

Antiracist Feminist Activism in Women's Social Service Organizations: A Review of the Literature

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Abstract

Drawing from the historical successes of the antiracist and feminist movements of the 1980s and 1990s, antiracist feminists of colour continue to challenge inequitable practices within women's organizations. In this paper, I review five strands of interrelated literature that help us to understand the contexts through which social justice activism is negotiated. I argue that in order to understand more fully women's experience of 'doing' antiracist feminism within women's organizations we need to understand intersecting arenas of activism. The literature points to several interconnected layers of social relations that need to be unpacked and examined, namely: restructuring of funding and accountability regimes within the non-profit sector broadly; unique challenges found within women's movement organizations; politics of racism and antiracism in the feminist movement; everyday antiracist action within women's organizations; and the relationships among politicized action, identity, subjectivity, and personal relationships.

Keywords: antiracism, feminism, activism, social movement, organizational change

The main political objectives of antiracist feminists are to shift inequitable power relations—specifically those based on race, gender, and class—and to foster social justice. This article examines the academic literature in order to understand better the contexts in which antiracist feminists do social justice work. That is, I examine literature that helps us to consider more fully how antiracist feminist activism is enabled, constrained, and socially organized through social relations of state funding and accountability within the non-profit sector; women's organizations; antiracist, feminist, and social justice praxis; and everyday lives of racialized women. For people engaged in politicized action against racism, sexism, and other relations of oppression within community and social service organizations, an overview of these contexts is crucial as part of a process of reflection and critical analysis. In order to know how to act as activists, and especially when we want to assess what change might be possible, we can use available academic and activist knowledge to gain perspective and to understand what constrains and supports activist work; in other words, before, during, and after we act, we need to know what we are up against and what can support us.

A useful place to begin a critical reflection of social justice activism is through an examination of academic–activist literatures, which allow us to develop an understanding of the relations in which we have operate. Specifically, in order to

understand the contexts in which antiracist feminism is enacted, I propose that we need to attend to the literature on the socio-political contexts of the non-profit and voluntary sectors, history and preoccupations of the feminist and antiracist movements, debates and tensions within feminist organizations, history of antiracist feminist organizational change, and, as well, the everyday lived experience of racialized activists politicizing and personalizing activism. In this overview of seemingly disparate literature, I explain how antiracist feminist activism within women's organizations is enabled and constrained.

In my work I use the term *antiracist feminism* consistent with the activist and academic Canadian literature. There is a diversity of antiracist feminisms which need to be acknowledged, and I include in this category: British black feminisms¹ (Brah, 1996; Mirza, 1997; Sudbury, 1998); Black, African, and Caribbean feminisms and womanisms (Bobb-Smith, 1999; Hill Collins, 2000; Wane, 2002); Asian, Latina, Chicana, and Mestiza feminisms (Anzaldúa, 2003; Brah, 1996; Narayan, 1997; Trinh, 1989); Third World and transnational feminisms (Ang, 2001; Mohanty, 2004; Ong, 2003); post-colonial and anticolonial feminisms (Brah, 1996; Smith, A., 2006; Smith, L., 1999; Spivak, 1988); Aboriginal, Indigenous, and Native feminisms (Grande, 2003; Maracle, 1996; Smith, A., 2006); and other feminisms based on critiques and analysis of racialized women of colour.

Although feminist and antiracist literatures have paid some attention to activism by women of colour within organizations (Brah, 2001; Sudbury, 1998; Transken, 1998), analyses of everyday work by women of colour in women's organizations are generally inadequate. The literature on feminist organizational responses to antiracist organizational change has not paid much attention to the actual experiences of feminist antiracist workers and the effects of their anti-oppression work within their organizations. This review focuses on those studies that have added to knowledge about antiracist and feminist activism by women of colour and its interrelatedness with their personal lives. The review focuses not only on the organizational contexts in which antiracist feminist activists "do" their work, but also those that help us to understand holistically women's experience of navigating social relations in order to enact their politicized visions. Women of colour engaged in antiracist feminist politics within women's organizations often confront sexism, racism, classism, and other inequitable social relations, so when they attempt to put their anti-oppression politics into practice, they find their efforts are often constrained and need constant negotiation.

¹ In the context of the United Kingdom, *black feminism* (where the *b* is usually uncapitalized) is a political-intellectual movement through which women who were racialized as non-white—such as women from Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and the Middle East—self-consciously and intentionally developed coalitions to confront racism, sexism, and other relations of oppression (Mirza, 1997; see also Brah, 1996). The term *black feminist* was contested by racialized women themselves, significantly by women with African heritage, who advocated reclaiming the label *Black feminist* and argued for an Afro-centred Black feminism (with the *B* capitalized) in keeping with Black feminisms or womanisms in North America (Brah, 1996; see also Sudbury, 1998).

In attempting to foster a holistic understanding of the social relations that shape antiracist feminist activism within women's organizations, I review a number of interconnected literatures. Scholarship relating to antiracist feminist activist work within women's organizations in this review includes (a) activist work in community and social service organizations and the restructuring of the non-profit and voluntary sectors, (b) the background on feminist organizations, (c) antiracist struggle with and within the feminist movement, (d) antiracist activism in women's organizations and, finally, (e) the relationships between activism and the personal.

Restructuring, Funding, and Accountability in the Non-profit and Voluntary Sectors

There is overwhelming evidence that the restructuring of the non-profit and voluntary sectors, which include women's community and social service organizations, has affected the viability and overall health of non-profit and voluntary sector organizations, particularly since at least the 1990s (Scott, 2004; see also Baines, 2008; Barnoff, George, & Coleman, 2006; Carniol, 2005; Eakin & Richmond, 2005; Mullaly, 2006; Richmond & Shields, 2004). The literature has shown that despite the gains made by antiracists, feminists, and other social justice advocates in highlighting and addressing inequity and oppression, the space for social and organizational change is becoming more limited. In many cases this reduced space has meant that antiracist feminist activists have had to navigate more carefully their politicized action. Non-profit organizations have had to focus their energy and resources on their very existence (Barnoff et al., 2006). Fisher and Shragge (2002) have suggested that success of community organizations toward social change in attracting resources has meant, paradoxically, that community organizations have been less effective as a result:

Over the last 30 years the contribution of community organizations as a force for social change has dramatically diminished. Paradoxically, this has happened partly because of their success.... Finding support from governments, foundations and local sources, community organizations have turned inward to build networks of service and ameliorate social and economic problems.... Related to these changes, these organizations have become less engaged in making demands for social change. (p. 39)

Furthermore, most Canadian non-profit and voluntary organizations rely heavily on state and external funding for their survival (Eakin & Richmond, 2005; Richmond & Shields, 2004; Scott, 2004), and this has created instability, particularly for community and social service organizations. A comprehensive study of the non-profit sector (which consists of hospitals, universities, and social services) reported that government transfers constituted 51.2 % percent of the non-profit sector's revenue (Eakin & Richmond, 2005). Social-service-oriented and community organizations were most dependent on state funding; for instance, in Ontario, social service organizations received 89% of their funding from all three levels of government in the 1990s (Richmond & Shields, 2004). Moreover, federal and provincial funding has been retracted from the voluntary sector, by way of cutting core funding and replacing it with program or project funding (Eakin & Richmond,

2005). In Ontario, the restructuring of the funding regime began to transform and renege on its previous long-standing commitments in the mid-1990s; that is, the state started shifting accountability for maintaining a strong social safety net away from itself, and began handing the responsibility down to the individual, community social services and NGOs (Richmond & Shields, 2004). As a result of such changes, administrative reporting increased exponentially for organizations, leaving little formal space for advancing social justice and creating instability for non-governmental actors as well as clients of social service organizations (Carniol, 2005; Barnoff et al., 2006).

Several researchers have shown how the autonomy, structure, goals, and day-to-day workings of non-profit organizations are adversely affected by changes in state funding (Barnoff et al., 2006; Richmond & Shields, 2004; Scott, 2004). For example, Scott (2004) offered empirical evidence that divergent funding policies, laborious reporting practices, and regulations avert key priorities and goals of organizations. Scott's insights into the effects of funding practices on redirecting and averting key organizational priorities are particularly relevant to the progress that antiracist feminist activists have made; that is, antiracist, feminist, and other social justice goals have also been marginalized. In addition, academics and organizational actors have expressed concerns that the emergence of a new funding regime for non-profit and voluntary organizations is changing the capacity of organizations for long-term sustainability and progress in an increasingly competitive and volatile funding environment (Baines, 2008; Mullaly, 2006; Richmond & Shields, 2004).

Moreover, feminist activists and theorists have documented the contradictory effects of government involvement in women's movement organizations, which both facilitate and limit the social justice work of women's organizations (DasGupta, 1999; Todd & Lundy, 2006). This literature calls into question the ability of women's organizations to pursue social justice goals while their very viability is threatened. Schreder (1996), for example, argued that while state funding "co-opts" politicized activities, state funding also "needs to be recognized as a legitimate gain for women, and evidence of the impact of struggle" (p. 196). More recently, Todd and Lundy (2006) argued that the issue of violence against women has become depoliticized, personalized, and largely situated in the criminal justice system, despite the early success of feminist organizing in the 1960s and 1970s. Todd and Lundy (2006) described the contemporary government's response as engaging women's organizations in a "consult and study" process, while providing minimal funding and choosing to place emphasis on legislative and policy changes.

There is a growing literature documenting how accountability to state (both governmental and extra-governmental funding bodies) offers challenges to community, social service, and feminist movement organizations in their struggles to decrease inequality based on gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and disability (Ku, 2003; Maraj Grahame, 1998; Nichols, 2008; Todd & Lundy, 2006). For example, Ng (1998), Maraj Grahame (1998), and Nichols (2008) have each described the way people's everyday work within a variety of non-profit settings (namely, an immigrant women's employment agency, a women's organization, and civil sector organizations) are shaped by funding regimes and state preoccupations.

Nichols (2008) argued that activists' everyday work, despite their own beliefs and values, becomes subsumed through relations of accountability to funding bodies.

Community and organizational actors have responded to restructuring in a variety of ways, and there is an emerging literature that empirically documents how organizational actors, particularly those on the front lines of service delivery, resist current bureaucratic and institutional arrangements in organizations through their political commitments to social justice and anti-oppression (Baines, 2006; Barnoff et al., 2006; Barnoff & Coleman, 2007; Smith, K., 2006). This literature suggests that professional and activist commitments can be actively mobilized as a response to the restructuring of social service organizations in Canada. Baines' (2006) edited volume on politicized social work has highlighted the everyday activist actions of social service and social workers committed to anti-oppressive practice. For example, Smith (2006) described the ways front-line social workers resist and challenge restructuring in "stealthy" ways.

Together these studies provide a context and backdrop for understanding the relations that antiracist feminist activists navigate as part of community and social service organizations. It is clear from the literature that spaces for social justice articulations are limited, subsumed, and hindered. On the other hand, community and social service organizations offer concrete spaces of struggle against racism, sexism, and other relations of oppression.

Feminist Movement Organizations

Feminist and feminist-influenced women's community and social service organizations not only face constraints from broader social and political contexts, such as those issues identified above, but also face internal challenges and opportunities. In many ways, feminist women's organizations are unique because of the links to feminist and other social movements; the legacy of politicized feminist struggle has meant that feminist and feminist-influenced women's organizations remain open to other social justice struggles. However, women's organizations are contentious and politicized places in which antiracism may be articulated and heard, but also hotly contested (see Nadeau, 2005).

In this article, when I refer to women's or feminist organizations, I mean those organizations that primarily work in direct service, advocacy, or activist capacities for and with women. These include health clinics, sexual assault centres, coalition organizations, advocacy organizations, and support groups that centre on women and/or women's issues. I use the terms *feminist organizations* and *women's organizations* interchangeably. I add the word *mainstream* to denote those organizations that were not set up historically for specifically immigrant or racialized clientele, and/or did not have any specific antiracist or multicultural agenda when they first started. In other work, these sorts of organizations have been called "white" women's organizations (see Srivastava, 2002). In my work, I focus on the antiracist work within "mainstream" and/or "whitestream" (Grande, 2003) women's organizations.

Although there is no consensus on what exactly constitutes a feminist organization, there has been a recognition that feminist organizations tend to work toward democratization more than most mainstream organizations (Ferree & Martin, 1995). Since at least the 1960s, feminist organizing has been predicated on the critique of the hierarchical, masculinist, or “malestream” organizations (Ferree & Martin, 1995). In many feminist organizations the “ideal” is that there is no hierarchy or formal leadership, all tasks are rotated, decisions are arrived through consensus, and small groups are preferred to ensure direct participatory democracy and collectivity (Agnew, 1996; Simonds, 1996). Hierarchies, factionalism, and leaders emerge nonetheless; these hierarchies within women’s organizations most often reflect the unequal privilege between women based on race, class, generation, disability, and other social relations (Agnew, 1996; Simonds, 1996). Historically, many feminist organizations have attempted to make decisions through collective and/or consensus models. Since most of the early consciousness-raising feminist groups were small and homogenous groups, collective and consensus models of decision making were made easier. However, in larger groups, where there are large differences in experience, goals, and knowledge, collective decision making has been more difficult to achieve, particularly when addressing issues of diversity and oppression.

Conflict among and within formal or informal social movement organizations is common among feminist organizations despite their shared goals (Srivastava, 2002). Feminist organizations have also suffered from, and also been propelled by, intergenerational differences and tensions, as well as their exclusions based on race, sexuality, class, and disability (Whittier, 1997). These tensions have particularly shown up in how women’s organizations personify feminist ideals. Many women have engaged in internal struggles in which liberalism and radicalism collide. On the one hand, most women believe in the “system” (voting, writing to elected officials, and so on). Yet, this contrasts with their sense that the “system” simply does not have women’s best interests at heart.

Additionally, many feminist organizations—particularly those that are explicitly pro-choice, politicized, or radical—have been subject to increased scrutiny and criticism by the public and the state (Nadeau, 2005). These create, for women engaged in activism, a high level of emotionality, causing personal and organizational instability in the forms of high turnover, burnout, and low morale (Srivastava, 2002). Due to the political nature of the feminist movement organizations, it has been impossible for many activists to see their work as “just an ordinary job.” External forces combined with internal struggles spawned by the difficulties of implementing feminist ideology in organizational practice have been extraordinary (Transken, 1998). Within this politicized, emotional space antiracism became, and continues to be, central to women’s organizations.

Antiracist Struggle With and Within the Feminist Movement

Although women of colour have always been involved in feminist movements, it was not until the 1980s that racialized women began to collectively voice concerns about racism and exclusion and to take an explicitly antiracist stance (Agnew, 1996).

Many authors argue that feminist movements were inadequate in their fight against racism due to several factors: a narrow definition of women's issues, racist ideologies, the racist roots of feminism itself, white women's reluctance to relinquish power, and feminism's stress on the primacy of sexism above all other oppressions (for examples, see Agnew, 1996; Bannerji, 1995; Hill Collins, 2001; hooks, 1984; Jhappan, 1996; Nadeau, 2009; Razack, 1998; Srivastava, 2002).

Despite feminist protest against the exclusion of a female perspective in modern philosophical thought and masculinist notions of the "essential human," essentialism has plagued feminist thought. Feminist theories and practices are dominated by the stereotypical perspective of the "essential" white, heterosexual, able-bodied, urban, middle-class, university-educated woman (Agnew, 1996; Jhappan, 1996). This pseudo-universality of women apparent in feminist literature assumed a decontextualized relationship with other social relations, where women of colour were rendered invisible. If non-white women were noticed, they were given an interpreted status by those in control of discourse (namely, by white women and men). By focussing only on white women's interests as universal interests, the feminist movement was able to gain and keep leadership in the hands of white, middle-class women (Bannerji, 1995).

Bannerji (1995) suggested that white feminism can never be free of racism because of its racist roots. She wrote that in order to rid white feminism from racism we need to deconstruct imperialist ideologies, institutions, and economics, as well as every mundane aspect of social life. Feminist analyses often focus on gender in isolation from race and class without any explanation of why gender is always more significant than ethnicity, race, or class (Agnew, 1996). Racialized women were further marginalized by so-called anti-oppressive theories because of the lack of gender distinction in race analysis and racial distinction in gender analysis (Agnew, 1996). According to Bannerji (1995), if Canadian women of colour were to develop their own theories around oppression, they would show that the organization of racism would be a way of forming class relations. And moreover, the class formation that would emerge would be fully gendered.

Women of colour have not always been motivated by many of the priorities of the "white" or "mainstream" women's movement, such as the emphasis on sexuality, pro-choice, and critiques of patriarchy within families (Agnew, 1996). One response to the critique that feminism is essentialist is to emphasize diversity, particularity, self-representation, or the "politics of difference" (Bannerji, 1995). However, different experiences of women generated different identities and hindered women from understanding each other (Agnew, 1996). Further, women of colour feared that sympathetic white women might speak on their behalf, thereby suppressing their voices again (Agnew, 1996). 'Difference' becomes a way of establishing otherness and ascribing "white, middle-class" as the norm. This politics-of-difference debate had the positive effect of recognizing different kinds of oppression, but led to fragmentation of communities and an over-emphasis on identity politics (Agnew, 1996). Bannerji (1995) has added that the politics of difference invented multiple political personalities within one subject, which depoliticized race issues in feminism. Furthermore, antiracism has been critiqued by antiracist feminists, who

have cautioned against the focus on racism without acknowledging the interrelatedness of different forms of oppression (Agnew, 1996; Bannerji, 1995; Jhappan, 1996); and many writers have taken up an intersectional approach to understanding and resisting oppression and dominance (see, for example, Hill Collins, 2001; hooks, 1984; Razack, 1998). These debates highlight some of the tensions that need to be navigated among antiracist feminists.

Antiracist Activism in Women's Organizations

Antiracism and antiracist organizational change are an important arsenal in everyday activist work in addressing racism with and within community and social service organizations, and in particular within women's organizations. Antiracism activists analyze, develop, and implement organizational antiracism initiatives as a way of dealing with institutionalized racism through highlighting how individuals and groups experience differential power and degree of representation within organizations (James, 1996). Antiracist change processes prioritize the needs of members of minority groups when attempts are made to rebalance the power within organizational structures. While people of colour have had long histories of struggle against colonialism and racism, antiracism as an explicitly politicized practice and discourse is relatively new to the study of race relations in Canada (Dei, 1996). Most of the Canadian discourse that attempts to understand, explain, and alleviate racial and cultural inequities has been focussed on "race relations," "cultural sensitivity," "multiculturalism," "integration" (which to some means assimilation), and some concepts of "pluralism" (Dei, 1996). Multiculturalism and related policies have been criticized (by antiracist critics) because they have not alleviated racism or discrimination despite their ideals of tolerance and equality (Abu-Laban & Stasiulis, 1992). Further, several writers claim that multiculturalism homogenizes differences between and within cultures by only focussing on symbolic ethnicity (Dei, 1996; Nadeau, 2009). Multiculturalism is also seen as a tool for masking socio-economic inequities between and within ethnic groups, thereby denying each subgroup political and economic status (Abu-Laban & Stasiulis, 1992). The discourse in Canada, as in the United Kingdom, seems to be "progressing" from multiculturalism to antiracism (Dei, 1996). Antiracism is a critical, political discourse on race, racism, and ongoing racializing of social groups for differential and unequal treatment. Central to antiracism analyses are power relations in the form of "colonization, cultural and political imperialism which are juxtaposed to simplistic notions of racial difference based on skin colour and natural difference" (Dei, 1996, p. 26). Explicitly, with this perspective, issues of race and social difference are issues of power and equity, rather than matters of cultural and ethnic diversity. Although culture and ethnicity are important factors, these social differences are constructed to account for differential and racist treatment of groups or individuals in our society. As such, antiracism moves beyond a narrow preoccupation with individual prejudices and discriminatory actions to examine the ways that racist ideas are entrenched and (un)consciously supported in institutional practices (see James, 1996), including in women's organizations.

Antiracist organizational change is often resisted; and organizations that have tried to engage with issues of diversity, racism, and other oppressive processes sometimes only peripherally deal with issues of managing diversity in workforce and clientele. The strategies they use encourage conformity at the expense of expression of diversity (Mills & Simmons, 1995). Additionally, antiracist initiatives are often blocked through denial of racism, non-recognition of all structural barriers, lack of resources, white privilege, classism, racist procedures, and narrow definitions of the organization's role (see Henry, Tator, Mattis, & Rees, 1995, who outlined various common forms of resistance against antiracism by organizations).

When feminists of colour try to address exclusions based on race within women's organizations, their efforts are often contentious. On the one hand, feminists suppose that women have common oppression and that we must come together as "sisters" in order to combat heteropatriarchy. On the other hand, we realize that in coming together, there are critical differences among us based on our personal experience, political conviction, and our "lived history" (see Downe, 2006). Andrea Smith (2006) saw these differences resulting from histories of colonialism, slavery, and Orientalism. In spite of the fact that struggle and transformation are the goals of feminist activism, some have argued further that women in feminist organizations tend to shy away from conflict and change (Acker, 1995). These contradictions have led to critiques by racialized feminists who centre on the (inequitable) power structures of feminist organizations based on race and class privilege.

Most organizational conflicts, such as who will lead and how decisions will be made, are exacerbated in the context of antiracist organizational change. Some of the challenges of addressing racism within organizations stem from decision-making practices and organizational forms unique to feminist organizations. For example, many feminist organizations were built on personal and community networks. Since community and personal networks rarely exist between people of disparate social locations, diverse feminist organizing remains problematic for feminist organizations (Acker, 1996). This is particularly the case when women from communities where there is little race or class diversity—such as wealthy neighbourhoods or certain socially homogenous areas—come into contact with women who live and work in socially diverse communities. Further, the lack of well-defined procedures in feminist organizations disadvantages those outside of informal networks (Agnew, 1996). Feminism's commitment to equal distribution of power has led to a refusal to critically analyze how power is exercised within these organizations: Power and leadership shift from individuals to factions within the organization. Often, as outsiders, racialized women find it difficult to become part of informal networks and thus end up as a token presence (Agnew, 1996).

There are several studies that describe the process of antiracist feminist change within different types of women's organizations—namely, coalition groups such as the National Action Committee (NAC) on the Status of Women (Nadeau, 2009), women's health clinics (Simonds, 1996), violence-against-women organizations and shelters (Agnew, 1998; Scott, 2000), and women's centres and advocacy groups (Maraj Grahame, 2000; Transken, 1998)—as well as multi-site studies of antiracist

feminist organizing (Srivastava, 2002; Sudbury, 1998). These studies offer insight into the successes of antiracist organizing within women's organizations and also some of the challenges faced by organizations and organizational actors.

Despite stated desires to become antiracist, some feminist organizational practices are characterized by "everyday, common-sense racism" such as claiming to speak on behalf of all women, asking racialized women to participate in "our" (read: white) organizations and (un)intentionally assuming leadership roles in women's organizations (Nadeau, 2005). Conflicts around antiracism ensue because of the discrepancy between what most white feminists say or do, and the ways in which their words are understood and experienced by women from Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean (Agnew, 1996; Nadeau, 2009). White, middle-class feminists have been accused of using white privilege to identify problems and propose solutions in ways that privilege the white, middle-class women (Agnew, 1996). Although more subtle, even the labels by which feminists (white and non-white) refer to racial differences among women take the dominant group as a point of reference and this reflects the ethnocentrism of the West (Stasiulis, 1996). For instance, the label of "women of colour" denotes the fact that white women do not have a skin colour and yet women of diverse racial backgrounds continue to use it.

Attempts to include or organize women of colour in women's organizations are often difficult because racism is so embedded, subtle, and difficult to detect (Agnew, 1998; Maraj Grahame, 1998; Nadeau, 2009; Sudbury, 1998). Nadeau (2009), for example, through her analysis of the antiracism work of NAC has written that, "white multiculturalist normativity is ... a subtle exclusionary practice which is pervasive ... [and] difficult to detect and even harder to unsettle" (Nadeau, 2009, p. 8). Maraj Grahame (1998), in her institutional ethnography of attempts by a U.S. mainstream organization to include women of colour, found that assumptions made about immigrant women as "unorganized" was determined by widely held misperceptions about racialized women. Specifically, Maraj Grahame (1998) found that there was a mismatch between what the organization considered "organized" and the actual realities of women of colour. She also noted that the issue for women of colour was not that they were absent in the white women's movement, but that white women were uninvolved in the issues of women of colour. She further argued that many of the organization's workers held the "ideological" belief that "Asian" women of colour, for example, were unorganized, lacked leadership skills and faced barriers to participation. These constructs were based on extra-local determinants such as academic and popular discourse, public policy, and activist perceptions of the funders' priorities.

Feminist organizations often become embroiled in controversy either from factionalism or from the distrust that emerges as women from different racialized and classed backgrounds work together to challenge entrenched oppression. Although feminist organizations may want to address racism, the activism that arises occurs in a context of relative recent personal and painful conflict over race and class issues (Nadeau, 2005; Simonds, 1996; Srivastava, 2002; Transken, 1998). For example, NAC, before its all-but-demise, erupted in conflict when it attempted to diversify. Such attempts included women-of-colour caucuses with direct access to

the executive's decision making; public education and taking anti-state stands on important issues for women of colour and Aboriginal women; and internal evaluation of organizational structures (Gottlieb, 1993). While antiracist feminists saw gains within NAC, the antiracist process had a cost. As white, heterosexual, middle-class women were asked to give up their privileged leadership roles, in some cases hostilities ensued; it was a painful and upsetting experience for all involved. Furthermore, NAC's antiracist and anti-heterosexist activism directed against the federal government resulted in subsequent state funding cuts (Gottlieb, 1993).

Many women-of-colour activists engage with women's organizations and disengage at select moments. Women of colour decided to articulate their political concerns in a variety of ways: within pre-existing or new coalition groups (Nadeau, 2009; Srivastava, 2002); within autonomous antiracist feminist organizations; or within ethno-specific, racialized, or immigrant organizations (Agnew, 1998; Bobb-Smith, 1998; Ku, 2003; Sudbury, 1998; Transken, 1998). Ku (2003) noted that immigrant women made choices to work within feminist or immigrant sector organizations depending on their experiences of racism and sexism. She also showed how these choices were not fixed; for instance, some women worked in both white feminist organizations and immigrant sector organizations.

While feminist organizations are important sites of struggle for antiracist change, they are also contradictory spaces in which antiracist feminist action is both supported and limited. In spite of the challenges of antiracist struggle within the feminist movement generally, and within women's organizations specifically, it would be inaccurate and politically paralyzing to presume that antiracist organizing has not mattered within the women's movement. Almost all of the studies of antiracist struggle within women's movements describe how women from Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean had success in challenging the status quo of race relations in both small and large feminist organizations. Women of colour exercise power in a myriad of ways to name oppressions and to define the conditions of their participation in feminist struggles dominated by white women (Nadeau, 2009; Srivastava, 2002).

Personalizing the Political and Politicizing the Personal

Everyday antiracist feminist activism within women's organizations cannot be understood without unpacking the links among politicized action, women's subjectivities and emotion (Srivastava, 2002), multiple identities (Alexander & Mohanty, 2001; Ku, 2003), and personal relationships (Alexander & Mohanty, 2001; Hill Collins, 2000). The literature that addresses how the personal is politicized and the political is personalized adds to our ability to critically analyze activist work. The literature points to the fact that, as individuals, we act because our sense of self is implicated in political action, and the fact that our political actions affect us in profound ways. As Siegel (2002) noted, since the late 1960s, the slogan "the personal is political" has changed the way we "came to think about the relationship between public and private life" (p. 2). So it is not surprising to find that feminists developed theories and practices focussing on the implications of the personal to the political, and the political to the personal (Hanisch, 1969/2006; Lee, 2007; Siegel,

2002). Though the first commentaries on “the personal is political” (such as those by Hanisch, 1969/2006) signified that women’s personal troubles had political dimensions, feminist theorists took up the slogan in a myriad of ways, all stressing the interrelatedness of the political and the personal (Lee, 2007). Antiracist feminist theorists have also argued that activism and how it is experienced are not separate from social relations. Essed (1996) noted: “For women, everyday life can be a site of political struggle. The kitchen, living room, or doorway of a school becomes a political space where women ... exchange family stories, as well as consult with each other about the future of the children in school” (p. 97). This is no different for women who engage in political struggle with and within women’s and antiracist movements.

Similarly, in the context of black British feminism, Sudbury (1998) noted that activism is at once personal and political, and needs to be conceptualized in six multidimensional arenas: individual, family, community, the local, national, and international. Sudbury (1998) also insisted that social change work must include not only collective-based organizing but also development of personal empowerment. Sudbury noted further: “An alternative understanding of the need for personal growth and confidence building is that many black women need a space in which they can distance themselves from the onslaught of derogatory and hostile representations and experiences which are a commonplace within British society ...” (p. 61). In arguing for a more comprehensive understanding of personal growth, Sudbury (1998) highlighted the salience of paying attention to the interrelatedness of different aspects of politicized action.

The literature on social movements also provides insight into “the personal and the political.” There are three overlapping strands in this literature that show how the political *becomes* personal and the personal *becomes* politicized. One strand of literature shows the ways women’s subjectivities and emotions are linked to politicized action (Srivastava, 2002; Sudbury, 1998; Wing, 1997) and, for both feminists and antiracist feminists, *became* personalized.² The second strand of literature describes how identity is linked to politicized action (Glass, 2009; Hunt & Benford, 2004; Melucci, 2003). This literature describes how a person’s identity and personal biography affect her/his activism, on the one hand, and the ways a person’s involvement in a social movement shapes her/his identity on the other hand. A third strand in the interrelated literature explores ways political action is linked with women’s relationships, most notably, with mothering/parenting (Abbey & O’Reilly, 1998; Hill Collins, 2000; McComiskey, 2002; Sudbury, 1998).

² Brah (1996) described the interrelatedness of identity, subjectivity, social relations, and experience. Brah suggests that ‘subjectivity’ is the site at which we make sense of our world (p. 123). Identities, on the other hand, “are inscribed through experiences culturally constructed in social relations” and they are not unitary or fixed (p. 123). In other words, subjectivity includes the ways that we react to or feel about the world, whereas identity is where we see ourselves as part of a collectivity. Since identity and subjectivity are inscribed through experiences, then these identities have much to say to one another, become a possible site of disjuncture, and are therefore available for looking at specific social relations.

Activist work is both personally liberating and personally draining and morale-lowering at the same time. Drawing from Frantz Fanon's proposition that decolonization is a violent process, Bannerji (2005, pp. 105–106) described her own experiences and personal costs of being an academic teaching antiracism and resisting oppression:

And yet I chose to do this violence to myself. Because I choose to de-colonize, to teach anti-racism ... it distorts me or us. Because anger against the daily ordinary violence and anger of racism distorts us ... So, yes I disassociate. The mediation of my anger cuts me into two. But here in my actual, immediate work of teaching, I am not silent. At least not that.

Ng (1998) also alluded to the costs of the embodied experience of teaching and learning critical education: "As we engage in critical education, this dynamism is what excites us at the same time that it makes us sick when we go against the grain" (p. 2). While these writers have discussed the psychic effects of antiracism within teaching, it has implications for understanding antiracism within a variety of settings; specifically, these authors direct us to contextualize the ways in which politicized action can be deeply intimate, with far-reaching psychic and embodied repercussions.

Several authors have also described emotional processes within women's organizations when they work toward an antiracist politics, and these studies describe some of the personal costs to white and racialized activists (Simonds, 1996; Srivastava, 2002). This is not surprising, given the emphasis of feminist politics on the notion of "personal is political." For example, Simonds (1996) and Morgen (1995) have described in detail antiracist processes within women's health clinics in the United States. Both researchers documented the high emotional tenor, conflict, and racism of the staff and administration in the different clinics they studied. Morgen (1995) suggested that for relatively privileged women, antiracism meant pain, shame, anger, and defensiveness as they were forced to recognize their complicity with dominant social relations of power. While explicitly politicized antiracist organizational change is emotionally charged for white women grappling with issues of power and privilege, women of colour, however, find themselves bearing a large amount of the emotional burden. The idea of "personal is political" does not take into account that race and class influence how power is shared within organizations (Agnew, 1996), nor the differential effects of racism and antiracism on racialized women (Srivastava, 2002). Kohli (1993), for example, has described shelter workers' racist, anti-Semitic, classist, and homophobic treatment which contradicted feminist discourse of empowerment. She described shelter workers' experience of being abused, dismissed, and silenced, and argued that this is the price paid by people of colour who refuse to be tokenized or exoticized by contradictions of the ideology of feminism and of feminist collectives. Similarly, Srivastava (2002) argued that the organizational processes of managing emotion, based on the feminist principle "personal is political," is cause for "emotional strain" for antiracist activists. Also, by analyzing the antiracist "moment of confrontation" in

organizations, Srivastava (2002) found that the emotional expressions of white and non-white women were organized by racialized and gendered processes.

Related to subjectivity and emotion, the relationship between identity and politicized action is important to understanding women's antiracist feminist organizations. Much of the social movement literature, based on case studies of specific social movement organizations, has attempted to make sense of why and how people enter and participate in (or leave) particular social movements (see Glass, 2009; Hunt & Benford, 2004; Melucci, 2003). A key aspect of the social movement literature on activism and identity is the notion of collective identity and its role in sustaining social movements. In their review of social movement literature, Hunt and Benford (2004) identified collective identity as a precursor and product essential to collective action for movements. Other authors such as Glass (2009) and Melucci (2003) proposed that collective (and individual) identity be seen more as a process than as a thing to be studied. Melucci (2003) argued, for example, for an actor-centred analysis of social movements. In this sense, collective identity needs to be understood as a learning process in which a unified actor is created, simultaneously creating a social movement. Glass (2009), taking up Melucci's (2003) actor-centred idea of collective identity as process, argued that individual or collective identity is not possessed by people, but is the actions that people take, which she called "identity work."

While much of the literature on collective identity and its role in participation in social movements has focussed on the production of sameness, antiracist feminist theorists have focussed on the paradox of the sameness of difference. In her essay on "difference," Brah (2001) unpacked another aspect of collective identity relevant to antiracist feminist organizing, namely identification with "difference" as part of one's identity. In linking this to politicized mobilization, Brah (2001, p. 474) argued that "political mobilization is centrally about attempts to re-inscribe subjectivity through appeals to collective experience. Paradoxically, the commonality that is evoked can be rendered meaningful only in articulation with a discourse of difference." Like Melucci (2003), Brah (2001) understood identity as a process, and suggested that it is more appropriate to speak of identity as discourse, meanings, and memories that can form the basis of identification within a given context. She described the complexity of the links between personal biography and collective history, and argued that collective identities partially erase the multiplicities of others within the same subject.

Like other social movement literature on the ways in which personal biography and entry into social movements are linked (Gardner, 2003; McComiskey, 2002; Todd, 2002), antiracist feminist activists also theorized the ways early family experience and collective history affects politicized identity (Alexander & Mohanty, 2001; Hill Collins, 2000; Ku, 2003). Ku (2003) traced the pathways to activism of women of colour in the immigrant services sector and argued that early experience in the family and community were entry points into activism. Bobb-Smith (1998), in historicizing a Caribbean brand of feminism in Canada, argued that "home" and community, based on collective history, were key sites of learning resistance and feminist independence.

Antiracist feminist theorizing on the links between politicized action and personal relationships within communities and within families also provides a rich backdrop. As I have already argued, activism cannot be seen as separable from women's everyday lives. Women bring their activism to their relationships, and their relationships affect their activism. For example, feminist theorizing on mothering and parenting (Abbey & O'Reilly, 1998; McComiskey, 2002) and Black and antiracist feminist theorizing on community and other-mothering (Hill Collins, 2000; Jenkins, 1998; Sudbury, 1998) help us to theorize motherhood as a site from which feminist activism occurs. In particular, the literature on community and other-mothering also highlights the fluid boundaries of feminist, antiracist, and activist subjectivities between family and community.

Relationships with parents, family, and community may also limit politicized action. Transnational, Third World, and other antiracist feminists have discussed the ways feminist and other forms of politicized action are sanctioned from within their own families, communities, and nations. Alexander and Mohanty (2001) wrote:

Women's bodies are disciplined in different ways: within discourses of profit maximization, as global workers and sexual laborers; within religious fundamentalisms, as repositories of sin and transgression; within specifically nationalist discourses, as guardians of culture and respectability or criminalized as prostitutes and lesbians; and within state discourses of the originary nuclear family, as wives and mothers. (p. 501)

Since women are considered responsible for the well-being of family and are often considered to be the site of the preservation of tradition and culture, women's articulations of resistance are seen as threatening and sanctioned. Women are sanctioned in many ways: through (threat of) violence, silencing, othering, isolation, ostracism, and sexualization, as well as through dehistoricizing, dismissing, and minimizing of the historicity of women's activism (Alexander & Mohanty, 2001; Anzaldúa, 2003).

Narayan (1997) argued that Third World feminists should not internalize these sanctions and see themselves as outside of their own culture. Ostracizing and minimizing has meant that they have struggled with being defined outside of their communities, and have thus been seen (by others and themselves) as inauthentic. The issue of belonging, ostracism, and cultural authenticity, Ku (2003) noted, is particularly problematic for immigrant activists within the diaspora, because it means a loss of credibility in terms of organizational roles as an activist speaking for "the community." She argued that activists within the immigrant sector who claim to be speaking on behalf of the community must claim insider status or risk being marginalized. Thus, for feminist activists from racialized, immigrant, and diasporic communities, belonging and authenticity must be negotiated. Furthermore, she argued that understanding immigrant women's activism requires that we acknowledge and unpack the competing identities within their roles as activists. However, as Sudbury (1998) noted, it is precisely this that frees women to think and act in more critical ways. Sudbury (1998) argued further that women who were somehow displaced from their communities were often those who were the strongest advocates against sexism, as their displacement in effect liberated them from their

communities. For example, she noted that women who were brought up outside of established black communities and were the only black child in their school, women who were taken into the care system or brought up by white foster or adoptive parents, women who had come out as lesbians, women who had defied cultural expectations by dating 'out', all had experienced social ostracism and had become emotionally strong in the face of rejection (Sudbury, 1998). For activists, then, belonging and ostracism are contradictory in that they both motivate activism and limit it.

Conclusion

This article provides an overview of the field of action in which antiracist feminism occurs and, as such, is intended to act as a guide to activists, students, social workers, and academics so they can begin or continue to develop an understanding of how our everyday acts are shaped. No wonder that antiracist organizing remains a struggle given the complexity of contexts in which antiracist feminists act! Unlike the common charges made against and within activist circles that we have to do more or that politicized action is ineffective, it is clear from the literature that everyday activism makes a difference. In particular, everyday antiracist feminist activism with and within women's organizations has made profound change within non-profit sector organizations, feminist, antiracist, and other social justice movements, women's organizations, and racialized communities and organizations, as well as within women's lives and families. By broadening our understanding of activism as a process of struggle rather than as an identity or acts, we are cautioned to stop and systematically reflect on the gains we continuously make within all intersecting arenas of public and private spheres of activism. While activists need to continue being critical of the ways in which those gains of ending oppressive social relations in organizations are eroded, appropriated, dismissed, captured, and stalled within current restructuring of funding and accountability regimes, we also need to shift our gaze to evaluating the quality of our everyday struggle. As the literature has shown, it is the struggle toward antiracist, feminist, and anti-oppressive politicized actions—not the simple arithmetic of gains and losses—which is the source of activist power.

For those of us engaged as antiracist feminist activists, the insights of the literature provide us a number of opportunities for activist reflection. First, antiracist feminist activism must be understood in relation to the concrete ways in which social service and community organizations are funded by, and thus made accountable to, the state. Activist work both with and within social service and community organizations is constrained and limited by funding and accountability regimes. Activists need to pay attention to the literature that warns of the ways activist ideals can be subsumed and reconstituted within dominating frames. The message is clear: We must reflect on these processes and be attentive to how they affect us. This applies also to the ways the state reconstitutes social justice ideals, as well as to the ways racist relations subordinate women of colour. In spite of dominating frames that shape our struggles, the successes of the antiracist and feminist struggle are made extant in the literature. The single most obvious sign of success is the fact that

antiracist feminist activism is ongoing and alive, despite the history of essentialism and racism within women's organizations. This is, as I have suggested, in part due to the history of the women's movement critique and the self-conscious attempts to redress power inequities within organizations. Sustained collective politicized action of antiracist feminists was always key to uncovering and fighting racism within women's organizations. The literature reminds us of the importance of being attentive to the motivations of activists and the effects of activism on activists who can both sustain and limit politicized action.

I argued that we need to understand better, via an engagement with the literature, how activism is shaped by historicized relations within the non-profit sector, feminist and antiracist movements, women's organizations, and women's personal lives. Critical reflection, assisted by a growing literature, is a key skill for social justice praxis; as activists, students, social workers and academics, we constantly find ourselves asking whether our actions are effective and just. We consider such questions not just as a way of understanding ourselves, but also in order to make sense of the complex social contexts in which we act.

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