



**Women and Feminist Organizing
during Second Wave Feminism in Canada:**

Reflections and Considerations

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Preamble

On October 17th, 2000 at about 6:30 in the evening, I stood with about nine or ten women outside of the west doors of Centre Block on Parliament Hill. We were weary but anxious as we waited - in the chilly, dusk air - for the eight women comprising the Canadian Women's March Committee delegation to emerge from an hour long meeting with then Prime Minister Chrétien. It had been a bright, crisp autumn day that had seen the arrival of approximately 60,000 women from across the country on Ottawa's streets, all of whom had marched to Parliament Hill in order to participate in the World March of Women's call to end poverty and violence against women. For many of the women who participated, the march in Ottawa to Parliament Hill had been the culmination of efforts undertaken in their respective communities to bring attention to the ongoing gender inequality many women continue to experience in Canada. It was also an opportunity to highlight how women experienced this inequality differently as a result of factors as diverse as race/ethnicity, (dis)ability, sexual orientation, language, citizenship status, immersion in a urban/rural environment, marital status, and age. The meeting with the Prime Minister marked the first time women's groups had met directly with the leader of the country in many years, and represented an ambitious lobby strategy that would include: a voteable Opposition Day motion, and meetings with three of the five parties' leaders to discuss their pending election platforms, as well as meetings with the Liberal Party Women's caucus, the Secretary of State responsible for the Status of Women, forty members of parliament and nine cabinet ministers. This lobby plan was part of a multi-pronged strategy to elicit the most comprehensive response possible from federal (and to some

degree) provincial governments on a set of 68 demands. These demands had been the result of months of consultation with women and women's organizations and represented the pan-Canadian feminist movement's prescription for remedying some of the most acute manifestations of women's inequality in Canada.

The results that women of this march were able to elicit from federal and provincial governments were mixed at best, though the march itself was one of the most significant undertakings of the Canadian women's movement in over a decade. I cite it here as a recent example of equality-seeking women's organizing that was national in scope and had as its goals to underscore the conditions and effects of women's inequality to governments, members of communities, and the media, and to influence policy and legislative changes at the provincial, territorial and federal levels that would ameliorate, if not reverse, some of these inequalities. In this vein, the march demonstrated the on-going strength of, and capacity for, feminist organizing in Canada in spite of the fact that the previous decade, the 1990s, had been one of the most difficult decades for women and women's organizations in that many of the inequalities women had fought to overcome during the Second Wave of the feminist movement in Canada had been exacerbated, rather than ameliorated.¹

Yet, at the same time, the extraordinary efforts of thousands of women acting in a coordinated fashion across many regions did not result in the substantive policy changes to federal (or provincial) laws and practices for which women had hoped. A year after the march, only two of the thirteen most urgent demands presented by the

¹ A number of authors and groups have made this claim, including Janine Brodie (1995) in her book, *Politics on the Margins: Restructuring and the Canadian Women's Movement*, Jane Jensen and Susan Phillips (1996) in their article "Regime Shift: New Citizenship Practices in Canada" and the Canadian Women's March Committee (2000) in their document *It's Time for Change: 68 Demands to the Federal Government to End Poverty and Violence against Women*.

Canadian Women's March Committee to twelve separate federal ministers and the Prime Minister had been even partially met². Even basic demands for a restoration of core funding for a small number of national women's organizations went unfulfilled in the months after the march. This situation did not surprise many of the women involved in the march, or those members of the Canadian Women's March Committee who had overseen the lobby. As noted above, women's movements in Canada had, for some time, been confronting an increasingly hostile state in which some of the key mechanisms that had been created within the federal government to respond to women's demands for equality had been almost totally dismantled. Indeed, part of the impetus for the march in Canada was a feminist critique widely shared by members of women's movements in Canada that the federal government's efforts to re-structure the Canadian welfare state had profoundly disadvantaged women. The march, then, had served as an opportunity for equality-seeking Canadian women to speak loudly and clearly about their opposition to such dramatic re-organization.

However, the march left women with much of the same political problem that had inspired such a mass mobilization in the first place. Despite the efforts of women's movements in English-speaking Canada and Québec, organized women were not able to make manifest the vast majority of the public policy changes called for in the key demands document: *It's Time for Change: 68 Demands to End Poverty and Violence against Women*, many of which had been long-standing demands. This

² These were the establishment of a review of the federal pay equity legislation and a commitment from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) to increase foreign aid expenditures to 0.7% of GDP.

was the case despite having deployed a wide range of tactics and strategies, including conferences, festivals, parades, potlucks, workshops, public debates, demonstrations, rallies and marches. In a paper on women and politics commissioned after the march, I wrote the following words, which reflected the sentiment of many women who had advanced the march's key political platform:

In the new context of corporate-lead globalization and the shifting cultural terrain that is accompanying it, existing formal political structures at the federal level [in Canada] are woefully inadequate to meet the realities of the majority of women in this country. Women then are in need of political mechanisms that will enable them to take positive action on public policy matters that are fundamental to their civic, social and economic equality.” (Peckford 2002: 15)

As a result of the frustration that many women experienced given the relative degree of inaction on the part of policy-makers after the World March of Women, the National Association of Women and the Law (NAWL) approached me in April 2001 about doing some preliminary research on Canada's electoral system from a feminist perspective. This gave way to an on-going collaboration with NAWL from May 2001 until June of 2004, during which time I: 1) produced a twenty page brief for distribution among their members about the possibilities for electoral reform in Canada³; 2) represented NAWL on a panel regarding electoral systems at the Association for Women's Rights for Development's (AWID) 9th International Forum in Guadalajara, Mexico in October 2002; 3) lead the writing of a funding proposal to the Law Commission of Canada so that NAWL could hold a national consultation on Canada's electoral system in March 2003 for which I served on the organizing committee, and prepared numerous fact sheets. These were adapted and elaborated

³ Peckford, Nancy (November 2002). *A Mandate of Equality: Women and Electoral Reform: Pursuing a Feminist Policy Agenda in Canada*. <http://www.nawl.ca/brief-electoral-reform.htm>

upon in the spring of this year for an election project of the Coalition for Women's Equality, of which NAWL is a member, and constitute a key component of the political action tool-kit I have developed.

This collaboration with NAWL on these numerous projects was a direct response to challenges national women's organizations such as NAWL were encountering in the period prior to and after the World March of Women in October 2000 around sustaining the equality gains which had been made through the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and legislative commitments. Through my work as National Lobby Coordinator for the Canadian Women's March Committee in the period preceding my collaboration with NAWL, I had the occasion to discuss these challenges at some length with both the Executive Director of NAWL, Bonnie Diamond, and Andrée Côté, Director of Legislation and Law Reform. These discussions touched upon on-going weaknesses of Canada's formal political system, including the low numbers of women elected, particularly feminist women, the decrease in resources for equality-seeking women's mobilizing, and the inadequacy of federal government and parliamentary mechanisms designed to elicit the perspectives of women regarding legislative proposals and reform. It was in this context that NAWL determined that a closer examination of Canada's political structures, with a special emphasis on the federal electoral system, was both relevant and strategic.

The materials developed for the various activities in which I have been engaged with NAWL have been widely circulated among national women's organizations. As the subject of electoral reform has gained momentum in three

provinces (Québec, Prince Edward Island, and British Columbia), these tools have gained increasing significance for women interested in larger questions of democratic reform. However, given the context in which this material was generated from 2001-2004⁴, including NAWL's activities to inform and influence the federal legislative agenda on files of significance to women, my explorations were not under-taken in isolation from larger political dynamics within and outside of the women's movement in Canada. The following essay has provided me with an opportunity to more systematically reflect on these dynamics, and in particular, on recent shifts in the nature of engagement between equality-seeking women's organizations and the federal state.

In the following paper, I review the ways in which organized, feminist women articulated a broad-based political agenda that facilitated the partial achievement of women's equality during Second Wave feminism. I explore how particular women's groups and networks were able to advance the notion that women constitute a legitimate political constituency and in so doing successfully challenged the patriarchal framework of the social welfare state⁵ and the male norm of 'citizenship' (Cohen 1993). I argue that these interventions have not brought about lasting changes to the functioning of formal political structures, or dominant political communities in Canada, so as to allow for a more inclusive and dynamic politics. In embarking upon

⁴ This context includes pending amendments to the federal Divorce Act as it pertains to custody and access, the introduction of Bill C31 (the federal anti-terrorism legislation) in the fall of 2001, NAWL's intervenor status in the case of *Gosselin v. Québec* heard in the Supreme Court in 2001 (which focused on Québec's cuts to its social assistance rates), and NAWL's on-going activism around the inaccessibility of legal aid for civil and family law in many provinces and territories,

⁵ According to Jane Jensen, the Canadian welfare state was characterized by the extension of citizenship rights so that citizen groups had reasonable access to political elites, and by the establishment of key social and economic rights, including universal access to health care, education, unemployment insurance and other key social programs such as social assistance (Jensen 1996).

this work, I am guided by the work of three feminist academics in Canada who have called for more systematic reflection upon the relevance of the various political strategies that have been used by women's movements in Canada (Brodie 1995; Rankin and Vickers 1988; Young 1998). "In an era in which government underwriting of feminist activism is rapidly evaporating, careful evaluation of our representational projects and practices appears urgent" (Rankin and Vickers 1988: 341). After extensive analyses of the representational practices of women's activism in Canada, Sue Findlay views the task for feminists endeavoring to pursue feminist political projects this way: "The task for feminists is to make the knowledge we have gained about representation from our struggles for women's equality visible in the current debates about democracy" (Findlay 1988: 295). Finally, it is my expectation that this project will assist me in better grounding my own activism in the lessons learned from the diversity of tools that women's movements in Canada have employed in the last three decades in advancing an agenda for change.

Theoretical framework

My theoretical approach in this paper is informed by feminist deconstructionist and post-structuralist analyses in which various theorists (Marshall 2000; Pringle and Watson 1992; Spivak 1984; Weedon 1987; Weedon 1999; Yeatman 1994) have argued that the category women is not a given, and, as such, is constantly subject to competing interpretations. In keeping with this perspective, I rely on the concept of discourse to demonstrate that gender largely functions as “a symbolic resource in a political culture” (Marshall 2000: 137). For many contemporary feminist theorists (Brodie 1995; Corrin 1999; Jensen and Phillips 1996; Marshall 2000; Weedon 1999), the concept of discourse “has come to be understood as a historically, social and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories and beliefs” (Corrin 1999: 240). Within this framework, “ ‘men’ and ‘women’ and their ‘interests’ rest not on biological difference, reproductive relations or the sexual division of labour, but on the discursive practices that produce them” (Pringle and Watson 1992: 66). Theorist Michel Foucault has been instrumental in identifying the notion of discursive fields, which “consists of competing ways to giving meaning to the world and of organizing social institutions and processes” (Weedon 1987: 35; Foucault 1980). Though the scope of this project is primarily preoccupied with reviewing dominant trends in feminist mobilizing in Canada during the height of Second Wave feminism (1968-1994),⁶ I remain cognizant of more

⁶ I employ this time period as a result of my understanding of how the establishment of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in 1968 proved to be a watershed moment for Second Wave feminism in Canada (Brodie 1995). I identified 1994 as the end of this era because this was the year that the North American Free Trade Agreement was signed, signaling Canada's full participation in a new economic regime that facilitated fundamental changes to Canada's fiscal strategies and social programs. One of the ways in which this manifested itself for the women in Canada was that in 1995,

recent post-structuralist analyses in which it is asserted that all constituencies, whether organized by gender, race, sexuality, or other identity considerations, are discursively constructed. I am of the view that specific discourses have been shaped and deployed by particular social actors throughout modern history to facilitate the establishment of hegemonic relationships which have been used to justify the unequal distribution of power and resources amongst social groups (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Though this paper does not allow for a full exploration of the concept of hegemony, I subscribe to the perspective that marginalized constituencies cannot create the conditions for structural and lasting change without challenging the symbolic ordering, that is, the social/political/historical understandings, which underlie the systemic oppression that this ordering, or hegemony, legitimates (Mooers 2000).

The application of deconstructionist and post-structuralist analyses has revealed that throughout modern, western identified history, certain privileged sites have emerged as a result of “articulatory practices” (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 96). These practices “temporarily arrest the flow of differences to construct privileged sites or nodal points which partially fix meaning” (Pringle and Watson 1992: 66). Both the concept and materialization of the modern nation state is an example of an outcome of a privileged site within predominantly western identified political thought, which has advanced a particular kind of politics. Seyla Benhabib (1996) argues that the concept of the modern state in western industrialized countries has generated a specific kind of politics characterized as “a politics of domestication,

the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women was terminated by the federal government. Further, also in 1995, then Finance Minister Paul Martin introduced the *Budget Implementation Act* which eliminated many of the social rights to income support programs and other public programs on which many women heavily relied, namely social assistance.

containment, and boundary drawing” (Benhabib 1996: 7). The shape of some of the interests which women advanced in Canada during Second Wave feminism has been directly informed by the parameters, also contested, of this kind of state, though the possibilities for engagement with the state are constantly shifting. It comes as no surprise, then, that the interests of women, amongst others, have been “constituted and constrained by the discursively available possibilities for representation and action” (Pringle and Watson 1992: 9). This particular view of the social order has had a profound effect on how notions of the political are understood and navigated by movements within society. Throughout this paper, I aim to demonstrate that what constitutes the “political” is never permanently fixed and is constantly subject to contested and multiple meanings (Pringle and Watson 1992).

Section I: Women's Political Organizing during Second Wave Feminism in Canada

Brief Encounters: Organized feminist women become a legitimated political constituency (1968 - 1994)

During the period of the Second Wave women's movement in Canada (1968-1994), many feminist women argued that the category "women" constituted a legitimate political constituency. The basis for this assertion was the argument that women had *shared* or *collective* interests as a result of the sexism and discrimination they experienced, and which are perpetuated by men and many of society's dominant institutions (Cohen 1993). The origins and manifestations of this oppression were subject to great debate by organized women during the emergence and course of second wave feminism. Three distinct streams, which have been widely documented, characterized second wave women's debates about the nature of and remedies for women's oppression: 1/ a liberal feminist approach best defined by its focus on achieving change for individual women through established political processes; 2/ a radical feminist approach signified by the formation by women of independent, locally based grassroots organizations, and 3/ a socialist feminist approach based in an (albeit under-developed) class analysis of women's oppression (Adamson et al. 1988). In the Canadian context, much has been written by Second Wave feminists themselves (Adamson et al. 1988; Findlay 1988; Vickers et al. 1993) about how women involved in all three streams struck broad-based alliances through various coalition groups in order to advance a "radically liberalist" politics, frequently evident in the functioning of one of the dominant umbrella groups at the time, the National

Action Committee on the Status of Women (NACSW). NAC was established in 1972 by a network of women committed to ensuring the implementation of the recommendations from the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in 1970.

In contrast to subsequent shifts in the theoretical understandings of women's oppression (to which I referred in my theoretical framework), which have brought into question the stability of the category women itself, organized women during the Second Wave appear to have mostly grappled with the nature and form of what they assumed were women's shared oppression (Cohen 1993), and not the stability of women as a category writ large. Numerous struggles did emerge, however, over which women were being invoked when organized women named and called for the elimination of women's collective oppression. This can be seen in the recommendations from the Royal Commission itself, which placed heavy emphasis on the impediments to the realization of women's individualized personhood, and less emphasis on the structural critique of women's role as care-givers within the family (McKeen 1999).

Dobrowsky summarizes the success of Second Wave feminist organizing in Canada by underscoring the ways in which "various interests could be pursued, identities affirmed, and new social programs established that would meet some of the needs of women" (Dobrowsky 2000: 9). According to Iris Young (1995), women's ability to conceive of themselves as a collective, and act as such, allows them to counter the individualist liberal agenda in which the status of women as full citizens is still contested, as is the pervasive oppression women continue to experience. "Without conceptualizing women as a group in some sense, it is not possible to

conceptualize oppression as a systematic, structured, institutional process” (Young 1995: 104). In many ways, organized women’s concerted efforts and successful mobilizing around the inclusion of an equality-clause in Canada’s *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* is the most fundamental indication of the degree to which women viewed themselves as having a collectively defined identity and shared interests. Organized women were determined to entrench their collective right to equality in this document as a result of the inadequacy of the then existing legal provisions regarding sex discrimination, including those contained in the *Canadian Bill of Rights*. Women who attempted to bring sex discrimination to the courts under the *Bill of Rights* were subjected to legal interpretations by judges in which women were told they were entitled to equal treatment before the law, not under it. This meant that as long as sex discrimination was applied equally to all women, discrimination on the basis of sex was perfectly legal. The determination of organized women at the time to establish a more progressive definition of equality for all women arose in part as a result of the commitment feminist women shared to a collective identity (Brodsky and Day 1989).

The assertion by organized women of a collective identity also formed the basis for their assertion that they constituted a legitimate political constituency within the larger universe of political discourse. According to Jensen (1994), the concept of “the universe of political discourse” (Jensen 1994:65) functions

by setting boundaries to political action and by limiting the range of actors that are accorded the status of legitimate participants, the range of issues included in the realm of meaningful policy debate, the political alternatives feasible for implementation, and the alliance strategies available for achieving change. (Jensen 1994: 65)

For Jensen, the “universe of political discourse” is never stagnant, but is constantly subject to change as beliefs evolve and new conflicts arise. Throughout this paper, I refer to ways in which new identities, particularly as they relate to emerging understandings of the language of women, have emerged among women in various parts of the world – identities which have dramatically influenced how women view themselves as political actors, and negotiate the political landscape.⁷ The “universe of political discourse” has two predominant effects. It establishes what issues/matters are actually recognized and considered political, and it facilitates the formation and/or repression of collective identities. Within a particular universe, only some identities will come to the fore. For the emergence of others, the “universe” itself must change. During the Second Wave of the women’s movement in Canada, activist women enjoyed limited success in becoming a legitimate political constituency in Canada. In order to do this, women attempted to reveal how the often private and invisible oppression experienced by women was a function of a public, and hence political ordering.

Significantly, women at the grassroots levels overturned traditional definitions of the political to include issues that were specific to women. Activist women during this period achieved this re-definition through challenging the nature of what constituted legitimate political discourse in Canada. In so doing, they can be regarded as having attempted to, in Jodi Dean’s words, “re-site the political”(Dean 1997a:2). Dean describes the process of re-siting the political to include “recognizing the

⁷ As is evident in the latter part of this paper, though the scope of this paper does not permit me to theorize political agency at length, I rely on Chandra Mohanty’s appeal to historicize and locate political agency as a “necessary alternative to formulations of the ‘universality’ of gendered oppression and struggles.” (Mohanty 1992: p. 74)

multiple terrains and spaces producing and produced by politics” (Dean 1997a: 2). Second Wave women’s movement’s attempts in Canada to re-situate the political relied on and produced particular discourses about women, some of which no longer resonate with nor are read by many women (or men) in the same way. This is not unsurprising when one applies a post-structuralist analysis. As Barbara Marshall (2000) points out: “the formation of identities is simultaneously an individual and social project, always undertaken in the context of historically available interpretations...and the result of contestation and resistance, which permit some interpretations and suppress others” (Marshall 2000: 159).

For feminist women during the Second Wave, re-sitations of the political happened in a number of ways, with particular significance given to the role women’s liberationist groups played. Through the use of the strategically employed slogan “the personal is political,” young women who were involved in revolutionary struggles during the late 1960s challenged the expectation that they should play secondary, supportive roles to their male peers, resisting the expectation that they would “make coffee, not policy” (Burt et al 1993: 160; Vickers 1989). Student-activist women who were dissatisfied with how they were being treated converged to form women liberationist groups that attempted to dissolve the “traditional boundaries between the personal or domestic and the political [that] expressed the need for a total politics” (Vickers 1989: 24). These groups were characterized by their rejection of the notion that women’s oppression was part of, or a manifestation of, larger oppressions such as class or imperialism. As a result, in both English Canada and Québec, women’s liberationists insisted on expanding the realm of

political discourse by demanding that women's oppression as such be recognized as a political concern, whether the issue was the right to abortion and other reproductive health services, the sexual objectification of women, or the victimization of women as a result of public and family violence, to name just a few.

The recognition of organized women as a political constituency in Canada was also enormously influenced by the establishment of the federal Royal Commission on the Status of Women. This Commission was formed in 1968 by Prime Minister Pearson whose government could no longer ignore the calls from the prominent and visible Committee on Equality for Women - comprising thirty women's groups supportive of the idea of a Commission), among others. The Commission, headed by journalist Florence Bird, was charged with the responsibility of recommending the appropriate steps to ensure equal opportunities for women in Canadian society (Burt 1993; Brodie 1995). The Commission conducted public hearings in all ten provinces over a period of two years, and in 1970, made a report that contained 167 recommendations to the federal government. Beyond proposing the recommendations themselves, however, the Commission is credited with facilitating the "development of [the women's movement's] most public face" (Brodie 1995: 42). The Commission tapped into the strength and diversity of women's organizing, and as a consequence "[the Commission] turned out to be far more dynamic, even more progressive, than might have been expected" (Burt 1993: 160). These hearings also had a significant impact on the mass media, the public and the Commissioners themselves to the degree that the Commission "directly

influenced the politics and the strategies of the women's movement" (Brodie 1995: 43) for years to come.

Most importantly, the Commission legitimated organized women's collective identity and status as a political constituency, primarily within a paradigm of the social welfare state. The work of the Royal Commission had taken place during a period when social welfarism was a significant influence on social policy making in Canada, and direct intervention in the economy and assistance to families was becoming the norm for most federal and provincial governments. It was also a time in which the federal state viewed itself as having a role to play in fostering certain collective identities, or in other words, "to help groups weld together individuals" (Jensen and Phillips 1996: 128). As a consequence, the advocacy in which many women's groups engaged was viewed by governments as being a function of politicized group identity and, in the case of the federal government, it was explicitly encouraged at the height of Second Wave feminism.

In this context, liberal feminist approaches to women's equality predominated as a consequence of the fact that the Commission was state mandated and financed, and because almost all of the Commission's recommendations were directed at government. Given this scenario, many of the women who had lobbied for the establishment of the Commission, or who had become politicized as a result of it, appealed to the federal state to take leadership and implement its recommendations. As it became increasingly clear after the Commission made its report to the federal government that the government was not planning to be particularly pro-active in responding to the recommendations, women intensified their interactions with

federal, provincial and territorial governments in order to mobilize politicians to take the Commission's recommendations seriously. In 1972, after two frustrating years of government platitudes and modest action, activist women convened a national women's conference called *Strategies for Change* to discuss the status of the recommendations. They decided to form the pan-Canadian National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) in order to strengthen their call for the implementation of the Commission's recommendations (Brodie 1995).

The nature of this political engagement has been characterized by Sue Findlay (1987) as one of "facing the state" (Findlay 1987:31) and she notes the myriad of ways in which, by the 1980s, even socialist and radical feminists had become engaged in state -centered activities. This included women's participation in lobby activities around the development of legislation to address violence against women and provisions for pay equity, as well as feminist women taking action within all of Canada's major political parties to push for the adoption of specific recruitment strategies for women candidates and for the generation of policy positions on women's issues. In 1981, activist women also quickly and forcefully mobilized around the inclusion of women's equality clauses in the Canadian constitution after it became clear that women's equality was emerging as a possible negotiable right that could be traded off against others (Brodsky and Day 1989).

The nature of feminist women's focus on the state during the Second Wave of the women's movement has also been called "radical liberalism" (Vickers, Rankin and Appelle 1993: 41), a term coined by Jill Vickers, Pauline Rankin and Christine Appelle to underscore the commitment to "the ordinary political process" (Vickers,

Rankin and Appelle 1993: 41) that was demonstrated within the Canadian women's movement during the Second Wave. "Radical liberalism" (Vickers, Rankin, and Appelle: 35) also refers to the belief in the efficacy of state action that was held by many feminists, particularly as it pertained to the provision of welfare state programs (Brodie 1995; Young 1998). The adoption of "radical liberalism" by some leaders in the English Canadian women's movement during Second Wave feminism has had significant reverberations for how many feminist women in Canada have understood and approached Canadian political realities. "Radical liberalism" had the effect of reinforcing many women's support for the welfare state, encouraged women to have faith in the potential of state action, and promoted the view that dialogue amongst organized women and between women and the state was helpful (Vickers, Rankin and Appelle 1993: 37). After the energy and momentum that had been generated by women's engagement with the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) became one of the primary political vehicles through which women practiced "radical liberalism". Via NAC, organized women, as a constituency, were able to make their collective interests known to the state. For almost two decades from its inception, NAC regularly held lobby sessions with politicians and public servants, and also enjoyed limited access to the federal cabinet through the creation of bureaucratic mechanisms within the state.

In this regard, one of the major successes of this period of mobilization was the hard-won victory by feminist activists to have women's equality rights fully included in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* as part of the re-patriation of

Canada's constitution (Jensen 1996). The successful demand by activist women for the full (and non-negotiable) inclusion of women's equality rights in the *Charter*, in the face of federal-political-territorial negotiations that were hostile to women's participation and that had treated women's equality as a bargaining chip, demonstrated the women's movement's representational power outside of elitist political institutions, their achievement of some legitimacy as recognized political actors, and the strength of their analyses of the effects of women's exclusion from full citizenship status.

"Women's issues" and social citizenship

The legitimacy of women as a political constituency in the years following the Commission was also derived from its capacity to address specific "women's issues" (Brodie 1995: 46), many of which had been identified by the Royal Commission itself (Ibid). Day care, maternity leave, reproductive choices, non-traditional occupations for women, and pornography were all included in this category (Cross 2000), and were all issues that led both governments and employers to accept interventions by organized women's groups. The federal government's approval of the conclusions of the Commission "in principle" (Brodie 1995: 42) had demanded that some federal Ministries and departments seek ways for women's interests to be represented to the state in a contained fashion, without having feminist values, or feminist activists, explicitly incorporated into the functioning of government (Ibid). As a consequence, the federal government resorted to soliciting, in a very controlled fashion, the expertise and analyses of particular women's organizations that had formed to lobby

Ottawa politicians and bureaucrats in the post-Royal Commission period (Findlay 1987: 44). This practice precipitated the development amongst various women's organizations of expertise on subjects which came to be recognized as "women's issues" (Brodie 1995: 46). As such, this expertise on women further facilitated the view that women comprised a constituency which carried particular interests.

According to Brodie, most of these issues which won the attention of the federal state in Canada during Second Wave feminism were questions of social welfare policy, questions which did not contradict the dominant federal policy framework of the time, social welfarism (Brodie 1995: 47). Within the context of "radical liberalism", organized women pushed state actors to re-conceive of some of the underlying principles of social welfarism that, at their core, were profoundly patriarchal in nature. Social welfarism had first been adopted by the federal government in the post-World War II period in an effort to create a new kind of pan-Canadianism. Elected leaders at the time had sought to extend the Canadian citizen's sense of citizenship to include the notion of collective responsibility, of which the state was "its expression and guarantor" (Jensen and Phillips 1996: 116). The provision of family allowance payments, old-age pensions, and unemployment insurance were all established early on in this period as national programs to be administered by the federal state, allowing them to, as Jensen and Phillips put it, "enter into a relationship with each Canadian" (Marshall 2000; Jensen and Phillips 1996: 116). Early in the 1960s, another phase of social expansionism was introduced by the federal state as citizen-based organizations and movements, including trade-labour unions, political parties, women's groups and, and a nationalist movement in

Québec took hold. Issues of inclusion, access, and representation were advanced by these actors, and in a period of unprecedented federal state activism in this vein, the mandate of the citizenship branch of the Secretary of State was expanded to include the provision of funding to selected advocacy groups. This funding served to affirm claims for recognition, and to assist some organizations in performing social justice work. In so doing, Jensen and Phillips note that “achieving social justice and equity were legitimate goals, and therefore groups which made claims, and programs which responded to such claims, were in the political mainstream” (Jensen and Phillips 1996: 118-119).

Within this context, organized women endeavored to expand the definition of the principle of social citizenship, and their efforts “were aimed at extending its meaning to be more inclusive and productive of substantive equality.” (Marshall 2000: 130). The two-tiered nature of social welfare benefits was challenged in which women only qualified for benefits if they were female care-givers (mothers or wives), and judged by the state to be deserving of this aid in contrast to men’s status as workers which conferred upon them the right to access a range of employment related benefits, including employment insurance and an [old age] pension (Scott 1999: 209). Feminist women offered both a critique of nationally administered social welfare programs that discriminated against them as a result of the patriarchal premise upon which many of them were based, and demanded that their citizenship rights go beyond formal equality so that they could enjoy meaningful access to the social, economic, and political rights that were to accompany equal citizenship. As a consequence, women succeeded in opening significant political space to make claims

on the basis of this challenge to social citizenship. This precipitated an array of victories, including significant reforms to marriage and property law, the inclusion of two equality clauses in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and an increased awareness of and penalties for the perpetrators of violence against women (O'Neil 1993). As well, the Canadian women's movement was able to achieve the recognition by the federal government of the inherent right of Aboriginal women to maintain their status regardless of whom they married, the adoption of employment equity legislation for the public service, and the hard-won decriminalization of abortion in order to enhance women's reproductive choices (Canadian Women's March Committee 2000; Dobrowsky 2000).

By the mid 1980s, however, the federal government was challenging the legitimacy of organized women's groups and the validity of the issues that they continued to advance. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Mulroney, the federal government began to re-visit many of the social and economic rights and obligations that had been forged as a result of the rise of the post-World War II citizenship regime (Marshall 2000). The *Royal Commission on the Economic and Union and Development Prospects for Canada*, which reported to Parliament a year after the Mulroney government was elected in 1984, proved to be a watershed in establishing new economic and social policy directions, and served as a blueprint for the subsequent decade (Brodie 1995). It became the catalyst for the replacement of the post-war regime of "social liberalism"⁸ (Voet 1998: 33) with a new regime based

⁸ Jane Jensen (2003) has described Canada's post-WWII emphasis on social citizenship as reflecting elements of social liberalism, particularly that of the version which was proposed by TH Marshall to the first British Labour governments in the 1940s and 1950s in the United Kingdom. Jensen names both the influential Marsh Report and the Liberal Party of Canada as two sites in which social

upon neo-liberal principles. Within the post-war regime of “social liberalism”, and in keeping with international trends in the industrialized world, the Canadian government had adopted the model of a welfare state which eventually included the provision of publicly administered health care and post-secondary education on a wide (universal) basis, and the establishment of social assistance benefits, amongst other things. Under the welfare state, the Canadian government conferred on its citizens limited social rights, particularly around freedom from abject poverty.

The shift to a neo-liberal model has been the subject of extensive debate and contestation in Canada (as was reflected in the national debate in 1988 about entering into a free trade agreement with the United States), although the term neo-liberalism is often subsumed under the more popular language of globalization -- which has been frequently invoked by governments and business leaders to justify fiscally conservative choices. Marshall asserts that globalization

generally refers to a new economic world order, linked to technological advances, where trade barriers have been torn down, goods and services flow freely between nations, and democracy has spread like topsy as free markets have triumphed over political dictatorships and centralized economic planning. (Marshall 2000: 128-129)

The pervasiveness of globalization within the Canadian context, however, can be attributed to the social power of the economic and political brokers whose interests are deeply connected with the neo-liberal programme, including stockholders, financial operators, industrialists, and conservative or social-democratic politicians (Bourdieu 1998: 2). For Pierre Bourdieu, “neo-liberalism tends on the whole to

liberalism embedded itself in the Canadian context. However, I acknowledge that the term is contested and is being increasingly invoked in reference to governments that have adopted socially progressive policies in regards to issues such as same-sex marriage or the decriminalization of marijuana.

favour severing the economy from social realities and thereby constructing, in reality, an economic system ... that is a sort of logical machine that presents itself as a chain of constraints regulating economic agents" (Bourdieu 1998: 2). Bourdieu's definition corresponds with the neo-liberal policies that have been pursued by both Progressive Conservative (PC) and Liberal parties in Canada. This has included a program of deficit-cutting in which federal transfers to the provinces for the purposes of cost-shared programs have been subject to a cap, income security programs have been exhaustively reviewed and modified to produce cost-savings, and labour market policies have been altered to foster a more flexible and mobile workforce (Little 1999: 65). In 1986, the Progressive Conservative government also entered into negotiations with the United States regarding Canada's first comprehensive international trade agreement with the United States, the *Canada-US Free Trade Agreement*. These changes were not without controversy, nor were they met without resistance. The 1988 federal election was fought over whether or not Canada should enter into the proposed *Free Trade Agreement* with the US, and all other federal parties opposed it at the time. Despite the fact that only 38% of Canadians voted in favour of the Progressive Conservative party during this election, the PC party won a majority of the seats in the House of Commons (a consequence of Canada's first-past-the-post electoral system), and the deal was implemented shortly thereafter. Once a signatory to this trade agreement, the Liberal Party embraced the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994 (Brodie 1995; Marshall 2000;).

It is worth noting, however, that the neo-liberal agenda has not been confined to the Progressive Conservatives. Despite Canadians' widespread opposition to the

Progressive Conservative party (and presumably its values) in the 1993 federal election at which time the party was reduced to two seats, the Liberal Party subsequently defied its own election promise to take Canada out of the *Canada-US Free Trade Agreement*. Additionally, in 1995, then Liberal finance minister Paul Martin introduced a federal budget re-structuring process that facilitated the elimination of the Canada Assistance Plan, the linchpin of Canada's social welfare program that assured national standards for health, education and social assistance by virtue of a fiscal arrangement between the federal government and the provinces and territories (Little 1999).

For feminist-based advocacy groups in Canada, this new regime has challenged the basis of social citizenship on which many organized women had successfully intervened. Gains that had been made by women to expand policies and programs based on notions of social citizenship so that they included feminist interpretations of women's interests have been replaced by government notions of "lean citizenship" (Mooers 2000: 288). This has involved a process of fully individualizing citizenship so that dependency on the state is discouraged, even punished, and individuals are expected to rely on the market and the nuclear family for the fulfillment of the overwhelming majority of their economic and social needs, even the most basic. "Lean citizenship [is] the attempt to strip citizenship of any collective or social attributes in favour of a wholly privatized and marketized notion of rights" (Mooers 2000: 288). For organized women, who were just beginning to influence the basis on which women's claims were evaluated, this turn of events has been extremely negative:

Not only is the structure of entitlement to the rights of citizenship being challenged but the very boundaries of politics and right of some actors to make claims are being challenged as well. (Scott 1999: 210)

With the adoption of a neo-liberal regime in Canada, many women's organizations that had relied on the state for funding in order to consolidate and advance the interests of their members are no longer able to function as relatively autonomous, responsive organizations. In 1994, the new federal Liberal government signaled its intention to financially support groups through Status of Women Canada whose primary goal was "service provision" (Jensen and Phillips 1996:122) *as opposed to* "advocacy work" (Ibid). The Women's Programme managed by Status of Women Canada also began to evaluate groups' applications for funding on the basis of the degree to which their aims were compatible with the current government priorities of the time (Jensen and Phillips 1996). In Jensen's and Phillips' (1996) view, these changes have resulted in a significant representational shift for interest groups: from one of representing, that is, consolidating and articulating the interests of their members, to that of representing the interests of the state to their members and allies. As a consequence, feminist women's opportunities to interact with decision-makers within the state and with one another, using collectively-based organizational structures which are able to advance particular interests on behalf of their constituencies, have been seriously diminished. Many women's organizations are no longer able to rely on federal funds so that they can hear from, engage with, and articulate the interests of their members.

For example, some women's centres in Canada, including in Newfoundland

and Labrador, have, in exchange for a limited amount of government funds, become primarily service providers (in lieu of provincial governments) for women who have been victims of violence and are in need of counseling and personal advocacy (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador News Release 1998). This process has been facilitated by service agreements sought by provincial governments that require elaborate reporting and accounting processes and which place a further drain on the resources of women's centres. Through agreements such as this, opportunities for political advocacy amongst feminist women in communities across the country have been severely constrained. Consequently, feminist women's ability to organize themselves according to shared interests and to advance collective and politically distinct interests has been seriously undermined. "Women's unofficial politics [in Canada] has been fundamentally altered through the demobilization of women's groups precipitated by funding cuts" (Rankin 2002: 13). For women during the Second Wave, the promotion of these interests, albeit loosely-based and constantly in evolution, was key to their recognition.

The National Action Committee on the Status of Women

These changes have had a particularly adverse effect on the viability of one of Canada's largest coalition of women's groups, the National Action Committee (NAC) on the Status of Women. From its inception, NAC served as one of the primary spaces in which a diverse range of women's interests were both consolidated and brokered amongst women.⁹ During its early existence, NAC incorporated many of

⁹ While this paper does not allow for a deeper analysis of how NAC functioned as a political space and institution, I am aware that there are multiple and disputed histories of women's movements in

the long-standing women's organizations that had been active in pushing the federal government to establish a Royal Commission and many of the more radical women's groups with members who were ambivalent about the ability of the state to make meaningful changes for women. This latter category included women's liberation groups that were engaged at the community level in education, consciousness raising, and the provision of locally based, women-centred support services. Throughout the bulk of NAC's history, its leadership (which changed numerous times) displayed an impressive capacity to accommodate a diverse and dynamic coalition of interests and approaches. At key moments, NAC thrived on building and sustaining broad coalitions around varying women's interests and its political efficacy can be attributed to its ability to facilitate strategic cooperation across ideological, multi-partisan and generational lines. As a result, NAC became a political site that both aggregated interests and provided organized women with the opportunity to accommodate these differences in the context of a dominant pro-statist approach. In fact, Vickers asserts that it was the English Canadian movement's "acceptance of radical liberalism as its operational code which made possible the strong coalition-building behaviours that would begin *to make women matter* [emphasize mine] in federal politics" (Vickers 1993: 30).

The efficacy of NAC as a political vehicle was also a function of its multi-partisanship, something which no longer exists. The Progressive Conservative, Liberal, and New Democratic Party all had members who were active in NAC, to the point that the first three chairs of the organization were each associated with one of

Canada, including and especially of the role that NAC fulfilled during Second Wave feminism in Canada.

the aforementioned parties. Over time, the activism of women from all three parties precluded the establishment of more formal ties between NAC and either the Liberal or New Democratic parties, as partisan women from all three were not amenable to the potential that another party would become a more dominant force within the organization. Nonetheless, as Lisa Young explains, as a result of the commitment until the late 1980's to the "ordinary political process" held by most members of NAC, the leadership pursued ties with Canada's main three political parties. The perception existed that "integration into established parties was a necessary route for furthering the movement's policy agenda" (Young 1998: 200).

In spite of the interest in party arenas that many of NAC's members brought with them, the fact that NAC functioned as a large and diverse coalition meant that it was also creating its own political culture. By political culture, I am using the definition developed by Raka Ray (1999) in her analysis of women's movements in India. For Ray, political culture refers to "the acceptable and legitimate ways of doing politics in a given society" (Ray 1999: 6). NAC began to assume the role of a "parliament of women in which conflicting understandings of the condition of women could be debated and explored." (Vickers 1993: 27). This was partly out of necessity. Women remained largely outside of the formal processes of political and economic policy-making. In her review of women's access and success within the electoral arena for a submission to the *Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing* in 1991, Janine Brodie argued that women

remain governed rather than governors, legislated rather than legislators. Without representation, economic, political and social decisions are taken with little attention given to, or even awareness of, the special impact new policy

initiatives have on women. (Brodie 1991: 9)

In contrast, NAC was a relatively inclusive space, where, despite some significant limitations, dialogue prevailed amongst an impressively diverse collection of groups of women. Given this scenario, it should not come as a surprise that within NAC's ranks, organized women were able to dialogue about and plan a strategic and diverse repertoire of tactics and strategies that went beyond lobbying in a few instances, incorporating mass mobilization, persuasion and direct action to advance a particular issue. With the election of the Mulroney Conservatives in 1984, the socialist and grassroots feminists who had always been part of NAC began to assume leadership of the organization, and challenged members to re-think the emphasis on conventional lobby strategies (Young 1998). As a consequence, NAC developed a more pronounced oppositional stance which, according to Lisa Young, entailed a "less deferential attitude toward political elites," (Young 1998: 202), an enthusiasm for less conventional "protest tactics," and a greater interest in expanding its focus on broader economic and social policy issues, in addition to its interest in narrowly defined status of women issues (Young 1998: 202). As a consequence, NAC, Young argues, went from being known as a "fairly conventional lobbying organization to a more oppositional protest oriented group" (Young 1998: 202).

In keeping with this shift in orientation within the leadership of the organization, NAC's willingness to accommodate a multi-partisan approach significantly declined from 1984 onward. The dominant tendency within the organization became one of profound scepticism about the good that could come from working with any of the political parties, including the New Democrats, who shared,

at least on paper, many of NAC's policy positions. NAC also found itself vehemently opposing federal government policy that was ideologically driven by neo-conservative values, including the not-so-small matter of the Conservative's proposed *Canada- US Free Trade Agreement* in 1988 (Young 1998).

Instead, NAC became more closely allied with the labour movement and social movement coalition partners that opposed the profound economic restructuring begun under the Conservative party and continued by the Liberal Party after it was elected to power in 1993. By the time the federal Liberals were elected in 1993, NAC's commitment to the "ordinary political process" (Vickers, Rankin, Appelle 1993), which served as a key element of "radical liberalism" (Ibid: 41), had waned dramatically. Although the federal Liberals had been re-elected in 1993 on a platform of social interventionism (including commitments to job creation, universal child care, and an expanded health care program), they adopted the Conservatives' economic re-structuring strategy, in the process signalling reduced support for women's organizations, including NAC that they had helped to found. By 2004, NAC was barely functioning, having been effectively silenced as the result of being the "victim of the right wing shift in civil society; a ten year campaign against NAC itself, led by right-wing forces in the country; and government cutbacks (Rebick 2004).

Where to from here?

The status of the federal government's support for women's organizing is

symbolic of a shift, which has been taking place in Canada for some time now, within Canadian democratic practices and the realm of the political. Aside from the withdrawal of some basic income support offered within the context of the social welfare state, Jensen and Phillips (1996) note that the emergence of the neo-liberal state in Canada has meant that the federal government no longer strives to facilitate the coming together of marginalized groups of citizens:

The responsibility for fostering solidarity and guaranteeing the collective access of the disadvantaged has been amputated from the citizenship regime.

Individuals are charged with representing themselves, through referenda and petitions and during public consultation, in addition to elections. (Jensen and Phillips 1996: 128)

The impact of these changes has fundamentally compromised the ability of actors within the Canadian women's movement to challenge how politics is practiced in Canada today, thereby limiting organized women's ability to influence mainstream political culture. It has been argued by Alexandra Dobrowsky (2000) that the Second Wave women's movement was unique amongst social movements in Canada for its ability to simultaneously challenge broader political and cultural practices while also focusing time and energy on conventional activities like lobbying (Adamson et al. 1988; Dobrowsky 2000). In her analysis of women's mobilizations around three rounds of Constitutional talks in Canada, Dobrowsky (2000) argues that the Second Wave women's movement transcended the conventional, that is, established political vehicles that were dominant at that time: "the women's movement's efforts to gain political regard and responsiveness can be shown to break through the representational confines of parties, interest groups, and social

movements” (Dobrowlsky 2000: 5). The ability of the women’s movement to organize from within (via traditional fora like state institutions and political parties) and from without (via looser networks of primarily grassroots women informed by a radically feminist approach), a phenomenon that many feminists understood as a choice between mainstreaming and disengagement, constitutes a distinct approach to doing politics in Canada in which “the women’s movement in Canada ... performed a seldom studied but nonetheless critical linking mechanism across representational forms” (Dobrowlsky 2000: 5).

During activist women’s participation in the *World March of Women* in the year 2000, organized women appeared to fulfill this “critical linking mechanism” once again (Dobrowlsky 2000:5). Organized women’s eagerness and capacity to do this may be in part attributable to their on-going engagement with various international United Nations’ processes which invited and encouraged women’s mobilizing, including the U.N. World Conference on Women which took place in Beijing in 1995. Nonetheless, women succeeded in mounting one of the largest mobilizations of women since the decline of the Second Wave of the women’s movement in Canada (1994) through their location in and engagement with the Canadian labour movement, faith communities, Aboriginal women’s networks, immigrant and visible minority communities, women’s centres, and more conventional lobby and research organizations, such as the National Council of Women and the National Association of Women and the Law, as well as others like the Canadian Research Institute on the Advancement of Women. Feminist women in the days leading up to the march criss-crossed representational forms, using informal

and formal political tactics to convey their message, including vigils, workshops, conferences, mock tribunals, river-rafting, walks, and provincial and federal lobbying (Peckford 2002). These efforts were reinforced by 60,000 person marches in Montréal and Ottawa, respectively. The energy women displayed for these marches demonstrated organized women's capacity to adopt a variety of tactics and strategies to convey their message, as well as their self-identification as participants in a collective struggle for women's equality. In doing so, they illuminated the circumstances of poverty and violence in which many women in Canada now live, despite the limited gains of Second Wave feminism, and they demanded immediate change from all levels of governments.

The inefficacy of these efforts to affect state action demonstrates the degree to which the political field in its entirety has changed. Raka Ray (1999) defines the political field to mean "a structured, unequal, and socially constructed environment within which organizations are embedded and to which organizations and activists constantly respond" (Ray 1999: 6). Ray includes in her definition of political field two key variables: the distribution of power, i.e. "the pattern of concentration or dispersal of forces within the field" and "political culture," which as noted above refers to "the acceptable and legitimate ways of doing politics in a given society" (Ray 1999: 6). Within such a field, there may lie more localized political sub-fields that Ray characterizes as "protest fields," which "consist of groups and networks that oppose those who have power in the formal political arena... although they are constrained by it" (Ray 1999: 7). The dramatic changes that feminists have endured within the political field in Canada have created tremendous flux for the organized

women's movement. As a result, I echo the observations that Janine Brodie (1995) made in her analysis of women and the impact of re-structuring in contemporary Canada -- that women are in the midst of grappling with the cultural dimensions of re-structuring, the effects of which have very particular political consequences. Brodie summed up this dilemma very well when she wrote: "The women's movement did not simply face a hostile federal government between 1984-1993; it became embedded in a process of carving out a new consensus, a new cultural ethos, and a new state form" (Brodie 1995: 47).

Section II: Impacts of the New Political Field and the Possibilities for Change

The “ordinary Canadian”

The emergence of the neo-liberal state occurred just as some of the collectively-based movement struggles, like feminism, began to realize some tangible political and economic gains. One of neo-liberalism’s best and most effective tools has been the attempt to (re)entrench the individual as the sole and only legitimate actor in the construction and practice of citizenship:

The re-casting of the individual citizen in democratic politics and the concomitant dislodging of groups as preferred political participants also forms a key element of the new political environment in which women’s unofficial politics struggle to maintain themselves. (Rankin 2002: 14)

The appearance of a new and mythic political actor, “the ordinary Canadian” (Brodie 1995: 71), has been a telling example in this regard, and is one of the ways in which new constraints on citizenship are being asserted (Brodie 1995). According to Brodie, the terminology of “the ordinary Canadian” was first invoked in the 1980s when it was used by some government actors to oppose the participation of equality-seeking organizations in federal government consultations. During Canada’s constitutional talks in the late 1980s and early 1990s, women’s groups were juxtaposed against the “ordinary Canadian” by mass media pundits and some prominent politicians as special interest groups representing particularistic interests. One of the “ordinary Canadian’s” more prominent appearances was at federal pre-budget hearings in 1994 when, not so coincidentally, Sunera Thobani (then NAC President) was denied the opportunity to be part of the Toronto-based consultation on

the basis that she was too high-profile, in other words, too visible as compared to the “ordinary Canadian”. In Brodie’s careful analysis of how “the ordinary Canadian” has been invoked, she asserts that the ordinary Canadian is best explained by what he is not. “The ordinary Canadian is disinterested, neither seeking special status nor treatment from the state. He is neither raced, nor sexed or classed: he transcends difference” (Brodie 1995: 72). On this basis, Brodie concludes that the “ordinary Canadian” can only be “a white, heterosexual, middle-class, English speaking male because in contrast to him, everyone else is special in some way” (Brodie 1995: 72). The tactical use of the “ordinary Canadian” reveals a strategy of containment on the part of some political actors regarding broader definition of citizenship. This question in some ways transcends the Second Wave struggles over women’s ability to shape and benefit from aspects of social citizenship, which was one component of a forward-thinking citizenship model proposed by T. H. Marshall in the post-World War II period (Voet 1998). Citizenship, a historically contested term which confers rights and responsibilities onto certain individuals (Jensen 1996: 113), is at the heart of many debates about how our political communities function and the principles on which they operate in a liberal democratic country such as Canada. The rise of the “ordinary Canadian” and its distinctly (un)gendered dimensions is symbolic of a challenge to the elaboration of citizenship rights that occurred during the height of Second Wave feminism, and is intended to advance markedly different understandings of who qualifies as a viable citizen. Its successful deployment is indicative of the precariousness of women’s citizenship rights. Though women in Canada may enjoy better legal protection of some of their equality rights, their ability

to participate -- as women -- in some of Canada's dominant political communities remains extremely fraught.

Linda Trimble (1998) has noted that since the advent of the Charter, equality-seeking women's contributions have been consistently portrayed by many of Canada's media pundits and political leaders as a way to protect and enhance their Charter rights, not as a means to enhancing a greater political project. Trimble writes: "Women are portrayed solely as *an* interest group, the perspectives and goals of which are partial, self-regarding and disruptive of the broader constitutional project" (Trimble 1998: 2). Evidence of this can be found in how organized women were characterized as "special interest groups" during their involvement in two rounds of Constitutional talks (Meech Lake and Charlottetown), implying that they were incapable of pronouncing upon the public good outside of a narrow self-interest (Dobrowsky 2000; Marshall 2000; Trimble 1998). Resistance to organized women's contributions regarding discussions of free trade and other macro-economic policies has also been expressed by members of the media and government officials. "Because these women were not viewed to be experts in areas outside of [those] strictly defined as women's issues, their opinions and analyses have been dismissed as having little credibility" (Cohen as quoted in Brodie 1995: 47). It is not surprising, then, that the achievement of women's equality clauses in the Charter would be regarded by some as one of the last moments in which feminist mobilizations would be able to achieve a significant gain for women. The Charter, Jensen and Phillips argue, "was simultaneously the culmination of the postwar citizenship regime and the beginning of its destabilization" (Jensen and Phillips: 119).

Re-examining citizenship

The dismantling of particular mechanisms that have been designed to increase women's capacity to participate in the public sphere has provoked equality-seeking women's organizations to call for the reinstatement of programs that support women's social citizenship. According to Anna Yeatman (1994), however, women's claims on the state on the basis of their social citizenship rights can never be fully realized because of the problematic underpinnings of the notion of "social citizenship" (Yeatman 1994: 86) which was rooted in the emergence of a welfare state. As social welfarism gained popularity in many highly industrialized countries, including Canada, in the post-World War II era, its accompanying discourse effectively organized citizens into two categories: those who achieved independent status as freely contracting individuals by successfully negotiating life in the market or public realm, and those who, for various reasons, did not (thus necessitating special assistance through state intervention). As a consequence, a discourse of independence vs. dependence took hold, producing some citizens as more independent than others, a situation which demands remedying if all who are recognized as individuals are to behave as full and equal citizens. Yeatman (1994) points out that the specific characteristics of the model citizen within the social welfare state rely on similar notions of citizenship first conceived by most early liberalist thinkers: that of a fully autonomous individual who, for the purposes of his/her citizenship, is located wholly apart from the domestic realm, and who possesses the "formal individuality of a rationally oriented, freely contracting subject [in which] all that is substantively needy about our lives, which makes us inter-dependent with each other, has to be bracketed

out" (Yeatman 1994: 85). As a consequence, those who are constituted as having special needs will only be included in the polity once the markers of their difference have been rectified.

The evidence for this can be seen in the way that the social welfare state has attempted to assimilate dependent, or non-rational, citizens by providing the means for them to conform to the dominant culture. Social citizenship "presupposes that a polity is possible only where its participants share a common culture" (Yeatman 1994: 86). Citizens who are defined as deviating from the "dominant culture" -- whether by virtue of their immersion in the private sphere, their attachment to the natural world (via reproduction and child-bearing) or their recent experiences in (other) cultures outside of this norm -- cannot be full citizens without relinquishing these differences. The efforts of Second Wave feminists to reveal the extent of women's inequality even in the face of the extension of formal political, civil and social rights, by emphasizing the "peculiar quality of female experiences... as citizens who were not only voters, but sexual beings, care-takers, workers, in short, embodied gendered persons" (Jones 1988: 18), have elicited only a partial victory. While the articulation of these experiences successfully provided the catalyst for decisive action by the state to create some of the conditions under which women could access some level of equality of opportunity, these actions have not sufficiently altered "the structure or the ethos of the polity" (Jones 1988: 16) to respond meaningfully to the multiplicity of experiences that the non-ordinary citizen brings to the table. Instead, the Canadian state has successfully foregone following up on its earlier efforts to address women's inequality by re-writing laws and modifying programs so that they

are entirely gender neutral (Marshall 2000: 137). This position of neutrality has allowed the state to further entrench social relations in ways that oppress women through the denial of their everyday experiences, and instead trumpets the possibility of individual success via the market in a gender neutral world.

Much contemporary feminist political thought has been devoted to conceptualizing new forms of citizenship that would allow for women's full participation and inclusion (Lister 1997; Mouffe 1993; Pateman 1989; Phillips 1991; Squires 2000; Young 1990). Squires (2000) synthesizes the dominant trend within the feminist treatment of citizenship as being that which went from an

attempt to add women into existing citizenship structures; to a rejection of the dominant concept of citizenship itself; and on to an assessment of the extent to which discourses of citizenship have worked to construct gendered identities themselves. (Squires 2000: 174)

In her analysis, Squires notes that the critiques of and alternatives to the dominant forms of citizenship in the liberal democratic tradition have focused, almost exclusively, on the civic realm, leaving the political component of citizenship under-theorized. "Social citizenship", in particular, has received a great amount of attention by national women's organizations including the National Association of Women and the Law (NAWL), the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) and related groups including the National Anti-Poverty Organization (NAPO). This has been as a consequence of the fact that many Second Wave feminist women recognized that the Canadian state's commitment to social welfarism offered a strategic opportunity to illuminate the unrealized nature of women's claim to equal citizenship.

The elusive nature of women's equality under the current conditions of citizenship in liberal democracies has prompted some feminists to develop proposals for alternative citizenship forms, including a form of citizenship based on women's experience of maternalism (Elshtain 1982; Ruddick 1980). More specifically, the "virtues of mothering- love, attentiveness, compassion, care and 'engrossment' " (Dietz 1992: 73) that most women as mothers extend to their children is viewed by some theorists to be a more legitimate and sustainable basis of women's citizenship than that based upon a notion of a fully autonomous and rational individual. For supporters of maternal citizenship, both the particularistic and communitarian experiences of some women (*qua* mothers) are valorized over constructs of citizenship in which individuals are motivated by their own self-interest in an abstract public sphere. More recently, the concept of maternalism has been expanded to include not only mothers, but also other women and men in society who sustain intimate relationships (Dietz 1992).

Another feminist political theorist, Iris Young (1990), has sought to address the inadequacy of liberal democratic citizenship by advocating a form of democratic cultural pluralism in which citizens who are members of group who are oppressed or disadvantaged on the basis of their difference would be provided with mechanisms for the "effective representation and recognition of the distinct voices and perspectives of those of its constituent groups" (Young 1990: 128). For Young, citizens who are members of oppressed groups (in her analysis, she identifies women and specific ethnic communities) must be provided with the necessary resources and political space to self-organize, consolidate their interests and express them in the

public sphere. Equality can only be achieved when practices of individualistic and self-motivated citizenship are counter-balanced with representation from groups of citizens whose interests and viewpoints would be otherwise neglected in the public sphere. Young acknowledges that the constitution and membership of groups would change over time based upon the shifting cultural terrain and a person's subjective life experiences of oppression, which may lead him/her to be a member of a marginalized group at one time, but not another.

Both of these approaches, maternal feminism and group pluralism, represent attempts to provide the means through which women could be fully included in liberal democratic political communities. In both instances, not only would concepts of citizenship have to change, but the structure of the polity itself would as well in order to accommodate different citizenship interests and the means by which these interests are articulated in the public sphere. Further, in the Canadian context, such proposals need to be evaluated on the basis of shifts amongst activist women over the last two decades regarding women's views of themselves as political actors, as well as new realities about the state, and the necessity of international organizing in the face of the consolidation of capital around the globe. In the course of these shifts, new invocations about gender and women have arisen among and outside feminist organizations.

These invocations have come about in part as a result of how many younger women in Canada view themselves and the role of feminism more generally. For example, the reluctance by many younger feminists to assert a strong gender-defined identity is a distinct departure from the goals of dominant Second Wave feminism

and reflects the reality that many women now relate themselves to a multiplicity of identities and have rejected a singular, or monolithic identity based on gender, race, sexuality or ability alone (Brown 1996). While Canadian feminist activists during the Second Wave grappled with ideological differences over political strategies, it was not until the late 1980s that the experiences of racialized women, lesbians, women with disabilities and abused women, all of whom were encountering multiple forms of oppression, received any sustained attention within mainstream women's organizations (Bashevkin 1994). Up until this time, the major feminist political voice for women, the *National Action Committee on the Status of Women*, did not always reflect the nuances and complications that the inter-sectionality of oppressions invite (Molgat 2004). This attention to the inter-sectionality of identities is also apparent in younger women who have grown up in the Third Wave and do not wish to prioritize their gender identity as transcending all other identities or oppressions that they might encounter (O'Neill 2003). O'Neill (2003) notes that younger women want to address the contradictions within feminism, and to confront some of the rigidities of Second Wave feminism. This has opened up space for new explorations, and in some instances, a re-defining/re-claiming of experiences, such as motherhood, women's sexuality and femininity, in ways that recognize women's similarities without erasing differences among them.

International realities have also changed, which has meant that the geopolitical/spatial framework in which feminist politics in Canada has largely been concerned has also altered. In their comprehensive overview of women and politics worldwide, based on a study of women's political engagement in forty-three

countries, Najna Chowdhury and Barbara Nelson, among others, identify four phenomena that are influencing women's contemporary feminist activism: international economic forces, the changing nature of nationalism, the rise of religious fundamentalisms, and the growth of international feminisms (Chowdhury, Nelson et al. 1994). The success of the *World Conference on Women* held in Beijing in 1995 and the global efforts around the *World March of Women 2000 to End Poverty and Violence Against Women* are but two recent examples of the ways in which feminist movements around the globe are responding to the interconnectedness of some of their struggles. The choice by organizers of the World March to pursue meetings with the World Bank and International Monetary Fund demonstrates the cognizance amongst feminist actors of the key role these institutions are playing in determining many nations' social and economic policies. In fact, organizers of the International March circulated a set of demands to all three global institutions: the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations.

The consideration of proposals for citizenship must also take into account the view that for some theorists and feminist activists, the language of "women" is no longer a stable or tenable theoretical category. Barbara Marshall (2000) contends that feminists must refrain from invoking gender as a politically pre-constituted identity. Marshall argues against invoking women as belonging to a pre-figured political constituency, writ large, because of the dangers it presents in glossing over the specificity of women's experiences. For Marshall, the reliance on a pre-constituted political constituency of women tends to render invisible the distinct characteristics of

contemporary hegemonic forces. Instead, Marshall (2000) advocates for the strategic deployment of the category of gender, and women, through the development of carefully contextualized research which clearly situates particular women's lives, through "their concrete appearances in specific bodies"(Marshall 2000: 161). In this way, women would not disappear from political discourses, but would be invoked in ways which make perfectly clear the various and varied oppressions they experience.

Marshall's proposal echoes the analysis of Chandra Mohanty (1992) who also argues against a call for women's global solidarity on the basis of a pretence of women's universally shared experiences of oppression, even if this pretence clearly acknowledges that these oppressions vary in tenor and nature. Mohanty (1992) advocates for a rigorous theorization of experience in which political agency is fully located and historicized. In so doing, the ways in which particular incarnations of power and ideology manifest themselves in a particular time and place can be revealed in precise terms, as well as the effects these have on specific women's lives. "The experience of being a woman can create an illusory unity, for it is not the experience of being a woman, but the meanings attached to gender, race, class and age at various historical moments that is of strategic significance" (Mohanty 1992: 82). Additionally, such an approach better enables focused and pertinent political responses and strategies by organized women in these locations who can uncover "alternative, non-identical histories which challenge and disrupt the spatial and temporal location of hegemonic history" (Mohanty 1992: 84). To this end, it allows for the full articulation and practice of a politics of engagement in which women can be wholly located, both conceptually and materially, in the realities of struggle:

It is this process, this re-territorialization through struggle, that allows me a paradoxical continuity of self, mapping and transforming my political location. It suggests a particular notion of political agency. Since my location forces and enables specific modes of reading and knowing the dominant. The struggles I choose to engage in are then an intensification of these modes of knowing—an engagement on a different level of knowledge. There is, quite simply, no transcendental location possible. (Mohanty 1992: 89)

In Mascia-Lees and Sharpe's (2000) review of postmodernism and anthropology, the value of situating women's gendered experience within the hierarchies that continue to dominate their lives, particularly through the use of reflexive and deliberative ethnography, is highlighted as allowing for the production of situated or "partial truth" (Clifford 1986). "In the absence of claims of universal validity, feminist accounts derive their justificatory force from their capacity to illuminate existing social relations, to demonstrate the deficiencies of alternative interpretations, to debunk opposing views" (Hawkesworth 1989 as quoted in Mascia-Lees and Sharpe 2000: 37). Applying this methodology to historicizing and making claims about particular women's lives may be the best strategy available to women seeking to struggle effectively against the dismal state of many of women's current material realities.

In the Canadian context, this approach demands that the declining state of women's material realities be more precisely framed. During the *World March of Women 2000 to End Poverty and Violence against Women*, women in Canada told the stories of their experiences of poverty and violence which reflected elements of this approach. The national lobby document, in particular, *It's Time for Change: 68 Demands to End Poverty and Violence Against Women*, which was directed at the federal government, framed proposed policy changes by situating women's

experiences not only on the basis of their gender, but also of their citizenship status (First Nations/Aboriginal, immigrant/refugee), their sexual identity, their work or student status, or their age, amongst other things (Canadian Women's March Committee 2000). Analyses of women's poverty contained in the lobby document acknowledged the fact that incidences of poverty and violence have a disproportionate impact upon particular groups of women, depending upon their social location. The selection of a delegation by the Canadian Women's March Committee to meet with then Prime Minister Chrétien also placed a high priority on ensuring that different constituencies of women were represented, including women of Colour, Aboriginal women, women with disabilities, young women, Francophone women, and working class women.

The submission in 2002 by the Feminist Alliance of International Action (FAFIA) of an alternative report entitled *Canada's Failure to Act: Women's Inequality Deepens* to the United Nations Committee, which oversees adherence to the *Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)*, also emphasized the experiences of marginalized women, including women with disabilities, Aboriginal and First Nations women, immigrant and refugee women in order to reveal the tenuousness for women living in Canada of Canada's international human rights commitments, particularly for vulnerable groups of women. The writers of the report also effectively made the links between cuts to social programs and services, public service jobs, reduced social assistance benefits, as well as tightened eligibility rules for social assistance and employment insurance, and the disproportionate impacts such decisions have on marginalized women in Canada

(Feminist Alliance for International Action 2003). FAFIA also echoed the observation of many women's organizations in Canada that the leadership role that the federal government once played in setting standards that helped to advance women's equality for national programs like health care, social assistance and education, for example, has disappeared. Instead: "women daily face a multi-layered political system that entrenches territorially organized interests and divides political power among jurisdictions in bewildering ways" (Rankin and Vickers 1998: 341).

A proposal for radical democratic citizenship

The increasing emphasis on how specific social policy choices affect women differently depending on their social location is a promising development amongst organized feminist women in Canada. Such a development demands that alternative models of citizenship go beyond ascribing particular characteristics, such as an "ethic of care" (Dietz 1992) or notions of a generalized "group identity" (Young 1995: 127), onto a vision of differentiated citizenship. Using this tactic forecloses on the possibility of women reflexively responding to the inter-sectionalities of multiple oppressions and the incredible diversity within women's lives (Dean 1997a). In my view, Chantal Mouffe (1993) has made one of the more ambitious and promising proposals for an alternate citizenship model that would complement recent efforts amongst feminists in Canada and elsewhere. She advances a concept of democratic citizenship as one which goes beyond the questions of rights and responsibilities that are core tenants within the liberal democratic tradition. The value and redemptive characteristic of citizenship for Mouffe is not in what it flatly bestows upon or denies

an individual, but in the dynamic of citizenship itself. Citizenship is “an articulating principle that affects the different subject positions of the social agent while allowing for a plurality of specific allegiances and for the respect of individual liberty” (Mouffe 1993: 70). In a liberal democracy, Mouffe argues, what binds citizens under this definition should not be the idealized notion of a universally shared experience of “Reason” which historically has been viewed as the exclusive bastion of men, but a set of “ethico-political values” (Mouffe 1993) that are open to interpretation by a plurality of citizens. According to Mouffe, it is the contestation over various interpretations of these values that constitute the realm of the political.

Within this community bound by an allegiance to these values, Mouffe advocates the formation of a common political identity she calls “radical democratic citizenship” (Mouffe 1993: 69) -- which represents one particular interpretation of citizenship. This common political identity would be forged among groups of citizens who share the view that the relations of domination persist in a range of social interactions. “Radical democratic citizenship” would serve to advance a critique within the realm of the political that these relations must be eliminated if liberty and equality for all is to be enjoyed. For Mouffe, the advantage of this citizenship regime is that there is no requisite purposive kind of community that would inherently privilege certain interpretations of citizenship over others, as is the case in liberal discourses. In this reformulation, relations of domination and exclusion would be regarded as the subject of legitimate political contestation.

Finally, for Mouffe, this kind of political community would not possess a shared notion of the common good, but would be bound by a “common recognition

of a set of ethico-political values” (Mouffe 1993: 69). Mouffe persuasively argues that a citizenship regime which is grounded in a general and comprehensive doctrine of the common good automatically privileges some citizens over others, and restricts the plurality of interpretations. She echoes the sentiments of Claude Lefort, who subscribes to the view that

in such a society it is no longer possible to find a guarantee, a definite legitimation, because power is no longer incorporated in the person of the prince and associated with a transcendental instance. Power, law and knowledge are therefore exposed to a radical indeterminacy: in my terms, a substantive common good becomes impossible. (Lefort in Mouffe 1993: 64)

In this sense, Mouffe is arguing for a “radical, libertarian and plural democracy” in which the “specificity” and “autonomy” of women as subjects can be recognized (Mouffe 1988: 100). Mouffe asserts that this model would offer different possibilities for a dynamic kind of solidarity in which the focus would shift from the shared identification around the violation of individual rights to the ways in which these violations can be linked to related, on-going struggles: “The longer the chain of equivalences set up between the defence of the rights of one group and those of other groups, the deeper the democratization process and the more difficult it will be to neutralize certain struggles or make them serve the ends of the Right” (Mouffe 1988: 100). Interestingly, the substance of this proposal converges with a proposal by Jodi Dean (1997b) for the establishment within the feminist community of a reflective feminist solidarity that would be grounded in an on-going, open, and discursive dialogue in which women would seek actively to identify with women whose struggles differ from their own.

Mouffe's proposal also complements Jodi Dean's (1997) emphasis on the multiple spaces in which politics is produced and enacted. In her reflections on this re-conceptualization of politics, Dean views the possibilities for "re-situation" as constituting a new kind of democracy in which there is a recognition of the increasing fluidity with which individuals, in their multi-dimensionality, identify themselves as being part of or implicated in collective efforts that are focused on generating particular socio-economic/cultural/political outcomes. Dean also recognizes that within this form of democracy, the necessary targets of particular collective actions are not necessarily formal political institutions or actors:

Our actions, indeed the very 'we' that makes an action 'ours' require continued working and recreating. In the second, we can no longer presume the target of political interventions or the terrain of the political. The new democracy responds to this decentering of authority-- of the father, the state, the subject, the text -- by taking responsibility for its articulations, resistances and counter-hegemonic engagements. (Dean 1997: 2)

The way forward

The experience of feminist women in the year 2000 who mobilized around the *World March of Women to end Poverty and Violence against Women in Canada* has created an impetus for individuals and organizations to reflect upon the political strategies that women's movements in Canada are using to advocate for change. The lack of action by key decision-makers and elected representatives at the national level in Canada in response to the efforts of women all across the country for the *World March of Women 2000 Against Poverty and Violence against Women* has highlighted some of the contemporary limitations of Canadian feminist organizing. The absence of any sustained response by the federal government to the demands advanced by

women underlines the degree to which the “political field” (Raka Ray 1999) has changed in its entirety. These changes have come about as a result of significant shifts in the ideological orientation of successive federal governments over the past two decades. This shift in the field demands that feminist women re-visit understandings about the state and the “ordinary political processes” which anchored the approach of “radical liberalism” adopted by many Second Wave feminists in Canada. It also demands that organized women fully confront the possibility that deploying the language of “women” as if it still constitutes a legitimated political constituency may no longer facilitate the full realization of women’s equal citizenship rights as many organized women have hoped:

...[T]hat ‘gender’ has suffered something of a legitimacy crisis, both theoretically and politically, is clear. The manner in which the political assault on ‘gender’ has been coded, in both its fundamentalist and libertarian versions, and the erosion of political legitimacy attached to gender when it applies to women should stand as clear warnings of the dangers should feminists fail to take up some of the difficult questions involved. (Marshall 2000: 160)

Chantal Mouffe (1987) has astutely pointed out that “democratic antagonisms do not necessarily lead to democratic struggles” (Mouffe 1988: 96). In other words, the subordination and inequality that individuals come up against in their daily lives (on the basis of social hierarchies) do not automatically pre-dispose them to working towards inherently democratic solutions. Feminism offers a space in which the effects of the unequal distributions of power, and the incongruities that these inequalities generate for and among women, as distinct from men, can be wholly confronted (George 2000: 233). With the rise of neo-liberalist governance practices in Canada, those committed to a fully inclusive, egalitarian and democratic politics must be vigilant in proposing alternatives that do not confine individuals to particular

identities or subjectivities that limit their capacity to work for transformative change. Feminist proposals for a “radical democratic citizenship”, such as that which Chantal Mouffe has conceived, offer significant insights for organized women in Canada who are committed to creating the conditions for an egalitarian and pluralistic society in which each woman would be considered a full and equal member.

In the Canadian context, the proposal for radical democracy seems quite ambitious given the trend toward diminishing the representational significance of particular advocacy or special interest groups. The ongoing tension in Canada between parties and extra-parliamentary organizations, including those of the women’s movement, among others, is indicative of a clear challenge to liberal democratic institutions, including Canada’s national parliament. Such institutions have been inadequate in their design and in their functioning to respond to a vibrant and diverse citizenry whose members are capable of forming socio-political collectivities, independent of political parties, to articulate and negotiate various interests and goals (Peckford 2002). This tension between extra-parliamentary groups and political parties has been exacerbated by the pervasiveness of the neo-liberal approach to politics in Canada that the federal government and numerous provincial governments have adopted. In her overview of the possibilities for feminist solidarity worldwide, Catherine Eschle (2001) argues that the neo-liberal model includes an attempt by those who adopt it to “erase oppositional action” (Eschle 2001: 31), particularly the type of action that frequently emerges from social movement activity. “Neo-liberalism positions the market economy as the context for democracy, not an issue for democratic discussion” (Eschele 2001: 31). As a

consequence, those who question the parameters of the dominant political and economic system and advocate for more popular engagement are targeted as undermining democracy. “The attempt to challenge the limitations that have been imposed on participation and to subject the political and/or economic system to more extensive popular scrutiny are positioned as attacks on democracy itself” (Eschele 2001: 31).

The on-going challenges women confront when seeking electoral representation further demonstrates another barrier to the full realization of women’s equal citizenship status. Currently, the representation of women in provincial and federal legislatures has stagnated, hovering in Canada’s national parliament (which was formed as a result of the 2004 election) at just under 21%, nine percent short of the 30% which constitutes the United Nations’ criterion for critical mass: the level at which women’s presence in a legislature begins to have a meaningful effect on political culture and policy (Cheema 1999). This puts Canada at 34th in the world for the representation of women in a national parliament, well behind many countries in the global South (Tremblay and Trimble 2003: 3).

These realities demand a re-thinking of our political institutions. Proposals for electoral reform, in particular, are being advanced by some grassroots citizens organizations in Canada, such as Fair Vote Canada, and are already officially in motion in three provinces, Québec, British Columbia and Prince Edward Island (Fair Vote Canada 2004). In addition, one of Canada’s national political parties, the New Democratic Party, is promoting the federal government’s adoption of some form of proportional representation as a way to better reflect the popular vote in the

distribution of seats in the national parliament. The recent success on the part of organized women's movements in a range of European countries (for example, France, Scotland, Wales, and Norway) to have national electoral systems modified in order to increase the number of women standing for election has also generated some debate amongst women's groups in Canada (Bird 2001; Bystydzienski 1995; International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance 2002).

Organized women in Canada are currently grappling with whether or not such changes in Canada would facilitate greater access to decision makers and enable some grassroots activist feminist women to enter the doors of parliament and other legislatures in Canada. My collaboration with NAWL over the past three years has facilitated some more sustained dialogue on this issue. As a result of funds secured through the Law Commission of Canada during our period of collaboration, NAWL organized a National Roundtable on Women in Politics in March 2003. In preparation for this roundtable, I produced, and co-produced some popular materials to equip women for this discussion. The brief I had written for NAWL, *A Mandate for Equality*, in the Fall of 2001 was also adapted for this roundtable so that participants would be provided with useful context. While these materials were well-received at the forum, many equality-seeking women's organizations underscored the degree to which they felt that formal political vehicles simply do not work for women whose goals are to further women's equality, regardless of the political party in power (Personal Account of NAWL convened National Roundtable on Women in Politics, March 24-25th, 2003). Interestingly, many women at this forum demonstrated little appetite for embarking upon a campaign to change Canada's electoral system when

the issues on which they focus daily urgently require more resources and more mobilization.

The feedback from this roundtable precipitated considerable reflection among the staff at NAWL, and the roundtable's organizing committee, about the factors which influenced the reticence many participants expressed around electoral reform becoming a significant issue for the women's movement. Though participants had noted their appreciation for NAWL's efforts to develop and popularize an analysis of electoral reform, the question of which issues within the women's movement should absorb the increasingly limited resources available for women's organizing permeated the weekend's discussion. In this sense, it was not the focus or format of the fact sheets that mattered as much as the dynamics within the women's movement; it was the latter which determined how they were received and made use of subsequent to the roundtable. As a consequence of this, the final fact sheets which appear in the toolkit used a different political moment, the federal election in May of 2004, to circulate information and analysis about Canada's political system and how equality-seeking women might considering engaging with it. These fact sheets were not directed at representatives from national women's organizations (which had been the case at NAWL's roundtable on women and politics), but at visitors to an election website for women, www.canadaelection.net, which was a project of a Coalition for Women's Equality, of which NAWL is a member. In this instance, the fact sheets were designed to address more basic questions of political engagement, including how to determine a candidate's position on a particular topic, why voting is a valuable activity, and how ideas about electoral reform fit into larger discussions

about the democratic deficit in Canada. This website became an unqualified success for the Coalition, receiving nearly 300,000 hits over the three week period of the election campaign, and peaking at 28,000 hits the day after the English language televised leader's debate.

Given my association with these two NAWL-related projects during this period (the national roundtable on women and politics, and the Coalition for Women's Equality's election website for women), I am of the view that there is no clear way forward for the organized women's movement in Canada today. Many Second Wave feminists who are still active in the movement are in the midst of coming to terms with the shortcomings of the success of Second Wave feminism. They have been witness to the re-structuring of the Canadian welfare state that has negatively affected many women's social and economic security. Third Wave feminists are dispersed throughout a variety of movements. While the *World March of Women in 2000* offered one opportunity for a diverse range of women to advance a shared platform of policy demands, the reality is that there is no mechanism in Canada for feminist women to bring sustained attention to women's inequality. The demise of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) has meant that organized women in Canada have little opportunity to come together and broker their interests. At the same time, groups like the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) and the Canadians for Choice Foundation (CCF) are mounting significant campaigns around particular women's interests. NWAC's *Sisters in Spirit* campaign has successfully drawn attention to the reality that over five hundred native women have gone missing in Canada in recent years, without explanation or proper

police follow-up¹⁰. As a result, I believe we must take up Chandra Mohanty's challenge to rigorously situate specific women's experiences of oppression and in so doing, fully account for the structural and systemic barriers that create and perpetuate women's inequalities. In my work with non-government groups and government bodies that advocate for social policy change, this focus is rarely achieved. The effects of poverty, violence and political disenfranchisement are rarely talked about in terms of what they mean for women, let alone particular groups of women defined by age, ethnicity, income, and so on. The on-going, systemic and acute poverty of many women, particularly single mothers with children, has been re-framed as children's poverty. Violence against women in the home has been re-categorized as family or spousal violence, even though the effects and scope of violence perpetuated by intimate partners continues to predominantly undermine women's personal security. This is why, for me, the naming of particular women's experiences, in all of their complexity, remains a radical act and one to which feminists must be fully committed.

¹⁰ For more information on this campaign, please see <http://www.sistersinspirit.ca/enghome.htm>

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