 1968 to 1975 that involved the coordinated intelligence and repressive apparatus of countries in the Southern Cone—Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Brazil—to assassinate, kidnap, and disappear left-wing political dissidents.
grandchildren, will continue to reside in the host countries and do not intend to return. Or, in the case of Chileans, a disillusion with the political evolution of Chilean politics that left untouched the systems that were implemented by the Pinochet dictatorship (Simalchik, 2004). Regardless of what led to the decision to continue to live in the host country, exiles, refugees, and immigrants are still not entirely included within the fabric of the Canadian polity.\(^{29}\) The issue of belonging is always being contested and its definition rewritten, particularly in the case of criminalized populations such as Muslims and Latin Americans. Political integration is superseded by a multiculturalism that promotes segregation and cultural “distinctiveness.” In this context, the process of identity formation has been a process of constant struggle for those working in the grassroots organizations, where there is a constant push for the “reinscription of group identities by transnational actors ‘from below’ as efforts to recapture a lost sense of belonging by recreating imagined communities” (Smith & Guarnizo, 1998: 22).

There are transnational Latino migrant communities in Turtle Island (Canada), such as Seasonal Temporary Workers (Preibisch, 2004; Goldring & Landolt, 2013; Basok, Bélanger, & Rivas, 2014), who could be defined as transnational mobiles because they are more or less permanently on the move, with low levels of anchorage in the host country (Dahinden, 2010). However, I would argue that the majority of Latinas/os living in Turtle Island (Canada) are “the members of a transnational community [that] seek to acquire the citizenship of their host country while retaining that of their country of origin” (Bruneau, 2010: 43–44). However, for a lot of Latin Americans there may be no longer feelings of uprooting or trauma, and many may also lack a strong urge to return (Peddle, 2014). There is continuous circulation between those continuing to live in Turtle Island (Canada) and their countries of origin. Consequently, transnational typologies result from a combination of transnational mobility and locality (Dahinden, 2010). In this period, Latinas/os in Turtle Island (Canada) belong to what Dahinden (2010) calls localized mobile transnational formations: they continue to hold ties with the country of origin by investing in property, visiting frequently for holidays and family obligations, and staying for longer periods of time after retirement. Undeniably, there continues to be a link to the political processes taking place in the countries of origin by organizations such as Casa Salvador Allende,

\(^{29}\) I will further examine this active process of exclusion in Chapter 4.
the FMLN Facebook group, Casa Maiz, and others. The facility of keeping a close social connection and contact with everyday occurrences has been enabled by technology. Digital communication and cheaper and frequent modes of transportation allow for movement between the host country and the country of origin. Thus, Latin Americans may continue to have links to different parts of the continent and have engaged in circular exchanges and transnational mobility; thus, in the wake of “dissemi-nation” (Bhabha, 1994), notions of cultural hybridity have become more salient. This activist, cross-border organizing has increasingly become constructed as the “global,” and throughout the history of the Latin American in exile in Toronto, feminists were and continue to be in a permanent dialogic relationship with women’s groups, transnational events, and ideological trends in Latin America, as well as the movements and theoretical productions from Latinas in the United States and different parts of Turtle Island (Canada). The transnational/transversal flows of communication influenced and continue to influence the ideological positions of Latin American women. Indeed transnational relations are “significant not only in the making of transnational identities, but also in the social construction of local and national identities” (Mato, 1997: 172).

9 Conclusion

According to Mato (1997), the “reality” of Latin America has emerged as the result of the processes of multiples exiles and transmigratory economic movements. I would venture that at different historical junctures the idea of a united Latin America had been mobilized against colonial and imperialist powers. Internationalism organized by political parties of the Left has tended to ignore national borders in pursuing the objectives of the international proletariat. Significantly, however, it was the massive exile of the 1970s and 1980s that reinscribed the notion of transnational liberatory struggles.

A significant number of women in the diaspora actively participated in supporting the struggles in their countries of origin politically and financially. It is in through solidarity spaces and actions that they became aware of the crucial participation of women in resisting the dictatorships by organizing publicly, or in semi-clandestine and clandestine organizations in Central America, specifically Nicaragua and El Salvador. This political participation took many forms, including military involvement. The creation of women’s groups that increasingly incorporated a feminist perspective—sometimes in acute opposition to their own political parties
or organizations—was something that resonated in the diaspora. Despite the fact that the traditional political parties of the Left have always historically organized women’s fronts, those groups were under the control of the parties central committees. It was during the period of the 1970s and 1980s that women began to take a critical stand against this kind of control and started to organize their own autonomous groups. In the 1990s to the 2000s, new feminist movements and theories emerged, including movements such as popular and decolonial feminisms. These political articulations continue to influence the feminist subjectivities of diasporic Latin American women living in Toronto.

I argue that it was through these transnational dialogic relationships that women from Latin America assumed critical positions in regards to the political movements to which they belonged. Thus, as Smith and Guarnizo suggest, transnational social spaces “can be viewed as affecting the formation of character, identity, and acting subjects at the same time that identity can be seen as fluctuating and contingent, as the contexts through which people move in time-space change and are appropriated and/resisted by acting subjects” (1998: 21). I am particularly interested in the flow of feminist consciousness through borders that illustrates that Latin American women are architects of their own feminist subjectivities.

---

30 For example, women members of the Movement of Revolutionary Left (MIR in Spanish), who were imprisoned, drafted a letter to the party questioning patriarchal authoritarianism. Unfortunately, the party would disintegrate before having a chance to discuss these issues.
Chapter 3
“Democracy in the Home and in the Country”

10 Introduction

The first part of this chapter presents an overview of women’s political engagement in the new democratic and revolutionary processes that were taking place in the 1970s in Latin America, when women from all sectors of society became active agents of change. Women as political actors participated in these different political processes as leaders, organizers, supporters, or sympathizers. Subsequently, with the onset of the military onslaught\(^{31}\) and the disarray that followed the shattering destruction of social movements, women were found in the position of leading struggles against the dictatorships. Women became part of clandestine organizations and were subjected to repression, or they began to publicly organize to demand the return of democracy, or the return of their disappeared (Pieper Mooney, 2010).\(^{32}\) Moreover, the economic implications, and *raison d’être* of the military regimes, were the aperture of the national markets, the closure of national industries, and the imposition of Structural Adjustment Programs (Klein, 2007; Lebon, 2010). The austerity measures forced or allowed the states to cut the social programs and the social safety nets for the population. It is remarkable, for instance, that when talking about the dire consequences of the economic and political upheavals in Latin America, women were and are scarcely recognized as victims of the political persecution and also ignored as the segment of the population that has been hit the hardest by these new economic policies. Women, as Maier eloquently states, have “subsidized neoliberal globalization” (2010: 35). In other words, women had to converge and mobilize for the survival of their families by

\(^{31}\) The coups d’état took place gradually in the Southern Cone: Paraguay, 1954, Bolivia, 1964, Brazil in 1966, Chile and Uruguay in 1973, Argentina, the last one, in 1976. Arguably, the only leftist coup d’état took place in Peru in 1968.

\(^{32}\) A tactic employed by the Nazis in World War II. According to the Convention Against Torture, enforced disappearance is defined as “the arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorisation, support or acquiescence of the State, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, which place such a person, outside the protection of the law.” Retrieved from http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/disappear/docs/E.CN.4.2005.WG.22.WP.1.REV.4.pdf. People were illegally detained, imprisoned, tortured, and killed, without having any official paper trail that indicated to family members when they were arrested, where they were taken, and what had happened to them (Di Marco 2010: 95). The objective of this tactic is to deny the person the protection of the law (habeas corpus).
developing and creating alternative and innovative income sources, for example by setting up collective kitchens. The solidarity movement, especially the women’s committees, supported the sale of arts and crafts from political prisoners that were sold in the international market, and a number of fundraising efforts were set up to support the collective kitchens and other projects developed on the ground. Latin American women’s political, social, and economic role permitted women to manifest their presence, reliance, and undisputed intrepidity in the face of the utmost political horror.

It was during the political struggles in the 1970s and 1980s that women began to debate and confront patriarchal ideologies from both the dictatorships and the traditional Left. These political expressions were reflected in the women involved in partisan resistance and the incipient feminist movement that began to coalesce, bringing with them epistemological ruptures, the emergence of new paradigms, and new guidelines to interpret reality (Vargas, 2002). The second part of the chapter addresses the appearance of the first five Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encounters from 1980s to the 1990s. The transnational spaces of the Encounters became the microcosm where many of these women struggled, negotiated, divided, and came together to deal with political issues affecting women in Latin America. The appearance of this new political actor—feminism—reverberated and reshaped the diasporic organization of women in exile, specifically those living in Toronto. The Encounters and the debates that sprung from them had a direct influence on the development of the feminist consciousness in Latin America and the diasporic women living in Toronto. Furthermore, Latin American feminism was inextricably linked to processes of liberation—with all its advances and setbacks—adopting an unequivocal anti-capitalist stance and clearly distinguishing itself from mainstream feminisms in Europe, the United States, and Canada (Marcos, 2010; Restrepo & Bustamante, 2009; Seminar on Feminism & Culture in Latin America, 1992).

11 Latin American Women’s as Political Actors

Latin American women have ample prior political histories or consciousness of revolt from which to draw. The generalized stereotype of women as “bereft of historical motivation” (McClintock, 1997: 98), if ever applicable, especially does not hold in the case of Latin American women. Gaviola, Largo, and Palestro (1994) argue that the appearance of new scholarly work about the history of Latin American women, which studies the roles they played
in social movements and the development of a “women’s culture” from a multidisciplinary perspective, underlines that Latin American women have had an ample history of being social/political subjects. Certainly, as Marcela Lagarde (2000) reminds us, civil society in Latin America has been a space of emergency and urgency, and as a consequence women have “emerged as social and political protagonists in civil society...because of a vital emergency, because something happened in our lives…” (17). Female militancy was not only passively enacted at the invitation or urging of male militants, but it emanated autonomously as a result of political awareness. Yet it would seem, by the brazen lack of interest of male historians (Armitage, Hart, & Weathermon, 2002; Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero, 2013), that after the imposition of the dictatorships and the emergence of contemporaneous women’s organizing there was no prior history, no resistance, and no independent agency by women. Many history records concentrated and extolled the role of women as family providers in the absence of males, becoming active in the public political sphere as wives or mothers looking for their detained or disappeared loved ones. Invariably, it would seem that the traditional male Left always constituted the relation of women to the revolution as a domestic one (Kirkwood, 1986; Molyneux, 1985; Pieper Mooney & Campbell, 2009).

In actuality, during the 1970s, feminists joined diverse social movements and struggles. These experiences set the basis for the subsequent reflections about imbalanced power relations in the internal organizing of political parties, unions, grassroots organizations, and guerrilla movements (Montaño Virreira & Sanz Ardaya, 2009). Interviews with women who arrived in Canada as political exiles indicate that they brought with them ample organizing and political experience.

I was a militant since I was a student. When I started working in the area of health I became active in the health union. I was always involved until the time of the dictatorship… Even before the dictatorship, I already had two daughters when I was arrested because we were having a meeting and they had been prohibited. (Celina Mazuí, Uruguay)\(^{33}\)

Since our youth we were involved in the popular movement. I was more involved in the area of solidarity with women and the participation of the churches. I was in Mexico working on solidarity and in contact with the women’s movement and in the

\(^{33}\) Celina Mazuí, interview, Montevideo, Uruguay (via Skype), February 22, 2017.
configuration of the Monseñor Romero Christian committees that were created after his assassination. (Loly Rico, El Salvador)

Even prior to 1970s, Chilean women occupied different locations in the political landscape of the organized Left. Indeed, many were active militants of different political parties but seldom did they occupy positions of leadership. Julieta Kirkwood argued in her seminal book *Ser política en Chile* (1986) that issues of discrimination against women were always peripheral within Leftist social movements’ rhetoric, and women’s liberation was either postponed as secondary or entirely dismissed. She stated that in the more combative formulations of the Left discourse against the Right was the defence of the “proletarian family,” considered the basic nucleus of the revolution, without questioning its inherent hierarchical and disciplinary structure. By arguing for better wages for “the head of family,” strict gender roles were not only maintained but were the aims to which the movement aspired. Kirkwood recognized, for example, that a considerable number of women during the Allende government in Chile (1970–1973) snubbed the calls to become involved in the labour force and only wanted to go back to being housewives (Kirwood, 1986). However, there were also a small but important number of women who became engaged in the political process in the 1970s. Interviews with activists in Toronto indicate this history:

I began my political participation during the presidential campaign of Salvador Allende in Chile when I was working with poor neighbourhoods and teaching poor women about politics and political economy. I was organizing classes about different topics, so they could resolve and reverse the *machismo* that was so prevalent in this population. (Mitzi Soto-Mendel, Chile)

---

34 The Theology of Liberation that espoused the option for the poor influenced the Latin American Catholic Church, and many of its proponents within the Church were assassinated and imprisoned. Archbishop Romero became an outspoken critic of the Salvadorian regime. Progressive Christian Committees sprouted up in a number of countries and supported the resistance work. In Chile, the Church supported women’s organizations until debates about reproductive rights surfaced. Please see Jadwiga Pieper Mooney & Jean Campbell. (2009). *Feminist Activism and Women's Rights Mobilization in the Chilean Círculo de Estudios de la Mujer: Beyond Maternalist Mobilization*. Michigan: Center for the Education of Women, University of Michigan.


36 In the notes from the 2nd Women’s Conference that took place in Winnipeg in November 28/29, 1981, it is stated that “women were mobilized around the traditional functions and participated en masse in local neighbourhoods councils, mothers’ clubs, food co-ops, and health committees. Yet, during the same period only five to eight percent of women participated actively as members of a political party and even fewer were involved in the trade union movement” (Notes, July 1980). Joan Simalchik’s archival documents.

I was always engaged in the process and the women I knew also began to participate because Allende stated that this process was not only for the compañeros but also for the compañeras. I did not join any party though because I was more of an anarchist. I didn’t want to be told what to do by the male comrades. I used to work in the Ministry of Agriculture and here we formed Volunteers Brigades made entirely by women. (Gina Ocaranza, Chile)

As a history teacher I was part of the union, which was fundamentally a women’s union. The group work, the organization of support work for the Popular Unity government in our area was all done by women. We were all women because I taught in a girls’ school. We didn’t have a feminist position, and the Left only provided lip services to these [women’s] issues. In 1970s to 1973 it was a path that we had not taken yet. (Maria Antonieta Smith, Chile)

Thus, the majority of the women who arrived to Toronto in the 1970s were a combination of those involved in the political process actively as militants or supporters. Even if women had not been actively involved the process of exile, the political urgency demanded their participation.

With the obliteration, decline, or mutation of the organized Left in Latin America during the 1970s, liberal principles of human rights as an organizing tactic became hegemonic (Basu, 2000; Pieper Mooney, 2010). The feminists and women involved in human rights issues embodied the political crisis of the era; for example, the women who organized for the protection of political prisoners and the demand for the return of the disappeared, or those who focused on the socio-economic crisis of the times and lobbied for the redistribution of resources. Many of these women also promoted the democratization of the family, society, and the nation—with slogans like “democracy in the home and in the country” (Largo & Qüence, 2006). Their praxis took advantage of the “interstices between traditionalism and transgression” (Maier, 2010: 32, 33). Thus, women involved in political struggle resignified traditional gender roles or cultural constructions of femininity, whether as mothers, widows, spouses, or daughters. This strategic

---

38 The word compañera/o was popularized in the 1970s, most notably in Chile. The word conveyed a mixture of companion and comrade. Originally from Latin (to share the same bread) it became a symbol of those who shared a Left ideology.

39 Volunteer Work Brigades were founded to deal with right-wing economic sabotages. Workers organized to keep industries and agriculture producing by taking over the production themselves.


41 Maria Antonieta Smith, interview, Toronto, Ontario, April 18, 2017.
deployment of identities was mobilized in such iconic groups as the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo, the Group for the Detained and Disappeared in Chile (Baldez, 2002; Gaviola, Largo, & Palestra, 1994), the Family Association for the Detained and Disappeared in Guatemala (Schirmer, 1987), and so forth. Most of these groups became recognizable in their use of “motherhood” as a political tool (Jaquette, 2009). Interestingly, some of the founding members of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo (Agosin, 1989; Di Marco, 2010; Maier, 2010) had previous political experience, but this past was subordinate to the narrative of being politically inexperienced “mothers.” Founded in April 1977, they were immediately labelled “terrorist mothers” by the Argentinian dictatorship. Although their initial response was to the disappearance of their children, there was also a process of reawakening that eventually occurred with regards to gender and women’s political participation (Di Marco, 2010).

In Chile, women were the first to mobilize publicly against the dictatorship or to begin the clandestine work of resistance, many times in direct opposition to their husbands or families (Gaviola, Largo, & Palestra, 1994; Largo & Quence, 2006; Pieper Mooney, 2009). In fact, a vast number of women who were imprisoned and tortured were there because they had been sympathizers or auxiliaries of the parties, or because they were supporting the parties by being couriers (Largo & Quence, 2006; Ocaranza, 2006). And even though women took on an unprecedented public political role, the expectations of the traditional parties were to be clear that their activism was only related to the absence of their male compañero or family. Rebolledo (2006), for example, underscores that traditional Leftist parties still expected women who had lost their spouses or compañeros to comply with stereotypical expectations as widows or weeping victims if they continued to live in the country. This image obviates the political agency of the many women who were active militants during national struggles. Rebolledo (2008) alludes to studies that state that 33.18 percent of those who sought exile were women who left Chile as a result of their own decisions that reflected their own political actions.

---

42 Indeed, when the Latin American Women’s Collective invited a member of the Mother of Plaza Mayo to Toronto, she publicly stated “we do not fight for the clitoris” (Ana Maria Santinoli as quoted in San Martin, 1998).

43 Compañero, as explained before, was a new vernacular that aimed to reflect more progressive ways to relate. The word became common to denote one’s relationship partner. I would contend that this was an incipient critique of traditional marriage and traditional patriarchal relations within couples.
Perhaps one of the major breakthroughs for the feminist movement was to realize that authoritarianism was more than just a political or economic problem, but one that has profound roots in the social structure, especially in the private sphere of quotidian life and the private family. As a result the popular feminist slogan “democracy in the home and in the country” (Kirwood, 1986; Largo & Qüence, 2006) became a quintessential indication of women’s struggle for gender equality at every societal level. In fact, the harsh political landscape of human rights violations, persecution, and torture, in addition to the brutal implementation of neo-liberal politics and policies, put women in the centre of the political resistance in two ways: the struggle for economic “survival” and the struggle for “life” and human rights. These women’s movements were striving to overcome ideological divisions in their aims and politics to forge collective forces (Chinchilla Stoltz, 1993; Montaño Virreira & Sanz Ardaya, 2009; Pieper Mooney, 2010; García Castro, 2001). In unstable and sometimes absent male leadership, women were able to reflect and question the “politics of sacrifice.” Many of these activists challenged their parties and introduced gender analysis with or without party support (Gaviola, Largo, & Palestra, 1994). Indeed, the women’s movement developed during dictatorships, when it was capable of coordinating and articulating its demands even though it was a highly heterogeneous movement. This movement included women from the political parties of the Left, poor women from popular organizations, and feminist groups, composed mainly of professional, middle-class women. Carrasco argues that “it is in this moment—the process of struggle against the dictatorship—when it is possible to incorporate a gender perspective, elaborating new conceptualizations about the relationships between men and women and social coexistence and incorporating to the public debate themes that had been absent or relegated to the private world” (2008: 146–147). It is reasonable, then, that resentment was exacerbated when with the return of the incipient democracies in the 1990s women were excluded from the democratic social contract (Largo & Qüence, 2006). The entire process of democratization in the Southern Cone and Central America was plagued with contradictions and the political compromises that ensued

---

44 Movements include the Miners’ Housewives in Bolivia; the women in the district of Villa El Salvador in Lima; in Argentina, the Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo the United Argentinian Feminists (UFA), the Feminist Liberation Movement (MLF), the Association for the liberation of Argentinian Woman (ALMA), and Association of Socialist and Independent Women (AMS); in Chile, the Association for the Unity of Women (ASUMA), the Committee for the Defense of Women’s Rights (CODEM), and Women of Chile (MUDECHI); and the Movement of Nicaraguan Women Luisa Amanda Espinoza (AMNLAE).
were based on key concessions that diluted radical demands from the most progressive groups, including women. With the return of democracy in the Southern Cone and the peace processes in Central America, feminism either established more firmly as an autonomous political project or became part of the governmental structures, albeit with a more “realistic” agenda.

Women have also taken part in revolutionary guerrilla movements for the last part of the century. It is estimated that women made up 30 percent of the Frente Sandinista de Liberación (FSLN) in Nicaragua, and many of the top guerrilla leaders were women (Kampwirth, 2002). Women also participated in the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) in El Salvador. In this country, according to data from the United Nations, “40 percent of the FMLN membership, 30 percent of the combatants, and 20 percent of the military leadership were women” (Kampwirth, 2002; Mujeres por la Dignidad y la Vida, 1993). In Guatemala, hundreds of urban and rural women took up arms from 1975 to 1985, leading to a “transcendent break” (Carrillo & Chinchilla, 2010) in the political history of Guatemala; in this case, military participation didn’t necessarily reflect a particular feminist consciousness, but it still reflected an “ultimate transgression into a male sphere” (Carrillo & Chinchilla, 2010). In Nicaragua and El Salvador, military participation created a women’s consciousness that translated into specific women’s organizations with a feminist political perspective, such as the Luisa Amanda Espinoza Women’s Association (AMLAE). In fact, women in Chile began to receive women’s literature from Nicaragua and El Salvador from the female comandantes: “this encouraged us a lot because we became aware that we could be feminist and fight the dictatorship” (Gaviola, Largo, & Palestra, 1994: 181).

In the film Mujeres en la Guerra, Historias de El Salvador (Cracken & Simon, 2013), six women explain how civil war in El Salvador was like a school that encouraged women to learn skills ranging from reading and writing to healing wounds to speaking publicly, and stirred many of them to join the armed resistance. This education, especially around women’s and human rights issues, influenced women and allowed them to hold leadership positions in many of the community projects developed after the War Accords (Chejter, 2007; Cracken & Simon, 2013). Women continued to push for social justice demands, including gender equality, and continued to be actively involved in the development of their communities. One of the women interviewed in the film expresses what they learned: “We are women that have been, and are very
empowered in our organization. And we work, and we defend ourselves, when we need to defend ourselves” (Cracken & Simon, 2013).

Women in the Southern Cone and Central America differed in terms of the nature of their political involvement. Due to the political context, women in the Southern Cone engaged in public political organizing (Pieper & Campbell, 2009). Although there was some military resistance, it did not expand and few women participated (Zalaquett, 2008). In Central America, beginning with the Nicaraguan revolution, women took an active role in public resistance but also in the military upsurge (Tijerino & Randall, 1978; Alegria & Flakoll, 1983; Randall, 1981; Molyneux, 1993). The Nicaraguan women’s movement solidified after the revolution only to lose its position and many gains later on. As Chinchilla Stoltz concludes, “in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala… feminism was born out of war and revolution with all the deprivations and sacrifices cataclysmic events brought with them” (1993: 17).

In Central America women were active participants and supporters in the guerrilla struggle. Yet in El Salvador feminist issues in the 1980s were still considered by party members to be a negative force, identified as a product of imperialism and acting as a divisive issue (Chejter, 2007). However, in practice they were striving for feminist goals:

In El Salvador, the women’s movement at the time was a feminist movement because it was seeking the participation of women not only in the war, because women did participate, but the movement was also seeking that women not only participated in the traditional roles in which women cooked for the popular movement or gave courses in the popular governments, but also to strive for equality in the Salvadorean society, and within the popular movement, because even though the popular movement was about change, there wasn’t a real understanding of equality.

In El Salvador because it is such a small country, women participated in all levels of the war. There was even an entire women’s commando. At the time we didn’t perceive some of these actions as feminist but the participation of women in non-traditional areas such as women in the radio, women participating in the popular government in the liberated zones…. Many women achieved positions of leadership and decision-making that you no longer see in this time. Sadly, there was a regression… But in 1992 in the peace process women used the [political] tools and at the end of ’89, ’87 women began to develop organizations that were called feminist. (Loly Rico, El Salvador)45

12 Transnational Identities: The Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encuentros from 1981 to 1990

In 1967 the General Assembly of the United Nations approved Resolution 2263, the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, giving way to the International Women’s Conference that took place in Mexico in 1975. It is at this Conference that Latin American feminism, as an international social actor, emerged while organizing grassroots parallel initiatives that criticized and condemned the official Conference (Montaño Virreira & Sanz Ardaya, 2009; Pieper Mooney, 2010). In this alternative space women from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, and Uruguay who were suffering under military dictatorships came together to denounce those regimes (Pieper Mooney, 2010). At the same time, it became clear that the movement was not homogenous, with tensions arising between those women with “double militancy.” This term was used by feminists who privileged the struggle against dictatorships or anti-imperialist struggle in their countries of origin, and who usually belonged to traditional political parties, as opposed to those whose only priority was a feminist agenda and whose struggle was usually highly critical of the traditional Left ideologies, usually derisively calling men “Machistas-Lenistas” (Marcos, 2010).

Notwithstanding these differences, it was here where the idea of having intra-regional Encounters was gestated, with the collective international participation of women who were exiled and who were crucial in the incubation of a Women’s Latin American and Caribbean Encounter (Restrepo & Bustamante, 2009). Intra-regional and Pan-American Women’s Encounters had a long tradition in Latin America going back to the 1800s (Seminar on Feminism & Culture in Latin America, 1992). Predictably, these Encounters became treasured transnational/transborder sites, spaces where women could strategize and develop alternative political and cultural projects; find solidarity and solace from others who shared their history and socio-political conditions; and critically contested, challenged, and negotiated with each other.

Encuentros (Encounters) and Desencuentros (Mis-encounters), as a number of Latinas have called them (Alvarez, 2000; Alvarez et al., 2003; Restrepo & Bustamante, 2009; Vargas, 2002),

These women were also called políticas or militantes, that is, they were members (cadres) in political parties.
have been key transnational sites where feminists have come together to define, refashion, contest, and negotiate feminist identities, discourses, practices, and strategies in Latin America. These “extra-official” gatherings bring together feminists “within world regions to build solidarity, devise innovative forms of political praxis, and elaborate discourses that challenge gender-based and sexual oppression” (Alvarez et al., 2003: 538). There have been 14 Encuentros thus far: Colombia (1981), Peru (1983), Brazil (1985), Mexico (1987), Argentina (1990), El Salvador (1993), Chile (1996), Dominican Republic (1999), Costa Rica (2002), Brazil (2005), Mexico (2009), Colombia (2011), and Peru (2014); and the last one in Uruguay (2017). These meetings have not only provided clues as to current feminist priorities and debates in Latin America, but they have also influenced the dynamics of social movements at the local, national, regional, and international levels. The emergence of some of the most incredible feminist organizing in the world, the Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encounters, crystalized the essence of a multifaceted movement. In addition, these mobilizing efforts arose from the bottom up, unlike other international feminist organizing that has been prompted vertically by the United Nations (Alvarez, 2000).

The Spanish connotation of the word encuentro (encounter) denotes layered meanings. Encuentro is both to stumble upon someone or something and to come together in a planned and organized manner. It means to meet old friends or to meet new people. Thus, an encounter is more than a meeting; it is to come together, to gather, and to allow oneself to be changed by the experience. Expanding on this meaning, Sara Ahmed links encounters to the process of identity:

The term encounters suggests a meeting, but a meeting which involves surprise and conflict. We can ask: how does identity itself become instituted through encounters with others that surprise that shift the boundaries of the familiar, of what we assume that we know? Identity itself is constituted in the ‘more than one’ of the encounter: the designation of an ‘I’ or ‘we’ requires an encounter with others. (Ahmed, 2000: 7)

Encuentros therefore assume a collective and decentralized construction very much in contrast to party congresses, conferences, or seminars that brought traditional images of carefully controlled and limited participation and strict hierarchical structures present in traditional Leftist parties (Restrepo & Bustamante, 2009). Encuentros also developed parallel to other more official international public arenas, such as the UN women’s conferences or state- and foundation-sponsored international events, making them into grassroots, collective efforts and dialogues that have been chaotic, creative, and conflictive. They have given birth to numerous advocacy
coalitions, identity networks, and further Encounters organized by Black Women (Léon, 1995; Laó-Montes, 2016; Moreno Vega, Alba, & Modestin, 2012), Indigenous women, and lesbians (Alvarez et al., 2003; Mogrovejo, 2010; Bunch & Hinojosa, 2000), in addition to issue-based coalitions such as sexual and reproductive rights, violence against women, labour rights, and ecological rights. Negotiating difference and diversity has been the pervasive conflict.

Encuentros have greatly influenced and directed feminist debates in Latin America. By exchanging and sometimes bitterly confronting different political perspectives and analysis, women have been able to construct viable political, social, and cultural alternatives, making the Encuentros key transnational arenas of transformation. Feminists who were leaders in social movements against dictatorships or who were supporting incipient democracies, and who were still being persecuted or ostracized from the social movements in their countries or regions, could bond and strategize to support and influence each other’s activisms and struggles in a transnational or transborder modality (Gaviola, Largo, & Palestra, 1994). Despite the sometimes acrimonious differences and political conflicts that reflected a chaotic political emergence, these Encuentros “help forge ‘imagined’ Latin American feminist communities” (Alvarez et al., 2003: 539). Women travelled from throughout the Americas to participate, to make connections, and to mediate between local, national, and regional political processes by bringing to the fore all the inherent contradictions that Latin American women face in their multiple locations. In the case of women, the globalization of transnational movements have become an important manner by which linkages amongst social movements has been encouraged. Encounters have become the locus of various processes of construction of transnational identities.

Each Encuentro has highlighted different “knots of conflict” (Crispi, 1987) that have reflected the struggles of the women’s movement in Latin America at particular historical junctures. From

---

47 The First Black Latin American and Caribbean Women Feminist Encounter took place in July 1992 in the Dominican Republic. It was here that the Afro-Latinas and Afro-Caribbean Women’s Network was created.

48 In 2009, the First Continental Summit of Indigenous Women from Abya Yala took place in Quito, Ecuador and sparked the creation of the Continental Coordinator of Indigenous Women.

49 There have been 10 Latin American lesbian Encuentros: Mexico (1987); Costa Rica (1989); Puerto Rico (1992); Argentina (1995); Brazil (1999); Mexico (2004); in Chile (2007); Guatemala (2010); Bolivia (2012); and Colombia (2014). It is interesting that the lesbian Encuentros do not use “Latin America” but the Indigenous name of Abya Yala for the continent.
the 1970s to the 1990s four Encuentros took place. Alvarez et al. (2003) have argued that the most acrimonious debates centred around three axes: (1) shifting conceptions of movement “autonomy”—feminism’s relationship to the larger women’s movement and to other actors in civil and political society, the state, and international institutions; (2) controversies generated by the movements, including a recurrent “crisis of inclusion” and “crisis of expansion”; and (3) debates centred on differences, inequalities, and power imbalances among women in general and among feminists in particular (541).

It was the feelings of isolation in their own countries and the quest for “affirmation, identity and solidarity” (Alvarez, 2000) that led to the first Encounter in 1981, where there were 189 participants from 19 countries. Yet the tension in the call for the Encuentro that took place in Bogota, Colombia, already reflected the internal contradictions in the movement. Some of the organizers wanted to issue a broad call to diverse groups of women who were committed to social transformation. Another sector, however, wanted to restrict participation to those women who already had some kind of feminist practice (Restrepo & Bustamante, 2009). There were profound debates about autonomy, “double militancy,” feminism, sexuality, abortion, and class struggles and anti-imperialism (Montaño Virreira & Sanz Ardaya, 2009). There were two facets to the discussions. The first one entailed the fraught relationship of feminists with the male Left. Many feminists had been or were still attached to political parties. In fact, it was probably because they were influenced by their internationalist backgrounds that women already had practice building transborder bridges, in internationalist solidarity movements and political parties. These women may or may have not identified as feminists but they were labelled políticas or militantes either because they continued to work with political parties or because their priorities were the dissolution of the dictatorships. Women interested in gender issues believed that these would be addressed by the “revolution” and looked to Cuba for inspiration. Many of these women would eventually become disillusioned with the existing socialist project, something that deepened when exile took them to live in some of the socialist countries. Other women were not interested in issues of gender, and class was the only priority for them (Largo & Qüence, 2006). The second facet corresponded to the uneasy relationship of feminists to the broad-based “women’s movement” (movimiento de mujeres) organized around economic and human rights issues and composed mainly of poor, working class, indigenous, and Black women (Alvarez et al., 2003). These sharp and sometimes bitter divisions and schisms were reflected in
the resistance to the dictatorships and in exile, and became salient in the feminist *Encuentros*. The debates in the first *Encuentro* that reverberated throughout all the following Encounters centred on who could be called a “real” feminist and how being autonomous could safeguard the movement against co-optation from the male Left.\(^{50}\)

As Restrepo and Bustamente (2009) note, the resolutions of the first *Encuentro* include a definition of the specificities of Latin American feminism at that particular historical moment with its link with the processes of liberation and a clear anti-capitalist stance establishing marked differences with mainstream feminisms from Europe or the United States (Marcos, 2010). Notwithstanding the anti-capitalist stance, there was also the demand that the feminist movement should be independent of traditional Leftist political parties (Restrepo & Bustamente, 2009: 16). Furthermore, it was crucial for the organizers of the Encounter that the space be conceived to be broad-based and inclusive, since it was key for the Latin American feminist movement to involve poor and working-class women who were considered to be a “key constituency” (Alvarez et al., 2003). Participants came together under a “logic of solidarity” that created networks to protect women’s rights and provide activists with political support. Women who attended “discussed the different strategies of patriarchal institutions at the center of military regimes, and identified violations of women’s rights, including their reproductive rights” (Pieper Mooney, 2010: 619). Notably, it was in this *Encuentro* that violence against women was identified as a central tenet, and November 25 is proclaimed as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women in honour of the Mirabal sisters, who were assassinated by the Trujillo dictatorship.\(^{51}\)

The next *Encuentro* took place in Lima, Peru in 1983, with an exponential increase of 600 women in attendance. In this second *Encuentro*, the presence of women who had been exiled led to the acknowledgement of how gender inequality was exacerbated by the experience of asylum, but there was also recognition that this experience may have increased women’s internationalist

\(^{50}\) This was not so different than what was taking place in the Global North. See for example Becky Ross. (1995). *The house that Jill built: A Lesbian nation in formation*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.

\(^{51}\) Julia Alvarez fictionalized the story of the Mirabal sisters in the book *In the Time of the Butterflies* in 1994. At this *Encuentro* it was also confirmed that March 8 would be recognized as International Women’s Day and May 28 as International Day of Action for Women’s Health (Montaño Virreira & Sanz Ardaya, 2009).
sentiments. Many women lived in different countries in Latin America before moving to Canada. For example, in Escobar’s (2000) study, six out of the ten women interviewed sought refuge in South American countries before travelling to Canada. These transnational trajectories and diasporic experiences allowed these women to create alternative and more complex understanding of identity, beyond narrow nationalist parameters.

Also of note in this Encuentro was the workshop on racism organized by Black and Indigenous women who denounced that “race” had not been incorporated as part of a feminist intersectional analysis. Lesbians also manifested their discontent and demanded that the issue of sexual orientation be added to all of the workshops and not be treated separately. There was a focus on the barriers and difficulties of women’s labour and the balance between domestic and waged work. Stemming from this debate, July 22 was selected as the International Day of Domestic Work (Montaño Virreíra & Sanz Ardaya, 2009).

The third Encuentro took place in 1985 and included 848 activists, again a significant increase in participation, although the numbers may have been negatively affected because the subscription fee was 60 American dollars, a prohibitive amount for marginalized and poor women. Moreover, this Encuentro took place in Bertioga, Brazil in an expensive hotel. This provoked heated debates, especially when women from the favelas tried to get in without paying the fee. Women from popular movements demanded the recognition of “double militancy,” meaning women who were members of political parties and women’s/feminist groups; they also demanded acknowledgment of the articulation of a dialogic relationship between the struggles of “women’s movements” and feminists. Although a strong political position was taken that anti-patriarchal struggle must be combined with anti-imperialist struggle, there was a rejection of masculine, vertical structures and of having any relationship to traditional political parties (Montaño Virreíra & Sanz Ardaya, 2009). Thus, a pivotal turn took place in this Encuentro with Latin American women: they concretely began to assume the pluralism of feminism.

The fourth Encuentro took place in Taxco, Mexico in 1987, and this was the first time that a group from Toronto, organized by the Latin American Women’s Collective (LACW), attended.

52 Shantytowns: defined as numerous crudely built houses on squatted land surrounding the cities.
This *Encuentro* dealt with taking apart the “myths” of the feminist movement—for example, that feminists are not interested in power, that feminists do politics differently, that all feminists are equal, and that there is natural unity amongst feminists because they are women (Alvarez et al., 2003).

The fifth Encounter took place in San Bernando, Argentina in 1990, with the participation of 3,200 participants. The main “knot of conflict” was the emergent debate between the creation of “feminist centres” versus the “feminist movement”—that is, the incipient role of non-governmental agencies. Interestingly, an article appeared in the Canadian Latin American feminist magazine *Aquelarre* written by Carmen Rodriguez, in which she notes that a number of participants attending the Encounter were residents of the United States and Canada. She emphasized that one of the main discussions in one of the workshops aimed to gather and synthesize Latin American feminism as a continental movement (Rodriguez, 1990). The Latin American Women’s Collective (LAWC) from Toronto played a vital role in the organization of the fifth Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encounter. I will discuss this participation in the next chapter.

Significantly, from the 1970s to the 1990s women in exile witnessed not only the resurgence of a strong women’s movement in opposition to the prevalent dictatorships in the hemisphere but also the resurgence, acknowledgement, and prioritization of feminist politics. This inevitably had repercussions in how exiled women in Toronto organized but also, and more importantly, in their own understanding of gender politics. Nevertheless, the antagonisms and schism that were part of the debates in Latin America were vividly reflected in the microcosm of Toronto. While women in Leftist organizations criticized and derided the women who identified as feminists, a small but active group of women emerged publicly as feminists. These women were confronting the rejection and criticism not only of Latin American women involved with partisan politics but also the white Canadian women’s movement that assumed that Latinas could not really be feminists. Two different groups of women organized around women’s issues at this time: the Chilean Women’s Committee (The Feminine Front) and the Latin American Women’s Collective (LAWC). I will discuss these groups in further detail in the next chapter.
13 Conclusion

The 1970s in Latin America saw an upsurge of structured social movements in the political landscape of the continent. Men, and although not as readily acknowledged, women, from all sectors of society became active agents of change and subsequently, after the brutal imposition of US-backed military dictatorships, victims of repression. Women assumed the leadership of public resistance movements in the Southern Cone by deploying a number of strategies, including the strategic use of “motherhood.” In Central America, women took an active role in the logistics of and participation in the revolution. Through these processes of political engagement women confronted authoritarian military regimes head on. This consciousness also led to their conclusion that authoritarianism and sexism were also an intrinsic part of the traditional Left.

This resurgence of feminist ideologies provoked confrontations with those women who prioritized the resistance against the military dictatorships—called the políticas, militantes, or women who held “double militancy.” With the advent of the Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encounters in the 1980s and 1990s, the contradictions and divergent perspectives about women’s social priorities became public. The Encounters’ transnational spaces became territories where women strived to negotiate a political praxis that was both feminist and anti-imperialist. This was not an easy process; it was fraught with pugnacious contradictions and fragmentations. Nonetheless, key strategic alliances were forged and the movement was able to move forward.

Latin American women in the diaspora understood the specificities of gender in the resistance and organized to support any political, social, and economic project that enabled women to continue with their resistance and ultimately overthrow the military dictatorships. Exiled women worked tirelessly to support those organizations, especially those led by women. They organized to support political prisoners and guerrilla combatants. They financially supported social projects such as education, food collectives, and cultural initiatives. In this vein, diasporic women developed alliances with other women’s groups and political struggles; however, the relationship with the middle-class, white Canadian women’s movement was pragmatic and limited.

Irrevocably, however, the political debates in Latin America found their way into the diaspora. Many exiled women had become disenchanted with the stale political praxis of the traditional
Left. The Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encounters became the catalyst that led to the formation of distinct Latin American feminist groups that espoused both anti-imperialist and feminist praxis. I turn to the experiences of women in exile in the next chapter.
Chapter 4
Solidarity in the Diaspora and Transnational Feminism: Women’s Organizing

14 Introduction

This chapter considers how Latin American women in Toronto were influenced and affected by transnational discussions that were taking place in Latin America. The influence of these transformative political debates were, arguably, more profound than the mainstream feminist debates taking place in Canada in the 1970s to the 1990s. Women’s leading roles in the resistance movements in Latin America shaped women’s political praxis in the diaspora. Furthermore, the emergence of grassroots feminisms and feminist spaces facilitated the advent of Latina feminist subjectivity in exile. As Alvarez et al. (2003) note the Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encounters “distilled a dynamic and mutually constitutive interplay of national and transnational feminist identities discourses and practices” (539). The aim is to show how these dynamics were inextricably connected to the experience of women in exile and informed women’s political consciousness and feminist subjectivities. To advance and support this argument, the stories of women shared in primary interviews are drawn upon.

The argument in this chapter will proceed through consideration of two main points. The first is the pivotal influence of the political background of the women who arrived in Toronto as exiles during the 1970s and 1990s. Second, the chapter considers as examples two main solidarity groups composed of women in Toronto. These are the Chilean Women’s Committee, called informally by its members the Feminine Front (Frente Femenino, FF), and the Latin American Women’s Collective (LAWC). These organizations reflected, influenced, and embodied the women’s and feminist debates taking place in Latin America.

Regarding the Chilean Women’s Committee, of particular importance are the discriminatory experiences that they confronted when they arrived in Toronto, and their participation in the solidarity movement, as well as some of the contradictions that they faced as women. Women were engaged in the solidarity movement mainly as the preservers of culture, strategically deploying the Canadian context of multiculturalism in the interest of solidarity. And as organizers, women established gender-specific groups, becoming active in the support of
women’s political engagement in Latin America, and also by participating in political mobilizations in Canada, such as strikes as part of the Canadian labour force. The last section considers how the Frente Femenino was made up mainly of militants of traditional parties and organized four Women’s Conferences throughout Canada, including Toronto. The Latin American Women’s Collective (LAWC) was a grassroots organization that developed a distinctly feminist and anti-imperialist position engaged in anti-imperialist solidarity, supported women’s groups in Latin America, and participated in the Feminist Encounters. These two groups of women organized most of the time in an antagonistic manner that precluded any alliances in terms of solidarity work, but reflected the ideological debates taking place in the Southern hemisphere and their transnational influence.

The chapter will conclude by considering how these women’s and feminist movements reverberated and reshaped the organizations of diasporic women in exile, specifically those living in Toronto.

15 Latin American Diasporic Women in Toronto (1970s–1990s)

Prior to 1973, there was a small Latin American political presence in Toronto. Community organizer and political activist Luis Carrillo\(^53\) recalls that around the 1970s he used to meet with other Latin Americans to discuss and self-educate about politics under the auspices of the Canadian Communist Party. In this group, Latin Americans engaged in debates about philosophical and political divergent strategies and participated in public demonstrations against the Vietnam War. Increasingly, however, there was disappointment with the Canadian Communist Party because of their perceived apathy (or lack of mass mobilization strategies).

During this time, however, the Chilean experience is notable. A number of Chileans who were in Canada completing post-graduate work began to attend the group in order to organize support for the Chilean socialist process. In response to the coup d’état in Chile in 1973, these students immediately organized into a group called the Chilean Students in Toronto (Bascuñán & Borgoño, 2015; Peddle, 2008; Simalchik, 1993; Concha Caldera, 2014). This group of students

formed the nucleus of the first Chilean political effort to pressure the Canadian government to isolate the Chilean dictatorship and organized the first welcome committees for exiles arriving in Toronto (Peddle, 2014; Simalchik, 1993; Concha Caldera, 2014). In tandem, progressive Canadians, many of whom who had been active against the Vietnam War, and members of the various church groups forcefully mobilized to lobby the Canadian state to accept political refugees from Chile. Exiles who arrived first immediately organized to support those who were arriving into the country:

When we arrived in Canada, immediately we became involved in a welcome committee to receive not only the political refugees but all the Chileans from the Left that were coming. This committee was organized by the Interchurch community…there was also two hotels, we would go there every night to check who had arrived, our task was to take them to Manpower. We would look for translators, and then we would commit to help them look for housing, and we would take them to the supermarket. (Mitzi Soto-Mendel, Chilean)

Exiles may continually hold on to the romanticized, idealized notion of the “motherland” and the resistance movements that were taking place back “home” (Bascuñan, 2006; Escobar, 2006). Survivors’ guilt, party directives, and the fact that none had “chosen” to come to Canada meant that this group consciously saw themselves as temporary “outsiders” in Canada, ready to go home at any minute, while at the same time mobilizing and organizing to exert any kind of political pressure that would assist in the overthrow of the dictatorships (Concha Caldera, 2014). This translated most clearly in personal projects when Chileans refused to “settle” by avoiding spending money on material possessions, refusing to study, or to commit to any long-term projects that would show an intention to stay in Canada. The axiom “we never unpack our bags” was current and realistic insofar as the expected fall of dictatorships was permanently

54 Other solidarity groups included the Canadian Coordinating Committee for Solidarity with Democratic Chile (CCSDC); Chile-Canada Solidarity Committee; Coalition on Canadian Policy toward Chile; Canadian University Committee for Chilean Refugee Professionals; and the active support of the Communist Party of Canada, and the NDP. Organizations such as the Latin American Working Group established a special Chile project committee, who together with the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) formed an ad hoc committee on Chile that would operate as the Chile-Canada Solidarity group. In addition, an ecumenical coalition the Interchurch Committee on Chile (ICCC) was also formed.


56 This axiom has been used for quite sometime in reference to the Chilean community. A Chilean play The Incredible Life of Mataluna presented a character carrying an unopened suitcase until the end of the play. See also Laurie Nock. (1990). “We never unpacked our bags”: Chilean refugees as immigrants. Multicultural education:
assumed to be proximate (Peddle, 2008; Wright & Oñate Zuñiga, 2007; Bascuñan & Borgoño, 2015). Long after the fall of the Chilean dictatorship, these feelings of not really belonging in Canada continue to exist:

> I feel Chilean. My roots are there. I am thrilled by what happens there, I am not saying I don’t get thrilled with things that happen here too, there are many things that are interesting here as well, but it’s not the same thing. As the song by Isabel Parra [singing about exile] says, “the bread that feeds me will always be other people’s bread.” (Virginia Medina, Chilean)

At the time of arrival, political refugees and migrants immediately began to develop transnational solidarity groups and networks that would provide political, economic, and logistic support for the struggles in their countries of origin. These political groups and/or cultural groups were mostly based in nationality or ideology. Some groups worked across national boundaries, while others were divided by diverse and sometimes antagonistic political strategies. For Chileans, Uruguayans, Argentinians, and Salvadorians, “pre-immigration socialization within leftist parties, guerrilla movements and grassroots social movements” (Landolt & Goldring, 2009) were reflected in the organizing efforts of these Latin American refugees. In the interest of supporting the struggles of the country of origin, exiles created numerous solidarity organizations, reconstituting their political parties abroad and becoming an “external front” in the struggle against dictatorships (Wright & Oñate Zuñiga, 2007). International coordination occurred via political parties, central committees from inside the country in exile, in conjunction with different coalitions formed in countries around the world.

The participation in these solidarity groups or associations

---

*Council newsletter of the Alberta Teacher’s Association; Milen Robles & Carmen Alicia Robles. (1980). The personal adjustments of Acculturation of the Chilean Émigré in the City of Regina. Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Social Work, University of Regina.*

---

57 Chilean, Argentinian, Uruguayan, and Central American exiles represented a spectrum of political ideologies on the Left. These ideologies differed in terms of tactics, strategies, and philosophical political perspectives. In Toronto, Chileans organized in coalition work that reflected the Popular Unity Coalition in Chile (*Unidad Popular*, UP) and included most of the political parties. Uruguayans and Argentinians each came together in one organization, the Committee for Human Rights in Uruguay and the Committee for Human Rights in Argentina. There was work across nationalities specially if the political expressions were along the same ideological basis. More concretely, organizations put away their differences at specific historical points in order to work together (Concha Caldera, 2014).
allowed people with a history of political activism to reassert this facet of their identity, while creating interpersonal bonds and a space in which they could provide mutual assistance on a practical and emotional level to those who were arriving. Re-establishing avenues for collective political action allowed many exiles to make use of their organizational skills, reassert their ideological beliefs, and form a powerful counter-argument to the military regime’s characterization of them as un-Chilean. (Peddle, 2014: 88)

Solidarity groups played a manifold role: they would organize educational/political events for exiles and supporters of their struggles around human rights violations or the denunciation of the complicity of the United States and the Canadian state. They would engage in outreach and lobby key political allies such as churches, unions, students’ organizations, women’s organizations, peace groups, and formal political parties. All of these organizations focused on providing transnational political and economic support to a number of political organizations engaged in social, political, and military resistance in Latin America. Eventually, for women’s groups, this form of transnationalism was, arguably, strongly influenced by a feminist approach embodied in women’s participation.

These organizations were a nucleus for support, assisting newly arrived refugees with looking for accommodation, jobs, English classes, and other forms of social service support (Soto-Mendel, interview, 2017; Concha Caldera, 2014). Efforts were made to organize summer schools for teenagers and sports activities, all clearly under a political umbrella (Concha Caldera, 2014). Many of the organizations overlapped as they participated in different projects. Many of the social actors also moved from place to place and tended to hold positions in various groups and organizations. Finally, they provided spaces where cultural/political activities took place, and they brought Canadians into the solidarity movement. Ultimately, these political groups also began local organizations that would eventually provide support with settlement issues, language heritage, developing youth sports and schools, and active cultural production (Landolt & Goldring, 2009; Concha Caldera, 2014).
These groups also engaged with those Canadian political parties that could be seen as allies in supporting state-sanctioned measures against dictatorships. For instance, many were involved in supporting the New Democratic Party (NDP)—and many of the political organizations in exile would exhort its members, after obtaining Canadian citizenship, to vote, all with the aim to overthrow the dictatorships and return to their countries of origin.

The students who were doing graduate work in Toronto organized and created the Toronto Chilean Association (TCA) immediately after the coup d’état (Concha Caldera, 2014). All of the leftist Chilean parties had representation, with the exception of the Movement of Revolutionary Left (MIR) that created the Chile-Ontario Information Centre (CHOIC). The site for meetings was an old church located in 121 Avenue Road. Uruguayans worked in the Committee for the Defense of Human Rights in Uruguay and the Argentinians created the Committee for Human Rights in Argentina. Although the organizations were nationally based, there were efforts to support each other, depending, as I have stated before, on their political ideologies.

We arrived the 29th [of November, 1978] and on the 30th we were sitting in the Committee for the Defense of Human Rights in Uruguay. There was only one group and we had a lot of contact and coordination with the Chilean group and with an Argentinian group, we all worked in the Avenue Road church. (Alba Agosto, Uruguay)

We started working in the Toronto Chilean Association where [my husband] became the president when we arrived. He was the president for two years, I think. We were very active in the TCA. Well, it was the men who participated the most because when we arrived we all had young children, so where were we going to leave the children? Little by little [women] became more involved in the organization. (Virginia Medina, Chilean)

---

58 For example, in 1978 at the World Conference of Solidarity with Chile that took place in Madrid, the Canadian delegation included a future Manitoba premier, the British Columbian president of the Carpenters’ Union, and poets from Québec (Simalchik, 2011).
59 This slightly contradicts the assertion that Latin Americans were not involved in formal partisan politics. In my personal experience, my father would make voting a family event, where we all had to go and vote for the NDP. This kind of political tradition has been really hard to shake off in the onset of the disappointing changing policies of the NDP.
60 A Chilean man worked in this church as a caretaker and he obtained permission to use the premises as headquarters. Numerous activities took place in this church including theatre, hunger strikes, and concerts.
In addition, other relationships were established with other groups of exiles, such as the Portuguese, Spanish, and Greeks (Bascuñán & Borgoño, 2015; Concha Caldera, 2014). This internationalist identity logic and the need to organize the political work against national dictators led to the crossover of numerous spaces. Crossover movements of exiles occurred not only in the Global North and Europe but also across different “nations” in Latin America (for example, Chileans, Argentineans, and Uruguayans living in Venezuela, Mexico, and Cuba). Latin American exiles ended up in diverse places, such as Angola and Mozambique in Africa and countries in the Eastern Bloc (Rebolledo, 2006; Wright & Oñate Zuñiga, 2007). In the majority of these countries, especially in Europe, Chilean women’s committees were formed. These committees did not have a feminist perspective at the time, but they engaged in supporting women’s organizations and activism, and one of their main objectives was to mobilize support from women’s organizations in their host countries. According to Wright and Oñate (2007) the Popular Unity Women’s Organization was established in 35 countries (Soto-Mendel, interview, 2017).

There was a lot of solidarity work across nationalities; Chileans would come together with Greek exiles, for example, to organize a solidarity event for El Salvador (Bascuñán & Borgoño, 2015: 127). Virginia Medina63 remembered that her husband attended another event by Greek exiles representing the Toronto Chilean Association. He was to bring a message of solidarity on behalf of his political party. This was difficult, since as a newly arrive exile he could hardly speak English. Chileans would be invited as representatives of political parties or the Toronto Chilean Association to show support for other political struggles. For example, Medina was invited to a solidarity event against the South African apartheid:

We worked with the South African people. Once I was sent to a meeting with South African women. I was like a little bird that didn’t know anything but I was flattered. You could not compare what was happening in South Africa…well; maybe it was equally terrible [as to what was happening in Chile]. (Virginia Medina, Chilean)64

Upon the arrival of Central Americans to Toronto in the 1980s, groups such as the Solidarity Block Farabundo Marti (1983 to present), the Committee of Solidarity with the People of El

Salvador (1984), and the Toronto Guatemala Solidarity Committee (1984) emerged. Women who arrived also became part of political movements that were not limited only to the solidarity struggle,

> When I came here in the year 1979. I began to work in a factory, where we were paid for piecemeal work. The foreman treated us horribly; he was really rude and used to swear at the workers, who were all women. I was one of the youngest workers and recently arrived. We were able to convince the older women in the factory and we organized a successful union but the factory closed. At the same time I became involved in solidarity work…. I worked with AMES [Asociación de Mujeres del Salvador]. (Maria R., El Salvador)⁶⁶

Exile, for women, was lived differently depending on a variety and combination of factors. These factors included direct experience with repression, age, professional/educational status, labour experience, family status, and political commitment during exile. In addition, women faced stereotypes based on racialized gender assumptions in the host country—and not only from the nationals of the host country. Racialized gender assumptions refer to a stereotypical belief that women from Latin America are submissive, dependant, religious, and conservative.

Whatever their position, however, exile implied ruptures with important referents such as family, home, and culture (Rebolledo, 2008). The grief of defeat and the agony of seeing a utopic dream come crushing down with unparalleled violence, uprooting and shattering lives and truncating careers, defined exile as a profoundly psychological, social, and political trauma (Wright & Oñate Zuñiga, 2007; Grinberg & Grinberg, 1984).

Married women faced the first shock of exile when their last names where changed to that of their husbands automatically upon entry into Canada. This change created a number of corollary problems, such as having documentation rejected because the names on the certificates did not reflect the ones in the immigration documents. This change was not just a trifling bureaucratic detail, but affected women at the level of identity, as they ceased to be who they were back in their countries and were put in a de facto position of dependency with respect to their spouses.

As the loss of last names reflected, “a woman’s political relation to the nation was thus

---

⁶⁵ One particular group exemplified the internationalist Leftist ethic and spearheaded the creation of a Latin American group in support of the Nicaraguan revolution. The group was composed mainly of Chileans and one Nicaraguan man (Lilian Valverde, 2017, personal communication).

submerged as a social relation to a man through marriage” (Rodriguez, en Rocinante No. 16, February, 2000, quoted in Rebolledo, 2006: 83). As Marta Zabaleta, an Argentinian writer, relates, exile converted her “automatically and above all else, into a wife.” Although being a highly qualified, middle class woman, upon landing in her host country she was seen “as a wife of a quasi hero, then as illiterate, deaf and mute, and even sometimes as a ‘poor-but-good’ mother” (2003: 21). In Toronto, women had different reactions to their loss of identity, as indicated in interviews with activists.

When the first women arrived they made us change our names, when it was not necessary. Because when we came here, we came with our own passports, with our names. The immigration papers were also in our name. I discovered that this was not mandatory. And when we were in the Welcome Committee we would tell women “if you are asked to change your name to that of your husband, don’t change it, unless you want to.” This was a loss of identity. The party in Chile, they have just revised the membership lists, and they asked me, are you the same person? This meant to me that those years of militancy [in Canada] were lost. Can you imagine that? (Mitzi Soto-Mendel, Chile)\textsuperscript{67}

Furthermore, changes in the gender role expectations may have been already taking place in their countries of origin. This was not merely due to the ostensibly more advanced gender relations of the host country, as commonly understood in western feminist interpretations (Simalchik, 2011). As discussed in the previous chapter, women may have already been in roles of political leadership in their countries of origin. In the previous chapter, I discussed at length that questions of gender inequality had already begun to surface in these women’s countries of origin. Certainly, exile may have exacerbated these conflicts or may have accelerated role changes because of necessity, as was publicly stated in the Second Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encounter that took place in 1983. For example, women in the family may have carried the brunt of the survival if their partners had been imprisoned, or they may have been already involved in the resistance movements. In the case of Marta Zabaleta, for example, it was she who had arranged all the papers to migrate, had obtained a research fellow grant for her husband since this grant was not available to women, and yet she was deemed to be the dependent (Zabaleta, 2003). In another example, because of the labour demands, many men may have begun to take a

\textsuperscript{67} Mitzi Mendel-Soto, interview, Toronto, Ontario, May 1, 2017.
more active role in the family (Peddle, 2014). It has also been argued by some researchers of the experience of exile that, overall, women may also have had a more healthy and pragmatic attitude towards the changes in class status in exile, while men tended to be more psychologically affected by their perceived loss of social status (Bascuñan & Borgoño, 2015; Escobar, 2000; Rebolledo, 2006).

Although many women had also been arrested and tortured, their experiences were seldom acknowledged publicly. Still, efforts were made by women leaders to bring attention to the great number of disappeared women. In 1977, Gladys Marin, Maria Elena Carrera, and Carmen Gloria Aguayo, all members of the Allende government, participated in a tour in the United States to bring attention to this issue (Concha Caldera, 2014: 57). However, even today not a lot has been written or made public about the experiences of women who were militants who were arrested, tortured, and disappeared (Rojas et al., 2002; Lira, 2010). There has been research that has determined that women during repression suffer as women and as political entities (Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture, undated; Collette, 2013; Gaviola, Largo, & Palestro, 1994; Humanas, 2008). Women who were militants were deemed to be unnatural by the military that thought these women had abandoned their traditional and safe spaces to engage in male public spaces. These women were defined as morally loose and deserving of “special” treatment. Rape has been the quintessential tool in wars (Humanas, 2008; Lira, 2010). Many women survivors of torture report that theirs had not been a political “crime” but a “crime” against patriarchal values (Ocaranza, 1990; Quintanilla, interview, 2015). In Toronto, doctors Fornazzari and Freire (1990) studied the effects of torture on Latin American women, concluding that women who experienced direct physical, mental, and sexual torture had a much harder time overcoming the sequelae of torture.

In my particular case, my father assumed a number of domestic tasks such as cleaning and cooking since my mother began to work in a factory and he worked night shifts.

Gina Ocaranza, for example, was imprisoned in Villa Grimaldi, a notorious torture centre, and later on at the Tres Alamos prison. She was pregnant and had her daughter in prison (Ocaranza, 2006). When I interviewed a lawyer of the Humanas Corporation, a Human Rights and Gender Justice Centre in Chile, I was told that women had only recently begun to seek justice for sexual violence and repression. Many of these women were waiting for their parents to die (Quintanilla, interview, 2015). In exile, women didn’t talk publicly about their experiences of repression as it usually included sexual violence. In fact, a friend of mine only disclosed her experiences for the first time 27 years after her imprisonment, and only as a result of my arrest and stay in jail. I know other women who have been imprisoned and they have never talked about what happened to them.
In relation to labour, some women began to work in exile for the first time, or for the first time since they had been married. Other women who were professionals or had a labour history struggled to attain equivalencies and continue their professional careers. Many of these women joined the labour force, though often not in their field of expertise. Some examples from interview respondents exemplify these experiences.

I tried to revalidate my degree and that is where the odyssey began. I could not get any of my documentation from Uruguay. It took me five years; this was something that really frustrated me. I still worked as a nurse’s aid mostly part-time. By 1975, I had my fourth child, so I mostly stayed at home, or I would work on weekdays or I would do night shifts so I could be with them. Also, [my husband] was working full-time, studying, and he was also a militant. After five years I got documentation so I could begin to revalidate. (Celina Mazuí, Uruguay)

I heard that they were hiring maids at the Harbour Castle Hotel. So I went there. A month after my arrival I was already working. In Chile I was a bilingual secretary. (Virgina Medina, Chile)

I worked cleaning houses for two years. Between the option of working in a sewing factory, where I would not have made it because every time I tried to sew the threads would break, the other option was to work cleaning houses, where I thought I could do a sociological study about the Canadian family (as if such thing exists). I never saw anyone, I only saw what I needed to clean, ovens and refrigerators. From there I moved to a store where they sold religious figures (saints). It was really an interesting place. It was located right at Yonge and Dundas. (Maria Antonieta Smith, Chilean)

In some cases, women had to take on the responsibility for the economic well-being of the family because their partners had been greatly traumatized by experiences of imprisonment and torture (Peddle, 2014). In other instances, regardless of their previous labour history, women were encouraged by their political organizations to assume the economic support of the family while the men engaged in political activism full-time. Others were unable to work as a result of their traumatic experiences with prison and torture. In still other examples, women coming from the middle and upper classes may have been tremendously impacted by the fact that they lacked

---

72 Maria Antonieta Smith, interview, Toronto, Ontario, April 18, 2017.
domestic help. The fact that these women often had to assume domestic responsibilities for the first time may have turned into a powerful consciousness-raising occasion (Baldez, 2002).

A number of women who were able to arrange childcare and educational support continued to study and work, while others were faced with blatant discrimination from a Canadian state that did not validate their professional credentials. In many cases, women experienced a lot more sexism and racism at the hands of immigration and Canadian officials than what they had experienced back home. For example, Dr. Marlinda Freire, when interviewed by Francis Peddle, recalls that she faced many obstacles because she was not deemed the head of the household. She was denied access to an English as a second language (ESL) course, and access to a program that would allow her to take the medical examination to enter an internship or graduate studies at the University of Toronto (Peddle, 2014). Gina Ocaranza, who came to Canada as a single mother, was also not deemed to be the “head of the household” and was denied access to the ESL course (Ocaranza, 2006). The denial of ESL classes to women has been noted historically in the literature as a common experience (Rockhill & Tomic, 1994).

Even their maternal roles, a quintessential feminine characteristic in Latin American societies influenced by the concept of “Marianism,” even changed radically in exile. Women in general may have experienced a diminishing of the perceived importance of the maternal role. Whether women were professionals in their country of origin or had been politically active, it is a reality that maternity was perceived as the most important role they could aspire to (Rebolledo, 2008). However, families were experiencing a number of power shifts that affected relationships among the members. Due to their parents’ language limitations, children became the language and cultural translators, becoming the link to the outside world and blurring the roles between parents and children (Bascuñan & Borgoño, 2015). Because of labour and political demands, children may have been relegated to second place, which may have had great implications for families, and specifically women.

The term Marianismo was first introduced by Evelyn P. Stevens (1973) and highlighted by Dr. Rosa Gil and Dr. Carmen Inoa-Vazquez in their book The Maria Paradox (1997). The concept, with its religious roots, refers to hyper-feminine behaviour that stresses the self-sacrificial aspect of nurturing and caring for family and others. It also relies on the assumption of female moral and spiritual superiority. I hasten to add that there are huge religious differences amongst Latin American countries. But while the Left may not have espoused religious beliefs, maternity was still considered the role of women, even in revolutionary times.
Sometimes I ask myself if my children were affected by my activism? Maybe I didn’t spend enough time with them, because I devoted my time to be active politically. This is a question I ask myself. Maybe yes, maybe no. (Virginia Medina, Chile)\textsuperscript{74}

An extreme example of this was reflected in some more radical political organizations. From the 1970s to the mid-1980s some women who were exiled in socialist countries were asked to leave their children in the hands of “substitute parents” in order to enter their countries clandestinely and engage in operations on behalf of the resistance movement (Rebolledo, 2006).\textsuperscript{75} For Chileans in exile, marriage breakdown was higher than the national average in Chile (Rebolledo, 2008). Exile brought into the fore contradictory gender/race relations with the host country, changing many of the gender dynamics of the exiles (Peddle, 2014). In Canada, the exoticization of Latin American women and men led to conflict between partners as “both men and women discovered that they were the object of sexual interest from natives of the host country, considered exotic and attractive because of their different appearance and manners” (Vasquez & Araujo, 1990, as quoted in Peddle, 2014: 115). This problematic notion needs to be challenged. Racist assumptions of hypersexuality coupled with romanticized stereotypes of “the revolutionary” were very much present in the Canadian progressive Left. Some of the arguments put forward to explain this phenomenon of marriage breakdown make use of contradictory and racialized gender assumptions about Latin American women, for example that they rejected feminism and they were far more socially and sexually conservative than their Canadian counterparts. The alternative argument that women had become more independent—more demanding, in essence “more liberated”—may have had a greater influence on the estrangement that couples faced.

The women began to work when they arrived here, they had the economic need to work and once women acquire economic independence it was when the ruptures occurred because the men could not accept that women could be independent alone. (Virgina Medina, Chilean)\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{74} Virginia Medina, interview, Toronto, Ontario, June 15, 2017.

\textsuperscript{75} See for example the fascinating documentary \textit{The Chilean Building} (2010) by Macarena Aguilo, which explores her experience and that of 60 children who were raised in what was known as the “Home Project” in Cuba, a collective childcare program where parents could leave their children in order to return clandestinely to Chile.

\textsuperscript{76} Virginia Medina, interview, Toronto, Ontario, June 15, 2017.
However, I would stress that these changes to the gender dynamics were as much the result of previous social and political experiences as well as the contact with societies that may have provided better social supports for women wishing to separate. For example, women taking a leadership role in the resistance, taking on the economic survival of the family, making decisions about exile, and other critical decisions, also influenced changes in gender relations. Perhaps a positive side effect of the number of separations that happened in exile and its emotional hardships was that it might have fostered a gender solidarity that included emotional support and pragmatic support, with childcare and survival (San Martin, 1998). Women who were left on their own had to reinvent themselves, which may have been key to the creation of organizations such as the Latin American Women’s Collective in Toronto.

Women were an example for the new generation. There have been many changes and now we value women much more. There were many changes that happened because of the war. The process helped us to revalorize women, demonstrated that we were able to lead and this increased our self-esteem. This was very important and it was very difficult. It was difficult here because I saw many couples separate...because the war also brought to the light many contradictions. When women became aware that they had worth, that they didn’t have to depend on what a man said, and that they had a voice. (Maria R., El Salvador)77

Thus, the women in exile were paradoxically expected to become “super women” but also to maintain their traditional roles. Political organizations’ expectations were assumed to be equal for men and women as both were expected to follow the party line, which would prioritize the struggle in the country of origin over any personal or professional project. Women who had been politically active in their countries of origin immersed themselves in solidarity work, while others may have become active only as a result of exile.

The policies and practices of multiculturalism have been extensively analyzed and critiqued.78 I will argue that for the Latin American exiled community, multiculturalism provided a strategic

space whereby the exiled person could maintain her political and social identity by mobilizing culture, something that had been intrinsic to the political struggles back home. In Latin America, culture and political activity had been intertwined with socialist and revolutionary political projects. The “New Man” (Martinez-Saenz, 2004)\(^79\) entailed new forms of cultural manifestation—inventing, reclaiming, and defending “autochthonous” identities that rejected the assumed capitalist identities of individualism, consumption, and frivolity. These alternative cultural expressions had led to an upsurge for the development of autochthonous\(^80\) art (equated with indigenous art), artisan projects, literature, art, and music. Thus, exile and migration represented a new frame of political reference that led exiles to underscore the importance of identity in order to denounce human rights violations through a different medium that could touch a broader sector of the host country and reinforce a “political” and social identity (Rebolledo, 2006; Wright & Oñate, 2007). In this sense, we find that there was a strong integration of political activity with cultural activity: “Music, painting, theater and literature were all put to political use as a way to provide identity and to brighten the solidarity initiatives, at the same time operating as a support for the [political] condemnations and a way to circulate and broadcast the Chilean situation” (Rebolledo, 2006: 72). Thus, women actively participated in the cultural spaces, with the caveat that these spaces are highly gendered.

In Shayne’s (2009) study about Chilean women’s feminism and feminist knowledge production,\(^81\) she notes that “culture is manifested in a variety of forms: rituals, linguistic markers, material objects, social practices as well as the less apparent ones like worldviews, beliefs, and value systems. The aforementioned ultimately serve as the infrastructure of politics. Culture and cultural production are thus fluid socio-political processes” (Shayne, 2009: xx). Thus, Latinas/os in exile used music, peñas, and other cultural expressions to promote group

---

\(^79\) Martinez-Saenz (2004) argues that the New Man embodies a communitarian attitude that conveys, “an individual defined solely in terms of his [sic] relation to a community” (16).

\(^80\) Please see Walter D. Mignolo (2005) on the appropriation of indigenous cultural practices as a counter hegemonic ideology to the cultural penetration of the North.

\(^81\) Her book is based on the production of Aqualarre, a Latin American feminist bilingual magazine published in Vancouver. Although Julie Shayne writes about this experience as an entirely Chilean experience, it is important to underline the fact that there were women from other Latin American countries who also participated in the project. Unfortunately, the process of ascribing a sole protagonist role to Chilean women has had the consequence of erasing women from other Latin American countries that were also vital to the development of these projects.
identity, to provide a space to grieve and to heal, to denounce the dictatorship, and to organize solidarity collectively (Shayne, 2009). This would explain the almost natural affinity of Latin American exiles to the constraints of the multiculturalism model, whereby the expressions of “culture” were paramount to organize a strong solidarity movement (Simalchik, 2006).

I participated in the organization of the cultural group Victor Jara. I danced there for about 3 to 4 years, in addition to all the other things I was doing. This was a mechanism of solidarity that we had, and it was really, really, useful because everywhere we asked for solidarity, we would go with the group and we would offer our cultural input, in addition to giving our political message where we would ask for more solidarity. (Mitzi Soto-Mendel, Chilean)

Peñas are cultural and political celebrations that served to showcase cultural expressions such as music, theatre, poetry, documentaries, photography, and paintings, in addition to providing music for dancing, wine, and traditional foods. However, peñas were also spaces where the reproduction of gender was reinscribed. In Canada, peñas became a space where those who were not Latin Americans but were working in the solidarity movement could mix with Latin Americans. These spaces also allowed exiles to mobilize their identities to support the urgent political project of the times. While the fascist military dictatorships engaged in a feverish nationalistic process that included the usual collective fetish spectacles with flags, marches, military hymns, burning of books, and religiosity (McClintock, 1997: 102), the exiles counteracted with their own rituals like posters, music, traditional food (the emblematic empanada, for example) and so forth. For Chileans, for example, nationalistic symbols like the national flag and anthem were also used to reassert the “validity of their vision of Chile and to confirm them as true Chileans as opposed to the military usurpers” (Peddle, 2014: 89). Peñas served the purpose of gatherings and maintaining an emotional support system for people in exile, as denunciations of human rights abuses to the host countries and as fundraisers.

82 Victor Jara was a renowned communist cultural worker, teacher, theatre director, poet, singer, and songwriter, who was brutally assassinated by the Chilean military in September 1973.


84 The empanada became a symbol of resistance, not only in terms of cultural survival but also because it was a symbol of the revolutionary possibilities that the Allende regime had embodied when he called for a revolution Chilean style with empanadas and red wine. It is my contention that, although it was mostly women who were involved in making empanadas, because of its symbolic meaning a lot of men increasingly participated in making them. Concha Caldera (2014) makes a specific point to discuss how debates took place about the quality and methods needed to create a satisfactory empanada.
Misunderstanding the objective of the gatherings might have given the impression to outsiders that the fundraising efforts were economically irrational (Rebolledo, 2006), ignoring the fact that these intergenerational spaces brought together women and men, militants and non-militants, and allowed the exiles come together to create and recreate collective activities aimed to revitalize the communities. As Shayne states, “the peñas served as a place to collectively heal the emotional and political pain brought on by exile” (2009: xxvi).

In this gendered activity, women actively supported the events by cooking, cleaning, taking care of the children, and organizing the dancing groups—rarely by giving key political speeches as the political representatives or spokespersons, or being represented in more serious artistic endeavours such as music. Thus, although cultural reproduction such as maintaining language, social values, and traditions was women’s responsibility and priority—since the life project for exiles was to return to their countries cultural competence was paramount (Rebolledo, 2008). Peñas were spaces where women participated actively and were key in their production, but rarely political spokespersons.

I participated in the Human Rights Committee for Uruguay. I participated in the meetings of course, but it was in the parties when I was most active. In the kitchen, in the selling of the food, which was the main activity; women were in the kitchen, see? (Celina Mazuí, Uruguay)85

In the peñas we all worked until the end. The kids would sleep on top of the parkas, on the chairs. No one had a place where to leave the kids. When we organized a peña, everyone would go. The kids were used to sleep anywhere, on the floor. Because we all had to work; we did it all for solidarity. (Virginia Medina, Chile)

Women organized innumerable cultural activities that included folkloric groups, theatre, the sale of crafts created by political prisoners, and the sale of arpilleras created by the women’s groups in Chile. They organized concerts. They hosted political leaders and artists that were brought to Canada. In addition, women organized annual activities for children and youth, such as the so-called Games of Exile (Medina, interview, 2017; Concha Caldera, 2014). They led the boycott against Chileans grapes and wines.

In some contexts, out of necessity women were asked to take on more salient roles and responsibilities that made women more confident in the use of public space. Maria R., a Salvadorian activist in her youth, shared how she had been forced by circumstances to take a fearless and independent role.

My passion was to join the war, combat, but I came here. I prepared myself physically and emotionally but I wasn’t sent to El Salvador, they sent me to Vancouver. It really helped me to become independent. When I arrived there I went hungry, I endured many things…I suffered, because I had to sleep on a park bench. But, it made me strong, independent. (Maria R., El Salvador)86

Although most women participated in traditional parties and groups, most of their participation was as rank-and-file members. Some political parties created women’s auxiliary groups, whose aim was to mobilize women in support of the anti-dictatorship struggle by appealing to issues that were considered to be part and parcel of womanhood: peace, motherhood or family issues.

Nonetheless, the need to get international women’s groups to support the struggle demanded that women in exile become savvy about feminist issues and seek support from feminist groups, especially during the eighties. Maria R., for example was one of founding members of the Asociación de Mujeres Salvadoreñas (AMES) in Toronto.

With AMES, women were able to attain positions in leadership committees, with AMES, they were able to have a strong presence. We had our own comandantes like Comandante Ana Maria that provided guidance, not only with respect to the war but also in terms of our self-value…. We were leaders. We could state our opinions. What we thought. What we disagreed on. But it was difficult because the compañeros many times didn’t agree with us. Nonetheless, we were able to consolidate ourselves as a women’s group. (Maria R., El Salvador)87

Clearly people in exile were alert to all of what was taking place in Latin America. For exiled women, this included witnessing the political leadership of women in Latin America, from the resistance to the dictatorships to the role of women in the guerrilla movements, and crucially the emergence of a women’s consciousness. The rise of women’s and feminist groups in Latin America impacted the left greatly, including those in the diaspora. The debates, the antagonisms,

and the schisms between the women who were militant on the left and those who identified as feminists were most transparent in the organization of the Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encounters in Latin America. These tensions were vividly reflected in the microcosm of Toronto, specifically in two parallel organizations, the Women’s Committee (El Frente Femenino, FF) and the Latin American Women’s Collective (LAWC).

16 The Women’s Committee: El Frente Femenino (FF)

This group was formed in 1974 as a women’s auxiliary to the Toronto Chilean Association (TCA) (Concha Caldera, 2014). The following year, the United Nations declared 1975 the International Year of the Woman. Angel Concha Caldera recalls in detail that “the Canadian government wanted to tone down this historic moment by limiting it to Canadian women. More than 50 unions and organizations interested in confronting women’s issues, including the TCA, endorsed the program put forward by women’s organizations” (2014: 27). The program presented by women’s groups included many social issues that had been ignored by the Canadian state, and committees were formed at City Hall to deal with issues such as “women’s sexuality and criminal law; justice in the marriage and property law; women, peace and national liberation; professional women; women in industry and services; etc.” (27). These were issues that reflected the same concerns that Chilean women expressed in the Allende government (28). At this particular event, Concha Caldera also notes that the Chilean folk group closed the workshops with a celebratory dance.

Interestingly, the name used in the Canadian context was the Chilean Women’s Committee, but in the Chilean community the name used was the Feminine Front (FF). Militants from the traditional Chilean parties, in addition to independent women who made connections to women’s groups in Chile as well as in Canada, formed the group, but it was stressed that their work was not limited to women’s issues (Bascuñan & Borgoño, 2015). These groups were reproduced in other parts of Canada.

When groups of work were formed, we received the information that in Europe they had formed a Front of Anti-Fascist Chilean women. This was around 1975 or 1976. And that is when we formed the Chilean Women’s Front or the Chilean Women’s Committee. This group began a tight relationship with women’s organizations in Chile, political
organizations, with the associations that had been formed, like the organizations of political prisoners, and the Association for the Detained and Disappeared. (Mitzi Soto-Mendel, Chilean)\textsuperscript{88}

We started meeting, it [was] nothing official. We didn’t take minutes in the meetings. Everything was spontaneous. We were women. We had to have the approval of the TCA but everything was jointly worked on. Women from all the different parties formed the FF. Why did women organize as women? I don’t know maybe because women have a better way of organizing. (Virginia Medina, Chilean)\textsuperscript{89}

Transversal links were established with the Canadian Congress of Women, the women’s auxiliary of the Canadian Communist Party, and the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC).

As a militant of a political party, and as an exiled woman, I became involved on behalf of my party with the Canadian women. Organizations like the Canadian Congress of women, that organized an International Women’s Day, also a Mother’s Day, and the day for the child…. There were many Jewish women who had survived fascism and Irish women, that came in the time of the [potato famine]. (Mitzi Soto-Mendel, Chilean)\textsuperscript{90}

Since many of the women who participated in the FF were party militants, they reproduced the same ideological stance as those in Latin America. That is, their priority was to overthrow the dictatorships or win the guerrilla warfare rather than focus on issues of gender. In the book \textit{Chilenos in Toronto}, the male authors explain, “the concept of gender, central to the feminist theory and understood as the cultural construction of the feminine and masculine, may not have necessarily coincided with the objectives of the FF nor transsexuality, queer theory or the lesbian movement” (Bascuñan & Borgoño, 2015: 153). Thus, women may have been critical of the existence of the FF as separate from men; for example, Cecilia Núñez sardonically comments “during those years a ‘feminine front’ was created. It is important to note that there was no ‘masculine front,’ there were political parties where men participated with a woman here and there” (Bascuñan & Borgoño, 2015: 154). Soto-Mendel (interview, 2017) also explains, “we had a different vision of what feminism is, because we were militants of the left, and for us the struggle was elbow to elbow, men and women equally.”

\textsuperscript{88} Mitzi Soto-Mendel, interview, Toronto, Ontario, May, 1, 2017.

\textsuperscript{89} Virginia Medina, interview, Toronto, Ontario, June 15, 2017.

\textsuperscript{90} Mitzi Soto-Mendel, interview, Toronto, Ontario, May 1, 2017.
What was clear was that there was no understanding or support for feminism as a political theory. The main objective of these militant women was to overthrow the military dictatorship and their connection was with the women in the political and economic resistance, many of whom abhorred feminism and deemed it divisive. The objective of the FF was to fundraise for women’s organizations in Chile. Usually these would entail support with educational needs for children of the disappeared, shantytown or working class neighbourhood organizers, soup kitchens, and women’s leadership programs. Other efforts that may have resembled more philanthropic activities, included sending used clothes to marginalized neighbourhoods. However, there was an incipient understanding that repression was different for women, that gender played a significant role in political organizing.

The FF had a minor role in the international Canadian Inquiry into Human Rights in Chile organized in October 1977 that took place at Ryerson Institute of Technology, where exiles provided testimony of the Chilean repression and three women relatives of the detained and disappeared were invited to provide their own testimony (Simalchik, 2011). The FF was in charge of taking care of the female guests, since they symbolized the role of women against the dictatorship; that is, in relation to their roles as mothers and wives. Particularly important were two events organized by the FF that are recorded in Concha Caldera’s *Compendium of the Chilean Exile in Toronto* (2014). The first event was on May 26, 1986, with Owana Madero, the wife of Manuel Guerrero, who together with two other men were kidnapped by the military and savagely killed by having their throats slit. The second event, organized on February 6, 1987, was with Verónica de Negri, mother of Rodrigo Negri, who had been burned to death in the streets of Santiago.

Notably, Chilean women were active in organizing four Latin American Women’s Conferences. The first Conference took place in November, 1980, in Calgary (Conference Resolutions, 1980); the second took place in Winnipeg in November 28/29, 1981 (Conference Program, 1981); the third in Toronto, 1982; and the fourth in Montreal, 1983.\(^1\) The resolutions of the First

---

\(^1\) There is some confusion about the conference in Toronto. Concha Caldera (2014) mentions a Fourth Women’s Conference in Solidarity with Latin American and Caribbean Women that took place in Toronto May 17–19, 1985, at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute. This conference aimed to raise consciousness about women’s conditions in Latin America and as immigrants in Canada. Women came from Cuba, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Chile. This would
Conference are quite interesting—amongst the more general resolutions a number stand out. For example, that a representative, Geneva Parker, was to be sent to Chile to participate in the Third Women’s Conference there. It was also resolved that solidarity committees should be created in every Canadian city with the priority to send money to the Women’s Section of the National Coordinating Union and other women’s groups. Another resolution affirms support for the demand for equal pay between men and women and the improvement of women’s education. Finally, and more crucial to more current discussions, there is a specific resolution to recognize and support indigenous women in Turtle Island (Canada) and their struggle for equal rights (Conference Resolutions, 1980). In the Second Conference, in some of the summary notes, it is stated specifically that Chilean women “do not consider themselves feminist, but they do believe that the liberation of Chile must include the ‘coming of age’ of women of the working class” (Conference Summary Notes, 1981: 5). In this Conference there was a specific workshop on the Role of Women in the Struggle for Liberation and Human Rights.

The FF in Toronto was the main organizer for the Third Conference of Chilean and Latin American women organized in 1982.

In the year 1982, the idea emerged to organize the Latin American Women’s Conference in exile. At this time, many other women that had come to Canada had become involved. Compañeras from El Salvador, there were compañeras from Nicaragua that had left for a number of reasons. But fundamentally, it was the Salvadorian women with whom we worked first. (Mitzi Soto-Mendel, Chile)92

In this Conference, there was a representative from the Association of Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared, Solá Sierra, and Mapuche leader Ana María Llao-Llao (Bascuñan & Borgoño, 2015). The objective was to organize a conference in Montreal in 1983 (Soto-Mendel, interview, 2017).

It is at this event where the schism between the Latin American Women’s Collective and the militant women reflected most acutely the debates and divisions taking place in Latin America.

---

92 Mitzi Soto-Mendel, Interview Toronto, Ontario May 1st, 2017
Although the LAWC had been invited to participate in the organization of this conference, it was eventually ousted when they questioned the decision-making process. Part of the problem had to do with the FF identifying feminism as a bourgeois, first world problem and not part of the urgent anti-imperialist solidarity movement (San Martin, 1998).


The Latin American Women’s Collective (LAWC) emerged in Toronto as a number of women from different countries, who had participated in partisan politics, became more disillusioned with patriarchal left political parties in exile and their positions with regards to women’s issues both here and back in Latin America, but also in response to the exclusion and racism of the Canadian women’s movement (San Martin, 1996, 1998). Influenced by the women’s movement in Latin America, women (mainly from the Southern Cone) formally formed the LAWC in 1983 as a feminist and anti-imperialist women’s group. This group consisted of about 50 women who participated at different times in its 10-year existence. The core consisted of six to ten women who were constant. The LAWC was structured as a collective in the spirit of feminist and democratic organizations.

As I have discussed elsewhere (San Martin, 1998) the identity that the LAWC opted for was that of “immigrant women.” This label conveyed the feelings of being outside of the nation as citizens, regardless of the manner in which they had arrived, but it also allowed Latin American women to carve out a place in the host nation rather than focusing exclusively on Latin America. As Dionne Brand theorized, the feeling of “perpetual state of migrancy” (1993) contributed to the feeling of invisibility and “outsider” status, and furthermore it legitimized the construction of Canada as white. The LAWC intuitively understood that “immigrant women” were by definition those racialized women that provided the cheap labour to the country. The appearance of LAWC in the political landscape was received with indifference or outright hostility by both the White feminist movement and the solidarity movement.

When we participated in the International Women’s Day, we had to struggle, we struggled in two fronts, we had to struggle within the solidarity committee to make them understand that this was a political opportunity for the committee, to denounce the political situation of the political prisoners, that we could not lose, that there were going to be thousands of people, that could read our materials, we could gather signatures and that it didn't matter if there were men and women who were at the table. On the other
hand, IWD wanted only women so we had to convince our compañeros that only women could be at the tables.

We added the class part to the IWD. White women had a good gender analysis, for the time, but we added the class analysis.

To the extent that you became a conscious feminist, you had your struggle at home, there were many fronts, because to the extent that you become conscious, you realize that it’s not only work, see? It’s also in your home; in your bed, with your sons, see? It was a very interesting time; it was really like waking up. I will never forget when my brother asked me, so are you a leftist or a feminist?...I said I am a leftist and a feminist, you can be a leftist and a feminist, he said “what about Marx?” [I said,] “too bad for Marx” (Gladys Klestorny, Uruguay)93

The LAWC priorities mirrored, in many instances, the priorities that many of the militant women in Latin America had identified, namely the struggle for democracy or revolution. As women with a left-wing political analysis and philosophy, the LAWC pushed gender priorities on par with an anti-imperialist position. The LAWC developed four objectives that guided their work: first, to support financially and politically the liberation processes of countries in Latin America; second, to advance women’s issues in the Latin American solidarity community; third, to participate in the Canadian women’s movement to advance an anti-imperialist stance; and fourth, to work politically with immigrant women in general (LAWC, 1987; San Martin, 1998). It was the first objective that was a priority for the group. It pushed the organization to plan fundraising events to the detriment, perhaps, of other important issues. For example, the LAWC lacked a comprehensive understanding of racism and when issues of race erupted at the International Women’s Day Committee the LAWC didn’t participate except as a witness to the intense and bitter debates about racism. The organization didn’t want to jeopardize its monopoly on the food sourcing at IWD, a main fundraising activity (San Martin, 1998).

Pointedly, there was a fluid communication between women living in Toronto and the women’s movement in Latin America. This communication was possible because of the constant travel of women to their countries of origin and the effort made in getting documentation and contacting women working in feminist organizations.

We were feminist, leftist Latinas. [LAWC] was a beautiful place to share, and to learn. I learned a lot. The one person that brought a lot of good theory to the Collective was Ruth. Ruth brought many good things that left me with an open mouth. I would listen to her attentively because she was the one with the theory, and she was bringing information from Peru that we hadn’t heard anything about, ideological information about feminism. (Gladys Klestorny, Uruguay)\textsuperscript{94}

The LAWC produced five newsletters called \textit{Mujeres} from 1985 to 1990. The newsletters were rudimentary but would include articles from women in Latin America that reflected the effort to maintain a close look at what theoretical epistemology feminists were producing there. The articles included analysis from Latin America and Canada about imperialism, feminism, and class struggle. In addition, they included women’s voices from the community, testimonies, poetry, and other topics of interest (San Martin, 1998). The newsletter was one of the first publications that dealt with the issue of violence against women in the community, providing an in depth analysis of violence as a capitalist and patriarchal tool to prevent social change. This analysis provoked a lot of controversy in a community that was not ready to see violence as a systemic issue but recognized it as an individual domestic problem, sometimes justified as a result of repression and persecution. The newsletter was distributed throughout community centres serving Latin American women (San Martin, 1998).

Debates about autonomy were fiercely taking place in Toronto. Indeed, it was the production of the last newsletter that brought to the fore issues of autonomy from the state. This issue of the LAWC newsletter had been produced as part of a project on violence against women funded by the Ontario Provincial government. It was this particular newsletter that provoked discussions about autonomy and what it would mean to have projects be financially supported by the Canadian State. In addition, autonomy from political parties was still a strongly contested issue. An incident with the FF around the Third Conference for Latin American Exiled Women in 1982 reinforced the critique that partisan groups, even women’s groups, were inordinately dogmatic and authoritarian. The LAWC had been invited to participate; however, when criticism surfaced around undemocratic decision-making processes the Latin American women feminists were sabotaged and blocked from further participating in the organizing of this event. Part of the

\textsuperscript{94} Gladys Klestorny, interview, Toronto, Ontario, May 29, 2017.
disagreement was the fact that deciding who to invite from Latin America was taken by the political parties without any democratic process. As one of the members of LAWC recalled, “there are forms of isolating you, they say ‘come and be part of the committee but whatever you say we will not implement it’” (Maria Rosa Pinedo as quoted in San Martin, 1998). The LAWC still attended the event but they were again silenced when they attempted to ask questions—they would be interrupted or ignored (San Martin, 1998). It became palpable that women from the LAWC were seen as deviants from the Left, labelling them “lesbians” and “bourgeois.” Tellingly, in the midst of the debate, some of the women partisan political representatives and leaders who had been invited to the Conference took pains to stress that they were not feminists.

The LAWC maintained contact with emerging women’s movements in Latin America by participating in two of the Latin American Encounters: the fourth Feminist Encuentro that took place in Taxco, Mexico in 1987, and the fifth Feminist Encuentro that took place in San Bernardo, Argentina in 1990. The fourth Encuentro was attended by more than 1,500 women with the unprecedented participation of hundreds of women from the movimiento de mujeres, who were new to feminism (Alvarez et al., 2003). Although a testament to inclusionary practices, many of the established feminists felt that there was not a specific “feminist” agenda since many of these women from the movimiento managed only an elementary feminist discourse. The ensuing debates led to the accusation that some feminists were using a “feministómetro,” an imaginary devise that would tell them who was a real feminist (Alvarez et al., 2003). The salutary conclusion of the debates was that any woman who defined herself as a feminist was a feminist.

Regrettably, this would not be the end of this debate. This was the first Encuentro where women from the Latin American Women’s Collective (LAWC) from Toronto participated. As one of the members of the LAWC recalled, she was mesmerized:

We saw the peasant women’s movement, indigenous women. We also saw troubling conflict. We saw how the presence and militancy of the Latin American lesbians was becoming evident; they were part of the movement. The movement as something diverse…it was the time of Nicaragua, it was the moment we were living, the intensity that made us…that welded us together. (Ana Maria Santinoli as quoted in San Martin, 1998)

It was precisely because of the presence of women coming from the “First World” that guidelines were developed to inform the relationship between these two groups. It was due to
this constant connection that women from the LAWC were able to develop a more nuanced transnational feminist identity (San Martin, 1998).

At the fifth Encuentro in San Bernardo, Argentina in 1990, the LAWC undertook a fundraising campaign to subsidize a group of 18 women so they could travel to the Encuentro. In addition, and as a reflection of their remarkable transborder activism, they assumed the responsibility for the coordination of the entire mailing for the event. This was an incredible feat considering that the LAWC was a grassroots organization that lacked any kind of institutional financial support. The LAWC also organized workshops on their return to continue the discussion that had taken place in Argentina with women in Toronto (San Martin, 1998: 75). Perhaps it was this Encuentro, where it became most visible for the LAWC that issues of class and privilege within the Latin American women’s movement needed to be problematized, and where they realized the exclusionary nature of some of the Encuentros through the active criticism of indigenous, afro-Latinas, lesbians, poor, and marginalized women. The paradoxical position of the women of the LAWC, mostly poor and marginalized women in Toronto but presumed to be privileged by virtue of living in the “North,” became a catalyst for further organizing.

18 Conclusion

A significant number of women who arrived in Canada brought with them solid political experience and organizing skills. Women were coming from traumatic experiences, including the imprisonment or disappearance of their loved ones, that had propelled them take on a number of non-traditional roles in the face of persecution and the responsibility of sustaining the family and keeping it together. In arriving to Turtle Island (Canada), women experienced the usual discrimination based on sex/gender and racism allocated to any migrant, refugee, and exile coming to live in Canada. Nonetheless, many women engaged in political work as soon as they arrived in this land.

Women engaged in solidarity work in traditional support activities that prioritized cultural activities and women’s organizing in their countries of origin, but they also engaged in non-traditional ways that saw them take on leadership roles in exile. For Salvadorian women, for example, the demands of political work allowed them to engage in a number of activities that were non-traditional. The fact that many women in El Salvador were in positions of leadership in the guerrilla provided an example to be emulated by women in exile.
For Chilean women, working in solidarity with men meant doing all kinds of support work, but rarely were they in positions of leadership. Women supported the peñas by cooking, cleaning, and assuming other menial tasks. However, they played a vital and protagonist role in the development of folkloric dancing that was utilized to reach other communities and bring them a political message. In this way, Canadian multiculturalism facilitated the dissemination of a political message to support the struggle in Chile that may have been more palatable when camouflaged as folk dancing by women.

The Feminine Front, on the other hand, had an enormous capacity to organize, although once again their role tended to be limited to work in relation to their roles as wives and mothers. However, the constant dialogue with women’s organizations in Latin America influenced the debates that were taking place in Toronto. Nonetheless, the Latin American Women’s Conferences organized by the Feminine Front provided an indication that social issues that affected women were becoming more salient in the struggles back home. Without calling themselves feminists, their praxis inevitably led to a deeper understanding of gender issues.

The emergence of Latin American women as leaders in the struggles of resistance and the appearance of Latin American feminisms led to the formation of the Latin American Women’s Collective (LAWC), which defined itself as both anti-imperialist and feminist. The LAWC played a foundational role in the development of a distinctly Latin American feminist subjectivity in Toronto. Snubbed by the solidarity movement and white, middle-class Canadian feminists, they maintained a fluid communication with the feminist groups that were organizing the resistance as well as the epistemic debates taking place in Latin America. This transnational connection crystalized in the participation of the LAWC in two of the Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encounters. These experiences recalibrated their feminist ideologies by confronting them to exhilarating experiences but also to the pugnacious struggles going on in Latin American feminisms.

In conclusion, there has been a history of political participation by Latinas/os at the level of grassroots solidarity organizations that has had a tremendous impact on the political landscape of Turtle Island (Canada), and this influence has largely gone unrecognized. As Veronis notes, social agencies and solidarity groups both influenced Canadian foreign policies and diplomatic relations with Latin America (2010: 186).
Since its arrival and emergence as a community in Toronto, Latin American women have been actively engaged in organizing political entities that maintained links and provided political support to a myriad of groups, political parties, and social movements in Latin America. It was this political and organizing acumen that was mobilized when it became obvious that the Latin American community needed to have services and a space in order to organize around pressing issues in their host country. Thus, whether inside the country or in exile, it is undeniable that a women’s political praxis was becoming a force to be reckoned with. And this force turned to the organization of community agencies in Toronto.
Chapter 5
Latin American Feminist Agency in Community Organizing: LACEV

19 Introduction

This chapter examines the complex dialogical and transnational work that Latinas became involved with in Toronto. The chapter highlights the political intersection that took place amongst the Latin American women’s organizations with a feminist agenda that led to the creation of social services and advocacy groups. These projects reflected the networks and alliances that were created with the immigrant women feminist community. They were also able to exert a degree of influence on changing policies in mainstream Canadian institutions. In the case of the development of non-profit agencies in Latin America and in Turtle Island (Canada) there are similarities as well as glaring differences in how they were mobilized to deal with women’s issues, social justice, and immigrant rights. Social and community organizations were created to respond to contextual demands, disappearing and morphing to respond to the necessities of the community or impositions of the state (Landolt, Goldring, & Bernhard, 2009). These organizations were able to balance the needs of the community, which requires financial dependency and accountability to the state while working within the system, with the need for autonomy in order to pursue social and political advocacy. It is my intention to show that gender played a key role in the emergence of these centres, agencies, and community groups, as it was principally women who responded to the pressing need to deal with an influx of exiles/refugees needing settlement information, emotional and medical support, and places to gather and respond to the urgent social upheavals in their countries of origin. Latin American women were key to the creation of ethno-specific agencies, participating in multicultural, feminist organizations and, finally, the creation of ethno-specific feminist organizations. These agencies not only responded to the practical needs of the community but also installed new conceptions of collective, democratic organizations where Latin Americans could continue to participate in creating new ways of being in the world.

In the first section of the chapter I will introduce the Latin American Coalition against Violence against Women and Children (LACEV). The role of LACEV was of paramount importance in terms of creating a network that began to comprehensively tackle the issue of violence against
women from a Latin American feminist perspective. LACEV was unsurpassed in its ability to mobilize the community. This capacity extended to its work with other communities in Toronto. For example, LACEV played a major role in organizing and lobbying for changes in the legislation regarding the issue of “defence of provocation.” Finally, it was LACEV that recognized the need to organize the First Latin American and Caribbean Women’s Encounter in Ontario. I will be focusing on the Encounter in the next chapter.

In the second part of the chapter I will provide some background to contextualize how LACEV stemmed from the foundational work set up by women who became active in community work by creating and participating in grassroots organizations (1) with the creation of ethno-specific agencies and (2) working with other racialized feminist organizations. This history also offers a glimpse of some of the political debates that were taking place at the time and that have recurrently plagued the community.

20 The Latin American Coalition against Violence against Women and Children (LACEV)

In the 1990s most of the solidarity organizations disappeared, reflecting the political changes taking place in Latin America. However, the continuing work to improve the conditions of women and the Latin American community in general witnessed an increase in the work of non-profit organizations. It was during this period that one of the most important organizations in the City of Toronto was created: the Latin American Coalition Against Violence Against Women and Children (LACEV). LACEV was formally created in June 1991 after the Conference on Family Violence held by the Hispanic Development Council (HDC) (Jimenez, Priego, Santinoli, & Rico, 1992). The HDC applied for funding for the production of a video about violence against women in the Latin American community and the development of a series of workshops utilizing the video as a resource (San Martin, 1998). The discussion around dealing with the issue was hotly contested within the membership of the HDC, since at the time violence

---

95 The label ethno-specific refers to services that cater to specific cultures and languages, including immigrant agencies. The term “ethnic” has been erroneously used to denominate racialized people and immigrants, obviating the fact that everyone has an ethnicity.

96 Initially, the name of the group was Coalition for the Eradication of Violence against Women and Children in the Spanish-speaking community (CEVSSC), a rather cumbersome name that was later changed.
against women (called “domestic violence”) was not perceived as a priority issue in the community. The President of the Board, Maria Antonieta Smith, persisted and was able to secure funding for the production of a video and to use the video in a number of educational workshops directed at community workers (Smith, interview, 2017). What was incredible was that although some male members of the HDC had been reluctant to deal with the issue, many members of the community were more than ready. Ana Maria Santinoli, a member of LAWC, was hired to coordinate the training sessions, where attendance was larger than expected and the responses of the participants very positive.

The success of the training showed that there was a necessity to continue to do education with the community, and as Alejandra Priego, the first coordinator of LACEV, recalls, there was a clear perception of the urgency and complexity of the issue:

In the follow up to the workshops, people stated that it was necessary to begin to meet…because systemic issues were identified, such as: the involvement of the police; what happened to the children when women leave situations of abuse; what happens to the children when she leaves for a shelter. Elba de Leon from Barbra Schlifer would emphasize what happens when women contact lawyers. Eva Safir would talk about when women arrived at Doctor’s Hospital. Melida [Jimenez] was here at St. Joseph’s Hospital… So we split up each aspect of the issue to see how we could support women. We assumed a systemic responsibility. And within that, we began to say, but what are we talking about? And what kind of education do these people, community workers, have regarding violence? What do they need to know, to respond appropriately? And that is how the training of Myths and Realities of violence Against Women and Children [in the Latin American community] began to be developed. (Alejandra Priego, Mexican)97

Alejandra Priego, who had come to Turtle Island (Canada) in 1990 to do her masters in health promotion, was hired to be LACEV’s first coordinator on a part-time basis. The organization was composed of representatives from 50 agencies and 15 independent individuals and conducted numerous conferences, workshops, and public events that dealt with the issue of violence. LACEV concentrated on doing advocacy and education around issues of violence against women and children and it provided extensive training and awareness to community workers who provided services to the community. The organization had meagre funding. Therefore, volunteers carried out most of the work.

It was a hellish amount of work, from people, volunteers because with $10,000, you could do nothing, nothing. So, everything happened because people were interested in doing something, because everyone came to the meetings…and at that time, each of the workers needed to justify where they went for three hours. If you were going to plan a training or a discussion, you had to go participate, invite your boss, who might be someone white, who may not have had anything to do with services for families, but the bosses came, and everyone wanted to support Latinas. The training was a more systemic answer [to violence] moreover, the focus was not “this only happens to Latinas” or “see that poor, subjugated woman.” The trainings stated that this [violence] happens to other women but we are focusing on Latinas. (Alejandra Priego, Mexican)

LACEV’s creation fits within the context where states and international bodies had began to lobby to consider violence against women a human right, culminating in a meeting in Vienna that led to the Vienna Human Rights Declaration and Program of Action and the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women in 1993 (Basu, 2000: 74). LACEV was a participant in this meeting and represented a different point of view from the mainstream Canadian organizations that were present. These were voices that were also absent in national policies dealing with violence. Interestingly, the main accomplishment at this conference was that contacts were established with other groups, mostly from Latin America. At home, LACEV maintained contact with the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, but participation was very limited because of the uneasy relationship between the NAC and racialized women (see Nadeau, 2005). For LACEV, the main objective was to mobilize the community with regards to issues of violence and to strengthen networks of support. One of the achievements, for example, was the extensive participation of women from Central America.

I was working with a group of Central American women and also working with the Hamilton House, so in that sense I saw integrating myself into the Coalition to establish a network, to make connections, to see how we could work together to bring women’s voices, especially those women who were petitioning for refugee status, because they didn't have access to anything…LACEV for me, was good. One, to continue with my growing as a woman, because I was seeking to meet women that had the same way of thinking about things as me. We are productive entities; we are unique entities that could give a lot to society. To be not only wives and mothers, but also we had something to contribute. [LACEV] also gave me the opportunity to create a network to support and help more Central American women that were coming at that time. (Loly Rico, El Salvador)

Highlights of the organization included a directory of services of all agencies dedicated to supporting women in the Latin American community, the ongoing recruitment of organizations and standing committees in response to multiple areas of concern brought forward by those involved in providing services, and the organization of various trainings and manuals. These trainings were organized by using feminist popular education techniques and participatory research practices (Jimenez et al., 1992). For example, the organization implemented a full four-day training and a manual developed for frontline workers:

We created a manual. We were doing training with all the community to find out the needs of the community with regards to violence, but also to understand migration, that is what I remember. I also remember about the famous tree that we used, to show that we didn't want to lose our roots; we wanted to keep our identity. (Loly Rico, El Salvador)\(^\text{100}\)

The training talked about patriarchy because the focus was feminist. And the interesting thing for me was that people were open minded, to participate in discussions, even though people were coming from different systems, from different ideologies, and as workers, to begin to open the conversation…to talk about racism and discrimination, and how that is transferred to the people we served. Conversations were great in that sense. (Alejandra Priego, Mexican)\(^\text{101}\)

In 1994 and 1995\(^\text{102}\) there was a Community Consultation project in collaboration with the Ontario Women’s Directorate. The project aimed to identify barriers to services. In addition, a series of workshops were developed on poverty and violence. It was during the period of 1994 to 1995 that LACEV engaged in one of the most important mobilizations for Latin American women in Ontario: the Latin American and Caribbean Women’s Encounter in Ontario.\(^\text{103}\) It was in the Encounter that once again issues of what was termed “regionalism”—that is, discrimination based on race and class—surfaced and it became clear to the LACEV executive that more effort was needed to incorporate women from Central America.

\(^{100}\) Dolores (Loly) Rico, interview, Toronto, Ontario, May 30, 2017

\(^{101}\) Alejandra Priego, interview, Toronto, Ontario, February 19, 2017.

\(^{102}\) I developed this chronology of events with the collaboration of Lilian Valverde, who was the Executive Director at the time as part of the Evaluation of the Leadership Training (2009).

\(^{103}\) I will examine the Latin American Women’s Encounter in Ontario thoroughly in the next chapter.
When I became the coordinator of LACEV it was so there would be more participation from the Central American women and also more recognition. But there were South Americans that didn't like this because they felt we were too radical, too feminist, we were not accepted…we would go to events and meetings and if we said we were coming from LACEV we were rejected, even in the media. I remember we went to the Tele Latino, [the host] was one of the ones that attacked us because we were dividing the community. And everything we said was against men. But for us, I think we needed that radicalization so it could be recognized that we had a place. We are still fighting that, if we look at the Latin American community today, who is in the leadership positions? They only look for men. (Loly Rico, El Salvador)  

Between 1996 and 1998 the organization partnered with a number of other community and social agencies to create various projects. LACEV produced a video in English with Spanish subtitles on violence called *A Beginning without Violence/Un Comienzo sin Violencia* in conjunction with a number of other agencies. The video was used in a subsequent project that involved a series of workshops for women and teenagers who were victims of abuse during pregnancy. Furthermore, a 30-minute video about HIV was also developed. In 1998, an advocacy video and manual were developed to train volunteers to advocate/escort women through the criminal court system.

From 2001 to 2003, the organization continued to implement educational workshops, such as a two-day training workshop for frontline workers focused on children called *Children Witnesses of Violence*; a one-day workshop for counsellors and therapists working with abused women and children in the community and dealing with vicarious trauma; and a four-day training called *Violence against Women in the new Millennium*, which consisted of developing skills and appropriate attitudes to enhance a worker’s ability to provide cultural and sensitive services to Latin American women facing violence.

Crucial to the development of later organizations has been the effort to produce community-based research. Knowledge production becomes a necessity when traditional research institutions such as the academia are not researching and producing important information that the community desperately needs. In this vein, LACEV produced a number of community-based research projects, such as the No (Wo)men’s Land Research Project (Berinstein & Wong, 2000) that focused on women who came as fiancés or sponsored spouses and who are subjected to

---

violence, leaving them with precarious immigration statuses. *Dance, Striving to Survive: A Research Study on Latin American Migrant Exotic Dancers* (Diaz Barrero, 2002) explored the issues of women who came with working permits to be employed in the sex and adult entertainment industry. Both of these projects were funded by the Canadian Auto Workers union (CAW) from their social justice fund.

The particularity of LACEV was that the organization did not receive core funding and for many periods subsisted only on volunteer work. Lilian Valverde was LACEV’s Executive Director from 1993 to 1995. After Loly Rico resigned, Lilian Valverde regained coordination from 1996 to 2003 when the organization morphed into MUJER. Lilian Valverde was retired at the time and therefore could maintain the existence of the organization even though funding was not stable. Without exaggeration, it was the strength of passion of the women who participated that kept the organization going.

The collaboration of diverse services and the people who worked in them to develop a more efficient and effective way to deal with violence against women in the community reflected the development of a large network. For example, Alejandra Priego worked for LACEV for a year and a half and then moved to Access Alliance Community Health Center, but continued to work and support different kinds of projects. It was through Access Alliance that a more or less permanent funding was found to hire someone part-time at LACEV.

LACEV proved to be unsurpassable in its convening power and coordinating capacity. Its success was not based in funding or the support of the state but the tireless commitment of innumerable women who gave their time and expertise.

Everything was based on the good will of organizations that at some point breaks down. The social and political atmosphere does not allow for sustaining that. I think that in its moment, it was one of the most important, historical mobilizations of Latinas, for a common cause. Where everyone understood clearly that it was a common cause, even people with their differences, their regionalisms and the other issues that exist like onion

---


106 I will discuss this organization in chapter seven.
layers. Ultimately, people were given services and people were connected. I am convinced that many women benefitted from that collaboration and that communication, to be constantly present to each other, was invaluable. You would lift your phone and would find what you needed for the person in front of you. Everyone found ways to support more people and families. (Alejandra Priego, Mexican)

LACEV also created solid links to feminist immigrant and racialized women’s organizations and to non-immigrant, feminist Canadian organizations. As with other community agencies, they participated in International Women’s Day and celebrated the day with Latin American women. LACEV also forged connections with agencies working on issues of violence against women such as the Wife Abuse Council, the Metropolitan Action Coalitions against Violence, and the Toronto Rape Crisis Centre (Landolt & Goldring, 2009). These alliances and the centrality of LACEV became apparent when they spearheaded a campaign in the legal arena against “defence of provocation.” Defence of provocation emerged in the 19th century, where the courts instructed juries to consider what a “reasonable person” would do under the same provocation; this is also referred to as “crimes of passion,” since the crime occurs because the perpetrator loses self-control in the “heat of the moment.” Thus, it was possible, when charged with second-degree murder, to argue that the egregious behaviour of the victim, such as an infidelity, could be perceived as provocation. This defence has been used in more than half of cases of femicide (Côté, Majury, & Sheehy, 2000), and also when heterosexual men killed gay men because mere “homosexual advances” were constructed as provocation (Ling, 2014).

The case of Graciela Montans was one of the most important cases where LACEV lobbied for the courts to reject “defence of provocation” in the case of violence against women. The case was extremely complex and mobilized not only the Latin American community but also

---


108 There was a change in the legislation in 2015; provocation is now defined as “conduct of the victim that would constitute an indictable offence under this Act that is punishable by five or more years of imprisonment and that is of such a nature as to be sufficient to deprive an ordinary person of the power of self-control is provocation for the purposes of this section, if the accused acted on it on the sudden and before there was time for their passion to cool” (Criminal Code of Canada, Section 232 (1)).

109 This case was extremely complex, as it involved refugee/immigration issues for the family, custody and childcare for the youngest and only biological child of Alcaire (who was five at the time), housing, furnishings (as Alcaire had taken most of the material possessions they had), formal complaints to the College of Physicians and Surgeons, formal complaints against the police, a complaint against the Judicial Council about the Crown, a request for protection of evidence, and an application to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board.
progressive community and mainstream organizations, forming the Justice for Graciela Montans Coalition, a group of legal and community organizations. LACEV was a key part of the Justice for Graciela Montans Coalition, as it was widely recognized that the Coalition had started with the Latin American community and then expanded to other groups, including groups who had not been active in women’s issues (Justice for Graciela Montans, 1993, July 22).

Antonio Alcaire murdered his wife Graciela Montans in 1992. Both were refugee claimants from Uruguay who had recently come to Turtle Island (Canada). Initially, the police accepted his explanation that she had died as a result of a traffic accident. However, due to the insistence of her three children from a previous marriage, who were 20, 18 and 15 years old and who obstinately believed that she had been murdered based on the pattern of abusive behaviour and threats from the perpetrator, the police were forced to investigate, although they remained unconvinced and told the children they were “imagining things” (Education Wife Assault, 1992/1993). Indeed, the police failed to request an autopsy. Eventually and at the request of the children, a first autopsy was conducted by a pathologist at Peel Memorial Hospital, in which he ruled the death to be the result of a fracture to the cervical spine, consistent with a traffic accident. After further investigation by the homicide division, they concluded that there was no evidence that a vehicular accident could have killed Ms. Montans. Because the children knew their mother had been murdered, they had delayed her cremation so the death certificate could be issued in her own last name. It was due to this delay that a coroner could examine the body again and determine that she had been severely beaten and that her cause of death was manual strangulation (Education Wife Assault, 1992/1993; R. v. Alcaire, 1993). The accused eventually plead guilty to manslaughter, arguing that Ms. Montans had physically attacked him, spat at him, and told him to drive her to her lover’s place. In essence, she had “provoked” him.

The Justice for Graciela Montans Coalition included the following organizations and individuals: Western Health Area, METRAC, Community Housing Support Service, Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic (Elva de Leon), Justice for Women Coalition of Hamilton, Metro Women Abuse Protocol Project, Metro Councillor Roger Hollander, Education Wife Assault, Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples (Ruth Lara), Carol Lehmann, Theresa Maher, LEAF, Working Women Community Centre (Rosalinda Paredes), Councillor Maria Augimeri, Access Alliance (Alejandra Priego), Metro Men against Violence, Women’s Action Coalition. Women We Honour Committee, Nellie’s Housing Project, and Women’s Health in Women’s Hands. I have identified the Latinas who were active in the Coalition, representing diverse community agencies, in parentheses.
During the trial, in which the children were not allowed to attend, the probing for evidence from the Crown focused only on physical violence, seemingly unable to understand the nature of verbal and psychological abuse. In her Victim Impact Statement, the eldest daughter (now 21 years old) related what that abuse felt like: “[Alcaire] made her life and ours a misery. We children were subjected to his abusive behaviour to our mother—to verbal, emotional and physical manipulation and domination over her, until he finally committed the ultimate assault by taking her life at the age of 42” (Victim Impact Statement, 1993).

The Crown, Ms. Marilyn Bartlett, blamed the “less than timely police investigation” (R. v. Alcaire, 1993) for not having the evidence necessary to disprove the defence of provocation beyond a reasonable doubt, and proceeded to validate the claim by settling on a reduction of the charge to manslaughter, against the wishes of the children (Education Wife Assault, 1992/1993). The Coalition groups expressed outrage at the Crown’s deal with the accused based on the archaic defence of provocation. The defence of provocation was entirely based on the testimony of the accused, who also stated that Ms. Montans was an alcoholic. The Crown displayed a lot of hostility towards LACEV’s Executive Director at the time, Lilian Valverde, refusing to let her accompany the children when the decision to accept the plea was discussed with them (LACEV, 1993, February 9). In addition, the Crown refused to let the eldest daughter read her Impact Statement in court (Justice for Graciela Montans, 1993, April 5).

The Coalition expressed its dismay and outrage in a letter to the then newly elected Marion Boyd, the first woman Attorney General, a portion which read: “We are deeply disturbed at the message that this sends out, that, in spousal situations provocation lessens the seriousness of the crime of murder to the extent that the penalty can be mitigated, and this on the sole testimony of the perpetrator” (LACEV, 1993, February 9). It was clear that members of the community believed that being a racialized and/or immigrant refugee woman didn’t merit the same efforts by the state to protect them. Indeed, the presiding judge felt the penalty was fair, stating, “it appears

---

111 It is interesting that in Report to the Commission on Systemic Racism in the Ontario Criminal Justice System one of the demands is to have independent legal representation or an advocate for the victims of violence. The job of the Crown is to represent the state, not the individuals who are the victims of crime. Therefore, women feel that they should have the right to have someone in the courtroom that represents their interests. This demand became relevant again in the case of Jian Ghomeshi in 2016, where much of the criticism of the Crown related to the fact it had failed to prepare the witnesses. The victims in this case lacked legal representation.
to me that the sentence of 8 years is extremely fair and is not in any way a ‘selling out’” (R. v. Alcaire, 1993).

As the result of this campaign, LACEV organized community consultations in conjunction with the Coalition to discuss racism in the criminal justice system and reported their findings to the Commission on Systemic Racism in the Ontario Criminal Justice System (LACEV, 1993, August 10, August 13). The main demands raised in the forum were the examination of the provocation defence, changing the definition of violence to encompass verbal and emotional violence, examining the directives for Crowns and their discretion to accept pleas, and advocacy for victims (LACEV, 1993, August 10).

One of the remarkable aspects of this case was the public campaign that ensued to abolish the defence of provocation, a campaign that was heavily criticized by Michael Code from the Attorney General’s office at the time, and by the presiding Judge Langdon, whose attitudes and comments toward the family and concerned individuals were “consistently high-handed, closed minded, defensive, insensitive to legitimate distress, and intolerant of our right to protest” (Justice for Graciela Montans, July 22, 1993).

It was due to the efforts of LACEV and the Coalition that forensic procedures were changed. The campaign led to a public inquiry. Coroners’ conferences introduced this specific case in their presentations and in their training manuals as a standard on how to deal with women’s deaths in cases of presumed accidents (Coroner’s Council Inquiry, 1994).

### 21 Historical Background: Latin American Women and Community Work

In the 1970s and 1980s, Latin Americans in Turtle Island (Canada) benefitted from a relatively stable economic atmosphere that provided for an expansion of social networks and social programmes. This “auspicious” period provided Latin Americans with both an opportunity to be gainfully employed in the non-profit sector and the opportunity to advocate for funding and legislative and policy reform, and to be actively engaged in community organizing. Gradually, with the retrenchment of the welfare state and the imposition of a neo-liberal agenda, the non-profits have lost their influence as the voice of the community and their place in policy decision-making bodies. Certainly the creation of agencies controlled by immigrant communities was part
of “the much-celebrated ‘Canadian model’ of settlement-service delivery [that] has been based on delivering services through community organizations funded by the State” (Richmond and Shields 2005 as quoted in Landolt, Goldring, & Bernhard, 2009: 1).

Luisa Veronis (2010) effectively demonstrates how Latin Americans engaged in the local non-profit sector in order to develop a network of social collective organizations and agencies that historically have served to unite the “community,” to respond to their most pressing needs, specifically settlement needs, and to provide voice and representation within mainstream Canadian society. Veronis’s research was concerned with migrant community organizing, which took place at the “mezzo levels” and where most of the influential work done by Latin Americans was concentrated (2006b, 2010).

The newly arrived refugees had been victims of repression, persecution, torture, and exile but they also were coming with a wealth of political organizing skills, what Ginieniewicz, based on Boardieu, has termed “political capital” (2006), and the desire to resist the bloody dictators back home through the creation of solidary organizations (Del Pozo, 2004; Veronis, 2010). However, it became clear that there was a need for more sustainable institutional support to deal with the urgent needs of the incoming waves of exiles. Non-profit social agencies and organizations became “pathways of political incorporation” that allowed those with a political, community organizing background to incorporate into the institutional landscape in order to act on their urgent needs (Landolt & Goldring, 2009, italics in original).

There were also substantial differences from Latin America in the founding of these non-profit organizations. A majority of the organizations in Toronto were created as grassroots organizations from the bottom up (Goldring et. al., 2006). Initially, they usually lacked funding or the funding was not sufficient to deal with the extreme demand, which meant that workers and volunteers contributed vast amounts of unpaid labour. This commitment to maintain these services and expand them was firmly linked to political engagement and Left ideologies. Furthermore, it has to be emphasized that from the perspective of the state, settlement services aimed to support immigrants and refugees for only a number of years, with the expectation that these communities would access mainstream services after the initial settlement period. However, it became apparent that not only did immigrants and refugees face employment and education barriers, they also “…faced obstacles within the very social-service institutions
charged with easing these barriers” in the mainstream (Working Women Community Centre, 2012: 63). During this period Latin American women continued to challenge political organizations and community agencies to include issues that were not considered political, such as violence against women and reproductive rights. They also developed extended networks with other immigrant and racialized women, where they “open[ed] new possibilities for cross-sectoral dialogue and alliance-building, produc[ing] policy shifts and some institutional mainstreaming” (Landolt & Goldring, 2009: 1227).

Meanwhile, in Latin America in the 1990s, the feminist movements had engaged in a relentless debate about the role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in grassroots movements and organizations. With the establishment of transitional democracies, many of the women who had been pivotal in the feminist and democratic struggle naively believed that they had won the right to influence their national constitutional processes through the creation of NGOs and other professionalized feminist organizations (Largo & Qüence, 2006). The democracies created a climate that was conducive to a large incorporation of women to local state structures and policy-making bodies. The eruption of rights discourses and the construction of citizenship as “technical-professional” promoted by the NGOs led to opportunities for fierce advocacy, research, and lobbying. Some women supported and became active in the state apparatus and NGOs in order to push for a women’s agenda and gender policies (Vargas, 2002, 2008). Others resisted what Sonia Alvarez called the “NGO-ization” of feminist movements. She defined NGO-ization as “the national and global neo-liberalism’s active promotion and official sanctioning of particular forms and practices among feminist organizations and other sectors of civil society” (2009, 176). Many feminists, called autonomas, called this massive incorporation into NGOs a “sell-out” to patriarchal and neo-liberal forces and derisively called those feminists institucionalizadas (Espinoza Miñoso, Gómez Correal, & Ochoa Muñoz, 2014; Pisano, 1999). Many feminists also argued that, in order to be funded, feminist organizations had to “water down” demands resulting in a lack of long-term, coherent goals (Carrillo & Chinchilla Stoltz, 2010); this was also called “discursive accommodation” (Grau, Olea, & Perez 1997 as quoted in Alvarez, 2000), for example, the referring to violence against women as “intra-familial violence.” Furthermore, this first wave of NGOs had also led to a tendency toward professionalization and bureaucratization that was harshly criticized by the grassroots women’s movements. Unsurprisingly, the fifth (San Bernardo, Argentina, 1990), sixth (Costa del Sol, El
Salvador, 1993, and seventh (Cartagena, Chile, 1996) Latin American and Caribbean Feminists Encounters became the terrain for fierce and acrimonious struggles about what it meant to have an autonomous feminist identity.

The situation in Toronto reflected some of the debates that were happening in Latin America but there was little concern about how autonomous from the state social grassroots organizations should be. In fact, it was generally believed that at that time that social and community agencies (NGOs) provided a vital space for resistance and negotiation with the Canadian state (Veronis 2006a).

22 The Creation of Ethno-Specific Community Agencies

The analysis in the light of history is that the greatest actors [with respect to the imposition of neo-liberal policies] were the people who worked in Community agencies. This was vital for me. Indeed, the other element was that the great majority of people who worked in community centres were women. So, it is interesting that this external pressure, this external wall that comes from the new governmental visions with regards to management of immigration and refuge…it goes against our ideals as a community, it is here really where the struggle began. (Duberlis Ramos, Chilean)

There have been a number of discussions that examine the creation of the main ethno-specific centres that have served the Latin American community: the Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples (CSSP), the Latin American Community Centre (LACC), and the Hispanic Social Development Council (HDC) (Bascuñan & Borgoño, 2015; Working Women Community Centre, 2012). In their extensive analysis of the multi-layered incorporation of Latin Americans to the political landscape in Toronto, Patricia Landolt and Luin Goldring provide an in-depth and interesting analysis about the formation of a number of Latin American institutions, focusing on the CSSP and the HDC (Landolt & Goldring, 2009; Landolt, Goldring, & Bernhard, 2009).

112 Landoldt and Goldring refer to these organizations as pan-ethno organizations. Arguably, these organizations reflected the diversity and heterogeneity of the community with its many ethnic groups. The Canadian state, on the other hand, homogenized the community under the label Spanish-speaking, Hispanics, or Latin Americans.


114 There are other organizations in the community, such as the Canadian Hispanic Congress, which is described as: “a national organization established to represent the interests of approximately one million Spanish-speaking people (multiple generations) with family origins in more than twenty different countries, now living in Canada”
My emphasis here is to bring to the fore what has been obviated from resent research, which is that the impetus to create these organizations came mainly from women. It is also essential to underscore that during this period discussions about gender inequality were already taking place in the community and they influenced the kinds of services that the community agencies offered. I also want to include a very small but important organization, La Casa Doña Juana, since it was the first feminist organization that developed services exclusively for Latin American women.

The Centre for Spanish Speaking People (CSSP) was formed in 1971 by a group of Spanish militant women from the Communist Party who had come to Turtle Island (Canada) as a consequence of the Franco dictatorship (Assaf, 2012; Carrillo, interview, 2017; Jackman 2012; Landolt & Goldring, 2009; Landolt, Goldring, & Bernhard, 2011). Under the leadership of Encarnación Escobar, Gloria Montero, and Ana Alberro, they initially wanted to open a daycare centre to assist Spanish-speaking women who were coming to Turtle Island (Canada). In conjunction with other Latin American women they established a group called the Latin American Women’s Group, which aimed to open a free, cooperative day care centre. Due to stringent regulations and after consulting with the Toronto chapter of the Communist Party, they decided to start a community centre. In order to become established they were forced to work without remuneration until they got a grant from the government. Luis Carrillo, a former president of the CSSP Board of Directors, who witnessed the creation of the centre, remembers that:

> The first locale of the Centre was located in Robert Street in a house’s garage…and there the first by-laws that stated that, they were not going to accept any funding from the government because it was proletarian thing. Afterwards it moved to College and at the same time, it divided into two, creating the Bloor and Bathurst Information Centre,

[http://canadianhispaniccongress.ca/](http://canadianhispaniccongress.ca/). This organization was created in 1983 and aims to include more people from the business sector. Elvira Sanchez de Malicki was its founder and first president. She also hosted a news program on Tele Latino. Elvira supported many LACEV projects and later the Latin American Coalition against Racism by providing television coverage. Lately, the Congress has had limited success in terms of representing the community, especially lobbying for amnesty for undocumented workers.

115 Lady Juana’s House. The prefix doña literally means a lady or gentlewoman. Interestingly, it has been used in as a sign of respect for older, working-class women.
Encarnación went to work there. She had an office in St Peter’s Church. (Luis Carrillo, El Salvador)\textsuperscript{116}

The CSSP became pivotal in terms of providing services such as settlement counselling, which provided newcomers with information, translation, and interpretation services; ESL classes; and a legal clinic. Significantly, the CSSP also provided a place to organize politically. For a long time workers in the Centre worked for free, becoming “masters of everything” (Encarnación Escobar quoted in Working Women Community Centre, 2012: 37). With the arrival of refugees \textit{en masse}, the Centre opened its doors to the community to deal with people who had lost everything, and who arrived traumatized and terrified. At this time, the priorities for the Centre changed and they established the Program for Chilean Refugees in January 1974, which entailed the reception of refugees, a legal clinic, and settlement services (Evelyn Murialdo as quoted in Bascuñán & Borgoño, 2015: 103).

Gladys Klestorny became the coordinator of the Centre in 1981; at that time the Centre had a program for women under the leadership of a feminist, Monica Riutort. The program encountered a lot of opposition; “at that moment we were in the first stage of a massive consciousness raising, [about women’s issues] but we were told, why do we have to have a special program for women? Programs should be for the entire community” (Klestorny, interview, 2017).\textsuperscript{117} Nonetheless, the Centre continued to have a women’s program and to support other women’s organizing efforts. Indeed, it was at the Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples where the first meeting of the Latin American Women’s Collective took place (San Martin, 1998). The Centre did develop many new programs for Latin American women that included rights for refugees and labour rights. Paulina Maciulis, who began to work at the Centre in 1982, emphasized “a lot of things that are now taken for granted, like refugee claims and helping with access to welfare, were initiated by the CSSP” (Working Women Community Centre, 2012: 38). The CSSP continued to have a women’s group that later on was coordinated

\textsuperscript{116} Luis Carrillo, interview, Toronto, Ontario, May 25, 2017.

\textsuperscript{117} Gladys Klestorny, interview, Toronto, Ontario, May 29, 2017.
by Ruth Lara and Maria Rosa Pinedo. Both women were members of the LAWC and continued to work supporting feminist projects like the Latin American Coalition to End Violence against Women and Children (LACEV).

The Latin American Community Centre (LACC) offered services that provided information about education, health and legal services, and translation and interpretation services. Later on, a summer camp for Latin American children, women’s groups, services for the elderly, a tax clinic, and settlement services were established (Alicia Díaz as quoted in Bascuñán & Borgoño, 2015: 104; Agosto, interview, 2017). The Centre was located in Milvan Road in the northern part of the city where services for Spanish-speaking people were non-existent at the time. As with other centres, the Latin American Centre would deal with all settlement issues ranging from birth to death.

At the beginning, the Centre was financed by a religious organization called Share Life. Alba Agosto, who worked at the Centre from 1979 until 1997, when the Centre closed, explains the reasons for becoming an independent organization in 1980:

A group of people proposed that we change the Centre, because it was limiting us. We could not speak about abortion; we could not talk about divorce; we could not counsel, we referred people a lot but we could not counsel, so it was very limiting. And in a General Assembly, with the participation of key people, [we moved to separate]; it was difficult to separate from Share Life. (Alba Agosto, Uruguay)\textsuperscript{118}

The Centre became a non-confessional, independent, non-profit agency with a Board of Directors. Women largely composed LACC’s personnel and with the separation from the religious organization there was an emphasis on reproductive rights for women. The women’s services also began education about violence against women (Agosto, interview, 2017). Regrettably, the Centre closed its doors amidst acrimonious community divisions and accusation of mismanagement in 1997 (Landolt & Goldring, 2009).

The Hispanic Development Council (HDC) was founded in 1978 by a group of community workers, mostly women who wanted to improve the coordination of work within the Latin American community and be more strategic about the creation of programs, implementation of

\textsuperscript{118} Alba Agosto, interview, Toronto, Ontario, March 30, 2017.
policies, lobbying, and the judicious use of financial resources (Duberlis, interview, 2017). The HDC has been involved in numerous projects in the last 30 years. I will focus on a particular project that had a tremendous impact in forming LACEV. As a former coordinator\textsuperscript{119} of the HDC from 1987 to 1988, I began my employment at a time that the HDC was facing financial difficulties and had been functioning from a Church basement in the Bloor-Bathurst area. The organization was able to move to a new location at the Cecil Community Centre and rented an open space on a balcony. During this time, a number of large and multi-agency conferences took place including a Latin American Youth Conference and the establishment of the Professional Association, seeking to facilitate the revalidation of educational degrees. At the time, Maria Antonieta Smith, a staff member from Working Women Community Centre, was the president of the Board of Directors. We had been offered money to translate a video for the Portuguese community that dealt with violence against women. Members, who represented numerous agencies, watched the video and a discussion ensued (Maria Antonieta Smith, interview, 2017). Women insisted that the video would not serve the Latin American community, for a number of reasons, including the portrayal of police officers that didn’t reflect the experiences of the community in Toronto. As refugees, we also needed to consider how traumatic experiences in our countries of origin affected our relationship with the police. The male representatives were not happy with focusing on violence against women in the community. Nonetheless, with the leadership of Maria Antonieta Smith, and the crucial support of Diana Abraham, a racialized, feminist woman working at the Ministry of Citizenship at the time, the HDC obtained funding to create their own video.\textsuperscript{120} The video would be showcased at the Conference on Family Violence. It was this project that became the tool that brought together the community around issues of violence against women and played a key role in the formation of LACEV.

Later on, in 1993 and 1994, the Hispanic Development Council organized the two Latin American Community Encounters that aimed “to discuss the changing role and function of the network of community organisations as Latin Americans grew in size and diversity.” I will refer to these Encounters in the next chapter since the 1994 Encounter was the catalyst that led to the

\textsuperscript{119}A number of women were coordinators of the HDC. Tellingly, the title changed to Executive Director when the first man took the leadership of the Council.

\textsuperscript{120}The video was called “Bitter Love.” Produced by Maria Teresa Larrain and Osvaldo Garcia.
organization of the First Latin American and Caribbean Women’s Encounter in Ontario. The role of the HDC for a long time was key to the cohesion of the community; Duberlis Ramos, the current Executive Director, comments that it was in the 1990s, when world politics changed drastically and we saw the advent of neo-liberal policies, that the community truly began to come together. The women’s committee at HDC participated in women’s organizing, but as members of the HDC they were many times pulled in different directions due to strained relations with newly emerging feminist groups in the community.

In Veronis’s work (2006a, 2006b) there is a nostalgic sense from the people she interviewed that until the 1980s there was a sense of community, solidarity, and unity amongst Latin Americans. However, this notion erases the conflictive relations on the ground. Without minimizing extraordinary organizational efforts, it is undeniable that tensions based on regionalism, class, and race were abundant.

In fact, the concept of regionalism usually hid the harsh racist and discriminatory attitudes that may have been present in many of the exiles/refugees from the Southern Cone (Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay) (Chute Molina, 2004, 2006). Coming from a dogmatic political analysis that identified the Southern Cone as the spearhead of the revolution, militants from the Southern Cone were forced to revise the stagnated Marxist and Leninist political articulations of the revolutionary vanguard in Latin America because of the explosion of revolutionary activity in Central America. This new correlation of political forces would make some Chilean cadres incredibly perplexed and sceptical when it was mostly indigenous peasants who lighted the revolutionary spark in Central America. The class and educational differences translated into very concrete material inequalities—for example, people from the Southern Cone had better access to jobs in the non-profit area, they had been supported to continue graduate studies, and a substantial number spoke English. In other words, although the creation of social agencies delivered extraordinary services for the community, it did bring with it issues of representation, accountability, and discrimination.

Conceptions of “civility” (Golberg, 2009) as applied to the Latin American population are also present within our communities. The measure of “civility” has been indexed in Latin America by being the furthest from our “indigenous” past. Countries in the Southern Cone (with the exception of Peru) have prided themselves as European descendants. Chile was called the
Switzerland of the Americas, and European migration to Argentina and Uruguay allowed for the erasure of the indigenous and Black presence in an intentional process that was called *blanqueamiento* (whitening) (Arat-Koç, 2010; Castillo, 2013). Another aspect of “civility” has been measured by the intense political participation of the people in political parties and unions. The fact that the coup d’états in the Southern Cone selectively targeted militants fomented the migration of the political elite. Coupled with Canadian immigration practices, initially, it was only those university educated, white collar intellectuals who found themselves as exiles (Peddle, 2014; Simalchik; 1993; Rebolledo, 2006). This narrative obviates, of course, the fact mentioned above that many Chileans coming to Toronto were “apolitical” and/or economic refugees from the poor working classes. Nonetheless, the mythologized history of origins, coupled with inherent racism and classism, arranged South Americans and Central Americans as competing groups in terms of “civility” and “backwardness.”

In 1976, Joe Serge from the *Toronto Star* wrote an article that elicited the first public discussion about differences in the community. The article, called “70,000 Latin Americans living in Toronto,” interviewed the Coordinator of the Centre for Spanish Peoples at the time, Evelyn Murialdo. In the article, she asserts that: “The people from Ecuador, for example, come here to escape the misery of poverty in their homeland. The Chileans and Argentines wanted to get away from economic and political instability” (Serge, 1976). Furthermore, in the article, Serge writes, “Mrs. Murialdo, a Chilean, said that European settlers in Argentina, Uruguay and Chile have influenced the lifestyles of those countries. In Ecuador and Colombia people remain isolated from the rest of the world.” Joe Serge quotes Murialdo again: “Because of the European influence in Chile, for example, I felt closer to Scandinavians than Colombians. The cultures in Latin America are so different” (Serge, 1976). Evelyn Murialdo (her husband’s last name) is actually a Chilean woman of Jewish European ancestry. In order to deal with the backlash, Ms. Murialdo argued in a letter to the editor that large segments of the quotes had been wrongly attributed to her, that she in fact had said that “the cultural backgrounds in Latin American are so different that a Colombian may have as much affinity for [sic] a Portuguese or Scandinavian as for [sic] a Peruvian” (Murialdo, 1976). The then-president of the CSSP also wrote a letter to the editor and protested what was perceived as an “unbalanced” article, which ironically emphasized the racist and classist assumptions from Serge but also from the community leaders. In her letter, she stated that “the article presents such as imbalance of facts that the reader begins to feel that
the Spanish-speaking community in Metro Toronto is little more than a handful of professionals and a mass of ignorant, impoverished, and probably illegal immigrants” (Montero, 1976, emphasis added).

These controversial debates would resurface with the increasing arrival of Central Americans during the 1980s when South Americans, especially Chileans, had settled in many of the community agencies and services that had been created. These jobs tended to put Chileans in a position of relative power regarding newcomers. The characteristics of the Central American military conflicts were very different. In Central America, the conflict had turned into a civil war, while in the Southern Cone it was a selective repression. Therefore, most politicized Central Americans, including the intelligentsia, were still fighting the civil war and had not immigrated to Turtle Island (Canada) (Garcia, interview, 2017). Those who immigrated were mainly the urban and rural poor. It is this difference in the political conflict that may have been reflected in the different levels of education in the community in Toronto (Zine, 2009). By the same token, the greater perceived racialization of Central Americans based on their larger indigenous rural populations may have influenced their relationship with people from the Southern Cone and the larger Canadian population.

Central Americans, we used to receive a lot of negative comments from the South Americans. They would treat us as if we were coming from the Jungle…I have not experienced this personally because of the political affinity that has united us, so I don’t feel that in my area of work I have been discriminated by other Latin American compañeros…but there have been comments about experiences of other compañeras that have felt, that many South Americans believe that we were not educated, that we didn’t have university degrees. (Noemi Garcia, El Salvador)\(^\text{121}\)

Indeed, the idea that Central Americans were more “traditional” in terms of their religious beliefs and cultural traits was perceived by South Americans as a more “backward” conception of culture. For example, it is common to assume that patriarchal values and sexism are far more rampant in Central America. These internal contradictions have remerged in different women’s organizing initiatives, such as LACEV and at the First Latin American and Caribbean Women’s Encounter in Ontario, forcing women to continually confront these divisionary practices.

\(^\text{121}\) Noemi Garcia, interview, Toronto, Ontario, April 30, 2017.
Finally, La Casa Doña Juana\textsuperscript{122} was registered in 1992 by a number of women including Clara Castillo, Maria Elena Oliva Bermudez, Georgina Ocaranza, and Ruth Lara—these last two women were members of LAWC (Carmen Miloslavich, personal communication, 2017). La Casa promoted the integral development of women, including training, creativity, personal, economic, and community development. The idea was to offer Latin American women living in the Riverdale area services that included economic development projects, taking as a model some of the women’s community projects developed in Latin America, such as sewing collectives and community kitchens. There were trainings about health, family, and how to create businesses. Counselling and referral services were also offered. Also, the agency included a library with contemporary feminist literature (Las Juanas Newsletter, 2004: 1). Remarkably, in 2001, La Casa signed an international agreement to work with the Peruvian Women’s Centre “Flora Tristan”\textsuperscript{123} that had been working on feminist issues since 1979. This was the first effort to institutionalize transnational feminist work. For this project, La Casa Doña Juana sent Olivia Rojas, who was a popular theatre director, to Peru to offer a series of workshops about domestic violence and alcohol abuse (Las Juanas Newsletter, 2004: 4). Presently, La Casa Doña Juana has incorporated men into its programming focusing on seniors.\textsuperscript{124}

Despite many conflicts and differences, it is true that the general progressive tendencies in the community did help to bridge some of the differences and created agencies that not only responded to the pressing needs of the emergent community but also provided spaces for organizing politically, disseminating culture, and acting as a “representational voice.” These organizations continue to provide much-needed programs and services to respond to the increasing needs of the community in a much more hostile funding environment.

\textsuperscript{122} The original name was La Casa Doña Juana a Place for Latin American Women in Riverdale.

\textsuperscript{123} Flora Tristan (1803–1844) was a socialist feminist writer whose father was Peruvian.

\textsuperscript{124} There were a number of other organizations that were created by Latin American women that I will not focus on here; for example, the Angry Women of Courage, which became a multiethnic and multiracial organization in the 1990s.
23 Working Across Racialized Feminist Women’s Organizations

In this section I want to explore the complex bonds that were created by participating in immigrant feminists of colour community organizing. Latin American women began to develop and actively participate in organizations such as Women Working with Immigrant Women (WWCC), the Immigrant Women Community Health Centre (IWHC), Cross Cultural Communication Centre (CCCC), and many other agencies that thrived at the time. I will focus on a few of these just to offer a glimpse into the enormous web that was created by Latin American women. These organizers created a solid network of support and effective organizations that provided women and families with services, information, and education about gender issues. These networks used limited state funding in the most efficient and innovative manner that allowed them to work in advocacy and support.

During the 1970s, when most Latin Americans began to arrive to Toronto, the Second Wave feminist women’s movement was struggling fervently to obtain spaces and resources for women. There were many differences in terms of what were considered feminist priorities for women. In the 1970s and 1980s the Canadian women’s movement was firmly entrenched in struggles that have been called the Second Wave. The Second Wave fought mainly against de facto (unofficial) inequalities such as sexuality, family, workplace, and reproductive rights. The fundamental rights and programs gained by feminist activists of the Second Wave include the creation of domestic abuse shelters for women and children, the acknowledgment of abuse and rape of women on a public level, access to contraception, and other reproductive services including the legalization of abortion, the creation and enforcement of sexual harassment policies for women in the workplace, childcare services, equal or greater educational and extracurricular funding for young women, women’s studies programs, and advocating for wages for housewives (Working Women Community Centre, 2012). It was Third Wave feminism that challenged the white, middle-class assumptions of Second Wave feminism and brought to the fore the demands of marginalized women.

Amidst these organizational struggles, immigrant and racialized women began to carve a niche that attempted to deal with the specificities of immigrant and refugee women. While immigrant women, black women, and racialized women may have shared many of the Second Wave
demands, they were also contending with the exploitation of sweatshop, piecework, cleaning jobs, and factories, demands that were not contemplated in advocacy for housewives, for example. In order to gain rights for immigrants and to fight women’s oppression, numerous women-run or mostly women-run organizations sprung up in Turtle Island (Canada) that provided services, engaged in feminist advocacy, and also provided decent salaries for their personnel. As Dionne Brand argues for the Black community, women dominated grassroots agencies and these activists had their political grounding in the African Liberation and other anti-imperialist movements (Brand, 1993), which was also a natural fit for the women who came from Latin America. It’s during this period that immigrant women in Toronto created a number of organizations and networks with progressive and feminist mandates, such as the Working Women Community Centre (WWCC), the Women Working with Immigrant Women (WWIW), the Immigrant Women Health Centre (IWHC), and the Cross Cultural Communication Centre (CCCC), to name just a few (Working Women Community Centre, 2012).

Latin American women were part of the racialized feminist women who set up successful, self-directed organizations that worked across communities sharing strategies, knowledge, and political goals (Carty & Brand, 1993). Not only were Latin American women pivotal in terms of the creation of services that were aimed at the Latin American community, such as the Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples, the Latin American Community Centre, and the Hispanic Development Council, but they also expanded to create and participate in pan-ethnic organizations that catered only to women. These agencies reflected a political consciousness that confronted the state in matters that affected racialized and marginalized women. Women organized around social issues with a distinctive political analysis. As Gladys Klestorny recalls, it was in this context that she became a feminist:

Once, I don’t remember the reason I went to a meeting with Immigrant Women Working with Immigrant Women (IWWIW) representing the Centre [CSSP]. That was the beginning. It was there that I met Maria Teresa [Larrain, coordinator of IWWIW at the time] and we became friends. At that time, I think the conditions were there for someone to understand the theme of feminism. But I think it was she… She was important in my development of a feminist consciousness. She would explain things in a manner that I could understand, and she would explain things while living the same contradictions that
I was living with my compañeros from the Left, so we were in the same boat. (Gladys Klestorny, Uruguay)

As Carty and Brand (1993) point out, women struggled for “equal education, equal employment and fair immigration policy, and at the core of their analysis was the class conflict” (213). At this time, many of these organizations have disappeared or have morphed into highly bureaucratized organizations coopted by the state. Even during the apex of the community agencies, it could be argued that their objectives may have been inconsistent since they were always accountable to the state. For example, Roxanna Ng (1987) argued in her study of the Immigrant Women Job Placement Centre that the agency operations actually supported the status quo rather than realizing its stated goals and mandate to improve the overall position of immigrant women in the labour force. In fact, many feminist agencies became sites of struggle and contestation between white imperial subjectivities and the women of colour (San Martin & Barnoff, 2004). However, community agencies, specifically those controlled by immigrant and racialized women, also served to politicize demands, creating consciousness about the demands of cheap, immigrant women’s labour, understanding gender differences, and raising feminist consciousness.

The story of the involvement of immigrant women in the struggle for equal rights in Turtle Island (Canada) has received limited scholarly attention. In 2012, Working Women Community Centre produced a book that documents the intersection of the immigrant women’s struggles, the women’s movement, the labour movement, and government policies of immigration and funding (Working Women Community Centre, 2012). Many of the women who were essential in developing services for women were profoundly interested in social justice back in their countries of origin. This political awareness, coupled with their experiences as immigrant women, led to their involvement in the creation of most of the services that still provide support and services to immigrant and refugee women. During the 1970s and 1980s, predominately immigrant women organized around issues of work, education, gender, race, and class, as well as family issues, many times in direct confrontation with the white mainstream women’s movement. This was also the period in which the Canadian government was responding to the recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, by creating the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) (Working Women Community Centre, 2012;

125 Gladys Klestorny, interview, Toronto, Ontario, May 29, 2017
Nadeau, 2005). So, just as in Latin America, NAC provided (mostly white) women with the capacity to affect policy and legislation without necessarily being part of the governmental administrative process (Nadeau, 2005).

Women created agencies that intended to reflect new ways of doing politics: They rejected formal leadership, claims to specialized knowledge, hierarchal structures, and segregation based on nationalities, ethnicity, and race (that multiculturalism tended to deepen). The women who came together to develop and organize these diverse groups of immigrant women were, as Judith Ramirez explains, “multi-ethnic or multi-racial and broke down silos” (Working Women Community Centre, 2012: 41). In addition to breaking down divisive barriers, non-profits also instituted a model of “collective organizing” that was popular with the feminist movement. This model resonated strongly with people who were coming from the Left and espoused socialist ideals. Every aspect of the traditional way of doing things was opened to critique.

We came with a dream to develop a democratic political social model that didn’t materialized in Chile. And here, this little seed appears that offers this possibility. People come with that mentality and finally, from being able only to speak about these things in the superstructure, the ideological, we arrive here, to a terrain, a small concrete terrain, where those principles can be really realized. [Accepting this type of organization] comes from a Left ideology, from a progressive ideology of a democratic model we aspired to but weren’t able to live it or practice it because the conditions were not given. (Maria Antonieta Smith, Chile) 126

Naldi Chang (interview, 2017) worked with a number of educators to radically change the way English as a Second Language (ESL) was taught. She recalls that there was one ESL project that worked closely with a union where English was taught using the popular education techniques that Paulo Freire introduced in Latin America in his Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970). After revising traditional methodologies to teach English to newcomers, there was a critique that the images and contents used to teach English reinforced patriarchal gender roles and white, middle-class values, and did not provide useful information. In this project, this entire methodology was changed to incorporate topics that were relevant to immigrants and refugees at the time. A slide show presentation was created to raise consciousness in unions and with ESL teachers about incorporating critical pedagogies that would be useful to immigrant and refugee/exile women.

126 Maria Antonieta Smith, interview, Toronto, Ontario, April, 18, 2017.
When you have a [political] position that is critical you take issues such as gender and they start to make sense. If you already have a vision that there are classes, people who are more privileged, there is a chance that inequalities based on race, or gender also begin to make sense, you begin to incorporate these ideas to your own, then there is a natural transition. So, we would have meetings about how we were going to deal with the topic of English, and suddenly we began to see the really marked roles between men and women. (Naldi Chang, Chile)\(^{127}\)

This was the kind of ESL that was used with participants in the New Experiences for Refugee Women (NEW) project. Naldi Chang worked with the Cross Cultural Communication Centre (CCCC), an alternative centre of documentation that included information about immigrants and refugees, and it also included information about issues such as sexism and racism (Working Women Community Centre, 2012). At the time, this information could not be found in libraries or mainstream organizations. The CCCC aimed to work with teachers to influence the school system but also worked directly with immigrant women in a project called Making Changes.

One of the objectives was that women from different parts of the world would mix together. Also the idea was that they would integrate into [Canadian] society having a critical perspective. So this was for women that spoke English or some English, it was an orientation to Canadian society and it included support in looking for employment, and it included the topic of gender. The program included an aspect of women valorizing and re-signifying their identity as women. (Naldi Chang, Chile)\(^{128}\)

Working Women Community Centre (WWCC) was established in June 1976 as part of the immigrant women’s struggle for social justice in Toronto (Working Women Community Centre, 2012). Maria Antonieta Smith, a Chilean history teacher, arrived in Toronto in 1976. She joined the WWCC first as a member of the Board in 1976 and later began to work as a part-time worker while continuing her studies at OISE.

I went to WWCC to see if I could find a better job. When I was there I was invited to participate in the Working Women Community Centre Board of Directors. It was a terrifying experience at the beginning because there were no such things in Chile, no NGSS, so I wasn’t sure what was expected of me, what was the language used in a Board meeting. What was really interesting, was that the person chairing the meeting [woman’s name] had just given birth and she was breastfeeding her baby while facilitating the meeting. This was tremendously unusual for me and I thought this was fascinating. It was

\(^{127}\) Naldi Chang, interview, Santiago, Chile (via Skype), March 29, 2017.

\(^{128}\) Naldi Chang, interview, Santiago, Chile (via Skype), March 29, 2017.
really a process of aperture for me, an intellectual and emotional birth. This would have been absolutely inconceivable in the world where we came from. It was a liberatory experience. (Maria Antonieta Smith, Chile)\textsuperscript{129}

The collective structure of the organization appealed immediately to her:

It was a fantastic work model and also a good model for community development, since the work with immigrant women didn’t exist. To start from zero, the work collective allowed for that possibility, to look at the broad range of difficulties that immigrant women confronted in their new lives in Canada. (Maria Antonieta Smith, Chile)\textsuperscript{130}

Community workers did not have restricted job descriptions. Those who provided services were forced learn about a spectrum of issues ranging from immigration, health, housing, social assistance, unemployment, ESL classes, education, and so forth. As a result, diverse aspects of the work, service delivery, leadership, and gender identity became aspects that the workers developed in tandem. Consequently, Smith’s (interview, 2017) analysis as a feminist matured from dealing with the specific harsh realities that immigrant women confronted. This natural progression took place because of the political background and activism that these women brought with them.

Nevertheless, the day-to-day labour of the Centre went beyond sitting at a desk but also to organizing solidarity events, participating in the International Women’s Day, and mobilizing women, where feminist analysis erupted. It was here as well that women became aware of the contradictions of organizations such as the National Action Committee on Women (NAC). Nadeau (2005) has written contesting the celebratory discourses of NAC as a multiracial and inclusive organization. Indeed, NAC was an exclusionary organization and these feelings of exclusion and marginalization from the NAC were palpably felt by Latin American women:

There were these women activists in the mainstream that spoke on behalf of immigrant women but we began to recognize that no, in reality ‘they are not speaking for me. My reality is different than theirs.’ It was a separation, a conflicted separation. We were all coming with a revolutionary spirit, and we were very combative…. In retrospect, the clash between the posture of immigrant women with a more pragmatic view and the

\textsuperscript{129} Maria Antonieta Smith, interview, Toronto, Ontario, April 18, 2017.

\textsuperscript{130} Maria Antonieta Smith, interview Toronto, Ontario, April 18, 2017.
women of the mainstream was positive, because we learned from each other. (Maria Antonieta Smith, Chile)\textsuperscript{131}

New Experiences for Refugee Women (NEW) was a service initially called New Employment for Women; it was changed to New Experiences for Refugee Women in 1983, although the acronym remained the original NEW. It still exists, but now it is a multicultural agency called Newcomers Women’s Services Toronto. According to Luis Carrillo (interview, 2017) the Asociación de Mujeres Salvadoreñas (Association of Salvadorian Women, AMES) played a major role in the establishment of NEW when a member of AMES, Marielba Pubil, started to work there. Noemi Garcia (interview, 2017) was a participant of NEW when she arrived to Turtle Island (Canada) in 1984. It was during this time that the massive arrivals of Central Americans necessitated specific projects to support them entering the labour force. The great majority of participants at the time were from Latin America, specifically from El Salvador, although there were Chileans, a couple of Argentineans, and some Guatemalans (Garcia, interview, 2017).\textsuperscript{132} Later on, Garcia would return to NEW in a different capacity:

I became a member of the Board of Directors, when a position became available. I resigned from the Board to apply and I was hired. This was a temporary position until I got a permanent job as Employment Preparation Coordinator; I organized group sessions with 15 Central American women and three Chilean women, who were coming here, mainly due to family reunification. (Noemi Garcia, El Salvador)\textsuperscript{133}

It was here that the ESL classes included critical thinking based on the popular education that Naldi Chang had worked on—the idea that women should validate their skills and experiences even if they had not obtained them in the labour field. For example, the organization of events such as a quinceañera or a baptism demonstrated an ability and capacity to organize large events. Any domestic skill or organizing experiences in the Church, for example, could be used to show women that they had ample skills that could be translated into work skills. Women who participated in the NEW project received skills training but also information about reproductive health from a Spanish-speaking worker from the Immigrant Women Health Centre. Women were

\textsuperscript{131} Maria Antonieta Smith, interview, Toronto, Ontario, April 18, 2017.

\textsuperscript{132} There is a slight difference in recollection, since Naldi Chang also remembers that NEW provided services to the Vietnamese community. On their website’s history of the organization it is stated that it began as a service for Latin American women.

\textsuperscript{133} Noemi Garcia, interview, Toronto, Ontario, April 30, 2017.
also encouraged to participate in civic engagement and to participate in the Canadian polity. Many of these women had participated politically in their countries of origin, but were also traumatized because they had suffered the death or disappearance of a loved one (Garcia, interview, 2017). One interesting historical note is that, because NEW was located in Jack Layton’s riding, he would be frequently invited to speak with the participants of the program, once again proving that Latin American women engaged in the political landscape and perceived themselves to be active citizens of Turtle Island (Canada).

Finally, through the telling of personal and agency histories, it becomes obvious that many of the community agencies worked as a system of intertwined networks that supported each other and maximized the minimal resources received from the state. This system of referrals, guest speakers, and training workshops made use of the expertise of a myriad of women who made their expertise accessible to many different groups.

24 Conclusion

As Veronis mentions, social agencies and solidarity groups both influenced Canadian foreign policies and diplomatic relations with Latin America (2010, 186). For Latin American women, there has been a long history of political participation at the level of solidarity groups and community agencies that has had a tremendous impact on the political landscape of Turtle Island (Canada); this influence has largely gone unrecognized.

Since its emergence as a community, women were actively engaged in organizing political entities that maintained links and provided political support to a myriad of groups, political parties, and social movements in Latin America and in Turtle Island (Canada). Latin American women were able to utilize their political background and organizing experience to create community and social services agencies that provided material and emotional succour to those exiles/refugees that were forced to leave everything behind.

Latin American women played a crucial role in the development of the services that the community needed. Contrary to some of their more radical counterparts in Latin America who saw “NGO-ization” as a selling out, exiles in Toronto saw a great need to provide services to the community but also, more importantly, to do so from an activist point of view, with a class analysis and understanding of migrant issues as part of an imperialist project.
These agencies participated in wide-ranging networks and lobbying strategies that helped to attain tremendous gains in the social position of immigrants, refugees, and exiles. The organizational skills that women brought from their countries of origin, in addition to their political analysis and ideological commitment, allowed for a more effective and innovative use of services.

One of the main network organizations was LACEV. This small agency developed educational opportunities that allowed Latin American community/social workers to understand violence from a feminist perspective, providing a more holistic approach to its eradication. LACEV developed a myriad of popular education projects that were key to the development of the Latin American community. The organization also sponsored a number of research projects that brought light to issues that had been ignored, such as women whose partners withdrew immigration sponsorship and the plight of exotic dancers. LACEV’s influence extended to more mainstream issues when they became vital in the Justice for Graciela Montans Coalition, which challenged a retrograde piece of legislation called the “provocation defence” and spearheaded a campaign that led to a public inquiry. LACEV played a key role in the subsequent changes made to forensic procedures. Coroner conferences introduced this specific case in their presentations and in their training manuals as a standard on how to deal with women’s deaths in cases of presumed accidents (Coroner’s Council Inquiry, 1994).

In the next chapter I will focus on one pivotal event LACEV organized, which consolidated the transnational feminist consciousness of Latin American women living in Toronto: the organization of the First Latin American and Caribbean Women’s Encounter in 1995, which led to the creation of the Latin American Women’s Organization, MUJER.
Chapter 6
The First Latin American and Caribbean Women’s Encounter in Ontario, 1995

25 Introduction

The Encuentro was a huge qualitative jump because we converted into an organization, as I would say, trying to put out all the fires. We were moving from an organization trying to provide services to transform into an organization with a broader vision, with more political participation, because we didn’t see the presence of Latin American women except in the social/community services, there were a bunch of women throughout the field. South American, Central American women were beginning to rise, but we were left there, there were limits. The Encuentro showed us there was a great potential for more. (Loly Rico, El Salvador)\textsuperscript{134}

In June 1995, an unprecedented event took place in the City of Toronto. Approximately 500 Latin American women, “Latinas,” came together for three days in one of the biggest political events for the Latin American community, or the women’s community, of this city. Not surprisingly, however, this gathering went nearly unnoticed in the mainstream community.

This chapter traces how this idea emerged and was implemented. I have contended in Chapters 4 and 5 that Latin American women had an enormous organizing capacity that had been put to use in the service of solidarity and the community work. With the evolving transformation of a feminist subjectivity, women had increasingly consolidated a Latin American feminist identity in Toronto that challenged dogmatic leftist gender assumptions. There are two historical aspects to this development: the influence of the Latin American women’s movements, symbolized by the Feminist Latin American and Caribbean Encounters, and the key contribution of the Latin American Coalition to End Violence Against Women and Children (LACEV).

By organizing this Encuentro, Latin American women sought to replicate, in the microcosm of Toronto, a transnational space that mirrored the Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encounters in Latin America; a space that could facilitate bonding in an adverse geography in terms of a cultural identity that utilized traditional and modern expressions of art to define identity; and be able to debate their political, social, and economic priorities as Latin American

women living in the Global North. It was in this “space” that diasporic/transnational Latina feminist identity and what it meant in the Canadian polity was debated, challenged, negotiated, and ultimately integrated into Latin American women’s vision for the community in Turtle Island (Canada).

I will analyze the process of organizing the Encuentro in Ontario in detail, since it offers an unparalleled example of sheer tenacity and strategic use of resources, while exemplifying the challenges faced in the continuous consolidation of a transnational Latina feminist subjectivity. Understanding that the Latin American community has scarce resources, how was the Encounter put into practice? What were the issues that were talked about and what were the responses of the women who participated? What kind of dynamics and politics came out of this important event? What did it all mean? And finally, how did it impact the women who participated in it, the Latin American community in general, and the mainstream white Canadian women’s movements?

26 Pre-Encuentro and the Necessity of Visibility

In 1994, spearheaded by the Hispanic Development Council (HDC), the Latin American community came together in a Second Latin American Encounter organized by the Consejo de Participación Comunitaria (Council of Community Participation). In this gathering, relevant issues were being discussed, such as the issue of representation and political participation. As it is quite common, the erudite—that is, the men—monopolized the discussions, providing the analysis and the answers for the woes of the community. Tellingly, no time or space had been allocated to discuss women’s issues. The women who were participating became immediately aware of this absence. And, progressively, the murmurs became louder and steady, a bit like a fly around one’s ear that will not go away. The women’s voices, represented by LACEV, demanded a space to talk about issues that pertained directly to women, that needed to be addressed by women and in a surrounding that would welcome them, their opinions, and their contributions.

In a flurry of heated debate, the organizers relented and a haphazardly organized a workshop for women called “Challenges and Opportunities for the Future.” The workshop was added to the agenda, thus providing a marginal space for women and solving the impasse. The two-hour workshop focused mainly issues of violence against women, but it was during this workshop that the women, decidedly displeased that once again their voices, experiences, and issues had been
ignored and then presented as an add-on, began to ruminate on the need for a women’s meeting
or conference (Valverde, interview 2017; Priego, interview, 2017). Women began to envision a
space where they could come together and begin (or continue) to scrutinize the realities that they
were facing, including the erasure of their participation in political debates in the community. In
all honesty, this incident provided the impetus to organize something unheard of for Latin
American women living in Turtle Island (Canada)—a space to talk about their social, economic,
and political issues as a diasporic/transnational community. Subsequently, and as often happens,
a small group of women took up the challenge to call a first meeting to envision how, when, and
where this would take place.

It is interesting that LACEV was technically an NGO, albeit a minuscule one, that lived from one
funding proposal to the next. This particular trend of community groups turning into NGOs had
taken place in Toronto as a result of forced migration and its ensuing settlement needs. As
discussed in the previous chapter, NGOs provided somewhat decent employment conditions, and
opportunities to offer concrete material settlement supports for newcomers and limited influence
to exert policy change. Thus, it could be said that LACEV could articulate feminist politics from
a semi-institutionalized setting that was definitely linked to the Canadian state apparatus but
retained a measure of autonomy since its funding was meagre.

In Toronto, the Encuentro became a place where Latina bodies came together to re/assert
themselves as those who that could identify themselves as a community, where contact with the
Other showed us our own reflection. The sharing of similar life experiences—political
participation in our countries of origin, persecution, imprisonment, exile, migration,
discrimination, living in an English speaking country, and so forth—could be verbalized in a
space where women could feel safe and with other women that could understand what those
experiences meant. Finding others like herself, a woman could set the basis for some kind of
unity. The Encounter could provide the interstitial space and moment in history that could
emerge as a third space (Pérez, 1999: xvi).

The need to assert an identity had been a problematic one that women were constantly
contending with but to which there was no ready response. Language, similar experiences, and
living in a “foreign” land as excluded, second-class citizens provided a tenuous thread to an
identity, a very incipient definition. Jeannethe Lara, the coordinator for the Encuentro, analyzed the complexities of what we began to call the Latina identity:

We need to respond to a need to define identity. Each of us knows that we are Latinas, but we are all scattered, one is here, the other is there. So the idea emerged, why don’t we meet, as women and as Latinas? But there are many other axes to identity. The issue of sex/gender and the issue of the geographic place of origin, those for us are fundamental. Within those two pivots, there are other aspects that begin to play a role, sexual orientation, national origin, national identity… but any other pivot of identity could be a threat… to the unity, to that assumed unity. (Lilian Valverde and Jeannethe Lara, Chile & Colombia)

Although the term Latin American or Latina was used, it was emphasized that the Encuentro included women from the Caribbean, as well as women of indigenous and Afro-descent who did not identify with the adjective Latina. Issues of race had been a matter of contention in the Latin American and Caribbean Encuentros in Latin America, where Spanish-speaking women who identified as mixed-race (mestizas) or who were of European descent dominated the proceedings, and led to the exclusion of Portuguese-, French-, and English-speaking women who usually identified as Afro-Latinas. The Caribbean erasure of women underlined issues of race exclusionary practices (Alvarez et al., 2003: 568). In Toronto no translation was offered to Portuguese-speaking women, although the issue was debated at length. English and French were not even considered. Nonetheless, there was awareness that issues of race were conflated under linguistic concerns. As it was discussed in the Final Report:

It was through the evaluations that it became evident that many groups do not identify themselves with the Latino adjective. It was necessary to recognize the racial and ethnic differences that are hidden when you denominate a group under only one characteristic, particularly our community that is greatly heterogeneous in terms of race and ethnicity. When we use the term Latino we affirm the European heritage and we bury our African and Indigenous origins and heritage, thereby negating part of our identity. (Lara et al., 1995: 7)

It was clear that this need for identity was also a cry for community and the result of feeling isolated, excluded, and alone. Lilian Valverde, coordinator of LACEV at the time, commenting on the responses to surveys and questionnaires sent to women before the Encounter, remembered that

135 Lilian Valverde and Jeannethe Lara, interview, Toronto, Ontario, April 14, 2017.
in all the evaluations, isolation was the constant and that [response] was telling us something. We needed a space, we needed someone to give us a hand, we needed support, we needed to know where to go when we need support and we could not find it. (Lilian Valverde and Jeannethe Lara, Chile & Colombia)\textsuperscript{136}

All in all, however, the First Latin American and Caribbean Women’s Encounter was an event that brought Latin America women from all over Ontario for three outstanding days, an event that has never been repeated in our community or others.

27 Preparing the Ground: The Call

The Encounter’s central topic was the integral well-being (physical, emotional, and spiritual) of the Latin American women living in Ontario (Lara et al., 1995: 5). The first contentious and divisive issue was that the event would be exclusively for women. The second controversial issue was the new philosophy of organizing from a feminist perspective. Finally, the last prickly argument related to the decision to open up the discussion to encompass a holistic and integral approach to understanding women within this social context. This approach provoked some divergence because a number of women, specifically those in social services, wanted to focus merely on violence against women (Lara et al., 1995: 5). This difference in opinion may have stemmed from the fact that government funding was very focused on dealing with violence against women. Perhaps some feared that we would not get funding if the topics were open to other more contentious issues such as racism, discrimination, and political participation.

The \textit{convocatoria}\textsuperscript{137} (the summons) to the preparatory meetings for First Encounter of Latin American Women was made by LACEV on July 10, 1994 (Poster, July 10, 1994). The first meeting took place on September 23 from 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. in the Canadian Autoworkers Union, located on College St. in Toronto. The idea was to invite women to participate in the envisioning and development of what women who intended to participate wanted the Encounter to be. However, the first meeting almost immediately ended in disaster. The main controversial issues were the participation of men in the Encounter and the perception that there was no direction from the women who had made the call (LACEV, 1994, September 23).

\textsuperscript{136} Lilian Valverde and Jeannethe Lara, interview, Toronto, Ontario, April 14, 2017.

\textsuperscript{137} The word \textit{convocatoria} is a fairly politicized term in Latin America. Indeed, having the power to summon (to a demonstration, strike, rally, etc.) demonstrates your political acumen and organizing strength.
The discussion was sparked by the attendance of two men to the meeting. One of the organizers, Elba de Léon, had politely asked the two men to leave the meeting. She mistakenly assumed that everyone had understood that when the call was made about a women’s Encounter it had meant women only. But it was precisely when a few women noticed that the men were leaving that the first argument erupted reflecting different understandings of the call. A small group argued that we could not leave men out of the Encounter. Men, they passionately argued, were part of our lives as husbands, brothers, sons, and fathers and they should be included, especially, these women highlighted, so they could learn about women’s realities and issues (Valverde & Lara, interview, 2017). The majority of the participants at the meeting had envisioned the Encounter as a space for women, where they could talk without being guarded by the presence of men, and believed that by merely calling it a women’s encounter that this would be obvious. Bewildered, they were unprepared for the ensuing debate. In the Final Report, the authors state that the decision to make the Encounter women only “generated debates within the Coalition as well as in the community at large. Without understanding the need and the reasons that guided us to take this decision, we were criticized and called divisive” (Lara et al., 1995: 5).

The minutes of the meeting only mentioned a long discussion on the issue of men’s participation. At the end, no resolution was attained and without it, the decision was left for the next meeting (LACEV, 1994, September 23). In reality, this discussion would not be brought to the fore until a much later meeting.

Other contentious issues that emerged were the perception that the group of women who had made the call lacked clear objectives and a philosophy for the Encounter. In addition, there was a perception that there were too many other logistical shortcomings. Part of the criticism of the group of women who had made the call was the lack of preparation or specificity for the Encounter. The women who had made the call had wanted to offer an open and democratic

---

138 The two men were Luis Aravena, member of LACEV and a counsellor for abusive men, and Duberlis Ramos, Executive Director of the Hispanic Development Council of Metropolitan Toronto.

139 I was part of the coordinating committee and I was present at this meeting.

140 All the minutes are in Spanish; translation is mine.
A forum that would allow for participants to become part of the organic development of the Encounter from its inception. Lara explains this position:

What would have been the point if women had come, and attended all the workshops, but didn’t feel a part of the process, they would not have taken ownership of every little piece of the process, they would not have had the time to share outside of those few spaces, where each one of them arrived with very concrete interests…it would not have been useful, the impact would have been different. (Lilian Valverde and Jeannethe Lara, Chile & Colombia)

Paradoxically, this was viewed as lack of preparation and organization, and two different political perceptions emerged. Most of the women who had made the call came from partisan political backgrounds. Therefore, it was imperative for them to provide democratic participation based on the premise of consensus. Indeed, in the minutes, there was a document that explicitly explained the advantages of the model of consensus (LACEV, 1994, October 6). However, this idealized notion has tended to obscure the fact that even with the best intentions, unilateral decisions took place (as discussed further on). Perhaps the effort to have an alternative way of organizing that reflected an idealized feminist praxis challenged the existing the leftist ethos that was a remnant of the way traditional parties had organized solidarity events. These antagonistic styles were also present in the Feminist Encounters that had taken place in Latin America.

Nonetheless, the organizers strove to respond to the critiques. Consequently, at the following meeting, on October 6, 1994, the main discussion focused on the philosophy of the Encounter (LACEV, 1994, October 6). In the brainstorm the main topic seemed to revolve around what the Encounter should be—the desire for a space and all that this implied kept resurfacing. Lilian Valverde recalls the discussion about what the main characteristic and defining philosophy of the Encounter should be:

So, suddenly someone said, “a space open to all”…and that was very interesting because that phrase resonates until today…this means that women are thinking: “What do I have a space for? Where is my space?” and so she searches for it. This is like opening a door and not knowing what is going to happen next. (Lilian Valverde and Jeannethe Lara, Chile & Colombia)

Regardless of the fear that such an audacious proposition entailed, women decided to go ahead with the idea. At the end, the final statement read that the Encounter would be:
An open space that belongs to all of us... An encounter of women, that should be open, full of solidarity, with the maximum participation of all women of Latin American origin, whether they speak Spanish or English (for example, the daughters of Latinas that have been born outside of Latin America). This women’s encounter should be free of discrimination based on race, religion, creed, political beliefs, and sexual orientation. (LACEV, 1994, October 6)

The difficulty, as usual, was to define who was/is a Latin American woman, a theme that was to surface continuously in this emerging movement. As discussed in my introduction, Latina is an umbrella term referring to women of Latin American birth or heritage, including women from South, Central, and North America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. This transnational subjectivity incorporates cultural and national identities; racial, ethnic, and social identities and locations; political experiences; and migrant experiences. Thus, the Latina subjectivity encompasses a fluidity of identities embedded in a panoply of experiences connected to each other and Europe by language. The complexity of determining who is a Latina entails continuous processes of negotiation, accommodation, subversion, and consciousness. The discussions on this issue were to continue for the entire organization of the event. Did we consider women from Brazil as part of Latin America? And if so, where were we going to get the funds to pay for translation into Portuguese? How about the English Caribbean? These discussions on identity were exhausting and eventually the call would read: An Encounter of Latin American and Caribbean Women. As Jeannethe Lara recalls, “we basically opened the door and whoever wanted to come in, could come…” (Valverde & Lara, interview, 2017). There was a caveat to this decision, however, a decision that was relatively easy to make, and it had to do with the presence of “white” women. It was decided by unanimity that white, non-migrant women from Turtle Island (Canada) or from the United States could only participate as observers (LACEV, 1994, October 6). Although, it was mentioned that solidarity should be recognized, the experiences of exclusion played a key part in the decision. Historically, Latin American women had felt the mainstream white women’s movement had been condescending and exclusionary, a view shared by most racialized or anti-racist feminist women in Toronto (Nadeau, 2005; Wane, Deliovsy, & Lawson, 2002; McKittrick, 2006; The Book Project Collective, 2015).

In the following meetings the objectives of the Encounter began to take shape, committees were formed, and the date and duration of the Encounter were decided. Some of the objectives discussed included identifying the political role that Latin American women could play in Turtle Island (Canada), the valorization of our social and political contributions to this new country, and
pointedly, the acknowledgement of our diversity to better respond to our specific needs (the fact that Salvadorian and Guatemalan women had experienced genocide, for example, and required specific kinds of support). Other key objectives emphasized the importance of reclaiming women’s history (LACEV, 1994, October 20). Recognizing that women’s social and political initiatives and the preponderant role that women played in key social and political movements in their countries of origin and in their host countries was constantly and consistently erased, reclaiming history was made a priority.

The logistical discussion also showed that great importance was given to truly making the space accessible to everyone (LACEV, 1994, November 10). Contacts were made with the Scarborough Mission to secure accommodation for women coming from outside of Toronto, which was found to be too costly at $30 per night. And other alternatives were sought. In the end, key decisions about geographic and social inclusion were made. Initially, the invitation would be extended to all of Ontario but women would have to pay their own way. It was immediately acknowledged that this would limit women’s participation. The social and economic situation of Latin American women in Ontario has always been known to be precarious. Therefore, although the Encounter had a cost, it was stipulated that lack of funds would not be an impediment to participation (Lara et al., 1995). To make sure, the organizing committee provided support by paying for transportation to the event, subsidies for those who could not pay, day-care services for children from 6 months to 16 years old, free lunch served in the cafeteria, and billeting in women’s houses for those who were coming from out of town.

At the November 10, 1994 meeting, the program committee presented an array of topics to be discussed at the Encounter; these included: refuge, culture, violence, sexual abuse, education, sexuality, work and training, youth, disability, older women, family, immigration, leadership, spirituality, politics, recreation and sports, health, feminism, and history (LACEV, 1994, November 10). It was also at this meeting that the decision was taken to hire someone to coordinate the entire event; in order to solidify this decision funds were needed urgently.

The minutes of November 24, 1994 indicate the funding efforts that were made (LACEV, 1994, November 24). The budget for the entire Encounter was $140,000 based on a one-year budget. The women who worked on these proposals were Elva de Leon, Magaly San Martin, and Josie Di Zio, who was the coordinator of Working Women Community Centre at the time (LACEV,
Applications were made to the Trillium Foundation, the Ontario Women’s Directorate, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Multiculturalism, and foundations like Levi Strauss and Reebrook were also tapped, in addition to a number of unions. By March 1995, the Encounter had received $50,000 from the Ministry of Health because of the unwavering support of Alejandra Priego, former LACEV coordinator, and the support of a network of racialized women’s organizations that vouched for LACEV and provided concrete assistance (Lara et. al., 1995). The only funding that was obtained was from the Ministry of Health and it would prove invaluable. Other funding came from the subscriptions to the Encounter, the sale of posters, a raffle, and donations. As is usual, the funding sources influence the parameters of the objectives. In the end, the three general objectives reflected the prism of community workers who had obtained funding from the Ministry of Health and understood health as a holistic proposition; the three objectives were

1. to identify the systemic impact of barriers that women encounter when accessing health services;

2. to develop necessary strategies for prevention and education to improve the health status of Latin American women; and

3. to use and to make more effective use of the existent resources within our own community and ourselves as women to obtain more equality in society. (Lara et al., 1995)

At the November 24 meeting, another issue became controversial that highlighted key ideological differences. The members of the program committee sought clarification on whether the Encounter was another LACEV project or an independent initiative. The discussion centred on the history of the idea for the Encounter. A few organizations that purported to represent the community had in fact turned their backs on the event after the decision had been made to make it into a women-only event.

---

141 The Encounter organizers understood that health is intrinsically related to the social determinants of health, which include education employment status, poverty, housing, and food, for example. Other issues that affect health, of course, would be trauma as a result of political persecution, trauma due to exile and refuge, precarious migration status, discrimination, racism, and sexism.
The contradictions between the Left and feminism haunted any kind of women’s organizing efforts, with permanent tension between these two political ideological currents. Moreover, the traditional Latin American Left is composed of a large spectrum of political ideologies, practices, and strategies, from the revolutionary/radical groups that advocated for armed struggle to social reformist parties. In addition, those who followed different and sometimes extremely antagonistic strategies put them in direct confrontation with others. In this context, militants were dogmatic and intolerant of other parties or groups, sometimes with calamitous consequences.

As I have discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, the one common thread that was present in the traditional Latin America Left had been its reluctance to engage in any gender debate or analysis that included a feminist viewpoint, especially from the sixties to the party politics of the seventies. The one thing that united the traditional Left was its rejection of feminist ideals or women’s emancipation. The most progressive movements promised changes and reforms after the revolution; for example, Cuba was heralded as having made enormous legislative changes that benefitted women (Randall, 1974). Women who were militants adhered to the party line and pursued this political position. In the first Encuentros that took place in Latin America between the 1980s and 1990s, a bitter division arose between the políticas and the autonomas (Alvarez et al., 2003). Women who had been involved in political/revolutionary groups were accused of transferring “their revolutionary dogmatism and intolerance into feminism” (Alvarez et al., 2003: 550). This particular issue also reared its ugly head in Toronto. On March 27, 1995, the coordinating committee received a letter where all the women who participated in the program committee resigned en masse. The problem was the perception that the process had not been democratic and that all the proposals that the committee had brought forward to the organizing committee had been rejected. According to the women who signed the letter, it would seem that there were only three women who were making all the decisions. The women who composed the letter stated: “We believe that if we are working to emulate the best of the world and Latin American feminism, we cannot accept to work in women’s organizations that perpetuate patriarchal ways of decision-making” (LACEV, 1995, March 27). The letter was not included in the minutes, which had been requested by the program committee members. The reasons given

142 Historically, however, there have been some groups, like diverse anarchist currents, where it has been far more common to see a critique of the family as a bourgeois and patriarchal construct.
in the March 30, 1995 meeting was that the letter had not been signed and that none of the women were present in the meeting to discuss the content of it (LACEV, 1995, March 30). However, the remainder of the members of the committee decided to contact the resigning women by phone with the intent of resolving the differences and to invite them to reincorporate into the work of the group. This did not happen and other women took their place on the committee. Thus, this particular rift in terms of the perceived (or actual) replication of the top-down, authoritarian, partisan ways of doing things was never discussed in any profundity. Fortunately, a number of these women who resigned from the committee still attended the Encounter as participants.

The eternal contradiction that women who had been militants of many diverse (and often antagonistic Left-wing) political groups was that it was the traditional Left that provided them with the political philosophy and the tools to be able to organize. However, it would be disingenuous not to admit that with great political savvy came also dogmatism and sectarianism. Women with partisan political backgrounds did not emerge from a tradition of women’s organizing, and indeed reflected the patriarchal styles found so often in political groups in Latin America. This is not to further essentialize women’s organizing as an epitome of democratic and sisterly organizing, but there have been efforts to change this into what has been called a “feminist praxis,” which we have assumed to be more democratic by including a collective decision-making process. Yet women’s movements have also reflected the social contradictions of the times and they exhibit the same racist and classist patriarchal styles of organizing. In the context of the Encounter, it may have been possible that in addition to many of these foibles, political sectarianism was also present in some of the Latin American feminist women. Celina Mazui, who was a key volunteer in the executive committee of the Encounter, recalls that:

It was a great achievement to bring so many women together. There had never been an event like this, so many Latin American women that met to participate in this activity…I think that it was a great thing because many important topics were discussed…. But sometimes, there was a lot of discrepancy; I was very surprised because we talk a lot about women’s union but at the first opportunity, women practically were insulting each other. It was very ugly. (Celina Mazui, Uruguay)

What was extremely remarkable was that the issue of whether this was going to be a feminist Encounter was never questioned. It had not been that long ago that groups like the Latin American Women’s Collective had fought intensely to defend the political decision to define themselves as “feminists.” The LAWC had confronted vitriolic criticism from some community groups, mostly the Left that considered feminism to be a middle-class white woman’s issue (See for example, San Martin, 1998). By 1995, the word feminism had lost its thorny connotations for those involved in the Left and the word and its praxis had become commonplace, especially in the community agency sector. Despite the controversies and some infighting, the organizing committees tried their best to be democratic and inclusive and the arduous organization of the event continued amongst what sometimes felt like insurmountable obstacles. In truth, the logistics of the Encounter were extraordinary. And it was women from the community that stepped up successfully to the challenge; in the process of implementing new ways of doing politics, the organizers came to the decision to enable men’s participation on their own terms.

What re-sparked the discussion about men’s participation was the fact that some women from the organizing committee had been interviewed on Aquí Nuestra América, a radio program geared to Latin Americans on CKLN community radio, where it had been clearly stated that this Encounter would be a women-only space (LACEV, 1995, January 23). It was at this meeting on January 23, 1995 that the discussion could no longer be avoided and it was resumed in the form of a question that would be discussed in the following meeting. The question was, “Should men participate in the Encounter, yes, no, and why?” (LACEV, 1995, January 30). Some of the arguments that emerged in the responses reflected a feminist point of view—for example, “We have the right to have our own space.” Sometimes it was framed as a historical redress of absence: “Although women have participated in every social and political movement in Latin America, our history has been silenced; we have been relegated to the rear-guard of all the social processes. Men had monopolized the experience of leadership and decision-making has been their hegemonic privilege” (LACEV, 1995, January 30). There was also an argument for historical precedence: “Precisely because that this is the first time that we organize a women’s encounter in Toronto, this must be our space” (LACEV, 1995, January 30).

The opposing view revealed in the minutes was from a more traditional leftist point of view that insisted that social struggles should not be divided by gender: “…we cannot do the same thing that they have done to us. This is not a contest and men are not garbage…” Or, perhaps as an
unconscious critique of radical feminism, they stated: “The fact that we are doing things for, with, and by women does not mean that we are not anchored in reality. In that reality women and men exist” (LACEV, 1995, January 30). After a long and tortuous discussion, it was decided that men were not allowed to participate in the organizing and planning phase. However, there was no unanimous agreement on their participation on the days of the Encounter (LACEV, 1995, January 30). In fact this controversy did not go away easily. One of the male members of the radio program Aquí Nuestra América unleashed acerbic criticism about the decision to have a women-only event (San Martin, 1995). This decision would have to be constantly defended. Notably, however, the Final Report alludes to the fact that many of the women who had reservations or were against the decision seemed in their final written evaluations of the Encounter to have come to understand and agree with the final decision to limit men’s participation (Lara et al., 1995: 5).

However, the issue of the men’s participation reflected a more complex political underpinning of the community. The Hispanic Social Council, the organism that had been key in organizing the Second Latin American Encounter, wanted to do a follow up when the idea emerged to organize a women’s Encounter. In fact, Lilian Valverde, LACEV coordinator, had been approached and told that the Hispanic Development Council (HDC) was very interested in being part of the call. The decision to make it a woman’s only space put a damper on the Council’s plans. The Council called a meeting with the Coalition to discuss this decision and to question whether the Coalition could in fact “represent” the community and whether it had the capacity to manage the funds. Indeed, LACEV didn’t have charitable status and could not manage the funds without a trustee (Valverde, interview, 2017). After funding had been acquired, the Hispanic Council had called another meeting with LACEV to question whether LACEV had the capacity to administer the funding and to be accountable to the Ministry of Health. They suggested becoming part of the project but it could easily be assumed this participation would not be as an equal partner (Valverde, interview, 2017). In the end, the women decided to do it on their own and it was LACEV that continued to spearhead the project. This distancing between these organizations reflected the fact that LACEV had taken the important role of coordinating the work of numerous agencies in relationship to the work of violence against women, in a way appropriating the role of the HDC. As Alejandra Priego recalls, with regards to the role of LACEV:
The Hispanic Council insisted that they were the voice of the Latin American community...and that anyone who wanted to do something in the community had to go through them. Meanwhile the underground work [by LACEV] that was being organized by 35 or 40 people that met every month to decide how to improve education, services, referrals amongst the organizations... They had nothing to do with that because they were not service providers. (Alejandra Priego, Mexican)\textsuperscript{144}

Finally, for the women organizing the Encuentro, the HDC’S attitude of trying not only to control the work of the women but also to imply that they would be incapable of administering the funds and being accountable to the funding sources was the spur to become independent from the HDC. It is in this historical moment that a split occurred affecting how the HDC was and is perceived by the community (Landolt & Goldring, 2009).

The main responsibility for organizing the Encounter rested on a coordinator who was hired specifically to organize the Encounter, Jeannethie Lara. She had arrived from Colombia in 1989 and engaged in social and community work. She had volunteered at the Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples where had become familiar with LACEV (Lara, interview, 2017). The other key organizer was Lilian Valverde, the part-time coordinator of LACEV. Valverde was a Chilean refugee with a solid political and organizing background. She had been engaged in solidarity work and started to work in community agencies later on in her life. The other volunteer members of the coordinating committee were Celina Maziu and myself.

Committees were formed with members of the community and members of LACEV who were all volunteers. The committees that were formed were Finance, Logistics, Awareness and Promotion, Public Relations, Artistic and Cultural Programming, Reception and Housing Accommodation, and the Program Committee (Lara et. al., 1995). A coordinating committee was created that included two representatives of all the committees in addition to the coordinator for the Encounter and LACEV’s coordinator. Final decisions would be taken in LACEV’s general assemblies.

The campaign to promote the event began with five months of anticipation and it required an effective system where women themselves could become the spokespersons for the event. Therefore the media campaign was targeted to the different sectors and regions in Ontario and

\textsuperscript{144} Alejandra Priego, interview Toronto, Ontario, February 19, 2017.
specifically aimed at women who worked in the social/community sectors. However, efforts were also made to contact teacher associations and faculties such as OISE (LACEV, 1995, March 9). Needless to say, a lot of support came from the community agencies that worked directly with the community, although there was also support from organizations such as shelters, like Interval House and Education Wife Assault, which donated paper and stamps (LACEV, 1995, April 10). Many of the main organizers were women who worked in community agencies—Lilian Valverde and myself worked at Nellie’s Housing Project. This meant that a lot of the logistical support in terms of office equipment came from this organization.

The promotional material included letters of presentation, advertisement, leaflets, brochures, a poster, and press releases. Community newspapers such as Jornada (Toronto), La Nación (Kitchener-Waterloo), the magazine Amanecer (Scarborough), and a Toronto magazine called hispanos supported the event by publishing a series of articles authored by the women participating in the Encuentro. This became an important part of the re/writing the history of Latin American women in Toronto. Articles touched on subjects such as feminism, sexuality/pleasure, identity, and lesbian identity (Fernández, 1995; San Martin, 1995; Sztainbok, 1995; Valverde, 1995), in addition to a main article about the Encuentro written by Ofelia Infante, who worked for the magazine hispanos, and who was a great supporter of the project. Interviews on community radio and television (Ondas Latinas and TeleLatino, Aqui Nuestra America, Frequency Feminist, Tejiendo Rebelde, all community programs from CKLN, Program Raíces from CIUT, and University of Ottawa radio) were also common. However, there was either not a concerted effort to reach the mainstream media or we were simply dismissed. There was an English press release but no document mentions any kind of contact. There were, however, articles published in the Vancouver feminist magazine Aquelarre (Lara et al., 1995).

Finally, artists like Lorena Gajardo donated her work for the poster that was used to advertise the event, a very successful fundraising tool, and Maria Elena Meza donated the logo that was used in all the materials for the event.

The logistics of finding space required an incredible effort. For instance, finding a space that was able to provide enough rooms to have workshops, a daycare, a working kitchen, and a cafeteria, in addition to being accessible, became quite a challenge. In the end, Harbord Collegiate Institute located in central downtown Toronto was selected. We were able to use the entire school to hold all the events for three days.
The process of organizing the people who offered their houses for those coming from outside of Toronto required that a number of volunteers coordinate the spaces with the number of women who were coming, giving directions and settling those who were coming with children.

Thus, amidst controversies that plagued the planning and organizing efforts, there was also an overwhelming sense of responsibility to provide a space that was truly democratic and inclusionary. Thus, tired but with boundless enthusiasm Latin American women were set to have an Encounter for three days in the City of Toronto.

28 The Encounter

_The skein in our hands…_

Today we begin this First Encounter of Latin American women in Ontario. This can be stated easily, however, we have had to go right through barriers, travel, dream, fly and finally arrive. The trajectory that we have journeyed has been very complicated but also very satisfactory. Finally, and after a long effort, we are here, us in front of you (but only for the moment), and all of us in front of other women that we haven’t met yet, even though we have so much in common despite the frontiers of the provinces. We could not forget the valuable collaboration of other people volunteers that have made this event possible. Without them our skein would still be in knots.

_We invite you to weave this skein…_

It would be limiting to think that our biggest achievement is to find 500 hundred of us today. Let us consider that in three days we will begin to weave this (spider web), a union web with all the women from Thunder Bay, Sarnia, Ottawa, Hamilton, Peterborough, Guelph, Burlington, Halton, London, Kitchener, Fergus, Montreal, Downsview, Woodbridge, and Cambridge. That knowing our differences we put forward our coincidences, which are to grow in diversity, to take care and watch over this great effort to maintain ourselves united. That is why; this First Encounter has been sealed with the central idea of “for a space open to all of us.”

Let’s all be co-responsible of making us feel welcome to share our ideas, our many loves and suffering, happiness and pain, success and stumbles, the same that will enrich us during this journey…and here on forward. (Gonzalez & Fombona, 1996)\(^\text{145}\)

---

\(^{145}\) This was recorded in a video produced by Paula Gonzalez and Javiera Fombona. The video was called “A Space For All of Us.” Unfortunately, the video has been damaged and only the first 20 minutes are available. I have been unable to find other copies.
Thus began the welcoming remarks of the Encounter that took place on June 16, 17, and 18, 1995. After receiving greetings from a number of government officials and community groups the event proceeded with a women-only artistic show that included modern dance, theatre, folk dancing, and poetry. It concluded with a sacred ritual in which women who had died at the hands of violence were remembered.

The Encuentro was deemed to be a space open to everyone, inclusive and non-hierarchical. The aim was to recreate something akin to what had happened in Latin America. Alvarez et al. defined the first Encuentro in 1981 in Latin America as “a true encuentro and not a rigidly structured political congress or more formal scholarly conference, reflecting a desire to create new, nonhierarchical, more participatory ways of ‘hacer politica’ [doing politics]” (2003: 544). Unlike the Encuentros in Latin America, the Toronto Encuentro was funded by the Ontario Ministry of Health and therefore it was incumbent on the organization to have Ministry representatives at the opening ceremonies. Fortuitously, none of these representatives cared to stay during the proceedings, and for once, language barriers became sine qua non strategy to maintain autonomy.

The Toronto Encuentro was not a space that concentrated on “policy-advocacy” (Alvarez et al., 2003: 548). This meant that there was not a lot of formal organizing to lobby the state and to give women the opportunity to influence policy in terms of gender or as immigrants in this country. The Toronto Encounter focused instead on “identity-solidarity,” which entailed “the movement-centered development of feminist identities, communities, politics, and ideas…” (Alvarez et al., 2003: 548). The Encounter allowed politically orphaned women to come together to deal with the wounds of dislocation and to meet each other.

After the initial ceremony, the activities commenced. In order to fulfill the objectives of the Encounter, which aimed to provide an integral vision regarding the many factors that affected women, it was important to touch on the social, political, economic, and cultural aspects that

---

146 Guests included Eunadie Johnson from the Minister of Health, Sue Kaizer from the City of Toronto, and Alejandra Priego, grants coordinator at the Women’s Health Bureau, who was unfaltering in her support for the Encounter. Greetings were read from organizations such as Working Women Community Centre, Consejo de Participación Comunitaria, Alejandro Morales from COSTI, the Hispanic Social Council, the Spanish Speaking Parents from the Board of Education, the ethnocultural Ecuadorian group Huairapungo, and a number of other organizations.
affect her social condition. The Encounter sought to provide women with information but also to obtain a more tangible understanding of what Latin American women were facing.

The main political framework that was used to organize the Encuentro was to have a space open to all. Therefore, there was no dilemma in terms of who could come to the Encuentro. As discussed in the introduction, diasporic identities are highly complex and fluid. In addition to nationality, ethnicity, race, and sexual orientation, class differences, for example, become blurred in the diaspora. Many women who might have been professionals in their country of origin became working class when they arrived as exiles/refugees or immigrants to Turtle Island (Canada). Similarly, it can be argued that women who had been politically involved possessed greater analytical and logistical proficiencies that allowed them a greater say in decision-making processes and participation. Thus, whether the women who attended really reflected a widespread of economic, social, and educational differences is hard to appraise. What was important, however, was that feminism was understood in a much broader way than White mainstream feminists had discerned. Women had mobilized politically in Latin America as members of political parties, revolutionary groups, progressive religious organizations, clandestine groups, guerrilla battalions, and so forth. As Domitila Barrios de Chungara (1978) argued, what was considered a woman’s issue in Latin America ranged from dealing with the effects of the brutal economic crisis, fighting the authorities for their loved ones in prison or disappeared, to getting basic housing, or plumbing or electricity for the increasing squatting actions that were taking place under repressive regimes. In Turtle Island (Canada), the issues were migrant/refugee rights, labour and housing rights, childcare, poverty, isolation, health, and so forth (Lara et al., 1995). Therefore, Latin American women both in Latin America and in Turtle Island (Canada) encompassed a more complex conception of what a feminist subjectivity would mean. Accordingly, feminists’ demands in Latin America and in Toronto were also different than what the white, non-immigrant, feminist movement may have been prioritizing. Indeed, there were

---

147 Domitila Barros de Chungara came to Toronto in the 1980s. It was her intervention in Toronto that prompted many feminists to challenge the slogan the “right to have an abortion” to incorporate the more encompassing “reproductive rights.” I was at the event when she rejected the demand for abortion and explained that in Bolivia women were demanding to be able to birth healthy children. This had also been the issue with the LAWC and their participation in the International Women’s Day in 1983, which led to some vitriolic articles in the Feminist Bulletin Broadside.
many women who may not have identified as feminists but believed in gender equality. Lara remembers that in the workshop about feminism,

Someone got up, and started questioning feminism. I got up and said, “look don’t be narrow. Take away the label just leave all the adjectives that go with it, take away the label, and you are going to see that whether you call yourself a feminist or not what matters is the content. If you believe that a woman should not be beaten because she is a woman, if you believe that men and women should face the same circumstances, if you believe that that women have faced injustice, all of that is what is important. To call yourself a feminist or not is really not that important.” (Jeannethe Lara, Colombia)

According to the Final Report, participation in the Encounter surpassed the expectations of the organizers. There were 450 women who registered and throughout the entire event this number would range from 480 to 530 women. Most of them lived in Toronto, but there were 50 participants who came from other places such as Thunder Bay, Sarnia, Ottawa, Hamilton, Peterborough, Guelph, Burlington, Halton, London, Kitchener, Fergus, Montreal, Downsview, Woodbridge, and Cambridge. Indeed, one of the key aspects that made the Encuentro successful and unique was the participation of women from outside of Toronto, which tended to decentralize the demands, since women faced different challenges depending on where they lived in the province. Women who lived in Thunder Bay, for example, would be organizing around having access to basic services for immigrants, since there was a lack of services in general. But even women closer to Toronto, like the Peel region, were also organizing around having access to basic services.

Having obtained funds it was possible, in most cases, to subsidize transportation for the women while families in Toronto housed them and their children. In some cases closer to Toronto, buses were rented and women were able to attend in this manner. When talking about the particular success of the event, one of the aspects that was most emphasized was that “…the event was inclusive and accessible” (Valverde & Lara, interview, 2017). There were also approximately 120 children and about 30 childcare workers that included volunteers and paid staff. In total, there were about 630 to 680 people who participated in the event (Lara et al., 1995: 21). The women that came to the Encounter for the three days represented a diversity of national and ethnic backgrounds. Some had arrived recently and others had been in Turtle Island (Canada),

148 Jeannethe Lara, interview 2, Toronto, Ontario, July 26, 2017
for 20 years or more. They brought with them different life experiences: there were housewives, students, professionals, and unemployed women. There were heterosexual women, lesbians, and bisexual women. There was some representation of young women and women who were elderly. There were single women, married women, and single women with children (Lara et al., 1995: 21).

Although the pre-Encounter had been organized by a relatively small number of women, the Encounter itself mobilized approximately 100 volunteers. These volunteers included the men who were in charge of the kitchen and serving lunch in addition to providing support with the care of the children. Remarkably, as well and without any further debate, the issue of men’s participation became “solved” by agreeing that they could provide logistical support in the kitchen (serving lunch, collecting the dirty paper plates, and cleaning up), daycare, and other practical tasks. There were about 50 men who participated in moving food, boxes, tables, etc. Even critics participated, such as the commentator of Aqui Nuestra America, who provided support for the three days. This role reversal is something that many feminist groups have demanded as a public support for women’s struggles. Rather than take the podium and monopolize the discussion as it was (and still is) very common, concrete support was given by taking over the tasks that are assumed to be feminine. In addition, to show that many Latin American men did support the feminist struggle was positive for the women who attended the event, and this support also challenged the quintessential stereotype of Latinos as machistas par excellence.

Another group of volunteers that became quite key to the smooth functioning of the event was the reception committee. This group received women and gave them all the information that they needed. This worked specially well for those women who were coming from out of town and needed to be settled in the different houses that had offered spaces. Billeting was something quite new for community organizing at the time, although it has been the more radical alternative organizing, for example the G8, where activists have been asked to provide lodging for activists coming from outside the city or province.

28.1 The methodology of the encounter

Alvarez et al. (2003) discusses a particular methodology as it was used in the eighth Encuentro in 1999, quoting from the organizing committee pamphlet that describes the “eje transversal”
[transversal axis], intended to recapture the ‘cultural-symbolic-relational’ elements of feminist practice. This methodological approach, correctly identified as a ‘political choice,’ was intended to foster creative, dynamic, and innovative forms of interaction among participants” (558).

Indeed, this was also the aim at the Encuentro in Toronto. In the pamphlet and registration form it states that the structure of the Encuentro included circles of discussion to exchange experiences and knowledges, workshops to analyze and understand issues, talks to learn about topics of interest, forums to expose different points of view about the same issue, some ludic sessions of massage and relaxations, artistic and recreational activities, information about services and programs for women, art and crafts exhibitions, and social gatherings (Infante, 1995). The topics ranged from the immigration and refugee process, violence against women, reclaiming herbal remedies, discussions on feminism, mental health, cancer, AIDS, reproductive rights and sexuality, the political and social presence of women in Latin America, menopause, discussions on relationships and “what is love,” professional development, identity, youth, the role of women in the family, women with disabilities, racism, indigenous women, elderly women, lesbophobia, women and art, how to write creatively, movement, and expression. There was even a graffiti workshop/demonstration for youth organized by a young Latina, the only female graffiti artists in the city. In addition, tables were rented to community groups and organizations so they could offer the community not only products made by women but also provide more information about services and agencies in Toronto.

The Encuentro was able to touch every agency, not necessarily Latin American agencies but also mainstream agencies where there were Spanish-speaking workers, women that came to LACEV in order to be able to coordinate and give a better service to Latin American women. (Loly Rico, El Salvador)

The array of topics and themes and the fact that they were repeated throughout the event for maximum participation became a priority for the organizers:

We tried to offer the most of what we could, to respond to all that was expected and the needs that could arise, from having massages, to bioenergy, women could paint, they could sing, they could debate, they could take [political] positions, they could learn about

149 This is particularly interesting in the context that in Turtle Island (Canada), such popular art and political expressions have been criminalized. For Latin Americans, graffiti is very much related to a muralist tradition.

immigration, about health, about cancer, reproductive health…” (Lilian Valverde and Jeannethe Lara, Chile & Colombia)

The methodology used by most of the facilitators who participated in the Encounter was based on popular education techniques. The balance between providing much-needed information and knowledge to women and providing a space where women could voice their concerns, needs, fears, and hopes was maintained quite successfully. The facilitators came from the community. Thus, one of the main differences with other mainstream events was that there were no “experts.” This does not mean that the women who facilitated the workshop were not highly qualified on their fields. Popular education acknowledges that everyone is an expert in her or his own life. Pains were taken to have facilitators who were representative of the community, including those from outside Toronto and from different nationalities and geographic areas. These women all had to be in agreement with the Encounter’s objectives, principles, and philosophy. This clearly reflects the ethos of the Latin American Encounters in that women “rejected formal leadership roles, claims to specialized knowledge of expertise, and representational schemes of any sort” (Alvarez, 2000: 37).

Culturally, is also important to underline the role of art in the social struggles that have taken place in Latin America. From the Mexican muralists to militant poets and novelists, art as been inherent in the lives of Latin Americans regardless of class. In fact, in some countries it was only through art, theatre, and music that resistance found a voice to struggle against dictatorships. *Peñas*, as discussed in Chapter 4, were political and artistic events that included typical foods and drinks, and were a distinctive organizing style that came from Latin America. Art and culture were being used “as privileged venues in the quest for new modes of communication and sociability” (Alvarez, 2000). Thus, offering dance, theatre, and poetry was an element that was immediately included in the development of the Encounter. This kind of methodology embraced a “‘new feminist ethic’…embedded in a form of cultural feminism…” (Alvarez et al., 2003: 558). This was very different from the experience of women in the solidarity movement where the women shouldered the grunt work of these cultural expressions, whereas men controlled the political expressions of the events. Therefore, in addition to having discussions about pressing issues in the community, there was almost a balance on the number of workshops that

---

151 Lilian Valverde and Jeannethe Lara, interview, Toronto, Ontario, April 14, 2017.
emphasized the care, understanding, knowledge, and reclaiming of the body via corporal and artistic expressions from modern dance, folk dancing, theatre, and play. To identifying “women’s values,” perspectives, knowledges, and experiences brought a sense of recognizing the strength, the endurance, and the courage of being a Latin American woman. This space became in essence a “liberated zone” where women were able to meet other women and get to know them, where self-expression was allowed in all its magnitude, where intergenerational debate was fostered and encouraged in workshops specifically designed for these discussions.

In the spirit of the Peñas and the particular way Latin American do politics, culture was a central part of the event. The Encounter had the participation of more than 25 female artists from amateurs to professionals. The opening ceremony included performance, dance from folk to modern, music, poetry, and theatre from a variety of artists. On Saturday and Sunday there was a permanent exhibition where women exhibited their photography, paintings, sculptures, and crafts. Women-focused documentaries and movies were shown all day. And on Saturday night there was a women-only dance that included more artistic performances. A Latino restaurant located on College Street graciously sponsored the Saturday peña. The aim of this celebration was to establish friendship links in an atmosphere of harmony.

Not unpredictably, controversies did take place at the Encounter. The main controversy had to do with the ill-timed cancellation of one of the workshops about lesbianism geared toward heterosexual women. The lesbian woman who had volunteered to facilitate this workshop cancelled at the last minute because of personal reasons. This prompted some women to try to enter the workshop organized by and only for lesbian and bisexual women. When this workshop was declared out of bounds some women felt excluded from this particular space.

The lesbian and bisexual women who participated in the workshop were very aware that many of the participants were still in the closet and needed a safe space to meet other women and to talk about their issues. However, when the heterosexual women and perhaps even women who were “questioning” their sexuality were turned away the response was accusatory and hostile. One woman wrote a comment on the poster outside the door calling the participants “separatists.” In retrospect, one of the organizers stated:

Maybe there was a morbid curiosity to find out what this was, others perhaps held a genuine desire to meet them, and to confirm that they don’t have three eyes, but that they
are simply women with a different sexual orientation, but I think that for many this was a threat. (Lilian Valverde and Jeannethe Lara, Chile & Colombia)

The lesbian and bisexual women galvanized around this assault and as a group they read a statement during lunchtime defending their right to have a space of their own. During lunchtime, Lara produced and read a statement on behalf of the organizing committee, again reiterating the official position that lesbians and bisexual women needed to have a space of their own. At this time, one woman who had written one of the comments got up and explained that the comment was not homophobic but that she was genuinely interested in learning about lesbian issues. She argued, “I was told that this was a space open for all, and now I find certain doors closed!” (Gonzalez & Fombona, 1996). The event escalated when the mother of one of the lesbian women took issue with the comments. In the video Un Espacio para Todas (A space For All), one of the main organizers of the lesbian workshop, the art exhibit, and the video about the Encuentro, Javiera Fombona, stated that, “to me the controversy was positive because it gave us visibility” (Gonzalez & Fombona, 1996). And visibility had been the main demand that lesbians had pushed for in other feminist Encuentros. Although lesbians had been an integral part of all the organizing efforts, it was still very difficult for them to put their issues in the feminist agenda. Many feminists were weary of admitting that lesbians were such a central part of the movement because the Left had used this accusation to “discredit” the movement (Alvarez et al., 2003). Thus, lesbians in Latin America, in order to confront invisibility within the movement, organized a Network of Latin American and Caribbean Lesbian Feminists, which held it first region-wide meeting in 1987 and has continued to organize Encounters.

The incident in the Encuentro in Toronto compelled the organizers to make a public statement clarifying why certain spaces where exclusively for some groups. For the lesbians and bisexual women who participated it was vital to have a space that allowed them not only to talk about a sexual identity but also to strategize about self-determination (Mogrovejo, 2010).

Furthermore, the issue that has been called euphemistically “regionalism” also emerged in a divisive manner in the Encounter. What has been called regionalism amongst Latinas/os in Turtle Island (Canada) reflects an enduring contempt for Afro-descendants and indigenous people.

---

152 Lilian Valverde and Jeannethe Lara, interview, Toronto, Ontario, April 14, 2017.
Racism in Latin America is widespread, yet it has been only recently that progressive and Left-leaning people and governments have begun to tackle issues of racism and discrimination directly. Discrimination and prejudice based on race have been blatant and brutal in Latin America, yet this particular oppression many times has been ignored by national states and suppressed under the umbrella term of “class” by the Left-wing theorists and the popular movements of the sixties and seventies (Mignolo, 2005; Jiménez-Bellver, 2010; Arat-Koç, 2010; Gates, 2011). It has been only recently that issues of race as pertaining to Afro-descendants and indigenous groups have flourished with struggles of their own that might even be critical or opposed to Left-wing movements and rhetoric. Thus, we have grown up with associations of *mestizaje*, that is, mixed-race politics as a desirable path were traces of indigenous origins would be tempered by the civilizing effect of European blood (Vasconcelos 1925; Mato, 1997; 2003). For example, Argentinians and Uruguayans had been countries with a lot of European migration, especially from Italy, which has affected the racial make-up of these countries, coupled with the politics of extermination that saw the “disappearance” of Afro-descendants and indigenous populations (Arat-Koç, 2010; Castillo, 2013). Chile, on the other hand, was a more mixed population, although efforts to exterminate the indigenous populations were, and continue to be, a priority for different governments.

As discussed in Chapter 3, issues of racism and discrimination have emerged in the Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encounters in Latin America and have led to the creation of identity-based networks and Encounters. These initiatives have been accompanied by an increase in the epistemic production of Indigenous feminisms and Black feminisms. These issues have also appeared in the community work based in Toronto, as discussed in Chapter 5.

In the Latin American and Caribbean Women’s Encounter in Ontario, Central American women caucused in order to discuss issues of networking, isolation, and priorities that particularly affected them. At this point, some Chilean women felt that this was an exclusionary practice and that if Chilean women were to meet on their own they would be called to task. According to the organizers:

> When the Central American women wanted to meet, the others asked, why? If we are all the same, women and Latinas… I believe that Latin Americans in general we have Simón
Bolivar’s dream, it’s there hidden in our collective memory…that we can be one [America] but in order to be that, we need to recognize our differences. (Lilian Valverde and Jeannethe Lara, Chile & Colombia).

For Central American women this meeting was vital to come together as women who had faced particular political histories, who needed to connect and to reinforce that women are diverse:

We also touched on the myths…that we were all Latinas; but we had different experiences that we had lived in the different countries and these experiences were not recognized. At that moment, we had been assimilated …that is why there was conflict. It was a moment of growth…. In the Encuentro we tried to identify and resolve those themes and issues. There was confrontation when the Central American women caucused…. There was a necessity to have a separation to identify, to recognize the differences between countries that for me was growth, it was painful, like any birth, because we ended up pulling each other’s hair [metaphorically]. We fought because not everyone has a broad way of thinking. [Central American women] had an immense need to keep our identity because we had been historically oppressed, and we wanted to stop being oppressed and unrecognized, invisible. (Loly Rico, El Salvador)

Another factor to add to the racial, class, and national tensions often posing in the context of regionalisms was linked to the fact that many of the exiles from the Southern Cone were fairly privileged and able to secure employment in universities and social agencies. In fact, many of these people had created such agencies. Therefore, when people from Central America arrived in Turtle Island (Canada), it was mostly Chileans, Uruguayans, and Argentinians who were positioned in community agencies. It was here that the racial tensions erupted with Chileans, Argentinians, and Uruguayans on one side and Salvadoreans and Guatemalans on the other. It is also important to recognize that amidst the regionalism the erasure of blackness is pervasive in all of Latin America, as Loly Rico emphasizes:

153 Simon Bolivar was key in the liberation of South American countries from Spanish rule. His dream was to establish a unified Latin America that could face imperialist threats.
154 Lilian Valverde and Jeannethe Lara, interview, Toronto, Ontario, April 14, 2017.
156 In Turtle Island (Canada), there was no formalized policy that recognized refugees as a distinct class of entrant until the 1976 Immigration Act (which went into effect in 1978). In fact, Turtle Island (Canada) was reluctant to accept Chilean exiles and it was only after being pressured by lobbying groups of activists that Turtle Island (Canada) accepted refugees under a special program based on the point system. Therefore, the exiles tended to be middle class and highly educated because the process of selection made it so. After 1978, Turtle Island (Canada) opened its doors to refugees as a separate class, allowing for a lot more diversity in terms of class and education.
One thing in the Encounter that became obvious was the invisibility and ignorance that as Latin American women we have with respect to Afro Latin American women. Because you see it as something natural, but then you realize that there is no voice from them, in the *Encuentro* we wanted to touch on that, but we didn’t really and it hasn’t been covered, we don’t speak about it. It is like a silence. (Loly Rico, El Salvador)\(^\text{157}\)

Therefore, it was not surprising that these tensions also appeared in the First Latin American and Caribbean Women’s Encounter in Toronto. Needless to say, the recognition of power relations based on class or colour of skin was sorely missing in some of the participants. Indeed, this was clearly reflected in the workshop on racism that found that participants keenly aware of the racism that they encountered under the homogenizing label of Latinas/os, but would adamantly deny the existence of racism within the community or in our countries of origin.

All in all, organizers managed miraculously to keep these issues from rupturing the Encounter. This is not to say that it was not evidently urgent to open the dialogue on these issues. And therefore, as an interim measure, the organizers committed themselves to confront these issues by organizing two follow-up workshops: one about homophobia and one about racism (regionalism).

As a final task of the organizing committee, an exhaustive report was developed that basically recounted almost all the workshops and their conclusions and recommendations for further work (Lara et al., 1995). Sadly most of the organizing committee disbanded at this point and there was little publicity for such a groundbreaking report. LACEV did try to make good on its promises during the Encounter: an anti-homophobia workshop and an anti-racism workshop were organized to provide an opportunity to educate the community about these issues and to continue the discussion that had been initiated at the Encounter. Once again, it was the anti-racism workshop that produced more acrimony amongst the participants. The issue of discrimination/racism within the community may have only begun to be discussed with the advent of the Latin American Coalition Against Racism.\(^\text{158}\) In addition, there was also a post-

---


\(^{158}\) The Latin American Coalition against Racism (LACAR) emerged as a community response to a poster that the Toronto Police Association erected at a subway station that depicted a group of Latino youth and labelled them “rapists, drug pushers and pimps.” LACAR organized numerous workshops and events where the issue of racism within and against the community was analyzed, debated, and discussed. Interestingly, the group was composed
Encounter meeting that took place at the Women’s Health in Women’s Hands Community Health Centre. This one-day meeting was in a much smaller scale than the Encounter as only about 100 women participated. Perhaps just as with the Encounters in Latin America, the post-Encuentros aimed to smooth out frictions that, although may have not been resolved, allowed for some negotiation of feminist identities.

In general, however, the lingering feelings about the Encuentro were very positive. Lara synthesizes these emotions when she concludes,

For me the Encounter was wonderful. I believe that it is one of those experiences that are never to be repeated. Never. Because it was a collective effort, an effort from all the women, big, small everyone made a contribution. They offered their house, their car. They organized something. They volunteered somewhere else. The majority of women offered something. There was a very open spirit. It was an ambitious project. When I got offered the job, I thought ‘how are we going to do this’? But it happened. I only had to make sure that everything coordinated. The rest of the women were all volunteers. It was an ambitions project that covered absolutely everything. This is what we are, everything that was here is what the community is, all the possible human resources to organize about 150 workshops, it was incredible. It was successful. There was commitment, disposition and more than the desire for this event to occur. (Jeannethe Lara, Colombian)\textsuperscript{159}

29 Conclusion

In the video Un Espacio para Todas, it is clear that the range of diversity that was reflected by the participants was an unparalleled experience. It is an amazing thing to observe women from all walks of life, bubbling with energy, laughing and excited. The video also shows that some of the concerns prior to the event did not disappear completely, as two mature women observe that “there is something missing from the Encuentro: the men” (Gonzalez & Fombona, 1996). Other women still reeled about what they considered not enough of a feminist stance to deal with what was perceived as homophobic attitudes regarding the incident with the lesbian workshop. The desire for unity and to celebrate feminism as a liberatory praxis led to a conscious and

\textsuperscript{159} Jeannethe Lara, interview Toronto, Ontario, July 26, 2017.
unconscious effort to minimize differences and compress conflicts that may have led to ruptures; as Alvarez notes, “the reduction of differences to a form of feminist pluralism makes it seem as though all feminisms and feminists operate equally on the same social terrain and fails to grapple with how that terrain is fractured by profound social and economic inequities and forms of prejudice” (Alvarez et al., 2003: 566).

The avoidance of dealing with inequality and privilege under the guise of “diversity” has prolonged the debate about racial, socio-economic, and sexual orientation difference. This desire for unity to become a political force may seem understandable but in fact limits the movement’s potential for change. To the organizers’ knowledge there were no indigenous women present in the Encuentro and only a handful of Afro-descendant women.

Furthermore, it has been impossible to provide a continuation to the Encounter and concretize the report recommendations, which has troubled the organizers the most. It can be argued that this great opportunity was squandered in that the Encuentro failed to develop more concrete political strategizing and only presented a shopping list of problems in the plenary and the Final Report. This has been a heavy burden, since it has been felt that the organizers were unable to respond to the women’s expectations; Lilian Valverde, summarizes this feeling, stated that, “It’s like opening a door. You don’t know what is going to happen. This door is very dangerous when you do not have the capacity to respond, because you raise enormous expectations…” (Valverde & Lara, interview, 2017).

Nonetheless, the First Encounter of Latin American and Caribbean Women in Toronto led to the conclusion that Latin American women needed to organize in a more holistic and integrative manner. It was concluded that dealing with violence was only one aspect of dealing with women’s issues in Canada, and that in order to engage in broader, systematic organizing around life for Latin American women it was necessary to also become more politically present in the Canadian polity.

Consequently, the one thing that everyone agreed on was that there was a great need to raise more awareness about Latina feminist subjectivities in order to engage more efficiently in mainstream organizations to affect policy. It was out of the fractures, ruptures, and points of agreement that MUJER was born.
Chapter 7

30 Introduction

In the new millennium, feminist currents, ideologies, and praxis are experiencing or undergoing fundamental revisions to their ways of thinking and acting. Arguably, feminisms are becoming more complex and nuanced in the struggles they have taken on. Indeed, the advent of neo-liberalism and its chaotic aftermath has also produced “the disintegration of old paradigms” (Waterman, 2006 as quoted in Vargas, 2009). As Virginia Vargas (2009) observes, there are two significant changes:

The first is the possibility of recovering a politics not located solely in “the state” but also in society and in daily life. The second is the prospect of transcending one’s own location to connect and debate ideas with other groups oriented toward change, which broadens the emancipatory horizon and has the potential to create a counterpower to confront (and offer alternatives to) the hegemonic power and discourses we face. (Vargas, 2009: 150)

In the 2000s feminist Latin American women and agencies in Toronto strived to continue to work from a strategic position vis à vis the Canadian state while at the same time continuing the dialogic relationship with Latin American feminisms, incorporating a more nuanced and complex position, especially with regards to issues of race and sexual orientation. After LACEV’s First Latin American and Caribbean Women’s Encounter, a steering committee was established to follow the mandate of the Encounter. Thus, in 2003 MUJER emerged as a new feminist Latina organization that endeavoured to engage in a new Latina feminist political praxis, with varying degrees of success.

In this chapter I will examine a number of the projects that the organization engaged in, but I will focus primarily on three pioneering projects that reflected the vision, philosophy, and radical pedagogy that best described the organic development of the organization: (1) leadership training and other educational initiatives; (2) the Latina feminisms course; and (3) the anti-violence campaign that targeted men in the community. Finally, I will offer some critiques of the work of MUJER.
31 The Latin American Women’s Group, MUJER

MUJER was an exercise in nurturing a democratic, transcultural, and transformative vision by “incorporating subjectivity into the transformation of social relations” (Jaquette, 2009). It was paramount for the development of MUJER’s philosophy to understand that discrimination based on race, ethnicity, nationality, class, gender, age, sexual orientation, and migration status are linked as constitutive elements of a nucleus of domination. Therefore, it was imperative that MUJER committed to a transformative, educational raising of consciousness, an emancipatory intention that would undermine traditional patriarchal discourses from the Canadian mainstream and from the Latin American community. MUJER was to engage whole heartedly in increasing women’s “impertinent forms of knowledge” (Mafia, 2000 as quoted in Vargas, 2009). Feminist organizations throughout the Americas have “encouraged the tendency to move toward a politics of ‘recognition’ as distinct from the politics of ‘redistribution’ that characterized much of the twentieth century” (Fraser, 2003 as quoted in Jaquette, 2009: 209); in the Toronto landscape, there was an effort by MUJER to engage with both the politics of recognition and redistribution. MUJER was envisioned as a grassroots/NGO that attempted to bring together a multiplicity of meaning to Latin American feminist work in Toronto. Lagarde argues that “all the NGOs have become alternative spaces of education…pedagogical spaces” (2000). This assertion, however, has been bitterly criticized by many grassroots groups, especially in Latin America; hence, MUJER had to balance being precariously funded by the state and maintaining a degree of autonomy to pursue more radical aims. In this vein, MUJER’s conscious choice not to become a service provider stems from the analysis that perhaps “helping” or “assisting” hampers the development of citizenship, and in fact limits struggles against material and symbolic exclusions (Lagarde, 2000). Alejandra Priego (interview, 2017) admits that these discussions were already taking place with LACEV, especially when funding for issues of violence was becoming exhausted.

Please note that here I am not referring to Glen Sean Coulthard’s (2014) “politics of recognition.” In Red Skin White Masks he argues that the language of recognition has been used to refer to Indigenous cultural distinctiveness, Indigenous rights to the land and to self-government, and the right to benefit from their resources. Coulthard challenges the assumption that Indigenous people and White settlers in Canada can reconcile via a politics of recognition. I am referring to simply being recognized as an active community in the political landscape.
After the Encuentro, a steering committee was established in June 1997 in consultation with LACEV members and women activists from the community. Its mandate was to initiate the development of the framework, mission, and philosophy of “our dream organization.” In November 2001, the committee held a large consultation with women in the community to set some priorities around services, programs, and activities for the organization. On January 15, 2002, MUJER was officially established, becoming incorporated in February 2003 as a non-profit organization. Since 2003, MUJER has engaged in numerous innovative projects that were based on some radical concepts such as autonomy, the use of radical pedagogies, the fluid understanding of identity and language, and the provision of a safe space.

MUJER was established after the First Latin American and Caribbean Women’s Encounter to respond to the need for an integrative approach to Latin American women’s issues. A place was needed in which to construct alternative political and cultural meanings for Latin American women. The difference between grassroots organizations such as the Latin American Women’s Collective or the Mujeres al Frente\textsuperscript{161} group and MUJER reflects the debates about autonomy and state sponsorship that took place in the 1990s in Latin America. Although these differences had been not been discussed in depth in Toronto, it does not mean that they didn’t exist. In fact, the emergence of MUJER came during a hiatus when the LACEV coordinator suffered a stroke and the organization was left without direction. A hastily organized meeting was called and about 13 women from the community showed up to establish this organization without any funding. When the coordinator came back she took control of the new organization once again and began to look for funding (Priego, interview, 2017).

As a result of the Encuentro, it was obvious that a feminist women’s organization should expand its focus beyond violence to include a more integral approach to Latina issues and struggles. At the time, other agencies and services (thanks to the pioneering work of LAWC and LACEV), and existing funding priorities had expanded their mandates to include work on violence against women. With the more ruthless entrenchment of neo-liberal politics, however, it was also clear

\textsuperscript{161} Mujeres Al Frente was a group composed of lesbian and women-identified queers who arrived in the 2000s. Their group provided support with issues of immigration and refugee status. They also organized around labour issues.
that the priorities for funding agencies were changing, severely limiting or decimating the more radical community work that relied on such funding (Incite!, 2007).

32 Changing Social Landscapes

Throughout the 1990s, the both federal and provincial government began to change the way they funded the non-profit sector. This trend has been constant with the continual decrease of social funding under austerity measures, and has affected relationships within the immigrant community and government sectors, having profound implications for programs, services, and support provided to diverse communities. In 2003, the Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD) explained this trend:

The changes in funding mechanisms were more profound than just cutbacks…the relationship itself between government and non-profit and voluntary sector organizations changed. The new relationship is reflective of a philosophy that introduced values associated with the private marketplace: competition, diversification, entrepreneurialism, innovation, focus on the bottom line… A number of organizations that have traditionally received an annual government grant to support their work, which left them a degree of autonomy in directing their own affairs, lost all or most of their core funding. Instead, they were left to apply for project funding targeted to certain priority areas or to enter purchase-for-service contracts with government ministries and departments for delivery of specified programs. (Scott, 2003: 8)

As Mandy Bonisteel and Linda Green argued, these new provisions in the Federal Charities Act had a particular negative effect on feminist anti-violence advocacy (2005). Feminist agencies face the fact that their direct participation and influence in policy-making and legislative change is severely limited by the changes to social feminist activism. MUJER, as a non-profit agency, did not have charitable status. In fact, the application for such status was denied by Revenue Canada on the basis that MUJER’s work did not fit with the current definition of a charitable organization (Canada Revenue Agency, 2010). Arguably, the fact that MUJER didn’t have a charitable status may have allowed the organization to have more freedom to continue its radical educational projects and to continue to foster “active citizenship” (Rebick, 2005).

MUJER’s focus became the development of popular education programs that would provide young Latin American women with a feminist basis of analysis that could be deployed to deal with violence (as the funding required), but it also provided analytical tools to understand
violence in a broader kind of way—encompassing state violence, sexism, patriarchal violence, poverty, racism, and discrimination. MUJER’s mission statement outlines that

MUJER is an organization that promotes the integral development of Latin American Women, emphasizing their rights and freedom. MUJER promotes programs, resources, and services that respond to the needs of Latin-American Women and youth. (MUJER, 2015)

Since the key word in the statement is “integral,” the organization highlights educational opportunities that would share knowledge, skills, and values with Latin American women. Accordingly, curriculum development became key in terms of disseminating a feminist agenda that would go beyond the funding requirements. A number of women participated in the development of the curricula and its implementation. Most of these “experts” worked in social agencies that facilitated and encouraged network connections with grassroots organizations. These individuals and their organizations donated “expert” time and also logistical support for the success of the programs. Camila de Maza Vent arrived from Chile in 2008 with a solid past in political engagement with the student movement and traditional party militancy. She admitted this kind of work was new to her:

Women, like me, were looking for a place to be, to share, where one could complain; I think that is a very Latin American thing. It was like here all of us have a place. We would organize discussions about refugee status, not because we had funding but because another volunteer person had the information and was willing to give a workshop on it. So, not everything was based on the capacity of the organization to have funds, and I think that was because of the spirit, of the first Latinas that came to Toronto. That regardless if they had any funding there was a spirit of collaboration. (Camila de la Maza, Chilean)\textsuperscript{162}

The stated philosophy of MUJER included an analysis of the social and political background that women in general face from living in patriarchal societies. Furthermore, it distinctly recognized that although women were unified on the basis of gender, “there are social, cultural and economic inequalities that may allocate certain privileges to some women and not to others” and thus, MUJER believed “women’s holistic development to be rooted in women’s own realities,” and ultimately sought to “build equality by fighting to eliminate and prevent different forms of oppression that affect women” (mujer.ca, 2017). It also becomes clear that Latin American

\textsuperscript{162} Camila de la Meza Vent, interview Toronto, Ontario, February 18, 2017.
women want to have a place in the Canadian nation, because the new generations are here to stay. The objectives of MUJER (2015) were:

- To promote the integral development of all Latin American women including Aboriginal and women of African descent
- To encourage the representation of Latin American women at all social and political levels in Canadian society
- To advocate for policies and inclusive structures for Latin American women within the Canadian society
- To support Latin American women who carry out political and leading actions that agreed with our mandate, vision, and mission
- To promote changes to Legislation that is sexist and discriminatory towards women

Thus the public face of MUJER stressed the need for the development and implementation of educational workshops, training, and campaigns that dealt with issues that affect Latin American women and girls in Canada. The understanding of what education meant, however, was radically different—education to Latin American women who came from the Left meant political consciousness and agency. Thus, MUJER had a “deeper” mission of raising political awareness and giving political voice to multiple sectors of Latin American women.

The term “autonomy” has had a long history and range of meanings in Latin America. Originally coined to define independence or rejection of the traditional parties of the Left, presently it is being used to define independence from the state or NGOs (Alvarez 2000; Jaquette 2009). However, a more nuanced definition of autonomy is one that strives “as an individual and collective commitment to claiming arenas from which to transform women’s lives and society as a whole” (Alvarez et al., 2003: 557). For MUJER, autonomy reflected a desire to not be coerced into providing services, but rather to be able to focus on areas of consciousness raising through education and defining the value or criterion for accessing citizenship. Thus autonomy leads to the social responsibility to demand economic and social justice. For MUJER, educating women about gender, class, race, ethnicity, human rights, and other topics was meant to provide tools for individual choice that would allow them to engage with an exclusionary political system,
understanding that social change requires coming together with others to be able to successfully organize for structural changes.

Marcela Lagarde speaks of two processes for feminist pedagogies, the first acculturation, which she defines as the transmission of culture and innovation, and the second enculturation, in which women learn from other women (Lagarde, 2000). This second pedagogy is always challenging because power relations permeate women’s relationships. In a culture that may favour women’s ignorance, or mythologize spontaneity and pragmatism, we may put women into disadvantageous positions. They may ascend to higher positions but they occupy these spaces without resources and political capacity (Lagarde, 2000). One of the clear notions that stemmed from the Encounter was precisely that knowledge is a precondition of empowerment. The definition of empowerment that was most useful for MUJER was one that defined it as

the set of processes through which each person integrates to her life resources, goods and rights obtained as powers. Empowerment is a continuous action in time, it’s not something that happens in the moment, it is to take resources from the world for our own life, it is to appropriate. The key is that these external processes turn into our own resources when the person internalizes the resources, the goods, the rights and power, and she uses them to live. (Lagarde, 2000: 40)

What MUJER wanted was the political formación\(^1\) of women. As a result, in order to critique and change the established order, MUJER needed to develop resources.

As LACEV had previously done, MUJER also made use of “transforming theories of adult learning” (Bishop & Fay, 2004) and popular education techniques to promote critical consciousness, enable people to understand how their situation is shaped by systemic inequalities, and motivate them toward collective action for change. Freire’s method is based on the concept of dialogue from a particular communicational perspective, closely linked to the concept of praxis and consciousness raising (Freire, 1970; Rodríguez, 2003). Education and consciousness are never neutral but are in constant relation with the surrounding reality. Critical education challenges learners to think, to problematize, and not to memorize or accept something as if it is final. Thus, education is conceived as a constant process of “liberation” for human

---

\(^{1}\) The word formación means both training and education in Spanish; it was also a lexicon used in the political Left. Here it usually means acquiring a political praxis. The verb “to mold” or “to develop” might also reflect a more accurate meaning. I have chosen “to develop.”
beings. MUJER assumes a feminist praxis that is the conjunction of action and reflection based on a Freirian philosophy of knowledge production: education as the practice of liberty and constant transformation of reality (Freire, 1970; Rodriguez, 2003). As Freire stated:

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (Freire, 1970: 34)

The educational method is that of transmission and production of knowledge, linked to the action of transforming the world, with participants who bring their own visions of the world. In order for the individual to practice freedom they must do something with the acquired learning. As Claudia Huerta, coordinator of the first leadership training, commented to a community newspaper, “We hope that wherever these young Latin America women go they help promote change, that they develop as political beings and pass the information around” (Méndez, 2005).

MUJER also integrated aspects of liberal experiential education, which is the participation of the facilitators as learner as well as teachers. Bishop refers to this pedagogical method as follows:

The facilitator brings a knowledge of the process, the conceptual framework of the course and the initial content to the session, but apart from that, he or she takes risks, is exposed to surprise, pain, joy, confusion, re-evaluation and all the reactions involved in deep personal learning, and models of the openness to learning that is encouraged in the students. (Bishop & Fay, 2004: 19)

The leadership program, for example, acknowledged and recognized the vast reservoir of expertise that resided in the community. And therefore it proposed a collaborative pedagogical practice that included the sharing of expertise and mentorship from women in the community to participants in the training. Acknowledging the “community as a site of knowledge and empowerment” (Gajardo, 2009) is in itself a radical notion when mainstream stereotypical images tend to construct the community as one that is forever marginalized and lacking skills and knowledge (de la Riva-Holly, 2012; Lugo-Lugo, 2012).

The facilitators developed their presentations taking into consideration that the leadership training purported to be an alternative space for learning and putting into practice this learning. This collaborative or sharing model was imbedded into the leadership training that then required
participants to share their own knowledge and the skills acquired in the training to conduct peer education in the community.

A number of cross-border authors, such as Gómez-Peña and Junot Diaz, have incorporated the use of Spanglish into their literature. In his very interesting dissertation, Jiménez-Bellver (2010) discusses the strategic uses of language to represent hybridity not only by excluding dominant languages but “inducing the reader to reconsider the mechanisms that define and homogenize language as it interacts with identity” (41). In MUJER the use of Spanglish has been a crucial tool to not only define and complicate identity but also show the organization’s willingness to provide a space of belonging and challenge the idea that in order to be a Latina one must speak the language. In fact, the use of Spanglish recognizes the complexity of migratory identity and could destabilize notions of authenticity. As Jimenez-Bellver succinctly articulates: “Quite to the contrary so-called hybrid tongues function as points of access to ethnocentric assumptions in contemporary societies about assumptions of ‘pure’ and ‘contaminated’ languages as informed by national arrangements” (2010: 42).

Young people, in particular, continually face issues of identity. It has been argued that many young people, in this neo-liberal phase, have not found a place to belong, a space that allows them to build a sense of belonging, which would facilitate spaces for expression and can reaffirm them as citizens and individuals that are part of and shape the place where they live (Quesada Ugalde, 2003). This sentiment is exacerbated by living in a host country that will always remind those who are racialized that they are immigrants (even though some might have been born here) and therefore “foreigners” (Priego, interview, 2017; Gaztambide-Fernández & Guerrero, 2011).

In the evaluation of the MUJER’s leadership training (San Martin, 2009) it was clear that young women who participated needed to be with other women like themselves: young, “Latinas,” culturally hybrid—this was one of the most important aspects of the training. The fact that training was exclusively for Latin American women was the main draw for them. There is something quite powerful to be able to say your complete name without having it mispronounced or shortened because of what is perceived as expediency. As Gajardo discusses, the process of young women positively identifying as Latinas means that “they have a personal and political interest in forming an active part of the Latin American community in Toronto…it is through this positive identification with latinidad that these young women will be able to commit
themselves to ongoing feminist and anti-oppressive work with the Latin American community” (Gajardo, 2009).

In this society it has been obvious that there is a lack of space for women to meet and to talk about their issues in a place that is not service oriented. MUJER provided a space where alternative feminist identities and educational projects could be constituted and strategized. In radical pedagogies, it is a novel idea that “a non-profit, community-based ‘third sector’ which would operate outside of both state—and privately-funded educational systems” (Richard Day as quoted in Jeppesen & Latif, 2007) can provide an alternative to hierarchical university structures. Inclusive in the analysis of any anti-oppression pedagogy is that it is not limited to a theory but it must be taught as praxis. As Jeppesen and Latif forcefully state when talking about anti-racist education in the space of a university:

To pontificate on end about racism and inequalities and unlearning internalized prejudices from behind the institutional protection of a racist and domineering institution is bad enough. But to then not do anything beyond speaking—to remain with the sterilized comfortable borders confining the podium, to extract education and action from the day-to-day to the safe remove of academic cloister, to believe that merely speaking in (or from) rarefied air makes a difference—that is so disappointing it just straight up hurts. (Jeppesen & Latif, 2007: 16)

Alejandra Cabezas came to Canada from Nicaragua in 2003 to study a master’s degree. As the daughter of two comandantes in the Nicaraguan revolution, she says that she didn’t become a feminist, she grew up as one. Alejandra was key to MUJER’s second leadership training and she explains the crucial aspect of praxis to the educational projects that MUJER organized:

MUJER was not only successful in instilling a feminist consciousness, but it went beyond that, you can get that in university, or you can get that in college, we went beyond that. It was to tell them “now it’s your responsibility to do something”, you cannot wait for your neighbour to do it. What are you going to do with regards to this? This is where we innovated…to make women an agent of change. To say no my dear, if you wait, who is going to fight for your rights? The White woman? She’s going to leave you waiting. If this affects you, why are you not going to change it? You have to be the one to challenge it. You have to be the one to change it. (Alejandra Cabezas, Nicaragua)\textsuperscript{164}

\textsuperscript{164} Alejandra Cabezas, interview, Toronto, Ontario, March 9, 2017.
MUJER endeavoured then to be a productive space of transformation, not only imparting information and skills, but also attempting to put into action knowledge obtained in relation to the larger Latin American community and the position of the community within mainstream Canadian society. Lilian Valverde emphasized that the basis of the program was “to take control of our own learning” (Inclan, 2005). Radical pedagogies and an inclusive space geared to Latinas was the combination of factors that made the programs successful. Lorena Gajardo, who has been studying issues of identity performativity and construction among young adults of Latin American descent, has found that many express the importance of finding spaces in the community that would welcome them as equal participants (2009). It is really interesting how these projects compared to radical or revolutionary projects being organized by women in Latin America; Alejandra Cabezas (interview, 2017), for example, remarks that this project might have not been really innovative in the context of Nicaragua. On the other hand, Chilean society, having survived a brutal dictatorship and its imposition of neo-liberal policies, may not have had the opportunity to develop radical feminist grassroots models. Camila de la Maza, when she went back to Chile, took these models, replicated these approaches, and organized with women from marginalized neighbourhoods (de la Meza Vent, interview, 2017). Perhaps this best exemplifies the hemispheric travelling and trafficking of theories and projects that are presently taking place in the Americas (Alvarez et al., 2014).

The organization also aimed to make social and analytical links as a social space of experience that expanded both locally and globally. Arguably, MUJER did receive funding from the state but it maintained a rather solid consciousness of autonomy. And as Alvarez states, when talking about feminist non-profit organizations in Latin American, the creation of a social space, albeit one supported by the state, has provided the much-sought “autonomy” from the Left and other agencies that relegated women’s issues to the sidelines (Alvarez et. al., 2003: 542). In the case of Toronto, MUJER provided that autonomy with regards to organizations such as the Hispanic Council or other community organizations that continue to set aside, disregard, or ignore women’s issues.

MUJER advocated for an intersectional analysis of gender equality by integrating, for example, workshops and debates on race and racism within and without the community; sexual orientation
and queer issues; issues of police brutality; and discussions on educational discrimination.\textsuperscript{165} There was a constant effort to make connections to Latinas and their struggle for labour and civil rights, by supporting research and concrete labour actions. There was a keen awareness in the organization that Latinas faced harsh economic realities. Lilian Valverde, when interviewed at a celebration of International Women’s Day, emphasized that there wasn’t a lot to celebrate: “Women continue to earn lower salaries here in Canada and in Latin America. They continue to be victims of gender, class and racial discrimination. Similarly, the huge segregation of indigenous women, continues to be a severe problem” (Teves, 2009).

33 Teaching Leadership: A Latina Feminist Praxis

MUJER as an organization conceptualized “leadership” very differently from the model endorsed in advanced capitalist societies, which tend to understand leadership as narratives about individuals, generally white men. These narratives reflect the values and assumptions of the industrial model, that is, they have a “management” oriented bias that focuses on self-interested, goal-oriented behaviour, utilitarian, rationalistic, and linear thinking, and individuals (San Martin, 2009). The “great man theory” focuses on “heroic” deeds rather than everyday collective actions, which have been explained as a result of men’s supernatural (theological) and/or natural (biological) ability and desire to lead (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Palestini, 2013). Feminist conceptions of leadership, on the other hand, extoll “open discussion and democratic participation, shares resources and promotes feminist values of collaboration and consensus building that empowers all participants” (Bernice Lott, 2007 as quoted in Gajardo, 2009: 136).

Historically, women have been invisible in sexist and essentializing “leader narratives” that defined women as the “weaker sex” and, therefore, assumed that they were incapable of leadership because of their “nature.” As feminist, Latin American women, however, we are conscious of the many and varied leadership roles that women have played throughout history, particularly in the last decades, as militants, guerrillas, protesters, organizers, and so forth. As discussed in previous chapters, in Toronto, it has been clear that from the solidarity organizations

\textsuperscript{165} MUJER organized two Youth Encounters that would tackle a myriad of issues that young people were facing. The first youth forum took place in November 26, 2005 and the second forum took place in November 25, 2006 (San Martin, 2009).
to the creation of community agencies, women have played not only leadership roles but have also organized in different kinds of leadership models.

MUJER proposed an alternative conception of what leadership means. This new conception was an ethical rupture with the tradition that equates leadership to heroism (Lagarde, 2000). This model exhorts people, and especially women, to a culture of sacrifice. Moreover, the culture of martyrdom is particularly present in Latin American gender expectations for women. Women are revered in their capacity to withstand enormous pain, loss, suffering, and relinquishment.

Women’s abnegation has become a matter of national pride. Another version of leadership is the neo-liberal conception of the superwoman who blithely deals with family, career, and politics. The leadership of the superwoman is an exacerbation of feminine omnipotence and arrogance (Lagarde, 2000). These are patriarchal leadership models that, rather than supporting powerful leadership roles for women, have tended to aim at their depersonalization.

MUJER’s leadership “training workshops and discourses of leadership as social activism interrupts mainstream understandings of leadership skills as a personal endeavour designed only to favour an individual’s personal advancement in society” (Gajardo, 2009: 135). Accordingly, MUJER strived to promote an alternative understanding of leadership that ruptured patriarchal and capitalist epistemological and paradigmatic conceptions to follow a more transformational, collaborative, and idealistic process (Early & Carli, 2007). In fact, leadership was seen as the social influence in which one person (or group) is able to enlist aid and support others in the accomplishment of a common task. As Marcela Lagarde, Mexican anthropologist and feminist, argues, there is a direct connection between a political agenda and leadership (2000). Lilian Valverde, the former Executive Director of MUJER, espoused this same view:

I have never supported the leadership model, we have talked about it a lot; it is a much-misused terminology. Here everything is leadership, and what is leadership? So, I rather keep the word activist, social activist rather than “leader” which is a term that underscores individualism: It reinforces that we all depend on an individual. (Gajardo, undated)

---

166 Silvio Rodrigues in his song “Women” sings about a “heroine” in Cuba whose five sons died in the war of Independence: “I was shaken by the woman who lifted her children up towards the star of that other greater mother and the way that she gathered them, dust-stained, so as to bury them within her heart.”
The feminist conception of leadership for MUJER would include the following objectives: to connect and mobilize; to train; to educate; to develop effective communicators; to raise our voices in diverse forums; and to access power by participating politically (San Martin, 2009). In addition, Third Wave struggles around class, race, and sexual orientation also forced MUJER to pay attention to the distribution and use of power while providing “leadership” training to young women. However, contradictions permeated the organization in terms of its own hierarchical structure. I will expand on these later on in the chapter.

Indeed, the three leadership trainings that were developed by MUJER between 2004 and 2008 focused on consciousness raising and capacity building. I played a key part in the development of the curriculum, in conjunction with a committee that included young women. Approximately 40 to 50 young women participated in these trainings. The focus was intensive training on understanding gender violence and sexism and acquiring skills to be able to become educators and organizers about issues of violence in the community. This educational process was used to raise consciousness about Latina identities and what it meant to live in Canada, and to provide the analytical tools needed to understand how patriarchal, capitalist, and racist trappings thrust women into positions and conditions of inequality, all in an accessible language. Lagarde defines leadership as “a set of capacities, one of the most important being the intellectual and affective sensitivity to grasp the needs of individuals or groups” (2000: 84). Capacity building in “leadership” training meant specifically teaching young women skills such as methodology, facilitation, media communication, outreach, and advertisement.

The first leadership training took place from February to March 2005. The training included a series of six three-hour workshops addressing the topics of violence against women in a cultural context, violence in intimate relationships, self-esteem and self-worth, sexuality and reproductive rights, changes in society, and young Latin American Women as agents of change. I participated in leading one of the workshops and other qualified volunteers were invited to lead the rest of the workshops, with the exception of the workshop on Latin American women as agents of change, which was led by Lilian Valverde.

The second training took place from September to November 2005. This training was part of a larger two-year project called “How to Build Healthy and Equal Relationships” that included peer training. This project was divided into four components that included a campaign, a youth
forum, the production of a video, and presentations to schools. The Ontario Women’s Directorate financed this training as part of the two-year project. Part of the requirement of this project, a youth forum, took place in November 26, 2005. Alejandra Cabezas was the woman who organized the leadership training and its logistics. As someone who had grown up in the revolutionary era in Nicaragua, Alejandra was shocked at how the system affects Latina youth in Canada:

It touched me profoundly…this country affects the self-esteem of young Latinas in an appalling manner. It makes them feel ugly, it makes them feel weak, and it makes them feel disconnected. (Alejandra Cabezas, Nicaragua)\(^\text{167}\)

This forum, called *First Community Forum: Let’s construct a positive environment: Let’s talk about equality*, was attended by approximately 150 youth. In addition, educators, journalists, police representatives, and City Councillors attended the forum. A number of issues were discussed, including racial profiling, violence in the home, and gender violence (in relationships and gang affiliations). Carmen Miranda applied to take the training from Sweden where she was doing an internship with Amnesty International, and eventually became part of the Board of Directors and, later on, president. To Carmen, learning about gender and the Latin American community became the most relevant piece of the training. She became a volunteer in the organization:

We went to the radio, we went to the radio program “Voces Latinas” [Latina/o Voices], we would talk about violence against women and how it affected society, the family. (Carmen Miranda, El Salvador)\(^\text{168}\)

The third leadership training took place from October to December 2006. This included the usual trainings led by members of the community. As part of this training MUJER organized a number of mini forums where participants visited eleven schools, including seven from the Toronto Catholic District School Board. Approximately 186 youth, predominantly young women, attended these forums. There was also another forum that took place on November 26, 2006, called the *Second Community Forum: Let’s construct a positive environment: Let’s talk about equality*.

\(^{167}\) Alejandra Cabezas, interview, Toronto, Ontario, March 9, 2017.

In recognition of these innovative pedagogical practices, MUJER was awarded the Mayor’s Community Safety Award by the City of Toronto in 2007. Furthermore, and as a reflection of the innovation and success of the training, MUJER was invited by the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) to share its pedagogical tools and feminist strategies. It was interesting that many of the people who attended the workshop, however, thought that these ideas were too political and “advanced” to be replicated in their communities. Perhaps the particular history of Latin Americans as a fairly politicized people may facilitate the discussion of these ideas in the community. Indeed, the majority of the young women who attended the trainings came from South American or Central American families that had come to Canada as exiles/refugees and were not entirely unfamiliar with the analysis of political issues. This capacity to be able to provide social and political analysis was also apparent in the youth forums, where young people were able to offer insightful comments on many of the social issues that affected young people. For example, young people brought to the fore that the increase in youth violence is related to the reduction of educational and recreational activities. In addition, when talking about the causes of violence, participants, expanding on the usual answers related to drugs, gangs, and alcohol, highlighted racism/discrimination, poverty, and machismo. Loneliness was also identified as a cause for joining gangs; for example, a young participant remarked that youth might be lured by gangs because “gangs give you a sense of belonging” (Burgoa, 2005; Inclan, 2005b, 2006).

The trainings were tremendously successful. After the organization completed an exhaustive evaluation of them, the consensus from the participants was that the trainings had had a significant impact on their lives; participants also emphasized that there was a need for further and more profound education (San Martin, 2009).

In 2009 and 2010 the organization focused on obtaining an exhaustive evaluation of the leadership trainings and incorporated another training about human rights and gender equality, which included in-depth analysis about racism and homophobia. This training included the development of a manual to be shared with other community agencies. The Manual for Leadership Training in Human Rights & Gender Equality for Young Latinas provided a feminist and gender analysis geared to improve the lives and participation of young women in the area of women’s rights. The manual aimed at increasing an understanding of theoretical concepts and how to apply these concepts into action (San Martin, 2010). The manual was divided into four
areas: Gender Oppression, Gender, Violence and Human Rights, Gender and Homophobia, and Leadership and Advocacy. Each section was divided into a theoretical framework that included an analytical perspective on the issues and definitions of specific concepts that were relevant to the topic in question. In addition, each section contained guidelines to facilitate a workshop on the topic. Once again, the organization made use of popular education techniques, where the participants’ experiences become the core of the learning process. The manual also underlined the reflexive nature of the role of the facilitator, acknowledging their social location (San Martin, 2010). The manual complicated the human rights framework by stating that, while it might provide a good tool to continue the work on the implementation of the human rights agenda, women’s mobilizing could not be limited to existing political structures but should include broader political participation, tactics, and strategies to challenge the political order (San Martin, 2010).

In 2012, MUJER launched a three-year project that involved a media campaign called Healthy Relationships, Body Image and Sexual Orientation to Empower Latina Youth. The campaign involved the creation of public service announcements that tackled bullying, cyberbullying, and homophobia. A committee of four Latina youth helped with the development of the scripts and three Latina youth from the local community were selected to be the actors. Although the media campaign was targeted locally, it received national attention from other Latin American and youth-focused organizations across Canada. Each of the videos has been viewed at least 1,000 times on YouTube and numerous presentations have been made in public education workshops and seminars. Unfortunately, we are witnessing an increase in violence directed at young people, specifically young women. The organization developed a message infused with hope and resistance that resonated with Latina youth and their parents. MUJER disseminated this message with parents and community members, who joined us in a discussion about the effects of bullying in our community. In the spirit of resistance and empowerment, MUJER organized a one-day youth retreat for 15 youth who explored different personal issues through art and movement. Another project in 2012 called Your Voice is your Strength focused on adult women.

This series of workshops trained 30 Latinas on their rights in Canada; the training focused on leadership and empowerment that aimed to involve and engage women from all ages to build community connections and awareness by promoting and increasing volunteerism, particularly among young women.

MUJER also organized six Latina summer camps in the summer for girls and young women from 12 to 17 years of age. The summer camps focused on a number of different issues including body image, eating disorders, Latinx identity, and so forth. Initially the United Way funded these summer camps. The United Way did not fund the last summer camp and MUJER was forced to organize fundraising activities, which included a party and an online fundraising campaign that raised $1,200. The summer camp went ahead and 15 young women were able to participate. Camila de la Maza, who had been hired to prepare the food for the workshops relates:

Although I was only in charge of bringing the lunch for the girls, I was still involved in the process, it was very interesting to me that these workshops were geared to really young girls…I could see how the topics made sense, because I could see what was lacking in Canada for young Latinas, at the beginning it seemed really different than what was lacking in our countries of origin, but they were in essence the same. That is, they had to do with a patriarchal society that labels you, that has particular expectations from you, that assigns you roles, so the First World was not that far from [Latin America].

(Camila de la Maza, Chilean)

The leadership training provided by MUJER, taught young women very specific skills within a feminist framework. It provided the youth with a space to share, and to support each other but also with the knowledge and the capacitation to go into the community and engage politically with the issues that affected them. It was clear, however, that young women wanted to learn

170 The definition of voluntarism in this context had to do with accessing spheres of power (Board of Directors, political office, lobbying groups) where women could advance Latina priorities.

171 Please note that I have included the word Latinx in this chapter because this appellation began to be used by the youth at MUJER. The label started in the United States around 2012, and its usage has been normalized within MUJER.

172 Please see MUJER’s “Summer Camp – The Value of Expressive Art Workshops, Leadership and Recreation,” at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8fyhdYEH7ig.

more about Latina feminisms and from their feedback the idea of the Latina Feminisms Course was born.

34 The Latina Feminisms Course

According to Marcela Lagarde (2000), one of the main objectives of recuperating the genealogy of women’s movements is to form political subjects who are knowledgeable about the politics of the state and gender politics and processes. In this vein, the free feminist university project was created. The idea emerged from the leadership training workshops and the necessity to deepen the theoretical understanding of feminism as well as to provide a deeper historical analysis of the contributions that Latin American women have made to the women’s movements. The free feminist university was envisioned as a project independent from MUJER but linked to the organization.

After the leadership training and its evaluation it became obvious that there needed to be a more formal development, what Marcela Lagarde call a formacion phase, that would strengthen the theoretical and historical analysis of young women who had taken the leadership training. Following Marcela Lagarde theory of leadership that “it is not enough to capacitate with fragmentary ideas, technical abilities, it is necessary to profoundly develop people…that is why there is an upsurge of academic processes and spaces are created to study gender” (Lagarde, 2000: 22).

The idea to teach a Latina Feminisms Course that would increase the theoretical knowledge and mould/develop young women became a possibility only because, as Latin American women living in Toronto, we have an accumulation of cultural capital, including women who are specialists and are willing to share their knowledge within the community. For the first time a theory-based course was offered to young women regardless of their academic background.

The study of Latina feminisms is a subversion of the understanding that feminism is “always/already constructed as Euro-American in origin and development […] women’s lives and struggles outside this geographical context only serve to confirm or contradict this originary feminist (master) narrative” (Talpade Mohanty, 2011: 59). This course worked to destabilize monolithic images of Latinas throughout the Americas by using a model of “feminist solidarity,” which has been defined by Chandra Talpade Mohanty as a “curricular strategy…based on the
premise that the local and global are not defined in terms of physical geography or territory but exist simultaneously and constitute each other” (2011: 60/61). Thus, women here and there are not seen as oppositional but as a continuum that forces us to make connections and understand our mutuality and common interests. Accordingly, this project cannot be separated from the understanding of race and ethnicity for Latin Americans in Canada.

The combination of an academic course with a community project reflects the rejection of an anti-intellectual position that is sometimes present in those who work in community agencies. Based on recurrent experiences, communities might sometimes be wary of academics that seem to appear only when communities are being used as subjects of study. There has also been a tendency to equate intellectualism with bourgeois ideology, a misguided sense of class position. For some of the key women at MUJER, however, the Gramscian concept of the “organic intellectual” was a more appropriate idea that allowed for a successful praxis to counter cultural hegemony and asserted that anyone can be an intellectual (Burke, 2005).

The political position of engaging in a critical pedagogy has been one that permeates Latin American Left ideologies, and it is most clearly distilled when in every social and revolutionary project literacy has been a priority. Henry Giroux has exhorted academics to assume responsibility and as “citizen-scholar, take critical positions, and relate their work to larger social issues” (Giroux, 2007). In his view, the university space is in a perilous position in this neoliberal era when corporations, the military industry, and the fundamentalist Christian right attempt to control this space. The university space should be conceived of as a public sphere where critical pedagogy, or decolonized education as Mignolo (2014) calls it, provides the conditions for young people to engage with ideas that will create critical agents. The university is a space that can give students the tools to reflect on their own racialized and sexualized subjectivities (Mignolo, 2014). Committed Latina scholars understand that critical pedagogy is essential to the social justice struggle and to a vibrant democracy, and that activist-scholars have a social responsibility to maintain the university space as a public sphere. In the case of the Latina Feminisms Course, it was imperative to make the space accessible to those who have been barred from it because of financial reasons and racist assumptions about intellectual capability and competency (Lugo-Lugo, 2012).
Although there is a dearth of literature about Latinas’ experiences in higher education in Canada, we can safely assume that it probably mirrors those of the Latinas living in the United States. Frances Aparicio persuasively argues, when talking about students of colour in the social sciences, “[they] may be stigmatized for their writing styles, hybrid linguistic practices, and bicultural or working-class perspectives that are censored or curtailed in their writing assignments” (2013: 1). Anecdotal testimonials do show that Latina/o students are not seeing themselves reflected either in the required readings or topics of the course syllabi, which may alienate them from the course materials. Latina students who want to pursue a research interest that focuses on a more specific field of Latino/a studies will probably not find viable mentors in academia. This is crucial for the student, who, because of racist stereotypes and economic barriers, does not imagine herself as a thinker or intellectual, as a producer of knowledge. Moreover, if the Latina student identifies racism as a problem she may be labelled a “problem student” or an “angry Latina” (Aparicio, 2013: 4).

The first course on Latina feminisms in 2009 was driven by the multifarious understanding of “identity, hybridity, colonization and empire, immigration [and refugee processes], language and bilingualism…and the politics of representation” (Aparicio, 2013: 7), and how all of these components affect Latina identity and political participation in Canada. The MUJER’s feminist university was conceived as:

[A] continuation of our work grounded in the feminist understanding that knowledge—personal, political and historical—represents an important tool for empowerment and social action. The proposed course of study…will provide young Latinas with a solid knowledge base and give them some of the tools to effectively engage in feminist advocacy/activism for social change.” (Gajardo & San Martin, 2009)

To prepare such a course required a profound knowledge of Latina experiences, not only in the North but also in Central and South America, since our feminist consciousness has been influenced by transnational histories, politics, and practices. To argue that anyone can teach a course such as this (for example, if you just Google the course syllabus) dismisses those who have been studying/teaching these subjects for years and who bring with them a rare combination of expertise, knowledge, and experience not readily available in academia, since Latina feminisms and lived experiences in Canada have not been written or have been largely ignored. Part and parcel of appreciating “leadership” is to give recognition to Latinas in academia, specifically those who continue to be involved with the community in the role of “organic
intellectuals.” We must acknowledge that the enormity of the academic achievement correlates to immeasurable barriers that we have encountered as racialized, working class, bilingual Latinas.\textsuperscript{174} As Carmen Lugo-Lugo writes, regular (White) students are only presented with archetypical images of Latinas found in the media and popular culture. It is with these lenses that students look at, interpret, and treat professors they encounter in academia. As mentioned previously, the hypersexualization of Latinas by definition eclipses any assumption of intellectual competence, professionalism, and knowledge. There is still a prevalent stereotype of incompetence that both white and Latina/o students are familiar with. In addition, the neo-liberal erasure of academia also has turned professors into service providers. Latinas again fit the stereotype of the service industry in the minds of North American students (Lugo-Lugo, 2012). It has been argued that the presumption of incompetence is something that women in general face in academia; however, this presumption is deeply intensified if we add race, sexuality, accents, social class, and other markers of difference; it can be an excruciating experience of segregation (Arriola, 2012; de la Riva-Holly, 2012).

As creators, not merely reproducers, of culture, the Latina Feminisms Course sought to introduce young women from every walk of life to a space that may not have been accessible to them, and to a new philosophy that knowledge was not a commodity but that it could be shared free of cost. Participants brought knowledge and experience to the course, and the knowledge learned could be applied to new ways of being in the world, specifically, in the microcosm of Toronto. This social and political participation is directly related to the construction of women’s citizenship. This knowledge sharing consists of creating the necessary conditions so women can become citizens (Lagarde, 2000). The course stressed understanding citizenship as a far more complex position than simply who has rights within the imaginary geographic boundaries of the Canadian nation-state; instead, it stressed the notion of inclusive belonging and actively participating in the politics of the polity (Richards, 2015).

Furthermore, as the creators of the project, Lorena Gajardo and I explained in the project proposal that it was essential to:

\textsuperscript{174} The dismissal of Latina scholarship and expertise is reflected in Frances Aparicio’s article where she explains that a colleague blithely commented that he could teach any of her courses, if he spent three months reading the bibliography.
Begin to understand social and historical processes in the Americas as articulated rather than as discreet and unrelated. This is why we have decided that it is important to take an integrative approach to the study of feminisms in the Americas which includes Latina diasporic feminisms. (Gajardo & San Martin, 2009: para. 2)

With this understanding, the call that went out to young women that the Latin American/Latina Feminisms Course:

Is for young Latina who are interested in learning about women’s movements and women’s contributions to social movements in Latin America, the U.S. and Canada. The objective is to learn about our historias so that we can have a better understanding of who we are as Latinas and Latin American women in Canada. (MUJER’s Research Committee, 2009)

For this particular project, it was decided that part of the epistemological praxis would be to have this course in a space where Latina bodies are not often found. With the support of the Centre for Women’s Studies in Education at OISE, University of Toronto, the organizers were able to secure a room free of charge in the OISE building. The idea was to stake a geographical space in an academic setting that was not entirely welcoming to Latinas. Indeed, the point was to demystify the space for many of the working-class, marginalized young women who believed they had no right to access these spaces.

The process of applying for the course was connected to MUJER but not part of it. The course directors decided to maintain independence from the organization while working closely with them. Priority was given to the young women who had taken the MUJER leadership training courses and those who had been volunteering at MUJER. The rest of the participants came mainly through social media outreach.

Participants were required to write a letter of intent explaining why they wanted to take the course and what they hoped to gain from the experience. The research committee reviewed the letters and advised the participants on whether they were accepted. The space was limited to 15 to 18 participants. It was stressed that this was a serious commitment and that participants were expected to attend to all the classes.

A sample of the letters of intent reflect the diversity and levels of knowledge of the participants:

I’d like to take this course because I want to educate myself by learning about women’s movements here in Toronto. I have a few friends who claim to be feminists but they
always fail to explain How and Why in a rational way. Also the Priest of the Church I go to gave a little speech about this topic and defined feminism as a sin. (Letter of Intent, 2009a)

The reality is that I do not know enough or barely anything about Latin American and Latina Feminism. Apart from some common names such as Frida Khalo, Mercedes Sousa [sic] and other feminists I am not aware of the big movers and shakers of Latin America in the past or current [time]. This course is an excellent opportunity to gain a rich experience learning about the women and their movements created to combat the patriarchy that plagues the world. (Letter of Intent, 2009b)

To further my development as a young Latina activist, I feel that I should also grow academically, especially since I have little knowledge of Latin American studies. (Letter of Intent, 2009c)

Seventeen participants were selected from very diverse backgrounds, nationalities, sexual orientations, and educational backgrounds.

Even for students that were attending university, the topic itself was knowledge that was absent from their university cannons. There were seven sessions in the course. The first class was an introduction to the course and included the expectations and responsibilities of the participants, the distribution of materials including the syllabus and the schedule, and getting to know each other. This class also served to establish the minimum requirements, including attending and participating in class and the completion of a reflection project. Ground rules for optimum group interactions were collectively decided and noted.

The second session, What is Feminism, was a presentation on the origins of feminism, including the philosophical and political currents present in the different historical waves. The third session, Feminism in Latin America, intended to illustrate the effervescence of the feminist movement in Latin America. The fourth session presented Chicana/Latina feminism and its theoretical contributions to the feminist movement and to the struggle of Latina identity. The fifth session continued its examination of Latinidad or Latina identity, focusing on its contested meanings. The sixth session ended with an analysis of current Feminist praxis and resistance throughout the Americas, but with an emphasis on Toronto. The final session, Representing the Latina Body, included a cultural discussion on issues of representation and political activism. A final session was incorporated to include course presentations and to have a graduation ceremony. The creators of the course were both doctoral students; therefore, the content reflected years of research in particular areas of interest. For myself, this particular kind of research had
been driven by my feminist activism, including my participation in grassroots organizations, community agencies, and academic work. The course provided an insightful and rare access to histories of Latin American women throughout the continent. Veronica Zaragoza, a newly arrived Afro-Mexican lesbian, noted that:

I was not aware of so many different movements in Latin America, of Latin American women, so many feminist women, immigrants like myself. Anzaldúa, for example, that is where I learnt about Anzaldúa. I didn’t know her. I hadn’t read her. I didn’t understand the acceptance of the mestizo label. With time, you understand. (Veronica Zaragoza, Mexican)¹⁷⁵

For the creators of the course, it was paramount to establish what Lagarde calls a genealogical gender consciousness (2000: 32), rescuing collective Latin American women’s history to own our ancestors, to assert where we come from, and recognize the women who came before us. The goal was to build an affirmative women’s memory to combat what has been called the “orphanhood of gender.” For Latin American women to discover the past is twofold in terms of gender and race: it helps to understand that there were always Latin American women who were warriors, memorable, endearing, active, and brave. Having historical references not only demystifies the role of Latino men but also that of White women, especially in the North. But it was also crucial to present the contemporary history of Latinas/as, especially in Canada, as this is a story that has largely been absent.

The course was structured as an academic lecture where women who have an academic speciality would share their knowledge. The recognition of this particular praxis is vital in a system that dismisses women of colour, especially Latina women and their scholarly specialities. The course directors presented theoretical and conceptual frameworks and therefore acted as “teachers,” presenting difficult concepts in an accessible language. As teachers there was recognition that the course directors had the power to set and keep criteria in order for the course to function. The structure of the course was formalized and explicit to the participants. The group was not seen as a structureless group, since “structurelessness” becomes a way of masking power, and within the women’s movement it is usually most strongly advocated by those who are most powerful “whether they are conscious of their power or not” (Freeman, 2005). The

lecture relied on a range of vocabulary and cultural references familiar to women of different classes and educational levels. Written materials were carefully selected, taking into consideration the different levels of the participants. Nonetheless, they were expected to read the material, which was provided as a package free of cost.\textsuperscript{176} Again, this closely mirrored any academic course, but there was also an understanding that “a literary text becomes one of many discourse, which are interwoven to answer social questions regarding cultural and racial inequality” (Aparicio, 2013: 5). The experience of the course aimed to reclaim diverse modes of knowledge production and to support the participants in acknowledging that they could have a “scholarly voice.”

The theoretical presentation was followed by a discussion facilitated by two volunteer participants and the teachers. Facilitators functioned as peers. Facilitation is based on a pedagogy that functions by

\begin{quote}

drawing the experience of the participants, helping participants “name” their experience and process it into new knowledge without judging the result as right or wrong, helping the group accomplish tasks without judging the results, paying primary attention to the group process, concerned only with learning, not a predetermined body of knowledge to be learned. (Bishop & Fay, 2004: 20)
\end{quote}

This part of the course structure allowed everyone the opportunity to engage in a participatory manner. It was in this part that the Freirian concept of “co-intentional education,” defined as “the process where both teacher and students unveil reality through common reflection and action and become committed to the task of liberation” (Freire, 1970: 56), could be put into practice.

The use of Spanglish, or the switching between Spanish and English, was also understood as something that is particular to the Latin American community. Some participants were newly arrived immigrants and refugees who did not speak English, while other participants were young women who had been born in Canada or had arrived at a very young age and didn’t speak Spanish. Although this was very challenging, it also speaks to the highly specialized knowledge

\textsuperscript{176} This was possible as the result of some community agencies’ in-kind donations. As mentioned before, many Latin American women continue to work in community agencies or mainstream organizations and supported the work of grassroots organizations by providing basic office supplies, paper, and printing.
that the instructors must have. Nonetheless, it was something that needed to be negotiated; Veronica Zaragoza recalls some of the limits, including language, that participants confronted:

For starters, we didn’t have any money; we were immigrants that were working for minimum wage. We couldn’t pay for any courses; we didn’t speak English. At that time our form of thinking was very limited. We wanted to learn, but we didn’t have any money to buy books and there weren’t any in Spanish. So, I said let’s go to the course. I was working at nights, so that meant that I had to leave earlier. We wanted to share the knowledge with the group [Mujeres al Frente]. It was a challenge because we hardly spoke English, so we had to translate the readings, so it took a long time. (Veronica Zaragoza, 2017)¹⁷⁷

Arrangements were made to facilitate the course as much as possible. Spanish and English were used and readings were provided in both languages. In addition, in order to accommodate different ways of learning, the instructors also made use of different pedagogical tools such as PowerPoint and other visual aids.

Part of the requirements for the course included a final reflection project handed in at the last class. The final project had to incorporate the concepts and critical analysis developed during the course. The project could take a variety of formats: an academic research essay; a seminar presentation (for those interested in learning how to do this); a literary piece (prose, poetry, spoken word, theatre script); or a short documentary film or video. Art has been used extensively in Latin America as part of popular education techniques (Lagarde, 2000). Students presented their work to each other, in this way sharing their learning and experience in a more formalized manner than just discussions.

Some of the projects had a ripple effect in the community. For example, a group of students organized a workshop at Working Women Community Centre called Understandings of Feminism through a Guided Visualization Technique. The purpose of the project was to explore recent Latin American newcomers’ understanding of feminism. The visualization workshop involved 10 men and women from different backgrounds, between 25 to 60 years of age, from low-income families and who had been in Canada less than three years (Carrasco et al., undated). Another project entailed a personal letter to an abuser, which brought to the fore the nature of experiential pedagogy that “believes that learning involves the mind, feelings, and the body”

(Bishop & Fay, 2004). This presentation unleashed an emotional breakdown that was unanticipated and forced the teachers to stop the presentations to deal with the emotions in the group and to debrief. More academic work included a profound analysis on three women presidents in Latin America and whether their sex/gender had an impact on women’s progress and reclaiming lesbian, feminist (her)stories.

The course also was successful in that participants wanted to continue meeting and to maintain contact with the other women; Veronica Bravo, an indigenous lesbian from the group Mujeres al Frente, recognizes that:

> definitely, at the personal level, what I have to be grateful for was the space, to get to know other women, that inspired me, and that today continue to be life examples for me. That they taught me to see the world in a different way, even though I had a history of political involvement in Mexico, before I came to Toronto, it was never so broad…

(Veronica Bravo, Mexican)\

Carmen Miranda (interview, 2017) remembers that for her the most insightful thing about the course was to identify that there isn’t one kind of feminism, but many:

> Gender affects everyone differently depending on your race and social status. There are other things that are universal based on the fact that we are women, it doesn’t matter what religion you have, because you are a woman you are affected but maybe differently.

(Carmen Miranda, El Salvador)\

Camila de la Maza (interview, 2017), who returned to Chile to practice law, adamantly declares that

> [the course] was a milestone in my life from every point of view, that is, to bring the academia to people who don’t participate in that space, it was my first encounter with pure and concrete feminism, it was a way to get closer to my own country’s history, 10,000 kilometres away. I think it was a point of inflection for me, a point of departure.

(Camila de la Maza Vent, Chilean)\

The Latina Feminisms Course provided a space where specific Latina pedagogies, theories, and movements could be discussed in a space considered to be out of bounds to young Latinas.

---

Participants were thrilled to be learning about their own histories throughout the hemisphere and were becoming aware of the multiple and outstanding roles that their ancestors have played in social movements and the development of radical epistemic frameworks.

35  Racialized Masculinity: Latinos against Violence against Women

In 2013 MUJER became more focused on gender relations and issues of racialized masculinity. The organization developed three educational videos to be used in a campaign to raise consciousness around issues of violence against women in the Latin American community. One key part of the project was the formation of focus groups of Latin American men throughout the province of Ontario, who met to discuss issues of violence in the community and to interrogate conceptions of masculinity.

*Machismo* has long associated with Latin American masculinity and is paradoxically characterized by aggression, docility, and hypersexuality. Sexual prowess and numerous sexual liaisons may define what a “real man” is; sexual conquest is then considered a source of pride. Predictably, the hypersexualization of men could be mobilized in a sexist/racist twist that allows men to deploy such stereotypes without seemingly being affected by them. This, coupled with romanticized notions of “revolutionaries” and “Latin lovers,” provided a good mix for the solidarity movement to garner support, for example. Furthermore, in Latin America, culturally exaggerated masculinity has also been tempered with *caballerosidad*—being a chivalrous man. This extends to the conception of “romantic love” and the understanding that males need to conquer (or woo) females. Thus, younger generations of males and females are coming to terms with traditional prescriptions of gender and sexuality and assumed and imposed stereotypes. The image of the “Latin lover” is not really far from the construct of Latin American masculinity as deviant and hypersexualized—something to be feared. Characteristics of the “Latin lover” are his “suavity and sensuality, tenderness and sexual danger” (as cited in Greco Larson, 2006: 60). In

---

181 Please see: Desafiando amigos (Challenging friends) at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xicFeqtAb4Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xicFeqtAb4Y) and Enseñando a la juventud (Teaching Youth) at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SHPoIkJEMhUU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SHPoIkJEMhUU). The third video is not available on YouTube.
the film industry, representations of Latinxs continue to reinforce these stereotypes (Smith, Choueiti, & Pieper, 2013).

Increasingly, due to the women’s movement and other social movements, many Latin American men and women are challenging these definitions of masculinity. Being presented with alternative models of masculinity is crucial to challenge sexist assumptions that lead to harassment, sexual assault, and rape. Men have begun to take responsibility for violence against women and to deconstruct notions of masculinity that are negative, stereotyped, and limiting. By organizing a campaign where men could talk to other men, the organization believed that we could engage the entire community in the project to stop sexual violence against women.

Similarly, having women challenge the understanding of what it means to be a woman and to be involved in a heterosexual relationship is really important. To deconstruct notions of desirability, romanticism, and flattery and how they relate to street harassment and sexual assault is paramount. In addition, it is also vital to deconstruct what it means for a woman to be “hard to get” and the assumption that “romantic love” means being chased, controlled, and mastered.

MUJER, as a feminist Latin American women’s organization, problematizes the ascription of machismo only to Latin American men. Machismo has been used to stereotype Latin American men as more aggressive and backward than their counterparts, particularly, White Anglo-Saxon men. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that Latin American culture is subjected to the same gender inequities as other cultures. In the book Masculinities and Gender Equity in Latin America, the authors provide a description of what being a man means for those interviewed: “For the man, a woman is an object of conquest, possession and sometimes of competence against other males” (Valdés & Olavarria, 2000: 23). In the US, for example, three activities form the core of “male Latino gang Life, or deviant barrio masculinity: substance abuse, gang violence, and extramarital affairs” (Ramirez & Flores, 2011). These particular and highly stereotypical conceptions of masculinities must be understood in the specific sexist and racialized structures of inequality, and are being challenged not only by women but also by men. More recently, discussions about racialized masculinity, violence against males (from other males), and responsibility for violence against women were taken up by MUJER from a feminist perspective.
36 Critiques of MUJER

During its existence there have many moments where tensions and power struggles have come to the fore in the organization. Around 2010, a number of young women became very critical of the hierarchical, generational structure that existed in the organization. These criticisms exposed that the agency in fact did not always work “‘from an inclusive, feminist, anti-racist, anti-oppression framework’ as it was claimed” (Lobo-Molnar, 2012). One particular incident became the catalyst for ensuing debates about democracy in the organization. MUJER was organizing a number of workshops to challenge homophobia. A youth coordinator put up a poster about safe space for LGBTTIQQ2 that depicted a triangle on the door that was the entrance to the agency. There are different versions as to how event proceeded from there. The youth coordinator argued that the decision to put up a poster had been agreed to (Lobo-Molnar, 2012). However, according to a member of the Board, Alejandra Cabezas, the Executive Director decided that the poster should be put on a less visible wall, in order not to deter members of the community who might already be hesitant to enter a women’s space and would assume that the organization was a lesbian women’s space. Understandably, this particular argument was deemed to be homophobic. Five members of MUJER wrote a letter to the Board expressing their disenchantment with the organization. Other members of MUJER held a different view on what became a fractious issue. Alejandra Cabezas, however, sees the positive aspect of the incident,

> When you critique, it's a good thing. Six months ago you would have kept quite, you would have left, you would not have sent a letter, you would have never faced me, you would have left with your tail between your legs. You can throw shit at me, because it actually makes me feel, “we did it!” (Alejandra Cabezas, Nicaragua)\(^{182}\)

That young women were able to organize and present a set of demands to the Board of Directors was seen as an example of the success of MUJER. Unfortunately, the response of the organization was slow and probably irrelevant by the time it was implemented, alienating some young women, including young lesbian women. Notwithstanding the many workshops and trainings about homophobia and the fact the organization was adamant in addressing issues of sexual diversity, inside and outside in the community, the poster incident became a symbol with which to accuse the organization of homophobia.

\(^{182}\) Alejandra Cabezas, interview, Toronto, Ontario, March 9, 2017.
Perhaps it is important to realize that newer generations born in Canada face more poignant issues of identity and have a different political acumen. Women who came as exiles usually brought with them an arsenal of skills, expertise, and political analysis that is sometimes sorely lacking in new generations or economic migrants. The crisis of education that we are facing as a community, when Latinas/os are the majority of the high school dropouts, may also bring to the fore hostilities between older women and the younger women who may approach the organization. There might also be a cultural problem with how “safe space” is conceptualized. In the words of Alejandra Cabezas,

[Young women] would see feedback as a criticism. And is a cultural thing, for me that I come from Nicaragua, when someone gives me feedback I don’t see it as a criticism, I don’t feel you want to destroy me. You want to increase my self-esteem, you want to make me stronger. (Alejandra Cabezas, Nicaraguan)\(^\text{183}\)

Again, as a reflection of the ideological debates in Latin America, young women have demanded to be represented at the inception of program development, for example in the Latin American Feminists Encounters (Alvarez et al., 2003). Many questioned the ability of women over 50 to be aware of the needs of young women. As a matter of fact, up until 2012 the coordinator of the organization was a retired woman in her late sixties; this may have led to problematic and reductive assumptions about ageism/age. The most serious critique was that MUJER understood “passing down the knowledge” as an “assumption that only one group (elders) within the community has something to teach the other (young), rather than searching for ways that intergenerational relationships can involve symbiotic learning within collaborative leadership processes” (Lobo-Molnar, 2012). However, this critique also disregards the fact that the organization strived to include young women in the Board of Directors, as volunteers, making it a priority to hire them for projects, and finally hiring a young woman as the Executive Director in 2013, who continued until the organization ran out of funds. Further, this critique fails to acknowledge that many of the (older) women who volunteered to teach the workshops were women with years of expertise in their fields, which made them able to donate their work to the organization and support youth.

---

\(^{183}\) Alejandra Cabezas, interview, Toronto, Ontario, March 9, 2017.
37 Conclusion

Despite limited funding and some intergenerational conflict, MUJER was able to implement new models of pedagogical learning that aimed to question the political and social construction of Latin American women in Canada. The Latin American women’s community in Toronto has not been able to systematize political experience, and there has been a lack of spaces where women can safely meet, making it difficult to transmit political experience and knowledge. This was precisely one of the most important contributions of MUJER, which provided a physical space where Latin American women could come together and organize to transmit (her)stories, experiences, and political praxis that could provide the tools to understand and change the social and political landscape.

Unfortunately, the goal of maintaining autonomy while still getting state funding would prove untenable. By 2015, the organization was unable to keep a locale and eventually gave up its space. New members of MUJER have continued imparting a version of the Latinx feminisms course, in addition to expanding discussions on issues of race, particularly issues related to Afro-Latinxs. The loss of the space, however, has been lamentable, since it makes it more difficult for women to come together (Zaragoza, interview, 2017).

MUJER’s history and role in the development of Latina feminisms in Toronto was transcendental, not only in terms of the innovative projects that were organized but also in terms of the impact it had on individuals who participated in its projects or in the organization itself. The leadership training provided young women with a network of contacts and support. Indeed, many women would later comment that the best part of the leadership training was the fact that it brought together young Latina women like themselves (San Martin, 2009). In addition, the majority of the women who participated have become active leaders in the community. The Latina Feminisms Course continues to be implemented, although with different aims than how it was originally envisioned. Nonetheless, it continues to be successful in bringing young Latina women together. Finally, there has been an increase in discussions about Latino masculinities in the community; however, it is hard to gage whether these discussions are necessarily from a feminist perspective.

MUJER began as an extraordinary holistic feminist project that intended to provide Latina women with a feminist praxis. It was a place where the slogan “the personal is political” really
became the practice of the organization. The organization was able to create pedagogical tools that became models for other communities in Canada and that could be translated into tools utilized in Latin America as well.
Chapter 8
Conclusion

Tengo ganas de sacar de los archivos de escondidas historias femeninas sus gestos, sus urgencias, y su ira…
I am eager to take out of the archives the hidden feminine stories, their gestures, their urgencies, and their wrath…

—Julieta Kirkwood, 1987

We live in a world where the voices of women have been systematically silenced, ignored, or devalued, and have been excluded from masculinist and Eurocentric orthodoxies and historical chronicles. The Latin American community is no exception; even the more progressive sectors of the community subdued the existence of women to that of the universal (new) man. Although this oversight has been increasingly challenged in Latin America, in Toronto gender has rarely been mentioned as a key component of the history of the Latin American community in this city. The work of key Latina actors in the solidarity movement and the foundation of agencies serving the community has been dismissed, ignored, or occluded. Moreover, the voices of Latinas have also been conspicuously absent in the White, middle-class Canadian feminist historical records. Racialized women and their allies have made enormous efforts to methodically include the voices of women who have been left out. However, the voices and experiences of Latinas continue to be muted.

The objective of this dissertation is to recalibrate history by reclaiming subaltern Latina voices in androcentric Latin American memory projects and exclusionary feminist historiographies. This intellectual enterprise is particularly important in this historical moment, where many racialized and indigenous women (Wane, Deliovsky, & Lawson, 2002; McKittrick, 2006; Altamirano-Jiménez, 2013; Kermaol & Altamirano-Jiménez, 2016; The Book Project Collective, 2015) have struggled to unsettle the fictitious post-racial, multicultural narratives of the Canadian nation. This project entailed the recuperation of the collective memory of activist Latin American women living in Toronto. These women brought with them enormous political capital that has influenced and shaped current feminist Latin American organizations. Latin American women

184 Crispi (1987)
came together as a result of political junctures that forced them to migrate to the Global North during the 1970s to the 1980s. The political priorities of the time required the formation of unified fronts that maintained dissidence at a minimum. Paradoxically, it was precisely this political context in Latin America that pushed women into a central role, resisting the military genocidal regimes, which led them to reject patriarchal structures from both the right wing dictatorships and the traditional Left parties. In the diaspora, these particular women played major roles in the development of transnational solidarity movements that transcended national boundaries and exerted political pressure that eventually overthrew military dictatorships; they also developed innovative organizations that were able to provide vital services for women and the community while making a long-lasting impact on the Canadian political landscape.

My dissertation was organized in two parts, the first framing the argument, and the second advancing findings drawn from the research, framing my field interviews along with documentary and personal experience. In first chapter I introduce the topic and explained the methodology and structure of the argument. Chapter 2 elaborates on the theoretical framework that sustains the work of the dissertation. Chapter 3 offers an overview of the Latin American women’s movement and feminist movement that informed the feminist subjectivities of diasporic Latin American women living in Toronto. The second part begins with Chapter 4, which examines the particular experiences that Latin American women, primarily Chilean and Salvadorian women, faced when they arrived to Canada, it examines their role in the solidarity movement and turns to consider two women’s groups that mirrored the ideological divides that were taking place in Latin America. In Chapter 5 the focus is on the creation, development, and participation of Latin American women in agencies serving the community. Chapter 6 concentrates on the First Latin American and Caribbean Women’s Encounter in Ontario in 1995. And to close the presentation of the findings, Chapter 7 analyzes the role of MUJER as an agency that distilled the accumulated experiences of Latin American feminists.

Community members can and do analyze their political praxis. Wane, Deliovsky, and Lawson (2002) reiterate this point when they quote Lugones and Spelman, who critique academics that “refuse to acknowledge that the formulations of theories is a prerogative not only for scholars in the academy but also for community members who combine theory and practice in their everyday experiences” (30). In the case of Latin American women, a significant number were exceptionally active in the political processes of their countries of origin. These women held
significant political capital (Ginieniewicz, 2006), which included practical organizing, communication proficiencies, and networking capacity. They were able to deploy innovative strategic and tactical skills and possessed the passion for social justice; they continue working tirelessly for political change.

In writing this dissertation, I wanted to reclaim crucial parts of history that has had a tremendous impact on Toronto’s political landscape. Through the articulation of experiences coupled with the reflexivity, Latin American women could signify diverse knowledges and events in the past and the present, which enable an understanding on how identities have been forged, mutated, adapted, and transformed. Mediated personal experience through testimonios, or oral histories, is fundamental in order to allow Latin American women to define themselves and provide an analytical retrospective of their past contributions. Moreover, the oral history methodology is particularly useful when there is lack of documentation or historical records. In point of fact, oral history has been a preferred methodology for those whose voices have been annulled; it is an activist method par excellence. As an activist scholar, my dissertation is not only a recuperation of memory but it also strives to obliterate hierarchies of meaning by introducing epistemic pluralism. Certainly, oral history must take into account that memory is influenced by social context, allowing us to discern a plurality of voices and perspectives that may not have been taken into account when these racialized voices are relegated or entirely erased. Thus, Latin women using their testimonios bear witness and inscribe history. These stories are also not being mediated by White, feminist academics that have tended to appropriate them for their own gains, to misrepresent them to fit their own imperialist viewpoints, or to dismiss them as unimportant or banal. Testimonios are essential in bringing different perspectives, experiences, and analysis that will diversify how we understand women’s political involvement and contribute to the annals of Latin American and feminist historiography. The voices in this dissertation represent a plurality of stories and points of view, and they speak to each of women’s unique experiences and identities. The interpretation of identity and political praxis is a process of constant construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction (Delgado Ballesteros, 2012); these collective stories and memories contextualize and facilitate this process of interpretation.

Feminists in Latin America have increasingly challenged gendered national narratives. Understanding that the labels we use to describe immensely complex and heterogeneous multiracial identities in this vast continent are inadequate and partial. Identities are therefore
constantly being contested within nation-state borders, transnationally when territories were taken over, as in the case of the south of the United States, or when they migrate to enclaves in North America. Thus, diasporic subjectivities must take into account the instability of Latin American identities while at the same time using it as a heuristic device that can be strategically mobilized for political agency.

Consequently, using Latin American women’s identity is relevant because of its political, epistemic significance and its relation to knowledge production (Moya, 2002). Latina or Latin American women’s identities reflect complex, situated, and embodied experiences and it is through these experiences that they interpret the world. Using postpositivist realist theory as an explanatory tool, it is possible to make the links between social location, experience, and identity. Identity can be mobilized as a viable category that is historically contingent and socially/discursively constructed (Moya, 2000, 2002, 2011; Martín Alcoff, 2006). By focusing on the particular experiences of Latin American women, taking into account their social location and the formation of their cultural identity, I was keen to understand how women could analyze their past participation with the feminist analytical tools that they may have developed. How women understood their identities indicated their politicized understanding of issues of class, race, and sexual orientation. The Latin American women interviewed for this project were able to identify and interpret the common political and migratory trajectories that they shared and how these shaped their political priorities in the diaspora, in conjunction and in relationship with the women’s and feminist movements in their countries of origin. Identity, with all its complexity and contested meanings, was and continues to be strategically articulated and deployed to organize radical political projects. Thus, identities continue to be politically and epistemically vital (Moya, 2002).

Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1981) theory of the flesh echoes Moya’s postpositivist realist theory, in that they argue that the physical realities of Latinas’ lives “fuse to create a politic born of necessity” (19). This exemplifies the experience of Latin American women in the diaspora, who understand the oppression and privilege of their own social location and use these epistemic strategies to challenge dominant ideologies. The theory of the flesh also posits the body as a source of knowledge—but not necessarily defining a person’s politics. As Anzaldúa states, Latinas can have multiple alliances: in the solidarity movement, the focus was the fight against dictatorships with an incipient understanding of gender; in community work, it shifted to
the community and its trials in Toronto, eventually concentrating on what women were experiencing (specifically, violence). The need to come together and broaden the understanding of what Latin American women need was concretized by the time of the First Latin American and Caribbean Women’s Encounter, which led to the creation of MUJER and a more integrative approach that centred Latin America women with all their multifaceted aspects. Sandoval’s (2000) notion of the “history of oppositional consciousness” was essential in charting the history of feminist consciousness and subjectivity, and how women have made tactical moves from socialist to feminist ideologies and praxis. In retrospect, the majority of the women interviewed in this project were able to interpret their own political praxis in feminist terms. Hence, using feminisms in Latin America and the United States, women in Toronto were able to develop political strategies and tactics that reflected their own priorities and analysis of the world.

Latina feminist subjectivity developed in a dialogic relationship with the women’s and feminist movements in Latin America in isolation from the White, middle-class, Canadian feminist movement. Latina feminist ideology was informed with a clear anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist stance that influenced what feminist priorities entailed, making demands that were broader and sometimes antagonistic to the demands of White, middle-class feminists in the Global North. Transnational Latina feminisms travelled, mutated, and fused through permanent dialogic interactions that took place in Latin America via the Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encounters. Through the work of internationalist solidarity, women in Toronto were able to organize and prioritize their specific feminist demands. Transnationalism has been celebrated as both liberatory and dystopian, as a process imposed from “above,” or organized as resistance from “below” (Smith & Guarnizo, 1998; Trotz & Mullings, 2013; Appadurai, 1996; Clifford, 1997, 2013). In the case of diasporic Latin American women, the experience of being forced into exile prompted the organization of grassroots solidarity groups that would respond to the resistance being waged at home (Wright & Oñate Zuñiga, 2007). The transnational relationship between those exiles and those resisting was profoundly influential in the direction that the resistance struggle took. As Sonia Alvarez (Alvarez, 2000; Alvarez et al., 2003) has written, the transnational, “extra-official” grassroots Feminist Encounters provided women involved in resistance movements with a safe space to reaffirm their politically marginalized identities, provide and obtain strategic solidarity, organize around key feminist issues, and debate the course and definition of Latin American feminism. For women in the diaspora, the role of
women in the resistance movement and the gender consciousness that was articulated in the Feminist Encounters fed into a circular flux of feminist praxis that informed the feminist subjectivities of diasporic Latin American women in Toronto.

In order to underscore the political acumen that exiled women brought with them, and the transnational influence of the women’s and feminist movements in Latin America, it was imperative in this dissertation to provide an overview of the political and social context that forced women to assume positions of leadership in the resistance movements in the Southern Cone, as well as in Central America. In the Southern Cone, specifically Chile, women may have not been actively militant during the Salvador Allende presidency from the 1970 to 1973 (Kirkwood, 1986), but they definitely became actively involved after the military dictatorship (Gaviola, Largo, & Palestro, 1994; Maier, 2010; Largo & Qüence, 2006; Pieper Mooney, 2010). Women were militants or sympathizers of traditional political parties that braved the brutality of the regime and often paid a high price for this resistance by being arrested, tortured, and disappeared (Largo & Qüence, 2006; Rebolledo, 2008). Women also became active in the reclaiming of their loved ones, organizing to demand the return of their families. Finally, as neoliberal policies were implemented, women became pivotal in organizing survival strategies.

In all their political mobilization women began to problematize gender and patriarchal authoritarianism. In Central America, women transgressed into the male military sphere, becoming gender conscious in the process (Kampwirth, 2002; Mujeres por la Dignidad y la Vida; 1993; Carrillo & Chinchilla, 2010; Chejter, 2007; Cracken & Simon, 2013). Amidst this resurgence of women mobilizing, the Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encounters provided a transnational space that allowed women to consolidate their feminist praxis and subjectivities (Alvarez, 2000; Alvarez et al., 2003; Restrepo & Bustamante, 2009; Vargas, 2002). The effervescent political debates around political priorities, feminist identities, and differences and tensions based on race, class, and sexual orientation exerted influence in the diasporic exile community. Latin American women in the diaspora, committed to the solidarity movement and its objective of overthrowing the military regimes, were inevitably influenced by the feminist debates in Latin America mirrored in women’s organizations.

This transnational influence was crystalized in Toronto in four different historical junctures: (1) the solidarity movement (1970s to 1990s); (2) the foundation of community agencies,
specifically the Latin American Coalition against Violence against Women and Children (LACEV); (3) the First Latin American and Caribbean Women’s Encounter in Ontario in 1995; and (4) the foundation of MUJER. I chose these four junctures to examine and analyze how Latin American women articulated and deployed their transnational identities and differentiated feminist consciousness.

38 Final Thoughts

Throughout this dissertation I have aimed to provide a genealogical account of the political presence and praxis of Latin American women in Toronto. The women that I interviewed continue to play key roles in the Canadian polity while continuing to support struggles in Latin America. Peddle (2014) has argued that there has been a waning of the “culture of exile,” however, other solidarity issues have taken the place of the old ones. Women continue to support radical projects in their countries of origin. For example, group of older activists, mainly women, have organized fundraising activities to support legal representation for Mapuche activists persecuted by the Chilean state. In this way their analysis of colonization and racism has become prevalent and integrated to the gender politics. Other participants in my research continue to work in community agencies and to develop programs, services, and policies to support Latin American women. Although there have different levels of integration into Canadian society. Some women have become quite active in issues that transcend Latin American politics; Loli Rico illustrates this:

I believe that I have a level of integration in this society. I believe that my position nowadays within the Canadian Council for Refugees gives me the opportunity to bring the voice of immigrant women, more specifically refugee women. I do go back to El Salvador, I keep my contact with my roots because I cannot deny them, it would be like denying my identity. I go back to offer capacitacion in my country so that El Salvador develops, especially in the area of gender. But I believe this is my home, here I have my grandchildren, here I have my children, here I have my work that is my passion…I believe that my work has been recognized, as a Latin American woman, because what I do is to bring the voice of Latin American women, I believe that we have to move beyond our community. (Loli Rico, El Salvador)

This dissertation aims to reclaim and inscribe the political legacy of “Latin” American women in the Canadian feminist archives and the annals of the history of the Latin American community in Toronto.
Latin American women have been agents of change and leadership in the community. Women have for decades struggled not only for economic change but also for the improvement of women’s lives. Although in the 1970s women who were politically active may have not called themselves feminists—indeed many have strongly rejected the label as something that represented “foreign values,” while others put their faith in utopic egalitarian societies to liberate them—their political quehacer (daily chores), their political analysis, reflected the understanding that gender was an important variable in their everyday resistance and solidarity activism. I would argue that this praxis was representative of an early feminist subjectivity. With the direct influence of women’s political leadership in the resistance movements and the appearance of transnational spaces of Latin American feminism, women in the diaspora began to develop a particular transnational feminist subjectivity. This feminist identity in turn was pivotal in the development of a number of radical projects that have affected the Latin American community in Toronto and the feminist landscape.

Adding distinct Latina voices and experiences to customary formal history will curb androcentric Latin American history and memory projects and also expand the archives of Canadian feminist annals. These narratives include the perspectives of women who took part in key historical events, reimagining and reconstructing insurgent subjectivities and resistances that allowed them to survive and thrive in an inimical environment. This dissertation emphasized the formation of radical grassroots organizations and projects that were created and led by women and had a tremendous impact at particular junctures. Contrary to what appears in the existing literature, these radical formations significantly affected and changed the Canadian political landscape at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels.

Reclaiming these histories, and rooting them in our ancestry, will provide a path for Latina or Latinx youth through which to ground their identities. Knowing what the women that have come before you have been able to accomplish, what their struggles were, allows the community to establish a strong sense of self and of identity. These (her)stories allow us to decolonize our minds, bodies, and theories. It is a way to continue to develop a critical consciousness that locates our struggles in the transnational geography of the Americas.

Reconstructing these narratives is “the process by which the past becomes memory and then memory becomes history” (Ruiz & Dubois, 2000: xv). The reclaiming of Latin American
women’s (her)story has material implications for organizing. In this neo-liberal, purportedly post-racial and post-feminist era, as Latin American women it is imperative to understand how we came to be here, who we are, and what we can do to change the world.
References

Books & Journal Articles


Di Marco, Graciela. (2010). The mothers and grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo speak. In E. Maier & N. Lebon (Eds.), Women's activism in Latin America and the Caribbean (pp. 95–110). New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.


Jiménez-Bellver, Jorge. (2010). *Un pie aquí y el otro allá: Translation, globalization, and hybridization in the new world (b)order*. Master of Arts, University of Massachusetts Amherst.


Maier, Elizabeth. (2010). Accommodating the private into the public domain: Experiences and legacies of the past four decades. In E. Maier & N. Lebon (Eds.), Women's activism in Latin America and the Caribbean (pp. 26–43). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.


Robles, Milen, & Robles, Carmen Alicia. (1980). *The personal adjustments of acculturation of the Chilean émigré in the City of Regina.* University of Regina, Regina, Saskatchewan.

Rockhill, Kathleen, & Tomic, Patricia. (1994). There is a connection: Racism, hetero/sexism and access to ESL. *Canadian Woman Studies / les cahiers de la femme, 14*(2), 91–94.


Simalchik, Joan. (2004). *If memory serves: Constructing the democratic project in Chile.* Doctor of Philosophy, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto.


Reports & Community Resources


Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture. (undated). In our midst educational aids to work with survivors of torture and organized violence: A reflective interactive approach. C. Whyte-Earnshaw & D. Midgeld (Eds.). Toronto, ON: Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture.

Carrasco, Christine, Grimaldos, Diana, Gomez, Paola, & Diaz, Zuzuki. (undated). Understanding of feminism through a guided visualization technique. Workshop notes. Toronto, ON.


Diaz Barrero, Patricia. (2002). Coming to dance, striving to survive: a study on Latin American migrant exotic dancers. Toronto, ON: LACEV.


MUJER's Research Committee (2009). Outreach poster. Toronto, ON.


Quintanilla, Daniela (2015). Interview with Author. Santiago, Chile, March 6, 2015.


Riaño-Alcalá, Pilar, with the collaboration of, Colorado, Marta, & Perez, Berta Alicia. (2002). Four Latin American Women in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver: Health, Housing and Immigration: submitted for the project Health and Home, Dara Culhane Principal investigator.


Victim Impact Statement. (1993). *Ontario Court (General Division).* In the matter of the Queen V. Antonio Alcaire and in the matter of the impact on the victims of the death of Graciela Montans at the hands of Antonio Alcaire.

**Newspapers**


Murialdo, Evelyn. (1976, December 23). Latin American article was misleading, she charges. *Toronto Star*.


*Audio-Visual Material*


Mignolo, W. D. (2014). *La relacion entre universidad, Estado y sociedad*. Quito, Ecuador. Retrieved from YouTube.com https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7XvNpx7qE&list=PLQdkTO4YPMj2r7p1KnHbPAOkwGXwURZ


**Online Resources**


**Interviews**

(All interviews were conducted in Spanish and all translations are by the author.)


Chang, Naldi. Interview with the author. Santiago, Chile (via Skype), March 29, 2017.


Smith, Maria Antonieta. Interview with the author. Toronto, Ontario, April 18, 2017.
Appendix A: List of Participants

Alba Agosto was a part of the Human Rights Committee for Uruguay. She also participated in community work at the Latin American Community Centre; she was a staff member at the centre for most of its existence. She continues to participate in the cultural projects at Casa Maíz. I was interested in learning more about the Latin American Community Centre, because there is scarce information about it. The Centre closed under accusations of misuse of funds. Personally, my second job was there as a camp leader, in a project that sought to reinforce “Latin” American values and culture to young children. At the time, I was very much aware that most of the staff at the centre were women.

Veronica Bravo (Achat Keriti Eredira) arrived in Toronto in same circumstances as Veronica Zaragoza. As a lesbian woman, she was a main force in the organization of Mujeres al Frente. She also took the Latina Feminisms course. She has continued to be active in the struggle for labour rights and the campaign for the increase of the minimum wage to $15. I was interested in her journey toward feminism and her process of identifying her Indigenous Purapecha ancestry.

Alejandra Cabezas arrived to Canada from Nicaragua in 2003 to finish her master’s degree. Alejandra grew up as a feminist in a family that played a significant role in the Nicaraguan revolution. She began to participate in MUJER and eventually was hired to coordinate the leadership training. Later on, she became the President of the Board of Directors. I was interested in interviewing her because of her particular analysis as someone who was brought up by a prominent Nicaraguan feminist and comandante in addition to the role that she played in MUJER.

Luis Carrillo has been a key political and community organizer. He established many of the organizations that provided solidarity to El Salvador. He was also a crucial participant in numerous community projects. I was interested in interviewing him because he is a community member that holds the collective memories of the many organizations that
have sprung up in Toronto. He is currently a member of the Hispanic Development Council.

Naldi Chang was a Chilean exile that arrived in Canada in 1974. She was a social worker who had began to work in the union for plastic workers as part of a new initiative that the workers had negotiated in their collective agreement. She began working in St. Christopher’s House as an ESL instructor and became involved in the solidarity movement. I was interested in interviewing her because she played a role in developing Freirian pedagogy used in giving ESL classes to workers. This pedagogy included gender analysis on the roles of women in the family in Canada. She also was a key actor in the development of NEW.

Camila de la Maza Vent came to Toronto in 2008. She became active in MUJER as a participant and a volunteer. She eventually became a Member of the Board of Directors and was involved in many of the debates that took place in the organization. She also participated in the Latina Feminisms course. I was interested in interviewing her because of her participation in MUJER and the course, but also because she brought a different perspective since she was not an exiled woman.

Noemi Garcia came to Canada in 1981 as a refugee via the United States. She became a participant in the New Experiences for Refugee Women project (NEW) and later a staff member. She also became involved with a Central American women’s group sponsored by the Quakers called Comunidad Centro Americana de Toronto (COCENTO). I was interested in interviewing her for her Central American perspective and the fact that she has been a part of NEW, an organization where Salvadorian women played a fundamental role in its creation.

Gladys Klestorny was a part of the Human Rights Committee for Uruguay and continues to participate in the group (now under a different name). She was also the coordinator for the Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples and became an active member of the Latin American Women’s Collective (LAWC). She became a representative of the LAWC in conversations with the International Women’s Day Committee, and she was a
participant in the debates that ensued in the organization. I was interested in interviewing her as a member of the Latin American Women’s Collective.

**Jeannethe Lara** is a Colombian who arrived in Canada in 1989. She came to Canada as a resident after working for an international youth agency. She was hired to coordinate the First Latin American Encounter in 1995. My interest in interviewing her was mostly to get her perspective about the Encounter.

**Celina Mazuí** was part of the Human Rights Committee for Uruguay. My interest in interviewing her was that she personified someone who had began in the solidarity movement and eventually became interested in feminist issues. She actively participated in the organizing of the Latin American Women’s Encounter in Toronto, Ontario, 1995. In fact, she was part of the four members of the executive committee that organized the Encounter.

**Virginia Medina** was also a political organizer in the solidarity movement for Chile. She was the *encargada*\(^{185}\) of the Chilean Women’s Committee (Frente Femenino) for at least three or four years. I was interested in learning about the everyday activities of the FF and their understanding of gender issues. Virginia is someone I had not met before and therefore she brought information that I was not aware of. She continues to actively engage in solidarity work with the Mapuche nation in Chile.

**Carmen Miranda** came to Canada from El Salvador in 1996 when she was 14 years old. She studied here in Toronto eventually getting her bachelor’s degree. After finishing her university degree, she obtained an internship in Sweden and when she came back she applied to MUJER’s leadership training. She became involved in the organization eventually becoming the President of the Board. As a participant in the leadership training, I was interested in her perspective about the organization.

---

\(^{185}\) There were no acknowledged leaders, or presidents, in this group. The word most commonly used in party politics would be “encargada” which means the person in charge or responsible for the group’s functioning.
Alejandra Priego is a Mexican woman who came to Canada in 1990. She was involved in LACEV, becoming its first coordinator. She was part of a number of workshops that began to address violence against women from a particular feminist Latin American perspective. The organization identified itself as a feminist organization. After leaving the role of Coordinator, she maintained a relationship with the organization. She was also central in supporting the organization of the Encounter. I was interested in interviewing her because of her history at LACEV.

Maria R. was an active member of the Committee in Solidarity with El Salvador. She was a young woman who became politically conscious in El Salvador, and arrived to Canada to join the Committee and eventually the Asociación de Mujeres de El Salvador (AMES). I was interested in interviewing her because she was influenced a lot by female military leaders who had an understanding of gender oppression in El Salvador without necessarily calling themselves feminists.

Duberlis Ramos is the Executive Director of the Hispanic Development Council (HDC). He came to Canada as a political refugee. I was interested in interviewing him because he had a role, albeit indirectly, in the organization of the First Latin American Women’s Encounter in Toronto, Ontario, 1995. In addition, he provided insightful and clarifying information about the question of demographics and social issues that the community is facing.

Dolores Rico was engaged in a number of Central American women’s groups. She was also and continues to be a member of the FCJ Refugee Centre. I was interested in interviewing her because she was actively involved in the Latin American Coalition against Women and Children (LACEV) and she was an active part of the organization of the Latin American Women’s Encounter in Toronto, Ontario, 1995. She is currently the President of the Canadian Council of Refugees.

Maria Antonieta Smith came from Chile in 1976. She had been active in the Teacher’s Union. She began to work in the Working Women Community Centre (WWCC) where her understanding of gender oppression developed in the praxis of working with “Latin” American women. I worked at the WWCC with Maria Antonieta for seven years. Later
on, when I became the Coordinator of the Hispanic Development Council, we continued to work together as she was the President of the Board. We worked on numerous projects together, including the creation of a video that educated Latin American women about violence. She continues to do solidarity work for the Mapuche nation. I was interested in interviewing her because she provided me with a lot of historical context about exiled women, and also about social issues in the community.

**Mitzi Soto-Mendel** was an indefatigable political organizer and someone I remember from my youth at the epicenter of the solidarity movement for Chile. She has continued to be a militant in political party where she holds a leadership position. I was interested in interviewing her to gage her understanding of her role as a woman in the Chilean solidarity movement and her role in the Chilean Women’s Committee (Frente Femenino).

**Lilian Valverde** arrived in Chile in 1974. She had a solid political past having become a union leader at 16. She was involved in a number of solidarity groups and a political party in Toronto. She began to work in community agencies later on in her life. She became a member of the Latin American Coalition against Violence against Women and Children (LACEV), later becoming its Executive Director. She was crucial in organizing the First Latin American Women’s Encounter in Toronto, Ontario, 1995 and later became the Executive Director of MUJER, an organization for the integral development of Latinas. Naturally, I was interested in interviewing her because of her role in the organization of the Encounter.

**Veronica Zaragoza** came to Toronto as refugee escaping sexual orientation persecution. She became active in the queer community in Toronto, eventually forming a queer group for women and women identified queers called Mujeres al Frente. The group mainly organized around immigration status and working conditions. Veronica was one of the women who attended the Latina Feminisms course. I was interested in her perspective as a newly arrived refugee woman and her process to identify herself as an Afro-descendant lesbian separatist.