**The Mediated Counterpublics of
Canadian Farm Women**

**By
Melissa Benner**

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Abstract

“Sisters, Workers of Saskatchewan, Sign Up!; Woman, the life giver, Take heed!”

This thesis provides a historical perspective on the links between gender, discourse and political action in farm women’s activist practices. I focus on the women involved in the Canadian farm movement, revealing how these women maintain gender integration in their organizations, while at the same time creating spaces to discuss and publicize women’s specific needs. I posit that some of the most ingenious initiatives of farm women over the past century have been the production of spaces in which communication and mobilization can occur over the long distances of rural areas. To argue this, I have chosen to investigate two dynamic media -- a newspaper page, and a radio broadcast -- created by farm women. In a two part discussion, I combine counterpublic theory with critical discourse analysis to explore, firstly, the historical, institutional and social context surrounding the women’s mediated counterpublics. Secondly, I analyze the active discussions about women’s roles that take place in these semi-public spaces. Overall, I highlight how these participatory media fora allow gendered identity to become linked to strategies for action, which facilitates women’s involvement in public life, and challenges the patriarchal social relations of agricultural communities.

Acknowledgements

Finally I am at the stage where the ideas have come together, the writing is nearly done, and I can attend to the necessary, final details. This thesis has been a long, long thought process, which began when I was very young, noticing the hard work and many hours my parents put into our farm each summer. This project began with them, and all the other farmers in my life. Thank you mom and dad for your constant support and love through this writing process; all the long distance phone calls were much appreciated. And my thoughts go to Grandpa Benner who taught me about the history of my farm family, and who always inspired me to write.

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As well, my thanks go out to Sara Bannerman for challenging my ideas, and providing good conversation, and Melissa Hunter, whose interest in the NFU echoes my

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Introduction:

FARM WOMEN, COMMUNICATION, AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

In advertising, farmwomen are presented in isolation from one another. This acts as a disservice to rural women's organizations and their contribution to community life.... As well, the work of the farmwoman is seen as easy and centering on the home. This ignores her true role of partner in the farm enterprise and farm production. The false image of her labour is extensive.

(M.J. Lipkin (1980), 'The invisible pitchfork' or The Portrayal of farm women in the Canadian Media)

The findings in Lipkin's 1980 report concerning representation of farmwomen by the Canadian media are not surprising. What is surprising, however, is discovering how misleading such "false images" are. When I began my research on farm women organizing, I felt as if I was discovering a little known history. Although the mainstream media outlets may ignore or misrepresent the contributions of farm women to Canadian society, these farm women have been ingeniously using alternative media to organize and agitate for social reforms for quite some time now. My research addresses the key question: how are farm women leaders using communication practices to facilitate women's involvement in the public sphere of farm politics? This focus will analyze the creative communication techniques used by farm women and provide a sense of how these techniques relate to what has been termed "agrarian feminism".¹ This analysis will challenge the common perception that social change originates only in urban areas, with rural areas being static, idyllic places left behind in a 'connected' world.

My interest in this research topic is both personal and political. I grew up on a farm in South Western Ontario, and this topic was the outgrowth of a long curiosity about

¹ The term "agrarian feminism" was coined by Louise Carbert (1995, 1996). She was referring to a type of gender-consciousness she found when surveying women in rural areas of Canada. I will assess her findings in Chapter Two as I talk about how I have decided to approach the question of feminism in rural areas.

communication in rural areas. This curiosity began when noting how the farm periodical the “Ontario Farmer” was a staple of our household, and solidified into a research topic as I wondered how media directed to farmers become integrated into their knowledge about broader agricultural trading systems. My interest has shifted since that early spark of curiosity, and now rests on the use of media by progressive farm organizations. The context of farm communications and politics has also shifted from Ontario to Saskatchewan in order to follow the development of the radical farm unions of the early 1900’s and the current National Farmer’s Union (NFU). Changing the unit of analysis from farm papers to farm organizations was important for two reasons. Firstly, instead of explaining how mainstream media frames the knowledge of farmers, I wanted to explore the populist and participatory education techniques that have been central to the community organizing of farm unions. As well, I was intrigued by how the current NFU has used media and research projects as a counterhegemonic response to free trade and globalized agriculture. As questions about the state of agriculture become more pressing, the NFU provides an analysis that is both progressive in suggesting different modes of agricultural development, and conservative in that it looks to maintain a rural lifestyle that is rapidly disappearing.

The choice to focus on women in the Saskatchewan farm unions and the current NFU came from a revelation in the earliest stages of my research. I noted that women are and have been vital to the farm movement, but their public, political contributions are often underestimated. Because the family farm is both home, and workplace, it is one of the last forms of ‘cottage industry’ in which paid and unpaid work are not easily separated. However, the *gendered* division of labour on the farms remains strong, and

also structures the public spheres of farm organizations and farm politics. I explore how women negotiate gender in farm unions that are inscribed with patriarchal assumptions yet still try to include women at all levels of leadership.

Focusing on farm union women can also help one to understand how feminism has been negotiated in rural areas. By conducting research on rural women's activism in progressive farm organizations, I hope to take up the challenge of social movement theorist Verta Taylor (1998), who points to the disparity of works looking at gender in social movements, and particularly at the work of women in gender-integrated organizations. My research will make a contribution to academic knowledge by examining the ways that gender surreptitiously constructs the internal processes of organizations through: "construction of identities, organization of needs and interests, strategies, organizational structures, leadership styles and actions" (V. Taylor, 1998, 26) and how this (en)gendering is even more apparent in mixed organizations. I also agree with Maxine Molyneux's (2001) statement that: "It is important to acknowledge that these other forms of female mobilization [such as unions], excluded from consideration as 'women's movements' nonetheless constitute a large proportion, possibly the greater part, of female solidarity in much of the modern world" (145). By understanding the negotiation of women's involvement in progressive movements, one can begin to understand the multiplicity of women's historically and culturally situated responses to oppression.

When considering social movements and progressive organizations, many theorists do not note the play of gender *and* communication within the 'empirical, objective' structure of the institution or group being studied. In conjunction with critical

theorist Dennis Mumby (2001), I argue that the internal processes of organizations are constituted by and through communication, and through intersubjective relations that are interlaced with power. My thesis will bring to the surface the two threads of gender and communication, but rather than focusing on how mainstream media misrepresents farm women, or looking at how women audiences engage in a politics of resistance through consumption of media texts, I investigate women as producers and participants of alternative communications. As Lisa McLaughlin (1993) puts it in her article “Feminism, public sphere, the media and democracy”:

A feminist critique must consider furthering the emancipatory project through exploring how women can take advantage of new media developments and alternative forms of media and participation to develop new forms of public life (pp. 619).

This thesis is organized to first provide the reader with a background of the farm movement, and then delve into the alternative forms of media produced by the women in the movement.

Chapter One begins with a literature review on farm movements to both situate my study in this broader body of literature, and indicate some of the challenges and contributions of this research project. The literature review is followed by a history of the farm unions that situates my analysis of the women’s media projects in the early part of the century. I then explore the current organizational work of women in the NFU to provide the background needed to understand the farm women’s recent media projects.

Chapter Two takes the reader through the processes of crafting together theory and method. In this chapter, I explain why I decided to use Nancy Fraser’s theory of counterpublics, and how I modified the theory to explain the ways farm women use media to organize across the distance of rural areas. I link counterpublic theory with a

critical discourse methodology that outlines how I conceive the “discursive interactions” (Fraser, 1997) of the counterpublics. In this chapter, I also introduce and explain the key themes woven throughout the thesis: the themes of gendered identity, communication and political action have been shaped to reflect my findings in the empirical material, and create a conceptual bridge between the theoretical framework and my stance as a feminist researcher. I finish this chapter with an account of how I collected the data for the next two analysis chapters.

Chapter Three provides an analysis of a 1920’s-1950’s newspaper forum where women wrote letters discussing the issues of the day. This chapter first explains the particular formation and qualities of the counterpublic, and then conducts a discourse analysis that looks at how interaction through epistolary media facilitated women’s action in the early farm movement. In this chapter, I will illustrate the dynamic links formed between the intersubjective creation of gendered identity and resultant public and political action.

Chapter Four is the final chapter, and investigates the creation of a radio collective counterpublic by NFU women in the 1990’s; to create a balanced analysis, I focus on both the empowerment and constraints found in the creation of the radio broadcast. By placing this counterpublic in relation to the discussion in Chapter Three, I investigate the historical continuities and change between counterpublic strategies and content. Through critical discourse analysis, I also explore how alternative knowledge about farm women’s roles was negotiated between the members of the collective, and then disseminated to a broader audience.

In this thesis, I explore the links between gender, discourse and political action through a historical approach that applies counterpublic theory to the organizing and activist practices of farm women. Kathryn Cirksena's 1994 prediction seems an apt description of the methods and contributions of this study:

Socialist-feminist work in communication² will probably eventually explore the problematic nature of divisions between private and public communications, reviving a history of women's speech and feminist periodicals that recognizes the semipublic nature of much influential female communication (28).

The communication practices of the farm women in the farm movement are multi-mediated exchanges that produce knowledge and alternative awareness about the situation of rural women in Canada. Though I will not claim the farm union women as representative of all rural women, this thesis can give a sense of the processes by which this specific population has named itself and its goals for social change.

² I am not using this quote to claim my stance as a 'socialist feminist'. Instead, I find that Cirksena's prediction points to an important direction in communication studies: the exploration of the ways that media connects the personal and public realms. Although I touch on much of what Cirksena (1994) regards as socialist feminist issues and concerns, my work, like much women-oriented research, cannot easily be slotted into one theoretical standpoint.

Chapter One

FERMENT IN THE FIELD: HISTORY, STRUCTURE & GENDER IN THE CANADIAN FARM MOVEMENT

The purpose of this chapter is to locate Canadian farm unions within academic scholarship, as well as explore the mandate of the early organizations and the current work of the National Farmer's Union. My review of literature on agrarian activism does not simply point out the lack of communication-oriented research within the field. It also discusses the two reasons why agrarian studies are useful for my research. The first is to fulfill the practical requirement of outlining the sources used to write a history of the farm movement in Canada. There has been little academic material written on the activities of the current NFU, so the historical literature on agrarian activism has allowed me to map the evolution from provincial to federated unions throughout the twentieth century.

Secondly, the academic literature provides insight into how progressive farm unions have centered their organizations around critiques of capitalism, and mobilization on sustainable alternatives. Discussing agrarian activism suggests how a communication perspective is useful to analyze the historical and current social practices of organizing and broadcasting alternative ideas in rural areas. Women's organizing techniques in particular have been highly important to the development of the union's mandate, though their contributions are often overlooked. Outlining women's historical involvement in the unions will provide the background for my later exploration of farm women's communication practices. However, before I delve into the academic field and the details

of history, I will explain why I define the farm unions by the term “social movement organization”.

The NFU as a Social Movement Organization

In the Canadian farming community, the National Farmer’s Union is considered a general farm organization (G.F.O.), in that it represents all commodity groups in farming. However, the NFU also considers itself a progressive organization or social movement that, through collective action, coalitions, and political activities, tries to establish change for farmers and rural communities. The earlier farm movements in Canada also termed themselves interchangeably farm organizations, social movements and/or progressive organizations. In this thesis, I view the NFU as a *social movement organization*, which allow it a slightly different character than terming it a *social movement*. But what are the differences between the two terms?

A social movement has been defined as a network of groups struggling collectively for social change (Desmarais 2003; Smith, Pagnucco, Chatfield 1997; West and Blumberg 1990). In contrast, Smith, Pagnucco and Chatfield (1997) explain:

Social movement organizations (SMOs) are those *formal groups* explicitly designed to promote specific social changes. They are the principal carriers of social movements insofar as they mobilize new human and material resources, activating and coordinating strategic action throughout ebbs and flows of movement energy” ([my italics] 60).

As social movement organizations, Canadian farm unions have elected leaders and executive boards to direct the unions at local, district, and federal levels. Despite the hierarchical structure of the unions, the twin policies of voluntary membership and direct democracy helps to keep members involved at all levels of decision making. Viewing the unions as organizations has helped me to note how historical shifts in structure, and

mandate shape the unions' political interventions, and also helps to understand how the unions retain membership when the broader farm movements lose momentum.³

As well, throughout this century, the unions have linked with other progressive groups to lobby for change. At key historical points, these linkages have broadened the mandate and critiques to encompass more than commodity and agricultural interests (Hunter, 2003). These coalitions and critiques signify Canadian farm unions as organizations that strive to effect broader social change rather than just representing a narrow lobby or special interest group. My claim that the unions have indeed been more than a lobby group, leads to the further question of how the unions have defined and fought for "social change". In fact, the types of change advocated by the unions resonate with current debates in social movement literature.

In social movement theory, there is an ongoing dispute about whether there has been a paradigm shift from older progressive movements that situated social change in economic redistribution, and new social movements which call for change along the lines of recognition and identity politics (Melucci, 1994; Buechler, 2000; Santianni, 2001). Noting this shift towards identity-based politics is indeed important; however, political action that challenges dominant knowledge and signification systems is often intertwined with calls for economic change. As Nancy Fraser (1997) argues, it is incredibly difficult to separate redistribution from recognition politics. And, as Michael Santianni (2001) lucidly points out, even the women's movement, as the quintessential 'new' social

³ The Canadian farm "movement" which challenged the state, and promoted economic and social alternatives for rural areas peaked from the 1900's to the late 1930's, and after WWII, slowed down. The 1990's are seeing the resurgence of farm politics, and the broadening of a national movement into international agricultural arenas (Hunter, 2003). This ebb and flow in the movement is in accordance with Sidney Tarrow's (1989) notion of social movement cycles, where momentum and action are hinged to specific historical moments (as discussed in Melucci, 1994).

movement based on gender and identity, is also deeply concerned with economic reforms. The farm unions, as social movement organizations spanning the century, provide a particularly interesting example of the interchange between social/symbolic and economic strategies for change.⁴ Focusing on the ways that farm women worked for social change within the unions gives a glimpse into not only the interchange between social and economic goals, but also how the strategies for social change have been gendered. As I will argue in my analysis chapters, these gendered strategies are linked to how the women's collective formations of gendered identities are intertwined with their material life/work situations. In this sense, I use the insights of new social movement theory to explain the interactive negotiation of women's roles, but claim that these roles remain tied to issues of redistribution and class. The following survey of literature on farm movements will give a sense of how farm movement politics have been analyzed by other scholars.

Sowing Seeds of Dissent: Peasant, Canadian and Farm Women's Movements

While the idea of rural social movements may seem an anachronism in a period of post-modern urbanism, there is a burgeoning body of literature that focuses on such movements. This literature centres on the current international peasant⁵ movements,

⁴ I intertwine the social with the symbolic, because rural life and farm work fosters the agrarian myth central to the self-representation of the farmers. As Mooney (1996) explains, this myth situates farmers as different from the urban population, and creates a very strong sense of rural, populist identity in farm politics. This myth has been one of the subtle ways farm union women distinguished themselves from their urban counterparts throughout the years.

⁵ The terms peasant and farmer indicate somewhat different ways of working on the land. In this particular body of social movement literature, 'peasant' generally signifies subsistence farmers who often have very little title to or ownership of the land. This indicates a difference from the sense of 'small farmer' in Western societies. These small farmers in developed countries are often contrasted to large agribusiness firms, indicating the smaller scale and more localized nature of these operations. But unlike peasants in

which take place mainly in Latin America. Recent studies of peasant movements by authors such as Marc Edelman (2000, 2001), Wilbur Robles (2000), and Annette Desmarais(2002, 2003), combine political economic perspectives on agriculture with analyses of the ways peasant farmers are mobilizing. This literature uses a critical Marxist framework to explain how capitalist agriculture has created structural obstacles that limit peasant's access to and use of farmland. However, the peasants' responses to structural forces are explained through references to both cultural and international aspects of mobilization (Desmarais, 2003). Such nuanced understandings of mobilization are characteristic of new social movement theory, and show how culture, race and gender intersect with class resistance. Through this layered theoretical approach, the authors discuss how colonialism and capitalism have shaped the situation of peasants but also how cultural identity shapes the nature of peasant resistance.⁶ The peasants' resistance is often viewed as a localized challenge to globalized agri-business operations, transnational seed and machinery companies, and free trade agreements privileging the large landowners of US and EU agricultural regimes.

The literature on peasant movements provides examples of studies trying to find new ways to explain the dialectic between structure and agency. This research reflects how post-structuralist thought has challenged assumptions of class and production as the central organizing principle in societies; these scholars note culture, race and gender as factors that are also relevant to the analysis, though always attuned to the political

developing countries, small farmer still own capital intensive and occasionally profitable pieces of farm land.

⁶ One of the most interesting cultural differences between current peasant and small farmer activism is the use of cooperative farming strategies. Though there is a long history of co-operative marketing in Canada, the ownership of farms has always remained tuned towards individual families, rather than collective ownership. In contrast, cultural traditions in South America privilege the collective use of public land and co-operative production techniques. Exploring these different strategies deserves further thought and research.

economic framework. My initial approach to Canadian farm unions was also tuned to a political economic perspective, in that I was interested in how farmers disseminated critiques of capitalist agricultural production. But focusing on farm union women has made me reevaluate this perspective: to understand the hidden history and public action of farm women, my study maps the discursive interactions that work to legitimate women's political involvement. This has kept my analysis on micro- and meso- levels of social relations rather than the macro-level where many of the political economic analyses of agriculture are situated (Friedmann, 1995, 1999; Magdoff, 2000). This angle, I believe, not only provides an original contribution to the field, but also helps to explain the ideological processes that accompany women's public action. However, a political economic critique of agriculture has continued to inform why I consider the Canadian farm movement an important area of study, and has helped me understand how structural constraints hinder organizing. My study is thus tuned towards how communication is used as an organizing technique, but I also take note of the hidden ways that structural factors shape the women's interactions.

Because I began research with the literature on peasants in social movements, I quickly recognized that the analysis of agrarian movements depends on situating the movement in the historical, cultural and economic contexts of the country. So, although commonalities can and have been found across farm organizations, in order to situate the NFU in its socio-historical field, I turn to literature on Canadian farm movements. My study is rooted in a historical analysis, so I had to understand both the origins and the present day activities of the NFU. What I discovered were two different literatures on Canadian rural activism: one, a historical approach on farm movements and prairie farm

women, and the other based on the new farm women's organizations of Canada.

The book by Louis Aubrey Woods, *Farm Movements in Canada*, is still hailed as the most conclusive study on farm movements, even though it was written in 1929. It details the early co-operative movement, and focuses on the activities of the provincial farm unions of the prairies. This book, though informative and useful, reflects the time period when it was written by providing a very detailed and 'objective' view of union history. The author does not take note of the fact that by 1929 many of the unions had deliberately included women at all levels of leadership, thereby creating a new solidarity in the farm movement. As well, the author focuses on the political action of *male* farmers, and specifically a few notable leaders, in a way that overlooks the work of women in the unions. Though Woods did provide a cursory glance at the work of women (relegated to the space of three pages) he narrowly explained women's work as providing the social side of the movement, a statement that overlooks the work of even the most famous farm women leaders of that time.⁷

A more recent book by Bradford Rennie (2000) entitled *The Rise Of Agrarian Democracy*, describes the history of the Alberta Farm Union, and rightly mentions that there is very little work done on post-confederation farm organizations and movements. Similar to Woods' (1929) book, Rennie is arguing that the early farm unions were not just interest or lobby groups, but were fighting for social betterment of rural communities through political and economic collective action. Rennie also uses gender as a point of analysis by deliberately tracing women's work within the unions to provide a better understanding of what women accomplished. His nuanced understanding of how farm

⁷ In my analysis, I also note that women took on the social rather than economic organizing in the early unions. However, by focusing on women's discussions, I provide a more complex and critical analysis of this role, arguing that it is important to pay heed to the holistic perspective that women often provided.

women named their roles is very similar to my own, which, I believe, came from reading primary sources that illuminated the complex discourse surrounding the women's actions. His book outlines the activism of the Alberta Unions, work that often overlapped with the Saskatchewan unions at the centre of my historical investigation.⁸ The key difference between our studies is that I approach the union history from a feminist communication perspective that reveals the interactive and fluid creation of women's roles. In contrast, Rennie adds women into his historical analysis without fully analyzing how this addition fundamentally challenges 'progressive, objective' accounts of history.

The general sources on farm movements and politics are useful to understand the history and context of the unions, but, with my focus on gender and action, I found Georgina Taylor's work on union farm women most valuable. As well, Taylor's work centres on the Saskatchewan unions, providing important information for my regional focus. Taylor has written prolifically on women in the early organizations (1980; 1991; 1997), and in her substantial PhD dissertation that focuses on agrarian activist and union member, Violet McNaughton, Taylor describes the evolution of the unions from a focus on women's activities. She provides an understanding of the agrarian feminism surrounding the work of the farm women; work that she argued focused both on social and economic reforms. Taylor's research has been key to understand the characteristics of women's involvement, as well as the evolution from early provincial unions to the federated unions.

However, my historical perspective differs from Taylor in two important ways. The first is that, in accordance with Gring-Pemble:

⁸ It wasn't until 1969 that the provincial unions merged, and where Alberta and Saskatchewan mandates became intertwined.

To view the emergence of women into the public domain as the result of the efforts of a few “great women” or as a result of social, religious, political and economic conditions is to highlight an artificial dichotomy between the public and the private and to ignore intermediary and highly significant processes of transformation. (1998, 44)

Though I will trace the history of the farm unions in this chapter in a more traditional way, the point of investigating the counterpublic is to note the collective work of women in facilitating change, rather than focusing on a particular farm woman leader. While it is important to remember that the farm women leaders initiated the communication projects, the projects were interactive and based on populist ideals that valued the work of all members. Taylor’s work, though of great use, still fosters a sense that “great women”, like “great men” propel history forward.

As well, my research questions Taylor’s assertions about farm women’s feminism. Taylor terms McNaughton an “integrative feminist”, whereas I view the farm women leaders and farm women members as politically motivated and gender conscious, but not necessarily feminist. This perspective is similar to Louise Carbert’s (1995) study that points out the difference between the feminism of farm women leaders and farm women members in rural organizations. Although Carbert ends up terming farm women as “agrarian feminists” she still puts forward strong arguments against terming the women as feminist without important modifications.

Carbert’s 1995 study conducted a survey with Canadian farm women, mainly from Ontario⁹, to find out how they defined themselves on the political spectrum, and

⁹ This geographical location is also very important to note. From my research on prairie farm women and my personal knowledge of Ontario farming culture, there could very well be a difference in perspective that comes from regional history and politics. This would be interesting to explore further, and yet again points to how important it is not to overlook factors of geography, culture and history when considering the different forms of feminism.

whether or not they viewed themselves as feminists. Carbert's main findings revealed a gender consciousness in the farm women that often included strong negative opinions about 'feminists' that occurred because a certain brand of feminism¹⁰ seemed to contradict other values that the farm women found more important. One of these values was a 'centre principle' that promoted balance rather than blame when it came to politics of all sorts (1995, p.88); another was a strong sense of shared responsibility between men and women on the farm and in the community. Carbert claims: "The most frequent conceptualization of feminism related to equality, role equity and traditional gender roles between men and women. These [women's] responses discussed feminism in 'relational' terms with a stress on the male/female unit as the basic social unit" (1995, p.135). Strains of 'seperatist' feminism threatened this delicate balance, and the women often decried the feminist movement as much as they embraced some of the strategies that feminism promoted, such as consciousness raising, consensus building and struggles for women's socio-economic equality. Carbert was left noting that:

The topic of feminism aroused far more intense emotion than did any preceding political question; even active hostility to feminism is more impressive than apathy. In sum, farm wives could speak articulately and intelligently on the subject of feminism whereas they could not for more conventionally political topics (1995, 134).

Carbert's work raises many interesting questions and provided a nuanced and fascinating study that revealed as many contradictions as there were certain noticeable commonalities.

¹⁰ This reaction to feminism could easily be due to the media portrayal and stereotypes of all feminists as homebreakers, lesbians, and/or other militant forms. If these farm women were presented with the example of earlier suffragists such as Irene Parlby, or other current respected farm women leaders, it would be interesting to see if their perceptions could be altered.

This rural feminism debate runs as a strong undercurrent to my thoughts, although not the key concentration of my work. The tension between women's lived practices and the conscious 'naming' of political position indicates some of the interesting decisions facing scholars investigating women's work. On the one hand, for theoretical purposes, I do think the women and organizations I am investigating exhibit a unique politics that the term '*agrarian* feminism' helps to explain. However, for this particular study, I have chosen to view feminism as a deliberate and conscious political choice. By focusing on the communications between women members and leaders, and the discussion surrounding the various social roles and political actions of women, I can give a sense of how any and all '*agrarian* feminism' or 'gender consciousness' is negotiated. This hesitation to label the women as feminist will allow me to investigate the constraints and contradictions of farm women's gendered identity and the practices that surround this identity in a more critical way than both Taylor and Carbert. By accepting the women's discourse as negotiated by their situation, I try to avoid conflating my feminist research framework with assumptions that the farmwomen's work is in a feminist paradigm.

This position also helps me with my review of more recent studies on farm movements. I found a large number on segregated farm-women organizations in Canada, and only one study that focused in-depth on the National Farmer's Union. The literature on farm women's organizations has been prolific in the last two decades, as feminists have focused on the new organizations of farm women in Canada, such as Women for Survival of Agriculture (1973) Women in Support of Agriculture (1975), and the Canadian Farm Women's Network (1986) (Teather 1995, 1997; Shortall 1994, 1999; MacKenzie 1992, 1996, Carbert 1995, 1996). These farm women's organizations

emerged after the second wave women's movement in the 1960's, and provide examples of the multiple ways rural women have gotten organized and active. Other scholars focus their analyses on how women are not represented in traditional male-dominated avenues of farm organizations such as the agricultural federations, and AgCanada (MacDonald 1995; Nieman 1996). This literature is helpful in that it places the gendered critique of the NFU women in perspective, and also gives a better understanding of what issues women have organized around in recent decades.

Yet, in this literature on current farm women initiatives, there is little discussion of women's activities within the NFU. It could be that feminists are interested in segregated farm women groups as more closely related to the women's movement. This, however, neglects to look at the variety of ways that women are becoming public and political. As an example, within the segregated farm women's organizations, the perspective is generally on gender roles more than class or critique of capital (Wiebe, 1995). A focus on NFU women, and the long history behind these women's work, takes into consideration the dual roles of producer class/farmer and woman and how women frame critiques of capitalism and patriarchy within gender-mixed organizations. My study will indicate the multiple constraints as well as the benefits of working within a gender-integrated farming social movement organization.

Finally, there is a recent 2003 M.A. thesis on the NFU written by Carleton student Melissa Hunter, which constitutes the only other in-depth study focusing on the organization, and provides a useful balance to the primary sources written by the NFU. This balance between primary and academic sources is important because it allows me to understand not only how the NFU has situated itself in current agricultural discussions,

but also how other academics have approached the materials put forward by the organization. In her thesis, Hunter approaches the NFU as a social movement, from the perspective that it responds to “political opportunity” structures in order to generate its collective action. Her argument about political opportunity structures gives a sense of how the organization’s policies reflect broader governmental and capitalist shifts over the century. This helps to understand how structural factors have lead to the re-organization of the NFU at provincial, national and international levels. And this is also one way to understand some of the motivations behind their organizational strategies.

Hunter’s analysis also discusses the approach the union has taken in order to get its message out to the general public. She focuses on the union’s response to free trade, its coalitions with other Canadian groups such as the Council of Canadians and OXFAM, and the general arguments the union has put forward, arguments that often coincide with academic analyses of the current political economy of agriculture. The areas where her thesis could have been strengthened are where my research comes into play.

My research perspective views communication as central to the organizing techniques of the union, and women’s communication practices as a way to understand how multiple roles and issues are negotiated within the union. Hunter’s method of data collection attempted to integrate both primary and secondary sources, but often avoided delving into the construction of the union’s mandate, and the roles that various members had in that construction. In my research, I use a larger variety of materials to try and provide a more in-depth and critical understanding of the processes by which the farm unions as social movement organizations have mobilized their members. I facilitate this

broader perspective through a comparative historical analysis of two fora of activism¹¹, thus noting the history of the farm unions as one of continuous and dynamic negotiation. This multiple collection of data involved reading not only what women were writing about in early farm periodicals, but also traveling to the annual NFU convention in November, conducting extensive interviews, and gathering materials from the farm union office in Saskatoon.

This additional research allowed me to discover both the process and product of the farm unions' public message. To better understand how the union's critique and actions are negotiated, one has to look more closely at the processes of communication within the union, rather than its objective structural response (the provincial/local/international focus of the unions) to structural changes (the different areas where government policy is decided). This communication perspective is historical, but focuses on history as intersecting narratives rather than objective, linear progress; it is a perspective that I am fleshing out throughout this thesis.

However, before I can explain these inter-organizational processes of communication, I need to provide an account of the empirical structure of the organization. To do this means providing necessary background information for the reader, while remaining aware of how I have shaped the history to frame my overall theoretical perspective. In the following sections, I outline the history and organizational structure of the National Farmer's Union, to give a better understanding of women's role within it. Then I will discuss the activities of NFU farm women leaders in recent decades.

¹¹ I will discuss my use of the "Mainly for Women" pages and Radio Collective programs in my methodology section, but I found these pages very helpful to get a more complete sense of the history of farm women's activism. As Linnett Fawcett (1999) points out, focusing on media forums has the dual role of both explaining women's communication, and providing a more in-depth and rich history of women's experiences in 'their own words'.

To tell this history, I rely on some of the more traditional sources (Woods 1929; Hunter 2003) to form a broad sketch of dates, details and movement of people to the West. Admittedly, this can give the sense of an objective historical account, or a “view from nowhere” (Code, 1995) that feminist historians rightly critique.

I try to counter this traditional telling of history in three ways. Firstly, critiquing the myth of ‘progress’ surrounding the settlement of the Western provinces is beyond the scope of this thesis.¹² However, I do recognize it is a problematic account, and this recognition may help me to counter any hyperbolic assertions about the taming of the West by industrious (male) farmers. Secondly, while I do broadly sketch the dates and details of the farm movement in this chapter, my analysis chapters provide a counterbalance by further exploring the dynamic negotiations of, and different gender experiences within, this *history*. Thirdly, as I begin talking more closely about the farm unions in this chapter, I frame it within a feminist revisionist historiography that draws out the experiences of women in the unions. This re-visioning of history indicates that whoever tells the history shapes the focus of that history, and that there are different dates and details that become important according to the research goals of the scholar. I constructed the following history through a feminist lens that does use empirical details, but recognizes that these details are tuned to a research agenda that privileges the interactive, gendered elements of communication, rather than the assumption that the farm organizations are coherent historical entities.

¹² A version of history that upholds the settlement of the West as ‘progress’ ignores the battles with First Nations people on the prairies, how settlement patterns were based on race and class, and the different experiences of men and women in the migration. As well, as I noted throughout my research, the farm women who were most active in the unions were generally white, of European descent, and literate. These women’s experiences are different from farm women on the prairies who were Eastern European immigrants or ‘domestic workers’ brought from colonized countries to help with the farm work. Revealing how these differences are left out of traditional histories is important, and could be the topic for another thesis.

Alternative Modernities: The Long History of Farmer's Unions

To begin, I will outline some of the dates, and details I have culled from various historical sources. These details flatten out the dynamic interactions, but provide a necessary backdrop for those unfamiliar with farm politics. What I will be outlining below is the emergence of an anti-capitalist critique by the farm unions, and the alternatives that were established on the prairies. How these initiatives intersect with gender will become clear when I discuss the structure of the farm organizations.

The organization of the “farmer’s union” has a long history in Canada, stretching back to the Grange farmers who came up from the US and mainly settled in Ontario (Hunter 2003; Woods 1975). However, the direct lineage of the National Farmer’s Union is found in the Territorial Grain Grower’s Association (TGGA) that was formed in 1902 in the Western provinces. The TGGA split into provincial unions with the 1905 birth of Saskatchewan and Alberta as separate provinces, and the Grain Grower’s Associations in Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan were very active and vocal during the pre-war years, fighting for both farmer’s rights and better development of rural communities. Although all the Prairie Provinces co-operated in the formation of an “alternative modernity,”¹³ I will be concentrating on the history of the Saskatchewan Farmer’s Unions. This is to foster continuity and contrast in my thesis: Saskatchewan has continued to be a stronghold for those involved in the current National Farmer’s Union

¹³ The term “alternative modernities” refers to development scholar Arturo Escobar’s writing on economic and social alternatives that do not quite fit in with the logic of capitalism yet are not quite traditional or socialist arrangements either. The farm unions, in the development of co-operatives, created an alternative modernity to capitalism in the beginning of the century.

and despite many changes has retained much of the progressive farm politics of the turn of the century unions.

To return to the early period in Canadian history, it is important to note that, especially in the West, the population was mainly rural and agrarian, and although by the 1920's Canadian demographics were split between rural and urban areas, the late development of the West, and the characteristics of this development, shaped the agriculture created there. The call to head West was indeed compelling: the prairie provinces, before deforestation and the dust-bowl years of the thirties, were considered "the bread basket" of Canada, an image heavily propagated by government and Canadian National Railway film. In the late 1800's, until early 1900's, there was an influx to the prairies of immigrants from Europe, and the more populated areas of Canada. This influx of people, and the underdevelopment of the West compared to other areas of the country are key to understanding the necessity behind the farmer's fierce drive for collective action. However, in a fashion that debunks the myth of the competitive, individualistic settling of the West, the prairie farmers realized that in order to survive the difficulties of prairie farming, they needed to co-operate at all different levels. Thus a unique type of populist, farmer politics was born (Laycock, 1990).

The early farmer's organizations in the West were concerned with two main issues: grains and trains. These issues meant arranging time and space -- railroads and markets -- to create infrastructure that would allow rural communities to flourish independently, but remain connected with the rest of the country. This connection was needed because farmers wanted to ensure farmer-owned marketing, storing and transportation systems to supply other areas of Canada with grain harvests. In the pre-

WWI years, and into the twenties and thirties, the farmer's unions worked to create an alternative to state capitalism: the co-operation between the unionized farmers in different provinces created a state of affairs known as the "Co-operative Era".

The Pooling drives in the twenties and thirties on the prairies are some of the most well known practical accomplishments of prairie co-operatives. The Saskatchewan Wheat Pool,¹⁴ established in 1924, was based on the notion of a farmer-regulated and organized central marketing board, which controlled the distribution and pricing of wheat. It was widely thought that this economic co-operation would help facilitate social reform and rural development, and in fact this was one of the platforms of the farm co-operative-as-social movement. As Bradford James Rennie (2000) points out, the farmers in the co-operative movement were not just trying to:

"improve their status within capitalism through scientific techniques, pressure tactics and 'managerial capitalism'... [rather] farmers sought popular political control and wanted to protect their families, communities and way of life from corporate hegemony...[though] it is important to recognize that farmers often used business methods to preserve their traditional values and lifestyles (5)".

The "corporate hegemony", according to the prairie farmer's of the time, consisted of predatory practices of the Grain Exchanges, big business, the banks and mortgage companies, and the far-distant federal government, practices which only collective action could curtail (Woods, 1975; Hunter, 2003). So, in contrast to capitalist competition, a farmer-led, regional, populist, and practical ethos of co-operation evolved, which encompassed both social and economic reforms.

¹⁴ Again, here is where my research on farm women gives insight to how the Wheat Pools were gendered arenas. As one woman in the NFU recalls: "Women were never on the boards of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, the Co-op, the Farmers Union, any farm related organization, women were only in the supporting role." (NFU radio collective, 1992)

The co-operative ethos that created a strong agrarian culture in the prairies also formed the ideological motivation to consolidate the two Saskatchewan unions, the Grain Grower's Association, and the Farmer Union, into one organization in 1926, the United Farmers of Canada (UFC). The UFC had a democratic, voluntary membership base, as well as an affirmative action structure that emerged from the impetus of a few farm women leaders. This shift from women's auxiliaries in the early 1900's to a gender-integrated form in 1926 is one of the important structural shifts in the organization, and central to my analysis of gender and communication practices.

In the early stages of the organizations, farm women had taken part by forming separate auxiliaries to the general union. As Linda Kealey explains: "The primary purpose of most auxiliary committees was to train women for leadership and provide a comfortable forum to discuss women's issues, including gender equality"(1989, 179). The TGGA, which I discussed earlier, began as a male-only union, but after Saskatchewan formed its own Grain Grower's Association (GGA) in 1905, women began to get involved in the political forum. In 1916, agrarian feminist and farmer, Violet McNaughton, joined with other women to form the Women Grain Grower's Association (WGGA), an auxiliary to the Saskatchewan GGA. The women's auxiliary focused on issues such as suffrage and better living conditions, which were primary goals of the women's section.

In 1926, with the formation of the United Farmer's of Canada (UFC), McNaughton and agrarian feminist Annie Hollis proposed an affirmative action structure. It was believed the leadership at each level of the union should include all participants of the *family* farm: that men, women and youth should have equal opportunity for executive

positions. As Hollis pointed out in a 1928 letter to the farm periodical, *The Western Producer*, there was much public discussion over women's place in the union:

The discussion on your pages "What is Politics" and "Women in Politics" seems now to have brought us to the problem of cooperation of men and women on equal footing in our farm organizations....the U.F.C constitution stipulates that a woman president and two women directors must be elected in the annual convention by men and women delegates. Any special resolutions from women members are discussed by them separately at United Farm Women's University week held in June and then brought before the main annual convention...our women members tackle the same economic problems as the men, believing that these are common human problems and can only be fixed co-operatively.

The difficulty and tensions with gender-integration were first faced in the 1926 UFC constitution with the inclusion of women to positions of leadership. In the aforementioned 1928 letter, Annie Hollis pointed out that the constitutional inclusion of women did not negate: "the prejudices of centuries...Even some of us who have worked proudly for years in our organizations sometimes sense the feeling of impatience and masculine condescension [with] which some men approach what are popularly known as 'women's problems'". With this quote, Hollis points to the constraints of patriarchy, but still avoids naming it as such. Because of these informal and continuing constraints to women's participation, the benefits of auxiliary, separate, and integrated forms of organization are still debated today. As well, Hollis' letter indicates some of the tensions surrounding the valuation of women's 'issues' within the organization. For the farm women who chose to work in the early unions, the decision to co-operate as a farming class made it difficult to advocate for measures tailored more specifically to farm women's needs. Thus, 'women's problems' were given less credence than the social and economic mandate, and often went unspoken unless discussed separately at women member's meetings. This segregation of issues gives a sense of the tensions between

economic, social and women's issues and the difficulties with creating a holistic mandate and integrated membership.¹⁵ When the provincial unions federated into the National Farmer's Union in 1969, it retained the broad mandate, the affirmative action structure, as well as some of the tensions found in the earlier farm unions.

The NFU Today: Organizational Shifts and Women's Involvement

Nettie Wiebe, former president of the National Farmers Union, gives her assessment of the union's shift from provincial to national levels in 1969:

In the early part of the last century, agriculture was very much a provincial jurisdiction, so we had all these provincial farmer's unions, the Saskatchewan, the Manitoba union, and in various ways, there were national links, but most of the lobbying and pieces that farmer's needed addressed were being addressed in the provincial legislatures, so that is where they focused their policy initiatives, their lobbying. By the late sixties, it had become clear that the provincial governments were no longer the key players, that it was Ottawa, the federal government. In 1969, that is when the NFU became a necessity and structured itself. In some places like the Maritimes, there weren't organizations, so they organized themselves to become part of the NFU. By then it became clear that the politicians in Ottawa were making policy decisions that affected every farmer across the country, and so that was where we needed to focus our energy. (personal communication, Saskatoon¹⁶, November 2003)

The NFU has not only altered its organizational focus in response to the changes in agricultural policy, but also questions the capitalist restructuring of the Canadian countryside. Since WWII, Canada has become primarily urban, and there has also been a general shift in the countryside towards larger, and more mechanized farming. As agricultural scholar Brian Page (1996) explains in his article "Across the Great Divide: Agriculture and Industrial Geography", the industrialization of farming in North America

¹⁵ These difficulties and multiple mandates could go unnoticed in general histories that presume the stability of the organization. As well, understanding the difference that gender makes within an organization is important, because it problematizes how and why certain issues are privileged over others.

¹⁶ All of the quotes from NFU farm women in the next two sections were taken from interviews conducted at the November 2003 NFU annual general convention, held in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

has come at a different pace than the urban industrial revolution. The move away from the factory format and compartmentalized processes of vertical integration has already spurred the label of “post-fordism” in the cities, but the countryside is only now seeing the beginning of this type of industrialization. As well, although the industrialization of the countryside has been slowly occurring since the 1950’s, this restructuring has sped up with the introduction of neoliberal policies and free trade. Along with many other industries, farm culture in Canada has become part of the trend that ‘bigger is better’. The self-sustainable small family farm is a myth of the urban imagination, seen only in ad-campaigns that promote the ‘good old days’ to sell processed products. The NFU has tried to counter these trends by being an advocate for alternative economics and family farming.

Throughout the seventies and early eighties, the National Farmer’s Union continued the goals of their predecessor unions: lobbying for railway transportation, the Wheat Pools and other economic rights of farmers, which were seen as intertwined with the health of rural communities. The NFU promoted itself not just as an interest or a commodity group, but saw itself as a social movement with policies and politics that covered issues from war, to women’s rights, to the education system (“Policy Statement of the NFU”, 2002).

In the nineties, as a self-defined progressive social movement, the NFU has labeled itself a protector of family farms¹⁷ as the “cornerstone of agricultural communities” (NFU promotional pamphlet). The organization tries to protect -- and promote -- a way of life that is increasingly marginal. With support for small family farms as, yes, a relic of the

¹⁷ In the NFU’s recent promotional pamphlet, their definition of a family farm is: “...an operation that produces food or other agricultural products and where the vast majority of labour, capital and management are provided by family members” (from NFU National Convention, November, 2000)

past, but still the ideal for a healthy, populated, economically viable countryside, the NFU as a social movement organization is promoting an “alternative modernity”. This is where the NFU negotiates an interesting stance between conserving a way of the past, and suggesting a viable future for farmers, worldwide. For, rather than just fiercely protecting the locale of small farmers in Canada, the NFU is also linking up with farm organizations internationally. Wiebe continues her discussion of the evolution of the NFU by noting:

By the late eighties it became clear to us that Ottawa was no longer the key focus point for Canadian farmers. With the GATT agreement, the places where these decisions around our livelihoods -- how we would farm, what we would grow, whom we would sell for, what prices we would get -- all of that was now going to be shifted to New York, and Geneva and Tokyo, and places like that, where we had no voice whatsoever; where the agricultural decision was entirely government negotiations side by side with transnational agribusiness corporations. So, that was the conversation and that was the understanding out of which the Via Campesina arrived. It became clear that, as small scale farmers, we needed a voice that would be a voice for agriculture that was not just the large scale commercial farmer and the transnational trader. That's the evolution, the thinking behind the international movement. (personal communication, Saskatoon, November 2003)

Wiebe's comments provide a sense of the direction the NFU is heading in, and indicate the creation of coalitions and the broadening of the mandate. This progress from provincial to national to international levels shows how the NFU has changed its focus according to where the government's economic and policy decisions were directed.

However, this progress has been hard fought for. As Louise Carbert (1995) points out:

The NFU is rebellious and pushes for change...it notably combines community and commodity issues in an ambitious critique, but for the most part, given that resources (membership dues, government funding and volunteers) are limited, both routes, are competing, and to a certain extent mutually exclusive (165).

Carbert's note on the problems that hinder the "ambitious critique" of the NFU signals my return to the communication processes within the union. By delving beneath the structural responses of the NFU and exploring how gender and discourse has shaped the political mandate, I can give a better sense of how strategies of resistance have been negotiated, and of the ways that union members have become involved in the development of the organization.

NFU Women: Promoting Healthy Rural Communities and Economies

If one looks at the NFU's online publication, "The National Farmers Union: Fighting for the family farm for over 30 years" (April, 2001), one can read a history centered on activism around economic issues. The dates span each year from 1969 to 1999, and what is taken away from this brief summary is that the NFU is indeed critical about and active on commodity issues in the traditional realm of farm politics. One also notes the slow movement into the international forum. However, when one looks more closely, with an eye to the broader mandate, and to the work of women, certain dates appear:

1971: 3500 western farmers demonstrate in three prairie capitals with hog cavalcades to focus attention on low hog prices. Farmers, many women, conduct information picketing at supermarkets

1980: NFU organizes leadership skills workshop for women in Saskatoon. This seminar explores women's contribution to the farm economy, the role of women in the NFU, and the challenges facing NFU women

1981: NFU initiates "Employment Practices of farm Women" study to document the contributions of farm families to farm operations

1987: NFU Women complete women's resource handbook: *Weaving New Ways: Farm Women Organizing*

1988: NFU Local 611, under the leadership of NFU Women's Vice President, Nettie Wiebe, launched one of the first rural childcare co-operatives under the new federal childcare policy

1992: NFU women undertake a "farm women's radio project" to broadcast rural women's perspective on major issues

1993: NFU women participate in a rural childcare conference in Quebec City

1994: NFU women meet with other farm women's groups in Ottawa, and develop an agreement on the need to push for rural childcare

*Vice President Carol Masse and Women's President Karen Fyfe lobby, along with other NFU members in Ottawa on bovine growth hormone [rBGH], rural childcare, and farm financial crisis

1995: Nettie Wiebe first woman elected to head major farm organization in Canada

*NFU Youth President Karen Pederson attends non-governmental organization (NGO) forum at the United Nations (UN) World Conference on Women in Beijing, China

1997: NFU takes a lead role in opposing Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI). President Nettie Wiebe addresses 500 in Saskatoon rally against the MAI.

1998: NFU delegation attends International Conference on Women in Agriculture, Washington, DC.

These activities, found here and there throughout the last three decades, point towards how "women's problems" have become part of the political mandate, alongside "community and commodity" issues, and intersecting with the international focus of the NFU. This multiple mandate comes from the creation of a women's advisory board in 1969, alongside the affirmative action structure of leadership. The women's advisors for each region are in charge of mobilizing women around issues particular to women as well as the broader union politics. This women's advisory board has been the focus of much debate over the years (Ruth Veiner, Martha Robbins, Marie Hendrickson, personal communication, Saskatoon, November 2003) but its usefulness in getting women involved and comfortable in the union seems unquestionable, especially when looking at

the barriers women face in the union and the important initiatives they have accomplished by having this space. By critiquing issues as diverse as “bovine growth hormone [rBGH], rural childcare, and farm financial crisis,” (“NFU: Fighting for Family Farms...” 2001), the NFU women have illustrated that women’s issues are as central to the functioning of the union, and of farming communities, as political and economic affairs.

Although listing the various initiatives gives a glimpse into what women have accomplished in the NFU, interviews and ethnographic research are the best means to evaluate how this work has been received in the organization. Documenting women’s first hand experiences helps to illuminate the processes of women’s involvement and mobilization; this is important because the apparent success of women’s collective actions can mask the sexism that barred the way, and perhaps even shaped the types of political action the women engaged in. To get the ‘inside perspective,’ this past November, I traveled to the annual NFU convention entitled “Climate Change and Agriculture.”

At this convention, I held interviews¹⁸ with Ruth Veiner, Marie Hendrickson and Marcella Pederson, all whom have been involved in their locals and in women’s advisory positions since 1969. I also interviewed former president Nettie Wiebe, researcher and NFU member Annette Desmarais, former youth president and current women’s president Karen Pederson, and former youth president Martha Robbins. With this range of women,

¹⁸ The interviews were originally designed to have a fairly structured format. But when I traveled to the convention and talked with the women, I found that an unstructured, conversational style was more conducive to creating a comfortable atmosphere. Thus the long list of questions were boiled down to a few basics: the position and involvement of the interviewee in the union, their recollection of women’s initiatives, and whether they thought men and women in the union approached the issues differently. I found this was enough for each woman to delve quite deeply into their experiences and perceptions on how women’s work has been received in the organization.

from those involved since 1969 to those who are now in youth leadership positions, I began to understand what women have experienced within, and have lobbied around, in the NFU. This was invaluable for moving beyond assumptions about gendered organizing culled from 'reading between the lines' of NFU texts and other academic studies.

In the interviews with the NFU women, I got a perspective of the difficulties and advantages for women participating in the organization. Martha Robbins, former youth president of the NFU, gave her perspective of the numerous ways the organization has been positive for women members:

I think that the NFU attracts really strong women, but it also creates really strong women. And it is really important -- it is kind of like the affirmative action question, really. In a sense, having a separate spot for women shouldn't be necessary, because there should be 50/50 representation in the union as a whole. But, in some ways, having a specific place where women work, has opened a space for farm women who aren't used to being vocal, and who wouldn't involve themselves just in the general meetings. It has allowed us to focus on women's issues and I think that is really important. And I think that the NFU has allowed that space for farm women that doesn't really exist in any other general farm organization. (personal communication, Saskatoon, November 2003)

Ruth Veiner, as a long time member, pointed out that indeed women have become more involved since 1969, but that this was gradual.

You really don't realize it has shifted until you stop and think about it. I look back at my old convention brochures, and there would be a picture of a microphone and a line up of the microphone of men. Maybe ten, twelve- a dozen lined up, and there may be, might be, one woman... The women's advisory job was to organize women and get women's projects through the different regions so that women could become involved, so they did have a venue to ask questions where they didn't feel put down or threatened or, you know, sometimes in a room full of men and there were only one or two women, very reluctant to say something. And so, with the women's position as such, though we were on equal footing, it allowed that we would have women's meetings so that women for themselves, within themselves, could work and question and learn together. (personal communication, Saskatoon, 2003)

In Veiner's recollections, one gets a sense of the difficulties women have faced in the public arena of the organization, and how the women's advisory provided a space to address these problems. Veiner also points to the double-load of organizing by indicating how all the outreach techniques that promote the general politics of the union are also methods to try and get women "who aren't used to being vocal" speaking and acting in the public realm. In the areas of public communication and education, women leaders use communicating the mandate of the union as a way to keep women members publicly active, as well as to facilitate other women's involvement. Veiner points out:

We always tried to get women involved in canvassing. Because when we got men to go canvassing, they tended to just talk to the men in the family. When women went, they tried to involve the female spouse, because often what we found is that the female spouse would be busy getting coffee and the cake on the table. And we would say "Well what about...?" and she would say, "Well, ask him," and would defer to her husband all the time. And we would feel it was up to us to draw them out, to make them feel a part of it. "Is the boss around?" "Oh just a minute, I'll get him- he's out in the barn". As if there was a boss- a boss and slave relationship. We tried hard to not strong-hand that, but to softly bring it about that her input was as important as what his was. (personal communication, Saskatoon, 2003)

Though this involvement of women in canvassing is a proactive attempt at getting women in public positions, other types of women's communicative and educating work within the union have some downfalls:

Women primarily have been the ones who have worked on the research projects, to try and gather information. Women were very involved in research for the Kraft boycott, and land ownership. Women are fantastic researchers-- it is a skill we have. But I think, in some ways, it keeps women busy, too. If you are busy at a project like research, you are not as likely to be involved in the politics of it, are you? (Ruth Veiner, personal communication, Saskatoon, 2003)

Veiner's focus on canvassing and research leads into a further understanding of how communication, the creation of knowledge, and women's involvement in the union are intertwined in both positive and negative ways. What is important to my investigation

is to consider the constraints mentioned by the NFU women in all aspects of women's involvement. These constraints are linked to traditional social constructions of gender roles. The barriers to women's public involvement, and double-load organizing, reflect how even the active involvement of women can still be inscribed with power dynamics. Ruth Veiner's earlier discussion of women's feelings of inadequacy in public discussions, and the fact that these research and media projects are necessary to boost women's confidence, gives one a sense of how much power imbalances still constrain the actions of the women in the union. Still, my analysis looks at the ways in which farm women leaders have used communication projects to overcome some of the barriers to women's public involvement. While Ruth points out how research projects are another way to keep women 'behind the scenes', in this thesis, I am interested in how women have made research, and communication, public and politically involved.

As Nettie Wiebe argues in *Weaving New Ways: Farm Women Organizing*: "In striving for recognition of and remuneration for our work, farm women have many barriers to overcome. These include geographical isolation, inadequate support systems, and, to some extent, rural life traditions." (1987, 3). These barriers of space between farm settlements, and the lack of time for organizing due to off-farm work, add to the already existing organizational barriers women face in male-dominated agriculture. Yet, in the same passage, Wiebe argues that there is an increased need for organizing across these time, space and cultural barriers:

However, we also have many incentives to organize: the need for mutual support and empowerment, the need to improve service infrastructure in many rural communities, and the need to join together to deal with the economic crisis in farming which is threatening to destroy not only our individual family farms but eventually whole communities. (1987, 3)

The handbook in which these quotes were found is part of a burgeoning amount of literature written by and for farm women. Throughout the last few decades, there have been women-centered participatory research projects, as well as workshops that involve farm women discussing and writing suggestions for policy change and gendered knowledge. The research projects headed by NFU women include *The Employment Practices of Farm Women* in 1982, and the recently published *Gender and Generation: the Employment Practices of Farm Families* in 2003. These projects are key to creating knowledge on the value of women's work on the farm; these are the first steps to moving away from the label "farmer's wife" and women's own self-depreciation. What is even more intriguing about these research projects is how farm women, both in the NFU and in other rural organizations, were deliberately made part of the research team. NFU farm women saw participatory research -- where farm women interviewed other farm women in informal 'kitchen meetings' -- as key to building leadership skills and confidence. In this manner, participatory communication and education strategies were what built the movement beyond just the women leaders involved.

The workshops are also ways to challenge how farm women think about themselves within the farm community. As Karen Pederson notes:

How do you get women involved? As a farm woman, you know what people are thinking. You have a workshop just for women and quite often you hear, "Well I don't know if I have anything to contribute here" or "I don't really farm, my husband is the farmer". That attitude is still there. Sometimes, it is necessary for us to say, well, no this workshop is only for women, we don't care if your husband is only the farmer, you come, you are the person we want to come, and then we'll discuss what are YOUR issues, what are YOU facing. And through the process of talking to people and validating their experiences, women become empowered. Empowered that they are a farmer, that they are necessary to how the farm is functioning, that it is a family farm: that they are farming, their children are farming- that it is not just their husband's farm. (personal communication, Saskatoon, 2003)

This use of participatory research projects and workshop discussions has been central to NFU organizing techniques within the last decades, and central to understanding women's communication in the NFU. Former women's presidents Nettie Wiebe and Shannon Story have written valuable source books to place these strategies in context. Wiebe's *Weaving New Ways: Farm Women Organizing* has been published by the NFU and is a general text for the use of any farm women's organization. Storey's *Organizing for Social and Economic Change: Developing a Handbook for National Farmer's Union Women in Saskatchewan*, is an MA thesis, and provides a critique of gender involvement in farm politics, as well as a workshop developed to get women more involved. These studies are not only useful for me to understand the reasoning behind the organization, but are also an indication that the barriers to, and possibilities for, communicating and educating women are well recognized by the women leaders.

In these women-centered projects, the NFU women have continuously blurred boundaries between women being integrated or segregated in the unions, between private and public spheres, and between social and economic initiatives. They live out Jill Vickers's intuition:

"Not enough research has been done at this point to 'ground' my intuition that in our [women's] political practice, we have begun to escape the traps of either separatism [informed by radical feminism] or integration [informed by liberal feminism]. This view can only be an intuition based on participant observation because we have only begun to explore the ways in which Canadian women try to resolve this tension or contradiction in their own political lives. It is a tension *within* organizations rather than *between* organizations" (1989, 26).

The above discussion on barriers, initiatives and techniques of the women provide the backdrop for my further discussion on farm women's communication. My focus shifts

slightly in the next few chapters, because I move from how communication and education projects are used as organizing tools into how these tools, and the discursive/idea-based products emerge into the public realm. By focusing more fully on the use of newspaper and broadcast media, I can explain how these interpersonal, and inter-organizational discussions traverse larger distances, reach larger audiences and become part of the battle over signification. The following chapter on theory and methodology will explain how I move from *describing* the NFU women's projects into *analyzing* them as publicist, historical, and empowering modes of communicative exchange.

Chapter Two:

MEDIATED COUNTERPUBLICS AND DISCURSIVE ACTION: CRAFTING A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

While in chapter one I outlined the political-organizational structure of the farm unions, I will now explain how I conceptualize the communication practices of farm union women. This means moving beyond interpersonal, organizational, and mass media studies, to explore how communication can be used as a tool for social change.

In their two-part anthology, *Communication and Class Struggle*, Seth Sieglab and Armand Mattelart (1981) broaden the scope of communication by claiming it as a central motivator of human development. The authors argue:

Communication is nothing more nor nothing less than the articulation of the social relations between people. In a profound sense, communication is one of the most unique products -- and producers -- of society's development. One could further say that along with human labour, communication's evolution is a characteristic unique to the human species (Vol. 1, 1981, 11).

In Volume Two of the same anthology, Sieglab and Mattelart further state that "communication = exchange" (1981, 11). This simple equation hints at the potential for agency in communication practices. In her 1994 book, *Women in Grassroots Communication: Furthering Social Change*, Pilar Riano defines communication in a manner that resonates with Sieglab and Mattelart's (1981) understanding:

Communication-- especially participatory communication-- is more than just a technology or set of methodologies, resources, or media; it is a set of exchanges comprising a collective "word" for naming people's realities -- a word that by naming a denied and fragmented reality makes it visible, identifiable and meaningful ([my italics] Riano, 1994, 23).

Sieglaub, Mattelart and Riano, though writing at different times, and from different perspectives,¹⁹ all claim communication as a means by which people can “articulate” and “name” their social realities. The emancipatory potential in this approach becomes apparent when analyzing the communication practices of social movements and marginalized groups.

Recent theories on the politics of marginalized groups argue that the processes of two-way exchange, founded on critical dialogue and reciprocity, are a core feature of democratic social change. This idea is woven throughout writings on popular education and community organizing (Friere, 1970, 1973; Stall & Stoecker, 1998; Darlington & Mulvaney, 2002), social movement theory (Melucci, 1995; Santianni, 2001), alternative media (Lewis, 1993; Butalia, 1993; Riano, 1994), and feminist media and research methods (Steiner, 1992; Cirkseña, 1992, 1996; Mitchell, 1998). Within these fields of scholarship, communicative exchanges are comprised of awareness raising through the critique of power relations, and the sharing of emancipatory ideals.

Riano (1994) delineates further differences between techniques of two-way communication. Highlighting the distinction between alternative and feminist communications and media is of particular importance to my research. Alternative communications²⁰ are difficult to define, but some key characteristics include: processes

¹⁹ Sieglaub and Mattelart promote a Marxist approach in their anthology, while Riano discusses grassroots communication as it is found in feminist and international development studies. Marxism and neo-Marxism have long focused on the links between ideology, class consciousness and awareness raising as a means to foster social change. Riano’s approach draws from these critical theories of communication as empowerment, but applies it to issues of gender and race.

²⁰ As Butalia (1993) argues, it is difficult to note the overall effects of alternative media, because of the lack of audience research, and the shifting of participants, projects and resources in any popular movement. This problem of scientifically analyzing the effectiveness of farm women’s communications in ‘changing mindsets’ or even reaching audiences, has shaped my methodology. So, instead of audience reception studies, content analysis or other similar quantitative analyses, I will use qualitative and interpretive

of communication production and exchange that are participatory, emancipatory and educational; social commentary with no commercial intent; and content that provides challenges to mainstream media representations (Lewis, 1993; Riano, 1994). Feminist communications share many of the same political goals and strategies as alternative communications, but in *feminist* communication, as in feminist theory, gender oppression is named, explored and central to the analysis.

With the women I am studying, gender-based oppression remains on the peripheries of their discourse, though, as I will argue, it works to constrain and shape their formation of gendered identity and action. This is why I term the women's communication as alternative rather than feminist. At the same time, through their practical actions of media production and public activism, the farm women challenge the social construction of women as apolitical, passive and private. This reveals that there are indeed similarities between the alternative communications of this group, and emancipatory goals for: "Women who choose to work with other women to produce women-identified words and images are -- whether they anticipate it or not -- involved in questions of power and rights" (quoted in Marshall, 1995, 1).

Despite the richness found in researching communication that addresses "questions of power and rights", Sieglau & Mattelart (1979), Riano (1994), and feminist communication scholar Kathryn Cirksena (1996) claim that there are still very few in-depth, critical studies on the communication produced by oppositional groups.²¹ I make a

methods to situate the women's communication practices in broader political and social concerns. I will elaborate on these methods later in this chapter

²¹ Though this does seem to be changing. Riano's book provides many case studies on how marginalized groups use communication media, with a focus on communication in the developing world. Recent feminist anthologies (Creedon, 1993; Rakow, 1992; Srebreny & Van Zoonen, 1999) also have articles on how communication and media are used by political groups. Finally, new social movement theory focuses on communication and knowledge as the central mode in organizing (Melucci, 1995; Buechler, 2000).

contribution to this area of scholarship by focusing on the processes used by Canadian farm women to create alternative media. I look at the 'words' by which these women have collectively named themselves, the participatory processes and media that enable this dialogue, and the social relations that surround and intersect the women's discussions. But before I begin an in-depth analysis, this chapter will outline the theoretical and methodological framework I developed to analyze the empirical material. Crafting a theoretical and methodological framework flexible enough to pay heed to the empowerment of the women's exchanges as well as the constraint of power relations has been a challenging process. The following sections will provide a sense of the research questions and themes that emerged within my intellectual forays.

Theorizing Communication: Finding a Framework

In order to account for the multiple modes and goals of farm women's alternative communication, I looked towards theoretical frameworks in various fields of knowledge. In the fields of organizational communication and in recent social movement literature, I discovered two theoretical constructs that seemed promising, and contribute to my understanding, but that fall short of offering a flexible and multi-faceted framework by which to discuss my chosen subject.

In the *New Handbook of Organizational Communication: Advances in Theory, Research and Method*, Stanley Deetz (2001) discusses the new manner in which communication in organizations is examined. Deetz explains that organizations are seen as discursively constructed, where: "discursive practices are both "in" organizations and

However, it is hard to come by in-depth studies that take a historical perspective, and look at multiple uses of communication by social movement organizations, and by women in particular. This is where my research is valuable.

productive of them” (2001, 6). Part of the challenge to organizational communication theories is to conceptualize the dynamics between structure -- the institutions/organizations -- and the discursive practices of the individuals working within the structure. Conrad and Hayne (2000) argue that the structure/agency dialectic is at the core of organizational communication.

In a later chapter in the *New Handbook of Organizational Communication*, critical theorist Dennis Mumby also highlights the process of communication in organizations, stating that: “Organizations are intersubjective structures of meaning that are produced, reproduced and transformed through the ongoing communicative work of its members”(2001, 585). He argues that power and knowledge are intertwined with these processes of communication, and one must move beyond the idea of organizations as stalwart structures ‘out there’ in the world, but instead note how communication and power are integral to the reproduction of organizations.

Mumby (2001) also argues that feminist organizational scholars try to combine notions of power relations with empowerment. This perspective combines critical theories of discourse with postmodern theories to explain how women are constrained in male dominated organizations, but also have engaged in various practices of resistance. Mumby explains that feminist empirical analysis of “organizations as gendered sites of domination and resistance” has a characteristically dual focus on “1) power-as-domination and, 2) (em)power(ment) as resistance” (2001, 610).

In organizational communication literature, and in other feminist studies, there are many examples of how this dialectic between power and empowerment impacts women working in institutions. This includes the infamous ‘glass ceiling’ where women get to a

certain position of power, and then reach a plateau (Vickers, 1982), affirmative action structures that retain a space for women at the decision making tables, but which are difficult to maintain in practice (as in the NFU), as well as the ways that women practice everyday resistance in the workplace (Barndt, 1999). Investigating the interpersonal and inter-group communiqués that can either establish or challenge power relations in organizations is central to feminist communication perspectives (Marshall, 1993).

This dialectic of structure/agency -- of institutions and individuals -- has helped to clarify my understanding of the processes used to create communication spaces for women within the NFU. It has enabled me to move past the idea of a reified structure to understand how the processes of communication shift throughout history, and thus alter the way the organization is structured internally and how it re-presents itself. However, a key difficulty with using organizational communication theory is that I am not primarily looking at the interaction between the farm union's structure and the women's integration or resistance within the structure. Instead, I am interested in looking at the complex practices by which a women-centered space is used to produce alternative media. This is a perspective that shifts from inter-organizational relations to how the women's messages reach a wider public.

As well, although Mumby (2001) does assert that organizational communication is wrought with power, this does not necessarily mean that organizational communication looks at marginal social groups. Instead, the basic unit of analysis for this field is public institutions and businesses, where the structure of the organization is much more defined, and political influence is not often the goal. As a social movement organization, the NFU does have a stable leadership structure, but is founded on democratic, voluntary

membership and a political mandate that calls for social change. For that reason, I need to introduce social movement theory as a field that tries to theorize the political, public workings of progressive organizations. Social movement theory has often remained in the domain of political science, as seen with theories such as political opportunity structures, resource mobilization and new social movement theory (Buechler, 2000; Santianni 2001). However, there are two social movement theories that fruitfully overlap with understanding communication and politics, one being frame theory and the other network theory.

Frame Schema, and Collective Action Frames

The concept of “framing” was first discussed in Ervin Goffman’s book, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (1978). In this book, Goffman defines a frame as a cognitive schema that organizes an individual’s perspective of the world, and the way this can be conceived and communicated. By creating a frame -- like a picture, or a world-view -- one emphasizes certain things and lets other stimuli fall into the background. In his various books, Goffman’s theory remains at a micro-level of analysis, focusing on individual perception, and the ways that framing works in conversations and interpersonal interaction. Social movement theorists Benford and Snow (2000) adapted Goffman’s concept to analyze the processes of collective action and collective identity, thus explaining how framing works at micro-, meso- and macro-levels of analysis. These theorists explain that:

Collective action frames are action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization (SMO)...a crucial feature that distinguishes collective action frames from schema and other related cognitive constructs is that collective action frames are not merely aggregations of individual attitudes and perceptions but also the outcome of negotiating shared meaning (Benford and Snow, 2000, 3).

While framing literature has proliferated, as it is a valuable explanation of how social movement messages are created, I find that it does not entirely fit with my research approach. The primary reason is that frame analysis does not concentrate on the production or process of communication and media -- instead, it focuses on the end product, whether it be a frame placed around an issue for inter-group communications, or how an issue is presented in the mainstream media. Many of the studies I looked at focused mainly on how mainstream media is used, with only cursory acknowledgement of the media produced by the social movement itself.²²

As well, there is a possibility that by focusing too closely on how the NFU frame their public messages, I could lose sight of the historical and institutional context. Instead, I will focus on the products and *processes* of alternative communication, as well as the web of social relations surrounding this production. So although I found the frame analysis research interesting, I turned to network theory to help try to conceptualize the communication practices within the farm movement.

Critical and Emancipatory Network Theories

The concept/metaphor of the network has become *en vogue* in the current climate of postmodernism and 'wired worlds'. However, as Armand Mattelart (1996) points out in *The Invention of Communication*, the metaphor of network has roots back to early capitalist ventures. Networks in Mattelart's work, refer both to material infrastructure, and the immaterial circulation of ideas, knowledge, currency and power relations. His

²² There have been a number of studies in communication that look at framing within journalism, and how certain schemata are used to create news stories. I have focused on social movement frame analysis rather than mainstream media frames because I am interested in the interactive and political process of message making in social movement organizations, rather than the results of journalistic framing and audience response. Dietram .A. Scheufele's (1999) essay "Framing as a Theory of Media Effects" gave me an overview of the communications literature, and helped me realize that it did not provide a theoretical framework suitable to my topic.

historicized and power-attuned account of networks provides a critical response to recent network theorists such as Manuel Castells (1996), who discusses the triumph of networking as a recent international occurrence, formulated only under postmodern conditions.

While Mattelart provides a sense of networking from a critical, Marxist perspective, actor-network theorists such as Bruno Latour (1988, 1994) and Michel Callon (1986) conceive the network as a way to understand the movement of communication, and a way to transcend either materialist or idealist perspectives. According to Latour, networks of communication translate people and resources into quantifiable and manageable units through the movement of 'immutable mobiles' such as maps, money, and other accoutrements of power (Latour, 1988, 1994). While writing from different theoretical standpoints, both Mattelart (1996) and Latour (1988) provide critical perspectives on how people in power use networks to control populations and resources.

In contrast to these critical views of networks, network theory in the social movement field tries to understand the process of counterhegemony using the metaphor of network. This perspective tries to understand the ties, both formal and informal, between groups of people struggling for social change. Transnational social movement theory, such as studies by Sikkink and Keck (1998; 2002), uses the common concept of the information society to try to understand links and strategies between groups on the international stage. Looking at human rights, environmental and peace movements on the world stage, Sikkink and Keck draw upon notions of communication to explain the often ephemeral -- but powerful -- links between social movements trying to 'scale up' their

mobilization. These theorists' discussion of information networks and political communications illustrates how counterhegemonic groups can use the communication infrastructure originally created for imperialist and colonialist purposes. This creative use of dominant communication structures facilitates both material interactions --through traveling to conferences, and exchanges, and nonmaterial solidarity -- through exchanging information and organizing strategies. Using these methods, the new transnational social movements try to share resources to plan for collective action. As well, network theory explains how democratic social relations are integral to maintaining cohesive groups, and argues that maintaining formal and informal ties allows for trust and mutual aid on a global level. This perspective is helpful in understanding how farm union women are connected to many other farm women's groups, as well as international farming communities.

Again, there are a few central problems to using network theory as a main theoretical framework. Sikkink and Keck (2002) theorize the power of resistance, and can often overlook the constraints on people working for change at local, regional and national levels. I find their idea of information networks useful, but only if paired with a strong analysis of why and how these networks are difficult to maintain. As well, although network theory is very helpful in delineating the movement of messages, ideas and information between groups, it still does not help to understand the spaces used for production and processes of communication --both mediated and interactive --which is then transferred among networks.

After researching theories on organizational communication, frames, and networks, I am left with more clearly defined criterion for a theoretical framework. This

meant finding a framework that can help account for the ways that gender/identity, communication, and political action infuse the practice of alternative media making, and public engagement. This is why I am now turning to Nancy Fraser's conception of a counterpublic.

Public Spheres, Counterpublics and Media

While Habermas' theory of the public sphere is still widely accepted, there have been critiques that range from the revisionist historiography claims that there was always more than one public sphere (Eley, 1992; Ryan, 1992) to feminists who critique Habermas' idea of communicative rationality (Kaufmann, 1995). Habermas' normative sense of the public sphere centres on the ideals of consensual communicative action that involves inclusivity, rational conversation, the bracketing of differences, and universal agreement on the common good. Scholars such as Fraser (1989; 1992; 1995; 1997) and Cynthia Kaufmann (1995) provide trenchant critiques by pointing to the way difference should not (and cannot) necessarily be bracketed. They argue that discursive conflict is part of democracy, and, by seeing difference as something that can be overcome by rational discussion, Habermas has not recognized the subtle constraints within the bourgeois public sphere. The mainstream public sphere, even if formally inclusive, retains subtle power relations because:

Even the language people use as they reason together usually favors one way of seeing things and discourages others. Subordinate groups sometimes cannot find the right voice or words to express their thoughts, and when they do, they discover they are not heard...the result is the development of powerful informal pressures that marginalize the contribution of subordinated groups in everyday contexts and in official public spheres (Fraser, 1992, 120).

These inequalities in the public sphere account for how people are given discursive authority based on race, class, gender, and age -- all the multiple identities that feminist theorists have pointed out as shaping communicative exchanges and social relations. At the same time, public sphere theory:

....unlike some other approaches, situates discursive processes in their social-institutional context. The idea of the public sphere enables us to study the ways in which culture is embedded in social structure, and affected by social relations of domination. It thus provides an alternative to the sort of free-floating, decontextualized discourse analysis that disassociates cultural studies from critical social theory (Fraser, 1995, 288).

This quote points to a common premise in both Fraser's and Habermas' works. Both theorists start: "from a position that the institutions and processes of public communications are themselves a central and integral part of the political structure and process" (quoted in Srebreny and VanZoonen, 2000,11). Placing value on public communications is part of the broader *Zeitgeist* of our times that claims democracy requires debate and multiple voices in order to function properly. Just as social movements and organizations have created valuable critiques to challenge state and market (Camauer, 2000), the public sphere can be claimed as indispensable to the circulation of these critiques and ideas within democracies. This usefulness of public sphere theory for a critical social approach is why I continue to engage with the theory, although introducing important modifications.

Counterpublics as gendered spaces

The most important modification for my research project is found in the idea of the *counterpublic*. Feminist scholars such as Felski (1989) and Fraser (1992, 1997) have suggested idea(l)s of public spheres based on difference, multiplicity and meta-communication about inequalities. Nancy Fraser introduces both the historical and

normative idea of the subaltern counterpublic as: “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses. Subaltern counterpublics permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs”(1997, 123). Though Fraser indicates that counterpublics are relevant to all “subordinate social groups”, she explains the idea of counterpublic from a gendered perspective, arguing that because women have been marginalized in mainstream (or male-stream) public spheres, women have had to create separate spheres of communication to address their own concerns.²³ What makes these separate spheres of communication emancipatory is that they are not just safe enclaves for a niche audience or group, but instead, provide the starting ground for discussions that are shared with the ‘public at large’(Fraser, 1997). This dialectic between inter-group communications and a broader audience signifies how oppositional definitions of needs and issues can move beyond “consciousness raising” practices into publicist practices, namely in media formats such as newspapers, magazines, films and broadcasts. Fraser uses the powerful example of how feminist counterpublics publicized the issue of sexual assault²⁴ in order to illustrate how counterpublic theory can be used to analyze and understand political practice.

But further questions arose when I began using the counterpublic framework to analyze the farm women’s communications. Fraser’s theory indeed provides an understanding of the circulation of alternative ideas, but how are counterpublics actually

²³ Fraser’s counterpublic theory helps indicate why farm women still had to create alternative spaces even after being formally allowed into the organization. There are, as Fraser puts it, definite ‘informal pressures’ in male dominated public spheres about how one should talk and the issues that are most important. This gives a theoretical understanding to my discussion of the double load of farm women leaders organizing in chapter one.

²⁴ This particular counterpublic is a pertinent example because it has not only created discourse and knowledge around the issues, but has mobilized for legal, health and safety reforms to provide material support to women who have experienced sexual violence.

formed and negotiated in practice? As Lisa McLaughlin (1993) argues, many studies discussing the ‘discursive interaction’ of counterpublics often analyze communication at the interpersonal level, and ignore the ways that media has been used to transmit these messages. In fact, it is often media fora, whether through mass or alternative media, that are central to the broader dissemination of counterpublic messages. McLaughlin states: “What I am advocating, then, is both a feminist theory of the public sphere accounting for media, and a feminist media studies accounting for the public sphere” (614).

Since McLaughlin’s article, feminist communication scholars Barbara Marshall (1995), Sheryl Hamilton (1997), Caroline Mitchell (1998), and Leonor Carnauer (2000), have all fruitfully applied counterpublic theory to the publicizing techniques of the women’s movement. What these articles contribute to the discussion are a sense of the dynamics present in the creation and continuation of counterpublics. Through examples of different initiatives, the scholars put some flesh on the bones of the Fraser’s theoretical framework. All of the articles begin from the assumption that what forms a counterpublic is the dual role of creating discursive communities with common political interests and then using publicist techniques to share, “the production of knowledge which emanates from women’s experience”(Marshall, 1995, 472). However, through the different media initiatives focused on, all of the scholars contribute to an analytical understanding of the characteristics of counterpublics.

Barbara Marshall’s (1995) study indicates that one of the characteristics of a counterpublic is to be self-critical, and deliberately democratic as a practiced response to larger, exclusive public spheres (in this case, what she terms the ‘malestream’ media). She uses the rather general example of the feminist print media in English Canada but

points to specific magazine editions, editorials and debates that raise meta-theoretical questions about the role of the media in women's lives. Sheryl Hamilton's (1997) article provides a more specific example of a group of women's attempts to create an Internet counterpublic in Montreal, and then points to the practical constraints found in alternative media forms, such as lack of audience access and funding sources. Caroline Mitchell (1998) does a fine job of illustrating how counterpublics are a space of learning and practical knowledge building through media creation. She also shows how different radio counterpublics work depending on audience, structure of programs and where the programs are broadcast.

Finally, Leonor Camuer (2000) introduces many notions similar to my own insights into counterpublic theory. For one, she recognizes the complex interconnections between interpersonal and mediated forms, and calls for the need to blend content analysis and the assessment of counterpublic context. She also notes the important distinction between investigating the processes within counterpublics (such as her analysis of women's discussions about creating public awareness pamphlets) in contrast to focusing on the final products of the more general media industry (such as Marshall's 1995 analysis of feminist print media). With the promise of a larger project to come, Camuer notes that, "very little research connecting the feminist public sphere or the women's movement and the media has been conducted thus far" (2000, p.164). That is why all of the above articles are important to creating a more thorough theoretical assesment of the workings of counterpublics.

My analysis will provide an elaboration on Fraser's theory, and the feminist articles, by supplying two indepth examples of the formation and content of

counterpublics. Because I am noting how women use counterpublics as activist fora, I have to take into consideration how publics are shaped by praxis. As well, looking at how counterpublics are practiced in rural areas, and in a gender-integrated social movement organization, provides additional insight. What is important to my assessment of counterpublics is how women farm leaders initiated the communicative spaces, the intersections between different forms of communication, and how the discussions in the counterpublics reveals the integration and modification of ideas from the broader historical context. These are similar to the analytical understandings raised in the earlier articles, but I will add weight to these observations by conducting empirical research with the women involved, reading primary documents, and putting all of this into historical perspective.

In sum, I refer to the farm women's work as "mediated counterpublics" because this gives a fuller sense of the dynamics of these particular communicative spaces. The discussion is *mediated* by editing and decision making which may be only partly participatory; this brings in the necessary human element, by pointing to how this counterpublic is also part of organizing techniques in a larger movement²⁵ As well, the woman's discussion is not divided into separate interpersonal and publicist forms, but rather the term 'mediated' gives a sense of the constant interaction between media form and women's interpersonal conversations. This allows one to remember how long-distance media, the media industry and funding are all part of the formation of

²⁵ In this case the farm movement, but the same approach could be taken when assessing initiatives in the feminist movement.

counterpublics in a modern setting²⁶. This initial understanding of counterpublic theory will extend in a variety of ways during my analysis of the media and materials that the women produced. The theoretical complexity of my approach has influenced my perspective as a feminist researcher, the choice of my case studies, and the methods I am going to use to analyze the data, all of which I will discuss in the following sections.

Methodialogues: The Processes of Data Collection and Analysis

Defining a Feminist Research Perspective: Situated Knowers and Texts

In the past few decades, feminist researchers have critiqued social science methods that privilege quantitative over qualitative methods, legitimize certain forms of data, data collection and research questions, and claim that researchers can produce objective and unbiased studies (Code, 1995, 1998; Cirkseña, 1992, 1996). When discussing feminist critiques of communication methods, Kathyrn Cirkseña explains the development of women-centered research:

What began as an “add women and stir” approach rapidly developed into something much more complex and threatening to traditional practices of scholarship. In order to focus on women, feminist scholars have noted, it is necessary to redefine “legitimate” texts, “significant” events, and “important” ideas. (1992, 39)

Cirkseña explains that to gather knowledge about women’s activities often necessitates methodologies that use different types of texts. These texts include the semi-public or private letters, diaries, and gossip of ordinary women. These types of texts, and the women producing them, are often not part of the elite producers and leaders, but rather are ordinary people engaging with their historical situation in less noted, but just as

²⁶ In order to keep this research at a manageable length, I concentrated mostly on the farm movement as the context for the counterpublic, but a more detailed assessment of how the women’s media relates to the print and radio media industry would be helpful

important ways (Cirksena 1992; Gring-Pemle, 1998). This focus is one that de-centers the traditional 'hero' or 'heroine' of history, and instead shows the interactive and collective processes of social change. I focus on the texts farm union women have created to see how they have used communication strategies to become involved in public life and produce their own knowledge.

Feminist scholars have argued that knowledge production is situated in complex, and compulsory historical and cultural processes. Lorraine Code notes:

Feminists do not look at "sufficient conditions" for knowledge -- which has led to oppression and silencing, but instead, they examine practices of knowledge construction to produce critical retellings of what historically and materially situated knowers actually do (1998, 220).

This feminist challenge to "the view from nowhere" (Code, 1995) will help me to evaluate farm women's avoidance of patriarchal critiques not as 'false consciousness', but as part of the evolving narrative of socially situated actors. I also acknowledge that I am as much a part of the broader systems of knowledge as are the women I am studying, so that the larger academic debate between post-structuralism and critical theory will also influence my discussion.²⁷ My feminist framework is inflected with the questions that arose with the 'linguistic turn' in the social sciences, and I am exploring the possibilities of a "resistance postmodernism," that: "...is concerned with the politics of production and maintenance of subjectivities, with language as a social practice, and how social difference is historically and hierarchically structured" (Hennessey, 1993, 3).

Some of the biggest difficulties in navigating this current 'sociology of knowledge' may arise during my analysis of the women's discussion of their roles as

²⁷ I have especially been indebted to Fraser (1997), Mackenzie (1992) and other feminist scholars who attempt to negotiate the insights of poststructuralism with the emancipatory potential and research goals of critical theory.

women/farmers, for I want to validate the formation of an alternative women's knowledge, as well as recognize the constraint of broader social relations on the women's thoughts. I am influenced by the idea that:

A feminist theory of social protest will encompass women-centered interpretations of who, when, how and why women engage in social protest. A feminist methodology will attempt to record the observer's and the subject's views, for both have to be integral parts of the process (West and Blumberg, 1990, 11).

At the same time, I realize that part of the goal of the researcher is to learn how to integrate the subject's views within an academic framework that, although never fully objective, does create a necessary order and distance. As well, as a situated knower in a critical academic environment, I recognize that a sophisticated analysis has to consider how patriarchy and material situations constrain women's agency. In order to work with these tensions in my research, I have to find an analytical method that allows me to weave together a discussion of power/empowerment. In the following sections, I will discuss the process of data collection, the choice of critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a methodology, and the ways I tuned these methods to my feminist research aims, and to the counterpublic framework.

Mainly For Women: The Process of Data Collection

When I began my research on farm women, I realized that it was revisionist feminist historiographies that most carefully documented the experiences of farm women.²⁸ Some of the richest sources come from using farm women's letters to document the history in the women's own words. The works of Christina Scowbey (1996), Angela Davis (1992, 1993) and Mary Kinnear (1988) have inspired me to look to

²⁸ Since the seventies, and following the academic drive to rewrite women into history, there has been a plethora of feminist writers documenting the lives of some of the most famous farm women leaders, as well as the everyday lives of farm women.

the epistolary interaction between women writing in the farm periodicals. Yet, as soon as I began reading, I noted very clearly the differences between these scholars' empirical historical perspective, and my perspective that viewed history through the lens of communication. As historical studies, the articles remained focused on the content of the letters as documenting life/work, rather than analyzing the means of communication as historical in and of themselves. The studies also remained tuned towards the experience of individual, isolated farm women, rather than noting the creation of clubs and organizations that were central to farm women's lives in that period.²⁹ However, I saw that conducting similar primary research would allow me to 'listen' to what the women were saying, and theorize how communication and media become part of the women's everyday lives.

The decision to read the "Mainly for Women" pages of the farm periodical, *The Western Producer*, came from reading Georgina Taylor's research on farm women leader Violet McNaughton. Throughout her dissertation (1997), Taylor gave tantalizing hints about the women's page that McNaughton edited for 25 years. Because the *Western Producer*, and McNaughton, came from union roots, I thought that reading this paper could provide continuity, and link well into my later discussion of communications in the National Farmer's Union.

After choosing which paper to read, I decided to read all the years over the span of McNaughton's editorial position. The periodical was published weekly, but with the "Mainly for Women" page as only one page per week, I predicted this would not be that difficult a task. Upon going to the National Library and taking over a week to read the

²⁹ The book "Women: Isolation and Bonding" by Langford and Keating (1980) does a remarkable job of discussing the high involvement of women in clubs and societies on the prairies.

first month's worth of pages, I realized that reading every year would be an impossible task. Instead, I chose to read the entire year every three years, to get a good cross-section of letters, as well as continuity in the issues and discussion on the page. So my corpus includes each weekly "Mainly for Women" page for the years of 1925, 1928, 1931, 1934, 1937, 1940, 1943, 1946, 1949; the page consisted of a shifting patchwork of letters, articles submitted by the readers, and pieces of information collected by McNaughton. Throughout the years, the format and content often changed, and this is because McNaughton shaped the content depending on the submissions and demands by the readers. To approach the "Mainly for Women" pages, I had to create a methodology to sift through the large amounts of letters, articles and information I found on the page. After the first months of 1925, I decided to read the entire page, but focus on the letters. In doing this, I managed to get a good understanding of the conversations the women were having with the editor and between themselves.

Finding Common Ground: The Creation of a Radio Collective

The choice for my second case study arose from a variety of circumstances, and particularly from my use of ethnographic research. Though I knew I wanted to conduct a historical analysis to illustrate the continuity and discontinuity in women's communication projects in the unions, I was not sure of how I could make such an endeavor not only cohesive, but also manageable for an M.A. thesis. By going to the National Farmer's Union convention in November, I received some valuable suggestions by women in the union, and I feel this helped to include them in the research process.³⁰

³⁰ I would have liked to engage in more of a participatory action research framework in my methodology. But due to the scope of this thesis, I have had to forgo a full inclusion of the women I am conducting research on, and instead tried to incorporate some of their suggestions.

From these discussions, I received enough information to write three theses, but have narrowed the materials down to what seem to be the key communication projects.

A discussion with Annette Desmarais, professor, former farmer, consultant with OXFAM Canada, and member of the NFU, began to give me a sense of the political value of the recent communicative projects NFU women have been involved in. In particular, she focused on the farm exchanges between NFU women and other international farm union women. The most important exchange occurred in the early 1990's between NFU women and Nicaraguan farm union women. My discussions with the NFU women who knew about the exchange, and my reading of the literature about the project, revealed to me how the "kitchen meetings" conducted in Nicaragua and Canada raised consciousness about gender inequalities in the farm unions. The interpersonal interactions during the exchange led to a sense of gender solidarity, and shared organizing techniques that were highly valued by many of the farm women leaders I talked to, including Annette Desmarais and former NFU president Nettie Wiebe.

However, a central goal of my research has been not only to describe the creation of counterpublics, but also to analyze the discussions that occur within and around these publics. This depth of analysis was impossible with the exchanges, for although I interviewed three of the women who had participated, they recalled very little detail of what was actually discussed in the kitchen meetings. In the end, what seemed particularly relevant for the approach and scope of this thesis, were the various media projects that arose from the experiences of the NFU women on the exchange. After talking with Annette, and going to the NFU office in Saskatoon, I was given a facilitator package of NFU workshops informed by the NFU-UNAG exchange, an MA thesis by former

women's president Shannon Storey, a booklet on the UNAG-NFU linkage, and information about an NFU radio collective inspired by the Nicaraguan farm women. I decided to focus on the radio collective, termed the Rural Women's Radio Project (RWRP), as my second case study because I decided it would be interesting to look at how a different medium was used for activism.

As promised, former women's president Shannon Storey mailed the 1992 and 1994 radio tapes to me. The 1992 radio tapes were organized around the three themes of "Farm Women and Sustainable Agriculture", "Is Access to Land Important?" and "Farm Women's Work and the World Economy", and revolve around presenting women's opinions and experiences on those issues. The end result was three radio broadcasts of half an hour each, the first aired in 1992, and then smaller 3- minute sound bites for air on CBC in 1994. The 1994 tapes were on the theme of "Women in Farm Leadership". I transcribed the tapes and then began to read through the material, keeping in mind the earlier newspaper page and contrasting the discourse between the two counterpublics.

The structure of the two chapters analyzing these case studies will reflect my attempt to combine a theoretical and historical analysis of the media as "counterpublics" with a more in-depth discourse analysis of the material circulating within the counterpublics. Throughout this discussion, I will refer to the specific historical and institutional context surrounding these communication practices. In the second sections of the chapters, I will analyze the discourse in the primary materials to show both the empowerment and constraints within the discursive interactions of the counterpublics. This analysis will be conducted through a critical discourse analysis, which I describe below.

Critical Discourse Analysis and Modifications

According to Sara Mills, critical discourse analysts, such as Fairclough, Wodak and van Dijk:

...have used Foucault's work to develop a politically inflected form of analysis...a concern for the relation between the individual interaction and the wider discursive and social structure not only makes for a form of analysis which is more complex and more finely nuanced, but also makes for an analysis which is self-critical in terms of its own claims to 'truth', and is aware of the dangers of naively ascribing meaning to texts (1996, 158).

These theorists, who work with critical discourse analysis, use a Foucauldian perspective on historical practices and power relations, but craft a method to analyze more rigorously the texts and talk produced by people. Jody Waters (2002) points out the link between situated knowers and texts as: "a way to think about the circumstances in which texts arise, and how they are used and what they mean" (Poynton and Lee, quoted in Waters, 2002, 33). From an understanding of this: "comes the awareness that texts are assembled in settings and processes that speak to various constructions of knowledge across institutional and other schemas" (Waters, 2001, pg. 33). I will apply this methodology both in my epistemological assumptions about discourse, and the categories I have devised to analyze the primary data. First of all, I will give a sense of how I have defined "discourse":

1) Discourse is a social practice, and is intertextually linked to the broader social relations of the historical period.

The counterpublics can be understood as practices in the Foucauldian sense, as: "places where what is said and what is done, rules imposed and reasons given, the planned and the taken for granted meet and interconnect" (Foucault, 1991, 75). The medium-based counterpublics provide the site by which to analyze the discourses of farm

women and place them in historical context with the other feminist and farming discourses of the times. These practices produce discourses that intersect with other practices and discourses; this intertextuality historicizes and helps to explain the power relations surrounding the communication practices.

2) Discourse is constructive of social realities. It can be the unit of analysis in itself rather than being used to access other mental or physical realities.

I will be looking at the women's discussion about, and assertion of, gendered identity, gender roles and women's experiences in the counterpublics. Because of the counterpublics' public and strategic nature, this identity is best viewed as collective and rhetorical rather than as an indication of "true" and constant individual cognitive realities. By analyzing patterns in the discourse of the counterpublic, I will be looking at the way that the participants have collectively named themselves, and at their roles as women and as farmers. Sara Mills explains that Foucault describes discourse in a number of different ways:

The second definition he gives -- "an individualizable group of statements" -- is one which is used more often by Foucault when he is discussing the particular structures within discourse; thus, he is concerned to be able to identify discourses, that is, groups of utterances which seem to have been regulated in some way and which seem to have a coherence and a force to them in common (1996, 7).

To understand farm women's discourse, I will be looking at how particular words, phrases, and ideas -- "groups of utterances" circulate and gain currency in the alternative media of the counterpublics. This is an interpretative method that looks for discursive patterns in historical data, while fully recognizing my situated perspective of researcher.

3) Discourse and discursive interaction are forms of agency and action in the world

By looking at the formation of alternative communication media as counterpublics, and the creation of gendered identity within these publics, I will also explain how women

have reasoned out and validated their involvement in the public, political sphere. In this way, I view talk and action as intertwined, and by understanding the communicative processes through which action is taken, one can understand the processes for active involvement created within groups, and the constraints over possible courses of action because of power and social relations.

From these epistemological understandings of discourse, I decided I would approach the data with the specific categories of gender and political action in mind. While reading the primary data, I treated gender from a primarily social constructivist approach: as something created between the women, but also as a practice that drew from roles and ideas about women at the time. When discussing women in the farm unions, Bradford Rennie points out:

Most women were concerned about gender issues, as the newer scholarship contends, but, as the older writing stresses, they also believed in inherent gender differences and felt that their main role was motherhood. Either downplaying women's conservatism and belief in domestic ideals while emphasizing their commitment to female autonomy and rights, or in turn, understating their pursuit of greater gender equality misrepresents their outlook. Farm women saw no contradiction between their equal rights and traditional causes...they saw no inconsistency in agitating for greater gender equality and believing in the primacy of motherhood (2000, 116).

Lisbett Van Zoonen (2000) discusses poststructuralist approaches in a way that mirrors Rennie's discussion of farm women:

In the mid 1980s, constructivist and poststructuralist perspectives superseded the sameness-difference debate in suggesting that gender be viewed as a discursive construct that is inscribed in the subject through language along with other discourse such as those of ethnicity, class and sexuality, often in paradoxical ways. This allows for the simultaneous recognition of equity and difference and fits women's more mundane experience of being different than men in some contexts at some times, being the same as men in other contexts at other times, and being totally unconnected to gender issues in yet other contexts (p.5).

This is where I find the term *gendered identity* useful: this allows me to avoid claiming the farm women's interaction as either feminist, or as traditional. However, although I am looking at how gender roles are established in the counterpublic through discourse, I want to restate that what makes this discourse relevant to the women are the ways it connects to the material conditions of their lives. In this way, discourse is not about free-floating signifiers adopted for purely strategic reasons, but instead, as the letters indicate, the most powerful 'naming' is tied to the women's personal experiences. This link can lead to the women's inability to look beyond present circumstances, or, alternately, can foster critiques of unfair conditions. By paying attention to the women's own words, I am able to note both tendencies; this is where multiple spheres of discourse and ideas intersect, revealing: "relations between the individual interaction(s) and the wider discursive and social structure" (Mills, 1996, 160).

During my preliminary research, I tried to discover how "individualizable groups of statements" formed patterns describing gendered identity. I looked for key words and descriptors -- the labels -- that women gave themselves in their mediated fora. I made notes of how often the terms mother, citizen, farm wife, farmer were used to refer to women's roles, and in which rhetorical context. By doing this, I tried to get a sense of the negotiations and strategies by which women named their positions in social relations. However, I am not just looking at how women have named themselves, but how this naming tied into practical, political actions.

Looking for political action in the data means expanding the word 'political' and defining "action". The sense of politics on the "Mainly for Women" page alternated between ideas of partisan politics and women's role in social reforms in the broader farm

movement. In the radio collective, “politics” refers to the socio-economic, legal and institutional reforms needed for women to be valued as political participants. In both counterpublics, ‘political action’ signifies the idea-based and material initiatives undertaken by the women to better the social and economic conditions of farming and rural areas. This extension of politics, I believe, arises from the women working within a progressive social movement organization, and points to how politics does not just refer to government, or mainstream ideology, but also includes the collective actions of groups of people fighting for change.

While reading the materials, I will pick out the key political campaigns, and initiatives that were discussed most frequently by the women, or were upheld as essential to the women’s advancement. Keeping these collective actions in the context of the farm and feminist movement, will also allow me to discuss the varying historical influences on the women’s choice of activist strategies. I argue that the types of action that I will discuss will also vary according to the medium used in the counterpublic. The differences between the two case studies can provide a better sense of how rural women have defined themselves over the century, as well as the different forms of activism that arose in the media projects.

My selection of textual evidence is in congruence not only with a methodology that links texts, agency and structures, but also with my overall feminist perspective. By analyzing the dynamic and fluid ways that women’s communication has led to action in the world, and knowledge about women’s experiences, I provide a new way to understand the gendered, political strategies of different groups of women. The following two chapters map out the difficult and continuous work involved in creating

counterpublics and discussing alternative ideas and action. Throughout, I hope to retain a reflexive, rich approach that will fulfill the critical feminist goals I have set for myself in this chapter. I also hope to share the vibrancy I have found in the work of these women, and indicate some of the silences and spaces where social relations have limited radical thought.

Chapter Three

'MAINLY FOR WOMEN': THE CREATION OF AN EPISTOLARY COUNTERPUBLIC

"Education, Cooperation and Power through Organization...our interests go beyond the four walls of home to the province, the federation and the world!"

The above call to action was featured in a pamphlet circulated to Canadian prairie farm households in 1919. It was written by farm woman leader Violet McNaughton to try and convince other rural women to join the newly formed women's auxiliary of the Grain Grower's Association (Evans, 1989). These auxiliaries and farm organizations worked together in "education, co-operation and power through organization" (McNaughton, 1919) to form the co-operative farm movement that reached its peak in the twenties and thirties. The populist ethos of the farm movement was manifested in the use of print media and public fora to ensure democratic participation of all members in decision-making. Pamphlets, canvassers, town hall meetings, and periodicals were some of the communication tools used to overcome the barriers of large distances between farm settlements, and the general lack of communication and transportation infrastructure. Women in the farm movement faced barriers to public participation beyond the general constraints of isolated homesteads and long-distance communications. These barriers were centered on assumptions about women's role in farming: the division of labour on farms, and in society, meant that women were considered farmwives, not farmers, and as such were assigned to the private, domestic sphere. Creating spaces for women in the farm organizations through either auxiliaries or integration was one way for leaders like McNaughton to get women publicly involved. Another equally important women's space was the "Mainly For Women" pages that were part of the general farm

periodical, *The Western Producer*. The page blurred the boundaries between the private and the public in many ways: by using personalized letters as a form of public interaction,³¹ by sharing life stories as much as political concerns, and by remaining part of the broader newspaper that could be read by both men and women. This forum was *mainly* for women, but also reflected the ideals of gender-integration in the farm movement of the time. By focusing on women's participation within this printed medium, I bring a communication perspective to the rich history of farm women's activism.

My argument is that the forum on the "Mainly for Women" pages facilitated a participatory, epistolary counterpublic, and by analyzing the discursive interaction in the counterpublic, one can understand how the women's formation of gendered identity mobilized their public actions. I conduct this analysis by tracing the key themes of "Co-operation" and "Women's Influence" generated in the women's discourse, themes that resonated with the broader farm and women's movements. One aim of my analysis will be to note the constraints on discourse within the women's counterpublic; this discussion will help to illustrate the difficult and practical negotiations of participatory communication. However, I will also point out the key moments when the women used communication to empower themselves to "go beyond the four walls of the home" and negotiate a political role in society.

³¹ Trying to understand the use of letters as a medium for public communication is an interesting task. While the famed "letters and literature society" made up one element of the early public sphere, often these letters were exchanged between two recipients, and written in a private tone, even if tuned to broader public problems. As Linnet Fawcett (1999) discusses in reference to letters to the editor in *Ms.* magazine, personal touches can situate the letter writer in time and space, creating a stronger sense of community connections. Though they did include personal touches, writers on the "Mainly for Women" pages also used a charged and formal rhetoric that conceived of a broader public purpose to the letters. Lisa Gring-Pemble's (1998) article "Writing Themselves into Consciousness: Creating a Rhetorical Bridge Between the Private and Public Spheres" addresses how the liminal space of letters can raise political consciousness and get women prepared to speak in public. These multiple uses of letters indicate how this communication form utilized many levels of public and private communication.

The Formation of a Mediated Counterpublic

The prairie periodical called the *Western Producer* originated in a 1923 newspaper named *The Progressive*, a title that reflects the publication's affiliation with the turn of the century progressive political parties. By the time that the paper had adopted the name *The Western Producer* in 1924, it had expanded the readership beyond members of the farm organizations, and was reaching about 20,000³² farm households primarily in Saskatchewan, but also in the other Western provinces. The *Western Producer's* roots with the farm unions and Wheat Pool initiatives resonated strongly in the newspaper's public support of the farm movement and co-operative politics (Taylor, 1997).

As noted in chapter one, the creation of the United Farmers of Canada in 1926 included the formation of an affirmative action structure, and the extension of leadership positions for both women and youth in the organization. With the creation of organizational spaces for youth and women in the unions, the *Western Producer* also formed youth and women's sections in the paper, and claimed these spaces for public discussion. Put simply, the format of the paper mirrored the format of the organization. As Sophia Dixon, a renowned farm women leader in the 1930's, and occasional contributor to the "Mainly for Women" page, pointed out: "The women's page was a forum to *share* conditions and express concerns, and you got to know women as neighbors....there were networks of interest and networks of people ([my italics] Evans, 1986)".

³² The current *Western Producer* archivist, Judy Ferguson, provided me with this information via email communication in February 2004.

Textual Publics, Participation and the Epistolary Pact

A women-oriented editorial page was a common forum in many early farm periodicals. As Tom Burkholder (1991) argues in his discussion of the farm women's periodical *The Farmer's Wife*, women editors provided a "consciousness raising" for farm women who were disconnected from the urban suffragist press of the time.³³ By creating a space for women's issues to be connected with farming issues, these early women editors politicized issues such as the recognition of farm women's work, the problems in farm organizations, issues with privileging farm machinery over "labour-saving devices" for the home, as well as more gender-oriented themes such as maternity grants, healthcare and childcare issues (Burkholder 1991).

This type of forum was also found in the *Western Producer*, where the women's president of the United Farmer's of Canada (UFC) wrote a weekly editorial on women in farm politics. The *textual* format was important for organizing because texts allowed isolated women to remain aware of the political conventions, meetings and workings of the farm movement. In the case of farm women, attending face-to-face meetings with the local branches of farm organizations was made difficult by, as noted before, lack of transportation and time, but also by the fact that gender relations privileged men to take care of the political work by going to town and attending the meetings. Interpersonal communications were few and far between, but newspapers could both notify women about the issues as well as the events and actions of the women in the movement.³⁴

³³ In "Divided Allegiances: The Response of Farm and Labour Movement to Suffrage" Carol Bacchi (1979) also notes some of the tensions between farm, labour women and the urban suffragist movement. She argues that the urban suffrage reformers promoted middle class values that did not fit with the politics of working women. Later in this chapter, I will further discuss these links between urban and rural women's initiatives.

³⁴ In editor K. Storrie's (1980) "Women: Isolation and Bonding", Taylor as well as Langford, and Keating argue that women's isolation on the prairie led them to develop organizations and women's groups for

Indeed, a reading public of farm women could be a powerful community: a textually-mediated forum could partially transcend practical and patriarchal constraints, and bring women's discussion and community into the household. Information tuned towards women and addressing their particular concerns is a powerful way to get women thinking about their positions in the world. I would argue, however, that what differentiates an audience or reading public from an activist counterpublic is the level of interactivity within the textual medium.

The "Mainly for Women" page had a different format than the editorials and articles written by farm women leaders. It was also different from other "women's pages", in that it was not explicitly suffragist like many women's newspapers were at that time, it was not just a small corner dedicated to domestic concerns or questions of etiquette, nor was it used to just outline the activities of the women's auxiliaries. In her role as editor, Violet McNaughton welcomed the letters and articles written by the women, and framed the page as a collective endeavor, based on submissions from the readers. Farm women began to take McNaughton up on the theme of co-operation, and created a unique version of it on the page, using it as a catch-all to share political, practical and social agendas through letters to the editor and to each other.³⁵

socializing. However, it is interesting to note that this is a gendered argument, for men may have had the same social urges, but this is never given as a reason for men's organizing. It is important not to overlook the women's political motivations as well. As discussed by Mary McCallum in the Grain Grower's Guide in 1918: "There is no gain in saying the club movement among farm women grew primarily out of a pronounced need for some form of social intercourse. The monotony and isolation of farm life with its consequent restricted opportunities for recreation and development of service was the despair of many a thinking woman. How was she to retain the advantages of which life on the land offered her, of the life lived close to nature and at the same time effectively assist social movements for the betterment of community and national life? As an individual she could accomplish little. She must become part of an organization." (quoted in Wiebe, 1987)

³⁵ Unlike letters to the editor in current newspapers, the letters related mainly to the topics on the women's page rather than issues addressed in the larger paper. However, the letters on the page did often refer to submissions by the women's president and other farm women leaders that were found throughout the general publication. Another interesting thing is that women would respond to each other on the page,

On the “Mainly for Women” pages, these ongoing epistolary relationships fostered the formation of a mediated counterpublic. In her discussion of early periodicals in Britain, Kathryn Shevelow (1989) terms women’s letters to the editor as part of an “epistolary pact”. She claims that this epistolary pact can only happen when the readers become “textually manifest” and take on an “actual constitutive existence on the page” (1989, pg. 78). She further explains that through the dialogue of letter exchange, readers and writers become co-responsible for the content and: “This sense of engagement is implicit in the epistolary form itself, which connotes relationship and reciprocity”(quoted in Fawcett, 1999, 5).

In the “Mainly for Women” pages, letter writing became an act of sharing stories and experiences. The women on the page referred to each other as “page friends”, and expected and looked forward to those who contributed frequently over the years, including the prolific Mrs. Haight, Agnes Coe, Jenny Pringle and many other women. These epistolary relationships also extended to interpersonal conversations in the farm women’s clubs, and, on occasion, lead to public and political action. The expansion of these relationships indicates the benefit of two-way communications: social organization mediated through texts indeed allows meaning to transcend local circumstances, but the textual manifestation of women’s dialogue can foster active multi-local debate about meaning(s).

An active debate through letters can also translate into action that challenges social relations. As Fawcett argues in her research on letters to the editor in *Ms.* magazine: “The resulting epistolary pact is one based not so much on who speaks, thus reinforcing the

offering advice, recipes, and debating issues of the day. On occasion, women would even ask McNaughton for each other’s mailing addresses to continue the correspondence.

positions that editor and reader occupy in relation to the text, but rather on what is said, and as a consequence, done”(1999, 56).

Seeing the epistolary pact as part of a broader counterpublic allows for the communicatory aspect of activism to be focused on, and the links between text, and context, between internal and external communication practices to be fleshed out more fully. It also allows for the constraints and silences within the publics to be accounted for because the women, in the act of creating solidarity, also develop and follow certain norms and rules.³⁶ To better understand how an epistolary counterpublic was created by and for these farm women, I now turn to an analysis of the letters on the page.

Gender Co-operation: Negotiating a Space for Women

Fostering a sense of ‘co-operation’ in a mixed-gender public was one method by which the “Mainly for Women” counterpublic negotiated its messages within the general farm movement. The women’s identities as *farm* women were tied to careful public promotion of the co-operative ideals that infused the culture and history of farm politics at that time. The proponents of co-operation tried to strike a balance between women’s specific needs and women as co-operators, but often women’s issues became secondary to the broader mandate of the movement.

In her first editorial on April 25th, 1925, McNaughton stated that she wanted to make co-operation central to their communicative forum. She called for women readers to share their ideas and suggestions, and thus forge an “attack” linking the discussions to the broader cooperative movement occurring on the Canadian prairies. She asked:

³⁶ This relates back to Foucault’s definition of a practice as: “places where what is said and what is done, rules imposed and reasons given, the planned and the taken for granted meet and interconnect” (1991, 75).

Will you co-operate with me in using this page for discussion of efforts that we can make to attack our share of economic problems and important social ones too? Will you send in ideas and suggestions to "Our Letter Bag"? Comments on the poultry pool, our educational system, labor saving devices; hints on "How to live on nothing a year"; "How to make farm life attractive"; and on the hundred and one questions that please or vex you?

This first editorial was addressed only to women, but a few months later³⁷, McNaughton points out:

I do not know how many of you will agree with me, but I am anxious that this page should have no appearance of segregation. True, it is headed "Mainly for Women" and a section of it is devoted to peculiarly women's questions. But outside of that small domestic section, there is a wide range of subjects...which are of equal interest to men and women and upon which views and discussion from men and women are equally welcome. This will be carrying out the idea of unity and cooperation.

With this caveat, McNaughton indicates some of the prevailing assumptions about men and women's roles in that time, as well as the attempt to transcend some of the barriers between men and women's affairs by using a discourse of universality. The women readers/letter writers also seemed to accept this ethos of gender co-operation, and at times gently reprimanded when McNaughton herself strayed too far away from this ideal. There was one particularly compelling example of this in October of 1925.

On October 1st, McNaughton included an article by farm women leader Irene Parlbay on the page and asked for the readers to respond. The article was entitled "The Economic Status of Married Women" and discussed how men controlled the farms, questioned the inability of women to own property, and explained how these factors resulted in women's poverty and dependence. In solidarity with the broader struggle of the first wave

³⁷ It is highly possible that McNaughton received complaints about the segregation of the women's page, though this isn't documented. Throughout the years, McNaughton would discuss the ways that the page changed because of reader demand. The most prevalent demand to the editor was for more domestic advice rather than political discussions. Or, alternately, there were also many letters arguing for more space in the paper for women to discuss the pressing issues of the day.

women's movement, Parlby called for legislation that recognized married women's rights. After reading her article, which seemed quite progressive for the time, I eagerly awaited the reader's responses. Only on October 29th, 1925 was one woman's response published:

Dear Mrs. McNaughton: You are asking for comments on Mrs. Parlby's article. After reading it over several times, it seems to me that at least the majority of farm women will hesitate to comment on it. The keynote of our economic problems today is co-operation, not coercion. It is not only the farm women who are suffering from insufficient remuneration for hard work, the men too, have had to work hard for years, without sufficient returns from the farm to pay them a decent wage...Let us do all we can to help co-operation both at home and abroad, and our economic status will not need legislation to have equal rights at home. Martha³⁸.

This letter effectively stopped discussion, and McNaughton dropped the topic.

Throughout the many years during which I read the page, I noted that women were very careful to not criticize the men in the organization. However, there was occasionally a sense of strain, which often came during off-page discussions with other women.

One of the times for these interpersonal discussions came in the annual farm women's week, which was a week set aside for women to make sure they could attend at least one convention, and thus solidify issues to bring to the later general convention.³⁹ Throughout the years, women wrote into the "Mainly for Women" pages to discuss the activities in Farm Women's week. A poem written by "Lammermoer" on July 28th, 1928

³⁸ One of the first barriers I encountered in my historical research was ascertaining which women were writing to the page. Most of the women used pennames or first names such as "Martha" throughout the first two decades of the paper, though, by the 1940's, more and more women were signing with their own names, or their husband's names. But "A Prairie Homemaker" or "Tess of Storm Country" really did not give me an idea if the women writers represented union women, where these women were from, or what their socio-economic backgrounds were. Although I can not document who exactly was writing into the page, and which populations of women were represented, I still hope to use the letters to provide a primary account of the ideas and discourse circulating at the time.

³⁹ Recall the quote from Annie Hollis in the history chapter that explained farm women's week as a time to discuss women's "special resolutions".

indicates some of the networks created and topics discussed at the first farm women's week:

We made little friendships there/which we hope to renew again next year/And it did us good to get together/To swap opinions with each other/We discussed the kiddies, church and school/The U.F.C and merits of the Pool/Raising gardens, turks and chicks/Dairying and other tricks...

And again in 1943, Iceberg points out a similar atmosphere in a letter entitled "What Impressed me About Farm Women's Week":

There was a willingness of all the ladies to stand on their own feet and express their views...Though the gathering represented only a small proportion of our rural population, it showed the line of thought farm women are taking and in no uncertain terms either...Are not rationing [during the War], educational systems, debt adjustments [on farms] parity prices [for wheat] and state medicine [nation-wide Medicare] what rural women are vitally interested in?

These women letter writers celebrate the spirit of co-operation at Farm Women's week, and mention topics that were at the centre of the socio- economic reforms for which farm organizations struggled. This public space allowed women to communicate more comfortably, and this often resulted in subtle hints of the problems faced by women at general mixed-gender conventions.

Ethel McBain of Beadle, Saskatchewan hints about these problems in her letter about the first Farm Women's Week on July 5th, 1928: "Some people say that women can't get along together, but a very much better feeling prevailed at our meeting than I have ever seen exhibited at any *large mixed convention*. Everywhere I heard expressions of respect and confidence in our women leaders. Mrs. Haight, Mrs. McNaughton and some of our other "old-timers" were included in this"[my italics]. And in 1928, Lammermoer explains the gender tensions that were brought up at Farm Women's Week, but does this through poetry:

Whilst discussing office and/elections/ Women's, mixed, or separate sections/We were surprised to hear some women state/Their men would not with them cooperate/And these women must carry on/Have a separate section of their own./Now if these men should chance to read/This most important rhyming screed/will they answer fair this question human/What objection have they got to women?/We ask them to tell us pat/Is it pride, prejudice or what?.../Women do not want to boss the job/Or with their men folk's rights play bob/Our watchword is Co-operation/With equal rights in Legislation/We want fair play and let me stress/we will not be content with less/To ask women to be meek and lowly/Is truly now the height of folly/And all men must learn soon or late/Such notions are obsolete and out of date/Changing conditions and women's capabilities/Have worn away traditions such as these/Put off the old, put on the new/And show what the UFC can do!

And, in 1943, Iceberg points out:

The men's ears must have been burning while our present system of government and organizations were under discussion...Would you men be willing to stand in the background and be pointed out as financial and managerial failures while the opposite sex at bringing about the reforms our country needs so urgently, but cannot get through you? ...Does not the motto "Unity is strength"⁴⁰ mean unity between men and women? Unless there is co-operation in business there will not be any cooperation in our homes.

The need for gender-cooperation is stressed in both these letters, and points to the sexism women faced within their homes, organization and society at large. However, within all the letters from 1925-1950, such public admonitions were few and far between.

The Segregation of Issues: Hierarchy in the Union Mandate

Another of the problems with "fair play" between the sexes in the farm movement was how "women's problems" were addressed in the gender-integrated public spheres. The union's balancing act between economic reforms such as wheat pools, and parity prices, and social reforms such as rural education and health,⁴¹ often overshadowed

⁴⁰ This motto is the UFC motto, which was also: "United we stand, divided, we fall" and "Humanity first".

⁴¹ The social issues were certainly considered important issues, and often were seen as under women's control. I will discuss this more in the second theme of Women's roles in the organization.

organizational talk about and action on “women’s problems”.⁴² Issues such as maternal mortality, birth control information, widow’s pensions, mother’s allowance, and economic valuation of housework were often discussed in the spaces of the “Mainly for Women” page and at farm women’s week, but seldom brought before the men at the annual conventions.

An example of this segregation of issues is seen in a letter to the women’s page on April 5th, 1928. “Voluntary Motherhood” describes the stillbirth of an anonymous “Mrs. John”:

When we women gathered after the birth, living and dead alike cried for the knowledge that means difference from bondage. As I listened I thought of our annual convention just passed. I thought back along the whole line of conventions as far as I could remember -- but I could not recall even one where this demand was voiced. Maybe my memory is faulty. I hope so...for how long shall we leave these steps barred? How many more “Mrs. John’s” will suffer?”

She finishes this account by urging for women readers of the page and McNaughton to contribute to: “the knowledge that means difference from bondage” by discussing birth control information and Maternity grants.

As pointed out in the 1989 NFB film “The Story of Farm Women and Co-operative Action”, the Criminal Code in the thirties did not allow birth control information to be circulated, so it was an impressive feat that letters about birth control were even printed and shared in the “Mainly for Women” pages. This gives an understanding of some of the ways this women-centered counterpublic brought private issues into the public realm.

⁴² It may even seem superfluous to point out that farm organizations would overlook women’s issues. However, that would be hinged on an understanding of early farm organizations as just commodity or economic groups; rather, these groups considered themselves part of a social movement combining both economic and social reforms. Understanding this will help to see the historically constructed distinctions between what were defined as the social issues affecting the healthy, holistic reproduction of society (such as health, and education) and what was defined as ‘just’ affecting the reproductive roles of mothers, so of less public importance.

However, the film also pointed out that such issues were not co-operated on within mixed-gender organizations: for, once the UFC entered partisan politics in the 1930's, the issue of birth control information was dropped completely. The difference between women's public discussion and general, public action are highlighted quite starkly with the above issue. In many ways, women's adoption of the co-operative ethos constrained their public discourse: it silenced dissent, and also reinforced the boundaries between issues discussed and eventually acted upon in the public, political realm.

The Pools: The Politics of Co-operation

The discourse of gender co-operation may have constrained the letter writers' critique of power relations on the "Mainly for Women" page, but when this ethos of co-operation was extended to relations between women, it led to many beneficial collective actions.

One of the earliest co-operative efforts on the page involved the 1925 drive for the Saskatchewan egg and poultry pool which was, as Georgina Taylor points out: "a producer cooperative by women for women" (1997, 533). The initiative was first introduced by McNaughton in her editorial comments on April 25th urging the readers to send for a contract, study it in their clubs, talk with friends about it, arrange for speakers, and take clippings from the *Western Producer* to understand it, for: "Whether you are a member of the Homemaker's, the Farmer's Union, or the Women Grain Grower's Association, an agricultural society, or just an isolated individual, this poultry pool is equally your business." Throughout 1925, women readers wrote in to publicly urge for co-operation, as well as sharing their experiences with canvassing efforts. "A Prairie Homemaker" writes on May 7th:

Is there any common sense in women slaving away looking after chickens, ducks, turkeys in addition to housekeeping, and then selling her produce at a very low margin of profit and in many cases at a loss? Decidedly not. She is demoralizing the market and making it worse for her sister slaves. As you say, nothing can be accomplished in this direction individually. It requires collective action. This means that we must strengthen our organizations.

In the same vein, and stressing the *moral* basis for co-operation, Muriel M. Dickson writes on August 27th:

Say! How are they asking you to sign up? Isn't it: "Sign up, even if you have only a few, it will help others?" Others!—There is the keynote of cooperation. Others as well as self. But the time is now, & right now for the Poultry Pool. Friends, Sisters, Workers of Saskatchewan, Sign up! Sign up! Sign up!"

In the often-overlooked work of women's canvassing and communicating, other women talked of collective efforts to gain support. On July 16th, Mrs. C.L.H shared how she spread the 'word' about poultry and egg pools at the Union Farmer's picnic, that pamphlets had been circulating, or "exchanging hands", and that Pool speakers had been visiting the town and hosting town hall meetings. On August 5th, Mrs. P.H. wrote into the page about canvassing under difficulties, and Mrs. Ethel B. contributed a letter on how her district had succeeded in getting contracts signed. On the same page, "Zannette" discusses some of the difficulties with organization and communication in the prairie regions:

We send all kinds of literature and contracts into the next district, but I do not know yet if they have shown useful results. The other district touching on this is quite a few miles distant with some wild land unoccupied between here and there. However, we all talk Pool to every body we see, as we feel confident that it will be the beginning of a little pin money for the women, and we sincerely hope it goes through.

Scholar Ian MacPherson points out that, in fact, the pool initiative was a success: “ In 1926, with the aid of the provincial governments and through the initiatives of the women’s auxiliaries of the farm organizations, egg and poultry pools were formed in the three provinces⁴³. The largest of these was the Saskatchewan Co-operative Egg and Poultry Pool”(1979,10).

This co-operation both in sharing difficulties and experiences, as well as the work of educating and promoting the pool remains a theme throughout 1925, and a similar ethos is reflected in the drive for a 100% Pool in 1931. The shift from the development and hope in the twenties -- with the late twenties bringing huge profits to the farmers from the Pools -- to the depression in the dirty thirties led women into more concerted efforts to try and nationalize and create mandatory communal marketing boards.

On January 8, 1931, McNaughton shares how she explained the Wheat pool to women in Europe: “I pointed out how 80% of the business was transacted by way of the housewife’s purse, so that co-operation was a matter of daily concern for the woman with the basket.” Brown’s Wife points out in January: “ Co-operative marketing is a process of education...do the men in our farmer organizations realize to what extent the success or failure of our co-operative movement lies in the hands of the women?” And in June 18th, 1931, Brown’s wife also writes:

The question we should ask ourselves is not what we expect our leaders to do, but what we shall do to make for unity and progress... We can do lots without ever going to a meeting or making an extra trip anywhere. When a neighbour calls to see us or we meet one in town, we can find out if he or she understands the principles of co-operation. We can find out if our friends have fully grasped why the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool asked the provincial legislature for legislation to market all wheat grown in Saskatchewan through one co-operative agency. Perhaps our friends may be able to tell us something we don’t know, then we can pass it on.

⁴³ The three provinces being Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

In the drives for Pools in both 1925 and 1931, the blend between economic and educational co-operation was central to the organizing and education practices of women on and off the page. There were indeed great troubles through the twenties and thirties, with political economic issues looming large, but the attempt to keep the page as a place for constructive action and sharing ideas and resources was ongoing.

Hard Time Hints: A Mediated Informal Economy

During the depression, the co-operative effort was given an extra ring of despair in the women's pages, because women readers were trying to be involved in such broad issues as the pool, as well as share "hard time hints" that allowed them to care for their families in the depression and drought years. In fact, these 'hard time hints' also facilitated a cooperative economic movement of sorts on the page, with women 'pooling' their resources in many practical ways.⁴⁴ In May of 1934, McNaughton, gave general guidelines on the exchange, explaining: "We only have a limited amount of space to give to gardens or any exchange and we want every request to be of real value to our members. As the Young Co-operator's say: "We co-operate!"

This practical co-operation included letters to the Mail Bag asking to exchange garden seeds, commodities,⁴⁵ and a book exchange in the winter of 1931, organized by McNaughton as 'food for the soul' in the destitute years. McNaughton explained on December 10th, 1931, that she would include a form on the "Mainly for Women" page to be filled out in order to exchange books. With this book exchange, McNaughton followed

⁴⁴ What seemed to occur was a type of small-scale informal economy facilitated through the page. Instead of the highly organized, and at times bureaucratic pools, these initiatives were about long distance sharing, and extending the reach of 'neighbours'. In some ways, then, it seemed less about political and social reform and more about survival.

⁴⁵ For example, on May 24th, 1934, Mrs. C. Hannet of Rolanville asked to exchange some hens for grade nine textbooks.

the tradition of rural traveling libraries and book circulation that had been fought for by the women's clubs over the years. She realized that women would need to work together to raise money for the stamps, but claimed that an easy way to do this could be through the local clubs: "Nearly everyone is a member of the Wheat Pool, UFC, Homemakers Club, Lady's Aid or some one society, so it would only be a family matter to ask the secretary's endorsement..." On December 17th, McNaughton further explains: "The book exchange can best be done through linking organizations and shipping from club to club."

The ideals of co-operation on the page were used to foster links between different farm women's groups and allowed women to share practical advice and resources in hard times. As scholar Christina Scowbey points out: "The 'Mainly for Women' page through the Great Depression allowed for collective identity, solace and solidarity" (1996, pg.3). Regarding this page as a counterpublic allows one to understand how communication is the mechanism by which this 'collective identity, solace and solidarity' is established over a period of time. These diverse experiences of both gendered constraints and successful collective action, leads smoothly into the next theme I wish to discuss. In the following sections, I will analyze the gendered identity and ideals of "women's influence" that were discussed on the page and the social reforms that arose from these interactions.

"Women's Influence Begins at Home; Who Can Say Where it Ends?"

Violet McNaughton borrowed the above quote from the Women's Co-operative Labour Guild in Britain, and it provided the header for the "Mainly for Women" pages from 1928 until 1947. In this quote, one can infer how gender roles were framed within

both the counterpublic and the larger society. At that time, women were still tied to the domestic, and private realm, but their work was slowly extending into the public sphere. One of the ways this change can be seen in farm women's lives is by how the home became the point of reference in the counterpublic letters. Because McNaughton did very little editing of the letters, I was able to note how the letters easily moved between domestic concerns such as how to salt pork, to calls for women's vote in the next paragraph. In this way, the personal and the political, the domestic and the social were less segregated, connecting the women's everyday reality to imagining and forming opinions on public issues. In fact, the conditions in the home itself were made a common issue in the counterpublic; and the counterpublic was the space that linked home with what was traditionally a male world. This connection between the material realities of the women, and their semi-public discourse, was then used to justify the women's involvement in, as they termed it on the page, "national housekeeping."

McNaughton's inclusion of the popular maxim: "*Men make laws; Women make morals*" on April 23, 1925, provides further hints as to the relational and moral characteristics of "women's influence". These ideas of women's role as moral guardian of the nation also spurred the urban second wave reforms of the time, including temperance, education and health reforms. This indicates one of the recurring overlaps between ideas and initiatives of rural and urban areas, and is documented on the "Mainly for Women" page.

Through discussion on the page, women tried to give personal meaning to their public involvement in order to both empower themselves and recruit other women to the cause. What arose from this was a discourse that shifted between ideas of equality and

difference, and the public and private duties and rights of women. Throughout the years, the women collaborated on creating a “gendered identity”⁴⁶ on the page, and linked this into mobilizing for collective action. Tracing these subtle, intertwined negotiations of gendered identity illustrates the dialectic between traditional and emerging ideas about women’s place in society.

Farm Women as Mothers and Farmwives

In the letters throughout the years, most of the social critiques and suggestions for change were founded on women’s maternal duties and nurturing roles. As Elizabeth Margaret writes in February 11th, 1937:

Women, why don’t we rise! Not as a political body, but as mothers, homemakers, crusaders, builders of Canada and demand our Canadian heritage for ourselves and our children! ...Are you ready as a woman and a mother to do more than be angry? Let our anger supported by our fortitude drive us into action... “The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world”.

This letter gives a sense of how women’s roles as mothers were extended into public action. In order to create solidarity and connections between themselves and the other women readers, the women writers often assumed the universal role of mother.⁴⁷ This homogeneity indicates how the creation and maintenance of a counterpublic can stifle alternative ideas. A maternal gendered identity resonated with the times and circumstances,⁴⁸ but also effectively narrowed and constrained the scope of women’s critique of their social roles.

⁴⁶ As noted in Chapter Two, by using the terms “gendered identity” and “women’s influence”, I wish to avoid the “equality/difference/maternal” feminist labels, and instead indicate the subtle differences by which farm women defined their public roles.

⁴⁷ A highly ironic element behind this assumption is that McNaughton herself, as editor and a prominent farm woman leader, was childless.

⁴⁸ As Vickers and Brodie (1982) point out, the Canadian first wave women’s movement had a strong sense of “maternal feminism”. This feminism was based on upholding mothers as being vital to society, and this meant that women’s public actions and reforms were based on their nurturing and care-giving perspectives, allowing them the moral high ground over men. This stance is somewhat similar to ‘difference’ feminism

Another key identity found on the page was that of women as *farmwives*, *housewives* and *housekeepers*. Christina Scowbey's (1996) article: "I am a Worker, Not a Drone:" Farm Women, Reproductive Work and *The Western Producer* 1930-1939" claims that the discussion on the "Mainly for Women" page revolved around women's formation and assertion of worker identities. My research indicates that the multiple intersections of gender roles created both conservative and progressive representations of women's work on the page. I would argue that many of the women letter writers differentiated their maternal role from social relations, thereby maintaining and naturalizing oppressive divisions of labour.

Though the letters on the page evidenced that the women did much outdoor farm work as well as the domestic work (often being completely in charge of poultry and livestock), the social construction of women within private, domestic roles was fairly rigid, and women viewed their primary roles as house/farmwives. The majority of women undervalued their work on the farm and in the household, a trend still apparent in farming communities today⁴⁹. Scowbey does, however, present some powerful quotes from women who claimed their place as workers, including:

Our slogan should be "No money, no marriage" for unmarried women and "no wages no babies" for married women. Then we could demand what we wanted from a scared stiff government. Let us stop rocking the cradle for the change, for we can rule the world instead! –Sue Scrapegrace, 1934 (1996, pg. 6).

Letters such as the one above provides a contrast to "Elizabeth Margaret's" earlier letter calling mothers to action. However, letters that promoted such a progressive view

today in that it privileges women's special viewpoint, although with maternal feminism, this viewpoint was based on a natural biological role, while difference feminism claims the viewpoint comes from a socially constructed position in society.

⁴⁹ This was noted in writings by the current NFU farm women, during personal interviews and in the 2003 NFU publication: "The Canadian Farm family at Work: Exploring Gender and Generation"

of women's rights to wages for their work occurred less frequently than letters promoting women's work from a traditionalist point of view.⁵⁰ In fact, during the Depression, a man named L.J. Pepper frequently wrote in to the "Mainly for Women" pages, trying to foster more militant and socialist understandings of women's work. His call for women to stop surviving on 'hard time hints', and to go on strike to protest both State and patriarchy received multiple indignant letters reasserting women's natural duties in the home.⁵¹

Farm Women as Equal Citizens

While these traditional roles were prevalent in the countryside, they were also intertwined with the realization that women needed to become politically and publicly active in the country's affairs. In fact, during the period between 1913-1916, the WGGa auxiliary in Saskatchewan formed coalitions with labour and urban suffrage groups across the province to make a concerted push for the vote⁵². This political push resulted in the Prairie Provinces being the first to receive the vote for women; a heritage that added pressure on farm women to become active, voting citizens. The debate over citizenship duties and rights, and what this meant to women, was an ongoing discussion on the page.

Farm women's conceptions of "citizenship" were founded on an idea of gender equality sparked by the civil and political reforms of the early farm women's auxiliaries

⁵⁰ And, unfortunately, it is impossible to know whether this was because McNaughton just didn't include such letters.

⁵¹ LJ Pepper was quite determined-- I would begin reading a new year of letters and was frequently surprised to see his name reappear. His letters called the women 'slaves' and told them to challenge their 'slave minds' in order to overthrow the capitalist system. He also continually challenged McNaughton to create a more political atmosphere on the page. He remained in close contact with McNaughton, and she referred to their personal meetings a number of times in her editorial comments. A woman named Judy O'Grady who also wrote in during the thirties, advocating socialism and "militant motherhood", echoed his rhetoric. The women responded quite well to O'Grady's letters, but LJ Pepper definitely got the women's blood boiling.

⁵² As Bacchi (1979) points out, farm women's desire to get the vote was partly due to the overall political strategies of the farm movement. By securing women's vote, Western farmers believed they could bolster agricultural interests by voting in farmer-friendly politicians.

and the first wave women's movement. In the following excerpts from women's letters on the page, women's roles were expanded beyond their work on the farm and in the family to include their work as citizens. On September 3rd, 1931, G.V.F wrote:

What I want to say is this: until women, one and all wake up to their equal responsibility as co-citizens with their men and reason for themselves and take an intelligent interest in the affairs of their governments, we can only expect the masculine viewpoint put forward in our laws and that point is mostly commercialism, and not for the good of humanity. Woman, the life giver, take heed!

....yours for co-operation, GVF.

This letter is interesting in that it calls for equal responsibility, reason and intelligence, which were presumed as traits to be learned, with the idea that women should bring their natural "life-giver" perspective to law and politics. In this brief paragraph, women's duty was tied both to a new sense of public equality and their traditional roles as mothers.

Another eloquent letter from 1934 entitled "Sow A Vote With Your Garden Seeds" says:

Why cannot the women of Saskatchewan set an example by turning out in full force to the polls? If someone called you a poor *citizen*, an indifferent *housekeeper* and an undutiful *mother*, you would be shocked and furious. Yet are you not all of these when you fail to vote? It is your money, your health interests, hospitals, prisons, unemployment schemes, relief, in fact, all that pertains to the housekeeping of a community, that will be affected by your vote, don't you forget it, our children, our homes, our standard of living... Our children will reap what we have sown. Will YOU vote at the next election?" ([my italics added] [Mrs.] Evelyn Churchill, Hillmond, Sask., February 22, 1934.)

These debates and working out of gendered identity on the page involved many contradictory and emerging understandings of women's role in society. The above understanding of women as mother-housewife-citizen resonated with the notion that women were in charge of the social "housekeeping of a community". Women's

designation as being in charge of the social rather than the political or economic⁵³ aspects of the farm movement infused many of the collective actions that occurred on the “Mainly for Women” pages.⁵⁴ These actions included the formation of a Running Water Club (1928), discussions of maternal mortality and the Peace Push (1931), which were all initiatives that got women active both on and off the page.

Women's Work, and the Running Water Clubs

As Christina Scowbey (1996) points out, one of the main rallying points and identifiers on the page was the nonstop bone-aching work, the “drudgery”, of farm women’s lives. During the twenties and thirties, there were early initiatives to get women’s domestic work recognized. McNaughton introduced this topic on March 15th, 1928, and connected it to women’s work as citizens:

Women the world over are awakening to the fact that if they are to gain the strength and leisure necessary to fit them for their own share in the important business of “National Housekeeping” their own household tasks must be readjusted. They are also realizing that domestic as well as other labour is a commodity and as such has a very real value. It is hoped that what the women in the worldwide movement are attempting to accomplish will be taken up by the women in Saskatchewan.

Farm leader Annie Hollis also wrote into the page quite often, urging women to understand the value of their work. Both McNaughton and Hollis speculated that gaining leisure time would allow women to develop into their new roles as citizens. These broad reevaluations of women’s work influenced the creation of a regional ‘Running Water Club’. This particular collective action illustrates the farm women’s practical attempts to

⁵³ Women were involved in some aspects of the economic collective action, with the poultry pool in 1925 being a unique example, but, in general, economics and politics were still considered men’s business. As the “farmers” in charge, men still managed and sustained the economic initiatives, during and after the pools were established.

⁵⁴ Woods (1975) also takes note that women were in charge of the social reforms of the farm movement, a statement echoed in a 1940 letter to the “Mainly For Women” page by UFC president Mrs. Al Toevs. She states: “There is also Women’s Section. *It is their part to look after the social side of the movement.*”

ease their lot and develop better rural homesteads and communities for themselves and their families. However, the low standards of housing was not just because of the poor prices farmers received for their crops, as was argued within the farm movement; rather, men's work was also viewed as more essential than women's contributions. As women pointed out at various times on the page, this meant that money often went into the farm implements and stayed out of the household. This hierarchy of needs indicates some of the recurring tensions that arose with the social devaluation of women's work⁵⁵.

McNaughton first introduced the "Running Water Club" on June 28th, 1928. In an editorial entitled "What are We Going to Do About it?" She says:

We need running water in the farm home! The elimination of one of the worst forms of home drudgery. But, "What are we going to do about it?" As is said elsewhere, the scheme won't do much good if it remains a subject for charts and lectures! Who will join a RUNNING WATER CLUB with me?

With this suggestion to form a club, McNaughton also included a diagram and invention drawn up by a University of Saskatchewan professor, Dr. Hardy, which gave instructions for a cheap and efficient water supply system. And on July 12th, McNaughton repeats the call, combined with an advertisement for farm women's week:

Why stop learning?" Go to the two conventions of UFWC and Homemakers...take advantage of the university [University of Saskatchewan], and the extension programs [including Dr. Hardy's water device]...*learn to eliminate drudgery for more leisure time to think and be a citizen...*join the Running Water Campaign! [my italics].

⁵⁵ Angela Davis (1993) also points out that this lack of "labour saving devices" shows the lower status of the home and the housewife on the farm. Francis Meyer Beynon, as editor of the early Grain Grower's Guide, the paper succeeded by The Western Producer, continuously pointed out this work inequality, and urged women to fight to gain more household help. The divide between the ideals of farm women leaders and the traditional division of labour became clear as farm women continued to sacrifice and undervalue their work.

This call to action received some ready responses from the readers. Muriel J Stoneman writes on June 28th, “yours for a water supply in every home”, and after McNaughton’s second call on July 12th, letters began to come in with women wanting to join the Running Water Club. As L.A.C from Kinley Saskatchewan writes on July 26th: “Will you include me as a member of your club, as the idea has quite intrigued me,” with McNaughton replying: “I sure will include you and thoroughly appreciate your cooperation”. Throughout August, women sent in letters, wanting to join the club, and sharing their experiences about the (lack of) water systems. McNaughton published all of these letters, presumably to induce other readers to support the campaign. Agnes Coe writes the page on August 2nd asking to join the Running Water Club and finishes her letter with:

We want action, not ‘oratory and eloquence’ and it was through action on the part of you, our editor, that the plans for this simple water system was designed and brought to our notice. In this, as in many other things, it took a woman to get the ball rolling.

The ball got rolling, and many women were mobilized, with the topic being discussed until December of 1928. However, when I began to read the page for 1931, I saw that the immediacy of the Depression had deflated the push “for better conditions” (a catchphrase of McNaughton’s) and the women’s attention was turned to issues of survival rather than bettering farm life. So although the conversation got started, the push for change had to wait until later years, illustrating how the epistolary interactions within the counterpublic intersected with, and were affected by, other historical and institutional concerns.

Shifting Issues and Silenced Issues: Overlooking Maternal Mortality

The letters and editorials shifted between a variety of social issues and actions throughout the years, as the women tried to maintain a holistic discussion of social problems. This shifting focus also documents how certain issues were mobilized within the broader public sphere, while other topics were discussed only within the spaces of the counterpublic. McNaughton gives a sense of the breadth of women's interests in her August 23rd, 1928 editorial comment:

Next to the question of World Peace, probably the most widespread interest today centers around the question of Maternal Mortality.⁵⁶ But, as we say of the running water problem, "What are we going to do about it? In view of the efforts being made in so many directions, don't you think the subject should have a place on every woman's club program and a claim to every woman's attention?"

The issues of running water, maternal mortality, and World Peace reflect the different levels of women's concerns: from the farm household and women's work, to intimate reproductive concerns, to universal goals. A commonality with these issues was that they all resonated with women's discursive roles as mothers-housewives-citizens. However, although these gendered identities were becoming intertwined, and allowed women to begin to move into new spheres, the socialized divides between private and public, particular and universal issues still limited women's actions.

As McNaughton noted, there was indeed much "widespread interest" around the question of maternal mortality, but this did not translate into collective action. High levels of maternal mortality on the prairies were not only caused by inadequate rural health systems, but also because "women's issues" were not valued in the home, by the government or in general society. So, although McNaughton and her readers discussed issues such as maternal mortality on the page, the topic was relegated to individual,

⁵⁶ Recall "Voluntary Motherhoods" letter earlier in this chapter.

piecemeal advice on how to gain maternity grants and birth control, rather than a collective investigation of the day-to-day inequalities experienced within patriarchy. Because of such social barriers to women's critiques, the issue of "World Peace" could become part of women's public activism, whereas mobilizing around reproductive issues had to wait until the second wave women's movement.

The Peace Push

During 1931, when it was feared that nations were beginning to arm themselves for another war, the Peace Push became documented on the "Mainly for Women" pages.

Bradford Rennie claims:

Farm women took a leading interest in world peace, supposedly because of their instinct to preserve life, Leona Barrit (first Auxiliary and UFWA secretary) described a UFA resolution on peace as 'perhaps nearer to our hearts' than requests for suffrage and women's property rights. Alberta farmers of both sexes believed that women's influence could help to make a lasting peace; they were more peace loving than men whose 'brute instinct' and 'combativeness' had led to war (2000, 119)

Prairie farm women wanted to avoid reproducing sons for cannon-fodder and saw it as their duty to help foster world peace. One woman even suggested in a 1934 letter to the page, that it was masculine aggression that caused wars, but was immediately critiqued in the next issue by both men and women respondents. This critical silencing on the page points to how the internal rules of the counterpublic limited any direct focus on the problems with patriarchal dominance. On the page, women were claimed as natural peace-makers, but, as in many other circumstances within their public discussion, blame for bad conditions was not placed on patriarchal power relations or, often, on anything in particular. Despite this silencing and lack of discussion over root causes, the women within the counterpublic continued to engage in practical work towards World Peace.

McNaughton first mentions the Disarmament Petition and the “Peace Push” on January 22nd, 1931, She says: “If the UFC lodges, Homemaker’s Club, Ladies Aid and other organizations in favour of world peace would only send for forms to distribute...” and she ends the letter by giving the address for the Women’s International League where the forms can be found.⁵⁷ Throughout that year of 1931, McNaughton continued to update her readers on the “Peace Push in Saskatchewan”, designating a small corner to account for the number of signatures collected, the conferences dedicated to world peace, and a place to answer women’s letters asking for information about study groups on peace and the activities of the Women’s International League. During the early thirties, McNaughton continued to document how women were busy collecting signatures for the Peace Push. On June 28th 1931, she notes the collective actions of the various women groups:

The campaign for signatures to the International Declaration of World Disarmament through the united efforts of Homemaker’s Clubs, the UFC and the Western Producer has resulted in 9711 names, an increase of 385 over last week. And many forms have yet to be returned.

By July 16th, McNaughton documents 10,000 names, by September 17th, 11, 019 names and by November 12th, 12,590 names. After the signatures were returned to the Women’s International League, the Peace Push slowly faded away on the page, to be replaced by other pressing issues including the economic crisis of the Depression, the

⁵⁷ The Women’s International League (WIL) was a body of women formed after the first world war, to promote peace and ‘world good-will’, world citizenship, education and understanding. McNaughton was quite active with this group, and the organization came up a number of times on the pages, with many women writing in about information, donations and membership, and McNaughton providing the links to the WIL.

formation of the Canadian Commonwealth Federation (the farmer-labour party that later became the NDP) and debates over communism, democracy, fascism and Christianity.⁵⁸

In retrospect, the prairie Peace Push was both saddening and ironic in that it was only eight years before the next World War occurred. However, keeping in mind that this drive was during the Depression, when fuel, food and energy was running low, and there was still lack of a stable transportation and communication infrastructure on the prairies, these efforts seem quite remarkable. In many ways, this particular initiative illustrates how the epistolary counterpublic enabled women to move beyond their local, isolated circumstances on the prairies to work within and think about broader world affairs.

Concluding Remarks

By investigating the themes of Co-operation and Women's Influence, I provided a sense of the active, dynamic forum of this epistolary counterpublic. As a means to join diverse women's organizations, and communicate across time and space, the counterpublic helped to foster farm women's engagement with broader economic, and social reforms. The epistolary interactivity on the page indicates how the communication practices led to discussions of gendered identity, and fostered personalized meanings that motivated women to engage in collective action. In the following chapter, I will discuss a new counterpublic in very different historical circumstances: the formation of a radio collective by current National Farmer's Union (NFU) women. It is important to keep in mind that these chapters will be in dialogue with one another, and that many of the themes and ideas are intertwined. This change of focus from a mid-century

⁵⁸ These were all fascinating issues to read about, seeing how the women integrated these broad occurrences into their lives and letters. The debate between advocates of Communism and the Christian readers was quite livid at times, and the links between politics, religion and morality were argued eloquently. In fact, McNaughton had to use another page at the end of the paper to include all the letters that she wanted to publish.

communication forum to a mid-nineteen nineties media endeavor is not to show the march forward of linear progress, but instead is used to illustrate the subtle changes, and the continuity in farm women's experiences with gendered identities, communication, and public activism.

Chapter Four

FINDING COMMON GROUND: THE NFU'S BROADCAST COUNTERPUBLIC

Who are the women who work on farms? What do they do? What do they call themselves? Their perceptions are changing as they begin to recognize the importance of their own work"
(*"Women's Work and the Market Economy"*, NFU Radio Collective, 1992)

Women have always been farmers, but when we use the word farmer, we think of men. Then in the late 1960's and 1970's, a number of factors came together to change all of that. Farm women, perhaps because of the rise of the urban women's movement, and women's rights began questioning their role, lack of legal title and general lack of real security
(*"Is Access to Land Important?"* NFU Radio Collective, 1992)

In this chapter, I will discuss how the NFU radio collective ties farm women's work roles and experiences to the emerging representation of women as "farmers" with equal rights to decision-making powers. This reassessment of women's roles is intersected by localized understandings of women's domestic duties, and international examples of farm women's work, creating multiple categories of what it means to be a modern farm woman. Analyzing the collective as a mediated counterpublic helps to explain how the farm women's discourses intersect with other publics, creating links between gendered identity and activism. To explore how this mediated counterpublic was formed, I discuss the social changes surrounding and infusing the counterpublic, the participatory processes used to create the media product, and the intersecting narratives found within the finished radio programs. As a unique strategy of community organizing, the radio collective has helped to re-locate farm women in changing social relations and the global agricultural marketplace.

Social Change and Farm Women's Issues

There have been many social and economic changes affecting farm women since Violet McNaughton finished her editorial position in 1950, and my analysis of the epistolary counterpublic came to an end. These changes include the emergence of a women's liberation movement that has extended into the countryside and has validated issues of particular interest to farm women. Another important change has been the restructuring of agriculture into an industry within an international marketplace, and the formation of a global farm movement.⁵⁹ These shifts have had important consequences for farm women organizing in many different countries, and have created a new 'public at large' with which farm women can engage. Most notably, farm women have begun to mobilize around issues of particular interest to them as *women*. Below I will outline two of the major politico-legal issues Canadian farm women have faced within the last few decades. Both of these issues motivated much discussion and action, and helped to create a public of women interested in gender and farm politics.

One of the issues that galvanized rural women was the Murdoch vs. Murdoch case in 1974. This particular legal battle was a divorce case in which Irene Murdoch, who had worked for twenty years on her husband's ranch, was awarded none of the ranch property after the divorce due to the fact that she had not put any capital investment into the land.

As a female lawyer interviewed in the 1992 NFU radio program pointed out:

Although Murdoch lost her court case, the dissenting judgment in that case played a very important role in the development of matrimonial property laws in Canada.

⁵⁹ Recall that it was in 1969 that the farm unions across Canada federated in response to the movement of agricultural policy to the federal jurisdiction. The radio collective occurred in 1992 and 1994, taking place around the same times as the first Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the US in 1989 and NAFTA in the mid 1990's. In this period, the NFU was involved in the active questioning and challenging of free trade and globalized agribusiness (Hunter, 2003). As well, 1993 saw the formation of Via Campesina, the international farmer's movement that the NFU helped to found.

Laskin's dissenting judgment recognized a "constructive trust". Where one party works for the benefit of another party, and the other party gains from that spouse's contribution, there is a constructive trust-that the property built together should be shared equally (from "Is Access to land Important?", 1992).

The dissenting judgment in the Murdoch case challenged some of the hidden assumptions about the value of women's work on the farm, and upheld women's rights to equal partnership. The irony behind the Murdoch case is that Irene Parlby had been addressing similar concerns in her 1925 article "The Economic Status of Married Women" that was published on the "Mainly for Women" page. This suggests that although progressive ideas do circulate in the countryside, the questioning of gender issues is slow, and it took this strong case to motivate the collective action needed for change.

Some farm women responded to the case by creating gender-segregated groups to represent women in ways that other farm organizations, and older rural Women's Institutes did not.⁶⁰ From this insight came the development of Women for the Survival of Agriculture (1973), Women in Support of Agriculture (1975), and, in 1986, the Canadian Farm Women's Network. Another type of response came within the NFU, as the women's advisory board held women's regional workshops on the Murdoch case (Marcella Pederson, personal communication, 2003), and created a union policy on women's matrimonial property rights. In the NFU policy book, it reads:

⁶⁰ This gender-segregation mirrors the initiatives of the urban women's liberation movement. Carbert (1995) argues against distinguishing between these new groups and the older farm women's groups (such as the Women's Institutes of Canada), claiming that many of the initiatives for gender equality overlap. I noted in my research that this is indeed true, for the farm women leaders have created intersecting publics on issues relating to farm women. However, each organization does have different mandates and politics that intersect with their gender initiatives. For instance, in many cases, the NFU's stance on corporate agriculture is a lot stronger than the newer farm women's groups. But, at the same time, in 2002 all of the farm women groups got together to demand from the federal government that agriculture be removed from the WTO; this indicates some common political economic goals as well. Despite these coalitions, there are general differences between the groups that deserve further research.

The NFU requests provincial and federal governments to introduce matrimonial property legislation that implements the principle of equal-sharing provisions respecting matrimonial property rights in all forthcoming marriages and in this regard...*spouses be accorded half interest in matrimonial property, regardless of financial contribution* ([my italics] 2002, Z-9)

The outcome of the Murdoch case brought some of the inequalities of patriarchal society into question. Essentially, it highlighted how power relations are inscribed into the home, and the land, privileging men's rights over women. The court case and the initiatives that stemmed from it challenged the ethos of gender co-operation that had prevailed since the early co-operative movement. As Fiona MacKenzie (1996) points out, knowledge of these recent politico-legal battles and their implications are now threaded throughout farm women's discourse.⁶¹

Another central change for farm women's rights occurred in 1991 when the Canadian census was altered so that more than one primary operator could be listed for farms. Prior to this, the primary operator was most often listed as the husband, and this effectively hid the amount and types of farm work that women performed. What is interesting to note is that this 1991 census change had a precedent in Annie Hollis' fight throughout the 1930's to get farm women's domestic work on the census. In this case, Hollis fought long and hard to get the term "housewife" to take the place of the claim "no occupation". The movement from "no occupation" to "housewife" to "primary operator" is indicative of how slow recognition occurs, but does point to the fact that some battles are being won.

⁶¹ In her article "Farm Women/ Farm Wives: An analysis of the politics of women for the survival of agriculture, Winchester, Ontario", Mackenzie discusses the tensions between women fighting for the survival of the family farm in the global economy and women's attempts to assert their own rights on the farm through political and legal measures. Sally Shortall (1999) in "Women and farming: property and power" also addresses this paradox of farm women's lives/work.

The premise behind the census change hinged on a political desire for both symbolic and material recognition of the multiple tasks that women perform. In the 1980's scholarship on women's work roles, Marxist feminist scholars established the difference between reproductive, productive and community work⁶², explaining how this gendered division of labour contributes to women's oppression (Taylor, 1997; Scowbey, 1996). Today, farm women remain almost completely responsible for the reproductive and community work, which is the most devalued work in general society. However, similar to their mid-century predecessors, farm women also perform much of the productive work, despite the fact that productive work on the farm is still considered the man's/farmer's job.⁶³ These socialized distinctions between types of work have been critiqued by academics writing on farm women (Taylor 1997; Scowbey 1996; Wiebe, 1995; Shortall 1999) integrated into discussions within the new farm women's organizations, and were part of the Saskatchewan women's discourse in the radio collective.⁶⁴ The NFU's analysis of women's work has been used to draw out similarities between farm women, and has challenged the city/country dichotomy established in earlier agrarian myths. As Nettie Wiebe explains in the 1987 handbook, *Weaving New Ways*:

As farm women in Canada we share with our urban counterparts the economic and social disadvantage of being women in a patriarchal society... Like urban

⁶² Reproductive work consists of all domestic and child-rearing work, community work is the social reproduction and nurturing of groups of people through voluntary, unpaid labour, and productive work is the work most valued in a capitalist economy structured on wage relations.

⁶³ The NFU publications on gender and work (1982, 2003) have been invaluable in showing the division of labour on the farms.

⁶⁴ It is important to remember that many of the farmwomen leaders in the NFU have university education, and many are aware of the various writings on farm women within the academic field. This is because farm women themselves have been instrumental to creating their own reports and research in their organizations. Farm women leaders Nettie Wiebe, Shannon Storey, Karen Pederson and Annette Desmarais have also published critical works on women in the global economy in various Canadian academic journals. Here the overlap between academic, and farm activist publics is subtle but strong.

women, we take almost complete responsibility for the care of children and household -- and this with fewer supports than city women have. This work is generally underpaid and undervalued -- invisible outside our homes even though it is essential to people, to communities, and to our society as a whole. In striving for recognition and remuneration for our work, farm women have many barriers to overcome (pg. 3).

As I noted when I began research on the NFU women's initiatives, such common ideological and legal barriers have created overlap between women's groups in reports, research and ideas.⁶⁵ This overlap has led to a vibrant and ongoing assessment of farm women's lives/work that transcends the distinctions between rural and urban women's movements, and activist and academic publics. As well, the NFU's evaluation of women's rights and work roles is not only critical of national legal and political structures, but questions how women's work is valued internationally. This international focus arose as the unions began organizing against transnational agri-business, as well as in farm union women's attempts to understand gender in other cultures. The women's efforts have resulted in practical, international initiatives where farm women share ideas, stories and organizing techniques.

The NFU-UNAG Exchange: Lessons in Organizing

The Canadian farm union women have been involved with international farm women's groups for some time now, but originally it was with international Women's Institutes (WI) and the Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW); organizations which focus more on rural women's issues than on the links between

⁶⁵ This overlap also causes competition over who receives the funds for the research. Throughout much of the sixties and seventies, the federal government provided quite a bit of funds to farm women initiatives. This included the creation of a Farm Women's Bureau, and Status of Women Canada was also tuned towards rural women's issues. Since the mid eighties, the funding has been scaled back and the farm groups are pitted against each other, with the money allocated to those who define themselves according to the policy mandate of the current government. This is one of the difficulties facing Canadian social movement organizations that rely on government funds for projects.

gender and farm politics. For women in agriculture, the lack of recognition of their rights at the national level has been exacerbated by the economic crises of rural depopulation, lack of social services, and, in developing countries, the structural adjustment programs (Storey, 2002). These challenges have led to increased interaction between women farmers who link women's issues with economic issues in a manner much more critical than in earlier international forums. The NFU women's first experiences with this critical linkage came in their exchange with the women members of the Nicaraguan National Union of Rancher's and Farmers (UNAG) that occurred in the early 1990's.⁶⁶

The NFU-UNAG exchange was valuable because it not only allowed women to witness how global markets have effected other farmers worldwide, it also allowed the participants to compare notes of how well farm unions have included and represented women members in the fight against globalized agriculture. An NFU publication about the exchange called *Common Issues and Struggles* claims:

The linkage [between the NFU and UNAG] is defining new terms of international cooperation. Participants learn about the day- to- day reality of farming families in Nicaragua and Canada. *Exchange visits provide an opportunity to share information, ideas, experiences and organizing strategies* [my italics] (pg. 3).

The discussions that occurred during the exchange provided some valuable lessons for all participants. The women on the exchanges focused on the economic and social similarities and differences between the groups, creating a strong analysis that allowed for solidarity without overlooking the inequalities between countries (Demarais, 2002;

⁶⁶ This exchange followed a host of other NFU exchanges to developing countries, including the Farmer's Brigade in the late eighties. These earlier exchanges were centered on the sharing of technical and farming skills with farmers overseas. What shifted in the nineties is that women became involved in the exchanges, and there was a push for more reciprocity between the farm groups who began to share organizing techniques, and political experiences as much as 'hard skills'. (*Common Issues, and Struggles*; Annette Desmarais, personal communication, Saskatoon, November 2003)

Common Issues and Struggles). The NFU impetus for the radio collective came out of two central lessons taken from observing UNAG's community organizing strategies.

The first lesson was that in comparison to Nicaraguan farm women, NFU women were not in positions of influence at the community or local levels. As both Shannon Story (1997) and Annette Desmarais (2003) point out, the concentration of women in leadership positions in the NFU is at district and national levels, and this can lead to a general lack of women's grassroots activism, with women filling the traditional roles of behind-the-scenes secretary or making the cookies for the meeting. Witnessing the strong community involvement of Nicaraguan women provided an example of how things could be and prompted NFU women to reassess their community organizing techniques. The radio collective was one way to get regional NFU members involved in a project to build leadership skills.

Another insight from the exchange was about the forgotten use of radio as a medium for social change and action.⁶⁷ The Nicaraguan women inspired the Canadians by their creation of a radio program that was cost effective, and spanned the time, space and isolation experienced by farm women in Nicaragua. As Nettie Wiebe points out in *Weaving New Ways*, the barriers of "geographical isolation, inadequate support systems, and to some extent rural life traditions" (1987, 3) also continue to structure Canadian farm women's lives. Though a plethora of mass media has entered the Canadian countryside, this does not necessarily mean that there are programs that speak to the

⁶⁷ Canada has a long history in the use of rural radio programming. The National Farm Network ran from 1936-1969, and was based on ideas of adult education, listener participation and centered on issues relevant to rural communities. Funded by CBC, the centre for Adult Education, and the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, this project was an interesting blend of federalist and populist initiatives. The format of this Farm Radio Network was also exported to developing countries throughout the last few decades. The use of a radio broadcast by NFU women unconsciously follows Canadian traditions, but it is interesting that it was only learned through visiting Nicaraguan women. With this example, it becomes clear how international linkages foster reciprocal lessons and creative ways to organize women.

needs of farm women; this is where alternative media can play a role. As Shannon Storey explains:

The structure of the radio industry in Canada made UNAG's exact strategy unsuitable to the Saskatchewan situation, but 1990 exchange participants Wendy Manson and Nettie Wiebe saw potential in the basic idea to address the problem of inaccurate perceptions of women's roles in farming and the agricultural community. They brought the idea back to Saskatchewan for NFU women to consider (1997, 96).

Through discovering mutual difficulties faced by women in farm organizations, the NFU and UNAG farm women shared ways to organize that would foster women's continued participation in agrarian activism. From these mutual lessons came the formation of a Canadian broadcast counterpublic.

Creating a Counterpublic: The Power of Participation and the Constraints of Broadcasting

As I argued in Chapter Two, investigating the dialectic between face-to-face interactivity and media forms, and between discourse and action helps to flesh out the ways that counterpublics are enacted in time and space. As the "Mainly for Women" forum indicated, the process by which the counterpublics are formed is key to understanding the way these publics can be emancipatory for the participants. In the newspaper forum, the "epistolary pact" created a continuous interaction that made up the medium, and so the processes of communication continuously formed and re-formed the media product in an ongoing cycle. With the radio collective, the interactive processes were geared towards creating a finished, polished product for dissemination over a broadcast medium.

To better understand the formation of this counterpublic, I treat the *processes* of creating the broadcast as a different type of political action than the final *product* of the 1992 and 1994 programs. The process of radio production was an interactive project that facilitated research and leadership skills, and fostered women's participation in creating knowledge. The final purpose of this product was another type of political action, chosen by the women in the collective: "Among the many different types of radio program, the Rural Women's Radio Project (RWRP),⁶⁸ chose a documentary format. A radio documentary is an in-depth look at specific issues. The goal of a documentary is to give the audience the information and empower them to make decisions (Roppel, 1993, 2)." The media product, then, was used to disseminate the knowledge created by the farm women out to the broader public. By exploring the different goals and activism of process and product, I thus provide an example of the dialectic between internal and publicist functions of counterpublics (Fraser, 1997; Camauer, 2000). The following section will explore the active, internal processes of participatory research to explain both the benefits and the constraints found in the counterpublic.

Community Radio, Women's Stories and Participatory Action Research

As Caroline Mitchell argues in her article "Women's (Community) Radio as a Feminist Public Sphere":

Community radio can provide a space for women; its participatory processes may have a transforming function with the potential to enable women to produce programming and meanings transcending some of the more limiting ideological constructions of their lives (1998, 83).

⁶⁸ The women alternated between calling the project a radio collective or the "Rural Women's Radio Project" (RWRP), but I will primarily refer to it as the radio collective

As Mitchell further explains, these participatory processes involve seeing women as able to learn and be trained in technological production, and values their contributions as that of 'ordinary people' rather than experts. She says:

Development of a feminist ethic of communication in the context of women's radio includes strategies developed by the women's movement. Parallels might be drawn between a holistic approach to training and feminist consciousness-raising. For instance, they share the objectives of instilling confidence and re-skilling women, raising awareness of women's oppression, working collectively, developing women's creativity, and networking (1998, 80).

The central purpose of most participatory media projects is to give women and other marginalized groups the power to name their positions in social relations, and focus on the stories and issues most relevant to them. This valuing of women's abilities and knowledge has been central to many other feminist and women-centered alternative media projects (Steiner, 1992; Butalia, 1993; Riano, 1994; Marshall, 1995; Camauer, 2000). This praxis speaks to the broader feminist revision of epistemology: the validation and sharing of diverse stories, testimonies and narratives challenges the idea that scientific, objective 'facts' are the only useful knowledge. As Lorraine Code points out: "Born of the 1960's consciousness raising practices, with their commitment to taking stories seriously, feminist critiques have revealed gaps between master narratives and women's diverse experiences (1995, 219)."

The co-ordinators of the NFU radio collective implemented a feminist praxis that combined the emancipatory philosophy of validation of women's experience with the practical goals of learning new skills and boosting union membership. When describing the goals of the radio collective, Shannon Storey explains:

Learning to produce such a program was a concrete learning task that drew women into NFU activity. Participants also developed research and critical

analysis skills by investigating issues of essential concern to the community of prairie farm women ([Wiebe and Masson, 1992], quoted in Storey, 1997, 97).

This meant finding a strategy that allowed women to define the issues they wanted to share with a general public, and create content that was based on the tales and testimonies of Saskatchewan farm women. The framework used by the NFU women leaders to facilitate this sharing was called “participatory action research.”

Though not explicitly feminist, “participatory action research” (PAR) relates to the choice to create alternative, women-centered media. The decision to integrate PAR was yet another lesson developed after the exchange with Nicaraguan farm women:

PAR and GAD [Gender and Development] approaches to participatory education and action planning have been used in NFU women's programming since about 1990, very much in response to UNAG's success in activating and assisting communities of women (Storey, 1997, 94).

PAR strategies challenge ideas of expertise, and the hierarchy of knowledge, and promote practical action based on populist, democratic principles. These types of principles resonate with the union's deep roots in the early co-operative movement that focused on ongoing adult education, study groups, and the formation of practical, critical knowledge (MacPherson, 1979; Storey, 1997).

In the current context, PAR⁶⁹ is especially effective for farm union women whose knowledge has not only been undermined by mainstream experts on agriculture, but also in more subtle ways within their gender-integrated social movement organizations.

Similar to the women's advisory board and other women spaces, a benefit of PAR is that

⁶⁹ NFU women have used participatory action research for many of their projects. The women leaders included NFU women members and other farm women in the recent research project on farm women's work, “Gender and Generation”, getting the women to conduct interviews, and research. As well, a small group of women leaders and members brainstormed together to create a current nation-wide workshop. This workshop gets farm women together to critique the federal agricultural policy framework from their personal experiences and expertise. The findings of the workshop will be published in a few years time.

it allows women to feel comfortable in asserting their knowledge, and posits research as a form of activism that can help foster other leadership and political skills. By intersecting with feminist, international, activist and academic⁷⁰ publics, the participatory processes of this counterpublic can provide valuable lessons that extend beyond the final media product.

The Process of Creating the Radio Programs

The NFU farm women members were, for the most part, in charge of all aspects of creating the programs.⁷¹ The focus for the programs was decided by a series of brainstorming meetings where the women chose what they considered the most vital topics facing farm women. After the specific topics were selected, groups of three to five women researched, interviewed, edited and created a final product over a four month period. This meant:

The programs were highly individual in style, sound and approach, yet were tied together by common themes of economics, power imbalances and concepts of duty. They displayed a self-generated critical analysis of the systemic effects of often inappropriate societal definitions of what a farm woman is, what she does, what she needs and how she rates in all too many facets of society (Storey, 1997, 98).

The 1992 programs included “Farm Women and the World Economy”, “Is Access to Land Important?” and “Farm Women and Sustainable Agriculture”. These programs were aired on the Saskatoon Co-operative radio station CFCR-FM, and comprised Phase One of the project.

Two years later, the women reevaluated the outcome of the first few broadcasts and decided that due to their inexperience with radio programming, they had not provided

⁷⁰ The use of PAR techniques for this radio project indicates some of the intersections between activist and academic publics: participatory action research is geared towards mobilizing for social change, but is also widely used in feminist and ethnographic academic research.

⁷¹ Though Storey (1997) does indicate that people chosen by the key organizers of the project facilitated the PAR research design, as well as training in technical, journalistic and editing skills.

the correct format for a radio broadcast. In contrast, the Phase Two of the project created five three- minute sound bites about farm women in leadership positions. The programs were aired on CBC Saskatoon and CFR, and received much more positive feedback than Phase One. Despite the desire to continue with Phase Three of the project, the principle funding bodies, OXFAM and the Saskatchewan Council for International Co-operation, cut all funding and the radio collective came to an end.

Between the two radio collectives, the women involved published a handbook entitled: *'In our Voices...With our Hands' The Rural Women's Radio Program: A Handbook for Social Change*.⁷² This handbook was a way that the women could share with other women's groups some of the victories and difficulties of creating the radio programs. One of the victories asserted was: "The NFU women involved in the project are able to talk about radio and radio production with hard-earned expertise and understanding, and it shows in their voice, their faces and their actions" (1993, 3). But the women admitted that the process was not an easy one: "Each of us became convinced that we had over-extended ourselves, and that we were attempting to do the impossible...But because the project was so exciting, and because we were breaking new ground, we kept going to completion" (1993, 4). And finally, the women also noted that it was an ongoing learning process: "Based on our experiences, we feel that radio production is a good way to do effective development education. We are aware, however, that this was the first step in a long process of learning" (1993, 3).

This sense of continuing process challenges the idea that such media projects can be easily evaluated and quantified. Nettie Wiebe also promotes the need for different measures of success when organizing farm women:

⁷² The pamphlet was funded by OXFAM and CIDA and written by NFU member Carla Roppel.

Don't use corporate models of efficiency as a measuring stick. Women don't just want to get things done—we want to learn and grow personally in the doing. Success in this realm isn't measurable by just counting tasks completed or battles won (1987, 74).

And, from the women's self-reflexive assessments of the project, one can get a sense of the educational benefits provided to women within participatory action research.⁷³

However, despite the personal growth provided to the women through the radio collective, there were some difficult barriers facing this particular type of project. Just as the women's ongoing learning process and creative activism can be a model for further organizing, the constraints on the counterpublic can also teach important lessons. I will argue that these constraints are often found in alternative media and within social movement organizations, and are based both on limited resources and recourse to mainstream systems.

When listening to the radio tapes, I began to get a sense of the difficulties in using a broadcast medium for alternative messages. Although the Phase Two programs did indeed get much better feedback and air on CBC radio and other local stations, the short nature of the tapes meant that some of the richest analysis, background and inclusion of multiple women's voices was negated. The second phase was much more standardized and concise, making it more palatable to broadcast and perhaps to the audience, but in some ways lacking the depth of the first programs.⁷⁴ As well, because Phase Three was

⁷³ The pamphlet did mention the difficulty of synchronizing the women's schedules, but I have little information on the actual working out of the PAR techniques. The only way I could have assessed the nature of the women's interactions was through more extensive ethnographic research and interviews. Unfortunately, the time and space constraints of this thesis prevented me from conducting further investigations.

⁷⁴ It did lack the depth, but at the same time avoided some of the interesting contradictions, paradoxes and inconsistencies found in the earlier tapes. For myself, and perhaps other farm women and academics interested in farm women's issues, the Phase One programs were full of insights. However, the target audience, as defined by the women themselves, was non-farm and urban audiences who would not necessarily have any prior knowledge of farm women's experiences.

cut due to the lack of funding, it is impossible to assess the improvements and learning goals that would have emerged if the project had been ongoing.

As Sheryl Hamilton (1999) points out in her discussion of a feminist Internet forum in Montreal, cost constraints, the structure of the media industry and uncertainty of audience reach are all difficulties facing counterpublics. The funding cuts experienced with the radio collective not only point to the transitory nature of counterpublics and alternative media, but also the uneasy reliance of social movement organizations on external funding. This lack of stable funding and resources is an ongoing difficulty for social movements, and because media endeavors such as broadcasting do tend to be more costly, projects are defined more by necessity and cost than benefits they could have.

A further constraint of the broadcast hinges on another common problem facing social movement organizations: how to implement the long distance distribution of alternative messages. In Canada, local stations still provide some airtime for social groups, and the public broadcast system may also provide opportunities, as the women discovered in the second phase of their project.⁷⁵ However, getting broadcasts that are technologically sound for broadcasting while also being cost efficient is difficult for small resource-tight groups. Such financial and technical constraints indicates that large audiences may not be possible, and local, regional initiatives continue to be the main means to disseminate messages, despite attempts to scale up. The value of counterpublics, then, may not be as much in the breadth of audience as in the process of making space for the initiative and the potential the ideas will continue to circulate after

⁷⁵ The women noted in their handbook on the collective, that they used the Matthews Media Directory as a database to help them decide which radio stations to approach. This was a helpful directory that provided the women with multiple options. This included sending the radio programs overseas to the Feminist International Radio (FIRE) in Costa Rica.

the project is finished. I now turn to a discussion on the types of gendered identities found in the radio programs, and how these ideas and identities translated into collective actions.

Discourse and Action: Narratives and Women's Knowledge

Power Imbalances and Concepts of Duty: Mediating between Multiple Roles

The circulation of ideas within the radio counterpublic revolved around the intertwined themes of, as Storey terms it: "economics, power imbalances and concepts of duty" (1997, 98). Publicizing these issues worked to reassess farm women's roles on the farm and in farm organizations, and this re-evaluation illustrates an important shift from the earlier "Mainly for Women" counterpublic.

What I noticed in the earlier epistolary counterpublic was the attempt to merge women's traditional roles with new roles in order to legitimate women's public activism. In recent decades, questions of power and rights have led to more difficult assessments, where "power relations and concepts of [women's] duty" can be very much at odds. The tension between women's reproductive roles and their roles as productive, public actors in the farming community infused the discourse of many of the women interviewed for the radio collective. Through a careful analysis of the women's attempts to blend the interviews of Saskatchewan farm women with stories about international farm women, and the radio narrator's more radical critique, one can see the different levels of awareness the radio programs tried to establish. The NFU women produced a pastiche

that indeed allowed women's stories to be heard, but also revealed the heterogeneity in women's gendered identities.⁷⁶

I argue that the women's paradoxical gendered identities in fact illuminate the clash between new ideas of women's rights sparked by the second wave women's movement, and the everyday requirements of living and sustaining a family farm.⁷⁷ I conduct this critique not to point out what was 'wrong' with the methods used by the women making the programs, but rather to acknowledge that the participants are "situated knowers" whose counterpublic gives witness to the multiple manifestations and lived negotiations of social change. Because the political action of the final media product is its ability to raise awareness through sharing knowledge, it is important to think about what types of understandings could arise from this content. I thus place myself in the position of a critical audience member,⁷⁸ and try to read the connotations and ideas behind and within the women's words.

Women and Farm Work in Canada

The 1992 radio broadcast "Farm Women's Work and the World Economy" began by asserting that women's perceptions are changing and then went on to ask interviewees what they termed their role on the farm. The answers included:

Well I think that I would consider myself a farm wife in that category, for the simple reasons that my husband has most of the responsibility for the farm-well, 99% of the responsibility. I help him a lot but he makes a lot of the big decisions.

⁷⁶ Much of my analysis will centre on Phase One of the programs, as they provide longer interviews and richer material.

⁷⁷ Fiona Mackenzie (1996) also indicates the tension in the public rhetoric of the farm women's group "Women for the Survival of Agriculture" between these new ideas of women as "farmers" and the traditional division of labour on the family farm. Where my analysis differs is in showing how the women's discourse about the family farm reflects not just strategic rhetoric for a social movement, but the necessities of blending gender awareness with everyday life/work.

⁷⁸ Admittedly, I have a fairly more informed view than most audience members. That is why this discourse analysis was set up through a discussion of the historical events and ideas that surround the counterpublic. It gives the reader a sense of how my knowledge on the topic is situated.

I look at myself as a farmer. Right now I am wearing two hats, farmer/educator, but I have always looked at myself as a farmer, because that is the profession I chose to be in.

I'm a farmer, because I own and operate my own farm.

I think I would call myself a farm woman. I am a farmer as well, but I find that perhaps it is the time in my life right now, but I found that my role as a woman in society and relationships and how it relates to our community and our farm, that being a woman is also important."

I guess within those definitions, I would say farmer. I prefer food producer because I think farmer is a very gender related word, and very male gender oriented. I call myself a farmer because I rent my sister's land, and have control farming it.

The four women who gave these opinions responded to a list provided by the interviewers, options that included farm woman, farm wife and farmer. Considering that the sample of interviewees were chosen by the NFU women who produced the radio shows, and these women were from Saskatchewan, one can presume that they had some understanding of the idea of women-as-farmer. What this initial tally of roles shows is that there are multiple understandings of women's position on the farm. Even by asking the question, the NFU women who created the broadcast opened up the idea that the roles were not fixed, but were being challenged.

The emerging idea of women-as-farmer in the broadcasts was supplemented by information on the struggle to secure women's right to land ownership. The 1992 broadcast "Is Access to Land Important", was centered on an analysis of the ways that women's changing responsibilities on the farm were establishing them as more equal partners. The broadcast gave a sense of change and progress, stating that women were beginning to assert themselves as farmers, as equal partners on the farm, and making these roles both legally and materially possible. This claim was illustrated by an example:

NFU member Wendy Manson described the process her mother went through to secure equal title to the land. The narrator then placed that choice in a broader context:

These conclusions are a far cry from the attitudes of women only a generation ago. At that time, a woman's well being or security depended entirely on her husband. It was simply one of the risks she took, whether her husband was a farmer or in any other profession. ("Is Access to Land Important?" 1992)

Yet within minutes of the above statement, the narrator also provides an example of a woman who accepted the traditional understanding of being a farmwife:

We talked to Delphine Reid, who is a NFU member from Melville, Saskatchewan. This is how Delphine saw her role: 'Well I married my husband and promised to be a faithful wife and stay at home with him in good and bad times. Though I did have an offer to be a cook's helper, my husband wouldn't think of it at the time because of all the children we had. He felt my place was at home. I think my status was based on taking care of my family and working in most community affairs. I did stay at home, and I've done my duties that I promised to live up to. ("Is Access to Land Important?" 1992)

The radio narrator further explains that during Delphine's marriage, she never questioned her lack of ownership of the farm, and that in fact: "Delphine's situation is quite typical, even with the women of the younger generation. In fact, few of us realize just how far we have come." This statement contradicts some of the earlier, more hopeful statements about changes in the countryside, and reveals a recurring pattern in the radio programs. For although the NFU women who produced the broadcasts tried to show the progressive changes in the countryside, what they document in their use of interviews and personal anecdotes is that these changes are not universally accepted.

As Debbie Ralstein explains in the 1992 broadcast, "Women and Sustainable Agriculture", the multiple roles of farm women, although increasingly validated and publicized by the farm women's counterpublic, still hinders women's engagement with broader issues. Shifting back and forth between first and third person in her interview,

Ralstein seems to be trying to, as Caroline Mitchell puts it, transcend the “more limiting ideological constructions” (1998, 83) of her life. Ralstein explains:

They [farm women] are a mother, a farm wife, a worker in their job, and usually some of the jobs are quite stressful -- nursing, teaching -- with long hours and you come home and have all the duties you have as a housewife. So you have a multi-role approach to life and that is stressful. And the farm is stressful and your husband is uptight over farm issues. This tends to be a lot of anguish. We tend to ignore or become unknowledgeable about what is happening....When we do sit down and talk about farming, I find that I am not up to date with what's going on. I don't turn on the TV or radio. I don't want to hear about the problems, or other people's problems and that is how I am coping with stress.

Her explanation of women's roles centre on very traditional understandings of female work (mother, nurse, teacher, housewife), and also highlights the fact that this work can keep women's minds tuned to the practical, survival matters rather than tending to world affairs.

The added stress that Ralstein discusses is based on what the NFU terms the “farm crisis” that has caused the family farm to become a threatened industry (Storey, 2002; Martz, 2003). As the radio program on “Women and Sustainable Agriculture” pointed out, women viewed the idea of ‘sustainability’ differently from male experts who debated on which types of agriculture were the most sustainable. In contrast, farm women viewed sustainability in terms of survival and community:

There is however, a third point of view, they are experts too, they live in the farm communities and half of them are women. These women are aware the camps are in place over the best way to farm. But nowadays they wonder: is it possible to have a cleaner environment and chemical free food when farmers face an increasing pressure to produce cheaper and cheaper food? ...Women in Saskatchewan express the very practical point of view that the first issue of sustainability is to keep the family on the farm. From this perspective it is clear that off-farm jobs are essential.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ One of the reasons that social change remains on the periphery is due to the triple work day of many Canadian farm women. As NFU women are now explaining and publicizing, women on family farms have had to take off- farm jobs as well as their other duties: this further complicates their roles on the farm and in farm organizations (Storey, 2002, Martz, 2003). Most family farms in Canada are now maintained through

While the family farm can be seen as the source of women's added workload and oppression, the farm is also integral to the women's livelihoods. So, although women have the 'labour saving devices' fought for by earlier farm women, the restructuring of agriculture internationally, and the women's traditional duties on the farm, is causing them to take on an extra workload. In an ironic development to McNaughton's argument that collective action such as the "Running Water Club" would bring increased leisure for "national housekeeping", farm women nowadays still have little leisure time for a public role as citizens or even to keep up with the media that brings the world into their homes.

The interviews with Saskatchewan women indicate how roles are shifting at the local level, but also how concerns about the farm and community constrains thinking "about the problems or other people's problems" (Debbie Ralstein). However, though Saskatchewan women claimed that the "first issue of sustainability was keeping the family on the farm", this localized concern was challenged throughout the programs by framing the crisis of small farmers and the increased burden on farm women as a global phenomenon. The intertwining of local and international perspectives in the radio programs provides the other level of knowledge the counterpublic was trying to promote: a holistic critique of the world system, and the notion that "common struggles, common issues"⁸⁰ connect women throughout the world.

Women and Farm Work Internationally

In the 1992 broadcast "Farm Women's Work and the World Economy" the experiences of international farm women are discussed immediately after terming the

off-farm income, and the women, who often have higher education than their partners, take on extra work as well as farm and family work.

⁸⁰ This refers to the title of the NFU handbook describing the NFU-UNAG exchange.

Canadian women as ‘farmers, farm wives or farm women’. The NFU women integrated this global perspective by reading stories about farm women’s work in developing countries taken from articles in progressive, internationalist magazines.⁸¹ Sikkink and Keck (1998) explain that this technique of sharing testimony through media is a new way to create international solidarity. As well, the feminist movement intersects with these international networking technique through the assertion that stories and narratives are valid forms of knowledge, that the personal is political, and that social change may come through empathizing and understanding the everyday lives of others. The use of these techniques in the radio collective was powerful, in that it revealed farm women’s public and political interaction with broader agricultural politics, and fostered a sense of solidarity between these publics. At the same time, the interweaving of farm women’s stories to highlight commonalities can be difficult and problematic, as I will illustrate below.

Through the narration of magazine articles in the beginning of the “Farm Women’s Work and the World Economy” broadcast, the audience could hear the experiences of a farm woman from Bangladesh, “Sophia” from Nicaragua, and a farm woman from Africa. These three stories consisted of litanies describing the day’s chores, with the first narrative in the first person, and the second two in third person. These textualized testimonies provide an interesting contrast to the interviews conducted with local women. As noted by the story of the Bangladeshi woman: “If you start at six am, you can often finish a fair portion by nine pm”, with Sophia from Nicaragua: “Sophia is awake before dawn, by eight pm she finds great comfort in her bed”, and the African woman: “Through much of the year, she may labour 15 to 16 hours each day”. The

⁸¹ This includes “The Briar Patch”, the “New Internationalist”, “Cross World”, and “Network Magazine”

chores of these international farm women include subsistence work that has little technological input. This seems stark compared to Canadian farm women. Ruth Veiner explains about her visit to the African countryside:

It was ironic, but the women were the ones who worked the fields there, and it wasn't uncommon to see a child in front or on the woman's back, and the mother working the fields ("Farm Women's Work and the World Economy", 1992).

And later in the same broadcast, Ruth explains:

Often I took the children with me out to the field, and that's the part that bothers me, that I had them with me out in the field. We'd talk and visit in the tractor, but before that, I was always trying to keep them in a safe position, but there is never a safe position in a tractor that doesn't have a cab. Even with a cab on our machine, it still isn't safe. My concern was for their hearing and for their safety ("Farm Women's Work and the World Economy", 1992).

Interweaving the different work days of farm women in Canada and internationally often had the effect of showing difference more than common experiences: the contrast between subsistence agriculture and mechanized farming, between feeding malnourished children and having to make time to get the kids to hockey practice made it seem that the women's work and concerns were worlds apart. This contrast was exacerbated by the discourse of the magazine texts that generalized about the day's work of often unnamed and unknown farm women in developing countries, and the interviews conducted in the Canadian farm women's own words. It was jarring to hear the well-written, polished magazine articles interspersed with the Saskatchewan women's interviews that had low sound quality, used informal language and were tuned to very local concerns. This indicates one of the dangers of integrating international voices in a project creating

alternative knowledge: the contrast between local and global was so great at times that all the testimonies were negated and trivialized.⁸²

However, where the radio broadcasts were strong was in the international analysis of Nicaraguan farm women. This was, I believe, because the broadcasts were tuned towards the direct experience and interviews of NFU women who had interacted with the Nicaraguan UNAG women. Using interviews and testimonies of Canadian women's experiences in Nicaragua created cohesion with the other local interviews, and continued the ethnographic and personal tone established throughout the broadcasts. Through second-hand accounts, the language and analyses did seem to suggest more common ground, and provoked a thoughtful discussion of some of the common problems surrounding women's work and roles in agriculture.

One of the commonalities between women in Canada and Nicaragua was not so much the type of work done, but the roles women took in the farm and farm community. I have already discussed the split between reproductive and productive work in Canada, and this was also seen in Nicaragua. In the radio programs, the narrators and women on the NFU-UNAG exchange claimed that the sexual division of labour on the farms was even more apparent in Nicaragua. This was partly due to the necessities of subsistence farming, and the more overt patriarchal culture in Latin America. Wendy Manson, an exchange participant and member of the radio collective, explains:

⁸² And, as I discussed in the earlier section, Canadian farm women are indeed also facing strenuous circumstances, and although the actual work may be very different, many farm women in a variety of countries feel the pressure of surviving the restructuring of agriculture. Thus, capitalist and patriarchal systems are indeed producing negative effects on women's lives, but the differences in experience point towards longstanding inequalities in the world system. The NFU has pointed this out successfully a number of times, especially in literature and education following the NFU-UNAG exchange. The radio program did open up this perspective, but I believe limited resources and time may have prevented a more sophisticated integration of women's voices and experience.

The women had difficulties in Nicaragua. In the co-ops, there was often a discussion about the division between productive work, which is farm work, and then the work that women commonly did. Like us here, they hadn't concluded that if you don't have women doing all this other work, than you wouldn't be able to do the productive work that is begin done here. Those two things are mutually supportive; those two parts of the labour equation fit together to produce a product. There is just a lot of confusion about that we haven't sorted that out at all, in either Saskatchewan or Nicaragua ("Farm Women and Sustainable Agriculture" 1992).

This division of labour often translated into Nicaraguan women not being involved in the progressive agrarian reforms implemented by the Sandanista government in the 1980's. Exchange participant, and former women's president and NFU president, Nettie Wiebe explains:

Talking to the women in Nicaragua, it was surprising to me how much of the conversation with them was about the frustrations they felt becoming members of their co-ops. Although they lived and worked there, full membership seemed out of reach for most of them...Once we had covered the ground and reached some mutual understanding of what our common ground⁸³ was, we recognized that all of us had some difficulty acquiring credibility as fully fledged agricultural producers and decision makers, as real and full members of our farms and co-ops ("Farm Women and Sustainable Agriculture" 1992).

An interview with journalist Lois Ross who lived and worked in Nicaragua during the mid 1980's also provided a sense of the subtle ways that gender inequalities structured the co-operatives. She noted that in the co-operatives, rules would be collectively decided on about what participation and membership in the co-operative entailed. One of the rules was that every member of the co-operative had to work eight hours in the fields per day. As Ross pointed out:

⁸³ This notion of "common ground" is a resonant one for farm women leaders. As Taylor argues about Violet McNaughton: "Her co-operative ideals led to her primary organizational strategy. She sought "ground for common action" among potential allies, and then she helped form alliances with individuals and groups based on common integrative principles, 'coming together on common ground for common good'" (1997, 522). Wiebe is familiar with the history of McNaughton and other organized farm women, and it is possible that she used the term understanding its long history.

That, of course, leaves women out. If women have children or are expected to do the double or triple time that women around the world generally do, which is rearing the children, domestic chores, and field work, how do they accomplish the eight hours to become members? They were stymied before they were even allowed to approach the door or cross the threshold. The decisions and possibilities to integrate or encourage the participation of women just aren't there because men are making the decisions, and men are thinking in a male way ("Farm Women and Sustainable Agriculture" 1992).

The devaluation of the women's reproductive role in patriarchal systems explains why Canadian and Nicaraguan women have faced similar barriers. These subtle barriers facing Nicaraguan women in their co-operatives mirror similar issues that Canadian women continue to face in their organizations⁸⁴. This indicates the covert and overt aspects of patriarchy in both countries, where women's work is still predominantly viewed as reproductive, and thus their involvement in public politics limited. This traditional exclusion of women is being challenged by gender awareness, but still has a long way to go. Though the integration of international narratives was a difficult, and at times problematic task, the NFU radio programs did expand knowledge of farm women's experiences to a global perspective, a linkage that is often unrealized by most urban audiences.

Concluding Remarks

The challenges and changes documented in the creation of and discourse in this broadcast counterpublic were founded on much broader social changes. As Annette Desmarais states in the 1994 program "Women and Leadership in Farm Organizations":

I think that since the mid 1970's, we have seen a fairly dramatic increase in women's involvement in farm organizations. As women become more active at different levels within these organizations, they are quick to recognize that there are still many social

⁸⁴ Including questions of childcare which has often prevented NFU women from taking part. Now, after much action on the part of NFU women members, there is child care provided at the majority of NFU meetings and conventions.

and structural barriers that block them from participating on equal footing with men in both decision making and leadership. This continues to be a major struggle for women everywhere.

As the radio programs, and the Nicaraguan exchange have illustrated, this “major struggle” is offset by the ways that farm women have organized to challenge gender inequalities. The participatory processes used to create the counterpublic illustrate the multiple ways that women are getting involved; and the discourse in the counterpublic reveals how this involvement is based on contradictory gendered identities that include farm women’s multiple work roles, and complex intersections between local and international solidarity. But all of this contradictory and fluid discourse provided alternative, nuanced knowledge to a wider audience. Despite the barriers, constraints and difficulties in creating this counterpublic, the NFU women have succeeded in broadening the discussion and circulating ideas that challenge how:

In advertising, farmwomen are presented in isolation from one another. This acts as a disservice to rural women’s organizations and their contribution to community life.... As well, the work of the farmwoman is seen as easy and centering on the home. This ignores her true role of partner in the farm enterprise and farm production. The false image of her labour is extensive (Lipkin, 1980, “‘The invisible pitchfork’ or The Portrayal of farm women in the Canadian Media”).

Conclusion:

THE PRAXIS OF COUNTERPUBLICS, AND THE PROMISE OF INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

This research has undertaken a multi-disciplinary perspective on the media activism of Canadian farm women. I have merged knowledge from various fields to analyze my empirical research, all the while highlighting the recurring links between gender and communication in the activities of social movement organizations. My research provides a historical account of women's involvement in both the co-operative movement, and the early and current farm unions. This discussion was tuned to a feminist revision of history, and thus I focused on the barriers to women's participation in public farm politics, as well as the successful organizing techniques that farm women leaders have established.

I realized early in my research that the formal affirmative action structures in the union did not necessarily lead to full gender integration, and additional spaces for women were used to combat sexism and entrenched gender roles. These formal and informal women's spaces illustrate the double load of farm women leaders who try to further the political economic mandate of the union, as well as foster women's continuing involvement in the farm movements.

My research also drew from the broad field of communication and social movement theory to create a framework by which to analyze the two case studies in this thesis. Working within critical social theory, I melded together counterpublic theory with critical discourse analysis to conduct a politically charged, feminist assessment of the strategies, processes used, and the content created in farm women's media. In order to understand the *practice* of these counterpublics, I had to extend Fraser's theory to explain

the various formations of publics that I discovered, with three facets drawing particular attention.

The first came in noting how a counterpublic can form alongside another counterpublic without splintering the broader social movement. The early and current farm movements are counterpublics in that they challenge state and market models of agriculture by discussing and publicizing a “producer class” (Mooney, 1996) critique of capitalism. However, the necessity for creating women’s spaces within the movement illustrates that progressive organizations also have to deal with the politics of difference. The women have worked to create these spaces in the NFU in order to provide a gender dimension to the union’s critique of globalized agriculture. Such interrelations between publics can give a sense of how counterpublics compete and supplement one another, and how they represent different identities and needs within social movement organizations.

The second aspect of counterpublics came in noticing how these public forums were a unique blend of interpersonal and mediated communication. The examples of the epistolary and broadcast fora illustrate how the media themselves can become the active counterpublic. Rather than separating internal/interpersonal from external/publicist functions, media counterpublics are processual and interactive fora that are simultaneously private and public. Mediated counterpublics further the links between the process and product of discourse and media formats, and provide insight into how alternative media can help women create political communities across time and space.

Finally, the counterpublics I investigated illustrate the overlap between discourse and women’s actions in the world. In both case studies, I extend the counterpublics to

include women's meetings and activism outside the mediated communications.⁸⁵ In this sense, "publicist action" is not limited to sending information out to the broader public sphere, but also means getting women to value their knowledge enough to become active members of larger publics. This signifies how the creation of mediated counterpublics and a common language to describe experiences can be practical and powerful tools of organizing (Riano, 1994).

What I learned from applying the theoretical framework to the empirical research was the difficulty in integrating academic discourse with the farm women's grassroots interpretations. I found that I was writing for two audiences: the academic audience, and the audience of farm women who will have access to my work. In my attempts to follow a feminist research method that validates and values the work of everyday women, I found it important to provide space for the women's words. This meant using many different texts, from interviews to primary sources, and choosing quotes carefully, with full knowledge of how the words were subtly transformed when removed from the initial context. This act of 'translation' is a key difficulty for researchers who try to remain connected to the people they are researching, while providing logical and critical academic contributions. It brings to the surface issues that have arisen as claims of 'scholarly objectivity' are challenged; this includes questions of ethics, social responsibility, and the purpose of scholarship. These questions informed my interpretation of the empirical materials that I collected during my research.

⁸⁵ It is important to note that these meetings and activism are usually discussed within the media forum, blending the reading and writing public with the experience of active members gathering in public places.

The Case Studies: Media Politics, Gender Roles, and Women's Issues

The analysis of the two case studies was based on a historical comparison, and brought together many of the key ideas I had discussed in earlier chapters. This involved exploring the ways women have participated through communication, as well as the continuities and discontinuities in their creation of media fora and publicizing of messages. I also investigated how the women's communication practices linked gendered identity to collective action, and combined initiatives for symbolic and material social change⁸⁶. And, finally, I explored the ways that the farm women's political action linked to the feminist and farm movements, and other progressive social movements. I have addressed many of these ideas throughout the two chapters, but would like to reiterate some of the strongest contrasts and parallels between the two counterpublics.

I chose the two case studies because these particular examples gave a sense of how the media related to the political strategies of the farm women. The "Mainly for Women" page created dense networks of friends and 'neighbours' that exchanged practical advice and political ideas; this epistolary counterpublic allowed women to link personal and public relationships to both mobilize for social change, and create a textual 'imaginary community'. This particular counterpublic illustrates how the ideal of co-operation was not just negotiated between men and women in the farm movement, it also occurred through an epistolary pact between the farm women writers and editor Violet McNaughton.

In contrast to the earlier epistolary counterpublic, the radio collective was produced by a small group of Saskatchewan farm women in the current National

⁸⁶ This was an important way to understand the balance of community, commodity and women's issues within the union mandate.

Farmer's Union. The participants were members of the union rather than the public leaders, and established a conscious and progressive political agenda for the counterpublic. This agenda was seen both in the participatory processes of media creation, and in the final radio programs that transformed interviews, personal opinions, and historical details into critical knowledge about women in agriculture. The radio collective was used to increase union membership and leadership at a time when women are often too busy with off-farm work, and local agrarian culture was slowly being eroded by corporate agribusiness⁸⁷. The choice of an urban audience for the broadcast, and the links created with international farm women throughout the programs, indicates the holistic perspective that union farm women were using to promote their alternative messages.

The strongest contrast between the two counterpublics was seen in the valuation and assessment of farm women's work. The historical contrast discovered by using primary documents--though limited, local, and not necessarily representative of all farm women--provides insight into how women have interacted with their historical situation. In the epistolary counterpublic, women were essentially and primarily mothers: motherhood was the foundation for all other identities, including that of housewife and citizen, and reproductive work was considered the natural duty of women. The gendered identity established on the page translated into the social reform initiatives that made up women's role in the farm movement.

As noted throughout the analysis of the epistolary counterpublic, the assertion of 'page friends' and solidarity stifled debate on and critique of the pressing matters of economics and patriarchy. This tendency was echoed in the unions, where women

⁸⁷ And the trends of off-farm work and agricultural consolidation continue today.

remained in charge of the social aspects of the farm movement. On a positive note, the inclusion of both economic and social initiatives reveals the holistic mandate of the unions, but it also reveals the gender division of labour within the farm movement initiatives. There were many instances when “women’s issues,” such as birth control, domestic drudgery and maternal mortality, were segregated from the general union mandate; and despite the active interest and concern expressed on the “Mainly for Women” pages, these issues remained primarily women’s ‘problems’ and ‘duties’.

In the radio programs, the multiple roles of women -- as workers, farmers, mothers, citizens -- were much more contested. It was not just assumed that all women were mothers, housewives, or their husband’s domestic help on the farm, but, rather, women were shown as defining and redefining themselves according to their personal situation. Such redefinitions were shaped by the various legal battles of the past few decades, as well as the growing awareness that ‘partnership’ on the family farm often privileged men, due to patriarchal legal and political systems. The creation and content of the radio programs indicated that women were ready to challenge the idea that “*men make laws, women make morals*” (from the “Mainly for Women” page, 1928) and introduce women to public life on their own terms, and in their own words.

This radio collective also exemplifies a type of political action that calls for material and symbolic reform geared specifically to women. These gender-oriented goals were much more holistic than the earlier social reforms on the “Mainly for Women’s” page; during the radio programs, the farm women promoted ideas of redistribution through a discussion of legal and economic issues. The women believed that this knowledge would get audiences to question their assumptions about farm women’s work,

and they advocated that the legal changes⁸⁸ of the past decades be enforced for women to achieve full socio-economic equality.

The Role of Counterpublics in Activist Networks and Agrarian Feminism

Despite these differences, there was an important commonality within both counterpublics. This was the role that the mediated counterpublics played in the creation of coalitions between social movement organizations. What defined the women I studied were their specific ties to the land, to rural communities, and to a certain type of life/work experience. However, the women's links with the early urban suffrage groups, and in the later NFU-UNAG exchange, indicate that it was possible to discuss and act on issues relevant to women from disparate backgrounds. In both counterpublics, the reach of the messages went beyond the media forum, and organizational circles to enter into broader public debates. These case studies point to the potential for communication and media to create knowledge, provide spaces for consciousness-raising, and facilitate collective actions within and between groups. Such communicative organizing practices are the often under-theorized means by which social change networks remain connected. From this insight, mediated counterpublics can be conceived of as the nodes in social movement networks. Understanding how counterpublics work within social movements, how they are linked to alternative media, and the ways that gender⁸⁹ shapes the formation of such public space, can help illuminate the complex processes of resistance.

Though the links between farm women's groups and broader feminist publics were mentioned only briefly in this thesis, the connections are something that deserves

⁸⁸ The battles of the Murdoch case and the census change led to a symbolic reassessment of the economic value of women's work on the farm, property ownership, and women's rights to land, but it also established legal structures to make this re-presentation materially valuable.

⁸⁹ Or, in other studies, how race and class can shape the formation of the counterpublics in progressive organizations.

further research. Indeed, the question of 'agrarian feminism' again arises when looking at how my analysis of mediated counterpublics illuminated commonalities between women's initiatives in urban and rural areas across Canada. These commonalities, as seen in the prairie social reform movement in the early 1900's and in the current battles for farm women's socio-economic rights, points to the fact that feminism has indeed entered the countryside. And, of equal importance, it indicates that this feminism has been modified by the particular characteristics of the agricultural sector and the geographical circumstances of living in rural, isolated areas.

Essentially, my research points to how organized farm women blended agrarian concerns with feminist organizational strategies, in practice, if not in name. What I discovered was a dynamic, ongoing negotiation between public and private spheres, between gender integration and separation, between traditionalism and feminism, all occurring in rural areas that contributed to the unique nature of the interchanges. The bridges that allowed for these negotiations were communication and the mediated spaces where women could comfortably discuss their roles as women and farmers. Though I did not term the farm women as 'feminist', I would not hesitate to claim that the unique practices of this group of farm women intersect with the ongoing development of feminism in Canada. The debate about whether or what 'agrarian feminism' is has not been closed, but instead has been furthered by a more cautious assessment of the politics of women subjects and the categories constructed by feminist scholarship. Future scholarship would more fully elucidate the different facets of feminism found in the countryside, the networks between urban and rural women's groups, and the overlap between the farm and feminist movements.

The International Work of Farm Union Women: Continuing the Battle

Currently, the NFU continues to form vibrant counterpublics and coalitions to facilitate collective action. The 1992-1994 radio collective was one of the first projects to publicize the women's international focus, and since then, the NFU women have become increasingly active and vocal in the international arena of farm politics. In fact, the women's exchange with the Nicaraguan farm women in the early nineties was one of the reasons the NFU became the North American representative of La Via Campesina, the international farm movement challenging corporate agriculture⁹⁰. As well, the farm women in the NFU, in solidarity with women members of other international farm unions, were active in creating women's leadership positions and permanent women's spaces in La Via Campesina (Desmarais, 2002; Desmarais, Wiebe, and Robbins, personal communication, Saskatoon, November 2003).

Canadian farm women's entrance into international coalitions signifies a new step in agrarian activism. Although the small family farm has oppressed women, it is still a way of life, and many farm women continue to fight for its survival. However, rather than just remaining attuned to local organizing strategies, the women are extending their activism to communicating with other international unions, recognizing common issues, and creating coalitions to battle the restructuring and consolidating of agriculture. These coalitions also facilitate a rural feminism and consciousness raising that connects women of diverse cultures in ways quite different than importing Western urban feminism.

⁹⁰ During the interviews at the November NFU convention, many of the women pointed out that by creating interpersonal networks of trust and communication during the NFU-UNAG exchange, the UNAG members felt compelled to invite the current NFU president, Wayne Easter, to attend the inaugural meeting of Via Campesina in 1993. Attendance at this important meeting secured the NFU a place in shaping and being involved in the formation of policies and the political mandate of the new movement.

Future research in this area would address the links between rural women internationally,⁹¹ and the various conferences, coalitions and activism that this facilitates.

The continuing challenge for organized farm women will be maintaining grassroots membership and local leadership, while extending women's counterpublics into international arenas. With their collective action, farm women show they are not just concerned with: "...the kiddies, church and school/The U.F.C and merits of the Pool/Raising gardens, turks and chicks/Dairying and other tricks..." ("Mainly for Women," 1928). But, instead are using sophisticated strategies that: "repoliticize the local, uncovering the way it is constituted by global forces, and also enhancing community participation" (Eschele, 2001, 175; quoted in Desmarais, 2003). Such engagement is exemplar of the active and creative means by which Canadian farm women have participated in, and contributed to, the public sphere of farm politics.

⁹¹ This again points to future research questions about 'agrarian feminism': is there a feminism and type of politics that is similar between women in farming communities internationally? Does this feminism differ between rural and urban areas in the developing world? Do other agrarian feminisms modify feminism in similar manners as what I discovered through my research? And what would this feminism mean for development research and international coalitions? Like Maxine Molyneux (2001) points out, allowing for nuances when understanding women's movements provides a broader ground to understand how women's resistance is shaped by their life situations.

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